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This book was published by ANU Press between 1965–1991. This republication is part of the digitisation project being carried out by Scholarly Information Services/Library and ANU Press.

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To Gail my wife who shared
Foreword

This book was planned as the first of two volumes on the life and times of the writer, Frank Dalby Davison, the second of which, provisionally titled *The Inward Journey*, was not completed before Owen Webster's death in 1975. The material assembled for the second volume, as well as the extensive manuscript material for this part, has been deposited in the manuscript collection of the National Library of Australia.

The text as printed here has been shortened from the manuscript, in line with proposals discussed with the author before his death. Illustrations intended by him for inclusion in the volume have, where possible, been used, but not all of them could be located.

Acknowledgment is due to the Literature Board of the Australia Council, which provided financial assistance for the publication of this book, and to the National Library of Australia, whose staff assisted in locating the photographs.
Acknowledgments

For an author working alone, without benefit of research assistance or any form of secretarial aid—but not without the most felicitous uxorial nurture—the task of producing a work such as this is necessarily a protracted one. Add to it the demands of being a family breadwinner, and the time required for the task might well become such as to lose one's potential readership and obscure the vision. My first indebtedness, therefore, is to the Literature Board of the Australian Council for the Arts for a year's fellowship in 1973-74, and to the Commonwealth Literary Fund for a half-fellowship during part of 1971 and a grant at the beginning of 1972, all of which have allowed me to enjoy periods of single-minded engagement with my task and without which this would have become a vastly different book. Conjointly, I must record my debt to Mr Frank Dalby Davison himself who, before his death in 1970, did so much to clear my way by supporting my first application for assistance from the Commonwealth Literary Fund at the end of 1969 and inducing among several of his contemporaries with claims more manifest than mine to write his biography an acquiescence that the job was, for the time being at least, bespoken. His friendship and confidence in my worth for the task have continued to buttress my labours, not least through the agency of his widow, Mrs Marie Davison, who has withheld nothing of document or memory from the biographer's stockpile of more material than could ever be used. To a similar extent, Mrs Doris Lister of Newcastle has ransacked her recollections of her family's history to supply much of the anecdotal detail that enlivens the chapters on her brother's childhood and antecedents; and Mrs Kay Davison of Sydney has relived the early years of her marriage again and again in conversation and the most painstaking written reminiscence, and with boundless patience has conscientiously answered my unremitting catechism of how it was.

Beyond them, my thanks are due to numerous librarians and archivists, many of whom have been no more than initials on correspondence or accommodating voices on the telephone; but in particular I am grateful to the following: Mrs Pauline Fanning, the Principal Australian Reference Librarian, and Mr Graeme Powell, the Manuscript Librarian, of the National Library, Canberra; Miss Marie Carter of the Queensland State Archives, Brisbane; Miss Pat Reynolds, Mr John Thompson and their colleagues of the La Trobe Library, Melbourne; the Keeper of
Public Records and staff of the Public Records Office, Melbourne; staff of the State Library, Melbourne; Mr Manning of the Victorian Titles Office; Mr Clark of the Victorian Railways Department; the Government Statist, Melbourne, and members of his staff; the Registrar General of New South Wales; the Mitchell Library, Sydney; Mr D. Culley of the General Register and Record Office of Shipping and Seamen, Cardiff; Mr E. F. Ladds, Borough Librarian, Douglas, Isle of Man; Miss Mary Clarke of the *Surrey and Hants News*, Farnham; staff of the *Western Star*, Roma; Mr Bert Strange, Mining Supervisor, Sovereign Hill Memorial Park, Ballarat; Mr Noel Loomes, assistant rate collector, Bendigo City Corporation; Mr Taggart, assistant rate collector, Shire of Whittlesea; the rate collectors of the Cities of Caulfield and Hawthorn; staff of the Valuation Department, City of Melbourne; and the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

I am also much indebted to Mr Robert Clark of Adelaide for making available to me his invaluable collection of letters from his friend written in the last years of my subject's life. I have also received generous and valued assistance from Mr and Mrs I. V. Kirilloff of Brisbane; Dr Roger Joyce of the Department of History, University of Queensland; Mrs Elizabeth Mackenzie (nee Milton) who allowed me to plunder her admirable BA thesis of 1968 on Soldier Settlement Schemes in Queensland; Mr and Mrs Don Meacham of Toowoomba; Mr and Mrs J. J. G. McPhie of Toowoomba; and Mr Philip Woods of Melbourne.

Research trips were greatly eased and assisted by the kindness and hospitality of the following: Mr and Mrs Pat Sorensen of Injune; Cdr and Mrs George Schofield, formerly of Brisbane; Mr and Mrs Colin Mackenzie, formerly of Chinchilla; and Mr Jack Syphers, the ranger of Uriarra Crossing, on the Murrumbidgee near Canberra. For the loan of tents I am indebted to Mr and Mrs R. G. Preston of Warrandyte and Mr Kevin James of Kangaroo Ground.

A few words for the purist about quotation. Wherever it has seemed to me that no injury would be done to the sense and character of a printed quotation or typewritten letter, I have usually corrected obvious errors and rendered it in a style of spelling and punctuation consistent with the rest of the text. The Queensland archival material was mostly dictated into a tape recorder and later transcribed, so it has not been possible to render paragraphing, punctuation, etc. as in the original documents. I have used a typist's transcription of the television interviews with Davison and have made some alterations to render the speech as coherent prose by eliminating repetitions, stammers and the like but without destroying individual syntax. Whenever the style of a letter or other document, including errors, has been manifestly part of its character, it has been reproduced with scrupulous accuracy.

Warrandyte: January 1970–May 1974
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Life that just happens in and for itself is not real life; it is real only when it is known.

C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*  
(*Collected Works* XII p.81 par. 105)
I Roots

*Memory is as slippery as a melon seed.*

Frank Dalby Davison  
in a letter to his mother, 1945
Jane Brown, so the story goes, landed at Melbourne at the age of sixteen in charge of a party of migrant girls from England. Whether she embarked with that status, and what degree of charge she possessed, is unknown. Perhaps she had emerged during the voyage as their spokeswoman; the literate one among them who could take charge of their papers, relay instructions to them, or ensure that they received medical attention if they needed it. The date, if she was really sixteen, would have been about 1855, the third year of the gold rush.

A small portrait of her, allegedly photographed at that age, shows her to have been a girl of rather forbidding mien, old for her years, with forthright gaze, a large strong nose, a determined mouth, and fine hands with long fingers. She is plainly but tastefully dressed, with a bangle of beads on her left wrist, a cameo brooch at her throat, and a simple band holding her dark straight hair close to her head. It is drawn back over her ears just enough to expose the lobes, from which two hoops suspend, nearly an inch in diameter. Her brow is low and her neck short and thick: a plebeian figure bearing herself with pride and dignity [Plate 1]. Among any small party of working-class girls of the time she would have been an obvious choice for a group leader.

She was one of three daughters of Frederick Brown, a wholesale butcher of Isleworth, Middlesex. Apparently she was driven from her home for a reason never specified in the surviving family correspondence; and not until she was a wife and mother, the only one of the three sisters to bear children, did she allow her family in London to know she was alive.

‘When I think of the way you left’, her elder sister Anne wrote in 1870, ‘I feel embittered to think you were driven from your home.’

Yet a family legend asserts that Jane’s father accompanied her to Melbourne, or at any rate saw her in Melbourne and returned to England. His eldest son also met them there. Fred Brown, junior, Jane’s brother, offered to pay her fare back to England, it is said, and either she refused or it turned out to be one of brother Fred’s unfulfilled promises, of which several more were to come.

‘Poor girl’, Anne wrote in the same letter, ‘yours has been a hard lot even before you left England. It is only thro recklessness we have all been shifted so. Poor Fred was harshly treated we never hear from him of course.’
When Fred was a lad, they say, he worked in his father's business. One day he was slaughtering for the local Jewish community under the supervision of a Rabbi. As the first beast expired, the Rabbi rejected it.

'Trayf,' he said.
Fred turned his knife upon the next beast.
'Trayf,' pronounced the Rabbi.

Again, young Fred slit the throat of a third animal, and again it was judged unclean, not kosher killed. In despair he turned to another. The blood gushed into a trough.

'Trayf.'

Fred pushed the Rabbi headlong into the trough and fled. He is said to have turned up again several years later headed north for Canada. It was the first of a number of sporadic reappearances in the early part of this story.

The following letter from the Isleworth butcher to his daughter in the colony of Victoria was written in his copperplate hand on the same day as Anne's first letter to her sister.

August 31 1870
Honors Home
Spring Grove
Isleworth
Middlesex
England

My Dear Jenny
I received your welcome letter of the 13th of June with the greatest of pleasure, having been quite lost in wonder of your long silence and I am very glad to hear that you and yours are still in the land of the living. Mother is very much afflicted with the Rhumatics so much so that she has to walk from one room to other with a stick. I am tolerably well now and then a touch of the gout I have not heard from Fred these seven years the last time we heard from him was he was going up to British Columbia he had been serving in the American war he was Lieutenant in the Federal Corps escaped without any wounds but had been very starved when a prisoner at Richmond but you know what a strange customer he is see how he treated you and me at Melbourne. I dare say he will turn up some Day like you have after being quite given up for there is a great many strange thing turn up now a days. Nanny [Anne] is living in a gentlemans family close to me and a very famous place she has got she is often with us—you will have a letter from her the next Mail Rhoda [the second sister] is still with her Ant Hill neither of them married both on the list to many women to get Husbands now a days. Your Brother Harvey is married and has one daughter he in the police force near woodford in Essex he has grown a very fine young man he at least an inch taller than I am he has 24 shillings per week and stands well for promotion he has a very nice cottage with four rooms with about half an acre of garden ground for 2/6 per week where he grows quite sufficient
vegetables for his use potatoes in abundance his wife belongs to a very respectable family and she is one of the nicest creatures possible and the little girl as fair as wax with beatiful white curly hair all over her neck they have lost one little girl 3 months old.

My Brother Harvey and his wife are still living at Kentish Town he has been very ill he has had an attack of appoplexy but as got over it very nicely she as also been very seriously unwell. Richard Druet is Dead about a twelve month we have had a very dry summer no rain of any amount all the year no hey at all such a season as never was known in the memory of man their is no grass for the Cattle to eat meat very dear shoulders of mutton 8½d to 9d per pound and all other meat equally dear pork very dear 9d and 1od per pund bacon 1s to 1s 2d per pound Bread best 8d the four pound loaf all agriculturall labour very badly paid 15 shillings per week about the average wages about us. I have had a very good crop of fruit this year, the fruit this year has been so abundant that there is scarcely any sale for it in the market potatoes are very cheap.

Richard Druet is Dead about a twelve month we have had a very dry summer no rain of any amount all the year no hey at all such a season as never was known in the memory of man their is no grass for the Cattle to eat meat very dear shoulders of mutton 8½d to 9d per pound and all other meat equally dear pork very dear 9d and 1od per pund bacon 1s to 1s 2d per pound Bread best 8d the four pound loaf all agriculturall labour very badly paid 15 shillings per week about the average wages about us. I have had a very good crop of fruit this year, the fruit this year has been so abundant that there is scarcely any sale for it in the market potatoes are very cheap.

Our bautiful place at Isleworth is thank God far removed from the scences of strife.

Now my dear Jenny I must beg and request of you that you will not keep me in that suspence again but write at least once a Year or say six months but be sure if your change your abode let me know where I can find you.

I should very much like to have the Photographs of your Dear children and your self taken all together when you can Rise the wind for that purpose and your Husbands also if you could manage it—his of course must be taken seperately . . .

William Bass and his wife are very well they have 9 Children 2 Dead William is still my tailor I have every year four yards of superfine cloth sent me from the [illegible] Company a very dark olive green which makes a very famous suit of clothes. our Home is just like a gentleman’s mansion every convenience gas for coppers for washing Bath and, in fact such a place that is scarcely to be found.

Now my dear Jenny

I think I have told you all and I shall fully expect you will after you get nannys letter or before that you will acknowledge this letter, you must kiss
all the Dear Children for me and give my best respects to your Husband
and allow me
to Remain
Your affectionate
Father
Frederick Brown

To Mrs Jane Davison

God bless you.

Jane had been married to Tom Davison for twelve years. They were married on 28 August 1858, and Jane gave her age as twenty-one. But if, as family records have it, she was born in 1840, she must have been only eighteen and lying about her age in order to marry without parental consent. Her father’s mention of having seen her in Melbourne confirms the family tradition that he preceded his daughter to Australia, but returned; and it seems likely, given her station in life and the poverty she endured throughout the rest of it, that she was an assisted migrant. If so, she was the Jane Brown, an eighteen-year-old general servant from Cumberland, who landed at Melbourne on 14 March 1858. She came on the Merchant Prince from Liverpool, with young working men, servant girls and nursemaids, mostly from the north of England. The ship’s purser knew that Jane was able to read and write. She had given her religion as Church of England, and a brother in Portland, Victoria, as her destination in Australia.

What happened to Jane Brown of Isleworth between leaving home and embarking for Australia? Was she driven from her home for the usual Victorian reason? Did she suffer a miscarriage running up and down the stairs in some tall stone Cumberland household where someone, from piety, had found her a job? And when Fred fled the slaughterhouse, did he in fact first turn up again, not in America but in Australia? Had he found work in the meat industry at Portland? It had been a whaling station; by the end of the 1860s it had a boiling-down works and the Portland Meat Preserving Company. Someone must have paid £4 towards Jane’s passage, and it was usual for someone in the colony to do so. Was Fred her sponsor? A fictioneer would answer all those questions in the affirmative, and the tale would ring true.

The most mysterious figure of all in Jane’s background is her mother. If her father came to Australia and saw Jane in Melbourne, he must have returned between March and August 1858, when he was fifty-five, and there is nothing to suggest that his wife accompanied him. He was sixty-seven when he wrote to Jane with news that her mother was ‘very much afflicted with the Rhumatics’; and the only other reference to her in the letters Jane kept are dark patches in the gloom that was all Anne had to offer ‘poor Jenny’:

Now my dear sister I can only say again how thankful I am to hear from [you] again and hope some day to have all your likenesses how I do wish I could see your children and make them some little clothes out of my own. I often think what things I could run up for you if you were handy. I often want a use for an old dress. Not that I am so flush as of course I have to find Mother in things there money will not find her things of course Father has his found.
Presumably their father had retired. Six months later Anne wrote: Shall I ever see you again and your dear children how I wish you were all nearer. poor Fred I wonder what has become of him ours is an unenviable lot some of our Family flourish Uncle Harvey. & Ellen has been fortunate and I expect will come in for all his money we seem not to be known. but he has a right to do as he likes with his own. we ought to be better off poor girl you were turned out of home. how I do grieve for you. She sent a postal order for a pound to pay for photographs of Jane and her family: I wish I could afford to send more but I feel I have wasted so much time and never thought of saving when I was earning double what I am now and I am looking to old fancy 38 in May but trouble has told its tale on me and I begin to feel not so able as I was where I am living I work tremendously hard Sunday is no day of rest I have been here 2 years. and I think of changing after Easter. for by the Papers they are giving good wages to Plain Cooks I have only £1 [per annum] but the inducement was to be near Fathers but I can’t study that always they are provided for I am not and have nothing to look forward to in old age. my health is very indifferent. She signed the letter ‘from your affectionate Sister’, having concluded with a curious secretiveness and conspicuous omission of their mother’s name: I hope you will get this safely I shall not sign my name you will ask for it in my name from Isleworth send the next letter to me here F Nalder Esq Bedfont Lodge Woodlands Isleworth only a few minutes from Fathers all send their love to you and kisses for your dear children.

Since there is no sign of any lasting break between Jane and her father, it seems reasonable to infer from Anne’s innuendo that she was driven from home by her mother. The last reference to her in the surviving letters is in November 1871 when Anne, still cooking for the Nalder household, reports the comforts of religion. Her employers were planning to move house and had sent their cook house hunting: have been to look at some close to Fathers I hope we shall not move out of the neighbourhood for I feel quite at home in it now and I belong to a chapel which I am able to attend regularly and of course by that I am known. and is very pleasant to pass an hour with some of them and talk of religious subjects I begin to think very differently from what I once did. Something within seems to tell us this is not our best there is a comfort in religion when all other things fail to satisfy us I hope you will instruct your children to pray. We had no Teacher to learn us to pray in fact Religion was never known amongst us it is terrible to think so many are blind to it. I pray earnestly for you and yours that God in his mercy will guide and protect you and tho we may never meet here we do so hereafter.

She acknowledged photographs received from Jane, having kept two for herself and given one to their sister, Rhoda. ‘They are too precious to let anyone else have.’ She continued:
as to Harvey I am not friends with he has borrowed money of me and
instead of paying he used such vile language I care not to see or hear any thing of him I never ask about him of course Mother dont like it but I cannot study them. for I think they ought to be much more grateful for what they have is more than their due I sometimes think I live too near we dont always seem to agree I have done my duty more than they [deserve] and I cannot always be giving to them they don't want it only for unnecessaries.4

A gap of more than four years follows in the letters Jane kept. Perhaps a missing letter reported their mother's death. Jane may have destroyed it deliberately, if ever she received it.

It is present-day tradition in the family that Jane's father was a wholesale butcher in business on his own account; but at her marriage Jane gave her father's occupation simply as 'butcher', and Anne's allusions to her own contributions to their father's support, apparently after his retirement (Father has his clothing 'found'; 'they are provided for') suggest that he had been an employee, perhaps a manager [Plate 2].

Now, among Victorians of the Browns' class (upper-middle, aspiring to lower-middle) the quest for individuality through romantic adventure was pursued, if at all, by departures from the established forms of church attendance into the sublimated incontinence of chapel-going and other more extravagant forms of religious nonconformism. It was the only uplifting leisure activity available to them. Such people were not prone to sexual misadventure. If exceptions did occur, they were thoroughly suppressed. What became a subject for hushed whispering in a later generation, and open discussion in our own, was never alluded to at all. Black sheep became scapegoats, especially if they were female. There is too little reason for guessing that Jane was driven from her home through a sexual peccadillo: she would not have been 'poor Jenny' for that. The sin for hushed whispers and oblique allusions among Jane's kinfolk was the demon drink.

We are a beggarly lot of course Uncle Harvey is as usual we never go. her family will have all his money, but he earned it and took care of it and has a right to do as he likes with it tis only bad management and the cursed drink Father did not have as much. When I think of the way you left I feel em bittered to think you were driven from your home . . .

. . . There seems to be nothing but difficulty to know how to exist it is all very well to preach about mercies but few have them to be thankful for I dont think we have much to feel grateful for. you especially but it useless to grumble . . .5

Uncle James is leaving Westminster he is not able to drive now they are going to live in Devonshire I suppose they have a little to live upon of course it don't take much to keep them he does not drink or smoke that costs for some more than living.6

Were both Frederick Brown and his wife Rhoda, née Fiddemond, delinquent drinkers? Was Jane driven out after taking her father's part in a drunken brawl between her parents? There is much to suggest a singular affection between father and daughter. Many years later, in 1892, brother Fred made one of his sporadic
appearances by way of his immaculate copperplate hand. His letter to Anne from Butte City, Montana, was sent on to Jane:

as Regards Myself I am getting old but I am well preserved I have good health which I attribute to taking as good care of Myself as possible and I seldom if ever Drink anything in fact I seldom touch it I have this to say I have never but once in my Life been under the Influence of Liquor so you see there is a Great Difference between myself and Father.7

Anne's accompanying letter to Jane was not preserved, but the last word in the above quotation has been blotted out with a thick nib and a smudge of black ink. It has not been wholly obliterated, however, and over the years the ink has faded above Fred's fine calligraphy. His remark is unmistakable. Which of the sisters was responsible for the obliteration? Anne, who seems regularly to have used black ink and poor, thick nibs, would surely only have had reason for such concealment from Jane in order to display her own filial piety. Jane might have wished to conceal the dishonour from herself, or from posterity.

Whatever the reasons for Jane's leave-taking and emigration, there are no doubts that she found a better life in Australia. That is to say, she exchanged a cold existence of intermittent violence and unrelieved gloom for a wretched one of respectable poverty, loneliness and toil.

Little is known about the man she married. He was born in Barking, Essex, to Thomas Davison, a drunken storekeeper, and his wife, Caroline, née Frankham. Since he was named after his father, he was presumably the eldest son of what was apparently a large family. Tradition insists that he was a sailor, at least thirty-three years older than Jane: that is, born about 1806 and therefore only some three years younger than his father-in-law.

As a young man he had followed the sea—sailing out of the port of Sydney.8

The sea was no place for an old man, and he was beginning to feel his youth slipping from him. Then, he met the girl who later became his wife, and after a while he married.

Before long, there was nothing for it, if he would earn a living, but to go up country and follow the only trade he knew—cooking.9

He was probably a ship's cook who followed an almost identical trade ashore: preparing plain food for crews of rough-living men in isolated conditions.

The old man used to follow the shearers down from Queensland through to Victoria as cook for the sheds, and so earn a living for himself and his distant family. He married late in life and had had a hard time rearing three children whose grandfather he should have been, not their father.10

In fact, Tom and Jane had a hard time rearing eight children, and three of those they failed to rear at all. Their only living son was responsible in later life for the above descriptions, rather gratuitously fictionalised.

Tom Davison said he was a member of the Wesleyan Church when they were married at the Wesleyan Chapel, Geelong, on the last Saturday of winter. Like Jane, he was able to read and write. He told the minister, the Rev. William Hill,
that he was a cook aged thirty-five: about seventeen years younger than the family
legend was to make him.

An undated photograph of Tom taken from a ferrotype reveals an expression
that seems ready to proffer any convenient fiction as fact. For that roguish twinkle
it would have been an effortless accomplishment to persuade a minister or registrar,
against his commonsense, to record an age fifteen to twenty years younger than the
lines in that puckish, weatherbeaten face. It is a Cockney twinkle, as untrustworthy
as it is cheeky, as feckless as it was doubtless endearing, and if it was fashioned out of
earshot of Bow Bells, it must have been because the wind was in the wrong
direction at the time. It is a face that might have jumped a thousand ships; as a cook,
he would have made a poor best of whatever makings he had around; and if it
happened to be only snake, then the 'chicken' soup could be spiced with curry and
who would know the difference? Or dare to challenge if he did?

He seems to have been a small-boned man, probably with an ability to make up
in bravado what he lacked in stature. His head is finely shaped, but the skin is thick
upon his cheekbones; the furrows of his brow and underlining his cheeks are not
those of wisdom but of ageing immaturity, not of experience but of experience
deceived; his small greying beard and top-heavy moustache overhanging like his
dark, vivacious eyebrows, performing much the same function as the broad-
brimmed billycock hat in which he chose to be photographed: less a habit of
fashion than a mode of concealment. His strongest feature is a slightly pendulous
nose, but that is contradicted by the wilful pout of his lower lip.

His descendants have often wondered why a girl like Jane, in a Melbourne
which must have been teeming with eligible young men, would have taken up
with one so old; and with such certainty of premature widowhood. But the
question ignores the realities of loneliness and exile. Who knows with what
twinkling promises Tom wooed her, of how his immaturities matched her youth,
and her fortitude his worldliness?

The picture is of a man at least fifty; by present-day standards he could even be a
youthful seventy. He is wearing a tie and low, starched collar, displaying a well-
laundered expanse of shirt-front above his low-cut waistcoat and between the
broad lapels of his single-breasted jacket. His felt hat is of a style fashionable in the
late eighteen-fifties. If it was not taken at the time of his marriage (and there is no
similarity of style with the portrait of Jane), it may date from 1871 when Jane
received Anne’s postal order.

If you can send 3 cards done in a group if your Huband is at home his as
well but don’t delay I shall anxiously look for them . . .

If Tom was working away from home by then, a ferrotype may have been the
only kind of 'likeness' available to him. He would have been aged between forty-
eight and sixty-five [Plate 3].

What was Jane Brown doing in the five and a half months between
disembarkation and marriage? Geelong was an obvious place to go if she wanted to
leave Melbourne. She could have travelled there in comparative safety by train, for
the two towns were connected by what was then the longest railway line in the
continent. Did she meet Tom during some unrecorded spell of domestic service in
JANE

Geelong? She gave no occupation when the banns were put up. Was Tom a cook in the Merchant Prince who quit seafaring when he met her? There is no proper evidence that he was a sailor, and perhaps the tale is another part of a family legend enriched by fiction.\(^1\)\(^2\)

He was evidently in Australia with a younger brother, and they were sharing the same forwarding address but otherwise not in touch with one another. The nature of his origins must be inferred from a letter he received early in his second year of marriage, when Jane was well advanced in her first pregnancy. A third brother, Harry, wrote from near The Angel, Islington.

Sep 13 1859
47 Rahere Street
Goswell Rd.

Dear Tom or Ben

I write this hoping that it will be the means of inducing you to write to Mother I have written several letters to both of you and she has received no answer for twenty months she is now getting old and I am sorry to say nearly blind her legs are also very bad it would be a great consolation for her to know that both of you have not forgotten her she says that she should like to see you both of course but as you can do better where you are stay there but she feels hurt to find that other Mothers often receive letters from their sons and she receives none from hers I know how it is you intend to write and put it off you should remember that procrastination is thief of time.

in writing to Bill Gooch I have told him that this note is of the utmost import to you to induce him to forward it without delay.

Poor Mother . . . I have tried to induce her to come and live with us but she refuses so I suppose she will go on till the last

Father is going on the same as usual that is he would drink more if he could get it—he is still at Burrells

Robert has been very prosperous he and Elenor and the six young ones are quite well I believe I have not seen them for two years they became so inflated with their own importance that I was obliged to cut them altogether.

Jack and Mary and the four young ones are quite well they have not long lost there oldest girl.

Joe is going on the same as usual he and his wife are quite well so are the three youngsters

I am going on in the usual style Emma is quite well so are the five youngsters two girls three Boys Aunt Caroline is dead and buried Uncle Ben got married and Aunt Sue bolted with all the furniture two thirds of which belonged to Uncle Ben but he had not pluck enough to get it back so she got off scot free a single Man lodger went whent with her but I suppose she found it expensive to keep a man for she has had the brokers in for rent an lost every thing and now that she can no longer keep him he has taken himself off and she is lodging with Mr R. Davison of Hackney downs
I am learning Bird stuffing if either of you should come home I hope you will be kind enough to lay out two pounds in Birds skins for me and I would repay you and take it as a very great kindness as they are very dear here

I am
Your
Affectionate
Brother Harry

Write home to Mother and write often

If, as the family's reckoning would have it, Tom was in his early fifties at the time, he would certainly have been the eldest son, and his mother at least seventy. With five younger brothers, four of them married with eighteen children between them, it is possible that, in those fecund days, Tom might have been a man of thirty-six. When Jane presented him with a son and heir on 6 December 1859, at their home in Clarendon Street in the Geelong suburb of Chilwell, the midwife's husband gave Tom's age to the registrar as thirty-five.

They called the infant Frederick Thomas, after his grandfather and his father. Seventeen days later, Frederick Thomas Davison was dead from dysentery and the exhaustion of it.

Tom may have written promptly to his mother; but it was not until seven months after their loss, when Jane had just become pregnant again, that she wrote to her father and Tom replied to Harry. In Harry's return letter, dated 31 March 1861, he wrote:

I called on Mr Brown two days after I received your letter he had received a letter from Jane I saw your Mother in law if your wife is any thing like her Mother you have drawn a prize in lifes lottery Mr Brown does not think that you are not high enough for his daughter but he thinks (and rightly so) that you are not carefull enough with your money but I assured him that now you had someone to take care of it for you you would be different for I find that a good Wife is the best Banker and you have by this time found the same. In your last you stated that you w ould send Mother som ething as soon as you could now I wish to impress on you that she does not require it I will take care of her . . .

A second son was born to Jane and Tom on 9 February 1861. They named him after Tom's brother, and when Henry was seventeen days old, Jane took him herself to the registrar's. She gave her own age as twenty-three (although she was probably not quite twenty-two) and her husband's as thirty-six, now nineteen years younger than subsequent family reports. And thereafter, at the registration of birth of each of their children, the ages given by Jane and Tom varied, reflecting neither their own true ages nor the intervals of time between the births. Fifteen months after he was born, on 16 May 1862, Henry Davison died of dysentery, as had his brother before him.

Perhaps their misfortune was due to the water supply of the port of Geelong. In fact, there was no public water supply, only a privately-owned tank in the market square, into which the untreated river water was pumped and out of which it was
sold and distributed by horse-drawn carts. A few groups of citizens also constructed underground rainwater tanks.

Did Tom and Jane associate their babies' deaths with the water (or, superstitiously, the "air") of Geelong? They continued living there, and Jane conceived again at the end of the same year. A daughter, Caroline Ann, was born to survive on 16 September 1863. It would be pleasing to think that the wish to give Caroline a better chance of survival was the decisive factor in their departure on the westbound train up the line to Ballarat which had been opened for traffic in April 1862. Before the line was opened, their shortest way to the goldfields would have been by Cobb & Co.'s Telegraph Mail Coach or by the night mail.

It was well known that Ballarat's water supply, in quality and extent, was second in the colony only to that of the capital, the local authorities having acquired water reserves to serve a population which was expanding at an unprecedented rate. Tom and Jane were part of the rush which had multiplied Victoria's population nearly six times in the decade before 1861; now, with Caroline, they were part of the explosion that continued to rock the three boroughs of Ballarat: four urbanised miles from east to west and a quarter from north to south, with ten thousand dwellings and more than four times that number of inhabitants. The reason for the Davisons' removal there was most likely to have been better wages and employment opportunities.

Indeed, if they had moved for health reasons, they must have wondered why they had troubled, for the first child born to them there died at eleven months old from unattended whooping cough. It was May 1866, and the damp chill air that aggravated the respiratory diseases of the miners was settling over the goldfields for the start of another winter. The child was another daughter, and was named after her mother.

They had settled at Buninyong, a township at the foot of the extinct volcano of the same name, one of two that dominate the local landscape; and it seems likely that Tom was a cook on a cattle station there, for the pastoralists must have lost many of their hands to the mines. Buninyong, seven miles south of Ballarat, only twenty years before had been the principal inland town in the colony, where bullockies built huts in which they could leave their families relatively safe from attack by Aborigines or bushrangers.

Jane conceived for the fifth time about a month after baby Jane's death, and another daughter, Emma, was born to survive on 16 March 1867. And it was at Buninyong, on 10 June 1868, almost ten years after his parent's marriage, that another son, the only son to survive, was born. He was given no second name. There was not to be another junior Thomas. This time he was simply Frederick.

In 1870, Jane wrote for the first time in a decade to her family at Isleworth. To judge from a remark in Anne's first letter in reply, written in August 1970, Tom was by then working long hours for twenty-five shillings a week.

the Papers tell such a different tale say things are well and labour plentiful a few do well I suppose there as well as here. I wish fortune would favour us a little more.

And in her letter of March 1871, Anne wrote:
I am so glad your husband has work but to think of him tramping the
Country so far is terrible.\textsuperscript{13} If Tom was working away from home by this time, it was probably because the
squatters in the region of Ballarat were no longer the employers of labour they
formerly had been. The large pastoral leases, especially those served by urban
settlement, were being subdivided under land acts passed during the sixties which
made ten million acres of the colony available for selection in agricultural blocks of
between forty acres and a square mile to anyone willing to pay one pound an acre
on interest-free terms over eight years. It took a few years for the selectors to fail
and their blocks to fall into the hands of their creditors, creating a new landowning
class among the bourgeoisie of storekeepers, stock and station agents, money
lenders and banks. Men like Tom Davison had to seek work on outback sheep
stations, for the wool industry was almost the only one without heavy
unemployment.

By this time, too, Jane was working to help support the family. ‘To think you
have to work at Laundry work for a living’, wrote Anne to her sister, ‘oh dear it
seems cruel’.\textsuperscript{14} Tom was home in the autumn of 1871, for then their seventh child was
conceived. Florence was born at the end of that year and survived. The eight-year-
old Caroline was writing letters to Aunt Anne. Emma, aged four, received a red
petticoat from her aunt which Anne had made ‘to the card’, that is, from her
photograph. The girls’ three-year-old brother got a picture book. Whether Jane
acknowledged these gifts is unknown. In her hard-won and fiercely-defended
pride, she may have resented her sister’s patronage, for in 1871 she ceased writing.
Slaving at what Anne called her ‘awful work’, standing at a washtub for her
living,\textsuperscript{15} Jane Davison was at last succeeding in rearing a son.

By the time the boy was five, the family had moved into Ballarat. And at the end
of 1873, Tom returned home from a long trip.\textsuperscript{16} That was when the last of their
eight children was conceived. Minnie was born on 17 September 1874.

With Minnie’s birth, Jane decided she had endured enough childbearing. No
more, she told Tom; and in those days such a decision by a determined woman was
tantamount to a vow of chastity. Tom probably set off on his next journey outback
with a different resignation and a little less reluctance.

The new baby must have been nearly a year old when, in 1875, Jane reopened
correspondence with Anne and told her of Minnie’s birth. Perhaps she wanted to
be sure of Minnie’s survival so that she could send a bright letter into the pit of her
sister’s gloom. Some time between Minnie’s birth and Jane’s letter, the family left
Ballarat for Sandhurst, another gold mining town in a valley seventy-five miles
further north. Later it was to have its original name restored to it: Bendigo.
Perhaps Jane’s reason for writing home again was to give Anne their new address.
There is an eager note in Anne’s reply of 5 October 1875, which suggests she was
writing shortly after receipt. She gave news of brother Fred, and of an even more
exceptionable form of patronage:

How pleased we are to hear from you again I have written to you but I
suppose letters have been lost you will be glad to hear brother Fred has made himself known to us after many years silence your letters I have forwarded to him as he [illegible] to know how you are situated and says he will bring your children up for you. of course he is anxious to know what sort of a husband you have he says he is in a position to help all of us if we are deserving of it. he is cautious as he says he owes his success thro temperance and as we well know the reason that caused us to be so scattered homeless he is quite right as he says his money shall not go for Beer or Gin he is in the Butchering and was a soldier in the last War for 2 years but I should think it likely you will hear from him before you get this. I sent him one of your Cartes . . .

He has sent me his likeness so nice looking really dear it seems as if we should meet again after so long silence now we all know of each other. he has offered to put me and Rhoda in Business but so many reasons I would rather not it is all paying for rent and taxes and at my age I would rather have a little instead where I could be sure of it . . .

I have had a very hard place in the kitchen the last 5 years and really people seem as if they could never have enough out of a servant for their money this has been my home on and off many years and not hard laborious work still I wish I had a home of my own how nice it would be if Fred would let me return with him and help with your children I should like to have something to care for and that would care for me and you are the only one of us who needs that assistance I dare say your eldest girl would like to see her Aunts her Uncle Fred has written many times to say he wished you could be found and your children he would rear them. I send my Carte to my eldest niece.

The letter is as unconsciously self-revealing as the carte for Caroline that accompanied it: a small sepia portrait of Anne in a floral bonnet with drooping mouth, nose, head, shoulders, left eyelid and earrings. She was forty-two when she wrote the letter: her face already embodied the old woman [Plate 4].

Whether her geography was contused, or whether Fred intimated that he wanted all his sisters to join him in America, is not clear. Something in the letter hurt the Davisons' feelings; probably Anne's harping on how much they needed help, with the implications that she approved of Fred's offer to rear the children and may even have written a begging letter to her brother on their behalf. Early in 1876, Jane replied to Anne, and communicated some of her hurt feelings.

Anne's next letter was dated March 8, and again she promised money to help them. The exact reason why Jane's feelings had been hurt may not have been communicated clearly enough. And Anne's sourness is not without reality.

I hope before you get this you will have heard from Fred he has continually written for me to find you out as he could and would help you but I hardly know what to think of him I can scarcely believe all you know the Americans are famed for deviating from the truth he promised to come and put me and Rhoda is Busniss but latterly I put not faith in his promises if he is so successful and money is to be made by him so
easily I am afraid it is apt to make him think is just as easy for others he makes great stress upon temperance I have practised it and hard work and economy and yet can only remain in one position and for many years have only had from 14 to 16 pounds a year, as to dress mine is of the plainest and have to do without many things as I cannot earn money for any indulgences of course I have had for years to give Father a little now he is better off since Uncle’s death. still I am only too pleased to be able to spare you £2 to help you in the Winter buy the dear children something for me and also your husband I am sorry to have hurt yours and his feelings believe me it was not intentionally I should much like to see him give my love to him and 10/ to buy him something I wish I could afford more . . . I hope Fred will assist I am sure by what he writes he might and directly, with your little family it would be a deal off yours and your husbands minds he said in one of his letters he would bring up your children for you how I should like to see him I am very glad he has made himself known after so many years . . .

Apparently, Uncle Harvey had left some of his fortune to their father, in spite of Anne’s earlier predictions. Anne reported that she had seen Tom’s brother Harry. He . . . says you never put any address in your letters. So he could not write to you I gave him your present address, he is a very young looking man to have a Son 25 his youngest 1 year old says he advertises in all the papers here and abroad I saw it in the paper . . .

give my love to Caroline and tell her I prize her nicely written letter very much how I should like to [see] them all it would be an object for me to love as I have now only myself. I am saving a gold Locket for her some time I will send it with mine and Rhoda’s Hair. I have yours you sent me many years ago. Rhoda and Aunt Hill send love & kisses to the children. of course Aunt feels she shall never see you again. if we 4 never meet again I hope we shall in the next world God grant we may . . .

I have not heard from [Fred] since just after Christmas, then he sent me a piece cut out of a newspaper certificate of partnership in a Butchers and before that he was selling off as he had so much and giving up business entirely. but I wrote to him not to raise your hopes and unsettle you unless he really meant something as with your little family it would be serious.

Meanwhile, early in 1876, a letter postmarked San Diego, California, arrived addressed in that unforgettable ostentatious copperplate: ‘care Mr Bush Grocer, Williamson Street, Sandhurst, Victoria’. The letter began in ink, but at the bottom of the first page the ink ran out. It continued, with somewhat less fastidious calligraphy, in pencil.

California
San Diego
January 27th 1876

Dear Sister

Your letter and also your Husbands came to hand also your little Girl Caroline your letter was forwarded to me here from Butte C as I have
sold out my Business in Northern California and now reside here in the Southern part of the State on the Border of Mexico I am in the Wholesale Butcher Business here I have got about 1400 head of Cattle 4000 sheep and lots of Horses and Land and have about 14 Men working for me I have got 3 good farms one about 1800 acres 2 smaller ones besides plenty of Range for Cattle

of course Sister Anne told you about my private affairs I was Married and Divorced cost me a fortune so I have got no one but myself here in fact I am alone and am in a fair way of making a large Fortune you can talk to your Husband Tom and ask him how he would like to Come to California ask about how much it will cost to fetch you all here the Whole Family of you and in the event of your coming why of Course I will help you along but then you know the Old Saying God helps them that help themselves. For myself I work very hard I get up every morning at 3 O'Clock while at home and when after Cattle I frequently ride all day and all night of Course you have a Large Family and if you was doing better in life why of Course it places you in a different position and you raise the Children differently in fact Jenny you being the only one of the family by Mother that has got any Children why of Course I feel it my duty to help you and that is the Reason why I would like to have you in California

you must excuse the short letter as my time is precious in fact I am busy all the time and have little or no time to spare will look for a letter from you and your Husband give my Love to the Children and accept the same Yourself

From Brother
Fred Brown

Tell Tom if ever you do Come here that if a Man is willing to work he can make a raise here quicker than anywhere else

Direct
Fred Brown
San Diego
California

After that Brother Fred, like his wealth, probably, disappeared again. The letter was received in Melbourne on 10 March and in Sandhurst a hundred miles away the same day. On the back of the envelope, in Jane's ageing hand, are the words: 'sent a letter last Nov 15/88'. Although she probably replied promptly, Fred did not write again. But even the ingenuity of a post office must have been hard pressed to isolate a single Fred Brown from all those in San Diego.

By now, Jane was rearing son and four daughters virtually single-handed. One day there was great rejoicing in the household, for she acquired her own sewing machine. It put an end to the work away from home at other people's washtubs and meant that she could stay at home and take in sewing. It was an achievement that would sustain her for the rest of her days.
My mother would talk to us around the tea-table as though we were as good as anyone else—and didn’t let us forget that anyone else was as good as us. That’s what I call true democracy. And she would tell us, too, that out in the world there was something worth while if we would only take the trouble to go after it.

And there were no carpets on our floors, nor pictures on the walls, either . . . only bricks for the one and hessian, covered with cheap wallpaper on the other. But there was a healthy belief in ourselves that made us all unconscious of the brick floors and of the hessian-covered walls.\footnote{17}

Their weatherboard house in Barnard Street, Sandhurst, was a double-fronted place under a shingle roof with veranda posts that also supported the front gate and the three-foot paling fence. It probably contained four tiny rooms divided by a centre passage, with cookhouse and other services under separate structures in the backyard. A faded sepia snapshot of Fred and his two younger sisters taken outside the house shows Minnie an inch shorter than the three-foot fence and Florrie close at her side an inch taller. They are wearing long-sleeved knee-length dresses and boots and their dark hair has been combed and parted. Fred stands a little over four feet tall. He is wearing a crumpled waist-length jacket buttoned right over left from neck to navel. The cuffs extend almost over the knuckles of his hands, which are held formally down his trouser seams. The long trousers, of some plain, dark material matching the jacket, are a little too long, probably so that he could grow into them. He is wearing boots which are mostly concealed by the crumpled trousers. His hair seems fairer than his sisters’: parted low on the left and perhaps a month from a short-back-and-sides haircut. The girls have the frowns and solemnly anxious expressions that are associated with malnutrition in photographs of workers’ children in industrial areas in those dark, satanic days, but there are no other signs of it in their bearing and Fred’s expression is cheerful enough. No doubt the girls are merely squinting in the sunlight. It is hard to tell from the photograph whether Fred is a tall, gangling boy for his age because the short jacket with its unpadded shoulders and the overlong trousers exaggerate the length of his limbs. The photograph could well have been taken in 1877, when Fred was nine.

Jane’s new occupation may have helped to relieve the older girls of some of the household drudgery, but, as well, it probably provided Jane with opportunities to intensify her devotion to her treasured son. Like her sister, she had begun to seek the comforts of religion; though, it appears to have taken the form of affectionate solicitude from a man of religion. Among the letters she tenderly preserved in a small hand-made cotton bag with a drawstring was one signed ‘Yours very affectionately, H. Rickards’, dated 11 August 1875, and apparently sent from Melbourne. Jane had evidently written to reveal her whereabouts and sent it by hand, possibly through a member of her church congregation. Mr. Rickards replied the evening he received it. ‘I have lost no time in commencing an answer, or rather my letter to you’, he wrote, having begun with ‘My dear Mrs Davison’.

I have often had you on my mind thinking how you were getting on with your family in this sorrowing suffering world we often hear of
sudden deaths, suicides & all sorts of events which is so ally’d to this our present pilgrimage state, the verses you sent me Abide with Me keep them in my testament its quite a favorite hymn and I often repete it for I often (as you do also) feel the great need in all trials & affictions how much we require the cheering presence of that almighty found Who has said come unto me all that are weary & heavy laden & I will give you rest dear Mrs D when we think who it is that gives this invitation you will see in 9 of Isaiah 6 & 7 verses & in Revelations 14 & first verse & read the first chapter He is the first & the last He is my Creator & He is my Redeemer & yours also... 

... I know you have much to depress the spirits & make you sad I know you bear things calmly & with fortitude & placidity & may our God & Father give you strength seek it from Him he has promised, I suppose you have but few comforters well if God is your refuge you have all for what is our all without that refuge we would not change our position with the great men of this earth if it was possible dear Mrs D I find my need of that precious blood of Christ its cleansing power every day now as much as ever & that perfect robe that is our dress when ever we go to God our Father now I must tell you a little about outward things thank God we are all well I have felt the cold but now I have a stove in my room but should be glad to do without it...

... my kind respects to Mr D sorry to hear he has such a bad cough the wet weather has been so conducive to cough’s its a great blessing that your children are so well, I shall always be glad to hear how you fareing in this uncertain world farewell...

By this time Fred and the elder girls were at school, Carrie probably in her last year there. Free compulsory schooling had been available to them since the Victorian Education Act of 1872 had converted the fee-paying ‘national’ schools, for which only buildings and teachers’ salaries were publicly subsidised, into free government schools. Fred was not to remember his school experience as pleasant, although he came to approve of its unpleasantness. ‘When I was a boy’, he wrote in 1920, the road home from school was to me a much more welcome path than the way there, and it was so with all my boy friends. I do not say that school should be made unattractive—far otherwise—but there is something about a task that does not appeal to the average lad, and the task of learning is no exception. I was not a dull scholar. Lessons were no trouble to me, yet school was irksome, and I watched the clock. Just how it was with those who found trouble in getting their lessons, I well know—and they ‘wagged’ it, in the parlance of those days... With me, no work was too hard or dirty just so it offered an excuse to miss school...

But at home, there was not likely to have been much hard or dirty work left for him to do; and his distaste for school may well have been exacerbated by the favours of his domestic position. As the only male amid five females, he was likely
to have been adored, indulged and served, until his uncriticised image of himself far exceeded his potential for realising it. He could probably do no wrong in the eyes of any of them; at the same time, he was Jane’s man. By this time Tom could not live with Jane: if he came home, he found it impossible to remain. So her husband was here today and gone tomorrow and her comforter was a hundred miles away in Melbourne. But her Fred was at her side and would remain there for as long as she could detain him.

It seems worth raising the question of whether Fred ever experienced a true childhood. When, in his seventh decade, he came to fictionalise his autobiography, he wrote:

Looking up one’s youth is a sad business, unless one is a good deal of a philosopher, and unless one’s philosophy is of the cheerful kind that readily acknowledges how much worse life might have been—that one has to be thankful for the things one has escaped as a kind of balance for the bruises that the years have dealt out, perhaps rather over-liberally.19

By early 1879, when his son was nearly eleven and Carrie had probably left home for domestic service, Tom had taken a job three hundred miles from Sandhurst; and it is possible that his family never saw him again. Yet there is no cause for thinking he deserted, unless a century ago the Australian tradition of shooting through was effected under a display of spurious solicitude and homesickness in scrappy letters full of excuses and written mainly to send maintenance money.

Tom’s surviving letters home, in a shaky, near-illiterate hand far more advanced in decrepitude than the one that signed the register only twenty years earlier in Geelong, do strike a note of real care; and the fairest inference is that he was driven away from the domestic hearth more from economic necessity and the vicissitudes of his trade than by a closed wife or at the behest of his mariner’s soul.

The family had moved again, this time to a house at the corner of Forest and McKenzie Streets. It was a crossroads with churches on three of its four corners and one of them was the Congregational Church to which Jane belonged. The Davisons are not traceable as ratepayers in Sandhurst at that time, hence it seems possible that they were living, rent free maybe, in the caretaker’s cottage in the church grounds, and that Jane was the church caretaker and cleaner. Tom would have been, in 1879, about seventy-three by tradition, or fifty-six by his own account. He was an ailing man writing home to a sick wife. All but one of the five letters are undated. This seems to be the first of them:

Wednesday

Dear Jenny

I arrived Here on Monday all right my leg is all right now I will get a little better living now as soon as I got this job I could have had one a good on 100 Miles nearer Home My luck never mind Neave [Never?] leave home on a Friday they are verry nice people but long Hours 30 a
JANE

week my love to all Kiss them for me I send the other pound—I must say
good night I am Your TDavison

The T and D are a single letter. The reverse side of the sheet contained the
following:

Mr Broughton Esq
Ticehurst Stati
Ivanohe [crossed out]
Ivahoe [crossed out]
Ivanhoe
NSW
a Do not laught

Tom was a cook in the dry outback of western New South Wales, half way up
the Cobb Highway between Hay on the Murrmubidgee and Wilcannia on the
Darling, three days by rail and coach from home. The letter that probably
followed contains signs of sickness, forgetfulness and longing. He acknowledges
two letters from Jane which were evidently too brief for his needs:

I receive both letters and it take some time Jenny if your letters had been
2 times as much I know you have plenty to worry you shuch as few
Woman I hope with good luck I may be able to se you again the place is
not a bad one and soon more will come the family is comming up and
than I will get Help—nice people no System Better soon I hope I have
not much time I shall keep a pound a month Back Kiss them all for me
Jeny [crossed out] my love to all our 3 Jenny I will send you a longer
letter when the family comes up my love to fred a Ema Little ones I have
a couhg and Bless you all

A man who can voluntarily send five-sixths of his income home to his wife and
four dependent children, even if he has all found, can hardly be called a deserter.
Letter writing was obviously difficult for him, as the following note, dated May 3,
testifies.

Received letter this mornig write the same day a man is going to Ivino
write every other Sunday I was Misirabl no letter for a Month write 3. I
send a 2. 0. 0. Cheque have no time the man waiting a longer letter after
you answer this my love to all.

Later the same mornig he had another reason for a brief note.
My Mate is sick I have littl time to write I am glad that you are keeping
pretty well I have no caps. Send me 2 By the post I want 2/ worth of
Root Rhubarb in them get a flat piece I send 3. 0. 0 and will send the
other when I hear from you a First Class Card. My few are getting old
have you any new ones I have looked at mine so often let this letter over
write the Elder one have forgot how. My love to all.

Did Tom plan to grow rhubarb for sale to the station? Was he tending a garden to
augment the produce of his kitchen? His descendants were to tell that in all his years
ashore he never grew out of a seafarer’s fascination with planting a seed in the
ground and seeing it grow. His reference to ‘a first class card’ must have been to a
photograph sent by Jane. The handwriting had become so poor that even she misread the end of the letter, which was probably intended to mean: 'Let this letter override the earlier one, but I've forgotten how because I don't remember what I said then'. Jane's reply was dated Sunday, June 1. Hence the year must have been 1879, and Fred almost eleven.

Dear Tom

I received yours yesterday with the cheque for 2 £ all right you do not say how you are getting on wether it is a hard place. the children send their love did you get Minnie & Fiorries letter Emma hopes you do not class her with one of the big ones that forget how to write to you. Fred is going to try his hand he acknowledges he does not know how to write a letter properly.

I have no more news than you have in the bush I send the rhubarb with this letter the caps by next post. I dont know wether you get them altogether. have you had any rain, it is very cold now. good night Tom

God Bless you

from Your Affectionate

Wife

J Davison

The last of Tom's letters could have been written at any time during the next five years, for in 1882 Jane had a spell in hospital and was forced to leave the children to fend for themselves.

Wednesday

Dear Jenny

I have not a letter for for a long wile I hope you are not ill a gain it is 2 weeks since I wrote I am verry buisy I have 2 Families a large lot but I hope to raise the wind to come Home from Here I send 3. o. o and will send 2 more when you write for it is a long way up and it might go wrong all at once I hope all are well. Kiss them all for me it is very Dry no rain yet. I know you must be ill a gain it is hard to be insuspence and all work and worry. My love to Caroline Emma and Fred. I have no had a line from any of them for a long time Bless you all

I am your

TDavison

Here was a seed in the legend his absence constantly nurtured. It grew into a family tale that he was given to sending his wife by two separate mails each month the two halves of a five-pound note, because of the unreliability of the postal service.

Towards the end of 1881, Jane received another letter from her father, who must have been apprised of her sickness. It contains the only indication from him that he had been married again, to a woman unknown to Jane.

It has been so long since we heard from you and was very sorry to have such a bad account of you but I hope you have got over the worst of it. It is now a twelve month on the 14 of this month [August] since my poor wife Died she was confined to her bed 14 weeks she had been gradually
declining this last four years she was just 70 I am glad to say that I remain very well for my age I shall be 79 next Birthday I go about the neibourhood every Day when it is fine I am a great deal by my self and was very miserable for sometime but I got through it all very fair a Bautiful full place to live in with plenty of monny to keep me 3 Large Rooms beautifullly furnished very convenient Kitchen and in fact every convenience I think you are aware that my Brother Harvey left me twenty pounds per year for my life so with that and my Pension of 58 pounds per year I am Quite a Rich Man no Rent Docters found Visits once every week and Nurse if required four yards of fine dark Cloth one Pair of New Boots 2 pairs Stockins every year I have got a Nice Garden plenty of Fruit this year Annie has just done down 14 Pound of black Currants . . .

Anne had married that year a man twenty years her senior and her father remarked:

she looks quite the old woman nearly as white as I am and very thin they have removed this week nearer to me they will be within a 3d. ride can can get to my place in a Quarter of an hour she is sometimes 3 or 4 Days with me and the rest at home but we have arranged for the Sunday she is with me for her Husband to come and dine with me so that will it very nice if she had not got Married I should have had her to live with me alltogether for gentlemen of the Company gave me leave to have her which might have led to her being an Inmate with a good pension of nearly a Pound per week I was sorry to hear that your Husband was so little at home I trust he sends you some mony . . .

Anne's wish for 'an object for me to love' had evidently been to some degree fulfilled. But the only remaining one of her letters that Jane preserved makes no mention of her husband of nearly two years. It is full of the three Freds, and even bears her father's address.

My Dr Jenny

I am glad you got my letter safely and I hope Fred will benefit from learning short hand as he has such a desire for it I dare say he will soon learn. Father is very pleased at his letters thinks he writes so nicely and hopes he will make a Good Tradesman let him write to Father it pleases him to see his letter. Father sends you £2 from the same post office as the last. So sorry to hear you are so ill I hope you do not want for any thing I shall try and manage to send the Shawl so that you may have it for your winter. Father is wonderfully well I manage to be with him every day at present we have not had much cold weather and that suits him better he does not go out but sits by the fire all day it is a very quiet place here quite country things are about the same with us Rhoda I see but little of as it takes all my time to do for the two homes

I wish I was near to have some of the eggs Fred says he keeps Fowls I am glad he is a good boy, and that the girls are so good which I think
they must have been to be alone and do all during the time you were in
the Hospital Father will be 80 years on the 5th March write as soon as you
get this I shall be 50 in May and I feel and look quite an old woman. meat
is very dear here mutton and Beef 1/- lb as Fred has got some one to learn
him cheaper the spare money I have no doubt you will find this useful.
Bread is 6½ qtrn we have not heard any thing of Fred since. I think as
your Fred has so much given him to do speaks well of his capability of
doing it and I hope he will be clever at his trade he evidently has a desire
to make himself proficient in it. give my love to the girls I have no doubt
they are equally good in working at home as things are now a good
servant here is thought much of with your teaching I dare say they will
reap the benefit . . .

Emma, at fifteen, was learning her mother’s trade and the fourteen-year-old
Fred was an apprentice printer. The meagre family budget was plundered each
week to pay two-and-six for his apprenticeship. The story goes that when he
discovered that good money was being spent to have him taught Pitman’s
shorthand, he bought the manual with money made from his fowls and taught
himself.

As he had grown up, Jane had become increasingly determined that the mines
should not claim him. She knew enough of unskilled boys who left school
prematurely or absconded from their apprenticeships to chase the short-lived
attractions of quick rewards on the diggings. The mining companies employed
boys of fifteen and sixteen as cheap labour. They could earn thirty shillings a week
underground, trucking mullock; a job that led in time to joining a party of miners
and eventually working at the face—with death, as like as not, some thirty years
later. Alternatively, a boy could earn as much as two pounds a week on the surface,
washing the particles of gold and other minerals from blankets that covered the
tables over which quartz was passed during the crushing process. But even washing
blankets contained health hazards from chemical contamination; and Jane was as
able as anyone to walk the streets of Sandhurst as she had of Ballarat East and see the
ex-miners with the black spit: men of fifty or less with stooped shoulders and
walking sticks. Such, she resolved, was not to be her son’s destiny. He was not to
forget his debt to her for that. Nor extricate himself from her ambition.

Then, on his sixteenth birthday, probably, Fred became uncontested man of the
house. Jane received the following immaculately penned letter.

Ticehurst
7 June /84

Mrs Davison
Sandhurst
Madam

I am sorry to have to inform you that your husband who was cook
here, was taken ill about 10 days and had to lay up. He appeared to be
suffering from a bad cold on his chest, which must have settled on his
lungs as he rapidly sank, and died at about 4 a m on last Wednesday
morning. Everything which could be done for him, was done, but without avail.

Enclosed you will find two chqs:, one for £5/- I found amongst some old letters, the other is amount wages due. Allow me to offer you sincere sympathy in your bereavement.

Yours faithfully
H E Brougham
pro F. O. Boys

Tom died on 4 June 1884. By family reckoning, he would have been a good seventy-eight. By his own count, he was sixty or sixty-one. But no record can be found of the registration of his death. The family presumption is that he must have been something of a ne'er-do-well, a larrikin vagabond. But in that small preserved sheaf of letters home to his wife are some hints that he may have been misjudged by those who had forgotten or never read them. Young Fred Davison could scarcely have known his father, hence his true age was not an essential factor in the fertile fantasy he formed about him. His father became a legend in the heart of the sixteen-year-old boy, already afflicted for life with romantic yearnings born of an inheritance of anxiety, ignorance, and emotional malnutrition.

He blamed himself for letting his father go away this last time. He had noticed he was ageing very quickly, but he disliked interfering, knowing how much it would be resented. So he had done nothing . . .

He said he was thinking of going farther north—that he had heard of a job at Ivanhoe. A cook was wanted at a sheep station there—for the homestead. 20

So he shouldered his swag and went north in the direction of the Lachlan river, and so on to Ivanhoe.

Often, he had measured his nearly eighty-year-old strength against the three-score-years and ten warning—and won; but this time he was to lose, for he staggered up to the men's hut at Ivanhoe a very sick old man. It had rained a couple of days earlier and he had lain all night in wet clothes. Now, pneumonia had him in its grip—and would not let go.

The men took him and put him to bed. The boss came down with the station medicine chest and did his best to ease his sufferings, but it was no good. The old man had run his race, and the end had come. 21

Ancient mariner turned bushman, Englishman weathered and branded by pioneer Australia: the unconquered wasteland of the never-never . . . for his only son there could have been little choice but to continue in pursuit of the Australian dream. Fred imagined his dreamsire buried at the foot of a big tree in a corner of the cultivation paddock. Over his head the kookaburra laughs and parrots scream, and none the less merrily because his bones lie crumbling below. And he sleeps as soundly in that unknown grave in the heart of the Australian Bush as any whose virtues are recorded on marble tablets for the edification of the curious.

When word came to Storm II that his father was dead, and that he had been buried on the station, he at first thought of having his father's body
brought to Bendigo . . . Later, he saw more clearly. 'No,' he said. 'I don't think Dad would wish to be disturbed. It is better as it is. He's buried where he always liked to be—and where he spent so many years—in the Bush. We'll let him stay there.'

Fred wrote that all his life Tom 'had been troubled with “itchy feet”'. Anywhere he happened to be had always been, to him, a good place to get away from; and anywhere else had always been a better place to go to. Not the best kind of man for a woman to marry, but for the purpose of extending the boundaries of a nation men of that sort are necessary. They skirmish ahead of the army's main body. Not always do they know where they are going—or why . . .

But it is from the Great Army of Men with Uneasy Feet comes every once in a while the Leader—who, differing from the rank and file, well knows where he is going, and why.

If Tom had seemed to spend his life seeing things and going places without knowing why, the only surviving male of the Australian Davison line knew better. He pledged himself to plant 'the flag of civilisation where flag never flew before'.

22

23

24
2 Amelia

The eighteen-seventies on Bendigo were a decade of explosion, both underground and on the surface. The population increased by sixty-five per cent in those ten years, so that by 1881 it had passed twenty-eight thousand. At the beginning of the decade, Sandhurst became a city, and the crest it acquired bore the motto: Progress. The glitter that was gold drew the skilled but impoverished tin miners from Cornwall; and others from the nearer goldfields. By 1870 the alluvial gold on Ballarat was exhausted, and Ballarat remained in the doldrums for six years until coarse mining was established there. In the meantime it was flourishing at 'Quartzopolis', as Sandhurst came to be nicknamed.

By the time the Davison family migrated to Sandhurst, the City of Gold, its permanent water supply was nearing completion after years of bungling, mismanagement, and engineering disasters. The prosperous city in which the Davison children grew up was one of high prices, rising rents, and a demand for houses that builders could scarcely keep pace with. Wherever one looked were the tall brick chimneys of the quartz-crushing operations, spreading over twenty square miles; the incessant roar of the batteries could be heard everywhere. For those who could afford such diversions, there were theatres, music halls, opera. It was a golden age for Australian theatre; and in the Royal Princess Theatre in View Street, Sandhurst could boast one of Australia's most ornate auditoria, two thousand seats, excellent acoustics, and stage appointments considered equal to those of Drury Lane. It was also a silver age of oratory, and for those whose tastes or incomes did not extend to stage drama, a cheaper and even more popular form of it was to be found at the pulpit. With evangelical zeal came the fervour of the temperance movement and the fellowship of the friendly societies which had come into being to supply the miners with their only security amid the perils of deep quartz mining. A Sandhurst branch of the Victorian Natives' Association was formed in 1874 and by the early eighties a lodge or benefit society was available for every creed and class of man, and almost every man in Sandhurst was a member of one.

In 1887, the city's fervour and conviviality coalesced in an ostentatious patriotic celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Queen Empress. The streets were alive with Union Jacks and streamers and rosettes by day and aglitter with illuminations
by night. A pandemonium of bands supplanted the thunder of batteries, and pious effusions from local politicians supplemented the perorations of the pulpit. Ten thousand children and youths processed through the town waving Union Jacks, and it is likely that young Fred Davison was among them. He was nineteen, and played the flute as a member of the local militia. It was an engagement with music that he soon left behind for the serious tasks ahead. Towards the end of that year he fell in love.

He saw himself as ‘a bright-haired, typically scimitar-faced Australian. His youthful activity and strength showed in his breadth without thickness and in his length without lankiness. He was a man in everything except actual years . . . ’

Already he was saving to buy his own business with money made from his fowls. And he was laying plans for his own life that far outreached Jane’s hopes.

Social life in poor families such as his was centred on the church. It was the Congregational Church in the Davisons’ case, but Fred had a friend who was a Primitive Methodist, and one day his friend took him along to a Methodist tea meeting, a high tea for young ‘prims’ served from trestle tables and followed by seemly games. Probably the lads had attended similar functions at other church and chapel meeting rooms to give the girls the once over. If it was not Fred’s first buck’s sortie, it was assuredly his last.

She was wearing a red dress. He neither forgot it nor embroidered upon its description. She was the Girl in the Red Dress to whom he was to dedicate his fictionalised autobiography and to whom he gave his heart. He never looked beyond her, save to ‘run on a long chain’, for the remaining fifty-four years of his life. There and then at the tea meeting he spread his dreams under her feet and stood her feet in the centre of his plan. And that was that problem settled.

‘Her name was Amelia Watterson. She was almost twenty-one and for five years had run her own dressmaking business from home. Doubtless she had made the red dress for herself and it became her so completely that Fred identified her with it. Before he met her

he had had daydreams of roaming the earth, ‘For to be’old and for to see, and for to admire this world so wide,’ but—one look at the girl in the red dress, and all Storm’s dreams went into the discard. He’d found something he wanted more than ‘be’olding, and seeing, and admiring,’ and what Storm wanted most that he went after—and got.

Most men don’t know that what they want ‘most’ they can have—if they really want one thing and one thing only and will go after that one thing with a single mind . . . ’

But Amelia was scarcely eager to discourage him.

Not that she was unmaidenly, but just that she knew him for her mate, and didn’t pretend otherwise. Then, as always, she acted with inborn honesty and lack of pretence. Her breeding showed in her actions, always.

Fred wooed Milly Watterson with all the confidence of his egalitarian preconceptions, and in deadly earnest. He was eighteen months younger than she, but she felt he was older. He seemed a man to her, not a nineteen-year-old boy.
When she took him home to meet her family over Sunday high tea, it was with her father he conversed, not with any of her five brothers, who ranged in age from a little younger than Fred down to three. John Watterson was the same age as Fred’s mother, and his wife was also named Jane. When he was not making boots for the people of Sandhurst, he was a lay preacher for the Primitive Methodists of the Bendigo circuit.

Because of his horny hands, and possibly because also of his rugged outspokenness, was mostly sent to fill the pine pulpits of the little churches of the ‘gullies’ towards Eaglehawk, while the congregations of the bigger places listened to the ‘ifs’ and the ‘buts’ of the more highly-trained—and the more carefully-spoken.

The two men must have recognised in each other a similar earnestness: the youth’s vision was secular but equally dogmatic, though his aspirations were here rather than hereafter. Probably the contrasts as much as the similarities were part of Amelia’s attraction to him.

John Watterson’s beliefs considerably watered down, and so with something of their ‘uncomfortableness’ removed, remained with his daughter; but, with the watering down, went a good deal of the ‘surefootedness’ of the old-time believer.

Fred came to see something of each of her parents in his intended: just enough of her father ‘to add the fighting touch so desirable, whether in friend or foe’.

Her mother . . . was one of those women who, once in a while, are sent into this world to the exceeding great advantage of the little circle of their home and their immediate friends. They seldom or never ‘belong’ to uplift societies—but long after they are gone their memory remains, and their children call them blessed.

She had been born Margaret Jane Fargher in the Isle of Man in 1842, a member of an old Manx farming family. Another branch of the family used the variant Faragher, also used by both Jane and her husband on two occasions of registering births of their children. She was married to John Watterson, a member of another extensive Manx family, in December 1863 [Plate 3].

John was a dark, peppery, passionate young man, and may have been the bearer of some Spanish blood. In later years, Fred Davison used to tease Amelia about the Spanish look that cropped up in the family here and there. ‘Sailors’, he would say, ‘washed up from the defeated Armada’. Family tradition held that either John Watterson or Jane Fargher hailed from Dalby, a hamlet in the parish of Patrick on the narrow western coastal plain beneath the morning shadow of Dalby mountain. John later gave his birthplace to an Australian registrar as ‘near Castletown’, a port nearly ten miles through the hills south of Dalby. Another family tradition places them closer to Douglas, the Manx capital seaport which they visited frequently, and which is hardly fifteen miles across the hills east of Dalby. Jane gave her birthplace to an Australian registrar as ‘near Douglas’.

In those hills, roughly midway between Dalby and Douglas, were the Foxdale lead and silver mines; and it would not be surprising if John had mining in his
blood if not in his experience, to set him among the Manxmen who paid their way to seek their fortunes on the Ballarat diggings. On 17 October 1864 the *Sam Cearns* from Liverpool docked at Melbourne. On board were an English labourer named John Waterson and his wife, Jane, aged twenty-three and twenty-two respectively. Waterson is a rare Manx variant of Watterson. In fact, John Watterson would have been twenty-four when he landed in Melbourne; but if, as seems almost certain, it was the same couple, the family legend that Jane was pregnant throughout the voyage would be borne out by the facts.

They probably went by train straight to Ballarat and there took the rented cottage in Ballarat West, where, on 11 February 1865, a daughter was born to them. She was given her mother's first name which she seldom used: Margaret. Five weeks later, John registered the birth and gave his profession as shoemaker.

They were still living at Ballarat West when Amelia was born a year and nine months later, on 16 November 1866. By then John had been drawn by the gold fever into the mines. Jane gave her husband's occupation as miner and his age as twenty-seven when, just before Christmas, she put her mark in the district register of births. If that was necessitated by illiteracy and not by some other manual incapacity, she must have been influenced by the fact that she had come to a country whose literacy rate was double that of her homeland, for by the time Milly was two and a half, Jane had learnt to write her name, at least. She signed it in July 1869 when she registered the birth of their third child on 17 April: another girl whose name was Jane but who was known all her life as Jean. By then the family had moved to another mining settlement south of the city, established as the result of a more recent strike and named Sebastopol in commemoration of that other long siege in 1854. John was still a miner.

But by May 1871, after the collapse of alluvial mining, he had wisely returned to his trade of shoemaker. That was when Jane registered the birth of her first son, William, on 24 February. Shortly afterwards, the six Wattersons became part of the migration to Sandhurst. They had relatives there.

Jane's sister Eunice, married to a Manxman named Brideson who managed a mine on Bendigo, had migrated from the island together with two of their brothers, James and John Fargher. John was in Ballarat, and remained there when they left. Margaret, Milly and Jean now had three cousins to play with. It seems likely that they left Ballarat in 1872, travelling by covered wagon from Ballarat to Castlemaine, fifty-odd miles away, from where they took the train to Sandhurst.

The free, compulsory and secular education which began in Victoria the following year meant that Margaret, who was just eight, and Milly, aged six, ceased to carry their weekly sixpences to the national school on Monday mornings, but took their lessons instead in severely overcrowded conditions.

At about the same time, John Watterson found for his wife and four children a small rented cottage in Barnard Street, formerly occupied by a miner. A second boy, Herbert, was born there on 18 June 1873.

The family lived in Barnard Street for five years, and it was probably during that time that Milly began to attend family worship at the Primitive Methodist Church.
AMELIA

on a hilltop in Rowan Street, less than a mile's walk from home, one of the many 
churches and chapels in that square mile of streets named after flowers and plants on 
the hills and slopes down to Bendigo Creek. And during some part of those years, 
unknown to Milly, her future husband was living with his mother and sisters 
farther along Barnard Street, and attending the Congregational Church.

Then in 1878, Milly and her family moved to a similar house only a couple of 
blocks away. Number 5, Violet Street was a four-roomed weatherboard cottage 
on a narrow but deep half acre. Beneath it ran the workings of the Deborah mine, 
the one Bendigo goldmine still working today, albeit making less from gold 
than from tourists. The Wattersons' garden above it contained the original 
miner's hut, built when the land was first subdivided and the freehold ceded by 
the Crown. That extra tin roof could well have contained the attraction of the 
place for Milly's parents, even though the rates were higher. They were going 
to need more space because Jane was expecting her sixth child. John Henry, 
always to be known as Jack, was born on 15 September 1878. It must have been 
about the same time that Jane contracted tuberculosis, unknown to herself, because 
its only symptom was an infected leg that would not heal.

In that old miner's hut in the garden, Milly's brothers as they grew up were to 
hold minstrel shows for other boys of the neighbourhood. Nearly forty years 
afterwards, Milly wrote about her recollections of her brother Billy 
violently exercising a hand-bell and holding forth as to 'this won-derful 
per-formance to be seen for tuppence' and then, seeing two of the 
'Bearsie boys' looking in at the back gate, he makes a concession, 'You 
can all come in for nothing if you let us come to yours.'

Later when the sack curtain had flapped behind the last boy, the noise 
began—and continued.

She learnt then that boys indulged their own particular forms of make-believe. But 
it was to be some years before she discovered how they did so, for to girls the 
minstrel shows were taboo. One of the little girls might wail that she wanted to see 
Herbert with black on him, but the older girls were wiser, and one of them would 
propose a visit to a friend who had a swing in her garden. 'Brothers', Milly 
discovered, 'are a liberal education to a girl'. From them she early learnt not to be a 
spoilsport, not to pimp on a fight, and also 'to divide like a Christian'.

But above all she learns how really unimportant she is, and so gets a good 
knowledge of the rules of the game before the other girl's brother comes 
along.9

Edward Thomas, Milly's fourth brother, was born a little over two years later, 
on 12 December 1880. Milly left school shortly afterwards. She was just fourteen 
and became apprenticed to a dressmaker. By the time she had qualified two years 
later, she was ready to make another demand on the space of their small abode by 
starting, and beginning to succeed with, her own dressmaking business at home. It 
would be odd if, after a while, some of her customers hadn't made mention of the 
girl of her own age who made exquisite white work in the caretaker's cottage 
beside the Congregational Church at the corner of Forest and Mackenzie Streets. 
But perhaps white work, 'all made with tucks and insertions and frillings and
embroidery', was subconsciously a symbol for her of her straitlaced upbringing, and Milly was already dreaming of discreet rebellion against it. She was a girl who expected much of life.

Before I was married when I went to tea at Davisons Em would show me a set of nightgowns or chemises ready to be delivered with the pride of an artist showing his paintings and I used to exhaust my adjectives for I really was impressed and they were fearfully and wonderfully made, but oh dear, one little slinky crepe de chiné was worth them all.11

'No girl of today', she wrote in 1920, 'loved a good time more than I did. I hated to miss anything. The daily routine was necessary, but it could hardly be called interesting; it was the purple patches that counted.' And there were thrills, even among the limited social activities of Sandhurst. One big thrill was provided by her first invitation to an evening party for boys as well as girls. 'It was a promotion I had long desired, from the come-at-three-call-for-at-nine ones, for girls only.' She had a new muslin dress, 'in the loveliest shade of pink, a real dream colour', but for several days before the party she suffered from a cough and an unbecoming cold in the head. So on the eve of the thrilling event she sought the rather desperate remedy of burning sulphur in her room. Her dress was spread out carefully, 'every soft fold in its place', and she went to bed. Her first waking thought was of the dress, and she raised herself on her elbow to gaze upon it once more. But the sulphur fumes had bleached it, 'the dream colour had gone for ever'.

I turned my face to the wall, feeling that the very spirit of my youth had bleached and shrivelled.12

Her optimism soon recovered, however, and her expectations of life were given a powerful stimulus by the arrival of a new thrilling figure, fresh from the Old Country, loquacious, informative, ambitious, and richly embroidered with personality. He was Milly's cousin, a self-educated young man of some twenty-five years, named Phil Fargher. In due course he was to meet and influence young Fred Davison.

Milly had probably not met Fred when her family moved from Violet Street during 1886, her twentieth year, when their landlord sold the house to a blacksmith [Plate 6]. The last of her brothers was born in 1884, at Violet Street, on Herbert's eleventh birthday. He was named after the homeland: Percival Douglas. He grew up disliking the name Percy and in later life was always known as Douglas.

The 'other girl's brother' would have come into Milly's life in 1887, when Milly's family were living in a slightly larger house in High Street just around the corner from Violet Street. The reasons for their remaining amid that small grid of streets in the Golden Square district to the south and west of the city was doubtless connected as much with the clientele of their cottage industries as with the familiar world of the Methodist congregation and the everyday immobility of simple working folk with neither mounts nor wheels. Johnny Watterson had not long begun his preaching career when first he met young Fred Davison.

When Fred's mother began to perceive the existence of a rival, she forbade her son to take Milly Watterson out. She was too powerful a force to be ignored; and
Fred was dutiful, conciliatory and gallant. So he obeyed his mother's injunction to the letter and never took Milly out again. Instead, he arranged to meet her out in order that he could take her home. But he was obliged to obey Milly, too, and change first out of his militiaman's uniform, for it was socially unacceptable for a nice girl like Milly to be seen walking out with a boy in uniform.

Jane Davison's attitude probably softened when Caroline came home with a German immigrant, Rudolf Schneider, whom she had met on the station where she worked. They were married, and left Sandhurst for Sydney, where they acquired a newsagency in Newtown.

By 1889, the year of Fred's majority, he and Milly had become engaged. In 1887 her family had moved into a house overlooking Bendigo Creek at the corner of Wattle and Creek Streets, after only a brief tenancy in the High Street house. They remained there for another eight years. It was the house in which Milly and Fred were married in 1892.

At about the time of Fred's engagement, his mother's thoughts were turning to her brother Harvey, who had joined the police force in Essex in the year Fred was born. He was now an acting inspector of six years' standing, working for a sergeant's pay at Willesden in north-west London.

Dear Sister Jennie

I felt most happy to hear from you. I received your letter and the Photo, and think it is wonderfully well done, yourself, my wife thinks, comes out firstrate, and I must also say, you wear remarkably well, after your many troubles, your family I am sure must give you great comfort, they having turned out so well, your son Fred, looks tall enough for a Sergeant of Police [underlined in red ink] but I think he has a better birth, he is just like my second boy Willie.13

And four months later, Harvey wrote: I was very pleased to hear, that you and your family were getting on so nicely, especially your son Fred, he is a very intelligent young man, & a great credit to you'.14

With her children's departure imminent, the lonely widow must have been casting about for contact with her surviving male relatives. Her father had died in his eighties during the previous five years. While she awaited Harvey's acknowledgment of the family photograph, she received from the Melbourne dead letter office early in May the last letter she had written to 'Fred Brown, San Diego, California'. On the back of the envelope she had written: 'if not known or dead, please open and return to enclosed address'. The message must have been treated seriously, for the envelope was also stamped: 'ADVERTISED, Jan 14 1889'.

Nov 15th/88
Sandhurst

My dear Brother

If you should receive these few lines will you write to me it is just 13 years since you wrote to me and I sent 3 letters at different times and never receiving any answer. I hardly knew what to think. I do not want anything of you Fred, I should like to know if I have a Brother or any
relative for since our Fathers death I hear no news from home I am afraid they must think it is not worth while corresponding, from

Your Sister

Jane Davison
corner of Forest and McKenzie Sts
Sandhurst
Victoria
Australia

It was to be another three years and more before news of Fred came by way of his letter to Anne from Butte City, Montana, in which he protested again his own abstemiousness, and spoke of his wife.

I am not at Home much being mostly on the Road as I Buy and Ship Cattle and Sheep to Markets East and West I ship by Rail Road a Distance of Two Thousand Miles and these Trips frequently take me away from Home as long as two Months at a time sometimes I am not at home 30 days in a Year sometimes I am in one part of the United States next week I am Three Thousand Miles in another Direction I have been in Business here about 12 Years but cannot tell how long I Shall Remain as I am going to Leave in the Morning for Portland Oregon on Business and I cannot tell yet whether I may have to stay there or not till I get there of course I was very Glad to hear from you and to know you was Well you had did not say it you had any Children or if your Husband was Living or if Rhoda was Married in your next let me know also if Jenny is comfortably Fixed and what Business her Son is following ... It must have brought little comfort to Jane, who knew the form so well.

As for Harvey, both his letters consisted of little more than an account of his own dissatisfaction with the police force and a catalogue of the progress of his own eight children. Jane's reply to the first of them asked for news of their sisters.

You ask about Rhoda, I have not seen her for years, but Annie has taken my daughter Jessie, there twice, & she has made her very welcome, they are all the grand, I believe he is (something in the City) quite a big Pot, so of course Rhoda does not want him to know, she has a Brother, so low as a Police Sergeant, but I have never pushed myself, as I have always managed to get a living, with my own exertions I never go where I am not wanted, You ask about Annie, as to her troubles, the greater part of them are imaginary, as her husband has a small cottage at Stepney let at 10/- a week, and he earns plenty of money at his business, but she was always miserable inclined and of course, does not improve as she gets older altho she has been very good to me, so that I am not saying this out of any unkindness, she some time ago, took a fad, that meat was not necessary, so lived principally on bread and has got into such a weak state, can hardly get about, and so now has taken to it again, & I think she sits at home, and imagines troubles, she often comes here, but we very seldom visit her, as they seem so strange, do not mention any of this to
her when you write as she would think it unkind of me but as you asked I gave you the particulars.16

Meanwhile, the son of Jane, for whom her brother Fred was by now hatching plans of his own, was ready to set off and seek his fortune. To that end he cast his die into the wicked, booming city which had got itself known as Marvellous Melbourne because anyone, it was believed, could make a fortune there. Phil Fargher went to live in the capital, too, and married his boss's daughter, Tillie. It must have been in 1890, round about his twenty-second birthday, that Fred Davison took lodgings at 33 Gipps Street, one of a terrace of four elegant houses in East Melbourne. He had grown a beard, possibly to lend substance to his years.

During the 1880s Melbourne had been extravagantly transformed. The population had almost doubled to nearly half a million. There were three thousand large factories, new bridges across the Yarra, the world's most extensive cable tram network newly connecting the city and inner suburbs with horse-drawn tram services to the fast-growing outer suburbs, a new theatre in Spring Street, the Princess, with a unique roof that could be rolled back on warm nights to open the auditorium to the stars; and in a decade which had begun with an international exhibition for which the huge Exhibition Building was erected, the city had acquired a cathedral, newly extended railway buildings, a new Harbour Trust which was busily extending the port facilities to handle an unprecedented increase in shipping and cargo, several new or extended public edifices, including the GPO and Law Courts, and a prodigious number of tall private office blocks suddenly made practicable and profitable by the introduction of the new hydraulic elevators from America. But it was also called Smelbourne, for the city was still unsewered and ravaged by typhoid. And the boom had not yet bust.

Young Fred Davison rented some modest rooms above the premises of the Melbourne and Suburban Bottling Co. He had entered into a business partnership with another printer, George Andrew Duncan, and at 181A Little Collins Street they opened as general printers. It was in the block on the south side of the street between Russell and Swanston Streets, less than a mile from where Fred was lodging, and he would have walked to work each day across the Fitzroy Gardens.

Their first major business coup was the job of printing the daily Melbourne Shipping Gazette. The fortunes of that four-page tabloid sheet had been erratic for many months. The proprietors were the Melbourne Shipping Gazette Company, and Davison, Duncan and Co. were the third printers in six months. The publisher's imprint at the foot of page four, column four, changed between two successive days in July 1890 in a way that is noteworthy for the adroit rearrangement of capital letters.

Monday, July 14, 1890.
Printed by Tyzack and Picken, Batman Chambers, 489 Flinders Lane, for the Melbourne Shipping Gazette Company, 326 Flinders Lane.

Tuesday, July 15, 1890.
Printed by Davison, Duncan & Co., 181A Little Collins Street, for the Melbourne Shipping Gazette Company, 326 Flinders Lane.

A good deal of standing type and all the advertisers' blocks were taken over, but
Tyzack and Picken's extra bold face type for headings was abandoned, and a lighter face used for headings, showing traces of an art nouveau influence. Ten months after Fred and his partner had taken on its production, the name was changed to, simply, The Shipping Gazette. Since Fred Davison viewed wherever he was as the centre of the universe, the specific 'Melbourne' was superfluous. Subscribers continued to receive the intelligence six days a week for a guinea a quarter.

Many of them must have found a strange reassurance in its lists of names and figures and ungarnished facts which indicated that commerce was still going on, for by now all was chaos. The trouble started the previous year, when employers in the shipping industry forbade the Marine Officers' Association to affiliate with the other developing trade unions through the Trades Hall. Men walked off their ships and the shipping companies sought help from the Employers' Union. Then there was trouble in the pastoral industry. Shearers were striking against the squatters' right to contract with non-union shearers. Then the wharfies refused to handle wool shorn by scab labour. Seamen walked off their ships in support of the marine officers, and railway and gasworks stokers supported them. Train services were reduced. The gas companies employed scab labour. For the first time in Victoria's history, organised capital and organised labour were ranged against each other in truculent confrontation and the community was seen to be deeply divided. By August 1890 the city was in uproar and the Mounted Rifle Corps was mobilised. 'Fire low and lay them out', their commanding officer ordered. And the authorities, from the government down, were mainly in sympathy. But suddenly all the resistance to established authority collapsed when the marine officers left the Trades Hall group.

Business had received a body blow for which it was wholly unprepared, and from which it never wholly recovered. For the wound revealed that beneath the skin of law and order something very lawless and disorderly had been taking place. The wild fluctuations of the land boom, in which land values had trebled and quadrupled over a few months, had already, in the last year or two of the eighties, caused the leading banks to start calling in overdrafts. Developers looked elsewhere to finance their exploits. The loose banking laws of the time were used to float the disastrous 'land banks' which were able to operate in much the same way as established banks. By 1890 a profusion of building societies held millions in deposits, mostly of wage-earning people, with which whole new suburbs had been built, only to remain untenanted for years. Public resources had also been overextended, largely to construct suburban railway lines that were laid ahead of settlement to serve land often owned by the same politicians who determined railway policy. The crash was as inevitable as the corruption that attends upon power.

For a while in 1891, Fred moved in with George Duncan at Derby Street, Kensington, a north-western suburb only two stations from Spencer Street, the terminus from which he could travel at weekends to visit his betrothed and his mother at Bendigo, as Sandhurst was now known. Whenever Fred did not go home he unfailingly posted off a weekly pound to his mother's support. But not
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for long, because later that year Jane decided to join him in Melbourne. Emma and Minnie came with her, but the independent Florrie refused, and continued in domestic service at Bendigo. They rented a double-fronted weatherboard cottage in Hawthorn, one of the fastest growing suburbs. It was at 7 Henrietta Street, off Glenferrie Road a few blocks south of Glenferrie station. Fred went to live with them. It supplied him with a garden in which he could resume his poultry keeping. No doubt it also provided a handy economy. And he could travel to work either by train or by the Rivervale Road horse tram.

Fred exchanged frequent letters with Milly.

‘Darling’, a word in such common use now, was not to be found in those letters. ‘Sweetheart’ was our word.17 She spent occasional weekends with him at Glenferrie which were to provide her with memories of tension and tight-lipped conflict. Jane was formidable as a prospective mother-in-law. She entered her sixth decade with a deportment as upright as it was stern, regarding a grudging world through circular gold-rimmed lenses supported by a vulturine nose in an angular face. In a photographer’s studio portrait of that decade [Plate 7] she displays an upper lip as stiff as the stays beneath her black velvet dress, and her thin hair, drawn tightly back, accentuates the angularity. Her right hand, dressed in black kid, rests upon an umbrella; from her left arm a reticule suspends. Her cuffs and shoulders are lace trimmed, and in a vain attempt at further softening a white lace scarf has been bunched above her breast in a bow with waist-length streamers. She wears a black cap on which a small white headdress has been raised.

Amelia remembered a weekend at Henrietta Street which ended as usual with Fred seeing her off at Spencer Street station. She settled her small figure into a corner seat as the train pulled out, dipped into her bag of nuts, and opened her book with a determined sigh of relief. She had escaped from the Davisons at last, she hoped for ever. But the following weekend, Fred was up in Bendigo, making good his pitch again.

Meanwhile, the undermined mountain which had raised the land boomers into such pious and rarefied greed was already cracking and crumbling. From about the winter of 1891, some land banks, buildings societies, and other parasites of the boom began to wind up their affairs. The avalanche gathered momentum as nervous depositors began to withdraw their cash. Then British investors lost confidence in Australian securities, unable to distinguish the sound from the fraudulent. Seven leading insurance companies announced in Britain in November that for the present they would not invest in any more colonial enterprises. The Commercial Bank, Victoria’s biggest, felt the consequences and its general manager decided to call in the overdrafts of large borrowers. One after the other, the banks, land banks and building societies succumbed. As assets became worthless, speculators sought a variety of means of escape, from getting appointed Agent General in London to simple suicide. Most of them took advantage of a loophole in the insolvency laws which allowed them secretly to pay out small amounts and so ‘discharge’ their debts without anyone but their creditors knowing they were insolvent. Hence no one knew who was insolvent and who was not.
Many other under-capitalised businesses went under. By the end of 1891, the price of city land had dropped to nearly a quarter of what it had been and land auctions held in the suburbs drew hardly a single bid. And in the middle of it all, Fred and Amelia joined their young hopes for the future.

They chose 1 February 1892: a hot, clear, rainless Monday. It was the day on which the first steam trams ran between central Bendigo and Eaglehawk, and carried two thousand passengers in the one day, many of them riding for the novelty. The cab drivers’ normal business was much reduced, and there were several minor collisions along the route with other unwary vehicles.

Fred and Milly were married by the Rev. E. W. Nye, minister at the Forest Street Wesleyan Church, who also preached at the other Methodist churches during his short ministry in Bendigo. Tea meetings were often held in the Wesleyan schoolroom adjoining the church, and perhaps the ‘prims’ also used the room for their own social functions. It may have been there that Fred and Milly first met, and Mr Nye was asked to officiate for sentimental reasons.

Milly wore a dress of eau de Nil trimmed with guipure lace that she had made herself. Her elder sister, Maggie, who had been the family cook, was herself married by now and living in Adelaide, so Milly also prepared the wedding breakfast. Apparently there was no honeymoon; and the Shipping Gazette did not miss an edition. Fred’s mother did not attend the ceremony. She was to greet them when Fred carried his bride across the threshold of the first of their many homes that evening.

He had rented a four-roomed weatherboard house at 7 Lingwell Road, Hawthorn, a quiet street near Auburn Station, one stop down the line from Glenferrie, and a mile or more away from Henrietta Street. Jane, it seems, had prepared their evening meal at their new home and, since she had not partaken of the wedding breakfast, it would have been seemly to invite her to their table. Afterwards, they all sat round and talked. And talked. Jane was unwilling to depart, and the children could not raise the effrontery to suggest it. Not until Em came over, close to midnight, and urged her mother home with her, was the bridegroom left alone with his bride.

As Amelia came to know her mother-in-law better, she felt able to talk a little more intimately to her, and even question her sometimes about the circumstances that produced the man they both loved.

‘Did you love your husband?’ she ventured to ask one day.

‘He was the father of my children’, Jane replied.

Christmas 1892 was even more bleak than that. Never before in Victoria’s history had there been a gloomier one. Wool prices had plunged that year to hasten the collapse. Theatres were half empty. Shopkeepers struggled to stay open, begging their customers in vain to buy up for the season of good cheer. But worse was yet to come.

By then, Amelia had learned that she was with child. They continued to live in the Lingwell Road house until about a month before her confinement, apparently sub-letting part of it, for early in May 1893 the rating and valuation record of the City of Hawthorn showed a population of four in the house. If they did sub-let, it
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was from poverty of income rather than shortage of accommodation. For it was reliably estimated that seven thousand houses stood empty in Melbourne in 1891. By the end of 1892 that figure had nearly doubled. Rents were half what they had been.

A low rent was probably what made it possible for the couple to take Macedon, a large brick house of six rooms at 182 Glenferrie Road, just across from Henrietta Street. It was two doors north of Lisson Grove, and the couple later came to refer to it as 'the house at Lisson Grove'. Lisson Grove in those days ran down to river flats along the Yarra, and some weeping willows stood along the banks, but even then 'the river was not a thing of beauty just there'. It was an exclusive neighbourhood, with large well-kept gardens. Jane had also moved house by this time, three doors further down Henrietta Street to number 13. The rent was probably lower: there must have been much competition and undercutting by landlords to secure dependable tenants. Emma sewed white work for three families in Lisson Grove, and doubtless counted herself fortunate in her clientele. She might have been one of a whole family slaving for twelve hours a day, six days a week, each worker earning for seventy-two hours work one-third of the rate then prevailing in factories. Sweating of outworkers was mainly practised in the clothing trade, destroying the health and self-esteem of people who would otherwise have starved; but it was only one of many forms of ruthless exploitation allowed to flourish in Melbourne at the time.

Some hope was given to Melbourne's unemployed in 1892 when the newly formed Metropolitan Board of Works embarked on the huge task of sewering the metropolis. It was almost the only new development permitted from public funds during the depression, made possible by a special loan from London. But although it provided employment for thousands, the successful tenderers paid wages for labour which were viciously low. Hundreds clamoured for work when the new pumping station was excavated on the Yarra bank in 1893, but their average pay was less than ten shillings for eight days' work, half what the contractor had quoted to the Board for the job. The sewerage system was to provide the capital with its greatest advance in health. By the time the city was connected six years later to the sewerage farm at Werribee, the death rate from typhoid and similar diseases had been halved. Yet in the winter of 1892, thirteen emergency tents had to be erected in the grounds of the still-unsewered Alfred Hospital to take the overflow of a typhoid epidemic which, with influenza and measles, had aggravated that winter's miseries in the Melbourne slums. Hospital conditions were still far from winning the confidence of intelligent citizens with the means of choice, their insanitary conditions and high mortality rates were such that there was no question that a girl like Amelia would prefer to have her baby at home.

Accordingly, it was at Macedon at the winter solstice of 1893, less than a fortnight after Fred's twenty-fifth birthday, that the twenty-six-year-old Amelia entered into a long labour which was to leave her health and energies depleted for a long time afterwards. The doctor behaved very decently, as Jane, her daughters, and Amelia's parents all subsequently agreed. At no time in that long and difficult
delivery did he once raise the sheet that concealed Amelia’s modesty, and her firstborn son.

Fred composed a poem to celebrate him. He was a large, healthy baby, born on 23 June 1893. Notification of the birth did not take place until he was forty-two days old, and that task was assumed by Jane, the rejoicing grandmother. He was named firstly after his father, his great uncle, and his great grandfather; and secondly after his maternal grandparents’ homeland. Frederick Douglas. It took him the next forty years to shed the names they gave him.
Frank Dalby Davison was born in the winter of the worst depression Australia had ever known. There were soup kitchens in the suburbs and starvation in the slums, babies dead from hunger or infanticide provoked by privation; there were formerly prosperous people living on scraps, unemployed men in rags shacking up in empty houses with a few old newspapers and straw, women in their thousands taking to the streets and brothels to earn enough to feed their starving families. About half the workforce, it was said, was unemployed; and these were people from all walks of life, many of them with no knowledge of how to survive in poverty. Those who had lost their investments in the crash now spent their last remaining savings and, with no social services available, became dependent on the meagre dainties of private charity.

In April an Unemployed Workers Association had been formed and two thousand men in rags marched through the city to Parliament House. James Patterson, the Premier, himself an estate agent, saw a deputation and promised to do what he could to provide work, but reprimanded the men for their wild remarks. On 1 May, the avalanche had at last come to rest with the news of a government proclamation closing all banks for a week. But two banks defied it and during that Monday morning swarms of their customers fought each other to get in and get their money out. When it was realised that the banks would continue paying out, the panic eased and some of the gold was redeposited. Then the slow business of reconstruction began. The worst was not over for many months, but at least things were on the mend.

New hope was given to many in the spring, when rich gold deposits were discovered at Coolgardie in Western Australia; and during that summer, another gold rush began, slightly reducing the impact of unemployment in Melbourne, but also increasing the number of houses standing empty, a prey to lead thieves. Several steamers bound for the west left the Yarra wharves every week, and somehow people scraped up the fare to fill them. Over the next four years, sixty thousand Victorians were to take part in the exodus, and Melbourne's population did not again reach the half million mark of 1891 for ten years.

An early member of the sixty thousand was Milly Davison's young brother, Herbert, who was in partnership with another Bendigo lad, James Young. For a
few struggling months in 1894, the printing firm of Young, Watterson and Co. occupied premises at 395 Bourke Street, adjacent to the premises of Davison, Duncan & Co. at number 393, from where the Shipping Gazette had been published since 22 November 1893. But by July 1894, Jim and Herbert had wound up their business and gone west. Herbert was to marry in Coolgardie, once he had found work. While Jim had been in Melbourne he had met and begun to pay court to another Bendigo girl, Emma Davison. They kept in touch by letter.

Fred’s sister, Florrie, was another who joined the exodus to Coolgardie, after her marriage in 1895 to a Bendigo boy named Alec Robertson. Prospering in later years, they moved to Sydney and they, too, bought a newsagency in Newtown.

Since the issue of 23 October 1891, the Shipping Gazette had been both ‘printed and published’ by Davison, Duncan & Co. for The Shipping Gazette Company. And throughout the depression it never failed to appear. By the end of 1894, the partners had introduced their own display advertisement into the paper. Describing themselves as Shipping and General Printers, they offered ‘Every Description of Shipping and Mercantile Printing in Best Style and Lowest Prices’. It ran daily for a little over six months. By then, Fred and George had spread themselves into the premises that Jim and Herbert had occupied. They had acquired full proprietorship of the Gazette from the Shipping Gazette Company, and from 5 June 1894, it appeared as the Daily Shipping Gazette in a four-page broadsheet size, published by Davison, Duncan & Co., 393 and 395 Bourke Street.

With the loss of so many of his relatives and more of his friends to the west, Fred, the loyal Victorian patriot, stayed behind. Things were tough and he saw them through: such, at least, was to be his boast in later life. He certainly worked hard to be able to do so. Milly remembered all her days how her young husband came home night after night, ate his dinner, stretched out on a sofa, closed his eyes, and spoke not a word until they went to bed. The demands of producing the Gazette as a morning paper, even if he came more and more to leave its late-night responsibilities to his partner, must have found him usually working into the hours of other people’s leisure. But there were to be some cherished family moments.

Baby Freddie’s first outing with his parents was a tram ride. Fred and Milly carried him down Glenferrie Road the one block to the junction with Riversdale Road and the tramlines. At the age of eighty, having in all likelihood not revisited that crossroads in half a century, Amelia wrote that it was still a memorable corner ‘for several reasons’.

One was that the first time we took you out (a few weeks old) we got on the horse tram at that corner: two very naive young people who thought that everyone on the tram was admiring their wonderful baby. She did not disclose what the other reasons were. Later, the family’s Sunday afternoon walks, with pram or go-cart, took them down Lisson Grove to the river, because ‘it was somewhere to go’. There was probably no money to do anything else. If Fred was taking three pounds weekly out of the business, he would have counted himself on a good wage; and he was giving a pound of that ungrudgingly to his mother.

There were also rare treats, such as at least one visit to the theatre. In the winter
of 1894, a rather shocking new play from London opened at J. C. Williamson’s Princess Theatre. Fred took Milly to see it.

It was supposed to be not quite nice—but we were not so terribly rigid—or perhaps we wanted to see how it was not quite nice. Anyway, it was a very good night.³

Freddie’s earliest recorded escapade took place one Sunday, probably late in the spring of 1894, when he was not yet eighteen months old. The parents were sitting over lunch talking with Milly’s cousin, John Brideson. The baby became restless and was lifted down from his high chair to run about the room. Suddenly, the grownups were shocked to discover that the child was missing. He could not be found in the house, nor in the garden. Dad headed north up Glenferrie Road. Mother went to see if he had made the familiar journey over to Grandma’s. John went round the corner into Lisson Grove and ‘caught the baby toddling steadily on, a little hampered by a dirty napkin’. After a second such truancy, Milly tied up the front gate. On that occasion, the adventurer made his own way across Glenferrie Road and was found pushing at Grandma’s gate. He was the only wanderer among Milly’s four children.⁴

In the winter of 1895, Fred withdrew from the Daily Shipping Gazette and bought his first house. It was in Elsternwick, five miles from Jane’s house. There is no reason to suppose that Fred and George Duncan had quarrelled, for they continued to operate from the same premises for another two and a half years. Maybe Fred sold his interest to help in the purchase of the new house. Fred continued to work as a printer. From about the middle of 1896 till the end of the following year number 395 Bourke Street contained The Davison Printing House; although for at least one purpose Fred continued to publish as from number 393.

It would be charitable to infer that a major reason for his relinquishing his part in the paper shortly after Freddie’s second birthday was to give himself more evenings at home with his family. But this seems unlikely: it may have helped to make the move to Elsternwick possible, in that he no longer needed to live so close to the sources of shipping information, but the main reasons seem to have been related to his social ambitions. He had several other fish to fry before he could fully assume the role, not merely of being a paterfamilias, but of being manifestly seen to be a paterfamilias.

Milly gave birth to a second child a month after Freddie’s third birthday, on 24 July 1896. And the house in which Freddie’s first sister was born was to provide the boy in later life with his earliest memory: sitting on the front verandah with his parents, discussing what names to give the new baby. The parents settled on Dulcie Una, and her father celebrated her with a poem.

Jane continued to live in Henrietta Street, but moved across the road into a single-fronted weatherboard cottage at number 32. It was a slightly larger house than number 13, with five rooms instead of four. The move may have had to do with Emma’s departure. The letters with Jim Young between Glenferrie and Coolgardie had culminated in their decision to wed. Jim returned to Melbourne for his bride, but Em got cold feet and fled to Carrie in Sydney, leaving instructions that no one was to reveal her whereabouts to Jim. In desperation, Jim sought out
his prospective brother-in-law. Weeping, he begged Fred to tell him where Em could be found. Fred did so. 'Tell her', he said, 'that you loved her so much you divined where she was hiding.' Fred considered that he knew much more about women than Jim. Jim took his advice and the couple were married in Sydney before leaving for the west.

Fred’s new house was a large weatherboard place with a verandah round two sides of it on a quarter-acre block on the south side of Hartington Street. Elsternwick, the first subdivision in from Kooyong Road. There were still views of the Dandenong Ranges from the garden in those days, across the Chinese market gardens of Murrumbeena, even though the vineyards that had once produced the famous Caulfield clarets had been carved up in the land boom. A block and a half further down Kooyong Road, was a private railway line, built by a land boomer named Ross, who sought to give his name to a new suburb—Rosstown. It was one of a number of private lines built by developers through their estates in an attempt to justify their inflated prices. They would tell intending purchasers that as soon as receipts equalled half the costs, the government would take the line over. But the government had no intention of doing so; and anyway the crash came before there were any receipts. The Rosstown Railway was hardly ever used, and it was finally abandoned at the end of 1916.

To buy the house named Linden in August 1895, Fred borrowed £250 from the Extended Starr Bowkett Building Society of Swanston Street. In those days, mortgages were not considered necessary and the title to a property being purchased was often transferred into the name of the lender. A deed of defeasance was drawn up at the same time, ensuring that on repayment of the requisite monies, the title would be transferred to the borrower. It was a peculiarity of the Victorian law relating to building societies which contributed to the crash. For too many societies exploited their legal right to buy and sell freehold or leasehold estate and their directors competed furiously for the best of it, using their clients’ deposits to do so.

Elsternwick and Caulfield were two of Melbourne’s fastest developing suburbs; and although Fred’s new address involved him in a half-hour journey to and from the city, he probably faced it morning and evening, telling himself that the exercise was fine for his health and that the open paddocks were good for his youngsters. It gave them a better place than the streets to play in. The nearest station was Elsternwick, about a mile away, and he decided to save train fares, and the daily walk, by buying his first bike. Since train and tram fares were beyond the reach of the unemployed during the depression, people had abandoned themselves to the bicycle craze, a health-giving activity widely recommended by doctors. Meanwhile, the railways’ daily average loss was a thousand pounds and the tramways’ annual passenger count dropped in one year by four million.

A new bike would have cost Fred at least £20, so it seems likely that he invested in a second-hand model. His son remembered the night he rode it home for the first time and ‘had a bit of an accident and cut his hand’. His route to work was a good
seven-mile journey, which included High Street Hill in St Kilda. Freddie used to hear talk about that hill, ‘a bit of a “corker” for men who cycled to town’.

It really is long and steep, and I guess most of them got off and pushed their bikes up that bit. I think the idea of biking was to save train fares, but it must have been rather hard on clothes, and must also have been rather trying in wet weather. I was imagining Dad as a young man trundling himself along between the city and Elsternwick. What a heap of energy he was?

He was, of course, a man devoid of self-doubt: the heap of energy was unhampered by introversion. Moreover, he had a wife who could save with a timely stitch.

Soon after the move to Elsternwick, the local branch of the Australian (formerly, Victorian) Natives’ Association received him into the ranks of its members. The ANA, a friendly society exclusive to native-born Australians, was founded in Melbourne in 1871 and during the nineties was growing in size and influence at a rate not exceeded before or since. Within weeks of joining, Fred got himself appointed to the branch committee and became a branch delegate to both the Metropolitan Committee in Melbourne and the Victorian conference.

At the age of twenty-seven, Fred still saw himself as a shy man; and if his ostensible motive for joining the ANA, as he always led his family to believe, was to practise public speaking by taking part in debating tournaments, his membership also brought side benefits that served several of his ambitions, not least of which was the advancement of his fatherland and especially one of the sons of its soil. To that end, he committed a substantial part of the output of the Davison Publishing House to a publication more flexible in its content and less specialised in its appeal than the Gazete. With his contacts in the expanding ANA, he knew he was assured of outlets and a potentially influential readership.

In January 1897 he launched the first issue of The Advance Australia, a monthly with a name that matched his stentorian accents, his debating magniloquence, and the Weltanschauung that possessed him. It described itself as ‘a journal devoted to Australian National Advancement and circulating in the Australian Natives’ Association throughout the Australian Commonwealth’. For Fred, along with much of the ANA membership, was dedicated to the campaign, then gathering momentum, to federate the six Australian colonies.

The inaugural issue was dated 26 January 1897; the second issue was dated 1 March, and thereafter the paper was dated the first of every month.

The advertisement on the front of the first number’s pale green paper cover billed THE GREATEST EVENT OF THE YEAR; but this was not, as a casual glance might have suggested, the arrival of the Advance Australia, but an ‘important clearing sale’ by Craig, Williamson & Thomas. The four cover pages were entirely given over to advertisements; inside, the editorial pages of forty-eight columns contained over fifteen columns of advertising, all drawn from Melbourne. All the branch news, from fifteen branches, came from Melbourne, and some of those readers ‘throughout the Australian Commonwealth’, if any there were, might well have been puzzled by the parochialism of such references as that to the ANA fête ‘to be held in the Exhibition on Tuesday’. Fred was clearly
not a man inhibited by the notion that there might be other centres to the universe.

The editorial page announced:

We will be glad to receive items of news and reports of branch meetings, especially from the Country Branches. Such reports will tend to keep our members more in touch with each other, and promote friendly intercourse in a manner that must be beneficial to the Association.

Contributions, on National or Association topics, sent to the Editor, care of the Business Manager, will receive careful attention, and will find a place in our columns, should the subject be deemed of sufficient importance.

Original sketches and short stories are solicited, and will be paid for if found suitable.

The Editor, of course, was none other than Fred Davison, who was also chief reporter, leader writer, and principal contributor under pseudonyms that proliferated issue by issue. It is impossible to tell whether his prodigious energies also allowed him to be the paper's typesetter. Probably not, because labour was cheap: large numbers of hand compositors were travelling the country at the time in search of work. The Linotype machine had come to Melbourne in 1895.

The paper can hardly be said to have had a sub-editor, for paragraphs reporting branch news were reproduced untouched and in a variety of styles. The chief reporter ensured, however, that news of the Elsternwick branch headed the column and was written at three or four times the length of any of the others.

The masthead of the front cover was reproduced on page one and the editorial beneath it began:

The present year opens most auspiciously for accomplishing that object which, more than any other, promises to 'Advance Australia'—the federation of our colonies. On this prospect we deem it our duty, at the inception of a journal whose columns are to be devoted loyally and steadily to national welfare, to heartily congratulate Australians, and wish them God-speed in their great enterprise.

... Let us therefore hope that the 26th January, 1897, will mark an epoch in the history of Australian Unity, and, from the foundation laid then, will be raised a superstructure of national strength and beauty, realising to its fullest extent the conception of its architects and the work of its builders.

But in the accomplishment of this, a question suggests itself, and one fraught with momentous issues to the whole movement:—ARE WE, THE PEOPLE, READY TO DO OUR DUTY? All questions are answered in the answer to this ...
first person plural reminded young Australians (all those who so lamentably neglected to model themselves on their twenty-eight-year-old exemplar) that

... in this supreme moment of their lives they are invited to play a distinguished part in the great and glorious work of nation-building and history-making. At such a moment the eyes of the civilised world will be on them, and, if they be but true to themselves, true to their country, and true also to the traditions of the race, victory will be theirs.

The independent politician manqué called for 'open minds, untrammelled by party or other unworthy considerations' to perform 'the duty of a wise selection' when voting at the Federal Convention Elections in March so that 'men of large views and experience . . . gifted with the qualities of statesmanship' would be elected.

Fred did not restrict himself to such platitudinous abstractions as the above, however. Page one of that first edition of the *Advance Australia* was also devoted to a second leader reprehending some members of the ANA Metropolitan Committee for disorderly conduct at committee meetings, which the editor claimed, brought the Association into disrepute. He of the editorial 'we' was, of course, also a humble member of the Metropolitan Committee. The Committee, declared the *Advance Australia*, was created 'for other purposes than to furnish "copy" for the sensational papers, but it has developed into a veritable happy hunting ground for the penny-a-liner'.

The Metropolitan Committee was responsible for organising the fêtes and for instituting debating tournaments. The first round of the first tournament was announced under 'Association Topics' on page sixteen, and the sixth of the eight debates was

**Should females be admitted to the A.N.A.?—Elsternwick v. Malvern.**

It was to take place at the meeting room of the Elsternwick branch, and the home team would argue for the affirmative. Topics of other debates in the round included: 'Should coloured aliens be excluded from Australia? 'Should British colonies elect their own governors?' 'Has civilisation increased happiness?' and a topic still being debated in Victoria eighty years later: 'Should capital punishment be abolished?'

Fred's part in the Elsternwick v. Malvern debate was prefigured if not preempted on his second editorial page with a third leader on the very subject scheduled for debate. Perhaps he thought the force of his argument might inspire the home team and prepare the judges for a sympathetic hearing.

**Woman, at present, is a political cipher, but in all probability in the near future, the vote will be granted her, and then it will be a matter of vital importance to our country that she should have a clear conception of the duties and privileges of citizenship. It is the bounden duty of the A.N.A. to see that opportunities are afforded her of acquiring such knowledge, and the establishment of a National Association for females on the lines of our present Association, would undoubtedly answer the purpose. If women are to stand upon an equal footing with men, in regard to the duties towards the nation, then it would be worse than criminal to allow her to remain ignorant of all political matters.**
In fact, the debate was won by Malvern, taking the negative, by fifteen points; but in due course an Australasian Women’s Association was formed as a sister body to the ANA. No doubt Fred saw his case as an inspired compromise from which neither feminists nor their opponents could reasonably dissent.

The Davison enlightenment spread into many other areas of political concern. Another short leader discussed the fitness of Cardinal Moran for a seat at the Federal Convention. It argued that his church could not allow him to be defeated—her honour would be at stake—and other religious denominations, recognising this, would accordingly endeavour to put forward men of their own religious persuasions and ‘sectarian feeling’ would be aroused. Hence, the Cardinal had ‘no moral right to allow himself to be nominated’. Were he to do so, ‘the flood-gates of religious animosity and distrust would be opened, and the possible good results of the Convention would thereby be greatly curtailed’.

A well-established Association principle debarred the discussion of ‘religious and political’ topics, by which is meant, of course, the expression of sectarian and party views and allegiances. But religious and political were all much the same thing to Fred Davison. His was a creed whose deity was Australia, whose temple was its land, and whose congregation was Australian, emphatically white, preferably Anglo-Saxon, dominantly protestant, and desirably as industrious as himself. It was a rude jingoism, popular then and clearly identifiable now. Fred was busy demonstrating that the ANA needed its own journal, but his mind was so untrammelled by party or other unworthy considerations, that in due course his public utterances became an embarrassment to some of his fellow Natives. A direct challenge was to come in the not-too-distant future.

The last leader in that first Advance Australia reveals another part of Fred’s public personality. It dealt with a thorny subject, especially for one so profoundly committed to the cause of Australian National Advancement:

If it be a proven fact that the northern portion of our country cannot be developed at present except by employing cheap coloured labour, then which is more preferable—to employ such labour, or to leave the country undeveloped?

Fred’s argument ran as follows:

Might not . . . an idle, disorderly, ignorant people be planted in our midst, to become a perpetual incubus and an element of danger?

If Australia were to attempt to draw its coloured labour from the South Seas, the supply would shortly be exhausted ‘by the gradual extinction of the native races’.

The Kanaka cannot live side by side with the white man, and his race is going the way of all inferior peoples upon whom the baleful influence of civilisation has been extended.

Where, then, would the labour trader go next?

Shall he try China, with its teeming millions? That would indeed be a suicidal policy. Western ideas are slowly but nevertheless surely finding their way into that crowded land; the outflow of Chinese is steadily increasing, and is becoming a menace to other nations, and shall we invite the persistent Chow to abide with us? Not so. The trend of legislation is
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towards shutting him out, for he has shown himself to be an undesirable citizen, both on account of the low scale of living with which he is satisfied, and by reason of his uncleanly habits . . .

The Japanese?
Japan is making enormous strides along the path of Western civilisation, and it is utterly impossible that her people would consent to become semi-slaves of a nation whose supremacy in the commercial world they were challenging.

The coolie is as objectionable as the Chinaman. He is dirty, lazy, and his civilisation in no degree approximates to our own. His ways are not our ways, neither are his habits our habits.

The Negro?
If coloured labour is to be used permanently in our Northern fields, then our sole resource is the negro. He alone can increase and multiply in proximity to the white man . . . [but] in process of time, becomes a menace to the very existence of the latter. Today, in the United States, there are 8,000,000 negroes of various shades of colour, and the racial trouble is assuming a very acute form. The best statesmanship of America will be needed to avert a struggle to the death between the white man and the black.

The conclusion was that 'we may risk laying the foundations of a race trouble for future Australians to settle'. It would undoubtedly be of greater advantage to them to have the country unoccupied, 'instead of having hordes of men, alien in thought, custom, tradition, and sentiment, living in a state of perpetual discontent, and secret or avowed enmity'. Therefore 'Let Australia be kept for the white man, and not surrendered to the money-making proclivities of a few capitalists'.

Under the banner of 'Editorial Notes' on page three, two columns entitled 'Ourselves' contained some further significant symptoms of what might be termed, with overtones not to be amplified for another threescore years and ten, the Fred Creed.

We come into existence because we believe there exists a necessity for such a journal as we purpose to be—a national newspaper. We belong not to party-politics nor religion. Protection nor freetrade shall have no place in our columns. Australia—the land of our birth is the star that shall guide us, and the advancement of all that tends to her welfare is our high aim . . .

We will strive by means of original tales, essays, poems, etc., to foster the growth of an Australian literature, thereby bringing into publicity talents that would, in some cases at least, have remained unrecognised, as well as at the same time, having a valuable educational effect on the members of our branches.

But 'we have a very much higher ambition', which was not to be 'merely the chronicler' of ANA affairs, but to 'make ourselves heard, and that with no uncertain sound' on 'all affairs pertaining to the well-being of Australia'.

We will also strive for the unity of the Empire, in so far as it is compatible with the rights of Australia. We believe that the day will
come, when having increased in population, trade and influence, our country will change her subordinate position for one more of equality with the mother land—not that the crimson thread of kinship will be severed . . .

Now is the time when Federation must be striven for, heart and soul. If the opportunity be let slip, at this juncture, then we may wait many years before it be brought to pass. A peaceful Federation is now offered to us. If it be rejected, the next time, it may be at the point of the foe man’s bayonet. Work! Work! Work! History is being made, and the path we now plan out, our children and our children’s children will have to tread. Let us use our highest wisdom that our country may have such a constitution given her that it will fit her to be a leader amongst nations abroad, and the guardian of her people’s welfare at home.

The United States Constitution should be at once a warning bell to tell us of the presence of dangerous rocks, and a beacon light to show us the harbour of safety, in the framing of our Constitution Act . . .

And so he raised the bugbear that has haunted ever since federalists and anti-centralists alike: the cautionary tale of the American Civil War. ‘Blood is thicker than water, truly . . . but liberty is still more precious!’

Page four contained two columns of snippets of unsigned intelligence and yet more editorial comment headed ‘Current Topics’, some of which had already been expounded at greater length in foregoing pages. (‘Federation is said to be in the air. Let us hope that it will not remain there . . .’) Another paragraph applauded the prospect of a cordite factory for Melbourne; and another reported a forthcoming Antarctic expedition. Fred had bought himself a little book on polar exploration and Freddie, ‘as a very small boy’ was in time to read it, and preserve it for at least another forty years.8

Other paragraphs commended the United States and Britain on the ‘ratification’ of a peace treaty and warned against ‘land-bugs’ exploiting the Northern Territory. (‘Now is the opportunity for the A.N.A. to put in some lasting work, and prevent their inheritance being sold for a mess of pottage.’) Cecil Rhodes was discussed in terms of much the same ‘unctuous rectitude’ as that of which he had accused England; and the ‘coloured alien trouble’ in Natal supplied an excuse for further doctrinal reiteration.

Fred’s oracular style, like his opinions, bespoke habits of newspaper and magazine reading, proof reading in jobbing printeries, and listening to the effusions of pulpit, lecture platform and debating tournament. His reading of books, whenever he was still for long enough to read any, would have been restricted to material that reinforced his rapidly congealing opinions: as far as possible the local Australian product. Devoid of any but the most meagre first-hand experience of traditional English literature, his taste might have extended to include a little of Mark Twain’s work for sentimental reasons, but only insofar as it watered his germinating prejudice that fiction must be optimistic, telling of success, achievement through individual industry, redemption by self-help, before it could be counted worthy of a Davison commendation. If there were one contemporary writer with an
international reputation who appealed to him, it was Kipling, who had passed through Melbourne during the depression; but only the popular Kipling of jingoism and jingle. In that first issue of the Advance Australia, he reproduced the fourteen stanzas of 'The Native-born' by Kipling, 'the bugler of the British Empire' who 'reminds the men of Greater Britain of their common origin'. In a column headed 'Poetry' beside another of ANA sporting fixtures, he solicited contributions 'from Australians, by preference' and reprinted twenty-one trite celebratory stanzas entitled 'The Yarra Yarra' from the magazine of the Albert Park branch of the ANA.

Warrandyte sees it rushing with force undiminished
Though the miners have harnessed it oft to the wheel;
And through picturesque Eltham it stays not its progress
Nor does Templestowe bend any slackening reveal . . .

Fred certainly read the two Australian masters, whose work had then begun to receive public acclaim in book form for the first time. Henry Lawson's first publicly published collection of stories, While the Billy Boils, appeared the year before the Advance Australia; and Fred must have been among many who derived from Lawson's distinctively Australian voice the hope that an indigenous (white) literature was a possibility. Not that he would have approved of Lawson's bleak depiction of the grimness of outback life; and, like so many of Lawson's contemporaries, he would have thought of him as a 'poet' and neglected his real achievement. And at that time A. B. Patterson, 'The Banjo', was well on the way to becoming Australia's most popular poet. It was in 1895 that The Man from Snowy River, and Other Verses first chirruped to the Australians what they wanted to hear about themselves and began to sell the first of its hundred thousand copies.

Meanwhile, Fred Davison was in pursuit of promotions of his own. He introduced Francis Adams to his readers in a short article entitled 'An Unfashionable Poet' under the pen-name of 'Ulimaroa'. Contributions by the same hand appeared regularly in subsequent issues, but they bear another stamp. Adams had died by his own hand in 1893 at the age of thirty, four years after returning to England at the end of eight years in Australia, during which he had been briefly a member of the Bulletin staff. His patriotism, whether for England or Australia, was ambiguous, or revolutionary, enough to warrant elucidation in the pages of the Advance Australia.

Ulimaroa's exposition contained an irony that implies a maturer and mellower authorship than the humourless Fred could then have attained, but the ideology is close to Fred's:

One reason why Francis Adams is unfashionable is because he refers to our beautiful social system in such words as these:—

This social structure of red mud,
This edifice of slime,
Whose bricks are bones, whose mortar's blood,
Whose pinnacle is crime!

Another reason why Francis Adams is worthy of reference just now is that it is useless attempting to 'Advance Australia' unless much hard work
in the way of reform is done first. And no one knows how to reform or what to reform as well as the great artist. Destruction, to be justifiable, must be an inspired destruction—a destruction which would destroy art itself, if necessary, by the mandate of art.

But if the implication that Adams was a great artist was ironical, it was an unconscious irony: for Adams was the author of some verses entitled 'Fling Out the Flag', the first of which Fred elected to raise to his own masthead. In the first issue of the Advance Australia he flew it at the top of his 'Poetry' column, above 'The Yarra Yarra'; but it was later to appear in another form and Fredesque place.

Fling out the Flag! let her flap and rise in the rush of the eager air,
With the ring of the wild swan's wings as she soars from the swamp and her reedy lair!

Fling out the Flag! and let friend and foe behold, for gain or loss,
The sign of our faith and the fight we fight—the Stars of the Southern Cross!

The sentiments, the straining after alliteration, the diction and the scansion suggest that Adams, however trenchant an essayist, was a minor poet indeed. Adams wrote the verses for the Australian Labour Federation; and the flung flag was the flag over the stockade at Eureka, the event at Ballarat that Fred's parents had missed by eight years.

The lines did not reappear in the journal until the September issue of that year, number eight, when Fred ran them at the head of his page one editorial columns, but with 'improvements' of his own and without acknowledgment of their original authorship:

Fling out the flag, let her flap and rise
With the rush of the eager air,
With the ring of the wild swan's wing
As she flies from the swamp and her reedy lair!

Fling out the flag, and let friend and foe
Behold, for gain or loss,
The Sign of our Faith and the fight we fight—
The Stars of the Southern Cross!

And there the lines remained until five months after Fred had terminated his connection with the journal.

Ulimaroa was Fred's only contributor to that inaugural issue, except for the anonymous reporters of the ANA branches. But he devoted some eight more editorial columns to material lifted from other publications. Back numbers of The Nineteenth Century were the source of two articles by the famous British war correspondent, Archibald Forbes, entitled 'A War Correspondent's Reminiscences', one describing an incident from the Zulu War, and the other about some of the leaders in the Russo-Turkish war, both experiences by then some two decades old. The Metaphysical Magazine supplied 'Man and the Lower Animals', by Isabel Pickering Miller, a prolix argument endeavouring to prove that the 'selfhood' of man, the sine qua non of his existence, is the vehicle of the reasoning power that sets him above and apart from the brute creation; and is not possessed
by any other animal 'because man alone is the creature of God'. And he plundered a report in *The Times* of London that among cotton goods imported into China, only the demand for towels was increasing, a fact which 'does not imply any increased attention to personal cleanliness on the part of the inhabitants . . . the towels are used for clothing'.

The second number of the paper, dated 1 March, contained a commentary on the elections for the Federal Convention held on 4 March by 'Wat. L. Blosum' and a letter to the editor signed 'Hugh K. Lyptus'. Ulimaroa reappeared and in fact became a regular contributor.

The April number must have been virtually ready for printing when the annual conference of the Association was held at Castlemaine on 23, 24 and 25 March. But space was reserved for a report on the conference; and that included a recommendation by the Board of Directors 'that secretaries and officers of branches be not allowed to bring before their branches any circulars or publications, unless the circulars have received the sanction of the Board . . . or the Annual Conference'. The Elsternwick branch delegates were the secretary, James Turner, and W. E. Edwards, a fellow member with Fred on the committee. And it was Edwards who moved an amendment that an exception be made of the *Advance Australia*.

A protracted discussion ensued and many delegates took part. Mr Robinson (Fitzroy) said that while he did not believe that the Association should practically give its official sanction to that particular paper, he wished the journal every success, but thought that it would be better if the members obtained it through the newsagents.

The amendment was evidently carried. 'We are satisfied', Fred editorialised, 'that there is a friendly feeling towards *Advance Australia* and intend to continue its publication, confident that the ANA will benefit thereby to a very great extent'. In fact, it survived for twenty-two years, though not with its founder editor, whose close shave at the conference served as a stimulus to fresh adventures. Fred continued to publish the *Advance Australia* only for another two years.

With Fred's many activities, which included alternate Monday evenings at the Elsternwick Hall for ANA branch meetings, Milly acquiesced. She remained richly happy; and all her life she retained a special tenderness for the house in Hartington Street. 'I was twenty-eight when we moved in there—and the world was wide—anything was possible', she wrote to her firstborn when she was nearly eighty. 'I had a husband whom I was in love with and a darling little boy who said “coll ole handie”—but the time in each house had its own particular joys.' And there were to be many more houses yet. She added: 'Eunice's mother said to me, “You expect so much of life.” Well, I have lived.'

Eunice's mother was Tillie Fargher, the boss's daughter whom the exciting Phil Fargher married. Phil's leisure at this time was mostly spent with the Melbourne Rifle Club, where he was an active member and a crack shot. The club contributed four of its members to a team of five civilians and six servicemen which, under two army officers, formed a Victorian Rifle Association team which was sent to Bisley in 1897 to compete for the Kolapore Cup. David Syme offered to pay the full
expenses for the trip. The team sailed for England on 10 April 1897; and the April issue of the *Advance Australia* carried the first of a monthly series of despatches from Phil Fargher entitled 'With the Bisley Team'.

Other features of the April issue included the reproduction of more Kipling, some more articles lifted from other publications, some more pen names, such as 'Harold Quill', and the introduction of the line 'Done for *Advance Australia* ' above articles, a story and some verse, only a few of which bore the editor's stamp. That month saw also the first appearance of a regular column of polemical paragraphs entitled 'Appy Pascoe's Opinions'; and, Appily pontificating month after month on every conceivable subject under the Southern Cross, it was probably Fred's alter ego, as much as anything, that eventually became too embarrassing for those guardians of the double-locked gates, those silencers of discussion of religion, politics, and a good deal of what little there was left worth talking about, those anchorites with time fast by the forelock, the directors of the ANA.

The May 1897 issue contained a story, 'Dobbie's Diversion', by 'Dooley', another emanation of the polypseudonymous editor; and the June issue ran a facetious piece on splints, about a broken arm from a bicycle accident, signed 'Daedalus', but since this was also the name at the foot of some more doggerel culled from the magazine of the Albert Park branch, the hand was probably that of another of Fred's slowly growing body of casual contributors.

The Bisley Team were back in Melbourne with the cup before Phil Fargher's series concluded in the last number of Volume One. By the first number of Volume Two, February 1898, Fred was advertising a book containing all his friend's despatches, reset and revised with the tenses perfected. *To Bisley—And Back With the Kolapore Cup* was printed at the *Advance Australia* office in 1898 and advertised at two shillings (postage twopence extra). It was bound in paper and the top of the front jacket bore the same armorial achievement as the masthead of the journal: the proposed arms of a still unborn Commonwealth, with kangaroo and emu, an airborne crest of a rising (or setting) sun on a wreath and the motto: ADVANCE AUSTRALIA. The book was dedicated to David Syme.

A sample of Phil Fargher's opinions and impressions, taken from about two-thirds of the way through the book's stapled unnumbered pages, contains lock, stock and barrel of the rifleman's garrulous manner:

I must say right here that the British can take a beating splendidly. It doesn't ruffle their feelings one bit. Their egotism is so thoroughly developed that they do not for a moment doubt that an occasional defeat is due to bad luck. It never occurs to them that the other side won by virtue of their superior qualities, and if anyone suggested such a thing he would be smiled at.

And one month after it was first advertised, the price was down to a shilling. It was readvertised at that price in the May, June and July issues of 1898. Fred's first excursion into book publishing shared the fate of so many other such excursions, but the dauntless Fred, like Fargher's British, was insulated by an egotism so thoroughly developed that his dream-wrapped romanticism never permitted him to doubt that an occasional defeat was due to bad luck.
By the time *To Bisley* appeared, the *Advance Australia* office had moved to 133 Bourke Street. George Duncan and Fred Davison appear to have parted early in December 1897. George Duncan took the *Daily Shipping Gazette* to Market Street, opposite the Melbourne Custom House, and the first issue bearing that address was dated 11 December. The December issue of the *Advance Australia* was the first to bear the 133 Bourke Street address; actually the address of the Eastern Arcade between Exhibition and Russell Streets, and Fred was at number 51, upstairs in the arcade gallery. In the days of the boom, the arcade had been known as the Eastern Market and, while there was no law to protect shop assistants from excessive working hours, it had been a favourite Saturday night promenade spot for working people who were persuaded to buy patent medicines from fast-talking bagmen, or the products of the sweatshops at knockdown prices displayed under the new electric light.

While Phil Fargher’s book was being ignored in the bookshops, another similarly humbling adventure was being sweated out in cloth binding through the heat of that Melbourne summer: the formally serge-suited delegates, fifty fat fathers of the bourgeoisie, were meeting for the third time to draft a federal constitution. Other meetings had been held the previous year in Adelaide and Sydney. Five of the six colonies had each sent ten delegates. Queensland did not do so when the two houses of that parliament could not agree on the method of electing their delegates. The colony was still riven by the threat of secession among sugar planters of the north, their only answer to the prohibition by Brisbane of the continued importation of cheap labour from the Pacific islands—the Kanakas. The West Australian delegates had been appointed by their parliament (which to most intents and purposes meant Sir John Forrest); the others had been chosen in the March 1897 elections, with which the first issues of the *Advance Australia* had been so flatulently concerned. A compromise decision, which diluted the many factional differences but never blended them, was eventually drafted into a constitution to be submitted to a referendum of people entitled to vote in June 1898. A new state called the Commonwealth of Australia was proposed, and the six colonies were to be known as states.

Fred continued editorially and by every other means open to him to champion a cause already half a century old, and which more and more ordinary folk, jack of being colonials, saw as a chance to become citizens of one Australian nation. For Fred’s part, he wanted to see the new Commonwealth becoming a decent place for decent white Australians. At an Elsternwick branch meeting in January 1898, he proposed the toast of ‘The Board of Directors’. The *Advance Australia* reported that he ‘criticised their acts of the past year [and] commended as a proper step their demonstration against indecent advertisements’. He had been the branch vice-president for six months by this time, and had another six months to run. In February, he formulated a motion which was put to the ANA annual conference that year, prohibiting the admission of alcoholic drinks to any branch meeting or function. It was lost by four votes. By the second half of 1898, Fred was branch president, having no doubt vanquished his shyness or, at any rate, convincingly repressed it.
Then he put the Hartington Street house on the market and the family left Elsternwick. Linden eventually changed hands in May 1899, when Fred repaid the £250 he had borrowed from the building society and the purchaser paid Fred £790. The profit, after less than four years, appears to have been a handsome one. The economy, left to do for itself, was patently on the mend.

The sale may have been an opportunity to advance the Davisons, but it was also motivated by Fred's concern for his mother. Jane was ailing; and the gentle Min, of all people, was giving trouble. She was now nearly twenty-five, a contained, softly sensitive girl with a fondness for gardening, and one night she had gone to a dance in the locality, meeting a young man of rich black hair and flashing light blue eyes named Tom Spence, a builder who lived near Camberwell, a couple of stations down the line. They had fallen irrevocably in love before he told her he was married, with two children. Jane had learnt about it when Tom's wife called to see her.

And with that confrontation, all Jane had denied herself, all she had been denied, rose up in her like bile as resentment masquerading as proud and outraged respectability. She confessed to Carrie. Why, demanded Carrie in a letter, why wasn't Fred after Tom with a gun? But Fred, who was scarcely less appalled, had enough on his plate already; and anyway, Tom had gone, leaving wife, children, and mistress, once Min had promised her mother never to see him again. He found work in South Africa and supported his children from there.

Fred did all he could. Jane needed Milly within easy walking distance, and so, perhaps, did Min of the sad green eyes. Fred could always bike to his meetings; so he rented a house in Loch Street, Auburn, only a short ride on the Riversdale Road tram from the corner of Glenferrie Road. Freddie was to remember those 'very tiny trams' from a night ride home from Grandma's when he was nearly six. 'I was staying with Grandma Davison at Henrietta Street', he recalled for his mother when he was fifty-five, 'and had been put to sleep after hearing a story about Nebuchadnezzar the Mighty Hunter, and you and Dad arrived to take me home, and I had to get dressed again. I can still recall jogging slowly along in the small, dimly-lit old tram, listening to the clatter of the horses' hooves on the metal road, and feeling very sleepy ... Think of that being a new suburb; the houses out that way have old trees in their gardens nowadays, and lichen on their slates. (That horse-tram reminds me of how very different life can be in all its circumstances while remaining exactly the same in all its essentials!)'

They had been at Loch Street for only a short time when Fred's involvement with the Advance Australia came to an end. For some months past, it had become increasingly an organ of the Association's domestic affairs. Reports from branches proliferating all over the colony had begun to occupy several pages; and in Fred's farewell issue of April 1899 seven of its sixteen pages were devoted to reports from that year's annual conference. The official takeover was described by Fred with his usual dauntless jauntiness, and no reader was allowed to infer that Australian Natives could be anything other than good mates.

ADVANCE AUSTRALIA has now taken a permanent hold on the ANA throughout Australasia. It is read from Charters Towers,
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Bananaland, to Coolgardie, in 'the land of tinned vittles and gins', as a poet of the ANA has put it, and its universal acceptance is proof of two things: first, that there existed a want for such a journal; and second, that this journal fitted the want. In Victoria, it is known in every branch, and, if the letters of approval that are continually received are any indication, that knowledge is favourable.

With this issue, the original proprietor and editor, Fred. Davison, concludes his connection with it—a connection that has been pleasant and profitable—and, having launched and successfully conducted it for two years (with the kindly aid of many well-wishers), trusts that its career of usefulness and prosperity will long continue.

Mr Theo. W. Heide, the new proprietor, is known wherever the magic letters, ANA, holds sway, and under his direction, Advance Australia will make still greater strides in public favour.

Fred moved out of the arcade and Heide, the former secretary of the fête committee, moved in. With the May issue, the cover was no longer green but 'made more striking' with red and black on cream. In other respects, the publication was much less lively. Several others followed Heide in quick succession. By 1901 the fortunes of the paper mattered to few but ANA diehards. It had become, like its parent association, institutionalised; and the object for which it, and the ANA, had largely been working, was, more or less, achieved. Deakin's Dream had become a bodged reality. The Commonwealth of Australia had been born.

Fred Davison continued to be an active and vociferous member of the ANA's Elsternwick branch. His new business address was on the corner of Queen's Walk between Collins and Little Flinders Streets, a site now cleared for the City Square. Queen's Walk was another shopping arcade built during the boom, splendidly ornate, its roof surmounted with lead-light cupolas. There, at 70 Swanston Street, Fred re-established himself, but in a much smaller way than previously, describing himself as a Card Printer. 'I print . . . CARDS not poster', announced his letterhead. 'Rubber Stamps. Visiting Cards.'

Invitation, Wedding, Memorial, Notehead, Program

But he was contracting the printer so that he could extend himself in other directions. He was still only thirty.

The removal of his business was accompanied by another move for the family. Shortly after the sale of the Hartington Street house was accomplished, he rented a tiny four-roomed terrace house in Jolimont with a frontage of only sixteen and a half feet; and there Milly embarked on her fifth essay in home making. It was at 37 Agnes Street, in that group of streets round Jolimont Square between the railway lines that converge on Flinders Street station, across the road from the Fitzroy
Gardens, within earshot of applause at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and within sight, from the upstairs windows, of the lighting of the city's streets each evening by the electricity which had been wondrously illuminating them for the past five years. Milly purchased vegetables from a Chinese market gardener who would push his handcart into their little back lane. Most of the rest of her shopping was done in Bridge Road, Richmond; and Freddie's first school was the state primary school at the corner of Bridge and Punt Roads, a safe walk across what was then Richmond Park for a lad who had just turned six [Plate 10].

It was far from being, even then, the loveliest of Melbourne's parks—a mere space between the back of Melbourne Cricket Ground and a new railway—but those unconsidered journeyings across it, walking, running, dawdling, daydreaming, wandering and staring, willingly or unwillingly to school, must have helped to sow in Freddie a lyric love of parks that was not to flower in his awareness for another forty-five years. Freddie and his mates developed a schoolboy ritual of somersaulting the horizontal iron railing, at boy's chest height, beside the park entrance. That would usually have been four times daily since he walked home from school to midday dinner served by a mother with thick brown hair that she sometimes let fall down her back. Milly was not beyond chastising her darling little boy. 'You will remember', he helped her recall in 1944, 'when the Jolimont railway was being built and we boys made a slide down the embankment, and I happened to have my best pants on, and wore the seat out of them, and you nearly wore the skin off my bottom when you found out.' But he was to remember it as a singularly happy childhood because nothing seemed to have happened. Everything went along fine. There were never tragedies. Oh, I cut my knee once . . . and various little accidents of that kind, but . . . there were no griefs. At the time I thought the world was a fine place.

There was very little punishment in our house. My Dad . . . always said, It's Liberty Hall. So long as no one hurts other people, you can do as you please. We were . . . very free to come and go as we wished.12

Freddie was, of course, protected from the darkness that fell over the family when his Aunt Min disappeared on a ship to South Africa, leaving behind a note that said she would rather spend a week in hell with Tom than the rest of her life without him. Heartbroken, her mother never recovered from the shock. Before the final Christmas of the old century, she had surrendered her tenancy of the lonely house in Henrietta Street and gone to live with Em in Coolgardie. She remained there for a year, after which she lived with Carrie in Newtown. With the Davisons' regret at her departure, much relief was mixed. Fred was to confess to his younger daughter in later life that his mother had spoilt the first ten years of his married life with Amelia.

In 1900 the family moved back to Elsternwick, where Fred had bought another house on a loan and a deed of defeasance from a building society. The new house was a little nearer the station than before, in Downshire Road, one of the streets along which Fred must often have cycled on his way between Hartington Street and the city. This time the house was called Linda. It was a weatherboard house larger than any they had lived in before.
When they first moved in, Milly, in the early stages of another pregnancy, took on the task of covering the vast new floor space with a variety of stains and varnishes.

Of course I had a burning desire to make it look nice. Dad's endeavour was to make the garden nice.13 Freddie went to the state school at Caulfield, where he was to remain a pupil until he left school.

The next Christmas, 1900, the family had visitors staying with them from Bendigo. They were Mill's brother Jack (John Henry), his wife Belle (née Keck), and their baby daughter, Nita.

That was a scorcher of a Christmas. While I was cooking the midday meal, Dad and Jack were asphalting the garden paths. I could smell the boiling tar, also they bordered the beds with narrow timber that they could curve.14

Milly's third baby arrived on 23 January 1901. He was named Douglas Thomas, the first name after the Manx capital and the second after his late grandfather. The fact that he also shared his elder brother's second given name was apparently an oversight whose rather untoward consequences were not foreseen. Fred composed a poem to celebrate his second son.

Within the year, he was composing another poem, this time for his second daughter, Doris Marguerite. Amelia moved into the spare room again; and on Christmas Day, 1901, the new baby was three days old. Now Fred must have considered that he had done at least two-thirds of his duty as a patriot. Writing nearly twenty years later, he recalled with approval a phrase of the man who had been President of the United States for about a year when Doris was born: Teddy Roosevelt's ominous caveat, 'race suicide', and his ancillary dictum that to be a good citizen a man must work, fight, and get children. 'That sentence', Fred observed, 'is full of true Rooseveltian directness, and is about as concise a statement of the whole duty of a patriot as could be put into a few words.'15 The chance to fight was yet to come. Meanwhile, the paterfamilias in the multi-faceted Fred was established for all the world to see.
For Freddie the new century began with a new school: his second and last. And it was at Caulfield State School—or so he was to acknowledge at the end of his life—that his interest in girls began. In his five years at that school, there were several objects of adoration. ‘The turnover was very rapid in those years!’

Love affairs were not uncommon at their school, but, if you valued your peace of mind, they were kept covert.

One of the last of them was named Florrie Dickson, and there must have been some reciprocation, for they remained a memory to one another for sixty-five years.

On the seventh day, there was Sunday School. His mother had been a Sunday School teacher in Bendigo; his father a Sunday School librarian at the Congregational Church. It was meet that their children should attend church, and be taught the scriptures properly, even though, as they grew older, their father would ask them on their return what they had been taught, and then enjoy himself explaining what a lot of nonsense it all was.

From the character of his son’s adult recollections, it would seem to have been a chapel school, probably Methodist. The superintendent at one period was ‘a big lump of a man’ who had ‘no roof to his mouth, poor fellow’. Helplessly, he would divert the children from his purpose for them by his manner of speech:

‘Here endeth the lethon . . . We will now thing hymn number theventv-thixth in the large hymn-book and number thirty-theven in the thm-a-ll . . . “Jethuth lov’th me, thith I know, for the Bible tellth me tho!” A—rithe, a—pleathe.’

His teacher was a different manner of man, and Freddie experienced him as a fearful figure. He was ‘one who set great store by the Second Coming’:

His eyes would shine when he spoke of this joyful event. ‘And we don’t know when he will come, boys! It might be this week, this day, this hour, even this very minute! And the world will be without sin! All will be changed! How happy we shall be, boys!’ Imagine me, small, silent, and fearful, ardently hoping that what the teacher so gladly expected wouldn’t happen until I had had my fair share of slices from the pie of everyday life. He made the Book, for me, a miserable compendium of Thou Shalt Nots while every grain of me was silently shouting, I shalt!
FREDDIE

With the result that the Book became something not to read and enjoy but to avoid like a dug-out dunny until I was a man of middle years who had shalted his way through most of the Commandments and felt himself in a position to take up the Bible on equal terms with whatever it might contain.4

The experience also engendered in him a robust resistance to any form of scriptural indoctrination. When scripture classes at his day school began to demand an extra unwilling engagement with the Book, Freddie found the way out. He told them what it would have been impossible to tell at Sunday School: that he was a Catholic.

Not that the home environment was in any way pious.

Dad always had Mother say grace over the evening meal, but never over breakfast or lunch! And on those rare occasions when Mother was away of an evening no amount of persuasion or kidstikes would make the old [man] say it himself . . . Dad was a pretty good thinker in most ways, but religion was a subject on which he appears never to have integrated his ideas.5

Hence there was little of any force or magic to win the boy away from a healthy Australian child's spontaneous nature worship, as he took the family's little dog, as companion and familiar, for walks across the paddocks that still lay within a boy's step of his house. The dog was an Australian terrier named Lassie, and almost the only other thing now known about her is that she once got stuck in the dunny.

On those walks, the boy's boots scuffled 'small, humble little flowers' that he discovered were 'quite pretty' when he looked into them. In spring the locality was abundant with flowers. In the fence corners were clumps of grasses with decorative seed heads that his mother would pluck and take home 'to fill a vase or two'. And wherever the grasses grew tall they were bright with native wildflowers 'and others, such as portaleucca and wild vetch, garden plants and farm crop plants' that had taken root for themselves and helped to deck the scene.6 In the eastern distance, on clear days, the Dandenong Ranges stood eternal, 'the rim of the visible world'.7

From the time he knew how, he always enjoyed reading; and of the secular literature that came his way he was able to be quite sharply critical. The principal reading matter then supplied in the state schools was imported from Britain: the Royal Reader, containing descriptions of English scenes and accounts of English historical events.

I remember thinking of it very resentfully. And it struck me, looking around, that if someone wanted to write stories about people like my father, or like myself and my friends, they would be worth reading, too.

In due course, The School Paper came into his ken. It was a sixteen-page cumulative supplement to the bound reading books, published monthly by the Victorian Education Department. It first appeared in 1896 for Class III; another edition for Class IV was added the following year; and a third, for Classes V and VI, appeared in 1898. Although much of its material was still of English scenes and English historical events, stories and poems by English and American writers such as Wordsworth, Southey, Conan Doyle, Washington Irving, Longfellow, Emily...
Dickinson, occasionally a poem by Henry Clarence Kendall was published, a story adapted from Henry Lawson, an article on Caroline Chisholm. Freddie was probably in Class IV by the time he noticed the paper: in 1902, the year he became nine.

It came out with bits about maize-growing in Queensland, of cutting the wool clip up in the Mallee; and then there’d be some bits of poems by Lindsay Gordon and Clarence Kendall, and we just seized on them. I remember three of us boys walking home one day declaiming one of Kendall’s poems as we marched along. It was a bit of us, you know . . . we were being affirmed in the world and the value of our lives for literary purposes was being demonstrated.

That was quite exciting. I’ve always felt a deep debt of gratitude to that man because not only did I see it affecting me, but as an older man I seemed to think: Yes, you belonged to that generation, too.8

The poem was probably Kendall’s ‘Song of the Shingle-Splitters’, which The School Paper first published in December 1902. One can easily imagine three nine-year-old boys, their boots stamping in rhythmic unison on the flagstones, chanting:

In dark, wild woods, where the lone owl broods,
And the dingoes nightly yell—
Where the curlew’s cry goes floating by,
We splitters of shingles dwell.
And all day through, from the time of the dew
To the hour when the mopoke calls,
Our mallets ring where the woodbirds sing
Sweet hymns to the waterfalls.
And all night long, we are lulled by the song
Of gales in the grand old trees;
And in the breaks we can hear the lakes
And the moan of distant seas . . .

Freddie became a voracious reader. ‘I was encouraged to read and then I took it over with such enthusiasm they tried to bluff me off.’8 That boy! cried his mother, scandalised by excess. He’s reading before breakfast! But he read ‘an awful lot of tripe’, such as Penny Dreadfuls, ‘and enjoyed them, too!’

Robin Hood and Claude Duval and all those fellows . . . Dick Turpin.
Oh, and more pretentious rubbish . . . The sort of stuff you struck in my younger days you could get by the barrow load at every little suburban library. You see, the people that used to cater to the suburban corner library trade, they’ve gone over to television and wireless: the situation comedy.9

At about that time Freddie’s Grandma was dying in Sydney. It was said that she never recovered from her grief over Min’s defection. Her last surviving letter to her only son is dated 23 August 1902.
Dear Fred

thanks for your remittance you must have got mine almost the same time as I got yours what a nice card that is something new, the class we live amongst here there is nothing of the kind I am glad the little ones are well and Milly well I hope she is first rate my love to her and them all

I am not very well myself I think it is best to tell you some times I am pretty bad but I do not say anything for I know it is a failing of my powers sometimes I am better than others I could not go out alone [without] one of the girls to hold their hand well for distance I could not walk from your house to the station my head troubles me so dizzy and then my sight goes you will think I am all complaints but of course I am getting old and it is no use doctrine. I am worn out it is a little quiet this afternoon for a treat but it won’t last long, we have just had a heavy thunder shower, they are all well in the west Mins promised one is allways bemoening and wishing she would write Em says he is a nuisanse at their place he is a Mining Manager. to £ a week he is a Bendigo man Min might have done worse a very gentlemanly man how are you getting on is Milly going to have a vote Carrie will if she can the children here are all well love to your own dear self
from your loving Mother

J Davison

I am well in health

Min had done a great deal worse. She had returned to live with Jim and Em in Coolgarrie, where she had many admirers. But probably she had left Tom in South Africa only in order that, apart from her, he might be more successful in persuading his wife to grant him a divorce. Evidently, one of Min’s admirers had been led to harbour expectations of her, doubtless without discouragement from the family, who were clutching at the presumption that with the prodigal’s contrite return to those who loved her, she had exhausted her sinful infatuation. But she returned to South Africa and Tom. His wife was always to refuse to divorce him. For how could a divorced woman ever retain a shred of respectability? It was to be another decade or more before Min and Tom returned together to their native land.

Jane’s letter was written in the month after the New South Wales parliament had approved a bill to give votes to women at state elections. Australian women had won the federal franchise earlier in the same year. But the answer to Jane’s question about Milly was in the negative. In Victoria, the colony in which the question of women’s suffrage had first been raised, women were not to win any kind of state vote for another six years, and even then it was granted only in a limited form.

Jane Davison died at 483 King Street, Newtown, on the last day of 1902, of ‘cardiac failure’ and ‘cerebral softening’, after an illness estimated at twelve months. Rudy Schneider, her son-in-law, notified her death and gave her age as sixty-four. In all likelihood, she was not quite sixty-four, since she was probably
born early in 1839. She was buried in the Presbyterian Cemetery, Rookwood, on 1 January 1903; and remembered as a cold, proud woman. But that coldness may well have been her only means of controlling a fiercely passionate nature, which all too many tribulations had denied expression.

Three weeks before she died, the Davison family moved again, to a rented weatherboard house named Brooklyn in Shoobra Road, the next street parallel with Downshire Road to the east.

While they were living in Shoobra Road, a local campaign was approaching a climax. In the last weeks of the old century the Town Clerk of Brighton had asked the Victorian Railway Commissioners to consider 'the necessity of having a railway station at Martin Street between North Brighton and Elsternwick stations for the accommodation of the increasing population of the neighbourhood between these stations'. The District Traffic Superintendent was asked to report, and he concluded that the request was premature. Two years later, the Brighton Town Clerk took the matter up with the Minister of Railways. 'As you are aware', he wrote, 'the distance between the Elsternwick and North Brighton stations is a very considerable one'. Many residents were compelled to walk the distance morning and evening. A new station 'would cause the erection of many tenements and would also greatly enhance the value of property in the locality'.

The distance between the two stations was a mile and a half, the longest stretch between any two stations on the line. According to the Melbourne *Argus* of 30 January 1904, the station had been 'absolutely promised' fifteen years earlier, building plans drawn up, and the scheme costed at a thousand pounds. In consequence 'a large area of land was purchased and cut up'. But money for the station was never made available. However, areas along the line further south had progressed at an embarrassing pace. The line had been extended in 1882 from North Brighton through to Sandringham, and duplicated all the way from the city. The Minister of Railways at that time was 'Honest Tom' Bent, the former Brighton rate collector, who, as Mayor of Brighton, had become its biggest landowner and one of the colony's most greedy and slippery land boomers. It was Tommy Bent who carved up the estates and market gardens that became the city of Brighton, Tommy Bent who was instrumental in doubling its population and nearly trebling its number of houses during the eighties. Bent brought Brighton its mains gas supply and its street lighting, laid the foundation stone of its old town hall and reorganised its water supply from a seat in parliament. His shady land deals became legendary, the press lampoons on him grew increasingly savage and, when the crash came, it bore Tommy Bent down with it. But, after a few years of dairying in the Western District, Honest Tom bobbed up again, and, at the time the residents of Elsternwick were campaigning for their new station, the Minister of Railways was, once again, Thomas Bent. He was also the state's Premier.

A public meeting at Elsternwick on 2 February 1904 appointed a deputation to ask the Railway Commissioners for the station, 'in view of the fact that not only is there a large population that this station would serve, but there are hundreds of acres of good building land in the immediate neighbourhood which would be almost immediately built upon if suitable railway facilities were granted'.
The event was a pediment for a self-styled pillar of the community such as Fred Davison. He threw himself energetically into the cause. Night after night he was out door knocking, first for support and, later, for money. He was probably a member of the deputation that saw the Railway Commissioners on 10 February, as a letter he wrote 'to the Chief Commissioner' on 8 March begins: 'May I be permitted to lay an additional argument before you?' Fred used his own letterhead, and was writing on his own behalf.

I have a block of land in that district on which I wish to build a house and cannot do so as the Building Societies and other Institutions will not advance money on property situated so far from a railway station. I can, they admit, offer them ample margin of security but they wont touch it.

'Wait till the station is built' they say 'and then we'll do it.'

Now I am not so deficient in humor as not to see the absurdity of asking the Dept. to build a station in order that I may build a house, but as nearly every home that is erected in Melbourne is put up with financial assistance, & as the Societies will not advance money in that district for the reason stated, the part of Elsternwick affected must remain undeveloped for an indefinite period.

Apologising for troubling you

Yours truly

Fred. Davison

The block of land in question was a pair of corner blocks in Caulfield legally owned by Amelia. They lay on the east side of Kooyong Road, south of the Rosstown railway, occupying two hundred and ninety feet of Saturn Street, one with a frontage of seventy-four feet to Kooyong Road and the other with a similar frontage to Venus Street. They were half a mile from the site proposed for the new station, at the top of what was then called Sheridan's Hill. During that year, the family moved again, this time a little nearer to where they planned to build. They rented a larger weatherboard house known as Skipton in Clarence Street, Elsternwick, with a garden backing on to the north side of the Rosstown line.

Plans and costings for the proposed station were drawn up. But, in July, the Chairman of the Railway Commissioners presented another deputation with a new problem—that of acquiring land to provide access to the station, at an estimated cost of three or four thousand pounds. Another deputation was formed, and the Minister of Railways agreed to meet them on 7 September. The deputation represented the municipal councils and residents of Brighton and Caulfield, and Fred Davison was among them. The residents proposed that if they could raise two thousand pounds towards the cost of purchasing access land, the government should contribute a like amount. The Argus reported the following day, not without a laconic irony, that the deputation sought to follow a principle laid down by Mr Bent himself, 'that those who wanted anything must help themselves'. But Thomas Bent was prepared to offer £1000 and

'Not-one-penny-more. Not-one-penny-more.' was Mr Bent's firm declaration. Seeing that he was not to be moved, the deputation made no further attempt at persuasion, but contented themselves with expressing their gratitude for the concession he had promised to recommend.
An *Argus* staff reporter is unlikely to have accompanied the delegation on its mission: the errand would have been too pettifogging. And the account was not that of an uninvolved observer. A reasonable inference is that a member of the delegation wrote the report, and sent it off to the *Argus*, and that that person was Fred Davison.

The deputation ought indeed to have counted themselves fortunate in gaining the concession they did. For Honest Tom was once again stretching his government's resources, this time to build a new railway tramline between St Kilda and Brighton. He opened it himself the following year, and shortly afterwards several large estates adjoining the line were carved up and sold off. One of these was a historic Brighton property of twenty-four acres known as St Ninian's. Its most recent owner, before subdivision, was none other than Thomas Bent.

Gardenvale Station, between Elsternwick and North Brighton, was eventually built. The necessary money was collected from local residents, although no extra land was needed for it. It was opened at the end of 1906; and Fred Davison's part in its creation passed into family legend.

It was probably the campaign for the station that gave Fred the taste for public life, for it could well have been at this time, in the year or two before young Freddie left school about the end of 1905, that Fred stood for membership of Caulfield Council. Perhaps his door-knocking campaign had led him to think he was well known and popular in the locality; and it was, after all, Tommy Bent's door-knocking experience as a rate collector that got him first elected to public office when he was only twenty-four. But Fred was unsuccessful and no record has survived. He tried, in part, to blame his failure on Freddie. For hadn't he told them at school he was a Catholic? Word had obviously got around.

Membership of the local authority in a developing suburb would have held many advantages for a man who was now busy establishing himself as an estate agent, as the example of Thomas Bent and plenty of other land boomers had amply demonstrated. Shortly before the new station opened, a five-acre block of land on the 'up' side of the line in Asling Street, Elsternwick, was subdivided. Fred acquired one of the smaller portions, erected a one-roomed wooden hut, put up his sign, and Frederick Davison, estate agent, was in business.

A table, three chairs, a sign board and some printing, bought and paid for, left him just eleven pounds fourteen shillings and fourpence in hand... His office was on the edge of the settled district, and for a mile or more the vacant lots of an old-time land boom stretched along the road.

If it is fair to judge from a story he wrote in 1920 under his old *Advance Australia* pen-name of Dooley, which was about an estate agent ('a real estate agent—not an imitation one') his method of starting in the business was to pay a deposit on a block of land and then talk big about the land he was selling so that he could ask a higher price than he paid for it in the hope of selling it before having to pay for it himself. When he achieved a sale, he would buy more land and sell it on the
promise of the coming railway station. If he found he was unable to suit a willing client, he was probably not above inveigling a house owner to sell so that the client could be satisfied.

He continued to maintain the printing business; and appears to have remained in Asling Street for only a few months. After Asling Street, Fred continued to operate as an estate agent from home—which, by late 1906, was no longer in Clarence Street. Milly’s eighth home-making venture was in a large weatherboard house that Fred built, a house that delighted her, a house built for four hundred pounds on her block in Kooyong Road at the corner of Saturn Street. In July 1905, the titles to both lots there were transferred to the Federal Building Society in exchange for a four hundred pound loan, which was repaid fourteen months later. Immediately, Fred acquired the title from Milly by paying her a token seventy-four pounds; and five months later, in February 1907, he raised another loan on it. This time it was for three hundred pounds, and with it he started to build again, a smaller weatherboard house at the back, fronting on to Venus Street.

Doris was four when they moved into the new house in Kooyong Road. She was to remember its drawing room walls handsomely hung with striped paper in satin pink, and kitchen curtains with red poppies. Fred planted another garden there, and re-established the fowls that always formed part of their domestic chattels; Douglas and Doris would watch them run headless round the garden whenever their father, axe in hand, elected one for the pot. Plucking and cleaning were also Dad’s job: Milly was adamant about that. A ‘scented gum tree’ grew by Milly’s bedroom window, tall enough for her to lean out and smell it, or pick some sprays.12 Freddie remembered ‘its tall Queen Anne gables’; and recognised them one summer night forty years later, as he was motoring past on a sentimental pilgrimage. He remarked that it was still one of the nicest homes in the neighbourhood, with ‘a dense coil of flowering gums standing between it and the side road’.13 The word ‘Kooyong’ was always ‘a pleasant sound’ for him.14

When the family moved there, Freddie was almost thirteen, no longer a schoolboy, and a bike was his mode of transport. Before he acquired it, new experiences sought him on foot. A couple of years before he left school, he plotted with a couple of friends to run away from home. They equipped themselves with what they thought would be the necessities of life: a tin of jam, a loaf of bread, a blanket and a bayonet. They were headed for the bush and struck off in a southerly direction. By the end of their first day out, they had reached Mordialloc, on the bay a good seven miles from home.

That was a long way in those days, especially to short-legged fellows. Just towards sundown we were going through the town and a large voice said behind us: ‘Where are you boys going to?’ And we looked round and there was a fine large police sergeant there. He listened to our story and said: ‘I think, boys, you’d better come along with me.’ So he took the three lads and locked them into the lockup. Then at nightfall they were called out and the sergeant’s wife fed them soundly. When they returned to the lockup, the sergeant’s son poked cigarettes to them under the door. Then they fell asleep.
About midnight, the boys were awakened. Fred and one of the other lads' fathers had together hired a pony and trap to collect them. They drove them off home in the depths of the night with the boys suffering one regret: that they had not managed to get a bit further. If they were punished at all, it was soon forgotten.

My Dad behind an unsmiling face would probably have been very sympathetic. I went very comfortably through the whole experience. I can't recall being ashamed of myself or pained in any way. School was much more of a punishment. There was one particular teacher who was always sharpening pencils. Freddie couldn't get along with him.

He was a tall bearded man well over six feet high, very short tempered, and I was a small defenceless boy and he used the cane very freely. I got fed up with it and I started driving round with the local baker, playing the wag from school.

His father had too many of his own problems to put up much resistance. Fortune was not smiling upon him just then, and, in a bid for more of her favours, he was at work on an invention.

Shortly afterwards, something else happened to thrust upon Freddie a sense of manhood for which he was unprepared, although it was a fairly ordinary part of normal growth and self-discovery. He would often walk across the still open paddocks around Gardenvale in those days, 'when the name was truly descriptive of the locality'. Once when he did so, he 'copulated with the beauty of evening'.

I was about twelve at the time, and possessed of sexual maturity (physically, I mean), which had come on me fairly early. I had always been responsive to nature, the sort of kid who varied his way to school in order to retain acquaintance with various trees, clumps of gorse, etc. On the evening of which I speak I had been sent on a message from my home in Gardenvale to Caulfield and was returning across paddocks through rounded hills of bracken. An orange moon was just rising above them. Day had not yet quite faded from the western sky. Below me were orchards and clumps of tall dark pines sinking into the twilight, and beyond these a glint of the bay. It was very quiet and I was brought by my response to a standstill, alone in all this hushed beauty. I felt I couldn't endure it without doing something about it. I experienced an erection, spontaneous and unvolitional, such as a grown man could think of only with envy. (Nature's way of suggesting an answer to my dilemma, I presume.) So I pulled out my cock and rubbed myself off, achieving a unison between myself and my circumstances (and an orgasm) such as only rarely comes anyone's way. Being a product of the Puritan tradition, I later looked back on this incident with a good deal of shame; and it was only after years that I came to see it for what it was—the act of a child with the genitals of a man, who had not yet learned to select and direct his responses in a man's way.

His father's problems were now suddenly complicated by unexpected responsibilities from the past. He was obliged to admit into his ménage a man he

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had never met, but whom he knew well enough as a legend. Uncle Fred Brown popped up once more. From California.

He was always to be remembered in the family as Rich Old Uncle Fred, but the title bore overtones of irony. For Rich Old Uncle Fred proved to be rich in little but his wily and legendary charm.

'Did you ever meet him, Uncle Fred?' inquired the romantic lad out of his world of Penny Dreadfuls, showing a picture of some famous Indian chief, such as Sitting Bull.

'Son', drawled the old fellow in his strange-sounding accents of faraway places, 'he was the meanest redskin that ever crossed my path!'

Young Freddie was on the point of leaving school. He was in Class VI and had done well. 'I was certainly under the impression that I'd learnt all there was to learn, so why hang around any longer?'

He had no idea of what he wanted to do.

I was content to do almost anything that was suggested to a boy. If they'd have said there's a ship that's going down to the South Pole, I'd have said yes. I'd do anything, anything for a change, anything to get away from familiar things.

On all sides they were crying the slogan: Go on the land, young man! It was largely a post-depression device to relieve the burdens of the cities and encourage people to live more cheaply, but it was one to which his father patriotically assented.

My father, who was suburban, a city man, essentially an urban man—you couldn't imagine him away from the city—he listened to this cry. And decided that I would answer it!

Now Fred took up another piece of real estate: a selection in the hills of the Great Dividing Range to the north-east of Melbourne, near a little township then known as Tommy's Hut. Today it is, prosaically, Kinglake West. Fred hired a man with a sulky to take him and young Freddie to Whittlesea and up the range to inspect it. Later, the pair of them made a couple of cycle trips up there to spend the night in a hut on the selection.

It was in a very picturesque but very poor district. It was the picturesqueness which attracted my father, I suppose... the land stood almost straight up on end.

Dad's problem virtually solved itself. The reasoning ran as follows: Rich Old Uncle Fred had been a pioneer, hadn't he? He knew about farming in rugged conditions, for had he not succeeded until falling on hard times? Young Freddie was ready, willing to learn, 'wide-eyed, and with a mind as receptive as the soil to water'. The old man and the boy got on well enough together...

So Dad hired a horse and spring cart, loaded it with 'settler's tools and goods to occupy the selection', and the three Freds set off for Whittlesea and the long winding haul beyond of eight miles to the selection.

If you were heavily loaded someone would have to meet you at the foot of the range with a spare horse to hook on in front.

But they had made no such arrangement. The journey took all day and most of the evening. The road beyond Whittlesea was of 'unsurfaced earth, a pioneer track,
broadened and graded within the limited resources of a rural shire'.
Its course had been determined by that axiom of simple bushmanship:
'To get through the ranges, stick to the tops of the ridges.' The settlers
had had no road-building gear—and you can't take a cart along the side
of a mountain gully—so they had taken the foremost spur by frontal
assault. It was a long stiff pull, and raised the sweat on a horse. You might
have to spell him on the way by chocking the wheels.
By eleven o'clock that night, the trio were still a couple of miles from their
destination, the horse 'weary from the day's journey from the city'. One of the
Fred's was probably whipping the last few pounds of pull out of its exhausted
muscles, the other two walking alongside, putting an occasional shoulder to a
wheel or holding themselves in readiness to throw a rock under one of them should
the horse falter and the cart begin to run back. Then suddenly a lump of clay,
mistaken for a rock, was thrown under a wheel, and the cart rolled inexorably
backwards.
'Chock!' yelled the driver, with panic in his voice. 'For God's sake, chock!'
There was a frantic scraping of hooves as the horse struggled to regain
control. Then the horse and cart disappeared into the night. Out of the
dark came the thump of something overturning, and a bang clatter as the
dislodged load shot off and avalanched down the hill. Then the groan of a
horse, followed by sounds of ineffectual plunging. Then silence again.
It was chill dawn before we had extricated the horse from under the
cart, man-handled the cart back onto the road, collected our scattered
goods, reloaded, and—shaken and hollow-eyed—were again on our way.
A shaft of the cart, lodging against a stump, had stood prop against
complete disaster.
They had fallen, they later learned, into the back of the farm of old McDonald. Fred returned to Kooyong Road leaving uncle and nephew to get to work.
The selection consisted of one hundred and ninety-six acres of hillside, divided
by a deep gully carrying Joyce's Creek.
The thin soil of the ridges ran to no opulence of leafage, only to slender,
grey messmate saplings, with bare gravel and rocky outcrops between,
and a few tufts of grey wire-grass. Here was no bird-song, no
undergrowth, no ground life. It was a lean, spare bush; life clung to these
bony heights only by drawing in on itself; you imagined that the putting
forth of a new leaf would be a matter affecting deep issues, and notable in
an uneventful calendar.
But in the gullies and on the slopes below the ridges, the soil was somewhat richer,
much of it supporting 'big timber country; heavily forested land, some of the trees
as thick through at the butt as the length of a couple of axe-handles'. A selector
named Alfred White leased it from the Crown; Fred Davison entered into a joint
interest in the place with him. The year was 1906.
Fred's new enterprise thrust unexpected burdens on Milly's uncomplaining
shoulders. A young bull, presumably acquired for the selection, was lodged in the
garden, but found its way into her kitchen one day when she and the children were
out. There were calves to be fed and endured till they could be transported up to Tommy's Hut. Some of them died before they could be got away, and men came to dig deep graves for them beneath her flower beds. And Milly nourished no great fondness for animals. Once, she and the children visited the selection. They were driven up the range after the train journey to Whittlesea. Rich Old Uncle Fred fed them on baked beans. Milly loathed every minute of it, and vowed she would never return.

What the two Freds did up there, apart from eating flapjacks and sourdough bread, is not recorded. It is not easy to imagine Uncle Fred putting his back into very much of the following.

It took upwards of half a week of sweat and hard breathing with mattock, shovel, and axe to grub and fell one of those trees. It went over at last like grandeur undone, its leaves wailing, and crashed to earth with terrible and dusty impact. Its trunk lay dramatically inert, and the yellow ends of its shattered tangle of branches seemed to protest dumbly against our triumph. The severed roots of the stumps were cocked up as high as a man's head; you could have buried a dray in the hole you had dug; and two men could see each other only from the chest up across its prone trunk. The trunk had to be sawn through in several places, the branches lopped and cut into manageable lengths, the stump end rolled clear of the hole, and the sawn logs of the trunk swung around and piled for burning—human strength and the craft of pole and lifting-jack pitted against earth's tenacious clutch of her own.

The fires had to be stoked for weeks on end, as well as being shaken down each night—spark fountains leaping in the dark—before you went to bed. Every chip from the axe, stick and fragment of wood, had to be stooped for and fed in armfuls to the fires. While the burning went on—and that was just one tree—the buttress roots remaining in the ground had to be traced and uncovered to below plough-depth, cut through in several places, torn from their moorings in the subsoil, and lifted and cast on the fires, then the heavy clay returned, shovelful by shovelful, to the holes from which stump and root had come.

In addition to the living trees there were the stumps of the dead, like great half-decayed teeth, to be dug and wrenched piecemeal from the earth and piled for burning, and the striving horde of saplings to be worried loose with mattock and axe one by one and gathered up to the fires, and the ground raked clean of everything that might foul the tillage.

There were only light cultivation tools on the selection, so a man had to be brought from a distant place with a heavy plough and three big horses to break up the ground; and the heavy earth gave to his mould-board with unwilling groans and the explosive snapping of small roots; and the yellow-grey furrows lay over against each other as hard and unyielding as paving slabs. It was left to lie like that, to weather, while we shifted the fence to include the new cultivation.

Their provisions were bought from the local store-owner, a man named Bailey,
'the only man of business in the community', who used to journey down to the railway with waggon and horses on Tuesdays and Fridays of each week.

He carried mail for the settlers, sold them newspapers, picked up packages for them at the rail, bought butter and eggs from them, and did a small wayside business in groceries, haberdashery, lamp-wicks and other kinds of country-store stock. He also did a gratis trade in local gossip.

His times of passing were known, and a little before he was due there would be a small gathering of people at each turn-off; a woman or two—perhaps with a piece of crochet or other current needlework to fill the time of waiting—a few small children, a boy or girl past school age, and perhaps a man or youth with sprouting beard, if there was a sack of flour to be shouldered. These little gatherings of an hour were a pleasant break in the isolation of selection life, and notable in a restricted social round.

There Freddie watched the traffic passing on the road between Whittlesea and Yea, 'a bullock waggon, a traction engine, a mob of sheep or a rabbiter's turnout, they all came along the mountain road between the tall trees, either going to or coming from Yea'. Yea became a fabled place, and all his life he dreamed of going there. But it was to be forty years before he did so.

Among the local inhabitants, who were attracted to the directness of 'the dark-haired lad in dungarees', Freddie formed a special relationship with the Simses. Arthur Sims and his wife Lucy were in process of settling a ninety-six-acre selection on the opposite side of the road to White's.

Arthur Sims was from the Old Country, a man of Kent who had spent the better part of a lifetime in Australia—or the Colonies, to use the term he employed with a slight air of patronage—bringing up a large family by dint of heavy toil until, in his late fifties, he had found himself with enough money to make a small start for himself on the land; a dream that had stalked his thoughts for years, growing more insistent as the time before him shortened.

Mr Sims was a man of medium physique and courageous countenance. Under a bald head fringed with greying curls he had fine blue-grey eyes in a bronzed face, a straight nose, and a good mouth showing between moustache and grizzled beard. Hard work had affected him. His gait was stiff-kneed and he walked with drooping shoulders and dangling hands.

He was a master ploughman, an expert scytheman and a knowledgeable orchardist.

My arrival was in the fourth year when, a little at a time, ten acres had been cleared, ploughed, and planted with fruit trees, and a house and barn had been built.

But even in the year that Freddie knew him, he still failed to make a living from his toil.

He asked me . . . why I didn't work in the city and grow up to sit at a desk and wear a coat and be a gentleman; and I had difficulty in making my preference for cleaning out stables and splitting fence-posts sound very sensible.
He had three sons and two daughters. One at a time, the sons ‘came in their turn from their wanderings far and wide to toil shoulder to shoulder with the old man’. Ernie had worked there before Freddie knew the family. Charlie arrived shortly before Freddie’s departure. Harry, who was twenty-four, was the one Freddie came to know best because he returned home shortly after Freddie’s arrival. ‘Sober to the point of dourness, hard-working, and with a pride in past feats of labour on the ballast trucks of railway construction camps’, Harry Sims was becoming a great reader of books, a re-reader, in fact, and in after years was to shame his younger friend ‘with some of the works’ he had read . . . ‘speaking inarticulately but familiarly with the masterpieces of the ages’.28

The Sims’s daughters were Annie, aged sixteen, and Hilda, aged about fourteen and in her last year at school. Hilda was ‘strong-limbed, blue-eyed and as blonde as new rope; imbued with something more than a tomboy interest in every aspect of the outdoor life of the selection’. She and Freddie were acknowledged to be sweethearts, following the day when they ‘exchanged, in the twilight of the barn, the first startling kiss of adolescence’; and he would sometimes wait about their kitchen in the hope of other kisses when her mother was out of the room.

Freddie was to remember Lucy Sims ‘only as a smallish dark figure ever hurrying about some household task’. She became someone whose kindness he took as much for granted as he had taken his own mother’s, for before very long he was boarding with the family, and working alone on his father’s selection.

One weekend when his father was there, Uncle Fred had innocently asked: ‘Does Caroline know I’m in Melbourne?’

‘No’, Fred had answered, thoughtfully. He had gone home and written to Carrie, telling her. She had replied and sent the old man’s train fare to Sydney. Rich Old Uncle Fred lived out the rest of his days behind a newsagent’s shop in Newtown.

For Freddie, the year at Tommy’s Hut was a fortunate one, and all his life he paid tribute to the Sims family for being largely the cause of it.29 He did so with his last prose elegy, ‘The Road to Yesterday’, which also happened to be the road to Yea. Those first experiences of country life, of love, of observing himself being formed through his battles against nature, of the inexhaustible magic and majesty of the Australian bush, of the sense of history being made with himself a part of it, these were to live with him as vividly as any of his later experiences and form the sustenance of his longings whenever he was far from home. It was up at Tommy’s Hut that he learned to ride horses, saw snow for the first time, and took a girl to a ball. The girl was Hilda, and the occasion the opening of the little corrugated-iron public hall on the road to Pheasant Creek. Hilda even spent a short holiday among his family at Gardenvale.

In the September of his year at Tommy’s Hut, his Grandma Watterson died. A year before, her long-infected leg had unexpectedly healed. But the infection, it was said, went to her lungs. She died on 7 September 1906 at her daughter Jean’s home in McKenzie Street, Bendigo, of ‘pneumonitis asthenia’, or debility from lung trouble, which the family put down to tuberculosis since a couple of other Farghers had died young of the same disease. She was sixty-three.
That year, too, Fred made an unexpected discovery about himself and his boyhood mate, Harold Brown. The Browns were neighbours of his parents. They had three children, Maud, Flo and Harold, and the families had become closely involved during the Garndenvale years. Freddie and Harold would spend their Christmases together in a tent pitched on the Browns' lawn, and prowl about on the west side of the railway, down Elster Creek and over to the beach. But when, at Christmas of 1906, as a thirteen-year-old young man of experience, he came home for the holidays to renew the tradition, he was at some pains to conceal from himself a small disappointment in realising that Harold possessed 'a certain plainness of mind'.

Among Harold's memories of the Davisons in later years was that of the flyproof screens fitting under the sash windows of their house. And when, in the middle of 1907, the house in Venus Street was completed, commemorated with the name of Sandhurst and, to Milly's sorrow, occupied by the family so that the other house could be let to a family named Benson, the flyscreens were installed there, too. Shortly afterwards, Douglas and Doris contracted ringworm from their old Australian terrier: they were covered with it from top to toe so that their heads had to be shorn. The little dog was destroyed, and the children were forbidden to play with other children. But they were permitted to sit on the back fence and just talk to little Douglas Benson. Then he contracted ringworm. 'The wind must have blown it over the back fence.'

The flyscreens were the invention that Fred had been working on so diligently. His application for Patent No. 10,270 to the Commonwealth Department of Patents was made on 19 November 1907. On 9 July 1908, just a month after his fortieth birthday, he signed the completed specification and diagrams in the office of a patent attorney, Clem A. Hack, who had drawn up the document. It was thereupon lodged with the Department and advertised on 30 August.

The object of my invention is to provide a screen which is easily attached without skilled labour, which will conform to the sash when the same is in any position thereby preventing the ingress of flies when the window is open.

I accomplish this object by forming a screen, preferably of woven wire, commonly known as fly screen, mounted upon a framework fastened to the window by means of a running attachment such as a screw engaging a slot and having a flange of sheet metal upon each side adapted to be inserted within the sash grooves between the sash and the beading . . .

Something very similar may still be purchased in old country hardware stores, or seen in use in old houses, filling the open spaces at the tops or bottoms of sash windows; although whether Fred ever put his invention into production in Australia and, if so, where and in what quantities he manufactured it, is all unknown. But the place of his invention in his and his family's life is of quite a different order of importance.

By 1908, Alfred White no longer held any interest in the selection at Tommy's Hut and Fred Davison held it alone. But Freddie was no longer there.

There was no one to keep it going and I got a job in the bush; or rather,
he got me a job in the bush. I'd have stood around a long time before I'd have got myself a job anywhere.\textsuperscript{32}

His father had found him work on a little station at Bulumwaal, nineteen miles into the hills north of Bairnsdale in East Gippsland, nearly two hundred miles by rail from home. He was away for ten months.

I had to fetch the water and cut the wood and help to cultivate the vegetables and go out stock-riding on occasions and help to kill and cure the pigs and—oh, all sorts of farm work.\textsuperscript{33}

Then he returned to Melbourne and took a job with an orchardist at Doncaster. His new employer was Tom Petty, the eldest of three brothers who migrated as boys from Yorkshire and, perhaps attracted to the coincidence of the name of Doncaster, acquired land there and planted it with fruit trees. Tom’s orchard, where Freddie worked, was off the south side of Doncaster Road between Tram Road and Whittens Lane. From there Freddie could cycle home for weekends, sometimes taking a route past Grandma Davison’s old house to remind him of his vanishing boyhood. The fig trees were still down the side of the house, and the little porch at the back remained, where Grandma had kept a water bag hanging. A couple of doors along the back lane was a loft where bellringers used to practise.

Forty years later, on a similar quest, he revisited the orchard and found still in use the large stable it had once been his job to clean. The district was prolific with Pettys, for Tom alone had sired a dozen children or more, of whom at least eight survived. The most distinguished descendant of Tom Petty is possibly his great-nephew, the cartoonist Bruce Petty.

One Sunday morning while Freddie was home for the weekend, his mother asked him if he smoked.

‘No’, he said.

‘Well, what are these?’ she asked, producing pipe, tobacco, cigarettes and matches that she had found in his overcoat pocket.\textsuperscript{34}

For a holiday weekend while the lad was working at Doncaster, his father came out on the train and they set off together on a three-day walking tour. They met at Ringwood station and walked to Lilydale, sleeping the night in a disused brick kiln, ‘and woke to find the valley hidden in silver mist’,\textsuperscript{35} then walked on across country to Healesville, where they spent their second night in a first-class railway carriage. On the third day, they walked over the range below Mount Donna Buang to Launching Place, on the Yarra, and caught the train back from there. The boy remembered it as ‘a very good jaunt’.\textsuperscript{36}

Dad was becoming even more restless than before. Somehow, everything in which he had involved himself had begun to pall. The fire and fellowship of ANA meetings had seemed to lose their warmth; and even the band concerts that he ran with his ANA committee friend, Harry Turner, on a public reserve near Elsternwick station, were virtually running themselves. By August he had repaid to the Union Building Society the three hundred pounds he had borrowed to build the house in Venus Street, probably because he had sold Sandhurst. The Kooyong Road house had fallen vacant, and he decided to move them all back there, where Milly could regain her view of the sea from its front verandah and Dulcie could
hold school again for Douglas and Doris from the flight of steps leading to its front door. A little clump of flowering gums that Fred had planted in a corner of the front garden were doing particularly well.

Amelia Davison's name appeared in the electoral register at 1 July 1908 for the Subdivision of Elsternwick in the Division of Balaclava. That was the year Tommy Bent at last gave way to the pressures of the Australian Women's National League and the more radical women's suffrage bodies, and introduced a Bill to enfranchise Victorian women in state elections. It was characteristically grudging, for it allowed only women ratepayers to be registered automatically; the rest had to apply for the right to vote. The Bill became law in October; but it is unlikely that Amelia ever used her vote in Victoria. For, as things turned out, the Kooyong Road house was as intended: their last. In Melbourne.

That September, an event took place which had a far-reaching effect on Fred Davison. From 30 August to 5 September it was Melbourne's Fleet Week. On the orders of Teddy Roosevelt, the Great White Fleet was engaged on a world cruise 'to show the flag'. Sixteen battleships of the US Atlantic Fleet and their supporting vessels, under the command of Rear Admiral Sperry in the flagship Connecticut, were watched by twenty thousand people at Queenscliff on Saturday, 29 August, as they steamed through the Heads into Port Phillip Bay after a week in Sydney. Alfred Deakin, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, welcomed them at St Kilda Pier on the Monday, and all that week, from their house in Kooyong Road, the Davison children were able to see the ships lying at anchor in the Bay. They also went with their parents to see the marches and the celebrations.

Two and a half thousand men from the Fleet were in the landing party, and thousands of Victorians saw and spoke with their first flesh-and-blood Americans. As Fred wrote in 1920:

Australian ideas as to what manner of men [sic] the American is had a great upset when the United States fleet visited Australian waters. The stage Yankee, who guessed and calculated, wore chin whiskers and half-masted his trousers, used to occupy very much of the mind's eye when an American was under discussion in Australia... The American man-o'-war's man put that conception to sleep...

Clearly, for Fred he did. 'Many of the men chewed tobacco', the Weekly Times reported reassuringly at the end of it all. Among the festivities and joyous junketings at the finish was a torchlight procession of Victorian firemen witnessed by an estimated six hundred thousand people. And with that, Australia closed, as the Weekly Times put it, 'what will probably prove to be the most momentous week of its young life'.

Many Melburnians visited the ships. Fred went aboard the Missouri and talked with officers and men. One of the junior officers said to him: 'Sydney boasts of its harbour and Melbourne boasts of its fine streets, but you Australians have something better than either that I have not heard anyone speak of, and that is your little children. They are not little men and women—they are real children.' How Fred must have glowed! And how attentively he must have listened and raptly dreamed when men from Missouri described the booming industrial city of St.
Louis! It would be surprising if he didn’t invite that officer and one or two of his shipmates home to meet his own children, to show them his house and garden, and the flyscreens he had invented. And would any of them have expressed aught but praise and astonishment, declaring that they had never seen their like back home?

Fred was forty. ‘At around forty’, his son wrote of him when he himself was over fifty, ‘some men are likely to turn to drink, some to strange women, and some to foreign travel’. Fred was a teetotaller; from the day he had first seen the girl in the red dress, he had never glanced desirously at another woman; only the last possibility was open to him. He would sell up everything and go as an inventor to America, bringing the blessing of his flyscreens.

All that stood in his way in altering his life was the usual state of mind of the man in the rut—that the walls of the rut are terribly high and difficult to climb. Of course they are not. It is just that they seem to be. One good leap—a toehold in their sides—a strong grasp on the top edges—another leap with all the strength that is in a man—and he is out of the rut for life.

There was to be no time for honest doubt and self-enquiry. During that summer it was all accomplished.

Perhaps he sold the Australian rights to his patent. He sold up the printing business, moved by now to 25 Queens Walk. He surrendered the tenancy of the shop he had for selling his printed products and rubber stamps, a few doors down from the old Swanston Street address, at 62 Swanston Street. He sold the Kooyong Road house to the Union Building Society, abandoned the estate agency, and forfeited his interest in the selection at Tommy’s Hut.

‘It is easy to see now’, his son Fred realised as a man older than his father had been at the time, ‘that the Kinglake experiment was a prelude to America. He wanted a change in his life.’

Shortly before the Davisons left at the end of the summer of 1909, father and son were taking what proved to be their last walk across Lempriere’s Paddock to Gardenvale station.

And in a boy’s philosophizing way I said to him, ‘It’s funny to think that we won’t be able to come back and begin where we are leaving off’. He said, ‘No, we won’t’. There was something in his tone of voice that I didn’t understand at the time, but saved up the memory of it until I did, in later years. I knew then how glad he was to get away.

Freddie’s parents had persuaded Jack and Belle Watterson to sell up in Bendigo and accompany them, together with their children, Nita and Willie. Their party of ten—four adults, two adolescents, and four children—were given a rousing sendoff at Spencer Street station by Phil Fargher and his daughter, Eunice, and a substantial gathering of their friends. Everyone sang ‘Goodbye, Melbourne Town’, for leaving Melbourne meant leaving Australia for Melburnians. They were in Sydney for Easter 1909, and on the Friday after, 16 April, they were bidden farewell on the wharf by Carrie and Rudolf and their two girls, and Florrie and Alec Robertson and their four, who were now installed in their own Newtown newsagency. And of course, there was also Rich Old Uncle Fred to give his
blessing on their voyage and watch them do what he himself had done over half a century earlier. They sailed in the Aorangi, bound for Suva, Honolulu, Vancouver—and the old New World.
The night at the end of April 1909 before the Aorangi docked at Vancouver, the obligatory end-of-voyage concert was organised among the passengers, most of them Americans, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders and British. Mr Davison (who else?) was appointed chairman for the evening—and unwittingly supplied some entertainment. Towards the evening's end, Fred thought to remind the Americans among them that they were aboard a British vessel and this would be the last night many of them would spend under the Union Jack. He called upon all present to be upstanding and join in singing 'God Save the King'. The American at the piano slipped adroitly away. Fred called for a volunteer, and someone from the British element took his place at the piano. So they all sang—with the Americans singing the heartiest of all. Not until several days afterwards did Fred descry that a joke might have been played on him. He heard a band in St Louis playing his country's national air as the finale to a public meeting. He was pleased to hear it so far from home; but puzzled. Only later did he learn that the same tune belonged to a song called 'America'.

The journey to St Louis was undertaken by train in tourist cars. They spent a couple of days in Vancouver preparing for what they expected would be a rigorous journey. Among the stores Fred laid in for the four-day itinerary he had planned were rugs for keeping them warm on the train. He knew that Canada could be cold in April and early May. Expecting that at least one of the party would become ill from the continual motion, he also planned a series of stopovers, one of them at St Paul, Minnesota, where they left the Canadian Pacific train. But the trains were so warm that they often had to go outside to cool off; and they ran so smoothly that they all arrived in St Louis as fit as when they had left Vancouver.

Fred was sensible of a certain fine distinction in his approach to the new country:

The mental vision of the man who enters America at the western gate is not that of him who comes in at the east. The Australian or New Zealander in America is from a country where democracy is far advanced, while those who first see the United States under the shadow of the Statue of Liberty are often from lands where men are not created free and equal.

At the border between Canada and the States, Fred encountered an officer of the
US Customs who ordered him to open his boxes, which contained only clothing and personal effects and were securely nailed.

‘How much is it worth not to?’ asked the new chum abroad.

‘Get busy and open them right away!’ he was told.

Fred obeyed; and subsequently reflected that he had got off cheaply. The experience also planted in him the conviction that all American customs officials were honest.

The only reason that can be adduced for Fred’s taking his flyscreens and his family to St Louis was that he had persuaded himself it was an industrial centre for the whole country, the dynamic Hub of Progress. It was a centre—of industry, commerce, transportation, of Mississippi steamboats and a radiation of railways; but did Fred ever stop to ask before he went, one wonders, to what extent American homes were equipped with sash windows?

At all events, the fate of the flyscreens may be inferred from the fact that nothing more was heard of them. His fifteen-year-old son got its measure at the time; and sixty years afterwards, with laughter, he recalled how his father planned to make his fortune over a patent, but that in reality it was just an excuse to go to America. ‘He went there as an inventor’, he said, ‘but he soon discovered they had plenty of inventors of their own—any amount of them!—and he went back to printing... I got jobs around with anything I could do, and then Dad decided it was time the boy learnt a trade, and he got me into a print shop.’

The family endured the hot, sticky days of the St Louis summer reminded of the weather they had encountered at Suva on their Pacific voyage. They had often spoken of ‘Suva weather’, but this, Amelia recalled many years later, ‘out-Suvad Suva’. But when winter set in, they had no previous experience for a comparison. Early one evening, after Doug and Doris had gone to bed, their sentimental Dad discovered that the winter’s first snow had been falling for about an hour. He got the children out of bed and wrapped them up, then shepherded the whole family outside so that they could experience it together. Sixty years on, Doris still remembered the incident vividly. And that Christmas, Fred and Amelia Davison had their own Christmas card printed to send to friends summering at home. The verse it bore was specially composed by Freddie: his first printed work.

In snow and softness and silence,
Old Santa is greeting us here.
With blue skies, sunshine and gladness,
May he bring you a happy New Year.

Much of Freddie’s leisure then was spent trying his hand at writing. ‘I could cheerfully spend a whole evening working on one paragraph, just so long as I got the right feeling. I think I had some innate feeling for prose. I’d write something and... oh, it’s too awkward, it laps over—there’s something wrong with it. Then I’d work away at that quite happily to get the excited feeling of that paragraph: of a statement made, elaborated, ruled off.’ Mainly, the subject matter was his experience as a boy in the bush. ‘I had a sort of instinct that if I got anywhere it would be by having fresh material to offer to American editors.’

Meanwhile, he was also set to shovelling the snow off their section of the Forest
Park sidewalk outside the apartment in West Park Avenue that they occupied for two years; and there were nights when Mother went to bed with the alarm clock under her bed jacket to protect it from freezing and failing to awaken her in time to get Freddie off to work in the morning.

Those were hard times indeed: quite as hard as any Fred and Milly had known since they were married. And even if Milly understood and the younger children accepted, it became harder for the adolescent son to excuse his fond father's follies. But Fred's vision was too similar to the American Dream to consider that his family might see less cause to keep their chins as high as he held his, or to be daunted by such (surely) ephemeral adversity. 'The first fifty pounds is the hardest to get', he had been wont to declare back home, 'after that you get it out of the blue sky'. What reason could there be for not translating it into dollars? A decade later he wrote, if not with wisdom, then certainly with the trauma of hindsight:

Occasionally adventurers climbed over the spike-topped wall, with the help of a golden-runged ladder; but they pulled the ladder up after them, and the wall remained as before.6

At the time, though the family might not have had two spare cents to rub together, they were never poor. Dad took jobs in the printing trade, often working at night; and spent his days filtering his impressions through his prejudices while following leisure pursuits that cost little or nothing. He travelled in a Mississippi steamboat on the Fourth of July. He saw the river in winter, thick frozen from bank to bank. He approved of the space-saving built-in furniture in their apartment and elsewhere. He admired the tidiness of the American suburb with its small, neat houses 'designed and set out in an artistic manner', unfenced gardens and well-clipped lawns on view, front, back and sides. ('Mister America is the champion grass cutter of this planet.') He found the American man, though his lawnmower chattered, 'inclined to taciturnity', although one might suspect some of having been merely dumbstruck by their encounter with Fred Davison. He was less sure of himself when confronted by American women, who bore themselves 'as though they had awakened to their own individuality and no longer asked other people as to what they should or should not do'. His investigations into the religious life of the country while taking his family on Sundays to the Methodist Episcopal Church revealed that 'what of America is not Unitarian is widely Christian Scientist'. But Mary Baker Eddy's faith, like university extension classes, was fashionable because it gave 'a veneer of mentality without demanding the sacrifice that goes to the root of both religion and learning'. By the time he wrote that, his sister Em and Jim Young had both become devout Christian Scientists in Coolgardie. Avoiding such an obvious pitfall, Fred took himself to public meetings, such as the mass meeting addressed by Booker Washington, the famous black ('half white blood') educator and emancipist.

He told the young women that school was a good thing, but not the school that set them above their work. He told them that when school days were over their place was in the home giving mother the help she needed. He told them that the negro was not a white man, but a black man, with his own place in the nation.
Observing that Washington did not rise to sing 'My Country 'tis of thee', Fred wrote:

A few full-blooded negroes have forged to the front of their race, but the leading men are largely mulatto or quadroon. . . African blood is slothful and irresponsible, and those nations who like the Portuguese have admitted it into their national life flood have done so to their own destruction. . .

He argued with commendable consistency that laws against intermarriage were meaningless if illicit unions were tolerated.

For a white man to approach a negro woman should be counted a high misdemeanour and punishable by the law, else the negro blood will work deterioration and ruin to the white race. . .

Racial antipathies are healthy and natural. They are Nature's voices warning men against dangers. The white American must strengthen the barrier between white and black. He must do this or lose his place among men. The negro is with him, unconsciously seeking the weak joints of his armour—seeking to mingle his blood with the white man's. . .

. . . Some day—perhaps in a far day, perhaps in a near one—a torch will be lighted that will not be extinguished except with white blood. And then the American negro will be admitted to full manhood—but he will have to win that rank as other peoples have won it, by showing the qualities of manhood.7

With such Caucasian self-assurance, it was scarcely thinkable to be a poor white; and defiantly, it would seem, Fred ensured that his family lived nowhere but at a good address. He had chosen to settle them hard by the ancient trees and luxuriant lawns of Forest Park, which contained the St Louis Art Gallery. On hot nights the family would take their evening meal over to eat in the park, and with them went a new family dog, a fox terrier named Captain Kettle, whom Douglas had brought home, so that he was generally acknowledged to be Doug's. One morning in a winter when rabies was rife in St Louis, Doris walked barefoot downstairs and Cap rushed over and savaged her feet. Dad condemned him to death, and as executioner he appointed Freddie, the experienced young bushman and slaughterman. The nine-year-old Douglas was sent away for the weekend to stay with the Wattersons and when he returned Cap was no more. Douglas's lifelong resentment of his elder brother perhaps began with this incident, and he was to be supplied with plenty more cause during the years of his growing.

Dad shaved off his beard and moustache at about this time. Freddie, meanwhile, laid his plans for leaving home. He had never felt particularly close to his younger siblings: mere kids they were, to be mercilessly teased, and to them he seemed a grownup apart. He took more notice of cute little Doris than the others, slipping dimes down her back and paying her to go out and buy his tobacco. He decided to go to Chicago to continue his printer's apprenticeship, and the rest of the family went too. Dad had envisaged himself for nearly three years as 'a man of the people' living 'the real life, the workaday life' in St Louis; now he took a job as a linotype operator with the Chicago Tribune.
They reached Chicago in February 1912 and found the winter there even colder than it had been in St Louis, certainly too cold to go house hunting and furniture buying. So at first they took furnished rooms in one of the large steam-heated houses in Indiana Avenue on the outskirts of the city, and Mother was relieved of housework for a while. The house contained an elegant staircase with a highly polished banister which was such a temptation to Doug and Doris that they constantly risked punishment for the joy of sliding down it. Dulcie would bring home an icecream brick for dessert which would be set out on a window sill to stay hard frozen till it was required. Some ten blocks along was the City Library, a regular Saturday afternoon walk for the children, feeling grand as they explored the district, unattended and unmolested.

In May 1912 they took an apartment among the trees and lawns of University Avenue, on the south side of the city near 66th Street. From there the children could roller skate to school; and in the winter they learnt to ice skate over the sunken lawns of the Midway, about four blocks from where they lived. Douglas got a job with the other local boys selling the Saturday Evening Post at the entrance to their nearest station on the El. And their accents were firmly American.

Among the first discoveries their father made after settling in Chicago was that young Americans were being given a lot of false information about Australia. When Doris was eleven she brought home from school a geography textbook written by a Professor Dodge and published by Rand McNally & Company of Chicago. Fred read the chapter on Australia. It stated that Melbourne was the country's only seaport and handled nine-tenths of Australian trade; that the Australian coast had few harbours and Sydney was not mentioned as one of them; that all the country was desert west of the dividing range; that the country's only railways were a few narrow-gauge lines into the mountains. Fred wrote to the Chicago Educational Department and ascertained that the book was in use in public schools throughout the Middle West and the West. He also called the attention of the Department to the errors and the matter was referred to the publishers. A Departmental inspector admitted that most of Fred's charges were well founded. 'However', he added in his report, 'this is not a matter of much concern to American children'.

Fred was relieved to learn that the publishers and others in the Educational Department thought differently, and he undertook the task of correcting the chapter. The publishers acknowledged his 'corrected sheets' in a letter dated 9 August 1913 and said they were being forwarded to the author. That letter is the only extant document on the affair, and in a handwritten footnote to it, dated 1940, Fred noted that he was 'permitted to practically rewrite the Australian Section as it now appears'. He also claimed to have sent a list of the misstatements to an Australian newspaper, which published them over one and a quarter untraceable columns. His correspondence to ANA cronies in Australia also described his intervention. The Melbourne Argus of 19 July 1913 carried a news item from Perth reporting a letter from Fred to the secretary of the ANA in Western Australia: 'Mr Davidson [sic] states that the average American's idea of Australia is that it produces droughts, kangaroos and pugilists'.
At the society's suggestion the Commonwealth Government decided to
distribute free to the American public libraries 400 copies weekly of the
different illustrated Australian weeklies. The libraries to which these
papers are being forwarded include institutions in every State of America.

Fred had other criticisms of the American education system. He admitted to
some puzzled approval of the 'modern' belief among teachers he met there that
children responded better if school attendance were made pleasant—'suspiciously
pleasant' was his own term for it—a process in stark contrast to his own schooldays.
Boys did not 'wag it', he noted, and the children made a fuss at any suggestion that
they should stay home to do odd jobs about the house.

Can this have been accomplished without taking from school that which
school was meant to possess? . . . Education is not a pleasant process—
whether it be acquiring knowledge under a school teacher or getting wise
later on in life in what has been called the only school for fools—that
school where Pedagogue Experience swishes the strap. Therefore, the
process being a painful one, how comes it the boys of these latter days like
it so much? I confess I give it up.8

But he was in no doubt about the folly of primary school experiments with
vocational training in manual skills, and considered that educationalists had not yet
reached the point where they dared condemn it for what it was—a time-waster
and a fad, a stealer of valuable school hours and a pretence—for fear that they
would be thought not quite up-to-date. Willie Watterson attended one of the
largest Chicago schools, 'set apart for experimenting in this fad', and for the whole
of every morning small boys were 'drafted' into the trade department. In
consequence, Willie was 'by way of being turned into a half-baked printer'.

Fred thought that Australian schools should introduce the graduation ceremony
at the end of each term for children finishing their primary school life because it
provided an aim for those in the lower grades and prevented parents from taking
their children out of school a year earlier. The last year was 'the most valuable one
of all to the pupil, for he is then of an age when the value of education is beginning
to dawn on him'. He did not disapprove of the fact that most American universities
were known for their 'low "pass" standards'.

'Quantity, Not Quality' is their motto. Yet this slackness opens the
door to Young America of the poorer classes. In no other country does
the gate to the professions swing inward so readily as it does in the United
States.9

Fred by now was President of the Australasian Society of America, an
organisation founded in Chicago with its headquarters (and, no doubt, its branch
offices) at number 1118 Hartford Building, 8 South Dearborn Street. 'He
advertised in the Chicago Tribune and quite a few homesick and Americanised
people answered. They used to have monthly meetings and occasional dinners at a
downtown hotel... They entertained Australians passing through Chicago.10
Milly and Fred would entertain visitors from the society with a Sunday high tea.
Among the people they met in their entertaining were a young Chicago architect
and his wife who were soon to leave for Australia. His name was Walter Burley
Griffin. He consented to becoming one of the six honorary vice-presidents of the
Australasian Society of America. The others included the President of the British
Empire Association in Chicago; R. F. Toutcher, MLA, of Melbourne, a former
vice-president of the ANA, and Alfred Searcy, clerk assistant of the South
Australian House of Assembly and author of a number of fictionalised travel books
set in tropical Australia. One of eight 'hon. corresponding members' representing
the five Australian mainland states and New Zealand, was Fred's old Melbourne
mate, Harry Turner, secretary of the Elsternwick branch of the ANA.

Dad's social life, whether meetings of the society, its dinners, or the mass
meetings he used to like attending at the Chicago Armory, was spent whenever
possible with the whole family, still seeking to involve each one of them in his
projects at every opportunity. He took them all, Freddie included, to the society's
first major event, an Australian Foundation Day dinner at the Grand Pacific Hotel
on 25 January 1913. But Freddie's principal contribution to the society's activities
was a broadsheet that he wrote, set, printed, published, and distributed to the
members. 'I would attend their quarterly meeting, their dinner, and each would be
presented with a copy of it.'11 His recollection at the end of his life was of more
than one issue, but only a single copy has come to light and that appears to be the
inaugural number. It was certainly a short-lived publication.

Its title was *Roo Thuds*. The first issue was dated April 1913, when the editor, 'F.
Myall Davison ('The 'Roo')', was nineteen. It was printed on one side of a double
medium quarto sheet and folded into three two-column pages. The title was
celebrated by the opening verses over the editorial pseudonym of 'Overseas'.

**THE 'ROO THUDS**

The Jacky laughs at the sun's red rim
For life is a joke that tickles him,
The 'Possum capers upon the limb,
The Platypus too, is in the swim.

The Bell Bird tolls from the gum trees tall,
The dingo answers the Curlew's call,
The Mopoke hoots as the night mists fall,
The 'Roo just thuds—he beats them all.

The 'Roo Thuds! The 'Roo Thuds!
Hopping around with a right glad hand,
Kicking up dust to beat the band,
Drummin' up 'Biz' for his native land.
The 'Roo Thuds! The 'Roo Thuds!

The taste of homesickness is unmistakable in those lines, as elsewhere in the
publication. Homesickness was in fact to dog their author's responses throughout
the ten years he spent away from his native shores.

The four other poems included 'A Rain Song' by E. S. Emerson, a minor
Australian novelist who had written the verse for a 1909 Australian bird calendar
illustrated by Norman Lindsay; and three by 'The 'Roo', two of which, 'The
Magpie' and 'My Native Land' were to reappear in stranger contexts later. The
fourth was a juvenile attempt at ‘philosophising’, which the author was not to succeed in doing satisfactorily until he was well into the second half of his life. It has an uncomfortable admixture of adolescent cynicism and assumed religiosity, and becomes a subconscious parody of a second-rate hymn.

**AS YOU TAKE IT**

Shun the shade and tread in sunlight
Take the track beneath the blue—
While there’s choice twixt shine and shadow,
Life is but a point of view.

Shapeless vaporings of nothing;
Voices inarticulate,
Swelling from life’s mystic axis—
That is mainly love or hate.

Such to use—not understanding;
But the Omnipotent Hand
Holds the ending and beginning,
Of that seeming tangled strand.

Standing then on life’s last hill-top
Where the ranges meet the blue—
Looking back o’er shine and shadow,
Life was but a point of view.

The prose passages, most of them signed ‘The ’Roo’, show something of whole evenings spent on a single paragraph.

The darkness hung hot and thick, lit only by the cool glimmer of the stars and the glow of lighted windows in the Teamster’s Rest.

A straggling, hiccuphy chorus of ‘so-longs’, and Bill Greenhide passed through the shaft of light that streamed from the open door of the pub, and jamming on his hat, stalked off in the direction of the camp—a few hundred yards up the road—talking cheerfully to himself as he went.

His solitary communings were broken in one, when out of the tail of his eye he saw a pale glow lighting up the sky above the nearby ranges.

He stopped with a suddenness that almost tipped him over, and stood watching.

The golden radiance that seemed to come from within the ranges grew visibly as the minutes passed. In slow-flooding waves it swept to the zenith, casting a veil across the face of the stars, creeping fanwise to the north and the south. Against it the ranges stood in splendid silhouette, piling black, massive heads and shoulders into the glow. The light waxed ruddier until it seemed that the ranges must split to release its glowing source.

The inebriated Bill registers a bush fire and staggers back to the pub bellowing the news. His mates gather on the verandah to watch.

A crystal wedge appeared in a cleft in the ranges, the wisps of vapor
parted, and slowly there floated up and hung in the sky, the summer moon—a golden bubble.

Already the fine sense of cadence that was to distinguish his creative work is present, but 'Bill's Bush Fire' is the more remarkable for being an apparently self-imposed exercise of the kind that might otherwise only be written at the behest of a professional writer by a class of tyros on a creative writing course. ('A drunken man sees what he thinks is a bush fire at night, but it is only the moon rising. Describe.') Something in the above quotation has been reconceived from actual experience: perhaps an experience of the view across Joyce's Creek from the selection at Kinglake wedded to some moment akin to that of nightfall over the paddocks of Gardenvale when, at the age of twelve, he had copulated with beauty. And despite the bathetic tint of the final words, the sketch does achieve a droll climactic paradox of anticlimax. 'Who would not pay to see the moon rise', the expatriate Richard Le Gallienne was asking at about the same time and from much the same point of view, 'if Nature had not improvidently made it a free entertainment?'

Another sketch, 'Campin' Out', facetiously, and less successfully, describes the horseplay of six encamped blokes taking an early morning swim. But even here is evidence of pains in the reworking of each narrative paragraph, and of the characteristic Davison attention to detail:

He drew himself out on the further beach. The red blood was tingling in his finger tips, the cool, clear air of the bush rushed to his puffing lungs. He turned and raced swiftly along the sand, shouting with pure exhilaration.

The rest were churning their way across as he returned. He leaped among them as they reached the shallows and the morning stillness was rent with shreds of their yells. Ginger and Snoozer were kicking showers of glittering spray over each other with the heels of their hands. . .

The repetition of 'red' blood in another piece suggests that the author had still to teach himself other elementary writing lessons. But it might be said, in extenuation, that he was labouring under his father's ambience. In 'To the Absentee' he appears to have been infected by his father's oratorical patriotism:

Today, two glittering ribbons of steel are creeping westward across the continent. Today the bushmen are trekking to the north to hold our wide frontier. Today Australian statesmen are laying the foundation of our national structure on the bedrock of Democracy. Today the hammers are ringing in the ports and Australian ironclads are going down the slips. Today our country's landward fighting machine is a hundred thousand strong. Today, while yet in the cradle of futurity, while yet Australian dust is pregnant with the men and deeds of a thousand years, we are in the vanguard of a newer freedom. Today from the Gulf to the Leuwin, wherever shines the sun, there rises the sound of strong red-blooded life.

The final item, 'Over the Slip Rails', is an unsigned ragbag of brief facts about Australia concluding with: 'The Australian form of government is not Socialistic,
as many foreigners suppose. It is co-operative'. It reads like a contribution from Dad, but would he have left it unsigned?

'The 'Roo' also included a short acknowledgment to Mr Foulkes, who drew the title piece, and paid tribute to the assistance of Cliff Manlove, the kindly old foreman in the printing works where Freddie completed his apprenticeship, a long-remembered friend who took a benign avuncular interest in the boy and won his enduring admiration and affection. He may well have helped to ensure that no misprints occurred in that issue of 'Roo Thuds. It was Cliff Manlove, indulging his apprentice as he devilled about the printery producing his magazine, who read one of his poems as he sucked on his old corn cob pipe and remarked: 'You keep on like this, son, and you'll be poet laureate of Orstralia!' Perhaps, if he had kept on like that, he would have deserved to be.

The climax of the ASA's activities over these months in Chicago appears to have been a 'dinner and corroborree' held at the Hotel Morrison on Saturday, 31 January 1914, to celebrate that year's anniversary of Australian Foundation Day. An elaborate souvenir program was prepared in four pages contained in a two-color cover surmounted with the society's emblem: the crossed flags of Australia and New Zealand with the initials 'A S A' separated by the staffs of the billowing flags. The top of the first page reproduced some lines of verse by E. S. Emerson celebrating New Zealand. At the tops and bottoms of the centre pages were quoted two quatrains headed 'Australia', By Dorothy [sic] Mackellar and Henry Lawson; four unsigned couplets entitled 'Tasmania'; and an unsigned couplet, 'New Zealand'.

The evening began with a welcome by 'President Fred Davison' set off by a tableau entitled 'Australia's Crowning'. The performers of the tableau were: Dulcie Davison, Nita Watterson, Doris Davison, Douglas Davison, Willie Watterson. The dinner concluded with coffee and toasts. 'The King and President Wilson' was proposed by the Hon. Horace D. Nugent, British Consul-General, and the assembled company joined in singing 'God Save the King'. Then the Hon. Barratt O'Hara, Lieutenant Governor of Illinois, proposed 'The United States and Australia', and this was followed by the singing of 'America!'

No fewer than fifteen people were next programmed to give 'brief addresses'. They included Walter Burley Griffin; the presidents of the British Empire Association, the Orkney and Shetland Society, the Sons of Mona, and the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois; the Supreme President, Grand President, and a past president of the Sons of St George, USA; the Chief of the Caledonian Society; a representative of the Sons of the American Revolution; the Past Master of Wisconsin IOOF and a former Wisconsin Commissioner of Immigration; the Health Commissioner of the City of Chicago; and E. J. Mulvany, of the trade and custom department of the Australian federal government. The evening appears to have concluded with 'songs, recitations and musical selections' by four gentlemen and two ladies who had not theretofore been heard.

But the main items on the program were the meal and the songs. No reference was made to wines or other alcoholic offerings, although Prohibition was still six years away. Perhaps the guests were subject to their President's decree in this as
COLUMBIA

well, and the intoxication of the ‘corroboree’ was accomplished by a ferment of patriotism and nostalgia. It appears that, between courses, a number of prominent guests sang songs, the rest joining in with the choruses. These choruses were printed on page four of the program; they were all written ‘by Davison, Junior’. The first of them, led by Burley Griffin, was the first verse of ‘My Native Land’, one of The ‘Roo’s poems in the first issue of ‘Roo Thuds:

CANBERRA—AUSTRALIANS

Though I have wandered far from thee,
Native land, my native land,
A loyal heart I turn to thee,
Native land, my native land.
O, thou art one from sea to sea,
One people’s pride, one destiny
Shall thine be to eternity,
Native land, my native land!

There followed nine others, each one representing a different place.

MAORILANDERS

(‘Red, White and Blue’)

Zealandia! the toast of the Southron;
The flag of her honor flies far,
The love and the pride of her children
At home or under skies far.
Though in peace, from Australia divided,
One people in heart yet are we,
And in war we’re forever united—
Joint heirs of our fair Southron sea.

CORNSTALKS

(‘Old Black Joe’)

Still do I dream of my home beyond the sea,
Still love the land where the old folks wait for me;
Still do I long for the land where I was born,
And for those happy days in sunny New South Wales.

GUMSUCKERS

(‘Old Folks at Home’)

Oft do I turn to thee with longing,
My childhood’s home;
Old memories that come a-thronging
Haunt me where’er I roam.
O Victoria, O Victoria, far o’er the wide sea,
Still do I hear thy voice a-calling,
softly a-calling to me.
**TASSIES**

('God Save the King')
Tasmania first with me,
Land where I long to be,
    My island home.
Girt by the Southern Sea,
Fairest of all to me,
I am but part of thee,
    My island home.

**BANANALANDERS**

('Home, Sweet Home')
Queensland, my sunny home,
    Thou opal-hearted land,
By nature adorned
    With open, lavish hand.
Where'er I may wander
    Across the wide blue sea,
My heart is always thine,
    My love is all for thee.

And so on. Western Australia ('Groperland'), South Australia ('Croweaters'), the Northern Territory, and Papua and the Islands were also represented. The choruses appear to have been written for the society, and from their calibre they would seem to antedate the more accomplished versifying done for 'Roo Thuds. Perhaps such 'corroborrees' were ASA ritual from the start.

Davison, Junior, was the only Davison not present for this ennobling occasion. Some months earlier, having completed his apprenticeship at the age of twenty, he had left home at last and gone to New York.

On 27 April 1914, the Melbourne *Argus* carried another news item featuring Fred. It was doubtless supplied from home by one of the ASA's 'hon. corresponding members'. It informed Australians and New Zealanders who were contemplating travelling through the United States that they could be sure of a welcome when they visited Chicago. But the news came a little late for *Argus* readers, because Fred had already left Chicago and taken the family to California because it was nearer to Australia. They arrived in San Francisco in March 1914 and 'settled' (for three months) in the seaside suburb of Sunset. Fred got a job with a newspaper in Marin County. The children had not seen the ocean for five years; and on the afternoon they moved there, Dad took Doris and Douglas to the beach. As they raced down the sand, he was himself a child for a moment: 'Come on! Let's see who can be the first to touch the Pacific Ocean!' And they touched it: the same waters that washed the shores of home.

With Freddie even further removed from the family circle, he came to be remembered as golden-haired, blue-eyed, the sunshine boy who could do no wrong. None was to resent this more than young Douglas, now thirteen, who would often suffer rebuke by odious comparison: Freddie would never have
done/said such a thing! Tut, whatever would Freddie think? Can you imagine Freddie behaving like that?

And proudly Dad sent at least one, and probably several, of the angel’s poems to The School Paper in Melbourne. ‘The Magpie’ was used on the front page of the October 1914 edition for Grades III and IV, because 16 October was Bird Day in Eastern Australia. It was attributed to ‘FRED. DAVISON, jun., in ‘Roo Thuds, a paper published by the Australasian Society in Chicago, United States of America’.

1. Hark! Do you hear him,
   Hear him sing,
   To the still morn, now
   His cadence fling,
   From the timbered ridge,
   With lilt and swing,
   And fill the air with
   His caroling?

2. O! hear him troll his
   Rollicking lay,
   A troubadour in
   The morning grey;
   To the waking farms,
   He sings away
   His golden rhyme of
   The golden day.

It was his first acceptance by an editor. It is ironic that from the start he was an exercise for schoolchildren.

Young Fred had taken a job as a printer in New York until the effects of Woodrow Wilson’s lowering of the tariff wall in his first months of office began to be felt as unemployment. ‘Things turned very bad, and stores as big as the big Bourke Street stores were displaying vacancy notices, To Let notices, in their windows.’ He would have just turned twenty-one when he ‘wearied of urban life’, left his few belongings in lieu of back rent in the care of his landlord at 115 West 13th Street, and ‘hopped the rattler up country, hobnobbing with hoboes, sleeping in haystacks and so forth’.13

A light rain was falling at dusk one warm evening in early summer—it must have been late in June 1914—when in company with some other unemployed men he was riding in a coal truck which had reached Albany in upstate New York. At about the same time, an obscure Austrian archduke was assassinated in a remote foreign town called Sarajevo of which in all likelihood none of them had ever heard. The bums were damp and filthy, stained with wet coal dust. Suddenly, outside the goods yard, the train stopped unexpectedly and railroad ‘bulls’ (detectives) swarmed over the sides of the trucks and frisked the stowaways for guns. Then they were all marched off to the calaboose.

The following morning they were brought before a judge. ‘Every time a charge was read out, all the old judge said was, “Ten days or ten dahlers”.’14 When Fred’s
turn came, the judge listened to his story of extenuating circumstances—"one of
the best stories I have ever invented"—and yawned and brushed a fly away from his
nose and said, "Ten days or ten dahlers." 15 His story had to do with looking for
work. He had only seven dollars in his possession, and started to argue with the
judge. "But the railroad detective kicked me in the ankles, very quietly, you know,
as much as to say, "Look, shut up, boy, or it'll be twenty days or twenty
dollars!"") 16

So in I went to the calaboose and studied at close quarters some of the
most depraved specimens of humanity I have ever encountered. There
were other types, I hasten to add; and of course the thing was not without
its humour. We used to stand at the bars of our cell doors and sing
choruses and swap smoking-room stories across the corridor—and up and
down the length of it. 17

He found that they didn't interfere with him as long as he kept out of their business;
and he was treated well by the authorities. "It wasn't bad in there... it was a pretty
long time to put in, ten days for a young fellow, shut up... They took all our
possessions from us, even down to a pencil and a piece of string, including my
seven dollars, and gave me a receipt for it and said, "You'll get that, boy, after.
When you come out, boy." And when I came out every bit was handed to me and
there were two fellows in charge there and one shook hands and he said, "Better
luck next time, boy" and the next one shook hands and said, "Any time you're
calling by, just look in and see us. Glad to see you again." 18 Among the hoboes he
learnt that the safest policy was 'don't talk, don't notice'. But he did notice 'all sorts
of sexual deviations and that sort of thing'.

He found freedom 'like Paradise Regained' 19 and went a few miles up-river to
Troy, where he found himself standing at a crossroads wondering which way to
go. A farmer in a Ford tin lizzie drove up and leaned across towards the kerb.
'Say, guy, you lookin' for a job?'
'Sure, I'm looking for a job.'
'I'll give you a dollar a day to come and help me get my hay in.' 20

He was a descendant of the old Dutch settlers, and he took Fred to 'a sylvan spot
called Wynantskill'. 21

A very pleasant job for the summer; and they were nice, a good class of
American people, thoroughly nice rural Americans who lived in a lovely
little white house on the side of the turnpike; nice green fields and
everything well conducted... I ate by myself, or with another hired
fellow, but the food was good. Everything was there and there were
baths and that sort of thing. 22

'Well,' said the farmer at last, 'how much do you reckon I owe you?'
'Ten dollars, the way I figure it.'
'I thought it was about that... I'll give you a lift into town.'

Fred had ten dollars and what was left of his seven, so, instead of returning to
New York as he had left it—"clinging to the brake rods, my limbs in danger and
my eyes full of flying grit" 23—he travelled down-river in a Hudson River packet,
'overrun with uniformed darky attendants' 24 and all 'white paint and gilt and plush
and me sitting there wondering how I got there'. He disembarked for a while at Peekskill and asked the local policeman to direct him to the home of Nathaniel Hawthorne. 'He looked at me suspiciously, swung his truncheon suggestively, and grunted, “Never heard of him. Must have moved away before I came here.”'

Meanwhile, in San Francisco, Dad was organising a new branch of the Australasian Society of America, for he saw a momentous task ahead of it. At eight o'clock on the eve of Britain’s declaration of war, he called a mass meeting of Australians and New Zealanders at 846 Sixth Avenue, Oakland. The San Francisco Chronicle carried a report announcing it on the previous day. It was headed:

AUSTRALIANS TO GO TO DEFENSE OF COUNTRY
Volunteers Will Be Asked For at a Mass Meeting Called for Tomorrow Night

and reported that Australians and New Zealanders, of whom there were two thousand in San Francisco, were 'setting afoot a gigantic movement for the defense of their own countries', so certain were they that in the event of Britain's defeat or partial defeat, Germany would 'pounce at once' on their two countries. Fred Davison of Chicago, president of the Australasian Society of America, was in San Francisco to announce the meeting. The report continued:

'At this meeting there will be no discussion of whether or not we shall prepare for the defense of Australia and New Zealand,' Davison said last night. 'We will simply ascertain who can go to enlist for this defense and how soon they can start. Then we will cable the Minister of Defense at Melbourne the number of volunteers who will be available.

'Not only the Australians and New Zealanders, but the British in California are aroused over present war possibilities. All feel certain that if England suffers the slightest setback at Germany's hands, Germany will attempt at once to seize Australia as the greatest of war prizes.'

There is no record of the turnout at the meeting, but perhaps its success may be inferred from the publication of a classified advertisement in the San Francisco Examiner two days after the meeting, on 5 August.

MEN OF AUSTRALIA, New Zealand, will meet 846 Sixth ave., Oakland, Monday 8 p.m. to take steps to offer help to Australia and New Zealand in war. FRED DAVISON, president, Australasian Society of America.

America was as yet uninfected by the war fever and so, no doubt, were most of its foreign nationals. But Fred had heard the cry, and, once again, he decided that Davison, Junior should answer it. He wrote to his son at his New York address and said so, taking it for granted that Freddie would join up. But Freddie was no longer there. He had disembarked from the Hudson River packet, returned to his lodgings to redeem his suitcase by settling up all round, and then walked down to the wharves.

After a few days of knocking about on the waterfront, and considering that he knew enough of printing by this time to print a ship's menu, he had signed on as a ship's printer at $27.50 a month in the Santa Marta, a British passenger cargo vessel of 3,126 tons which was steaming to the West Indies and the north coast of South
America with a cargo of general merchandise and returning to New York with 'bags of coffee beans, oranges, bananas, parrots, pleasant recollections—and the tourists'.

He was engaged on that historic Tuesday, 4 August 1914, and

On an afternoon that was overcast we quit our berth and slipped down the East River, the skyscrapers of Lower Manhattan sliding past our taffrail so close that you felt you could have touched them. We left the emerald tip of the Battery and the Statue of Liberty to starboard, nosed our way through a fleet of harbour craft, and, at sunset, with Long Island astern, we were rolling in the grey Atlantic, hove-to, and dropping the pilot.

A saffron sun, resting on the edge of the slim shore-line, had found a slit in the clouds. He sent one long ray that turned the white superstructure of our ship to luminous gold. The trough of each roller, as it raced up to us, was filled with a yellow light that quickened like the colours in shot silk. It quivered a moment, dimpled and flamed, dispersed and fled, reappearing down the back of the next sea.

Whether news of the outbreak of war had reached him by then is uncertain, although it seems inconceivable that it had not. If it had, Fred had made up his mind it was not his war. With simple Morse wireless but no radio, the ship's master (whose name was also Davison) and his passengers and crew would not have heard the news once they were at sea; and when, twenty years after, Davison wrote a poorly fictionalised account of his seafaring adventure in *Caribbean Interlude*, he recorded news of the war as having reached the ship at Puerto Colombia, almost her furthest port of call, which in fact would have been on 17 August. But in *Caribbean Interlude* he wrote as if there had been only one voyage from New York and back. At the end of his life, he said there had been three. No record can be found of more than two.

On that first night at sea, he enjoyed feeling 'the hard resistance of a deck underfoot' for the first time in five years, realising that salt water stirred in him 'something bequeathed by a seafaring ancestry'—although his paternal grandfather was the only bearer of it that he could have traced. Later, he lay in his bunk, wakeful and alert, listening to the voices of the ocean, 'too excited, too strung-up for sleep'.

Of those twenty seamen and others of the crew in their first ship, the young printer became a good friend of one, an assistant steward who was third pantryman named Bertram Owens, a Virginian and 'a deserter from the United States Army; he had been framed in connection with some canteen fund fraudulence'. His name on the *Santa Marta's* register was M. T. O'Bryan of Lynchburg, Virginia. In *Caribbean Interlude* he is Marsh: Marshall Thomas O'Brien, 'a Southerner, from the Confederate State of No'th Ca'olinal!' In life and fact thereafter he was Tommy O'Brien, a tall red Virginian of 'fine hair with a soft wave in it, the nose and chin of a youthful Byron, a chin that must have given its modeller a moment of joy, and grey eyes that had an enigmatic droop. He had a smile—not a grin—and a voice so full of soft southern modulations that he could have coaxed a she-alligator to let him steal her eggs from under her.'
Marsh shared my love of the sea. He was sensitive, too, to its changes of mood, and with as quick an eye for its ever-changing colours. We spent many an hour together during that voyage, jogging elbows on the rail, ducking a head occasionally to light a bumper, and, for the rest, content with each other’s company.

We each had a job down in the bowels of the ship, a decent kit of clothes, a slender fold of dollar bills, and were out to see life inexpensively. We were of a ripe age for seeing it, too, children in our faith in it, men in our capacities.

Most of the crew were British, notwithstanding the fact that we sailed from an American port. Americans don’t take kindly to work entailing the rendering of personal service.’

It was the time of school summer vacations in the United States, and forty-eight of the Santa María’s seventy-one passengers, according to Davison’s ‘fictional’ figures, were school-ma’ams taking advantage of ‘the least popular and cheapest time of the year in which to make a voyage south’.

With a delight in doing things in concert which is characteristic of their nation, they had arranged this pilgrimage in mass formation to equatorial shores. These ladies were travelling with the double motive of recuperating from the strenuousness of the previous school term, and of improving their minds. Forty-eight female pedagogues! The mere thought of their combined impact against the strongholds of ignorance was impressive. I wasn’t so long out of school myself but what I viewed them with a certain amount of awe.

At dawn, apparently, on 10 August they reached their first port of call: Kingston. They were allowed ashore briefly before their ship departed the same evening.

Jamaica, old haunt of the buccaneers, on an afternoon of tropic blue and green; palm-trees along the beach and the mountains towering high behind the town; the white toffs in tropical helmets and linen suits driving by in little pony carriages; a company of black soldiers in full and glittering regimentals marching by with a band in the lead, every man as spirited as a terrier. It was a land of cheap women; negresses coaling ship, long files of them carrying baskets of coal on their heads into the interior of the vessels and softly singing hymns in four-part harmony as they plied back and forth; and down at the dock gates the younger ones, little girls of twelve and thirteen, offering their bodies to the sailors and tourists at a shilling a time.

Three days later, the ship reached Colon in the Canal Zone with twenty-four hours in port, then docked for another twenty-four hours at Cartagena the day after that, followed by a day’s run round the coast to Puerto Colombia.

The dark damsels were too commercial for romantic young men such as we, so we continued on our way. We were young men of strict episcopalian upbringing and had been thoroughly shocked by such wickedness.
But that was 'nothing but fabrication' in an exercise 'intended as a display of virtuosity' undertaken as riposte to 'an awful lot of books written by sailor men all tediously discussing their favourite adulteries in port' and instead 'reporting our purity all the way down there where pretty women were available for two bob apiece'. It would seem most probable that it was at some port of call during his Caribbean interlude that young Fred lost his virginity—if virginity can truly be said to be forfeited in the mechanical frictions of mercantile exchange.

One afternoon on the high seas the Santa Marta passed a square-rigged windjammer 'beating her way north after her slow passage round the Horn'.

I had seen a few, at odd times, lying with furled sails, in port; but she was the first I had met upon the high seas. They were shaking out more sail, and you could see the sailors, real seamen, on the yard-arms. Marsh had a pair of field-glasses... They pulled her so close that the carved figure supporting her bowsprit could be seen, her cordage and tiny deckhouses became realities, and it was possible to move intimately through the mountain of canvas sail. She was a type of the craft that carried our grandparents to Australia in the days when tales of gold to be had for the digging brought men and women halfway round the world. As I looked at her, wispy recollections of talk of 'on Bendigo' I had heard around my grandparents' fireside, came back to me. Four months out from Liverpool—puddings boiled in sea-water—ladies in voluminous skirts—gentlemen with side whiskers—the Britain they were never again to see receding into memory, and their hopes and realities drawing slowly nearer.

And among 'a lot of yarns that the fellows told lying on the forecastle of a moonlit night down in tropic waters', Fred, or Dave as he is in Caribbean Interlude, related at least one of his own. He told that on his mother's side he was of royal descent.

This was perfectly true. My maternal grandmother, one of those two ladies whose calm braving of wind and wave had resulted in the stupendous fact of my presence... that night had been a daughter of the last king of the Isle of Man. Her sisters and she were reputed to have been lovely women in their youth. King Orry was their father's name. He lived near Mount Snaefell, where he ran the Manx equivalent of a general store. That is like the Manxmen. They'd want to be in the fashion and have a monarch, but they wouldn't let him off earning his own living. His Majesty was very fond of horses, of which the royal stables contained two. They were driven tandem in the cart that was used for delivering groceries. It is said that when the varlet who drove the cart was ready to go out on his rounds he would inform Orry. His Majesty would then come from the store to inspect the royal turnout.

On one thing my royal ancestor insisted, and that was that the horses should not be asked to draw too heavy a load. He was a man of very fine physique, and, to make sure that too much was not being asked of his beloved steeds, it was his practice to crawl under the cart on all fours, get
the axle across the broad of his back and try to lift the loaded vehicle. If he couldn't do so it was considered to be carrying too much weight. The varlet would be ordered to throw off a bag or two of sugar or a case of kerosene. When Orry, without unduly straining his loins and shoulders, could raise the wheels of the cart an inch off the ground it was considered fit to be driven away. There was a king for you!

Indeed there was, for King Orry reigned between 1079 and 1095 and a case of kero on his cart would have made him far more famous than he was. F. D. Davison was never one to let the facts spoil a good story.

Dave was no card player.

I couldn't sit for hour after hour with my attention riveted on a handful of pasteboards. I just couldn't, and that was all about it. I preferred to fall back on inward resources.

He apparently kept a diary, studied a little Spanish from a grammar, and once got himself knocked about in an unequal sparring bout, put on for the amusement of passengers and crew, with a negro, 'probably a tenth-rate pug from the American prize ring, who had come south in hope of getting white residents of tropical ports to arrange bouts in which he would be the star performer'.

Now I am the last person who should engage in boxing bouts, but I hadn't learned that; life, for me, was full of possibilities, not of limitations . . .

The only consolation I had was the discovery of ability to take a little thumping without getting hurt or finding myself so soft of flesh as to become unduly marked.

The Santa Marta returned to New York by way of Santa Marta, Colon and Kingston, arriving on 28 August, which was probably when Fred received his father's letter. He replied that it wasn't his war, causing Dad to go about for several days with a black expression. On 2 September the Santa Marta put to sea again.

That month, the family moved again: out of San Francisco to Mill Valley, beneath Mount Tamalpais and close to the giant sequoia redwoods of Muir Woods. They lived in Mirabel Avenue, a winding country road, and began what was probably their happiest period in the States. Milly became reconciled to the country through her experience of California and the many friends she made there.

Young Fred's second voyage began very differently from the first. This time, the Santa Marta, 'being under British colours and therefore in fear of German raiders', made the run with hooded lights, in darkness except for her pale masthead light.

That's an extraordinary experience . . . she becomes a creature of the sea. There's not a light showing and you learn to get around in the dark. That was quite an experience, to go to sea in a big ship with lights out, and in fear, with fear running beside you. Yes, that was well worth going through . . .

The ship's printer had still only the menu to print. 'But he's carried because he can also, if he wishes, develop photographic plates, snaps, for passengers. An eager young man with a bit of a gift for personal service can do all sorts of jobs.' The ship was a lime-juicer: under British Board of Trade regulations the crew had to receive a daily ration of lime juice.
Marsh and I, on alternate nights, made it our duty to prepare it and bring it from the pantry. We brought it in an enamelled bucket, with some lumps of ice bobbing about in it, and set it along with a couple of pannikins in the middle of the hatch, where the boys could refresh themselves by reaching forth an arm . . .

For the three days of the voyage between Kingston and Colon, Fred acted as a steward. ‘The one experience I had. I’m very amateurish, made a lot of mistakes; but they were all very good-natured and they set to and helped me. I don’t mean helped me carry things, but they kept reminding me of what each one, you know, what Mr So-and-so wants, and so on. Yes, we made a little party of it all the way. People are awfully nice, you know, if you don’t pretend.’

At Kingston, Dave and Marsh took a road that looked promising and ‘made a break for the bush’. They came to ‘a row of negro cabins’ and were invited into almost every one of them.

When we came into view, girls, black, half-caste, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, from fourteen to forty, and of every degree of personal charm—and lack of it—appeared, to take up positions, standing or sitting, in their doorways. As we passed they greeted us with wreathed smiles and cries of ‘Hello, darling!’ and ‘Where you going, love?’ . . .

The doorways were quite close to the path, so that we had glimpses of the interiors as we went by. They were meagrely furnished, a feature of all those into which we glanced being the number of large illuminated texts from Holy Writ that adorned the walls . . .

. . . It was to be noticed that all half-castes were the children of coloured mothers. Was this because the black man was too slack to stand guard over the tents of his women, or was it the nature of women to seek the men of a dominant race, and of the women of a dominant race to shun the men of a subservient one? Nature is pitiless in her ways.

Fred’s resistance to his father’s wishes contained some curious paradoxes . . .

On the run to Colon, the ship carried ‘a deck cargo of niggers—hundreds of ‘em, packed tight on the decks’.

They slept where they sat during the day, and they fed from tucker brought to them in containers from the galley. They brought their own stench with them, an acrid, sweaty odour that belongs to negroes the world over. The well decks were like cages full of black animals, who spoke among themselves, nursed their bodies in silence, and stared watchfully at all who passed among them . . .

Panama Canal was building (or digging), and all the labouring was being done by West Indian niggers. They were brought from Jamaica and other islands for a term of work in the Big Ditch . . .

There was something impressive in the sight of those black humans yarded in the well decks like our people yard cattle. During the run from Kingston to Panama the functions of their daily lives, with decent exceptions, were performed in the public gaze. They ate, slept, loused
themselves, and even did a little furtive love-making with no privacy at all . . .

I divided the number of white passengers by the number of lifeboats, wondering what would happen if disaster overtook our ship in mid-ocean. There was no provision for the black cattle that I could see. What events would have taken place if the unlikely were to occur, one couldn’t foresee. Niggers, under stress of emotion, run wild. I don’t think the ship’s officers could have held them with revolvers at the heads of the companionways . . .

Hymns were sung in four-part harmony, softly, as if the children of Ham dreaded the wrath of the sons and daughters of Shem, at whose bidding they herded in these corners of the ship. The singing passed from group to group. As one lapsed into silence another took it up. Oftenest it was picked up by the voice of a woman, lifted in a sort of forte, leading and compelling. Then you’d hear the voices of the men rising to sustain it in a crooning bass. Their sense of tune and harmony were perfect. Mostly the hymns were simple, comforting ones, like ‘Jesus, Lover of My Soul’. They reached Cristobel-Colon, the twin town bisected by the border between Panama and the Canal Zone, in the afternoon of 9 September, ‘a day that was grey and green, and electrically still’.

Towards evening the storm which had been brewing broke over the town. We were in a corner beer-shop, whose front and sides were open to the street. We had bought our beer and taken it to a side table to drink. From there we saw the heaviest rain storm I have ever seen . . . The opposite side of the street vanished from view. Within two minutes the road was under water, and the surface of the water itself was a dancing field of splashes. There wasn’t any part of it that was not leaping to the impingement of the falling shafts of rain. Blue lightning forked and fizzed between the buildings; peals of thunder cannonaded along the streets. Moisture without and within, the humidity of the air, the knowledge of the sea near at hand, the flatness of the beach, and the impenetrable wall of rain made us feel like goldfish in an aquarium.

The roadway filled with yellow water. We watched it creep over the footpath. Presently it came crawling toward our feet, across the floor. We noticed other patrons ascending to seats on the tables, their feet on the chairs, and we did the same. My bush-bred eye then discerned what I had not previously noticed, flood marks on the walls. Outside in the street, the flood was already two feet deep. But then the rain ceased and the flood subsided straight into the sea, almost as quickly as it had risen. The town resumed its normal appearance and activities. Beyond, the water lay still on little Limon Bay, where the ships of Drake had anchored, and of ‘Balboa, Columbus, Ojeda, of Morgan the buccaneer, of l’Olonnois, Portuquez, Brasiliano, Dampier, and a score of others who sailed for fame and plunder when all the world was wide’. They were ‘in the land of grand piracy’ where ‘the Spaniard looted the Indians and the British and the French looted the Spaniard, and each other’; and the
United States, in the novitiate of its own grand piracy, was building the Canal. Their next port of call was Cartagena, 'the walled city, Spain's Pearl of the Caribbees', and they reached there a day after leaving Colon, on 11 September. But they were disappointed to find Fort San Jose and Fort San Fernando, those 'mighty fortresses staring across the Spanish main' to be less tall than the main deck of the Santa Marta; until they realised they were looking at the actual dimensions of the Elizabethan age.

Up this water lane had sailed the old adventurers seeking El Dorado, in the days when these shores were the rim of the known world... These waters glinting so transparently green in the sun that smarted our necks had borne the galleons that came for the treasure of New Granada. They had floated the black hulls of the slave ships. The Spaniards had brought slaves from Africa, as many as ten thousand in one year, to build the walls of Cartagena. From the jungles they herded them straight into the ships, and bolted the hatches on them. The stillness of these waters had marked for them the ending of their dark and dreadful voyage. Stark tales were extant of the opening of the holds. Life and death had gone on in them. Children had entered the world, men had left it, leaving only their bodies to be carried ashore. Women came from the dark hulls heavy with child. In what agony the walls of Cartagena were built by those blacks no one may know.

Dave and Marsh visited Cartagena, as their other ancient ports of call, with historical background knowledge that would have been more impressive were it not acrid with the odour of their author's sweat, unable to smoke, as he mugged it all up in a Sydney reference library twenty years later.

Fred told anyone with whom he could converse that he was American because he had learned from experience that hardly anyone had heard of Australia and explanations caused him to be regarded with disbelief. Along with his shipmates, he called the local people 'Spikkaties', using the vernacular contraction of the phrase 'No spikka da Engleesh'; and it would be easy enough to infer that when not mindlessly acting out the crudest of his father's prejudices, Fred had submerged himself in the stereotyped coloration of common mariners who were scarcely less insular or xenophobic than Drake's Devonians, scarcely less dominantly genocidal, in thought and word, than stout Cortez. But there was always something more to young Fred Davison, perhaps best described as an innocent eye, which preserved his essential integrity for the time, still many years away, when he had matured enough to surrender to it.

There were times when a sense of being was sufficient; when an awareness of natural things in one or another of their manifestations overbore the fretful need of activity; when to possess the power of perception and to be stirred and stilled by the simple magic of the earth was enough.

And that was the innocent eye also engaged by Fred at Cartagena.

The little doorways were painted, like the walls, in rose, fading to pink, and deep blue, fading to turquoise. There were not wanting evidences of
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deterioration both of man and the works of his hand since the brave days that were. Buildings, gay with colour, were in disrepair; men ambled by barefoot and half-clad where they once strode shod and armed. The walls of the houses looked as if they were hung with large birdcages. These were the vedas or grilles enclosing the windows. They overhung the house-fronts by about eighteen inches. Those on the houses of the more prosperous were of wrought iron, on the poorer houses of turned wood. The windows themselves were unglazed openings with very wide sills. It was the Cartagenian habit to spend the brief twilight seated on the sill, watching the world move past through the spindles of the veda. Social intercourse did not necessarily entail visits between houses; conversations were carried on from veda to veda on opposing sides of the street. The observer, within the veda, was screened partly by the spindles and partly by the darkness of the room behind. The passer-by was in whatever light of day remained. We found it odd, at first, hearing these apparently bodiless voices addressing each other across the street. Always at our passing, the voices ceased, and we knew we were being watched. Sometimes we caught glimpses of those in the window-places; a man crouching, smoking a cigarette; a woman nursing a child. Near a cross street two girls, unseen, were gossiping from veda to veda. They fell silent as we came abreast of them and across our backs we heard one exclaim in a loud whisper: 'Dos Americanos!' and the other, 'Si, si!' We'd struck a spark of interest...

... Evening brought with it realization of that dream of an hour spent sitting behind the spindles of a veda—each of us, of course, in a different veda.

The Santa Marta reached Puerto Colombia on 13 September. They tied up again at the end of the mile-long pier that was 'the only convenience offered to shipping'. It was dark as we made our way along the pier to the shore. The journey was not unadventurous, owing to the number of planks that were missing... The port consisted of a score or so of thatched adobe huts hooded in tropical foliage. There were no lights and no plaza. We stumbled around for a while in the starry dark, barked at by dogs, and falling over swine that had laid themselves down to rest in the middle of the unmade streets... It was primitive. It smacked of the lost villages of the mysterious interior.

A short sail round the Colombian coast, and on 14 September they reached Santa Marta, 'a fruit stand'. The fruit was mostly bananas, 'as many stacks of them standing about as there were houses'. More were being brought in from plantations back among the hills on 'long trains with wheezy little engines'. Those hills behind the town, 'long, low, dry-looking and faintly blue', produced by their blueness a moment's homesickness in Fred, the first of all the mountains he had seen to do so. The following day they sailed again for New York.
On reaching New York, Fred discovered that in his northbound journey he was one of hundreds of men of English tongue moving north at the same time in a slow and scattered vanguard, like the leaders of a horde of migrant lemmings. The only difference was that Fred's conscious motive was not yet the same as theirs. The whole tide of feeling began to move, and you got back to New York and discovered that all sorts of Englishmen and sons of Englishmen from all the Americas, from way down Patagonia—they were all streaming up the Atlantic any way they could get.

It was a very romantic war, you know. England, England was in danger and needed men! Some who had never seen England—they were the descendants of Englishmen from the Latin American countries—they were all streaming up there into New York and getting into that Consul's office . . .

The Santa Marta docked in New York on Thursday, 24 September and Fred was discharged from the ship by mutual consent the same day. He was paid $30.50 as balance of wages due to him; his character, for conduct and ability, was rubber stamped 'very good'. He had been a sailor for fifty-two days. Next, he went with Tommy O'Brien to the British Consul's office. The tide of feeling was proving stronger than Fred's defiance of his father.

I went to see someone that I believe was the British Consul. Anyway, he was a man of superior dress and manners in an office somewhere in New York where I was told to go, and he fixed the lot of us up with tickets and sent us up to Halifax, Nova Scotia. No doubt he wrote to Mill Valley and told his family of his decision. Dad's reply is not extant, unless it was transposed into a story F. D. Davison wrote upon the outbreak of the next war, in which an English-born American, whose father 'had brought him up in a tradition of loyalty to Britain', receives a paternal letter from an American address.

In it there occurred the heroic injunction, ' . . . and when you reach the field of war, my boy, do not expose yourself unnecessarily; but if it comes to the charge, let no man show you the way'. . . There was a father for you! My eye dropped on to another bit . . . something about, 'should you not survive your honourable wounds . . . .' In his excursion into vicarious heroism the old boy seemed to be letting his imagination run away with him.

Of course, Dad may never have written so, even if plenty of other dads did. But surely it was not out of character with Fred senior; and it does contain a familiar—Fredesque?—resonance of bombast and cliché.

Fred made the journey to Halifax partly by land and partly by sea. Of course it was all illegal. They were not supposed to be recruiting men for the British Army right in the heart of New York, and actually could swear that they were not recruiting them. They were only sending them up to take over a cattle boat . . . There was a ship ready loaded with, I think, seven hundred and twelve horses, and we had to take her across the Atlantic . . .
He and Tommy O'Brien 'crossed the Atlantic with a hundred or more Australians, Limeys, New Zealanders, Yankees, Canucks, Anglo-Brazilians and Argentinians'. They collected three more staunch friends on that trip: Billy Newsham, a New Zealander named Dick Miln, and another redhead, the American son of an Englishman named Tattersall, known to everyone as 'Tatters', a lad secretly tormented by the fact that his parents were divorced. Between them, the quintet made up their minds that the war would be over by Christmas 1914, a common enough delusion among those young romantics of the day who started their war by fighting the authorities to let them get into the army. 'We were in fear that the war would end before we got there.'
Ten minutes after disembarking at Liverpool, Dave, Tommy, Billy, Dick and Tatters, wearing 'two-piece summer suits and straw boaters', enlisted in the British cavalry. Dave, for one, calculated that he would reach the Front quicker on horseback than with the infantry. The friends were drafted together to the 2nd Dragoon Guards (the Queen's Bays) and posted to Aldershot, that ugly garrison town in Hampshire thirty-six miles south-west of London, which all soldiers in English regiments seem to pass through at some stage in their military careers.

Our superiors flattered us at first, put us together, and proudly called us the Overseas Platoon. But they discovered that we had a motto, 'One in trouble, all in trouble!' They didn't approve of military unionism, and presently they were calling us 'Those blasted colonials!' They ended by breaking up the platoon, scattering us through the battalion. It was not that we weren't as good soldiers as the rest, but we believed in moderate resistance to authority, especially when authority was represented by a sergeant of peace-time regulars, who, for all his strapping size and fine military bearing, had the manners of what he was—a guttersnipe. He probably had a snotty nose before the army taught him how to wipe it—and it was my making this remark, well within his hearing, that brought about the final bust-up.

Number 5816 Trooper Davison, F. had never heard of the Queen's Bays, known to other cavalry regiments as The Rustybuckles, but he was soon instructed that they were 'first in the field and last to leave it', that their regimental motto, Pro Rege et Patria meant 'For King and Country', and that the Queen's Own Royal Regiment of Horse, raised in 1685 by James I to help quell the Monmouth Rebellion, had been renamed The Bays in 1767 after they had established a tradition of being mounted on bay chargers. They fought at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, and their other regimental battle honours included Warburg, Lucknow, and the Boer War. 'The pride of the Army', they claimed for themselves. 'The right of the line!' They were destined to add Mons, the Ypres Salient, and other French and Flemish place names to their record.

But Fred Davison was probably more impressed by the songs and bawdy ditties of military life and leisure that he learned while making wassail (as he was wont to
call it) in the other ranks' canteen; songs like the old cavalry chorus:

Old soldiers never die,
They only smell that way!²

It was common practice in those days for trainee recruits to be confined to barracks for several weeks, and perhaps months, until they had acquired a soldierly bearing, having learned to be properly dressed, to wind their puttees securely, and, whenever caps were worn, to salute the King's Commission in accordance with King's Regulations in whatever circumstances it was encountered. Off-duty hours in those weeks, when not being spent in the canteen, would have been occupied mainly with sleeping, but also with 'interior economy', or cleaning the barrack room and ordering one's bedspace, with spit and polish, and sometimes with writing letters, and sharing with one's closest comrades letters received.

Trooper Davison may have thought he knew well enough how to ride, but he was required to learn again nonetheless. He had to develop a relationship with his horse not far short of intimacy, to groom it, feed it, and clean out its stable to a condition of spotlessness matched only by that demanded of the infantryman's rifle. Doubtless there were a few occasions when, after an hour or more of labour, with the stables just ready for an officer's inspection, his inconsiderate mount lifted his tail. There was no time to grab a bucket; a cavalryman's hands were trained for dirtier work than was called for by that emergency: it was quicker and easier to run and catch in cupped hands which could be washed, what otherwise would have caused a panic replacement of soiled straw. No wood-and-water joey in the hills behind Bairnsdale was ever called upon for such a task.

He learned that British cavalrymen had worn swords, not sabres, since about the time of the Charge of the Light Brigade.

It was probably found that in the heat and excitement of battle a soldier armed with a sabre was as great a menace to his comrades and their horses as to the enemy.

Among the skills of mounted horsemanship that he was obliged to acquire, was that of the charge, practised with flexible sword and protected by mask and padded jacket. As the enemy was approached, swords were drawn and the pace of the mounts was quickened to a gallop. As the moment of engagement grew imminent, the rider threw his full weight into his stirrups and strained forward in his saddle until his horse's mane was fluttering about his face. His sword arm was twisted anticlockwise until it hurt, so that from swordpoint to his steed's hind heels he was an unbreakable straight line. Then, as the weapon was thrust to the hilt between the ribs of his hapless antagonist, he followed through by turning at the waist as he galloped past and tightening his grip on the hilt with his arm extended to full stretch, thus recovering his sword from its bloodbath hopefully in time to skewer the next oncoming rider.

Success depended on his never, never, never thinking of what might happen to him, but in concentrating on what he hoped was going to happen to the poor, silly man coming at him.

On one occasion, a ten-stone Davison unhorsed a thirteen-stone Scot whose
ineptitude for horsemanship subsequently caused him to transfer to another arm of the Service.

Horses are inclined to run wide in passing at a gallop, but Fanny, the handy little mare I was riding, was obedient to the pressure of my left knee and would run as close as a whisker. My swordpoint buckled on touching Hamilton's chest, and then my hilt caught him at the length of my outstretched arm. He disappeared.

You can understand that in the cavalry way of looking at things a horseman unexpectedly and unwillingly separated from his horse was the last word in the utterly absurd. When I met Hamilton in barracks later in the day he spoke to me abusively. He—a member of the Imperial breed—had been unhorsed by a lowly person from one of the Colonies! He had much to say about skinny, sallow-faced, herring-gutted people who were descended from convicts and scarcely knew who their mothers were, let alone their fathers. He was trying to provoke me to a fist fight which he, with two inches advantage in height and three stone in weight would surely have won. I had enjoyed my victory for the day and had no intention of handing it back. I answered him merely with my best imitation of a vacant up-country grin, and he presently stumped off muttering to himself in Gaelic.

On Sundays there were unavoidable church parades which gave Fred his last contact with 'church-going religion' for over fifty years.

We marched as a regiment each Sunday morning with a brass band to lead us, to what they called Divine Worship. This was a mild and decorous Anglicanism intoned above our heads from a high pulpit by a padre with an Oxbridge accent who probably had a glass of claret with his lunch and settled his digestion with a pipe of tobacco.

After they broke up the Overseas Platoon as it was called in Caribbean Interlude, and which in fact was called the Colonial Troop, Trooper Davison was transferred to open barracks and a troop in the Reserve Squadron of the Second Reserve Cavalry. But he did not lose social contact with his friends of the voyage on the Etonian. He spent his leisure, as far as he could, adding to or re-reading the few books he had found time to read since landing. And once in a while, a thirty-six-hour pass permitted 'slipping up to London' and even (maybe) 'grabbing off a bit of stuff in Piccadilly', followed by a night in the Regent Palace Hotel, a popular haunt of servicemen and their donahs.

I could tell you of my days—and nights—on leave in London, one very good story of when I stayed at the Regent Palace Hotel and spent most of the night running up and down the staircases and corridors in my pyjamas. They were missing from my kit, next day, after I had left the Regent Palace; and I don't know how that came about.

Sometimes he would take a cheap seat at the Theatre Royal, Aldershot, where provincial touring companies presented three-night shows, 'things with catchy tunes, a comedian and a chorus with pretty legs'. But he much preferred tramping the surrounding countryside and could take a fifteen-mile afternoon walk in his
puttee-supported stride. His companion on many of these excursions, and his closest comrade throughout these months of training, was Tatters.

There were some pleasant walks once you got beyond the town, the barracks and the surrounding encampments, particularly on the Surrey side. We went to a place I had discovered about seven or eight miles out, called Dogmersfield. It dated back to Danish times, when it was called Dagmar’s Veldt.7

Fred’s description of the walk, written twenty-four years afterwards, testifies that the uncouthness of military constriction had not dulled his perception of the great outdoors.

You walked across the cavalry training ground, Long Valley, up a hill where the road dived through the shadow of spreading beeches; then on through Church Crookham, a village in a bend of the road, mostly church, with half a dozen cottages, smothered to the eaves of the thatch in clambering roses, and with fat women in the doors, who patted their stomachs under their aprons as they watched you go by; then by crooked lanes, close under hawthorn hedges, oast-houses, and tilled land where the wheat, starred with cornflowers and poppies, was ripening below the song of a lark—and so to Dogmersfield, little, lost and dear.

There’s nothing in the world to better the pale tints and fine light of the Australian landscape, but English earth is lovely too. Little Dogmersfield, caught in a web of rutted lanes, shadowed by its old, old trees, set in a fold of green slopes, seemed far from war. It seemed to have gathered round its little stone bridge to brood happily and gently over a great store of ancient recollections. We scraped our military boots along the aisles of a little church that was middling new when John put his hand to Magna Carta. We deciphered inscriptions in archaic English, whispering, bemused by old dates, wondering that men and women could have lived and loved and laboured and died so long ago—forgetting to find it wonderful that we should have come so far, so long after, to read their epitaphs.8

He was never to return to England once he was demobilised, but that description is as vivid, and almost as accurate, as if he had written his notes as he went. The inaccuracies are minor: Dogmersfield is on the Harts side, not the Surrey side, of the barracks; and the church, though it contains some brasses in archaic English, actually dates to 1843.

One summer evening early in June 1915, Dave and Tatters left barracks on their Saturday night’s leave, and this time, after walking four miles to Farnham, decided to stay in the town rather than walk on. The local committee for the entertainment and welfare of the troops had taken a hall in the town for a dance and get together. Dave didn’t dance, but the two mates decided to go all the same.

The hall was in semi-darkness. Air raids were always a possibility. It was a romantic atmosphere, charged with a gay recklessness; and the civilian girls were as infected with it as the men in uniform. Tatters was soon up and dancing, leaving Dave to sit shyly along the wall. One of the girls Tatters danced with was an Irish
nurse named Molly Byers. Tatters was not to know it, but she was married to a regular soldier, one of the first hundred thousand already serving in France. Molly (née Calhoun) had come out for the evening to try to allay her anxiety about her husband’s wellbeing. As she confided to her friend from the same lodging-house who accompanied her to the dance, she had that very morning caught herself spreading out a crumpled newspaper which had been wrapped round some food and, with her rosary beads in her hand, searching it for Jack’s name among the dead or missing.

While Molly danced with Tatters, her friend sat and talked with the shy, clean-shaven boy who seemed out of things. He offered her a cigarette, which she accepted in her zealous modernity, and he learned that she was Agnes Ede and was lodging in Farnham while she trained to be a private children’s nurse, one who would be engaged in a household upon the midwife’s departure. Her petite face took its strength from a prominent nose and a languid manner of speech with an impediment in enunciating her Rs, as if she spoke with a sweet in her mouth. Her eyes were a little lighter than cornflowers, and her hair a good deal paler than copper beeches. Her trim figure was neither slight nor overweight, and when, after she had danced with Tatters a few times, Fred claimed her as his partner for supper, they found she was as tall as the second button on his tunic.

She was born on 26 July 1895 at North Holmwood, not far from Farnham. Her father, a general labourer named Peter Ede, had been a member of an extensive Surrey family. He had died when she was seven, leaving her with two stepbrothers and a stepsister from a former marriage. Peter nicknamed his daughter Pip, because she was so small, and the name persisted throughout her teens. Her mother, Harriett, had remarried, and now, as Mrs Jelly, lived more than forty miles away at Watford, in Hertfordshire.

Pip was growing up with a reputation as a flirt. She enjoyed the power her reputation gave her, tinted, moreover, by the torrid folklore about redheads. In the years before the war, when she had dwelt with her mother at Godaiming, Surrey, she would walk through winter rains four miles to the market town of Guildford to watch the Saturday soccer matches. Her mother’s suspicions of ‘something more than football’ were well founded. Though she was, and remained, interested in football, she also had two friends and admirers in the local team. But Agnes cared little for the admonitions of her elders, and less for the whispers of those who judged from appearances. She was busy just being ‘Me’, and she knew her essential virtue to be impregnable. If ever it seemed in danger of coming under siege, she had always her mother’s injunction with which to fortify it: ‘Never sit down. Keep on walking’.

‘There must have been . . . a quarter of a million troops stationed in Aldershot; there wouldn’t be more than fifty girls’, and Trooper Davison determined not to be one of the two hundred and forty-nine thousand-odd going begging. Agnes, however, made it clear that she was not so ready to abandon the blandishments of her popularity. From his accent, Fred was clearly an American, and she didn’t care much for Americans. Although she had taken his address when he asked her to
write to him, she told him where he stood when he tried to engage her for the following day. Fred and Tatters had walked Agnes and Molly home, and the four lingered, talking, at the girls’ gate. Fred explained that he was not American, but Australian, and told her how he came to enlist in the British cavalry. She was touched by his earnestness, impressed by his sincerity, and intrigued by the incomprehensible air of loneliness about him. She relented; and as he strode back that night to his barracks, his military boots scraped a little less on the gravel.

That Sunday he set off on the first of what became daily tramps over to Widow Edwards’s villa in Abbey Street, Farnham. He did his best to occupy Pip so fully that she had no time for the other men she knew. Pip was in a class different from girls he had known in America, and there were too many men about likely to treat her as if she were not. For one thing, she read books. For another, she seemed sincerely interested in him. Her curiosity about him was not confined to casual questions that ceased upon the first brief but unexpected answer: she treated his replies seriously, and followed through with more questions.

Agnes could see that Fred was searching for something more than easy barrack-room sociability, and the mystery presented itself to her as a challenge. She set herself to find out, and launched one conversational gambit after another. Sport? Music? The theatre? There was a small response, but no quickening. Was he interested in painting? The cinema? ‘Not very much.’ Finally she asked him what sort of books he enjoyed and offered to get some for him. ‘Then the floodgates opened, and I could understand what that loneliness was all about. At last he had found somebody he could communicate with.’

They began to exchange books that they enjoyed: she liked W. W. Jacobs, he admired O. Henry for the economy of his style. On their long strolls together they discussed the thrills of Jack London and laughed over Mark Twain’s *Innocents Abroad*. Fred confided in Agnes that he wanted to be a writer like O. Henry and she assured him that one day he would. He even confessed to writing poems occasionally, but, because it seemed rather an unmanly pastime, he was shy about them; and he knew it was not very good poetry.

Their friendship ripened evenly in the June sun. One Thursday towards the end of the month they went out as a foursome with Molly and Tatters. Agnes was staying for a short period in a cottage at Rowledge, a couple of miles beyond Farnham, and the two couples must have separated when the time came for Fred to walk his absorbing girl home. They had ambled about chattering all afternoon, and by the time he left her she was pensive and obviously tired. They had been talking about the future, the brave new world after the war, the bright promise of Australia, and probably also love and marriage in terms as general and circumspect as possible. Fred had apparently spoken of his determination not to marry until he was sure he had survived the war as a whole man. Agnes responded reassuringly, more affectionately than before. They made another date for the Sunday, and Fred promised to write the following day.

That Saturday, 26 June, Agnes received Fred’s letter. It was written in pencil, and the full stops were little Xs: not kisses, as she may have thought, but the printer’s copy signs for fullpoints, part of a compositor’s habit.
Dear Little Girl

I am sitting down to write to you as I promised but I do not know of any news that I have to tell you. You looked pretty tired when we got home last night, I guess you had been walking around all afternoon and then the walk home was too much for you. I will take care that you do not have to do it again. I was very happy in your company last night, dear, I felt somehow from your actions that I really meant something to you, I want to think that you love me Agnes because I love you.

I suppose every fellow who has intelligence enough to know that he is alive and daily moving on toward the end of life, has plans as to how he shall spend his days. Well kid until I met you no woman had any place in my plans but as I got to know you my ideas changed and I felt that I wanted you to be with me always. I have made room for you in my life, dear, and I want you to come in and share your life with mine.

You know how little I have to offer you little girl, except myself but if I live to see the end of the war I have a good trade and we could soon get a home together.

I am afraid that you are a bit suspicious about me being in earnest as regards coming back to you after I have been to the front. I guess you think that it is funny that I do not want to marry you, before going away. Well dear I do want to marry you, first because I love you and want to claim you as mine and in the second place because it would make us sure of having our passage money after the war, but kid I could not bear to come back a cripple and be a burden on you always. Try to realize what it means little girl but—well let us talk it over tomorrow night.

I want you to offer Molly my most humble apologies for not wishing her goodnight last night my only excuse is my deep interest in yourself. I hope she will understand.

I guess this is all, sweetheart
goodnight, with fondest love
from
Fred
P.S. Xcuse pencil as only pen available scratches
FD

Fred was just twenty-two, Agnes almost nineteen.

Tatters, too, was becoming involved. With Molly. One day, the two girls took a trip over to Guildford and at a Catholic church there Molly paid ten shillings to have an early morning mass said for Jack. Now she had done all she could for her absent husband. He was now God's worry; and Molly was free to enjoy her young life. When Tatters started talking of marriage, Molly did not discourage him. If she went through a form of marriage with him it would bring some pleasure into his young and (probably) truncated life, and she could double up on her army wife's allowance. Plenty of other girls were doing it, hedging their bets, as it were, and some were even widowed more than once. But it was all too much for Fred's
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episcopalian upbringing. Agnes had told him Molly was married; and in due course he felt compelled to break the news to his lovelorn mate.

He couldn't perform the lofty rite of physical intimacy with a woman on a commercial basis—and the other sort of girl you treated as if she were a vestal virgin. I'd had difficulty myself with the effects of being well brought up—as the saying is.¹²

The discovery that Molly was married came as a profound shock to Trooper Tattersall and he never saw her again.

When Fred and Agnes came to talk about Fred's proposal, Agnes suggested that they be married before he went to the Front, chancing what condition he might come home in. 'You see, I was not sure of myself. There might be someone else while he was away. We had only known each other barely a month.'¹³ During the next few weeks, their topics of conversation moved from books and writing to life in Australia, and Fred's plans for making money and a home for them. 'Such a rosy picture he painted. I was a bit sceptical and cynical about it all, and it could have been the reason which prompted his decision a few weeks later. We talked a lot about the pros and cons of marriage before [his departure] and after [the war], until one day late in July he surprised me by saying, "I think we had better get married before I go away, you might not be here when I come back." I replied that it was quite possible. I knew myself and apparently he had come to know me, too.'¹⁴

When Davison recalled how it happened in the last year of his life, he spoke of the ease with which young people drift into marriage. 'They go out half a dozen times and they rather like each other and they don’t realize that there might be other choices or their situation might contain inherent difficulties. You know, you just get married—very simple to do, very difficult to undo.'¹⁵

But in their reckless urgency, it was not quite so simple to do. They required a special licence on a dispensation from the Primate, otherwise Fred might have received his embarkation orders while they were still awaiting the calling of the banns. Fred had no financial reserves, but Agnes was able to contribute something, five pounds as she recalls it. Thirty shillings of it went on buying her wedding ring. Fred managed to scrape together the balance of the licence fee. There was no time for Agnes to get her mother's consent; indeed, she didn't expect her mother would have given it. She decided to lie about her age. [Plate 11]

Now that Agnes was at last to take his name, Fred decided that the naming should not be done by halves. The names by which her friends knew her were too common a currency for a romantic young dragoon to accord his bride. Her second given name was Harriett, after her mother. But Agnes decided to take a stand against her mother's influence and assert that she was Kathleen. To Fred, she was small, playful, wilful, mischievous, and elusive. Thenceforth, he insisted, she should be Kitty.

He was allowed twenty-four hours leave from Thursday, 5 August, and on the first day of the second year of the war, Frederick Douglas and Agnes Kathleen ‘entered into reciprocal captivity'¹⁶ before the Farnham Registrar, since the bridegroom was bent on refusing all voluntary contact with churchgoing religion. Molly was one witness. The other was Billy Newsham. Kitty raised her age a year
to twenty-one; Fred also raised his, inadvertently perhaps, to twenty-three. He had been ten months in Aldershot; Kitty had lived in Farnham for two months longer.

The foursome ate a wartime dinner in a restaurant and spent the evening at the Theatre Royal. *The Belle of New York* was playing, and Fred appeared not to enjoy it much. No doubt he was contemplating what was to follow.

For the Davisons "did not, following their union as man and wife, celebrate their changed status in the union of their bodies quite as soon or quite as satisfactorily as they had expected". That afternoon, Kitty had announced that he was barred by Mrs Edwards from Tavistock Villa, Kitty's lodging-house. Although at Fred's insistence she had plucked up the courage to ask the landlady's permission for her bridegroom to spend the night with her, and had even produced her marriage certificate as proof of society's permission to do so, Mrs Edwards was adamant in her refusal. The watchful widow knew what would take place between her young boarders and their soldier friends the moment she relaxed her surveillance or made any exceptions. Such malpractice would not take place under her roof, and to ensure it all her boarders had to be in by ten-thirty every evening, with an extension to midnight on Saturdays only. Defaulters would find their suitcases out on the front lawn, their belongings tossed into them; and Mrs Edwards's door would be barred, her whitened threshold forever forbidden them. Fred protested that Kitty had not tried hard enough; but he could find no money for an hotel room, and was not yet in a position to do more than his chivalrous best in bowing to the inevitable. "They were marrying for many more reasons than one, were they not?"

That night, on his solitary walk back to the West Cavalry Barracks, Fred turned into a field by the roadside and did his best to sleep there. The brave young soldier had not the courage to face the taunts of his comrades which he knew would surely greet his return to the barrack room on his wedding night. The dawn that eventually broke on his lonely, huddled form was the same which earlier had put the stars to flight above two water lighters grounded far out in a bay of the Dardanelles. And as Fred Davison reported back to barracks upon the termination of his leave pass, a number of his countrymen, frantic from thirst, were fleeing from battle and crowding down to a seashore to fight each other for drinking water or drink the brine of Suvla Bay.

Life for the Davisons thereafter continued as before 'except that I had a ring on my finger and I was Mrs instead of Miss'. Two full months passed before Fred was granted another twenty-four-hour leave. This time he knew the Squadron had been ordered to the Front. The war was going badly for the Allies. Kitty thought that if they undertook another of their long walks that day, they would brood in silence, so she suggested that they see a motion picture with Charlie Chaplin at the Farnham cinema. But first, Fred insisted on confronting Mrs Edwards.

He found her less intractable than he had been led to expect, and soldier and landlady reached the desired arrangement. As a concession to Kitty, Fred agreed to enduring an evening with Charlie Chaplin. He was never to become a lover of the cinema. That night in Tavistock Villa, Kitty performed her bedtime ritual of
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turning the photographs of her boyfriends face to the wall, turned out the lamp, and undressed, 'with the result that the union, when finally arrived at, wore something of the air of a formality taking place by the consent of the world at large, after having been postponed through misadventure'.20 Kitty cried and wanted her mother; gently and considerately, Fred assured her that next time it would not be like that. She hoped not, for if it were, she would wish she were not married. Nothing could have warned them that next time, if there were a next time, could be twenty-one months away.

It was mid-October when she saw him off at Aldershot station with his squadron, wearing the five-shilling Ingersoll watch that had been her parting gift to him, and bearing her promise that she would look after his American friends when they came home on leave. He sailed for France on a secret date aboard the RMTS *Viper*. It was probably 17 October. He was posted among the new British armies in the trenches at Loos. 'That was our baptism of fire, there.'21

Twenty-four years later, as the next generation of young Australians was enlisting with a comparable eagerness and ignorance, Davison was to court accusations of sedition by writing in a short story, 'Fathers and Sons', of matters which could only have been reconceived from personal experience. It was his only anti-war work.

We had high-flown romantic notions about war that are hard for people in these times to understand.22

Lots of the lads, knowing they might be killed, were desperate to have a woman before they went to the front. It wasn't what is called depravity and it was much more than physical craving. It was the knowledge of their uncertain tenure of life; all that life might have been and might not be crowding in about them. It was just young life, away under khaki, under the hardness and the sunburn, crying out against being cut off, feeling that it could look death more steadily in the eyes if it had known the solace of a woman's flesh. I think the girls must have understood, too, with the boys going away.

It gives you a funny feeling the first time you hear guns at close quarters, at the front; not guns fooling about on manoeuvres, but the guns that speak—and mean it! Guns shooting at something.

The truth was that we who had had a taste of the front line were facing the war with divided minds. Our elders—and particularly our elders of the newspaper editorial chair—had given us to understand what was expected of us. Our country's honour—a word that was obscurely involved with our country's business considerations—required of us that we face filth, hunger, insult, fear, weariness of the flesh and the spirit, mutilation and death. Our manhood was challenged, a point on which we, as young men, were very sensitive.

We had no intention of letting our elders down, of going back on the splendid—if somewhat bloody—tradition of our race, but we . . . found out that hatred of the 'Hun' diminished mile by mile as you left the home atmosphere and approached the front line. There, where the vile
foe was within comfortable bomb-throw, you suddenly realized that he was just another fellow caught up in the other half of the same machine that you were caught up in, a machine that you had seen tearing your mates' bodies apart, and which, of a mathematical certainty, would tear yours in turn.

Along about a mile of length the ground between our trenches and the enemy's was thickly strewn with British dead. It was an amazing sight. There was a kink in our trenches, a sniping post, where you could get a look over no-man's-land with small risk of being picked off. Fellows went along for a view of it, and came back with a reflective look in their eyes, and didn't say much. In places you could have jumped from one body to another. In other places they were in little heaps. They were hanging on the barbed wire like old clothes.

What had happened was the British public opinion had demanded a victory. The Gallipoli campaign wasn't fulfilling the glorious promise of its early days . . .

To assure the public that British honour was not in jeopardy a division of Scots had been brought up and sent over. The artillery preparation was inadequate, scarcely more than enough to warn the enemy of our intentions, to cause him to pack his lines with machine-guns.

Whatever doubts may be cast on man's intelligence and moral pretensions, his heart—unhappily, it seems—is brave, and the Jocks, pressing forward over their own dead, penetrated the enemy's trenches with bomb and bayonet for about half a mile on a mile front. It really wasn't a very big show, not by comparison with the Somme, let us say, but a major offensive as against the general stagnation of the times . . .

The reason that the British dead lay in front of our present front line, and not behind it, was that the thin ranks of victors hadn't been able to hold the captured ground; they had been driven back in the German counter-attack much later, gradually, merely by inference, when their attention was on fresh developments. It was a good battlefield to have seen, a working model of victory-at-arms, whether in terms of a single battle or an entire campaign. Hell's will accomplished—and waiting to be done again. I know that now . . .

Davison's ability to discern in the futile carnage of one battlefield 'a working model of victory-at-arms' exemplifies one of the birthmarks of genius. Perhaps that baptism of fire that attended upon the birth of the writer.

Yet he was more reticent about his war experiences than anything else in his life, except his sexual experiences. It took the enlistment of his own son to move Davison to write about war.

Hadn't I, who might have known, and had the power to speak, gone unmoved for half a lifetime?23

Not so much silent, evidently, as unmoved . . . 'You didn't squeal', he used to say, by way of accounting for it. Unlike Sassoon, Owen, Aldington, Graves and
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others, Australian writers 'did not contribute to that terrific flood of anti-war fiction that broke out from about 1927 on'.

Even after he had written 'Fathers and Sons', when in 1942 he first wrote directly of his own life in three long letters to a young student, he made a joke of his war experience and dismissed it in a single paragraph.

Exploits as a cavalryman? I saw both mounted action, on the Somme and at Arras, and trench warfare when the cavalry left their horses and went in to relieve the gravel crushers. Do you expect me to tell you of my heroic actions? There weren't any, Mr Meacham; like most old soldiers, I have a string of funny war stories and a lively appreciative recollection of the times I got roaring tight—or I could tell you of my days—and nights—on leave in London . . .

There followed his account of the incident at the Regent Palace Hotel: 'Perhaps somebody—as you have done—asked me about my heroic exploits and I took my nice pyjamas off to show them my war wounds.' But by the end of his life, in a television interview, he appeared to have forgotten the incident as completely as if he had invented it on the spot. 'I wasn't in the Regent Palace . . . I was never in the London hotels . . . I would say that from the time I joined the army until the time I left it I never had pyjamas. You slept in your shirt tails in the army.'

At the time those interviews were recorded, he privately knew he was dying. He was willing to talk more about war and death than he had ever been. Soldiers, he said, don't think about killing. 'That's one thing they haven't got on their conscience, no matter how much they're killing, they don't.' He was asked whether his disillusion had set in by the time the cavalry were fighting as infantry, and he was in the Hohenzollern Redoubt at Vermelles in 1916 or whether he was still possessed of the convictions with which he enlisted.

Both things happened. You early came to realize that the enemy, the man in the front line just across the way was caught up in the same terrible machine that you were caught up in and you felt no hate against him. We—the soldiers of that war—felt no hate against the enemy, you see. But at the same time, one thing that stuck in your mind was that Britain couldn't be beat. They're not going to beat Britain, you see. That was what brought all those Australians all the way across the earth, and they were volunteers. I remember mentioning to the French people that they were volunteers, the Australians. They couldn't believe it. 'Volontaires, Monsieur! Les volontaires, pourquoi?' They wouldn't believe, they took a lot of convincing that they'd actually volunteered. They wouldn't now.

I didn't write anything anti-war until I wrote 'Fathers and Sons' before the outbreak of the Second World War. No; to have written, to have pulled a poor mouth would have been squealing. I was a Kiplingesque romantic: we went there to see Britain right, right cock-a-doodle-doo, you see. You never, never let on what you really went through, what terror you experienced . . .

I simply do not know how we endured it. We were skinny twenty-year-old lads, see, and how we endured, you know, six weeks in frozen
muck continually unable to sleep at night because of the vermin, see, as so
soon as you got warm the vermin would start. The only way was to get
cold again. Oh, the the the the privations . . .

So he quickly learned that war, as he was wont to put it, was one part scared to
death and nine parts bored to death. He wrote to Kitty from time to time and she
received his letters censored. She worried through long periods in which she
awaited news of him, but its arrival hardly allayed her anxieties. She received an
allowance of sixpence a day from his pay, which added a little extra spending
money to the thirty shillings a week she earned in her job. But Fred was expecting
her to save it for their future. Like a million others, she read the jingoistic anti-
German muck-rag *John Bull* with a kind of religious fervour, scrutinising every
word for some glimmer of comfort indicating how soon the war might be over.

*John Bull* was my Bible at the time."26

Early in December 1915, Kitty found cause to think she was pregnant. Mrs
Edwards nodded sagely. When Fred was told, he quickly replied under cover of
one of the army’s special green envelopes for letters not subject to the usual
censorship restrictions. He assured his wife that she was wrong, which indicates
that Fred’s understanding of their nuptial ‘deed of darkness’ was superior to
Kitty’s.27 But he suggested that she should leave Farnham all the same and go to
live in Watford with her mother, who was contributing to the nation’s war effort
by raising money from the sale of flags of the Allies on their national days. Once
Kitty did so, she saw no more of Molly Byers.

When Mrs Jelly saw the ring on the third finger of her daughter’s left hand, it
was her first intimation that Pip was married . . . ‘From Australia! He might be
married already! How do you know? I’ll have the whole thing annulled! You’re
under age!’28 Kitty suggested that her mother should wait until she met Fred. And
when might that be? . . . When, indeed? Kitty knew her tears would have the
desired effect, and no more was said.

Apprised of the incident, Fred replied that he felt easier because he knew Kitty
would be cared for. He wrote to Mrs Jelly, telling her of himself and his intentions,
and saying that he was looking forward to spending his next leave with her and
Agnes.

At about the same time, he ordered Kitty that she was not, on any account, to
take a job as a bus conductress. She was to stay at home and help her mother with
the flags. For in February 1916 the Asquith Government introduced conscription,
and its harbinger was an appeal to the nation’s women to take over the men’s jobs
and release them for the fighting services. But for the boys in the fighting services,
it was a mixed blessing. Trooper Davison would have known as well as anyone of
some comrade who had deserted, or fallen into a depression and been charged with
malingering, or inflicted a wound on himself, or kept his head above the trench top
a moment too long, or got himself killed in an act of heroic folly, because he had
received word from home that the object of his heart was exposing herself to
‘goings on’. Fred evidently thought that Kitty’s virtue would be safer if she were
selling flags rather than fares; though his motives were probably not entirely free
from snobbery.
But once Kitty had felt the sting of John Bull’s scourge, the flags ceased to hold any satisfaction. Her mother continued the work and in time received an illuminated address from the King, thanking her for raising so much money. Kitty went to work in munitions. She was passed medically fit, and on 22 January started work under the terms of the Munitions of War Acts, 1915 and 1916, at H.M. Factory, Watford. She attended first-aid classes at the factory and in due course joined the Watford branch of the Red Cross Society. She formed a committee to work under the War Savings scheme. In April she was appointed forewoman of the box factory, where they made the boxes into which the powder for mines was packed. In August she was put in charge of the stores, checking all the goods that entered the factory. Fred objected on the grounds that it was too dangerous, and in her imagination she replied that there was danger in walking the streets, or just sitting at home twiddling your thumbs. She didn’t write to him of the Zeppelin raids, and the nights of frozen fear spent in air raid shelters, nor of the explosion in the shed where she worked and the even worse one, which claimed several lives, in the Trench Warfare section. She told him instead that her days and nights were full and very rewarding.

Those were the months in which the British munitions output rose to keep thirty-six army divisions in France, and made it possible for fifteen of them to be ordered into attack on 1 July on a fifteen-mile front north of the Somme. Five more divisions were in reserve, two of infantry and three of cavalry. As the intense fighting dragged on through the autumn Davison took part in his first mounted action. But 5816 Davison was not among the three-quarters of a million Allied casualties in that quagmire of mud and blood.

During this time Fred found an outlet in writing trite verses to his half-forgotten beloved; verses of the kind in which fight rhymed with night, burning with yearning, and June with moon. But these, and all the wartime letters of their separation, did not survive their private holocaust.

Largely at Fred’s request, Kitty sought release from munitions and was certified free to accept other employment from 30 November 1916. On 3 December she started work as a dispatch clerk at Australia House, while continuing with her Red Cross work, often late into the night. That was the month ‘when the Asquith government went right under’, as D. H. Lawrence was to recall in 1922, while living in New South Wales at Thirroul, ‘and in its place came that John Bull government of ’16, ’17, ’18.’ That was when ‘agonies gave way to tortures’. By 1917, Lloyd George’s coalition had over one and a quarter million men under arms on the Western Front alone.

Then on 4 April, five days before Haig’s assault at Arras demonstrated that the British cavalry were the best trained in the world, and two days before America entered the war, Fred Davison, senior, joined up in Sydney. At about the time that young Fred left England for the Front, the family had left Mill Valley for Reno, Nevada, where Dad took a printing foreman’s job with another newspaper, the proprietor of which was a woman. Early in 1916, after he had worked there for three months, his employer made a pass at her tall, handsome, imposing foreman in the prime of life. But Dad was as innocent of sexual nuances as he was of most other
nuances, so he failed to recognise the purport of what had taken place, failed to respond, and went home to Milly at their house in Humboldt Street and reported whatever it was that happened. Milly kept her counsel, but began to prepare for another move. Fred was fired the following day. Milly had been so happy in California that he decided to send the family back there. But he could earn better money in Chicago, and somehow enough had to be earned to take them all back to Australia. The call to arms was sounding across America now, and it had reached Fred with more immediate urgency than ever before. But if he was going to answer it, he would have to do so in Australia. He lived in one room in Chicago for a year, while he worked and sent every dollar he could to Milly to save for their fare home. He was determined not to leave his family in America; Milly would have been happy to stay, although she was glad to be able to see her father and sister Jean again. Jack and Belle Watterson stayed behind. The Davisons left in March 1917.

Number 7479 Private Davison, F. enlisted in the 1st Battalion of the Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force, reducing his age by four years to forty-four. At the beginning of June he was heading for the scene of action as one of the ‘Marathons’, aboard His Majesty’s Australian Transport the Marathon among the troops commanded by Major E. H. Bushell, sailing for England via the Cape of Good Hope.

A group of men on board produced a ‘Weekly Wag’ called Shrapnel. On the last page of the final issue some verses appeared, over the name of Pte F. Davison. They were entitled ‘My Native Land’ and submitted, as in a hymnal, ‘Air—Native Land (same as Maryland)’.

Though I have wandered far from thee,
Native land, my native land!
A loyal heart I pledge to thee,
Native land, my native land!
O, thou art one from sea to sea,
One people’s pride, one destiny
Shall thine be to eternity,
Native land, my native land!

But ere the wattle blooms again
Native land, my native land!
By river bed and mountain range,
Native land, my native land!
O, I am coming home again,
Thy call to me is clear and plain;
Thy coo-ee calls me not in vain!
Native land, my native land!

The contribution by which Dad joined in the jolly pleasantries of the Weekly Wag first appeared, of course, over the name of The ‘Roo in the first number of’ Roo Thuds; and its first stanza was the one sung by Burley Griffin at the Chicago corroboree. Fred must have reproduced it from imperfect memory.
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Young Fred was by now Corporal F. Davison. He had been promoted after Arras on 28 April, 'for saluting under shellfire'. And at the time 'My Native Land' reappeared in print, he was in Watford on his first fourteen-day leave, getting acquainted with his mother-in-law.

WILL BE VICTORIA ABOUT THREE—FRED

The telegram was handed in at Folkestone Pier at 2.12 p.m. on Friday, 13 July, and Kitty was stunned when she received it at Australia House. 'My heart stopped. I sat down with the telegram in my hand and stared into space. At last! But could there have been a mistake? There was no hint of leave in his letters and—oh, my gosh!—I hadn't seen him for two years. Would I know him again?' She dashed into her boss's office, begged for the time off, kissed him when he acceded, with his blessing, and rushed to Victoria, well before three. She took up a position near the barrier and scrutinised every soldier's badge that passed. Could she have missed him? Would he know her? Suddenly, she felt a hand on her shoulder... 'I almost blacked out with joy. Surely I was dreaming. I was trembling all over.' His dark eyes regarded her steadily. On his broad upper lip was a weighty moustache with waxed ends that she had not seen before.

The couple wasted no time at the station. By 2.51 they were in the vicinity of Australia House again, where Kitty arranged her own fortnight's leave and from a post office they telegraphed her mother in Smith Street, Watford. They went to Euston station and drank a cup of tea while waiting for the Watford train. Kitty could eat nothing. They arrived home late in the afternoon to find an afternoon tea prepared by Mrs Jelly awaiting them. Fred and his mother-in-law talked volubly and Kitty sat shyly tongue-tied. After tea, she filled the bedroom jug with hot water from the boiler by the kitchen stove and asked Fred if he would like a wash and brush up. With jug in hand, she was making her way to the stairs that led to the bedroom, when Fred was on his feet offering to carry it. From the foot of the staircase, Kitty assured him that she could manage, and continued upwards, trying to appear as if she were not hurrying.

'But it's too heavy for you. Let me do it.'

'No', she replied, edging up another stair. 'It's not too heavy. I do it every day.' Fred hesitated; and she scampered off to her bedroom, closing the door with a gasp. She placed the jug in the basin and collapsed on the bed to light a gasper. She caught herself trembling, so she gave herself a good old talking to about how her husband, who had every right to be in the bedroom with her, was home for two weeks and she had got to get used to it. She had probably not even noticed that he would be home for her twenty-first birthday. By the time her cigarette was finished, she felt better. She set out a clean towel and a fresh cake of soap and descended the stairs feeling more in command of herself.

They spent that long summer evening on another of their walks. Kitty showed Fred the church where her great aunt had been organist, and the headmistress of the adjacent infants' school. With his arm round her shoulders, Fred remarked that it would have been a good church to have been married in. Kitty's great aunt had been the driving force behind the erection of Watford's war memorial and its roll
of honour, which Fred was also shown. Then she took him into Cassiobury Park and along the towpath of the Grand Union Canal, where they sat on the bank and watched the horses pulling the barges and she told him of the adventures that she withheld from her letters. They visited the cattle market and strolled among food stalls lit by naphthalene flares, shaded in case of air raids. They stopped at a cockle stall, where she persuaded Fred to try his first taste of winkles, which he learnt to extract from their shells on a pin and dip into vinegar and pepper. 'Fred wasn't greatly impressed. You didn't eat those sort of things in Australia.'

Subsequent days were spent on sightseeing trips to London and theatre visits. Just before Fred came home, Kitty had bought a new cloche hat which she liked fitting snugly over her bobbed hair. She decided to wear it for one of their outings, but when Fred saw it he did not like it. He had been used to seeing her in a large-brimmed hat. This one, of brown and beige ribbon, protruded at one side in a bunch of autumn berries.

'You're not really going to wear that hat, are you?'
'Yes. What's wrong with it?'
'Everything. It doesn't suit you. You look awful in it.'
'Well, I'm going to wear it. If I look so awful, the boys won't look at me, will they?'

Whereupon Fred pulled it off her head, threw it on the floor, drove his spurs through it, and slammed out of the house. During his absence, Kitty did her best to remind herself that she had vowed to be patient with him during his leave and not to let him return to the Front with unhappy thoughts. She reflected on how much thinner he had seemed to her in the moment at Victoria station when she responded to his hand on her shoulder; and how tired he looked. She decided to say no more about the incident when he returned. He did so in about an hour: kissed her and apologised, handing her a paper bag. It contained a bunch of black grapes. Kitty rejoiced. She threw her arms round his neck and they were friends again. She realised they were hothouse grapes—and asked the price. The cost was equal to Kitty's allowance from Fred's pay for a week. Before they parted again, he bought her a new hat with a wide brim. But Kitty and modern fashion had grown past the picture of Fred's desire, and she mourned her little cloche hat.

Another dramatic moment in that leave came on 21 July, the Saturday that commenced the second week. Another telegram arrived at 9 Smith Street.

JUST ARRIVED QUARANTINED COME DOWN TO AMESBURY SALISBURY PLAIN, FRED DAVISON

Dad had set foot on the soil of the Mother Country and was demanding service. How he knew his son was on leave at Watford is anybody's guess; but the Davison tribe always knew how to use their own system of drums. Amesbury was eighty miles by road from Watford and the same distance by train from London. With only five days of his leave left, Fred raced up to London and the War Office, brandishing his telegram.

I saw the right chap, you know, a major, and they were very nice to us fellows; and as soon as he heard I was Australian and my father had just
arrived from Australia, he wrote me out a chit for two extra days' leave and my railway fare down to Salisbury Plain. Thus father and son met for the first time since Fred had seen Freddie off on his train from Chicago to New York.

Kitty retained no memory of the event; she also forgot whether she celebrated her twenty-first birthday, which fell on what was to have been the last day of Fred's leave. But several months previously, she had made a cake to be kept for some unspecified future celebration. The ingredients were purchased with saved ration coupons, and collected piecemeal over several weeks, as they became available. The last day of Fred's leave was the obvious occasion. The tin was opened and the cake, in perfect condition, was cut by the pair of them, wedding fashion. Mrs Jelly had bought a bottle of her favourite port and that, together with the genuine affection Fred had won from her, set her weeping liberally. Kitty preserved her own decorum right through to the following day when she accompanied Fred to Victoria station and was one of the hundreds of women seeing their men off to the Front again.

Would I be able to last out? You don't send your boys away, red eyed and miserable with tears streaming down your face. You give them a happy picture to take back with them—crack a few jokes about the mesdemoiselles that will be waiting for them—hold on to your tears—keep them for tears of joy when the war is over. I was talking to myself, willing myself to hold the tears back.

The train pulls in, you cling to one another, you kiss and don't want to let go, you hold hands tight. They have boarded the train. Hands and heads lean out of the window. You grab his hand. You can't let go. Everybody is singing, *Take me back to dear old Blighty*. The train is moving. You run along with it, still holding hands. And then he's gone.

Thank goodness, I didn't cry. She contained herself until she got into her bedroom again, where she sat on her bed and lit another gasper. She hung the spurs Fred had given her over her bed, and at last permitted herself a small ration of tears, wondering how long it would be before she saw him again. Then she remembered she had been detailed for duty that night at the local air raid shelter.

I didn't feel so lonely looking after the terrified women, looking after their children and trying to quieten the babies, making tea, with the Red Cross kit at the ready. In the line of duty, she was obliged to meet troop trains of wounded . . . stretchers on railway platforms . . . armless, legless, shellshocked, paralysed . . . the Red Cross ladies dispensing tea, casual kisses, lighted cigarettes, offering to dispatch telegrams. One day, eating her sandwich lunch on the roof of Australia House, she ignored an air raid warning and the order to assemble in the basement. Instead she hid in a corner and watched a formation of enemy bombers pass overhead, down Fleet Street, for a target which appeared to be St Paul's Cathedral. The bombs fell in Paternoster Row. Wearing her Red Cross badge, Kitty set off and was admitted through the police cordon. There, for the first time, amid the civilian wounded,
and the blood and flesh and bits of broken bodies of the civilian dead, she faced the reality of modern war.

Then her mother began to protest, ostensibly on Fred’s behalf, that Kitty was away from home too much. Was she being fair to her husband? she preached. Would he like it if she knew? It was the excuse Kitty needed to leave home again. Before she did so, she met her father-in-law, who came from Salisbury Plain proudly to spend a leave with her. He was given a room at Mrs Jelly’s, and one day Kitty entered it to tidy up and was met by an unexpected smell. Dad had been spraying eucalyptus about his room. She understood then something about Australian homesickness.

She understood something of Dad, too, when she discovered that he carried with him a small bottle of black hair dye. His explanation was that it was necessary to corroborate the reduction to his age. But Kitty began to ask herself deeper questions about it when he proposed to have a portrait done in a Watford photographer’s studio to send across the world to his friends, and engaged her to sew sergeant’s stripes on his sleeves for the occasion.

Dad said he wanted to see the Tower of London, so Kitty took him. At the ticket office, the female clerk asked: ‘Do you want to see the Bloody Tower?’

He leaned close to the grille with an affronted look, and in what to him was a discreet undertone, he boomed: ‘I have a lady here!’

When Kitty left home, she went to live with her best friend, Mary Watson, whose mother ran a private nursing home in Watford. She also quit her job at Australia House to work with Mary at the Horseferry Road headquarters of the Australian Imperial Forces. From the officers and men with whom she worked in the pay section, she learnt more about the land of her future than she had among the public servants and other civilians attached to Australia House. In Australia, the soldiers told her, Jack was as good as his master. Kitty scarcely needed such encouragement. When the captain under whom she worked reprimanded her for breaking the rule that forbade female staff to engage in unnecessary conversation with soldiers and other male personnel, she told him she resented the nasty implications he was making and gave immediate notice. She returned to her desk and worked till the end of the day, when the captain approached and asked her to reconsider her decision. But Kitty remained her implacable self. Mary collected her pay for her, and Kitty thereafter helped Nurse Watson with her patients, mostly obstetric cases, at the same time continuing with her Red Cross work. To Fred at the Front her occasional gifts now included pomade for waxing the tips of his moustache.

The loss of the military male company at the AIF headquarters deprived her but little, although she was a person who all her life preferred male company to that of females. Fred’s American friends came home on leave from time to time and were only too happy to spend their time between London and someone they knew at Watford. There was usually a vacant bed at Nurse Watson’s, and at a pinch there was almost always the room containing the narrow surgical bed. Tommy O’Brien was one who slept on the surgical bed for a time when Kitty allowed him to squire her to the sights and shows of London during a leave, in defiance of her absent husband’s jealous anger. He couldn’t tell her that he wasn’t making free with
mesdemoiselles behind the lines whenever he was given the opportunity. Anyway, she enjoyed Tommy's company, the smile of his grey eyes and the charm of his 'soft southern modulations'; she took pleasure in catching sight of her diminutive auburn-topped figure walking beside the tall handsome red-headed escort, and came to realise that if she had not been married to Fred Davison, she could well have become Mrs Bertram Owens. When Tommy O'Brien was awarded a campaign medal, it was Kitty to whom he had the citation sent.

1918 dawned with no end of the war in sight. Zeppelins still flew over Watford in search of the munitions factory. The new year was twelve days old and snow was thick on the Watford streets when the lights went out again. It was a Saturday night. Wardens patrolled the streets shouting their warnings at those who failed to shade their candles. But the townsfolk needed little reminding, for they knew that a direct hit on the munitions factory would imperil them all. Kitty and Mary with the two Watson boys and the walking patients went down to the basement by the light of a shaded candle and a fire was kindled with some of the precious wood and coal. It was an eerie hour and, among the dancing shadows and the faces ghoulishly illumined from below, Kitty agreed to chilling them all with a ghost story. Her tale was well advanced when they were startled by a knock on the front door. Nobody dared to move.

'It's only the warden', said Kitty at last on a high note, 'come to tell us the All Clear's up.'

The knock was repeated. Kitty saw that she had terrorised the others more completely than herself. It was she who would have to take her heart in her mouth and mount the dark stairs. Silhouetted against the snow as she tremulously opened the door was a soldier in a greatcoat.

'Does Mrs Davison live here?'

Kitty was speechless. Then Nurse Watson came in response to the knocking, and Kitty found her voice.

'It's Fred', she gasped. 'My husband. He has come home.'

Now she was trembling from a different cause. They stood in silence and each other's arms behind the closed door, and then she led him down to the basement, helped him out of his greatcoat, performed introductions, and burnt her tumbling fingers on the match as she lit the gas to boil him a cup of cocoa. After the All Clear, when the lights came on again, Kitty's eyes filled with tears at what she saw.

An overwhelming sense of love and wanting to comfort him came over me. Fred looked so weak and thin and very tired, and terribly quiet.37 His mate Tatters had been killed in action only two days earlier.

I was asked whether I'd like to train for a commission. I said yes I would like, because it would take me out of the firing line.38

He was given seventeen days' leave before a posting to an officer cadet battalion at Crowborough, Sussex. Over supper later that night, after Fred had thawed out a little in a hot bath and Nurse Watson had warned Kitty that he was exhausted from months of strain and needed plenty of rest, Fred told his wife about Tatters's death.

I made my way to his sap, and there he was lying, face up and quite still, on the bottom of the trench. While I was kneeling beside him his
bombing mate explained that they thought they had heard a strange noise over the top. From a sense of fair play to men who would be coming in as strangers to the sector, Mitch had chanced a swift look over the parapet. There had followed a crack from across the way, and he had fallen backwards.

The sniper had got him through the forehead, a clean little hole, as if a pencil had been pushed in. His body was still limp to the touch and his eyes unglazed. I had a feeling that if I shook him a little and spoke to him urgently he would come back. He didn’t look dead. He didn’t seem far away; and that little hole in his forehead—it was hard to believe that it couldn’t be undone. I lifted his head a little and a gout of blood ran out from behind. I let his head down again, very gently—funny as it may seem—lest I should hurt him. I had a feeling that if I shook him a little and spoke to him urgently he would come back. He didn’t look dead. He didn’t seem far away; and that little hole in his forehead—it was hard to believe that it couldn’t be undone. I lifted his head a little and a gout of blood ran out from behind. I let his head down again, very gently—funny as it may seem—lest I should hurt him. 39

He was twenty-four, the same age as Fred. They had been very close friends. Mitch often showed me his letters, or parts of them. One I recall gives an idea of what people thought of the moral nature of their country, their cause—and themselves. It was from an uncle of his, in Sheffield, a small manufacturer who had just secured his first munitions contract. ‘... but more than the money, Charles, is the thought that it gives me a chance to put all my strength behind England, Honour and the Right.’ No doubt he believed what he wrote. We believed him. He enclosed a couple of quid; ‘one for your Australian friend’. We’d believe anybody who’d do things like that. 40

After he was killed... the sergeant handed me his personal effects in a little bundle. I was his closest comrade. I would go through his trifling possessions, disposing of them to the best of my judgment, and I would write to his next-of-kin, a comrade’s letter, enclosing any item of his I thought they might value, relating the manner of his death, assuring them of his soldierly record. This was common practice in our crowd. 41

The only room available for Fred in the nursing home that night was the one with the surgical bed. The night before, a patient had died in it. It was acceptable, Kitty assured Nurse Watson; Fred need never know. And according to her later recollection, she left the bedroom she shared with Mary and slept with Fred on the surgical bed.

They spent a few days with his delighted mother-in-law, then Kitty took him to stay with an aunt whose cottage at Harrow Weald was beloved in Kitty’s memory as the scene of many girlhood holidays. Aunt Jane had opened an upstairs room as a tuckshop for the boys from Harrow School nearby, and some of Kitty’s first flirtations after leaving school were conducted from behind stoppered jars and over bags of sugared almonds with young gentlemen in straw boaters.

Fred was especially taken with a huge English sheepdog belonging to cousin Jim, and the dog’s presence gave rise in him to evocations of kelpies and graziers, of shearing sheds and shearing teams, and no doubt of the cooks who fed them all at shearing time. Strolling in the big garden, wandering in the orchard, sliding on the
pond when the ice was thick enough, Fred began to re-emerge like the first leaf of an early crocus through the frozen clay of his disillusioned weariness.

He left for Crowborough at the end of the month and Kitty resumed her life at Nurse Watson's. Then towards the end of March he wrote instructing her to join him for seven days' leave he had been granted over Easter. That year, Easter Monday fell on April Fool's Day. At last the money, the setting, and the self-confidence were available. He could make his own choices and divide his wife's time with nobody. All her life, Kitty was to remember that leave as like a delayed honeymoon, the happiest week she had spent with Fred since their first meeting. He wore the yellow band of the officer cadet round his cap, but still his Bays badge and NCO's uniform, with puttees meticulously wound, his lanyard always freshly pipe-clayed, his buttons sovereign-bright, his spurs shiny and jingling like king's new shillings, and his whip a swagger stick thrust beneath his arm.

The landlady of the house they stayed in mothered them like newly-weds, and on her country fare they ate better than wartime rationing had previously permitted. It was one of those occasional periods just after the spring equinox in southern England when a rare south wind brings soft airs from the Mediterranean, not to bestir the naked branches of the trees, but to promise the burgeoning earth the spring that is still another full moon away.

Nature had organised a perfect display for us. The fields were green after shedding their mantle of snow, with yellow cowslips thrusting their heads through the grass in the fields. The spring flowers were in bloom, primroses and violets were appearing in the hedgerows. Cuckoos were busy laying their eggs in other birds' nests, with a smug call of 'Cuck-oo, cuck-oo' every once in a while. The plovers were laying their eggs in the wheel ruts across the fields; you had to be careful lest you tread on them. And all over could be heard the song of the larks, and the sound of church bells on Sunday. In the evenings we walked in the twilight and listened to the nightingales singing and saw the glow-worms... lighting their lamps...

During that leave their first child was conceived. Fred promised: 'You shall come back in the springtime'. But, as Kitty probably sensed, the promise was never to be fulfilled.

Late in April, Fred was posted to Fleet, five miles into Hampshire from Aldershot, and his yellow cap band was replaced by a white one, now worn with officer's uniform. He rented a bed-sittingroom in Grosvenor Road, Aldershot, and sent again to Watford for Kitty. This time, at the end of each day, he walked into Aldershot to visit his bride. Kitty, for her part, was initiated into housekeeping on an army wife's allowance and a gas ring in an open fireplace. It was a source of friction between them that Kitty had never saved into a nest-egg the sixpence a day allowance she received while Fred had been in France and she was earning a wage. It was probably at this time that Fred showed her a snapshot taken in France of a young woman holding a baby about eighteen months old. 'What do you think of that, then?' Fred asked. Kitty offered some suitably non-committal reply, asked no questions, and prepared to draw her own conclusions. Her secrets were her own.
They were living in their first home, and she wanted Fred's father to know that he was welcome there any time he came home on leave. No word of him had been received for some time, so she wrote to the AIF headquarters enquiring of him. A reply in mid-May told her that 'his name is not included in any of the recent casualty lists and therefore it must be assumed that he is well and serving with his unit in France'.

With more time at his disposal and less terror in his blood, young Fred started writing again. He discussed his ideas with Kitty and she suggested submitting to the daily papers stories based on his war experiences and perhaps his adolescent years in the bush. Since many Australians, she reasoned, had taken English wives, the papers would probably be eager for news of Australians and descriptions of Australian life. Fred reported daily on his progress, speaking hopefully of the extra money he would earn. After some weeks she noticed he was dispirited and moody. Her solicitous enquiries received no explanation until one evening he walked in as usual and tossed a packet on the table.

'Go on, read 'em. I'll never make a writer. You can keep them. They'll make interesting wallpaper.' It was his first collection of rejection slips.

He could write, of that I was sure. Was he being too verbose, too descriptive, not leaving enough to the reader's imagination? A lot can be said in a few words. In time he would reach a style of his own by which he would be known and recognised. This I suggested to him. His reply was a snort of 'Forget it!'

Kitty began to miss her Red Cross work. She felt shut in, her days measured by the bugle calls from the barracks nearby. She took to walking over to see Fred at Fleet sometimes, until the walks seemed to take longer and longer, and she began to suffer from bouts of neuralgia and indigestion. On some days, she didn't feel like getting up at all, but since she was always up by the time Fred came home, it was not until she was visibly losing weight and failing to keep her food down that he overrode her persistent refusals to seek medical advice and applied for a weekend's leave so that he could deliver her into her mother's care. Fred suspected she was not eating the right kind of food off the gas ring in the bed-sitter.

The doctor Kitty eventually consulted diagnosed anaemia and acute indigestion. But Nurse Watson, whom Kitty saw as her condition deteriorated, diagnosed a baby in December. Overjoyed, Fred got immediate leave.

When he returned to Fleet he sat, and passed, the examinations for which he had been studying during the previous months. Second Lieutenant F. D. Davison was commissioned on 25 September 1918 and posted to the Hertfordshire Regiment [Plate 12]. He was given another leave, during a weekend of which Kitty fell seriously ill with severe abdominal pains and violent vomiting. Ignoring the reassurances of his mother-in-law, he panicked and fled to Nurse Watson, who realised that Kitty was prematurely in labour. Her condition lasted through Saturday and Sunday. By Monday afternoon, Fred was sitting on the bed with Kitty's hand in one of his and in the other his Ingersoll watch timing, on Nurse Watson's instructions, the intervals between contractions.

In the early hours of Tuesday, 8 October, a daughter was born to them. She had
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red hair, and was 'a tiny little thing weighing less than the joint my mother cooked for Sunday dinner'. It was Mrs Jelly’s comparison.

She was born at seven months. It could have been a couple of weeks earlier, which might explain all the trouble I had.

Fred wanted his daughter to be called Doris after his favourite sister. Kitty wanted Mary, after her best-beloved friend. After much deliberation, Kitty accepted what she considered to be a compromise. She would be Doris Mary; and by that pair of names, virtually hyphenated and sometimes even joined as Dorismary, she was always thereafter known.

Early in November, Fred was posted to Hastings for further training: another reprieve from the Front. He quickly found a flat of two rooms and a kitchen in the house of a gracious brother and sister, and summoned his family. Kitty’s doctor pronounced her fit to travel with her one-month-old baby; and she assured her mother that she was capably trained in baby care.

‘We’re a family now’, he said as he joyfully met them at the train. ‘There are the three of us.’ He insisted, however, that there would be no christening.

It was another happy time, this one heightened by the Armistice. Kitty was always to remember it, and that Easter holiday, as the happiest times of her marriage. Fred enjoyed sitting on the roof outside the kitchen window to catch what little sun there was; and, observing him daydreaming there, Kitty realised how homesick he must have been. In that solitude, Fred laid plans for the life ahead.

Dad, meanwhile, negotiated with the authorities for a quick repatriation and discharge, so that he could prepare the way at home for heroes returning with their brides.

He got away early, you see. He wrote to me and said: ‘The war’s over. I’m going to leave you kids to pick up the pieces. I’m going home.’ And he just went home. I don’t know how he got away with it; he just went home.

Private Frederick Davison, aged fifty, of the 1st Battalion, Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force, was issued with a civilian suit and cap in Sydney on 4 March 1919. Fifteen days later, he was discharged at the recorded age of forty-six in consequence of medical unfitness. It is said that he suffered migraine during route marches in France and Belgium. He had served for fifteen days short of two years. Then he set up in business in Sydney as a real estate agent.

Lieutenant Fred Davison in the meantime had been posted across the Channel again. He took charge of a munitions dump at Charleroi on the River Maas south of Brussels, having left Kitty with instructions to read all she could about Australia so as to prepare herself for a new life which, as Fred was dreaming it, was going to be in the Outback. His parting gift, an unconsciously ironic promise, was a copy of Mrs Aeneas Gunn’s coy classic, We of the Never-Never, which had first been published in London ten years earlier. ‘It will prepare you’, he told Kitty, ‘for the new life ahead of you.’

Through the hard winter of 1919, Kitty took Doris Mary for a daily walk in a hired pram, watched the spring slowly burgeon around the park lake beyond her window, and read of a pioneer journey through hotter climes and fiercer
privations. When she had finished *We of the Never-Never*, she lent it to her landlord to read to his sister. They found it less than inspiring. The thought that their paying guest and her baby were to be taken into a world such as the book described shocked them and they began to wonder what darkness lay beneath the charm of young Lieutenant Davison. Kitty’s mother echoed their sentiments, and when she saw Fred she berated him in terms which Kitty had not heard before.

It was nothing short of murder to take us to such a place and she definitely did not approve of it.

Before that year was out, Kitty was to discover that Jeannie Gunn had an easy life by comparison with the one to which she had committed herself.

On 10 April Fred posted home to Hastings a picture postcard which bore one of his simple messages: ‘Dear K. Demobbed. Today. F.’ On 13 April he was sent on twenty-one days leave to await a passage to Australia. Much of their wearisome waiting time was spent buying necessities like suitcases, shopping in London, packing, and collecting information about repatriation and soldiers’ settlement from Australia House. And when they went out together, they often played a game of their own devising.

It consisted of him giving her fifty or a hundred pounds of imaginary money, and of the fun of spending it together looking in shop windows.

She would choose whatever she liked, and he, with his pencil and pocketbook, kept count. When she had spent it all, the play was over till the next time. One day it would be furnishings; another day, clothes; and they even bought sheep at a fair, for they intended to ‘go on the land’ when they reached Australia.44

At last, on 15 May, Fred received a telegram announcing that they would be sailing in the RMS *Osterley* from Tilbury on 21 May. On 20 May a Hastings doctor certified the family free from infectious diseases and Fred was able to collect his embarkation papers. Kitty said goodbye to her mother and her native land for ever. Her mother ‘looked a very little and disconsolate figure from the wharf’. But Fred had promised that he would send for her, and that in five years Kitty would be home for a long holiday.

He still held the King’s Commission; the family travelled first class. With so many women and children on board, it was decided that the Suez Canal might be too dangerous and the *Osterley*’s course was changed via the Cape of Good Hope. Her fuel supplies had to last the longer journey, so she steamed slowly, and the voyage took two months.

Fred was restless and impatient to start his life on the land. When his dispersal certificate had been drawn up on 9 April he had stated his occupation in civil life as ‘farmer’. He spent the days reading and in the evenings he would walk with Kitty four or five times round the deck. Kitty joined the sports club and won some prizes, but Fred took no part in the social activities of shipboard life. He pointed out a wealthy Victorian squatter to Kitty as an example of the wealth and opportunity that existed in Australia, and which in time would be theirs. When the squatter threw a champagne party for his daughter’s twenty-first birthday, the Davisons were invited; and at last Kitty prevailed upon Fred to dance with her. She
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taught him the jazz waltz, and for the rest of the voyage he joined in the dances.

One day he saw someone reading a paper with a familiar pink cover. Later, he saw someone else reading it. He kept an eye on its progress from one deck chair to another and at last found it in an empty chair, whereupon he wishfully presumed it to have been abandoned. Excited with his capture, he ran back to his cabin brandishing for Kitty the first copy she had ever seen of the bushies' bible: the Bulletin. One day, he told her, he would write something and submit it to the 'Bully' for publication. Meanwhile, he read all of it assiduously and dreamed of becoming a squatter.

When they went ashore at Durban, he sought out the booksellers and rejoiced to find a copy of C. J. Dennis’s book of verses, The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke, which had first been published in the year they were married, then republished in 1916 in a pocket edition for the trenches. By the end of the voyage, Kitty considered she knew the laureate of the larrikin by heart.

They dropped anchor at Melbourne on Saturday, 5 July, then steamed on to Sydney. They were on deck before the Osterley passed through the Heads, and as she came alongside the wharf, Fred recognised his father in a group with Mother and the younger children. He had not seen Douglas and Doris since they were schoolchildren and they were now in their late teens. Kitty, feeling shy and nervous, heard Dad’s stentorian voice demanding: ‘Where’s Baby?’ She brought Doris Mary up from the cabin and sat her on the rail. There was ‘much waving and pointing to her red curly hair’.

Not long before, the family had moved house. They had been living in North Sydney at 435 Miller Street when Dad was first discharged; now that was his estate agent’s office. He had moved them into a house named Thalia a few blocks away in Carter Street; and there, triumphantly, he drove the seven of them in an old hired Ford. At that address, young Fred received from London later that month the following intelligence on War Office Form D5A.

WAR OFFICE,
LONDON,
S.W.1.

7 JUN 1919.

SIR,

I am commanded by the Army Council to inform you that in consequence of the demobilisation of the Army you have been disembodied as from 1st July 1919 inclusive.

You will receive a further notification of any gratuity to which you may be entitled.

You should report any change of permanent address to the:

Secretary War Office
Whitehall S.W.
I am also to take this opportunity of conveying the thanks of the Army Council for your services to the Country during the late war, and for the excellent work you have done.

I am,
SIR,
Your obedient servant,
R. W. Brade

And so, with his freedom from bondage to one government instrumentality confirmed, Fred doffed his uniform and set off immediately to commit his fortunes to a new ignis fatuus. But before he is pursued into the consequences of the most crucial decision of his life, and in order that its full folly may be perceived, some antecedent intrigue must be recorded.
1. Jane Brown, allegedly aged sixteen.
2. Frederick Brown, butcher.
3. Tom Davison, aged between forty-eight and sixty-five.

5. John Watterson, father of Milly.

6. Milly at about age twenty.

8. Fred Davison.
9. Frank Dalby Davison as a child at Glenferrie.

10. Frank Dalby Davison aged about seven, with his sister Dulcie.
11. Kitty Davison at about the time of her marriage.
12. Frank Dalby Davison just after receiving his Commission September 1918.

14. Frank Davison, Kitty and Doris Mary at the sliprails.
15. Bill Davies and Doris Mary.

17. The first ‘real’ house at Injune.

18. ‘Just down from the bush’ with Doris Mary and Peter.
19. Frank Dalby Davison, writer.
II Growth

*It's possible that I wasn't a farmer to begin with. I was only a crazy writer from the very start.*

Frank Dalby Davison
in an interview for television, 1969
Of all the spectres that have troubled the white dispossession of the Australian Aborigine, none has been more darkly persistent than the guilt-ridden dread that in turn he will be dispossessed of his brief and precarious toehold on the rim of the island continent by some other horde as genocidal and rabidly xenophobic as himself, though of course of a different colour.

The bogey of the Yellow Peril is at least as old as the gold rush. There were eight thousand Chinese miners encamped near Ballarat when Jane Brown landed at Melbourne; and when her son Fred set up his first printing business, Chinese accounted for fifteen per cent of the population of New South Wales. ‘No nigger, no Chinaman, no lascar, no kanaka, no purveyor of cheap coloured labour’, asserted the *Bulletin* in 1887, ‘is an Australian’. The North Queensland goldfields at one time supported thirty thousand Chinese miners; and nowhere has the fury haunted more resolutely than in Queensland, that part of Australia which suffers the closest contiguity to the putative lair of the Peril. ‘Remember’, cautioned the Brisbane *Labour Bulletin* in August 1890, ‘the maritime men before this fought to keep Australia from Chinese, and conquered’. Four months later, the Queensland Shearers’ Union passed a rule forbidding any of its members to deal with Chinese or work for anyone who employed Chinese. And one of the first Acts of the new Commonwealth Parliament was the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, more popularly known as the White Australia Policy.

In Queensland it became a common belief that if all the available land were not quickly settled to its fullest capacity, ‘someone else’ would come and settle it. The measures taken to avert such a catastrophe were concerned both to keep non-whites off the land and to bring whites onto it. A motion was passed in 1907 at the Labour in Politics Convention ‘that no Asiatic, Polynesian or African aboriginal shall be able to hold land in freehold or leasehold from the Crown or private owners’. And plans were afoot to disperse some of the superfluous metropolitan multitudes from other states over the vast open spaces of what Fred Davison, senior, was wont to call Bananaland. To this end, the Queensland Government legislated to resume and subdivide the big leasehold cattle stations and other agricultural land. The risks of such a policy, it was thought, would be trifling compared with those of not embarking on it.
The Closer Settlement Bill of 1906, empowered the Queensland Government to spend up to half a million pounds in any one year to purchase agricultural land for closer settlement. Previous repurchase Acts had enabled the Government to acquire properties only after they had been offered, but under the new Act the Minister could initiate the offer. Joshua Thomas Bell, member for Dalby and Secretary for Public Lands, in introducing the second reading of the bill, reminded the Queensland Legislative Assembly that his Government's general policy had been to get as many people on the land as they possibly could, but that they did not want to crowd more people on to a given area than that area could properly support. It had been suggested that the owners themselves would subdivide, but, said Bell, 'one of the disadvantages of subdivision by a syndicate or a private owner is that the sole goal and aim is profit. It is a matter of indifference to them whether they subdivide their properties in large blocks or in small blocks; whereas, under the Government, our object is to subdivide it into as small an area as will fairly support a man and his family.'

One cattle station affected by the Act was an area of about five hundred and twenty-five square miles in the unsettled district of Leichhardt, known as Mount Hutton Station after the flat-topped mountain of three thousand feet that dominated its north-western corner. William Glasson was holding a grazing lease there when, on 6 December 1913, the Government gazetted its resumption for eventual subdivision under the Closer Settlement Act with effect from 1 July 1914. The opening of the land for selection was deferred, however, pending development of the Government's railway policy.

The nearest point of railway connection was some forty miles south of the southern boundary: the railway running west three hundred miles from Brisbane through Roma, the nearest market town, then on to Charleville in the southern centre of the state, nearly five hundred miles from the coast.

One of the Crown Rangers from the Land Office at Roma, H. McDougall, reporting on the country before the resumption, described it as consisting of open box country along the frontages, with low ridges timbered with ironbark, box and sandalwood, and patches of dense brigalow and belah. The country along the main range on the south consisted of dense brigalow and on the western boundary of open ironbark. The northern boundary along the watershed consisted of rough stony ridges timbered with dense brigalow and belah. It was watered by Injune Creek in which, McDougall reported, there were some good holes which were 'practically permanent'. Oakey Creek was not permanent, but it had a good hole at the top end. Barramundi Creek had some good holes which were not permanent, and Ah See Creek was good only after rain. There were plenty of good sites for tanks or dams.

- Soil: black, sandy loam, brown and red.
- Grasses: blue, kangaroo, wire.
- Herbage: carrot, crowsfoot, wild sago or lamb's tongue.
- Edible shrubs: wilga.

'Owing to the distance from railway communication', McDougall's report concluded, 'and this country not being suitable for agriculture, I would suggest it
be opened in large areas, say from five to seven thousand acres, as some of these portions would have a good deal of scrub.'

McDougall's superior, the Roma Land Commissioner, John B. O. Evans, supported his ranger's assessment in an accompanying letter to the Under Secretary for Public Lands, but introduced a more optimistic note:

The water in Injune Creek is permanent, and so are the lakes near Mount Hutton, but the latter are very inaccessible and the surrounding country rough and strong. The flats on the creeks and the ironbark ridges are well grassed with good soil, and the scrubs, if ringbarked, could be converted into good pasturage. The country is not suitable for close settlement but will be readily selected if surveyed into areas from five thousand to ten thousand acres, and open to grazing selection. Wallabies are numerous, and I saw isolated bunches of prickly pear, probably brought from the infested areas on Womblebank holding, which is adjacent to the north-western corner of the holding.3

Less than fifteen months later Crown Ranger McDougall certified the holding free from prickly pear.

But it was not the pear which had been cleared. It was the old Liberal government. On 22 May 1915, within a month of the Gallipoli landing, the people of Queensland elected Australia's first effective Labor government, giving it forty-five of the Assembly's seventy-two seats. With the exception of a short period out of office during the Great Depression, the Queensland Labor Party was to govern the state for the next forty-two years. Its first premier was T. J. Ryan; its first Minister for Public Lands was the member for the Maranoa since 1907, one of Roma's leading merchants: John McLwan1 hinter of Hunter's Ltd, the Roma department store. The Mount Hutton lands, if not exactly on his doorstep, did border on his constituency and were in fact (in unsettled regions where demarcations were none too rigorously observed) near enough to the Maranoa when it came to the question of closer settlement to be claimed as part of that better known and more desirable settled district.

On 24 May 1916 Glasson's lease, together with all improvements on the holding, was surrendered to the Crown. Then on 26 September the following memorandum was sent from the Lands Department by the Under Secretary, W. Gordon Graham, to the Land Commissioner at Roma:

Be so good as to instruct Ranger Watson to inspect the land and make a recommendation as to the best mode of subdividing it in the interests of closer settlement. The greatest care is to be taken not to make any of the portions larger than would be required to make a good living for a selector, having in view the proximity of the land to railway communication and the nature of the soil for cultivation. Should the areas of agricultural land in places be scattered, such areas should be peacocked and surveyed separately and not included in larger areas of inferior land which will doubtless be selected later.

One of the major developments taking place in Hunter's constituency at the time of his ministerial appointment was the construction of a railway branch line from
Roma, pushing thirty miles north-westwards to the tiny settlement of Orallo. In the winter of 1916, plans were being prepared for the second stage of the line: an extension due northward for another thirty-one miles through the heart of the Mount Hutton resumption to Injune Creek. Of all the developments engineered throughout Queensland in the service of closer settlement, this was the only time a railway was laid in advance of the population that would use it. The Labor Minister for Railways was J. Harry Coyne, the member for Warrego, which lay on the western border of the Maranoa. The first stage was completed and the second stage begun on 4 May 1917. By that time a new and more revolutionary settlement Act was on the Queensland statute book.

Towards the end of 1916, a popular suspicion spread abroad in Australia that the War to End War was about to reach its end. For the Government of Queensland, as for the other state governments, the prospect of returning heroes, many displaced, many seeking to start life afresh, was a providential opportunity to augment their populations, develop their bailiwicks, increase their revenue and their power. John McEwan Hunter, a man of almost fifty-four, introduced 'with mixed feelings' to the Legislative Assembly on 21 December 1916 the second reading of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Bill, 'with regret,' he said, 'because of the necessity which has made it essential for some such measure as this to be placed on the statute book . . .'4

The Bill, Hunter explained, was designed to set apart areas of Crown lands, after they had been carefully selected and classified with a due regard to the soil, rainfall and water supply, for the settlement of men who had obtained an honourable discharge. During the first three years they would pay nothing for the land, be asked for no deposit, and charged no rent or survey fees. Thereafter, they would pay one and a half per cent on the capital value of the land. The land could not be transferred during the first ten years of occupation except to another returned soldier. The reason, Hunter said,

is that it is desired to secure, as far as possible, some sort of permanency for those men. Having gone to the expense the Government are incurring in order to put those men on farms prepared for them, and to do everything possible to assist them, it would be unwise to allow them to dispose of their interests in the land, and perhaps find themselves on the labour market once again, after having gone through what little they may have saved or made by going on the land.5

He listed the areas of land so far set apart for the purpose and reported that sixty-three returned men had already been allotted land throughout the state.

He made no mention of what was to be the largest of the state's soldier settlement schemes, the Mount Hutton resumption, which had yet to be designed for settlement, and its cattle rounded up. Thirteen thousand head of cattle were paid for; but (it is whispered in the locality to this day) only twelve thousand head were mustered. Shortly afterwards, the tale continues, extensive alterations and rebuilding took place to Hunter's Emporium in Roma.

Staff Surveyor W. H. Cadell of the State Survey Office in Brisbane was given the task of designing the Mount Hutton resumption for settlement purposes; and
his instructions were that it was to be surveyed in areas much smaller than those recommended previously by Commissioner Evans. Cadell first designed eighty-four portions in the far eastern part of the resumption: the area containing the old homestead and the Washpool, two points of permanent water fed by Highland Plains Creek. There was good grass everywhere when he submitted his first report at the end of April 1917.

Along the creeks there are some good flats which would perhaps be suitable for agriculture provided there is sufficient reliable rainfall. The chief objection is that the rainfall is not reliable. Although the average annual rainfall appears to be sufficient, the trouble is that the greater half falls in about two months, the rest being distributed in isolated storms in quantities generally under half an inch, and in the summer time half an inch of rain makes no impression in this district.6

By the end of June, when he had designed another seventy-six blocks to the east of the proposed railway, Cadell reported: 'Scarcity of water will be the greatest hindrance with regard to the settlement of this country'.7 And when extracts from his reports were sent in mid-August by the Under Secretary for Public Lands to the Treasury, they were accompanied by a request for a report from the Water Supply Department on the possibility of damming the head of Injune Creek or one of the other creeks in the hilly country to the west at the foot of Mount Hutton.

When he designed the western half of the settlement, Cadell had some first-hand observations on the nature of the 'permanent' lakes in the 'very inaccessible' country near Mount Hutton itself, on which Commissioner Evans, probably from local hearsay and legpull, had reported in 1912 to Hunter’s predecessor. ‘The so-called lakes’, Cadell stated, ‘are swampy waterholes on ledges under Mount Hutton. The largest measures only about three chains by two. They are not permanent and are in rough country.’

His design instructions were clearly no secret, for while he was at work, an alarmed meeting of the Bungil Shire Council, partly concerned to protect themselves and their ratepayers from the extra cost of clearing and maintaining roads through the settlement to be thrust upon their bailiwick, instructed their clerk G. A. Ross to write to the Minister in protest.

The areas proposed to be open to selection are too small to enable selectors to make a living therefrom and will not have the effect of settling the land in a satisfactory way. This Council recommends that areas abutting the railway might be from 640 acres to 2000 acres according to the quality of the land. These selectors could carry on dairying and mixed farming. The land away from the line suitable for sheep from 3000 to 5000 acres and land suitable for cattle from 5000 acres to 10,000 acres. If the Government persist in opening the land in small areas it will result in failure.8

But the Government did persist. A footnote in the handwriting of the Under Secretary for Public Lands, W. Gordon Graham, to the letter from G. A. Ross states that the land was to be surveyed ‘in areas of from 320 acres to 1280 acres, generally of 640 acres, 320-acre lots only where land exceptionally good’.9 W.
Gordon Graham, probably on the Minister’s instruction, appears to have been directly responsible for Cadell’s orders. No doubt it was recognised in Brisbane that the Council had an axe to grind; and, besides, what value was the opinion of a handful of simple country folk three hundred miles from the proper centre of things? Cadell’s designs followed his survey instructions and were approved in two hundred and ninety portions, some as small as two hundred and eighty acres.

There were also contrary opinions about rainfall and promise in the Mount Hutton area. Ranger Watson, who claimed to know the land intimately by now, reported to the Department at the end of November 1917.

I have no doubt there will be a rush for the frontages and out for at least ten miles. The more I see of this country the more I am convinced that this is a very sound small settlement proposition. The station rainfall for the past six years, drought year included, is a point or two over twenty-nine inches and so far this year thirty-one inches. It is some inches over the Roma rainfall. At Orallo, at the head of the existing line, I saw some very fine crops of wheat. The farmer informed me he expected from eight to ten bags, and other crops I saw looked very well. He was convinced, he added, that a major part of the resumption was a fine wheat and dairying proposition. He had seen the country in good and bad times, and it compared favourably ‘with the best of our western lands, with the advantage of a better rainfall’. The drought year he referred to was 1915, when the total rainfall at Roma was nine inches. He neglected to mention that rainfall records taken at the old Mount Hutton homestead in the north-eastern corner of the new settlement did not necessarily reflect the rainfall on the ridges to the south and west of the station up to thirty-five miles away in country where the rains could differ between two ends of the same square-mile subdivision. Nor did he observe, as Cadell had done, that more than half the year’s rain could fall in two consecutive months, a fact apparent from the most cursory glance at any local rainfall table.

It was a requirement of the Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Act that a report on all transactions under the Act should be made to Parliament each year. Through these reports the official annual average rainfall figures for the Mount Hutton Settlement became preferred to the actual figures, and were repeated and embellished in the press and elsewhere. The Under Secretary’s first report, dated 24 June 1918, contained the following.

On Mount Hutton holding, which was acquired for closer settlement purposes, an area of about 112,390 acres has been specially reserved for discharged soldiers and is now being surveyed into portions ranging from 320 to 1280 acres. The country is situated in the Maranoa district north of Roma on the Dawson watershed and has an average rainfall of 27 inches per annum. The railway, now being extended from Orallo to Injune Creek, will intersect the area.

Water finders from the Lands Department had visited the area and recommended sinking bores for water. ‘Without permanent water’, they reported, ‘the carrying capacity of the area for dairying, etc. would be very erratic under present conditions, and the difference of values with and without permanent
water is considerable'. They suggested that selectors should be given the option of having their portion loaded at an estimated 15. 10d. per 1280-acre block to meet the cost of a bore. Unfortunately, the law prohibited offering the land for selection at an opening price which was undefined. But the mere existence of subterranean water gave sufficient cause for the Under Secretary for Public Lands to write to the Treasury asking that no further action be taken on his request two and a half months previously for a report on the possibility of damming the head of Injune or other creeks. An examination was made notwithstanding by H. H. Hamley, the engineer in charge of the Public Estate Improvement Works, and he reported that the cross-sections of the creeks were generally abrupt at the heads 'and the soil of so friable a nature was not to be considered safe for earthwork dams, as dams could be continually subject to scour during each rainy season’. He considered that the soil would not lend itself to the construction of watertight dams, 'and to attempt to construct dams in reinforced concrete would render the cost prohibitive, even if it were warranted’. He found that the bed of Injune Creek, when it was dry in early autumn, contained 'a vast quantity of pure sand right up to the head, all evidence of great erosion from the mountain face'. Oakey Creek was equally unsuitable. Hamley's descriptions of Injune and Oakey Creeks with their soft loam banks provides an important setting for much of the subsequent action of this adventure.

By the beginning of 1918, H. A. Watson had been appointed Land Ranger in charge of the Mount Hutton Settlement, and he continued to perceive its promise through the storms of his own ambitions. When he heard that it was the intention of the Public Estates Improvement Department to sink a sub-artesian bore at the junction of every four selections, he instantly wrote to Brisbane:

May I point out that each and every farmer or dairymen wants his water supply as near to his homestead as possible, and to that end I suggest the matter of getting water be left in the hands of the selector who would probably use the bank for that purpose. A 2000-yard tank will last out the carrying capacity of any 1280-acre selection in this district. In all cases there are good tank sites and as the current local price is from ninepence to one shilling per yard, the matter of getting a water supply is not exhorbitant. During the 1915 drought, the man here who had a good tank was the man who saved his stock and the man who had to drive his stock to water in nearly all cases lost heavily. Then again, the land adjacent to these proposed bores may be the worst on the selection. It would practically be forcing a man to put his homestead in a most unsuitable place.

Within the week, Watson had met 'a thoroughly straight, reliable man of undoubted experience' who was offering to put down tanks for only sixpence per cubic yard if he was provided with the plant. He calculated that a selector would thus get a 2000-yard tank for $5 or under. 'I am confident', he wrote, 'that the tank system will be the cheapest, surest and most effective method of obtaining a water supply for this country'.

Later the same month he was urging that tanks of a minimum of 2000 yards should be allowed on selections of 640 to 1280 acres. 'My experience here has
proved beyond doubt that the popular 1000-yard tank is only a death trap in a dry time. Many of the selectors have from one to three of these small tanks and although the aggregate is greater than the one 2000-yard tank, the soakage and evaporation is so great that they will not stand a long, dry spell.' Watson calculated that the carrying capacity of a 1280-acre selection would be one beast to ten acres, or one hundred and twenty-eight head, and allowing seven gallons per day per beast winter and summer, a 2000-yard tank would last for two hundred and eighty-three days. He suggested that if a dry spell of that duration did occur, the country would be eaten out before the water was used up. In fact, seven gallons a day was an extremely small consumption for even a non-milking beast; and his calculations did not allow for beasts becoming bogged in the near-empty tanks.

His advice and calculations were favourably received in Brisbane, and that winter Watson was evidently invited to head office, or presented himself there, to talk with Under Secretary Graham personally. His next report revealed that his vigilance continued undiminished.

Being a pear-infested district, wide roads will be the ultimate ruin of the Mount Hutton Settlement and in a few years these roads will only be cart tracks, as is the case of all our stock routes along this line. I respectfully contend there should be no road on the Mount Hutton Settlement of more than one and a half chains and in the interest of the State and the Settlement in most cases chain roads would be ample. The Department is catering for the small settler and to that end is providing a railway. Although it be necessary to provide stock routes on and to the head of the line, it is quite unnecessary to have them through the settlement. In no case will the settler have more than a day's drive to the railway and the railway will be his outlet...

Watson was beginning to see himself as the friend of the small settler; his long report, which was not his first on the question of road width, showed an anxious concern for what he termed the 'wide-road ruin' throughout the Maranoa and other pear-infested districts. Wide roads, constructed to serve also as stock routes, were reduced by prickly pear to cart tracks within a few years, useless for the movement of stock. The ten-chain road from Chinchilla to Roma was described by Watson as a sixteen-foot cart track, the rest a mass of pear. 'The same applies to most if not all our stock routes in the Maranoa adjacent to the railway.' Apparently it was not the duty of the Shire or anyone else to keep the roads clear.

But Watson's advice to the top was taken only when it accorded with what the top already had in mind. In this instance, Surveyor Cadell's designs prevailed. The roads alongside the proposed railway were three chains on the west and one and a half chains on the east. A ten-chain road divided the far eastern part of the settlement, following Highland Plains Creek and passing through a gate and a small reserve which contained the Washpool. A five-chain road ran west of the railway into the foothills of Mount Hutton, and other roads were two and three chains wide. The narrowest were a chain and a half. Yet in this instance, Watson's prognostications were proved entirely correct.
The prickly pear plague which, along with the rains, the creeks, the tanks and the chicanery, is another of the essential elements in the soil of this story, had at this time still another seven or eight years to advance to its zenith. It was spreading over areas with an annual rainfall of between twenty and thirty inches, inland from the coastal strip of New South Wales and Queensland, at an average rate estimated at two and a half million acres a year. By the time the peak was reached, an area larger than Great Britain was infested, and Queensland hosted a belt of it four hundred miles wide stretching from Rockhampton to the New South Wales border. The Queensland Prickly Pear Land Commission had fifty-one and a half million acres under its jurisdiction, and by 1926 more than half of it was so densely covered that grass and herbage could not grow. By that time, the cost of only a first clearing of Queensland by chemical poisons was estimated at more than a hundred million pounds, a price so prohibitive that hundreds of square miles of the state’s grazing land had to be left to become so heavily infested that for mile after mile along ruined roads and tracks nothing whatever could be seen but a dull green desert three to five feet high connecting patches of trees and scrub. The real peril was not yelow at all.

The Queensland Liberal Government had appointed a Prickly Pear Travelling Commission in 1912 to visit other countries where the plant flourished and report on a suggestion first made thirteen years earlier: to control prickly pear by means of its natural enemy. They sent back specimens of the cochineal insect, which bred successfully and virtually destroyed all the infestations of one sub-species throughout Queensland. But from the common pear the scourge continued unabated, even though the Travelling Commission introduced the insect that was eventually to prove victorious and provide the most dramatic recorded instance of biological control of a weed pest. It was the moth from Northern Argentina and Southern Brazil, *cactoblastis cactorum*, still an object of some reverence among the older folk in those parts. An attempt to raise the cactoblastis in 1914 failed; and it was not until 1925 that the caterpillars were successfully released to start sucking on the common pear.

One of Ranger Watson’s multifarious duties was to recommend opening certain subdivisions in the Mount Hutton Settlement as Prickly Pear Leases, whereby a selector was virtually given the land free of charge on condition that he cleared it of pear. His first recommendations were made in August 1918, before the lands were opened for selection.19

By then, he and the Department were working under a new Minister for Public Lands, the former Minister for Railways, John Harry Coyne. The Ryan government had been re-elected in March; when the Twenty-first Parliament was convened on 26 April, J. M. Hunter had resigned his portfolio for reasons which were not made apparent, after only a single term of office. He was appointed Vice-President of the Executive Council.

Watson was showing intending selectors round his little empire in September 1918. He was also complaining to head office that he had only one buggy, one saddle, and six or seven useable horses with which to do so.

Under the present dry conditions, it would be only a matter of a very
short time when my horses would be knocked out, and I respectfully submit it would be hardly fair for me to find the horseflesh and plant at my own expense. I have taken out several parties already and there are others booked ahead, but I do not think I can do the lot when the rush comes. I would ask to be supplied with two water bags.20

There were no conveniences at Orallo, he added in a report at the end of September, neither accommodation nor horse hire. He offered to see if anything could be done by arrangement with a local selector. 'Owing to the dry state of the country', he added, 'horseflesh is almost unprocurable and then in most cases they are in a very low condition. I have great trouble in getting water for my own horses and can only do this by going out two miles under the sanction of the owner of the tank.'21

September shade temperatures in the region can rise to the century; and during that month of 1918, only twenty-four points of rain had fallen on Roma, bringing the total since the end of January to less than five and a half inches, about a third of that year's total. It was what caused Ranger Watson, on 30 September 1918, to offer the most presumptuous of his proposals to the Department of Public Lands.

If this dry weather continues, I would suggest postponing the opening of the land, as intending selectors will get the worst possible impression of the country and there will be practically no way of seeing the different blocks.22

But the 12 October issue of the *Western Star*, Roma's bi-weekly newspaper, announced that the Mount Hutton land would be thrown open for perpetual lease selection at Roma on 4 December.

About 112,000 acres have been reserved for soldier settlement, while the balance is for ordinary competitive selection. About 143 portions are subject to personal residence, and there are 69 perpetual lease prickly pear selections not subject to personal residence . . . The average annual rainfall is stated to be 27 inches.23

It had been advertised throughout the Commonwealth.

‘Fully two-thirds of the land’, Watson reported back to head office on 21 October, 'is in a burnt and parched state and could not look worse. I fully realise that the loss of the expenditure up to date will be considerable, but there is so much at stake I do not think it would be wise to put the land on the market at present.' He listed five reasons why 'we have so much to gain by delaying the opening': roads and bores would be at a more advanced stage; it was reasonable to expect the wet season at the beginning of the coming year; plate laying would have started on the railways by that time ('all the rails are on the ground and fully two-thirds of the line is completed as far as bridges, culverts and earthworks are concerned'); conveniences at Orallo were 'practically nil' and no one would undertake the watering of horses; and finally, 'given our usual rains or wet season, the country is quite good enough to stand inspection and perhaps by that time we may have something definite re the war and this alone would, I submit, repay doubly any past expenditure. The greatest bar to successful settlement at present is the abnormal prices for selection improvements.' He recommended deferring the
opening date to the end of January or February. ‘As perhaps we may expect heavy rains during the former month, February would be the safest.’

The Department acted immediately. On 25 October telegrams were sent to both Watson and the Roma Land Commissioner ordering withdrawal of the lands from selection, adding that they would be reopened at the Land Commissioner’s Court in February. All enquirers were sent a notification that the opening had been deferred till 5 February, and the reason given was that ‘owing to the present dry weather and the country having been burnt out by bushfires, suitable arrangements cannot be made to enable intending applicants to inspect the various portions’.

December brought only twenty-seven points of rain to Roma and the ‘wet’ season of January a point less than an inch and a quarter. But pessimistic thoughts of drought were vanquished by the ending of the war. There were floods of returning heroes, all in imminent danger of surrendering their homesick dreams to the blessings showered upon them by their grateful leaders.

The weekend of 10-12 January 1919 found Ranger Watson staying at the Imperial Hotel, Gilgandra, forty miles north of Dubbo in central New South Wales and five hundred miles from home. The Castlereagh, the local paper named after the river on which the town stands, reported that he was in town to place the Mount Hutton Estate before the public.

Bores are being put down all over the estate and roads cut. The land is being opened as perpetual lease selection with a capital value of 13s. 4d. per acre. As a cattle, sheep, dairying and mixed farming proposition, the land is first class.

Annual rainfall as taken from the Mount Hutton Station is 30.25 inches. The land is situated from 40 to 60 miles north of Roma on the divide of the Maranoa and Dawson water. It consists of open box and myall flats, open box ridges and belah and brigalow scrubs, well watered in places and splendid grass country.

Soil: chocolate and black. Flour mill and butter factory at Roma.

Government savings bank assists selector up to £1200 for improvements. Half fares paid over Queensland Railways to inspect, the whole if selected, then family and effects franked over same lines.

One of the first intending selectors shown round by Watson was a Scottish American named George Ferguson from Rochester, forty miles north of Bendigo. ‘The Victorian I took out’, Watson reported on 30 September 1918, ‘was very favourably impressed with the land and informed me he would select and bring others along with him’. Accordingly, Ferguson was among the first in the queue at the Roma Land Office on Wednesday, 5 February 1919, at eleven o’clock in the forenoon, when the Mount Hutton Lands were at last thrown open for selection. He selected two adjacent blocks of 1169 and 823 acres respectively, in an area west of the railway. They were choice selections, possibly recommended by Watson, for they were bounded in the south by a five-chain road and in the north by Bluey Creek; and between them they bordered on the only three waterholes ‘up the Bluey’. Another road, a chain and a half wide, ran through their northern parts on
the south side of the creek from the proposed railway siding at Blue Lagoon, less than two miles south of the Injune Creek railhead. A third road connecting the other two was planned along the western boundary of portion 95, but in fact it was never cleared.

Ferguson told Watson that he represented a number of Victorians who were prevented from travelling to Queensland by quarantine restrictions on passenger traffic from New South Wales and Victoria imposed in an effort to arrest the spread of pneumonic influenza, which was ravaging the southern states throughout the first half of 1919. Watson took him out again to pick blocks for his friends.

Ferguson clearly knew from which side of the separator to collect the cream. He wrote thanking Watson for the courtesy and consideration he had shown him in taking him round ‘and placing your thorough knowledge of the estate and the conditions under which selection can be made so completely to my service’.

It is evident to everyone that no effort on your part is being spared to place an excellent class of settlers on the land, and both the Government and the settlers are fortunate that so competent an officer as you are is filling your position.

He listed eleven blocks and asked for them to be withdrawn from selection for forty days. Two contained Oakey Creek, two more contained Horse Creek (so the east of the settlement) and five bordered on Injune Creek, two of them embracing a waterhole. He had already selected a residential block for his son and proposed to select another for his brother.26

In a similar way, several other syndicates of farmers and old comrades selected various parts of the settlement.

The ranger continued to show selectors round and was sometimes away from his office in Wallumbilla for three weeks at a time. He would meet them at the Orallo railhead and return them there, even, on one occasion, sharing a railway carriage during a stormy night with ten of them. Two others slept on the waiting room floor. ‘It is impossible to get a bed’, he reported on 31 March, ‘and though food can be got, it is a rush and a compliment to get it.

February had brought more than three and a quarter inches of rain to Roma, and Injune Creek had been uncrossable for a week. ‘The estate looks magnificent at present’, Watson had reported on 12 March, ‘and it is only a matter of getting people to inspect to get selection. Poor cattle brought up at the end of the year are now fat.’ He sent a parcel of grasses to Brisbane that he collected from an acre of one of the Springbok soldier settler blocks, suggesting that they should be prominently displayed at the inquiry branch. ‘I firmly believe forty good edible grasses could be got on any of these blocks.’

He reported some scattered pear on the railway reserve at the ‘51-mile’ which could be cleared for about ten pounds, and asked for permission to have it done if the railway authorities were not going to clear it. The bore contractor, Chapman, was on his fifth bore. ‘So far as I know’, said Watson, ‘the supplies are not a good advertisement for the estate. In one the supply is absolutely salt and, with ill due deference to the analyst, I will be very surprised if stock will drink it.’ He suggested...
giving the contractor instructions to continue 'until the fresh supply that the
diviner says is there is struck'. He complained about the condition of the roads,
which were still far from the advanced stage he had hoped for when he
recommended postponing the opening. Six months after road making had started,
the roads were 'practically useless as a means of inspection'. Many were cleared, but
the cuttings were not done.

Why the cuttings were not let and completed as the clearings were done I
cannot understand. . . . It would have saved the contractor going over his
country, and after each cutting was completed, his horses would be
spelling until the next was reached. The majority of the roads should have
been completed for inspection and could have been with ordinary push
and energy. 27

By March, which brought a hundred and twenty points of rain at Roma, eleven
soldiers and their families and several ordinary settlers were on their blocks, 28 and
by May only three blocks between Ferguson's and the railway reserve were still
vacant. There were as yet no fences, except for those of the old station. In June,
Ferguson reserved one of the three remaining portions in his immediate
neighbourhood for a single girl of twenty-two named Janet Stewart. It was a block
of 381 acres on the north side of Bluey Creek over the road from the block already
reserved along Ferguson's eastern boundary for his neighbour, Adam Stewart,
who was Janet Stewart's father. None was a returned soldier.

When on 2 September the Lands Department presented its second annual
progress report to Parliament, it was able to state that twenty-nine of the one
hundred and six portions specially reserved for discharged soldiers had been
applied for, and fourteen more discharged soldiers had secured portions 'under the
priority provisions of the Act' of the part of the holding open for public
competition.

The selectors have commenced improving their holdings, but too little
time has elapsed since selection to admit of much being done in this
direction. Advances are made under the Land Settlement Scheme and
arrangements are now being made for the erection of dwellings and the
sinking of tanks where required, while fencing wire is allotted to the
soldier selectors as supplies come to hand. An officer has been appointed
to supervise the settlement.

A new name was by then recorded in departmental files; and camped up the
Bluey on one of the settlement's largest blocks was another new selector, a young
returned soldier who was greener than the herbage which was already dying off in
the dry season of a year in which less than twelve and a half inches of rain were
recorded at Roma. He was a youthful twenty-six and with him was his kid
brother, aged eighteen. He was too unworldly to attempt to curry favour with the
authorities, or to seek special advice or privileges; and too naively romantic to
conceive that something more than sweat and muscle and grit, a rare and visionary
tenacity, and the goad of a second-hand dream, might be required to wrest a
competence from two square miles of the land of his fathers.

Significantly, the first intimation the Lands Department received of his
intentions was not an application of his own. His homecoming was heralded in a letter dated 20 June 1919 from 435 Miller Street, North Sydney, and addressed to the manager of the inquiry office, Lands Department, Brisbane.

Dear Sir,

I have a son on his way back after 4 years’ service in the English army. He is an Australian and I think eligible for the Repatriation aid although not in the AIF.

He has had three years bush experience in Australia and wishes to settle in Queensland and mentioned Taroom and Banana to me.

Will you please send me any land maps and other information that may help him as he will arrive in two weeks and does not wish to lose time.

Yours truly

Fred Davison

Taroom was a hundred miles roughly east of Mount Hutton Settlement, on the Dawson River; Banana was a hundred miles from Taroom. Neither locality was scheduled for soldier settlement, but both were among the many localities subdivided as grazing selections under the Land Acts of 1910 to 1918. Grazing selections, or grazing homesteads, were not subject to the provisions of the Soldiers’ Settlement Act. They were all much larger areas than those allotted for soldier settlement, and returned soldiers were allowed no priority in selecting them.

The departmental reply to Dad’s letter at the end of June enclosed ‘leaflets explaining the special provisions of “The Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Act of 1917”, and giving particulars of the operations now being carried out by this Department in preparing land for selection under that Act’. The letter explained grazing selections, and added that a plan of grazing areas to be opened at the Land Office, Banana, on 15 August was being sent separately. With that plan, it is possible that the Davisons also received a copy of a lithograph poster, containing a detailed sketch map of the Mount Hutton subdivisions on a scale of one hundred chains to the inch, which announced the opening of the land for selection on 5 February. Tabulated details were given of the sizes, capital values, rentals and deposits required for each portion. It included a list of rail mileages from Brisbane and other places to Orallo, and the road distance to Juandah (now Wandoan). There was also a small sketch map of the region at twenty-four miles to the inch, showing a planned extension of the Juandah railway north to Taroom. It was never constructed. The copy sent to the Davisons was probably not coloured or marked to show the portions already selected, unlike the posters displayed in inquiry offices and land offices.

Between disembarkation and disembodiment, young Fred made several trips across Sydney Harbour to the City in search of maps and information about opportunities on the land. With pontifical advice from Dad, Freddie and Doug spread themselves and the maps on the floor and argued about the best place to make their fortunes. Doug’s expertise came from having worked on the land near
Guyra in the New England region of New South Wales after the family returned from America. The boys settled for Mount Hutton.

It was probably on the afternoon of Wednesday, 16 July that the brothers caught the two o'clock train to Brisbane. A week or so back in the family milieu was enough for the family wanderer, driven as he was by his unconscious response to that goad now three generations old: to become the man who, ‘differing from the rank and file, well knows where he is going, and why. And because of that great difference he plants the flag of civilisation where flag never flew before’. Accordingly, he left Kitty with instructions to wait until he sent for her. He promised to do so in six weeks, when he had a home built. He may have thought he knew where he was going, but apparently his inquiries had not been so exhaustive as to discover that it would take him almost half that time to get there. It must have been with little but blind eagerness that he set off north in quest of his own patch of earth.
Early one frosty Saturday morning while it was still dark, the westbound mail train set down Fred and Doug in Roma, a town of eight streets and ten pubs. The boys had the weekend to recover from their night sitting up in the train, to study additional literature they had collected from the Lands Department on Friday morning during their twenty-hour stopover in Brisbane, and to explore what the Department's publicity material called 'a thriving centre', the tin roofs of which Fred gazed over from the upper verandah of the King George Hotel as he sat in the warm sunshine pencilling yet another letter home to his wife. For him, Roma provided an important reacquaintance with an Australian bush town.

Ten years of absence—some of them boyhood's years—have turned me, a native-born Australian, into a new chum. I strolled around the streets, to renew my acquaintance with sights and sounds that were once familiar. The weatherboard houses behind their picket fences; the pepper and locust trees that line the streets; the sales yards; the creek, with its sandy bed and sprawling gum-trees, and the half-tipsy men who leant against the pub verandah posts were only vaguely familiar. I found that I had grown critical. The romantic glamour with which my mind used to endow such a bush town as this has thinned away to nothingness. I couldn't help noticing that odd pickets were missing from the fences; here and there a gate hung by one hinge; the houses needed painting and the condition of the sales yard suggested that the volume of business didn't warrant the expense of the repairs that were obviously needed. The tipsy men were no longer bushmen on a glorious spree, they were a nuisance and an eyesore. This homecoming is a delusion.¹

But for Kitty he painted a different picture.

My letters to her speak of the glorious Queensland skies, the graceful pepper trees that shade the footpaths of this little town, and the wonderful display of flowers—in such gardens as are to be found. I have picked out the pretty bits of colour and am leaving her to form her own opinion of the background of the picture. Of course it is drought time. Perhaps this is a more attractive place in good seasons. I hope so.

Rainfall in Roma for the month of July 1919 was nil, and in the twelve months up
to that time only fourteen inches had fallen, more than six of them in the annual storms of January, February and March. Fred found out that Roma had ‘two lawyers, a little sanitation, an ice cream parlour, a dago restaurant, a movie show, a rubbish tip and tin can repository by the waterless creek, a block of good stores, another block of stock and station agents . . . a butter factory, a moribund flour mill and an incipient oil well’.

When the Land Office opened on Monday morning, Fred would have made it his first call. He was probably given another folded copy of the lithograph poster map of Mount Hutton Settlement, this one indicating the blocks still available, and no more advice than he was able to ask for. It was three more days before he could catch the weekly train to Orallo on Thursday afternoon. Three trains a week were scheduled, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, but Fred’s report and, later, Kitty’s recollection were of only one train a week; and here may be a case for preferring the fallibility of memory to that of railway timetables. It appears to have been the Thursday train he caught to Orallo, and it took at least its usual two and a half hours to cover the thirty-mile journey. Douglas remained behind at the hotel. Unlike Fred, he would have been obliged to pay the second-class fare of four and elevenpence return.

Fred set off almost empty handed; certainly with no bedding roll. Characteristically, it was beyond the Queensland imagination of those administering the Soldiers’ Settlement Act to predict all that would not be known by visitors to their state, most of them accustomed to several years of having their thinking done for them. The unpreparedness of selectors arriving at Orallo had been a common complaint of Ranger Watson in his memoranda to head office. Once on the train, Fred fell in his usual way into interrogative conversation with a native Queenslander knowledgeable about the local flora. He was on his way to select at Stewarts Creek, a settlement a few miles west of Orallo. About eight miles out, they entered the prickly pear belt, and Fred learnt that the better the land, the thicker grew the pear. It ranged from four to eight feet high, ‘so thick that a dog cannot find room to bark’. They passed farms deserted because the pear had driven people off. ‘On the longer-abandoned places it had smothered the land right up to the doors of the decaying shanties. It was a sad sight. Falling fences, cultivation land overrun, rich myall flats ruined, and fat scrub lands choked up so thick that even the wallabies and paddymelons have migrated.’ Yet occasionally they passed ‘a thrifty-looking selection, carved clean out of the jumble of pear and timber, well grassed and carrying herds of fat stock. It was strange to see the pear crowding to the fencing wire, and yet, within the paddocks, the land was as clean as a city park.’

Even so, Fred began to doubt the wisdom of selecting anywhere within a day’s ride of the curse.

They passed through belts of timber unlike the popular idea of Australian bush. Fred’s travelling companion introduced him to the lore of the trees. There was bulloak, ‘resembling a pine but bearing coarse, erect needles’, a sure indication of poor grazing land, wormy and sour country. Then there was mulga, a light green shrub with pendulous leaves, which was ‘fair drought fodder’. And he identified sandalwood, a small bright green tree with gnarled black branches.
GROWTH

It is great fencing timber, and contains a fragrant essential oil which preserves it from rot and white ants. A post four inches in diameter has a life of sixty or seventy years. It grows in hard ground which dries out quickly.

He found that scrub in Queensland was not the thickets of stunted eucalypt or dense tea tree familiar in the southern states, but 'more heavily timbered than the forest', growing to a height of forty to sixty feet and standing 'about twenty to the chain' in ground 'covered with a dense growth of evil emu bush and "wait-a-while", all of which are bright green and form a pleasant contrast to the dark belahs and brigalow'. Belah resembled a pine and brigalow had leaves 'of an aspen grey colour'. He appreciated that the scrubs afforded relief from 'the fierce white glare with which the sun bleaches the thinly-timbered forest lands'. The lands carrying the belah and brigalow scrub were the fattest in Queensland.

The expense of clearing them is heavy, but once down in grass they are in a class of their own. The railway clearing afforded proof of this. On either side of the track ran a strip of the greenest and thickest grass I had seen in half the length of the continent.

It was dark by the time the train arrived at Orallo. The only permanent buildings there were a small goods shed and an even smaller platform shelter. 'Travelling bush folk camp in the platform shelter and the local residents hold dances in the goods shed.' The rest was 'a couple of score of tents' occupied by and serving the needs of a hundred and fifty men working on the line which at this time was constructed about halfway along the thirty-three miles to Injune Creek. The passengers were told they could eat with the workers at the tented 'boarding house', the dining room of which proved to be a Railways Department tarpaulin stretched on saplings above walls of flour bags stitched together. There was a cooking stove at one end, and they sat on forms along a trestle table to eat hugely of corned beef, potatoes and boiled pumpkin served with large cups of tea by the proprietor's wife. The final course was jam pastry. Since he had brought no bedding roll, Fred was obliged to ask for a bed. He was offered one for two pounds, provided he didn't mind sharing it with two of the proprietor's young sons.

He planned to ride to the railhead the following morning on the construction train, and was warned to take his own tucker with him. He was directed to the local store, popularly known as Anthony Hordern's, after the Sydney department store. It was a bark shanty, 'about the size of a suburban woodshed'. Dave Wills, the proprietor, traded 'in groceries, clothing, camp utensils, tobacco, lollies and soft drinks. He would reach almost anything on his packing case shelves by turning and putting out his hand; and when he was obliged to move, he had just sufficient headroom to avoid bumping the pots, billies, water bags, etc., that were suspended from the roof.'

At a quarter to six the following morning, just before daybreak, Fred was awakened by the engine's whistle announcing the construction train's departure in fifteen minutes. It had been a frosty night and, with no breakfast and only a flannel shirt over his vest, Fred was faced with the prospect of travelling sixteen miles
squatting on a flat open truck. But, he remembered the journey as one of the most enjoyable experiences of his Queensland adventure. 'I wanted to stand up on the floor of the swaying truck, suck my lungs full of the cold, keen air, and let it out in one yell of satisfaction.' Day was breaking as the train set off and, because the interval between darkness and light around the twenty-sixth parallel is a short one, the sky was aglow within a few minutes and 'broad beams of light shot up like the ribs of a fan—and there was the sun, blinking through the tree trunks'.

It was great to be getting back to the bush again. A new enterprise, new hopes, and new possibilities. The smell of the gums and the sense of the open spaces awakened something that had slept during the years of my wanderings in strange cities . . . Old scents and sights came back to me, filling me with eagerness to pick up the thread of life where I had dropped it years ago.

. . . we passed through a belt of cabbage gum country. There is nothing more likely to make one long for the power of reproducing nature’s colours on canvas as the sight of cabbage gum country half an hour after sunrise or half an hour before sunset. The ground is red sand, which shows warmly through the thin grey-green grasses. The trees grow tall, but not thickly, and each carries a dense head of foliage that contrasts vividly with the blue of the Queensland skies. The trunks are smooth, and have in their substance an undertone of pink. The scene, warmed by the light of the almost horizontal sun, is a feast for the eyes. Incidentally, it is a poor class of country . . .

The end of the line at that time was the Forty-six Mile. Every quarter mile from the main line a tree near the track was blazed and the distance cut into the trunk. Some of the landseekers who alighted from the train set off along the railway clearing with neither swags nor tucker, 'but a subiime trust in Providence they had in plenty'. Others, after vain endeavours to locate a horse and vehicle for hire, shouldered their swags and set off in the tracks of the others. The railhead was a mile or two from the southern boundary of the settlement. A third group, four brothers from New South Wales, 'finding no conveyance handy, and no official provision made for their convenience, declared their intention of returning . . . on the construction train, and thence home . . . At the initial difficulty, when the appliances of civilization petered out, they tamely turned round and went home. Such faintheartedness is amazing.'

Fred, the loner, stouthearted to a fault, asked a navvy to put him on the track to the nearest dam, where he could boil his billy for breakfast.

Half a mile along the track from the railhead I came in sight of a long, low earthworks, thrown across the bed of a creek at a point where the small hills on either side came close to the banks.

He was probably near the head of Drafting Yard Creek, which flowed northwards through Gunnawin in the valley followed by the railway to join Ah See Creek, a tributary of Injune Creek. The track led only as far as the dam; nearby stood a homestead consisting of four huts and a bark humpy for a cookhouse. An old man stood in the doorway of the humpy sizing up the approaching traveller who,
despite the soft felt hat and the flannel shirt, still walked like a new chum. Fred was
told that the dam, though low, was holding up well, for there had been no water
down the creek for two years.

The old man gave Fred a mug of tea in the humpy, ‘as clean and well ordered as
a housewife’s kitchen’. He was offered some condensed milk, and butter and jam
for his bread. His host suggested that Fred leave his swag there and return and stay
that night, then offered to walk with him through the box trees to a road about a
mile away that led into the settlement. After tramping through the bush for about
twenty minutes, Fred’s guide stopped and looked about him for the road. He
found it, and offered to go along a bit with his guest. A few minutes later, the settler
stopped again and said: ‘Just keep along the road and you’ll be right’. At last Fred
admitted he could see no road anywhere—or so he was to relate later.

The double black lines on his map corresponded, not yet to roads, but to
roughly parallel lines of trees blazed about waist high by the axeman of the survey
party. Fred’s guide pointed them out, then took him ‘about thirty yards’ through
the bush to show him the parallel line. It was perhaps the road that led westwards
along the southern boundary of the settlement. Single lines of trees were also
blazed to mark the boundaries between selections. Carrying his billy of cold tea,
Fred set off at last on the inspection tour of the country where he planned to put his
roots down.

The blazes on the trees that give direction vary in frequency according to
the sort of man employed as axeman. The chap who had blazed the line I
was following had not been very enthusiastic about it, for the cuts were as
far apart as a man could see . . . So, because of the long distances between,
I found it was not advisable to quit one blazed tree until I had picked out
the next.

He soon became proficient at identifying the blazed trees and developed an
ordinary walking pace. Then he became over-confident as his thoughts wandered
downhill into the settlement. When his thoughts returned to the survey line, his
feet were bushed in the box forest, and only the slight incline suggested that he
must have wandered to the right. He broke down a sapling to a height of about
four feet and hung his hat on it. Then he searched for blazes in a zigzag course up
the slope, keeping his hat in view. He had to move the base four times before he
found the road again.

I was quite pleased and proud. Rather childish—but then, to me, it was a
sign that I was getting back to the bush, shaking off the stiffness that
comes of being hemmed in by bricks and mortar, and being guided by
footpaths and policemen.

At any rate, that was the story he was to recount about a year later, when he
wrote a series of thinly fictionalised accounts of these adventures. In many of his
tales of new chums on the land, he tended to exaggerate the folly for the sake of a
good yarn by having his heroes fall into one after another of the errors expected of
new chums; and the perils of getting bushed was a theme he repeated. Yet this tale
rings true, and the note—‘rather childish’—of his pride in the achievement
suggests something more than a factitious piece of bush lore.
SELECTION

After a while he saw some open country and struck northwards off the blazed trail into the still unsurveyed waterless blocks of two square miles set apart for soldier settlement, 'and very fine it was, from the viewpoint of the prospective selector'. He knew there was little fear of getting lost, for his map showed that if he kept to a northerly course he would eventually reach a creek, and then, at the end of the day, if he kept the late sun at his back, he could not fail to strike the railway clearing. He passed small mobs of 'mud fat' cattle and sometimes mobs of kangaroo. 'There was an abundance of game, and all so wild that they were tame. Rarely, if ever, shot at, they did not fear a man.'

Fred's observations were just those predicted by Ranger Watson when he reported the condition of the land: 'it is only a matter of getting people to inspect to get selection'.

The grass was tall and of a bright yellow colour—cured on the stalk, and excellent feed. The colour of that grass is one of the greatest assets of this dry west of ours. The grass ripens in the autumn, and once the frosts set in we get no more rain until the growing season commences again. On the coasts, rains fall in between the frosts, and bleach and blacken the old grasses. Those winter rains make no new feed, but they ruin any dry grass that may be standing in the paddocks.

Then, in the west, winter is a succession of frosty nights and mornings, and warm days with rarely any rain, so that if the paddocks are not eaten out, the ripened grasses retain all their feeding value until the breakup of the frosts and the commencement of the next growing season. This coupled with the fact that the native grasses of the west have more body than the imported grasses grown on the coast lands, is why the cattle buyers will accept a western three-year-old as a bullock, but will class a coast beast as a steer until he is a four-year-old. And all these things explain why men go into the west and attempt a solution of the water problem.

He tramped into the water problem that morning. 'Notwithstanding the frost, by the time the sun was three hours high, the day was hot.' By the time he struck what must have been Barramundi Creek, another tributary of Ah See Creek, he had drunk the last of his cold tea. He followed several likely-looking gullies vainly searching for water. He pressed a forefinger into the grouts in his billy to squeeze out a few drops, but it only tantalised his thirst. He continued down the creek, and the sun was almost at its zenith when he saw 'an iron roof beyond a straggling line of gums'. He presumed he had struck the creek near to where it passed the old station homestead. In fact, it was the outstation: he had reached the subdivisions advertised for open competition.

In the creek, right opposite the house, was one of the finest waterholes in the district. It was thirty feet deep, clear, blue, and protected by steep banks and overhanging trees. One has to tramp thirsty for a few hours under a Queensland sun to appreciate the beauty of such a sight. I think the sweetest drink I ever had was at that hole . . . I scrambled down the banks, lying full length on a rock, drank as much as I could comfortably
hold—caught my breath and then drank some more. Then I climbed halfway up the bank and sat down to rest and smoke and luxuriate at the sensation of having so much water at my disposal.

He had walked a little over ten miles. That year the waterhole at the old outstation fell as near to dry 'as it had done in the memory of white men'. When Fred drank at the waterhole, it was only about half full; 'before the drought broke, a settler nearby was . . . dipping it out with a pint pot into a kerosene tin'.

But no waterholes in that country's creek beds could really be considered permanent, droughts or not. The summer storms could fill them either with water or with tons of mud and sand carried down when a creek was running a banker. Settlers learnt to build silt traps on the upstream ends of the holes, but they were effective only where conditions were favourable. Other holes were gradually formed elsewhere by the floods, but that was no consolation to a settler who depended on a hole for his water supply. A hole might form in a creek bed a few feet or half a mile long, but its value as a reservoir would depend no less upon its size than upon the nature of the soil around it. A big hole might empty quickly through soakage; a small one might hold like a bottle.

The localised nature of the summer storms meant that a creek might run once every two or three years, once a year, or up to three or four times a year. But seldom for long: a torrent thirty feet wide overnight might by morning present only the creek bed and its familiar strip of sand, 'along which one might drive a buckboard and pair'. Droughts in that part of Queensland are counted when the spring and late autumn rains fail, and the former do so fairly frequently. The summer storms have failed only once in living memory, during the unforgotten '02. Before the country became pitted with tanks and dams, the drought-proof landholder was the one who understocked, but

The little man, if he is to do any good, must carry fairly heavily . . . We have more droughts than city folk realise. Not until the country is full of starving stock and harassed men do the papers mention the drought. The 'dry spells', as they are called, the stock-keeper fights without publicity.

Fred rolled himself a second cigarette, wiped the head of a wax vesta round its tip to protect his lips from the paper, struck the match along the serrations inside its little tin container—and inhaled a decision to explore the deserted outstation.

An idea of the class of cattle that had to be drafted and branded could be gained from the construction of the yards. The posts were cut out of tree trunks and were anything from twelve to fifteen inches in diameter. The rails, five in number, were stout four-inch pine spars, and the top rail was six feet from the ground. They don't do things for show in the bush, and one may be sure that the yard was given its weight and height because it was wanted.

The little place had a forlorn look, and even the grey myall trees, with their pendulous branches, seemed to pine for the romance of bygone days. It was not hard to people the homestead in imagination, dust swirling in the hot sunlight above the yards, smoke issuing from the chimney, the sound of horse bells in the timber, and men moving about.
But it was not to be long before Fred was actually helping to people it again and restore a little of its 'romance'. The outstation became the venue for dances attended by the settlers and the families of the western half of Mount Hutton.

Fred set off again towards the railway, through poorer country where the grasses were coarse and wiry, the timber straggly with a lot of bulloak, the soil 'clayey and gravelly' on the ridges, and in the gullies deep, loose sand. He was trudging wearily through the sand around mid-afternoon, hot, sweaty and thirsty, having seen no cattle and few signs of 'game' but wallabies, when he saw a horseman and a dog some distance away. The rider changed direction and approached for a chat. He was looking for two horses, missing since the previous Sunday when he was out with his wife and baby in the buckboard searching for sandalwood for fencing. The family had had to walk over seven miles home. He had searched for the horses every day since then and was thinking that they must have returned to where he had bought them, sixty miles away. He had selected before seeing the country, taken one of the smallest and 'got one of the best as a consequence'. The family had been on the block for three months. Fred was invited back for a meal; the selection was a mile from the dam where he began his tour that morning.

The settler's camp 'was a wonderful combination of canvas, sacks, galvanized iron, bark, and grass matting. It contained three 'rooms'—all under one roof, and the roof had as many unexpected gables as an old English farmhouse'. Flour bags, well stretched and used as walls, will turn the heaviest rain. When the billy boiled, Fred noticed that the settler's wife skimmed the scum off the water with a tablespoon before she made the tea. He 'had been doing a good deal of wondering' as to what Kitty would think of 'a lot of things in this rough part of the land'. The meal was cooked in a camp oven.

After tea, Fred was conducted to the boundary of the selection and pointed to where he had left his swag, twenty-five minutes' walk away into the setting sun. Darkness was closing in when he reached the dam, and his host was looking out for him. He was fixed up with a shakedown for the night, and after breakfast the following morning caught the construction train when it returned to Orallo for the weekend. The next train to Roma was not due out till Tuesday afternoon. Fred resigned himself to waiting, but he was awakened by the 'boarding house' proprietor in the darkness of Monday morning to be told of an unscheduled train just leaving.

At about eleven o'clock on that Monday morning, 28 July, he again presented himself at the Roma Land Office, where he was interviewed by the Land Agent for the district, R. W. G. Pitman, J.P. Sight unseen, from the map, he selected Portion 82, Parish of Injune, surveyed at a full 1280 acres. It lay on the north side of the road running westwards from Blue Lagoon, a little over two miles out past George Ferguson's corner peg. Among the subdivisions in the north-west of the settlement, many of which were only marginally smaller than the maximum acreage, the map showed 82 Injune to have several clear advantages. It contained three creeks and a watershed. Bluey Creek flowed through its northern end. Deep Creek, a tributary of the Bluey, ran down the broad shallow valley, and a small unnamed tributary of Deep Creek was shown to rise in its well-grassed plain.
between the dense bragalow and belah on the watershed rise near the road and the ridges in the north of 'Ironbark Bloodwood Box & Gum with Brigalow Belar & Wilga'. A concentrated study of that one and a quarter square inches of lithograph, well laced with fancy, hope, and perhaps the supportive salesmanship of a land office clerk, revealed another vital feature. Between Deep Creek and the hachured ridges to the north was the word 'well'. But it was part of the statement 'well grassed', the second word an inch away amid the lettering over Portion 83.

The map showed the portions in the southern part of the settlement, through part of which Fred's tour of inspection had been made, to be rather featureless, mostly waterless, and ten miles or more from the proposed new township around the Injune Creek railhead. Likewise, the large blocks in the far east of the settlement were at the maximum distance from the railway and their most practicable outlet would have been the ten-chain road past the Washpool that once linked the old head station to Roma. Portion 82 would be only seven miles from the new railway; no other block with water was so large and so close to the vital outlet for produce. Given the size of the dream, the reasoning was sound and percipient.

Pitman found it necessary to write a letter for Fred to sign, addressed to the Land Commissioner, Roma:

Sir

I beg to apply to have the terms of Section 2 of 'The Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act of 1917' extended to me.

I enlisted at Liverpool England & served with the Imperial Army for 4 years & 8 months & enclose herewith copy of my Dispersal Certificate.

I hold no other land.

I have lodged with the Land Agent at Roma application for Portion 82 parish of Injune and he received same 'Without prejudice'

I was born in Melbourne, Victoria & am 26 yrs of age

Yours faithfully

F. Davison

(full name: — Frederick Davison)

P.S. As I am anxious to get to work on this land I would be pleased if you would hasten this matter.

F. Davison

Fred spent Monday night at the Australian Hotel; and returned next day to the Land Office to be told that his application had been sent to Brisbane. He had no choice but to wait, idle in a strange town and unable to make any preparations until his application was confirmed. He decided to try reducing his delay by writing to the Under Secretary himself and asking him to wire approval. He sent two shillings to pay for the telegram.

The Lands Commissioner tells me that as my military service was with the English army my application requires special sanction.

I am a native-born Australian.

I am very anxious to get to work at once.

Could you wire to the Lands Commissioner at Roma your approval to my application.
Enclosed P.O. Order for reply.

My application was forwarded to you yesterday 28/7/19.

I am,

Yours Respectfully

He must have missed Tuesday's post, for the letter was not received in Brisbane until Friday, 1 August, by which time the answer to his first letter had already been sent. On Saturday morning, probably, he would have been handed a departmental memo addressed to him, dated 31 July, from A. G. Melville, the officer in charge of soldiers' settlement.

... I beg to inform you that as you served in the Imperial Army during the late war and received an honourable discharge, you are already a 'discharged soldier' within the meaning of the above Section. There is, consequently, no need to have the term specially extended to you, and you are eligible to select straight away under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act.

When a letter from the Department's accountant dated 4 August, returning his two-shilling postal note, arrived for him at the Australian Hotel, he had already left with his hired draught horse, his cart, and his brother.

He had tried to fire Douglas with some of his own elation at the good country he had seen, the fat stock, and all the good auguries for the projected partnership. In the evenings at the hotel he had chatted with old hands long settled in the district, some of whom had spoken highly of the areas now being opened up. Douglas, though interested, was unmoved; and Fred was disgusted.

I was surprised at the number of people who were quite indifferent to all the beautiful land which was to be had almost for the asking. I was more surprised to find that there were people who had doubts as to prospects that the land offered.

One man, a shearer—and an intelligent man—declared that he would not touch a selection with a forty foot pole. Another man, a scalper, expressed himself more forcibly: 'Me take up land! I don't think! You never seen no Queenslander taking up land: they ain't such dam fools. You'll see... most of the blokes'll be from Noo South and Vic.'

Fred could not have been wholly idle while he waited at Roma. He must have at least chosen the items he intended to purchase. As soon as he could, he bought a second-hand spring cart, 'an old one, built of seasoned spotted gum in the days when good workmanship was something to take pride in'. He must have bought a halter and harness, hobbles and a horse bell; a camp oven, a cross-cut saw, axe and grindstone, a fencing bar, more familiarly called a spud bar, and shovel for digging post holes, an auger for boring holes in the posts, a fencing wire strainer, a mattock and a couple of buckets. With the brothers' swags and provisions, the small two-wheeled cart must have been loaded high when they left.

The grocer's man, who helped us load up the tucker, wished us the best of luck, and generously stuffed half a dozen empty flour bags belonging to his boss in an odd corner of the vehicle. He said they might come in handy.
The publican’s daughter put a feed of chaff in the cart, in case they struck a bad camp. Provisions for themselves would have included a loaf of bread for the journey, at least one bag of flour with baking soda and cream of tartar for damper, tins of corned beef, packets of tea, tins of tobacco and matches, perhaps a few bottles of Cockatoo tomato sauce, and certainly some tins of ‘cocky’s joy’, or golden syrup. Whatever else they may have thought of, one thing is sure: it could not have been a balanced, nor even, for more than a few weeks, an adequate diet.

Fred hired a horse for the sixty mile trek north. Once the animal was harnessed and between the shafts, it became obvious that she was ‘accustomed to working with three or four horses on either side of her to keep her steady’. The tracks they left behind in the dust of the road out of Roma that Saturday morning ‘were far from straight’.

Doug had taken the reins. Once they were travelling easily along the bush road, Fred rolled a cigarette and gave himself up to the enjoyment.

But once they had entered the prickly pear belt, one of them had to keep alighting ‘to give a pound on the wheel’, for along the ridges the road was ‘cluttered with rocky outcrops’, and on the hillsides were ‘deep ruts and scars made by the torrential summer rain’ with sand deep and loose in the gullies. The mare was pulling a big load for a bad road, but she delighted the boys with ‘a trick of digging in her toes, humping her back, and scratching her way to the top’ of even the worst hills.

In the downhill pinches, where the road was rough and a sudden lurch might have resulted in a broken spring, she sat back in the britching and handled the weight behind her as gently as a mother would a perambulator.

They passed a small waterhole in the creek the road was following, but it was only mid-afternoon, so they decided not to camp yet but to press on and chance finding another hole. They began to regret their decision towards sunset when in all the sandy length of the creek bed neither of them saw any water, but their anxiety was suddenly relieved when Fred caught a flash of the setting sun in a puddle, like a speck of gold in a panning dish. They made camp close to the roadside because the pear was too thick elsewhere. Fred took the horse down to the water; then, with no other feed in sight, he spread out the gift of chaff on one of the empty flour bags. But ‘like most farm horses in this part of Queensland’ the mare ‘was unacquainted with hard feed’. She pushed it about with her muzzle, snorted twice, and that was the end of the chaff. Fred tied her bell round her neck, hobbled her, and left her ‘to choose between the pear and the fencing wire’.

Doug lit a fire and put on the billy. They discovered they had forgotten to buy a frying pan, so they wedged a tin plate between the prongs of a fork and fried their corned beef in that.

I enjoyed that first night’s camp as much as any school kid camping out during the holidays. The long drive had given us keen appetites, and a smoke afterwards, sprawling beside the fire, tasted good. The darkness shut out everything ugly. The silence, broken only by the tinkle of the
horse bell, the sweet cool air, the glow of the fire, the companionship, and the sense of adventure, were very pleasant.  

After we had turned in I lay looking up at the big stars through the pines and thought of many things. The kind of thoughts that do not come to a man while he lives in big cities. I had very little money, and a fair amount of responsibility, and I was about to tackle a big job; the details of which were to me as the pages of an unopened book. But as I looked forward to the days to come, there came to me a feeling of deep joy. The kind that does not leave a nasty taste in the mouth next morning. Instead it was the kind that takes much longer to leave a nasty taste.

At first light they were out of their blankets, shivering, and lighting the fire again. By ten o’clock they had left the pear country behind, and at noon they passed through Orallo, where a race meeting was in progress. But they had no time to stop. They reached the belt of cabbage gum country around three o’clock and Fred discovered that red sand which helped to create the wealth of blending and contrasting colours was soft and deep, so that the loaded cartwheels bogged ‘halfway to the nave’. They both walked, Fred leading the horse and Doug ‘some distance away out of reach of the dust, which billowed up like smoke guns around the horse’s feet and the wheels’.

There was no breeze to carry it away, and we moved along in a red choking cloud.

Twenty yards at a time was about the best the horse could do, and she needed a good spell in between. Owing to the lack of feed at the previous camp she was not in the best heart for the work. They would have camped, but the next water determined the length of their day’s journey, and it was sundown before they reached the point on the track which was nearest to the springs two miles away. They camped beside the track and Fred led the mare to the water to save her drawing them and the cart an extra four miles. That night, having eaten the last of their baker’s bread, they baked damper in the camp oven.

There was probably one more night’s camp before they reached the selection, for the road continued deep with dust and there was a slow but unnoticeable climb of three hundred feet from Roma up into the Great Dividing Range. When they left the railway to strike out towards the north-west, they found the road from Blue Lagoon had been cleared ‘sixteen feet wide and as straight as an avenue’. It gave them great satisfaction to turn the mare’s head and bowl ‘merrily along this thoroughfare’, especially when Fred realised that they were thus saved the task of blazing their own track from the selection to the railway. But their satisfaction was short lived, for after about a mile the road came to a dead end in a patch of sandalwood scrub. Douglas walked ahead and returned with the information that a deep gully lay across their route about a hundred yards away. It was the first of the road’s two crossings of Bluey Creek and one of those unfinished cuttings that had provoked Ranger Watson’s protest five months earlier, that the roads were ‘practically useless as a means of inspection’.

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Fred steered a way through the scrub while Doug searched for the best crossing. After a good look at the gully we had our doubts of getting across. There was a gutter in the bottom with almost vertical sides; just about deep enough to shake a new spring cart to pieces. He was thankful theirs had the strength of an old, well-crafted one. He kept the mare back in the breeching to the last inch of level ground, then held his breath and let her go. They hit the bottom with a bump that rattled his teeth; but before the cart could settle in the rough soil, she was into the collar. She humped her back and grunted. Nothing moved, so ‘she humped a bit more and grunted again’ and they came out of the gutter. Once out of their difficulty, the brothers discovered that their own faces ‘were all screwed up in sympathetic tension’. Less than a mile further on, they conquered the second creek crossing, then headed through the scrub until they struck a bush track that led them in their general north-westerly direction.

From the general course of the track, we concluded that it was leading us to a hut and a waterhole which was marked on the map. A half hour’s drive proved this to be the case. The hut and waterhole would have been those on the tongue of Portion 95 that crossed the road to the bank of Bluey Creek; and there camped George Ferguson, his brother Alec, his son Wally, and his wife. George and Alec ‘were men of over sixty years, which is a fair age to begin belting into virgin forest’; but on that occasion, according to Fred’s later account, they met only Alec Ferguson. He apparently gave the vaguest ambiguous information and left the Davisons to follow the course of the creek, one of them walking ahead with an axe to clear a way for the cart.

It was early afternoon when we reached a gully too deep to cross and impossible to go around . . . The brigalow grew about forty feet high and stood as thick as hair on a dog’s back.

They had failed to locate the survey boundaries of the blocks they had been crossing, so they could only guess at their location. Tired and hungry, they agreed to unharness on a narrow strip between the scrub and the creek and, after a meal, walk to the selection ‘and pick the best vehicular route coming back for the horse and cart afterwards’. They blazed two trees to commemorate the camp and set off. Fred was still in high spirits.

This was something I had been looking forward to for years. I was experiencing the feelings of a boy waking up on Christmas morning. The long-looked-for day had arrived and I was anxious to know what I should find in my stocking.

The man, not the boy, was simply anxious. He was beginning to perceive the folly of selecting sight unseen, yet suppressed with his euphoria the knowledge that was, within days, to confront him ineluctably.

I had inspected a good deal of the country in the locality, but I had selected off the map. This I learned later was done in several other cases, but on the whole it is a very unsafe procedure. Land was just land to me in those days, and I was so crazy to possess a piece of land that I would have taken up a selection in Hades—supposing that place were thrown
open for settlement. I had land hunger, a disease that has brought a lot of otherwise sensible people to grief. Meanwhile, they were delighted with the abundance of sandalwood for fencing. Doug estimated that they were on Portion 83 and Fred found the blazed survey line between that selection and his own.

After inspection we were well pleased with the place. It was 1280 acres in area, approximately a mile wide by two miles deep. They followed up both the water courses, but failed to find any water. Unless they could find a supply, they realised, they would have to camp at Ferguson's, with a four-mile walk to and from work every day, 'not a pleasant prospect'. They started back towards their camp and passed a place where the banks of the creek were exceptionally steep.

I thought it worth while to go and have a look. To our pleasure there was a small pot-hole in the bottom containing perhaps three or four hundred gallons of fluid—one would hardly call it water—of about the same consistency as the Mississippi during the spring thaw. Someone had camped there previously: the water was surrounded by a fence of stakes driven into the ground to prevent wild animals from exhausting the supply. The brothers were not over-particular about its quality, for it seemed to be the solution to their difficulties. They shook hands and danced round the hole.

A mounted scalper with half a dozen dead possums hanging from his saddle approached the waterhole and exchanged greetings. He told the wayfarers that the surveying party had camped at the hole, and explained with a grin that they had made a track all the way from the end of the road. He was camped near Ferguson's himself; and although it was growing late he offered to show them the track back to where they had left the cart.

It was almost dark when he landed the brothers safely on their own selection and 'declining to wait for a meal, rode off through the gathering darkness'. They soon had the billy on a roaring fire that brought warmth and vitality to the still, frosty night. They sat beside the fire on upturned kerosene tins, their plates balanced on their knees. 'The exertions of the day gave a sweet savour to the meal' and the smell of burning eucalypt brought back to Fred 'a flood of half-forgotten recollections'. And when 'the tiresome business of feeding' was finished, they lay down beside the fire and smoked and yarned. Later, rolled in their blankets on the ground, Fred reflected, during the minutes before pulling his blankets up to his chin and sleeping a satisfied sleep, how good it was to have work done today and more to do tomorrow.

It was good to lie for a few minutes watching the shadows in their fantastic dances on the outer edge of the firelight, and up at the electric-blue stars, which shine so bright and appear so close in this dry atmosphere that it seems one might knock the biggest of them down with a stick.

He also found it good 'to lie thinking awhile of the present and the future', wondering how Kitty and 'the little one' were getting along, 'and how long it would be before a home was ready for them here'. To fulfil his promise he would have, from the morrow, all of three weeks to get it ready.
For three months, living with her in-laws in Sydney, Kitty endured the waiting, chafing against the knowledge that all the time she had known her husband she seemed to have spent waiting for him. His letters made no mention of her joining him, and her father-in-law insisted that she must await her husband’s summons. She contemplated her unknown adopted country, failed to imagine its immensity and, emancipating herself in the teeth of two generations of Freds, she finally made up her mind, late in October 1919, that a wife’s place was at her husband’s side, no matter where he chose to be nor what adversity he chose to endure. Surely, she told herself, the journey could be no more arduous than travelling up to Scotland.

Faced with a will at least the equal of his own, Dad at last withdrew his opposition. He even put her safely on the train at Central Station, pressing some money into her hand as he did so. ‘That will help to pay for your meals’, he said. ‘And remember this. There is no tipping in this country.’ Kitty, with her thanks, murmured something about not needing so much money; not, she thought, for a couple of meals or so. Dad was making her feel like a disobedient child.

She settled into her seat at the window with her own child, now just over a year old, on her lap, the Moses basket at her feet. She observed that the first-class car was dirty, ‘which made me wonder what the third class would be like’. Beyond the window was no familiar sight. She was overtaken by homesickness and then by tears. But she pulled herself together with the thought of her responsibilities to Doris Mary, and cheered herself up with the thought of the family reunion; though she was sure that if Fred had known of her intention, he would have forbidden it.

She ignored Dad’s admonition about tipping and found the guards on the trains ‘both helpful and comforting’.

There was always milk and food for Doris Mary, and throughout the long journey our personal comforts were always attended to . . . When I left the train at Roma and said goodbye to the guard, I felt that I had left a good and faithful friend behind . . .

On arrival at Roma, Kitty remembered the first address on Fred’s letters from Roma and nominated the King George Hotel to a man who took them and their
substantial amount of luggage to a building in darkness. 'You wait there, Missus, till I wake someone up to look after you.'

A man with a lantern appeared and led her into a darkened room. She asked for a bath and warm milk for her baby. 'Sorry, Missus. The fire's out and cook's gone home. Breakfast seven-thirty sharp'. As soon as she could she found her way to the kitchen and asked to be allowed to prepare her baby's food. The kitchen was hot and 'reeked of fried onions'. The cook, a woman of 'no more than thirty', with a yellowing complexion and lank, bedraggled hair, spoke to Kitty almost savagely. 'You're English, aren't you?' she declared. 'And how long do you think you're going to keep that complexion? How long do you think you're going to look like that, with droughts and no water and all?'

The dining room contained one long table around which about twenty men were breakfasting, most of them 'lanky, leathery bushmen'. Kitty discovered that she was staying at a working men's pub, and that she was the only woman staying there. She found a place made for her at the head of the table. The guard had told her she had 'just missed' the weekly train to Orallo, so she must have arrived on a Saturday, as Fred had done. It could have been 1 November. She resigned herself to staying at the King George for five more nights, and during that time she became friends with the cook. In the cool of the evenings, sitting on the verandah slapping at mosquitoes, she learnt to play euchre with the men. 'A blackfellow's game, Missus.' She also observed with amusement how her table companions started arriving at meals with their jackets on, and freshly shaved. And they always passed up the condiments to the head of the table before using them.

The journey to Orallo was hot and dusty, but Kitty was inspired by the thought that she was almost at journey's end. She was tired and hungry when she alighted from the train and, with Doris Mary in her arms, took stock of her surroundings. Not a house or hotel was visible. A man working nearby directed her to a bark humpy known as Anthony Hordern's. 'That's Dave Wills's place', she was told. 'You tell him what you want and he'll fix you up, Missus.'

Kitty walked over, introduced herself, and announced her errand. 'My baby and I are very tired', she explained. 'I do want to get to my husband as quickly as possible. Could you please tell me where I can get a taxi?'

On the morning of their first day on the selection, the brothers Davison had risen before sun-up.

'We had plenty to do. The first job was to build a bark hut. A bark hut is very easy building to erect under certain conditions, but the history of this selection... is one of a succession of small blunders.4

They agreed on a site and, with the necessary poles cut and carried to it, they erected the frame with ties of fencing wire and set about stripping bark to cover it. But they had not allowed for the drought. There was no moisture between the bark and the wood so that when they tried to strip the bark 'it stuck tighter than a stamp on an envelope'. After trying 'a dozen or more trees' they decided that 'the completing of the shanty would have to wait until rain had fallen'. A great deal
happened over the three months before Kitty's arrival, but none of it was rain. Roma received sixty-two points.

With the humpy abandoned, they turned in the afternoon to fencing.

The first operation was cutting posts. There was a patch of sandalwood near the camp and we made a start on that.

They started at top speed, and at the end of two hours were out of breath and 'as limp as dishcloths'.

This business of going on the land was more than I had bargained for. If I was to feel like this after two hours' work, would the time ever come when I could stand up to it all day? I thought of the miles of fencing to be erected. The hundreds of acres of trees to be ringbarked! The buildings to be erected! I looked at my arms—and wondered where it was all to come from.

Tuesday, 6 August, was the day of the monthly sitting of the Land Commissioner's Court in Roma. Among the applicants for Perpetual Lease Selections accepted to await formal ratification and licensing in due course by the state Land Court were those for Portions 82 Injune (F. Davison) and 21 Injune (I. V. Kirilloff). Portion 21, a block of 693 acres, on the north-western edge of the proposed township, containing a permanent waterhole on Injune Creek. It was one of the most desirable allotments in the whole settlement, but had been earmarked as a camping and trucking reserve and withheld from selection. Then it was thrown open unexpectedly and a ballot among the applicants was held at the Land Office. The winning marble was drawn by Chloe Kirilloff, the wife of a Roma general store keeper. The couple were Russian immigrants: 'Jack' Kirilloff enlisted at the outbreak of war and contracted rheumatic fever in the training camp at Brisbane. He was discharged after six months' service, but qualified to be a returned soldier.

The lease of Portion 21 was one of those conditional on residence, so Jack left Chloe to wind up the business in Roma and send up the line the things he found he needed and anything she failed to sell. Jack was thirty-five, and destined for a few years of local distinction such that the waterhole on Portion 21 became known, and remained known, as Kirilloff's waterhole. It lay in the path of anyone taking the short cut between the township reserve and the northward bend of the road to the Carnarvons, or between the proposed railhead and the old homestead; and Kirilloff's camp became a point of rest and yarn and refreshment. If a wayfarer asked for a plug of tobacco and Jack happened to have one with him, he could not refuse to sell it. The bush telegraph soon carried the intelligence that Jack had been a shopkeeper and still had access to supplies that were otherwise beyond the settlers' reach. As the demand increased, so did the rangejack was required to ask Chloe to send up the line. Before long, his tent was filled with boxes and the settlement had its first universal supplier. There was no liquor licence within sixty miles and Jack Kirilloff is remembered in the district to this day as a seller of sly grog.

When the Davison brothers ran low in provisions, Fred would have written to Roma for them, probably paying by cheque. Until they could afford a horse of their own, they probably prevailed upon a neighbour, such as George Ferguson, to
collect their parcel whenever he happened to be driving the slowly decreasing distance to the advancing railhead. But there must have been times when they miscalculated their rate of consumption and ran out of something desperately needed, like tobacco or matches, so that the quickest way to satisfaction was to take half a day off and walk ten miles to Kirilloff's and ten miles back. Fifty years later Davison denied that he bought alcohol from Kirilloff's—or anywhere else.

I was completely enthusiastic. The day was never long enough for me. I can get drunk on work—never thought of grog in those days. 5

The brothers found ways of augmenting their sack of corned beef with fresh meat and the aid of Doug's pea rifle. Fred experienced the usual shame on the first few occasions of intimacy with the bungled killing of a wounded creature: haunted afterwards by the colours of a screaming parrot defying death and its slaughterers, sickened when a joey found alive in a dead doe's pouch had to be dispatched because they had no milk to rear it.

I suppose I am a bit squeamish in this matter. I have seen some of bloodshed and have been uncomfortably close to the gates of Kingdom Come myself on occasions. Theoretically, that should make a man callous. In practice, I find it does the opposite.

The parrot never took part in a pie, but the kangaroo provided steaks for Sunday's breakfast once it had been laboriously borne back to camp bouncing about on a shouldered sapling.

We tried walking with the sapling on opposite shoulders to each other; we tried walking in step and we tried walking out of step. We tried to ease our aching collar bones with the philosophical reflection that 'hard work ain't easy', and I think the recognition of that obvious truth did us more good than all our manoeuvring. It was after dark when we stumbled into camp.

Fred was the baker in the partnership and Doug the cook. They sat back to back and in a complex silence when they waged their first experience with kangaroo meat.

I liked the taste, really, and the meat was very tender, but my imagination was troubling me and from certain indications I then experienced I have reason to believe the seat of the imagination is the pit of the stomach—sometimes it moved rapidly up to the back of the throat, but by pausing with the knife in one hand and the fork in the other, and my eyes fixed on a knot in a tree opposite, and by the exercise of great self-control I found I could arrest its movement at that point. I did so several times.

Fred finished and hastened off for a walk round the selection alone, not returning until nearly noon. He followed the boundary over the ridge and down to the northern arm of Bluey Creek. The ridge between the two creeks was one of the highest points in the locality, commanding 'a splendid view of the surrounding bushland—timbered hill and valley and open grassy plain in one direction, in the other a broad sweep of dense scrub, and the precipitous bluff of Mount Hutton, 'with the low wall of the Great Dividing Range on either side of it'. The dry air was so clear 'the individual trees on the top of the mountain eight miles away were
clearly visible'. He could see Douglas with his back to a tree, reading; he could even hear the horse bell. By this time, they must have acquired John Willie, their solitary saddle horse.

What more could a man desire? Morbid fears concerning my breakfast vanished in the midst of all this sunlit glory. He dropped down the side of the ridge, passing through a belt of scrub, and then crossed a well-grassed flat to follow the creek up to the western boundary ‘hoping to find a further supply of water’. Walking became laborious because of waist-high grass, thick and tangled. At the western boundary he turned again and climbed once more to the ridge, the sides of which were timbered, chiefly with ironbark. He observed with pleasure the delicate colour of the foliage and black twisted tracery against the deep blue of the sky, then halted on top of the ridge to refresh himself in the cool breeze.

I am a bit of a crank on scenery, but after inspecting the selection I think I have become the proprietor of something more substantial than a good view. When he reached camp again, he was tired, thirsty, and surprised to find himself eager for some more kangaroo steak.

Fencing continued to occupy their working hours, but it was on walks like this one that Fred was confronted by the variety of the tasks lying ahead of him: building, ringbarking, damming, burning; all of them incidental to running stock and none a source of income.

After about a month of fencing, they agreed they would have an easy day. We’d have a burn and let the fire work while we had an easy day. On the flats the grass was so tall and heavy that a shovel would stand up against it while we were using the fencing bar.

The wind was in the east, so the fire would be borne away towards the mountain. They set the grass alight ‘and the fire went off in great style, the flames sweeping along, licking the grass up and leaving the bare, black, smouldering earth behind’. They walked around for about half an hour, enjoying the steady pace of the fire as it ate its way through the wall of grass. The yellow flame and its cloud of white smoke held an irresistible aesthetic fascination. Then a stiffer breeze sprang up, ‘probably created by the fire itself’, and ‘the voice of the fire took on a new tone’. It hissed and crackled in the fan of the wind, gathering speed and alarming the tyros. Great sheets of flame flapped forward, bent, and licked up several square yards of grass at a time. Also it was spreading out on the flanks. The smoke grew denser and took on an angry hue on the lower side.

We got alarmed. The fire was certainly travelling away from the settlement, but it was working towards the range—and beyond the range lay the cattle stations, with hundreds of square miles of grass as dry as tinder.

Fred broke down a sapling and began slapping at the burning grass. After following the line of the fire for a chain or so, he looked back and found that the flames had burst out again.
With everything so dry, the least bit of red ash left after the flames were beaten out flared up as soon as it was touched by the breeze. Under the heat of the sun and above the heat of the ground, he began to put more effort into the work. Some distance away through the smoke, he saw Doug thrashing away with a sapling, too. They were working up the valley that carried Deep Creek, calculating that the creek would act as a fire break along one flank and if they worked along the other they might keep the fire down to a narrow front so that it would eventually burn itself out.

The flank was along the sides of the ridges, and down on the flat we could hear the flames crackling. For a few moments the noise would be loud, but steady; then a puff of breeze would come along—just a little breeze, hardly enough to flutter a piece of paper, but its effect could be gauged by the ravenous roar of the flames. A puff of wind a little more vigorous, and the fire leapt forward in a way that was alarming . . .

Blackened and sweating and choking, we half shut our eyes to the stinging smoke and thrashed away for all we were worth. On the ridges the grass was not so thick, so they managed to hold their own, but only by standing up to heat, sweat and smoke till they were ready to drop.

When we could face it no longer, we withdrew to the clearer air and stood panting in the shade. We had no hopes of being able to put the fire out.

We were both as black as charcoal, sweat-streaked, singed, and trembling with our exertions; but the enemy was still active. As soon as we saw the flame leaping to life again we had to tear down more saplings and go back to it . . .

At last, about mid-afternoon, they flung down their beaters, beaten. Wearily, they fell on to a fallen log to watch the fire still racing on. Fred confessed later that by then he 'did not care if the fire swept over half the state'. Plodding back to camp across the blackened ground, the boys comforted each other with assurances of the benefit they would receive when the fresh new grass came up. Their experience had led them to underestimate the effects of a single match in the dry parts of Queensland in September.

All that night the fire continued on its journey towards the range. It looked very fine in the dark. The flames climbed up the hollows of the dead trees and poured out of the ends of the short, broken limbs, and from the top of the ridges the burning timber appeared like the lights of a city lying in the valley.

Most of the timber was very hollow, the older trees being mere shells surrounding a 'pipe' perhaps two feet in diameter. When fire gets into them the heated air rises and sucks the cool air up after it, so that the flames roar upwards and pour out from the top as from a blast furnace.

Lying in camp that night we could hear half a dozen around us, and every once in a while the crash and the tremble as some big fellow, burnt through at the butt, toppled to the ground.

Next morning the fire was slackening a little, and about midday it met
a patch of sandy, thinly grassed country and burnt itself out.

The logs and debris smouldered for a week after, and for several days we were saved the trouble of lighting the camp fire—we could get a shovelful of red ashes in a score of places.

There were doubtless other activities, besides the burnoff adventure, that led Fred to the discovery that leisure could not be won by varying the work on the selection; instead he made time to turn his now well-calloused hands to the other occupation nearest his divided heart. Perhaps he set part of each Sunday aside for it; on other days there could have been the post-prandial midday spell and the hour before retreating into his bedding roll and the innocent sleep of physical fatigue. At such times he might have taken a ten-by-eight, feint-ruled pad of notepaper from a safe corner of the springcart, a stub of blunt pencil from his pocket and, settling himself on the ground with a fallen log at his back—probably after dark, in the light of a hurricane lamp—fashion his tidy but unformed calligraphy into lines strained like fencing wire: the lines of what he dearly hoped were poems.

It may well have been in those weeks, with his wife and child still a thousand miles away, that Fred produced some verses on a theme that was to obsess him for the rest of his days. He conceived, a kind of inverse god: a dog with the soul of a domesticated hunter, a crossbred dog by kelpie out of dingo from a chance encounter. This guardian of Davison’s essential secret, symbol of his personal underworld, 7 first manifested itself as ‘The Warrigal’, nine six-line stanzas which, despite their trite and derivative diction, remain instinct with some essence of nights when their author lay on the primal earth under Sirius in a reflective silence broken only by the howl of a solitary dingo.

In the vast, dim dome the still stars hung
Like silver lamps in a network strung;
All was still, for the homestead slept,
But the warrigal dog in the stable kept
A wakeful watch, for he heard a call
That held his pagan heart in thrall.

A servant of men his sire had been—
Born to cringe; and plain to be seen
On the warrigal’s hide, the slaveblood’s trace,
The markings white of a bonded race;
And down in his most inmost heart there ran
A fear of the master voice of man.

But his dingo dam had given to him
A temper, stern and fierce and grim;
And freedom’s blood through his veins did surge,
Like the wild sea-songs of the ocean verge;
And oft he heard the bushland call
Him back to his tribe in the ranges tall.
SETTLEMENT

He lay low crouched, and he listened to hear
The people of midnight passing near—
The nomad breezes’ eerie mirth,
The wild geese, winging low to the earth,
And the solo sweet of the lone curlew
Came like a summons and thrilled him through.

Soon, from the silence, faint, yet clear,
A tribesman’s hunt song reached his ear,
His fear of man was all forgot,
And out of the stable door he shot—
Across the paddocks, a shadow fleet,
Skimming along on pattering feet.

The wheat blades rustled and swayed and bent,
As down through the standing crop he went,
Drinking deep, his lungs he filled
With tonic earth scents, dew distilled;
With muzzle low he burst from the grain,
Tasting the joys of the hunt again.

He bayed as he entered the bushland dim,
And called the shades of his tribe to him;
O’er star-cooled spur and though gullies rank
The ghost pack ran with him, flank to flank—
Dogs long dead, but who hunted again
With the savage half of his mingled strain.

He ran that night by swamp and hill,
Till he found his quarry and made his kill,
And his blood-thirst slaked—he drank full deep—
He stole away in the scrub to sleep,
Till the feeble light of the aged moon
Foretold that dawn was coming soon.

With the cold advent of the clear, white day
His primitive glories passed away,
Return, he must, to the homestead gate—
A warrigal caught in the snares of Fate—
With telltale stains on fang and lip,
To cringe at the fall of the scourging whip.

From the beginning of 1919, the Queensland Government had raised the bonus payable for dingo scalps by boards constituted in dingo districts from five shillings to one pound to encourage destruction of the pest. In his deep empathy for all creaturekind, Fred must have drunk ‘full deep’ of the meaning of the war against the dingo as he felt himself identified with the ‘warrigal caught in the snares of Fate’.

And before very long, against all the defiance of his own dingo nature, he
himself was obliged to cringe at the fall of another whip, the scourge of thirst. While the absence of rain deferred both shelter and their need of it, the two daily gallons of black tea consumed by the brothers, and their other needs, like washing after firefighting, soon exhausted the little fenced waterhole. So when, on 14 October, Fred caught the Tuesday train from Orallo and went again to Roma, he surrendered his licence to the selection on the same day that he collected it. His application had been formally approved by the Land Court on 8 October and the licence signed a week later by R.W.G. Pitman, now the Deputy Land Commissioner. Probably on the suggestion of Ranger Watson, who would have called on Fred and Doug during their first weeks on the selection, Fred sought the advice of the officer in charge of soldiers' settlement, a man named Rose, then installed at Roma. He applied for one of the blocks exclusively reserved for soldiers' settlement in the Parish of Gunnewin: Portion 13, with an area one rood less than 1277 acres, on the eastern side of the railway. It is not easy to deduce what made it so desirable. It was well grassed with small open plains and brown soil amid dense brigalow. A watershed ridge ran from the north to south across the middle of it, so perhaps it offered several sites suitable for tanks. It lay about five miles across country from the Gunnewin township reserve, and its north boundary lay along the east-west three-chain road less than three miles from the railway and a bore. Once again, Pitman wrote out a letter for Fred to sign. He gave his address as 'c/o Mr George Ferguson, Bluey Creek, Mount Hutton', which suggests that the Davison brothers had walked off their block and were camped with their possessions at Ferguson's waterhole. The letter was addressed to the Land Commissioner, Roma.

Sir,

I beg you ask that portion 13 parish of Gunnewin be allotted to me under The Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act.

I have this day surrendered P.L.S. 4921 Roma District on account of the water having given out & it being nine miles from water.

I had a conversation with Mr Rose, Controller of Soldier Settlements & he had no objection to the surrender being registered. I would point out that I served in the Imperial Army & therefore get no sustenance from the Commonwealth as do those men who served with the A.I.F. I have to depend on my own work for a livelihood.

The inevitable postscript added: 'Please advise me without delay if this portion is allotted to me'. Pitman signed a footnote for the Under Secretary confirming that the applicant's 'honourable dispersal certificate' had been produced once more. Fred was also required to sign a Certificate of Qualification to Apply for Land, certified by Pitman; and his request was supported by a telegram to Brisbane sent at eleven thirty-five the same morning, 16 October. The same day a reply was wired back.

THIRTEEN GUNNEWIN NOT AVAILABLE.
ALLOCATED PORTER DISCHARGED SOLDIER

On 22 October, a letter confirming the fact was sent from Brisbane to Fred at Ferguson's address.
Fred must have returned to the settlement, technically landless, and remained there for another five weeks before filing another application. How was he occupied in the meantime? Further work on Portion 82 would have been pointless. It was reopened for selection on 20 November and gazetted two days later, eventually to be allotted to W. G. Davis, whose application was lodged on 29 January 1920.

What probably happened was that Pitman offered Fred some kindly paternal advice, suggesting that he return to work on another vacant block in the locality he already knew and a little nearer a water supply; then to consider putting down a tank in time for the summer rains. If, once he had the feel of the place, he still wanted to select, it would be held in reserve for him and he could fill in a new application form which Pitman gave him, get his signature independently witnessed, and post it to the Land Office when he was ready. Perhaps Pitman or a member of the Land Office staff suggested Portion 84 in June; perhaps Watson had recommended it; perhaps Fred had observed it for himself as he walked across it down the Bluey to Ferguson’s waterhole, less than a mile on. It was a portion of 1234.4 acres, and it contained the confluence of Bluey and Deep Creeks.

Work on the new selection probably proceeded much more casually than before, since the application had yet to be filed. The brothers were still waiting for rain so that bark could be removed from trees for a humpy. The rainfall in Roma for October was nine points. No doubt they cut a few fence posts which could have been transported to another selection if necessary, and Fred may have dug postholes and ringbarked some brigalow scrub to keep his hands hard and his muscles trim. Doug, made of less tenacious stuff, a minor charged with a borrowed vision and easily disillusioned, probably slackened off as the mounting light of reality removed the last appealing shadows of the dream, and in his private thoughts he turned once more towards the city.

The brothers were getting to know each other again for the first time in nine or ten years: as the weeks passed and time hung heavier on their hands they sat no longer back to back at meals, no longer stood shoulder to shoulder at work. Face to face, Doug must have endured the disintegration of a more personal illusion, a dream of his own which proved as insubstantial as his big brother’s. Freddie was not the model of manly virtues, not the exemplary paragon, that their parents had so often presented to him. He could err, he could hold convinced opinions which were subsequently proved wrong; he could be foolish, irascible, moody, violent, and although his sense of humour came often to his own rescue, his young brother was at best ambivalently amused by the comic clay feet of the idol that had been thrust upon him. They disagreed; argued; quarrelled; maybe they even fought.

The experience of a raw selection may well have been as destructively traumatic for Douglas as it had proved to be creatively traumatic for Fred.

Fred elected to walk each day before sundown with two kerosene tins to Ferguson’s waterhole.

It was no light task, that water carrying. Each tin, when full, weighed forty pounds, the wire handles cut into his hands, the sun was hot, the sweat got into his eyes and the flies walked on his face.
When the downward drag of the water began to send hot shoots up his arms, he would fix on a spot some distance ahead—a tree, or bush, or stone—and make that his temporary objective. Arrived at the point agreed on, with tins beginning to bang against his legs and slop water down his pants, he would rest.\(^9\)

When Ferguson’s cows came into milk, the Davisons also had milk in their tea, and Fred probably added a billy of it to his burden. It was on such walks, and when he stood ‘with his hat pushed back and flexing his fingers to ease their numbness’,\(^{10}\) that he contemplated the sunset over Hutton’s tabletop, and considered the best site for his tank, which would release him from the labour with the four-gallon cans. But the tank could not be sunk until there had been enough rain to refill the waterholes for the tank sinkers’ horses.

On those walks, too, he learnt to read the signs of a herd of wild scrub cattle, ‘the story of their comings and goings in their tracks along the bush pads’.\(^{11}\) They were the scrubbers, that lived in the ranges and drank from the settlement waterholes.

The old bullocks, their hoofs splayed with weight and years, used to leave tracks as big as dinner plates. The red cow—I have an image of her flashing into cover of the belah scrub—was in the prime of life, a wild and lovely creature.\(^{12}\)

Though he saw the scrubbers on many occasions, the image of the red cow remained with him all his life, as vivid as an unattained desire, even when he knew he was dying.

One afternoon at sundown, ending his half-hour walk to the waterhole, Fred entered Ferguson’s camp for the milk and was invited into Ferguson’s shack to find Kitty drinking tea there. Doris Mary was on the mud floor in her Moses basket. After Dave Wills had finished laughing through the opening in his humpy wall at Kitty’s request for a taxi, he explained that the locals wouldn’t know a taxi if they saw one, and saved up the tale for gossip to his customers. Kitty’s request was a joke among the settlers for as long as she was known to them. She was told she would have to wait for Jack O’Donohue and his buckboard. ‘When he’s loaded up, he’ll take you, Missus.’ But that would not be till tomorrow or the next day; meanwhile, Mrs Dougherty at the boarding house would look after her. Kitty was offered a meal there and Mrs Dougherty drew up to the bare table an empty kerosene case, and invited her to sit down. ‘Just plain bush tucker, Missus’, said this large woman with her hair in a long red plait down her back. ‘The train only comes here once a week with supplies’. She served cold corned beef on a chipped enamel plate with boiled pumpkin, which Kitty had never tasted before. Kitty also got her first taste of damper and cocky’s joy, washed down with tea from an enamel mug. Mrs Dougherty kindly took Doris Mary off Kitty’s hands—until Kitty saw her take the dummy out of her own baby’s mouth and give it to Doris Mary. Kitty was outraged. This was carrying bush hospitality too far! Any dummy was bad enough, but another child’s! She paid for her meal and took herself and her baby off to report the incident to Dave Wills and ask if there was another guest house. With an amused and knowing look, he directed her to another tent, the one in which the railway bosses stayed. At least the table had a
cloth on it and the floor some goatskin rugs. She was given a bed, but was awakened during the night by something poking about beneath her. It was only a goat looking for somewhere to sleep.

With daybreak came Jack O'Donohue, and when he was ready to depart, Dave Wills performed introductions. With a bow he said: 'Your taxi, Madam. And I wish you a safe journey.' After a cup of black tea sitting on a box in O'Donohue's camp, they set off. From time to time, as the day grew hotter, they pulled up to deliver mail and offload provisions to men who were waiting at the roadside. At last Jack pulled up in the shade of some trees to rest the horses, leaving Kitty while he walked over to a tent in the distance to try to get some milk for her baby. He returned with milk and biscuits, and for his hungry, unbreakfasted passenger some 'leathery corned beef' and the staple cocky's joy and damper. When in the late afternoon he delivered her at George Ferguson's, he shook hands on parting. 'Good luck, Missus. Look out for them dingoes and goannas. I enjoyed your company.'

Kitty found Ferguson's shack comfortable compared with the guest house tents, but still there was only a box to sit on. Weary and almost in tears, she drank some tea with fresh milk and cream in it and Mrs Ferguson prepared food for Doris Mary.

Mr Ferguson explained that my husband was camped a little way up the creek and always came down about five o'clock for his milk and was he expecting to see us?

The sun was almost down and I was getting anxious and a little nervous when I heard Mr Ferguson say, 'Come and see what I have inside'. And there was Fred on the doorway. My heart missed a beat as he looked at us with a not-too-pleased expression . . . couldn't say anything, for I thought I would burst into tears if I did. Then his expression changed from annoyance to pleasure as he picked up Doris Mary and came towards me. Then he looked from me to baby and back again and his face broadened to a great big grin.13

He sat down on a box and took his daughter on his knee. Mrs Ferguson made him a cup of tea and invited them to a meal. It was one that Kitty enjoyed. There was even dessert, and in anticipation of it Kitty pushed her finished plate to one side. 'We don't do that in the bush', George Ferguson explained in a kindly tone. 'We have just one plate and for the next course we turn it upside down'.

Their hospitality was such that Kitty grew eager to reach the end of her ten-day journey and settle among the homely comforts of her own place. She had left all her luggage but three suitcases at Orallo to await a train to the railhead. Now they left two of them with the Fergusons and set off, Fred with a small suitcase in one hand and Doris Mary proudly on the other arm, Kitty the billy of milk and the gift of a mug of cream. After they had walked for a while, Fred stopped. 'Well', he said, 'here we are'. But all Kitty could see was an upturned cart. 'Doris Mary can sleep in her basket', said Fred, 'you can have my old army sleeping bag, and I'll just sleep on Mother Earth. You give Baby her milk and whatever she's supposed to eat and get her into bed while I make a fire and put the
billy on and then we can have a yarn over a cup of tea.' But where could she warm the milk? Kitty wondered. How could she wash the baby before putting her to bed? There were some arrowroot biscuits in her suitcase and she soaked them in some milk in an enamel mug of Fred's before giving them, and the milk, to the baby. Fred hung the billy over the fire from a wire hook suspended from a cross bar supported by two forked twigs stuck into the ground, and over their tea they talked into the night of herds and homesteads, possessions and prosperities, journeys back to England and Mrs Jelly's returning to stay with them. By the time Kitty had settled into Fred's sleeping bag, he was asleep on the ground beside her. When she awoke, Fred had the fire lit and a mug of tea for her. He had even brought the other two suitcases up from Ferguson's and borrowed a large galvanised bowl in which his womenfolk could wash. He introduced her to a muddy waterhole near their camp and warned her about wasting water. It was all they had, he explained, until it rained. Breakfast was cocky's joy and damper, with warm milk and biscuits for Doris Mary.

Fred went off to work up the creek and left Kitty to bathe her baby, then sponge herself down by standing in the same bowl of water. Taking stock of their provisions, she found plenty of flour in a large bag, a good supply of sugar and tea, large tins of cocky's joy, cream of tartar and bicarbonate of soda which she discovered were rising agents for damper, and something that looked like old boots rolled up. This was corned beef. It was hung over the fire to keep the flies off it and cut in hunks as required. Kitty saw she would have much need of the kindly little grey-haired lady down the creek, with her apron and the small men's boots she wore. No more than five feet tall she was, and slight: smaller, if anything, than Kitty herself. Already Kitty was thinking of her as Little Mrs Fergy and acknowledging the foundation of a friendship which was to last until Mrs Ferguson's untimely and unexplained death.

Kitty retained no memory of Doug's presence on that first night on the selection. But he was among them thereafter. It was a menage that could not survive for long. Douglas was a young man of charm and urbanity beyond his years, not yet cutting much dash as a ladies' man in metropolitan circles, perhaps, but for the adzed manners of the outback, smooth and chivalrous. He would have been a sympathetic ear for anyone suffering the adjustments from metropolitan to bush life and an eager ally for anyone at odds with his cocky brother. Squabbling between the boys quickly increased. A recurrent detonator of the explosive between them was Doug's habit of shooting goannas with his pea rifle as they emerged from the shelter of some hollow up in the fork of a tree, and leaving them to rot there until the noisome stench seemed to pollute even their drinking water. It was doubtless an aggressive comment, charged with unconscious meaning, on his imperfect brother. The situation was such that the trio could never become a triangle, but it presented an honourable excuse for Doug to pull out of the partnership. In later years he confessed to his sister-in-law, with characteristic charm and fraternal disloyalty, 'I can never forgive myself for leaving you up there like that with him'.

Once Doug was in Sydney again, the atmosphere on the selection changed from
one of nothing much happening, the impression Kitty received during her first days there, to an air of frenetic labour. She assumed all the domestic duties and Fred shouldered the burdens of husbandry. Kitty’s most urgent task was the organisation of food supplies; Fred’s was to ensure the provision of water. He also completed his application form for Portion 84 Injune and Kitty witnessed his signature, signing herself ‘A. Ede’. Pitman received it in Roma on 26 November and a week later at the Land Court it was accepted by Land Commissioner Hooper, along with thirty-nine others, one of which was Jack O’Donohue’s application for Portion 64 Injune, a 643-acre block adjoining the township reserve. He was probably no longer needed for the mail run, because about this time a post office was established at the Injune Creek township.

With her quick wits, her tenacity and enjoyment of challenge, Kitty soon became skilled in drawing up large orders for provisions which could be posted to Hunter’s in Roma. Her grocery lists usually contained flour and sugar in large bags, seven-pound tins of jam and rather less than previously of golden syrup, condensed milk, huge quantities of tea, and tins of Robinson’s Patent Groats and Robinson’s Patent Barley, the baby food she had known in England and was relieved to have supplied by Hunter’s. She had given up smoking herself, but she was never allowed to forget Fred’s tobacco and cigarette papers. Then there was always a need for Lifebuoy soap, candles, matches, some additions to her first-aid kit, medicinal paraffin, goanna oil, corned beef, and dehydrated vegetables, ‘tasteless, but at least you knew you were eating vegetables’. She also ordered fresh meat at first, apparently not knowing the contacts through which to buy sly meat from an occasional illegal killing by Jack O’Donohue. By the time meat was collected from the railhead it was no longer fit to eat. Butter, too, would not keep and supplies had to await their own dairy herd. She quickly learnt to make damper, baking it in the camp oven set in the ground among the ashes of the fire and heaped over with hot coals. And whenever a billy of muddy creek water was boiled, she carefully poured the distilled water condensed on the underside of the lid into another receptacle and saved it for Doris Mary. That November, Roma received thirty-eight points of rain.

Now a new mood of hope and enthusiasm possessed Fred. The inspiration of his dream had not deserted him and that, with a renewed cause for proving himself, was enough to thrust his shoulder to the reality. His first priority was to provide shelter for his mate. He cut a frame of sandalwood trunks and sunk them in holes dug with spud bar and posthole shovel. He had acquired some roofing iron and tied it with wire to the frame to form a roof and a back. Its sides were hung with chaff bags which Kitty slit open and stitched together, and its open front overlooked the ragged chasm of the dry creek a few feet below. It was their first marital home of their own. The table consisted of four strong saplings sunk in the ground with the wood from packing cases nailed to the top. Kerosene cases were again used as stools, and they continued to sleep on the ground.

Kitty’s first visitor was a large goanna which slithered quickly across the ground and ran up onto the table. Her first terrified thought was that it would get into the basket where Doris Mary was sleeping. She remembered Jack O’Donohue’s
warning and stood guard by the basket with a stick at the ready. At last, when she heard Fred’s footfall and cried out to him, the intruder took flight at the noise. Fred explained that they were coming out of hibernation and she must leave no food about and be sure to bury all scraps. But with no cupboards, what was she to do with the food?

They may not have known that goannas were protected by law. In August 1918 the Queensland Government had issued a proclamation under the Rabbit Act ‘declaring the iguana or goanna to be a natural enemy of the rabbit and prohibiting its being killed or captured’ within certain rabbit districts, including the Mount Hutton settlement, with special ministerial permission. But between legal protection and effective policing, many shots have been fired. A tale is still related in the district of an inhabitant who saw a goanna scare a hen off a clutch of eggs and then devour the eggs. She took a gun, shot the reptile, cut it open, extracted the eggs, and set them back under her hen.

Kitty took her food storage problem down to Little Mrs Fergy. Over tea with the luxuries of real bread, butter, jam and home-made cake, the old lady assured her that ‘Wully’ would fix her up some shelves. There was plenty of spare timber about the place, and he was handy with his hammer and nails. Hadn’t he built their own shack? Kitty lamented that there were no walls to bear the shelves. But Wully managed, and with two chaff bags sewn together for a curtain, the food was safe from goannas.

Kitty also learnt from Little Mrs Fergy how to make her own yeast. Hops and the other ingredients were ordered from Roma and it thrilled her when the corks in the bottles started hitting the roof so that Fred had to wire them down. There was no more damper after that, and the bread would rise so high in the camp oven that it lifted the lid.

Word soon got around the locality that Davison up the Bluey had his English missus with him, and one day Kitty saw two horsemen approaching. She remembered Fred’s instructions and immediately raked up the fire and put on the billy. The men dismounted and tethered their horses to a tree.

‘G’day, Missus. Where’s the boss?’

‘I beg your pardon’, she replied. ‘Whom do you wish to see?’

‘The boss, Missus.’

‘If you mean my husband, he’s working up the creek.’

It was another tale to go the rounds. The men squatted on their haunches to drink their tea, declining her offer of kerosene cases, and warned her of the dingoes, which would come into your camp at night while you slept and pull the blankets off you. Kitty displayed a polite interest. On taking their leave they asked her if there was anything she wanted. She replied that she wanted nothing so much as some good fresh meat. They returned the following day with a hind quarter of kangaroo, instructing her to hang it and then she could cut off steaks and fry them. Later, at nightfall, she felt something move in her hand as she gathered some chips from the woodpile. It was a large brown snake. She fled down to the camp.

‘Snake!’ she gasped to Fred. ‘A great big one!’ He took up the lantern and returned
SETTLEMENT

with her. It was still there. He prodded it with a stick... and laughed at the joke Kitty’s visitors had played. She passed all the initiation tests. ‘Davison’s little missus, she’s all right!’

Another family in the district with whom Fred and Kitty became acquainted were the Nimmos, who, on learning that the Davisons depended on George Ferguson for their fetching and carrying, lent them a spare draught horse, a bit deaf, very docile and a good worker, a chestnut Clydesdale named Rose. Their first outing with Rose between the shafts of the springcart was to the railhead for their provisions and mail, with Doris Mary asleep in her basket beside them. Delighted with their new mobility, they were driving along a bush track when they hit a bump. Suddenly Kitty saw that Fred was no longer beside her. She caught sight of him lying in a heap on the ground and called to Rose to stop. But she failed to hear, and took fright, crashing away through the timber with Kitty tugging vainly at the reins. At last the cart became wedged between some trees and Rose was halted. Looking back, Kitty could still see Fred lying in the same position. She took Doris Mary to a safe place and pacified the mare till she could be led back to Fred. He was unconscious and, with no help anywhere at hand, Kitty realised that somehow she had to lift him into the cart. She saw that she might do it by removing the seat and making a ramp of it against the cart, but not without some co-operation from Fred. She took the water bag hanging from the back of the cart and sprinkled cold water over his face. She made with her handkerchief a compress for the back of his neck. She shook him and called to him, dragging him over to the ramp. At last she climbed into the cart, grabbing his arms, and started hauling and hauling to the very limits of her strength. Fred now opened his eyes a little and was able to hang on to the side of the cart. Then she heaved him in and he sat there with his head in his hands muttering over and over, ‘Put a pignet over me. Next time I come in, you put a pignet over me.’ Fred seemed to have recovered by the following day, but remained hazy about the incident.

He continued to work with the same zest as before, from sun-up to sun-down, returning to camp almost too tired to eat and wash with what little water remained.

I soon bounced back from the war. I don’t know how we stood it at the time, but in those years, oh, I could work! The day just wasn’t long enough. And I suppose the reason I got so much material out of it is that I lived it so intensely at the time, little knowing that what was to come out of it was material for writing books.16

Fencing was the one interminable construction job, and whenever there were no trips to be undertaken and no work more urgent to be done, Fred would set off for the day with canvas water bag and food, tobacco and matches, armed to do battle with two of the elements. He would hang his water bag on a shady tree, measure out the distance from the previous post with a sixteen-foot measuring stick, making sure that it was in line with the other standing posts, ‘like a file of soldiers standing to attention at his back’,17 then set to with spud bar to loosen the dry, clayey, unyielding chocolate soil. Then the soil would be dug out with the narrow posthole shovel, and the process repeated until a hole a little larger in diameter than
the post had been dug to a depth of about twenty-two inches. The posts had been cut against the length of another measuring stick equal to the depth of the posthole plus the height required for the post, then the bark had been stripped off.

The posts averaged six inches in diameter and Fred had to bore holes in them with an auger, three, four, five or six to the post depending on the height and strength of the fence required. If he encountered a tree growing on the site of a posthole, he would saw it off to fencepost height, strip the bark down to the ground, and bore the holes through the stump.

It was characteristic of Fred to ascertain the daily output of the best fencer in the district and set that as his standard. The figure was fifty standing posts a day.

Each day he tried to set up one post more than on the previous day. It helped to get the job done and it helped him forget the ache of his muscles and the pain of the broken blisters on his palms. That last post was always a corker, and when finally it stood erect and straight in the row it was a victory of the spirit over the flesh.18

It is astonishing how the appearance of a fence along the boundary of the selection awakens the sense of proprietorship. Before the fence is erected, one looks along the survey line and thinks, 'Oh, yes, this side belongs to me and that side to some other fellow.' As soon as the posts are erected, the division is more noticeable, and one thinks, 'This is "my" place.'19

Asking for such an output of strength, he once blacked out. When he regained consciousness, he returned to camp. Kitty saw immediately that something was wrong. He sat at the table with his head in his hands and told her he could not go on working for the pain in his chest. Now the full force of the fact that the nearest doctor was in Roma was brought home to Kitty. With her Red Cross experience, of which he had disapproved, she diagnosed acute indigestion with a severe touch of the sun. 'He thought his heart was conking out.'20 His pulse was certainly racing, but Kitty reckoned that if during his military service there had been no incidence of heart trouble, it was not very likely now. She spread out his bedding roll on the mud floor and insisted on complete rest and a light diet. With the aid of cold compresses to his neck and head, and doses of bicarbonate of soda for the pain in his chest, his pulse returned to normal in a couple of days. Little Mrs Fergy gave her all the milk and eggs she needed, and allowed her the use of her fuel stove to cook light meals. Fred remained too weak to roll his own cigarettes, and all he craved was a smoke. So Kitty had to learn to roll them for him. She quickly became proficient at rolling fifteen to twenty a day, which was the limit she imposed on him. After ten days he was eager to resume work. 'All my life', he said close to the end of it, 'my body has given me whatever I demanded of it.'21

Kitty sent him off the following day with his water bag filled, his lunch and his day's cigarette ration, instructing him to take advantage of the shade whenever possible, to eat his lunch slowly and rest awhile afterwards, and to knock off early. 'How do you think I'm going to get all the work done if I keep resting?' he demanded irritably. 'There's only one pair of hands to do it all, and look how much there is to be done!' So Kitty reminded him that if he didn't ease up a bit
there wouldn’t be any hands to do anything. That night when he returned he was as tired as ever. But he had beaten the sun, he said, by cutting down a sapling and sticking it in the ground to work in its shade as he went along.

Wiring was a completely separate operation for which he needed a second pair of hands. So on days that followed completion of a line of posts, Kitty would join him in the sun, taking Doris Mary along in her Moses basket. For the rest of her life she was to remember those days seated on a box with her baby beside her on the ground and a heavy coil of No. 10 fencing wire round her knees, paying it out while Fred threaded it through the row of holes far down the fence line.

I didn’t know anything about wire or anything at all and once or twice I got a kink in it. And through a hole in a post you couldn’t pull a kink through. Oh—goodness gracious me!—life wasn’t worth living. He rushed over: ‘What the bloody hell do you think you’re doing? How the bloody hell do you think I can pull that through the post?’—‘Oh, what have I done now?’—‘I don’t want to pull wire through a post that’s got a kink in it! You’ve got to learn to pay that wire out properly.’ I had to be very careful how I paid the wire out so that he had a clear run through the posts. Day after day I’d sit there all round that place with Doris Mary in the basket alongside in the boiling sun. Dear to goodness me!22

But those were not Kitty’s only tours of the fencelines. While Doris Mary was asleep at night, Fred conceived another enterprise to be shared with his yokemate. Sometimes he would find himself settling down to complete his day at the candlelit table with too little tobacco to last through his writing till bedtime. Accordingly, with that adroitness of invention known to all writers—of excuses for distraction from the practice of their craft—he would take up the hurricane lamp and lead Kitty out under the stars and along ‘the line of fenceposts which represented the day’s progress toward the farm-to-be’.23 Then they searched for the dogends he had thrown away on the day’s progress, until he had collected enough to take back to the humpy and roll into fresh cigarettes.

One day their only timepiece ceased to work. It was the end of the Ingersoll watch that had been Kitty’s parting gift to her new bridegroom when he left for the Western Front. Thereafter, the couple had to learn to tell the time from the sun, a habit which came to give them accuracy to the nearest quarter hour.

Kitty came to realise that in her letters home to her mother she would have to pick out the pretty bits of colour and leave her mother to form her own opinion of the background of the picture. In time their address—Sandalwood, Injune—became a form of concealment.

I’d never let her know one word of what went on. She would have been horrified if she had known.24 She ruefully remembered her reading of We of the Never-Never; the shock of the landlord in Hastings after reading it at night to his sister, and his farewell comment to Fred:

He looked at him and said, Look, I’ve always admired you, but—he said—I don’t like you any more. He said, You mean to tell me you’re going to take that sweet little baby and that dear little lady into a place
like that? He said, You’re nothing short of a criminal, and I’m disappointed in you.\textsuperscript{25}

She remembered how she had lent the book to her mother. ‘And my mother hit the roof.’\textsuperscript{26} Yet, as Kitty recalled it, ‘the Missus’ in that book had it easy.

She didn’t have any hardships or anything like that. Well, I mean to say, they had to wade through creeks that were overflowing, they had to camp and all that sort of thing until they got to the homestead. But there were blackfellows and lubras to do the work, and there was men to do this and men to do that—well, she had it easy, didn’t she?\textsuperscript{27}

The clouds gathered as December advanced and occasionally a few heavy drops of rain fell. Kitty would set out all the kerosene cans and other vessels she could find to catch the drips from the roof. But by the time she had set them out, the rain stopped. As their water supply grew lower, Fred stretched his dwindling financial resources to buy a twenty-gallon galvanised tank and mounted it on to a kind of sled adzed out of the fork of a tree. It was harnessed by chains to Rose’s collar and, with Fred walking behind controlling the reins, it could be dragged for several miles to be filled from Ferguson’s or some other waterhole further distant. He had to go for water every second day.

Only the alternate days were now available for the job of improving the selection, and, as the job promised to last his lifetime, and probably well into his children’s lifetime,\[he\] was naturally anxious to make all haste, and the loss of every second was a trial to his patience . . . Before the rain came, he was carting his water from a hole six miles away.\textsuperscript{28}

But at last one heavy, unforgettable storm broke, ‘before which the trees bent and groaned, and through whose sweeping sheets one could see scarcely fifty yards’.\textsuperscript{29} Kitty had several reasons to remember that first storm.

When the rains did come, they did come with a vengeance. The creek ran a banker and it came into the humpy where we were living and Fred came running down from the creek to see if everything was all right and found Doris in the basket on the table and me sitting on the top and the water coming up a foot or more. In about twenty minutes it was all over.\textsuperscript{30} Fred saw that he would have to build a new humpy on higher ground, but meanwhile he stood at the entrance to this one ‘with joy in his heart’\textsuperscript{31} and watched the mud and the transformation of the jagged scar in which he had never seen anything but withering herbage, rocks, and a ribbon of dry sand. Now there would be waterholes, for domestic use as well as for the tanksinkers’ horses.

As soon as the storm eased off a little he pulled on a raincoat and went down the track . . . The smell of the wet air, the slosh of the wet earth underfoot, and the drip of the water from the trees were good after the long dry spell. Down by the creek he could hear the frogs, silent for months past, raising a chorus.\textsuperscript{32} Kitty noticed how quickly everything turned green after rain, including the standing water. Within a few days, she was collecting off the billy lid the distillation of water which she was drawing green and slimy. She did not notice the profusion of wildflowers.
Fred built their new dwelling on higher ground hard by the cattle pens, but still it was no more than a shanty of logs and roofing iron, with a pitched roof and open below the eaves for a yard or more. The railhead was closer to them now, thus making it possible for Fred to order extra corrugated iron for walls. The front was still open to invading goannas; and now since the rain a smudge fire of dried cow dung had to be kept burning to ward off mosquitoes. An anthill was broken down and spread evenly over the floor. Once watered and trodden flat it set like concrete. And at last they had a bed: a frame of saplings supported on stumps dug into the ground with corn sacks stretched tightly across. With twigs Fred made his wife a besom to sweep the new floor, and in a corner he constructed what Kitty called her galley: a fireplace with forked sticks and a rail, and beside it a hollow for the camp oven. ‘There’, he said affectionately, ‘you’ve no need to cook in the heat of the sun any more’.

They had now been reunited for about as long as their last separation, and in those three industrious months they had come far towards establishing the beginnings of a farm. They had two dogs, a red and white spotted cattle dog called Bess, and Kitty’s first dog, Traddles, who was part collie. Kitty had been reading *David Copperfield* when she acquired him, so named him after the hero’s friend. Passing bushmen continued to bring her fresh meat, even the occasional luxury of a scrub turkey. Kangaroo tail soup became both a nourishment and a pleasure. When Adam Stewart started dairying on Portion 97 and killed a vealer, he would usually pass a hind quarter on to the Davisons, which they kept cool in a Coolgardie safe ordered from Roma and hung in the shade of a tree.

In the small zinc tub which was Doris Mary’s bath, Kitty washed out coarse cotton sugar bags until they were soft and the printing had been bleached away. Then she cut and sewed them and trimmed them with ribbon and lace to provide her baby with new clothing. She had brought her goffering irons from England, so the lace was always prettily fluted. Twenty-five-pound sugar bags also proved to be just the right size for pillowslips.

At last they were ready to invest in their source of income. The calf yard was constructed, milk churns and a separator had arrived from Roma, and on a memorable Wednesday in February 1920 they took delivery of a dozen cows and half a dozen calves, purchased from W. R. Nimmo, senior, of Wallumbilla.
GROWTH

Poddying the calves was to be my job, so Fred told me. What he meant and how to do it was something I had not the vaguest notion about, but I soon learnt and enjoyed my job.¹

From Nimmo they bought a new draught horse and returned Rose to her owners. She was another Clydesdale, black with a handsome blaze.

I gave her the name of 'Ribbons' straight away. She looked every bit an aristocrat and worthy of all the ribbons the show ring had to offer. She was my pride and joy, who later on I was to ride bareback to help Fred bring in the cows for milking. I only had to call her name and show her a piece of bread with cocky's joy and she would follow me anywhere.

Thereafter, each morning at sunrise, Fred would set off up the creek on John Willie with Bess at his heels and bring in the cows for milking. After the milking was done, he would set off as before and spend his days fencing, ringbarking, clearing. He would return at four and saddle up to bring the cows in again. Seven days a week he worked, from sun-up to sundown. Fearing that he was overworking again, Kitty asked to be allowed to help with the milking. But Fred absolutely forbade it. 'The cow yard,' he said, 'was no place for a lady. But Little Mrs Fergy did it, she protested, and so did Adam Stewart's daughter, Netta, who had taken up Portion 62 and was only about the same age as Kitty [Plate 13].

'You stick to the poddies,' said Fred. 'You're doing a pretty good job there. I'm not going to have some scrawny Henry Lawson woman for a wife!'  

So she stuck to the poddies, and filled a billy with cream and shook it until her aching arms drew the muscles taut in her face and set her mouth in a thin straight line: until the cream had turned to butter. She even purchased the invaluable refinement of a mincing machine from Kirilloff's store. Chloe and their daughter had now come up to join Jack and, with three days' notice of his family's arrival, he had thrown up a twenty-by-twelve shack of roofing iron and hessian. His tent remained full of boxes. The mincer remained with Kitty all her life. Each time she went to the store she bought something extra for their domestic comfort: china plates, cups, saucers, proper bed linen. So now with butter on their bread, milk for drinking and cooking, meat in the Coolgardie, and the old enamel ware now used for feeding the pets, their daydreams took on more colour: the primordial dreams of fat kine in rich pastures, of marketing, money, and a leisurely maintenance of it all. The goods and provisions ordered from Roma were ordered from Hunter's, and Hunter's treated the Davisons as they treated other settlers who had yet to draw an income from their labours. They grubstaked them until they could pay. They would become good customers in time; and if not, no country storekeeper, in all the cycles of Australia's land settlement crazes, had ever lost through defaulting selectors.

The last official visit of John McEwan Hunter to his electorate had taken place in May 1919 when with his wife and daughter he dropped off at Roma for a day and left the same evening for Charleville and Cunnamulla. While he was in Roma, the Mayor had found it necessary to ask him to arrange for goods for the soldier settlers at Mount Hutton to be carried by rail as far as possible. Hunter replied that
Had he not known of the difficulties of the early settler he would not have asked the Government to build the railway before the settlement of land took place. That was why the railway had preceded settlement. The line was being built as rapidly as possible. He had been told that he had rushed men on to that line so that he could win the election by having a lot of navvies at the other end of the line. The real reason was that he wanted to see the line completed to the terminus and then further.  

Less than four months later, his appointment was announced as Queensland’s Agent General in London as from 1 January 1920. It has always been a popular way for Australia’s state governments to divest themselves of embarrassments. Shortly before taking up his London appointment, Hunter had given an interview to a London newspaper and ‘outlined the opportunities for the settlement of ex-servicemen in Queensland and contended that the most generous treatment was offered by the soldier settlement scheme of the Government of Queensland’.

The *Western Star* at that time illuminated life on the settlement with unvarying brightness. ‘SOLDIER SETTLERS MAKING GOOD’ ran a headline on 31 March 1920 over a report that of twenty-five suppliers of cream to the Roma butter factory from ‘among the settlers along the new railway’, ‘at least eight’ were returned soldiers. The largest cheques earned during the month of February were £30 and £31.

But that was Wednesday’s paper. The following Saturday at the 51-mile peg, on the reserve which was to become the township of Gunnewin, members of the Mount Hutton and District Soldier Settlers Association held a special meeting at which it was decided to ask the Minister for Lands to attend another meeting at the same place a month later. There is no evidence that the Minister complied. In the letter of invitation, the Association’s secretary wrote:

> There is as you are doubtless aware not complete tranquillity in the Settlement due in good measure to the fact that no settler knows where he is. Almost weekly some change is made, some new interpretation, some discrimination, some promise or understanding knocked sideways.

> Again, the burning question of houses: not a house finished yet, not a house or plan of one that can be built at the price allowed. The confusing position of the question of clearing pear. The roads here are a standing menace and undesirable heritage and this Association is making an organised protest against their being brought in their present state as a charge on the settlers . . .

> Another dry time is seemingly approaching and the bores are an unknown quantity for most of the settlers . . .

One of the eight returned soldiers who sent cream to the butter factory that February must have been Fred Davison of Bluey Creek. On 23 February, twelve days after the arrival of his herd, he harnessed Ribbons and loaded up the springcart so that together the family could take the first of what were to be weekly consignments of income-earning cream to the railway siding for dispatch to Roma. The railway was not yet finished, but a siding had been established between two reserves at a crossroads by the 56-mile peg, only about a mile to the east of the
old outstation. Later the locality was known as Komine. Their most direct route lay across Barramundi Creek, but when they reached the crossing, they found the Barramundi in flood. It must have been raining somewhere. Fred urged Ribbons into the creek, but the water was higher than the shafts. So he unloaded Kitty and Doris Mary and settled them in the shade of a tree while he took his chances alone. Ribbons got them safely across. But on the other bank he had discovered that he had left the labels and consignment note with Kitty. It was one of those moments in a man's life when he feels driven to venture upon new unexplored vastnesses of his rage. When his fury abated enough to permit action, he proposed hurling the whip over to Kitty. She could tie the documents to that and throw it back. But instead it dropped into the creek. Roaring like the torrent, he drove Ribbons and the cart across again quickly enough to catch the whip on the way downstream. On the final crossing, he took his womenfolk with him.

Those trips to the siding with the cream became the highlight of Fred's week, for they gave him an opportunity for social intercourse, when he could discuss problems and progress with his fellow settlers, and exchange news and gossip. And now he was mobile, he could also take his wife to the local dances, or 'bush shivoos', which were held at the full moon for selectors within driving range of the outstation.

Fred would get the cows in at milking time and I would have everything ready for a quick getaway... It was all so thrilling and romantic. I have never been able to recapture that feeling of my first dance in the bush... The music for dancing was a violin and concertina supplied by two of the locals and never before or since have I danced to better music. Even if you couldn't dance, you would sit and tap your feet to the rhythm of the music, and before you knew anything you were grabbed and pulled onto the floor.

They were all-night affairs, ending in time to return for the morning's milking, and during the course of any of them, Jack and Chloe Kirilloff were likely to oblige with a Russian dance; heavy-footed cockies negotiated quadrilles and lancers while children played tag among them; there were square dances, old-time waltzes, jazz waltzes, and foxtrots; Kitty would usually be invited to dance a schottische with Jack Kirilloff; Mrs Nimmo would probably be prevailed upon to render some recitation, notably 'The Wild Colonial Boy'; and some proudly applauded vocalist would supply interludes of song. Supper, provided by the ladies, would be laid out on the skirting table in the shearing shed, a table adzed from bush timber and carved with initials. Its surface was dark and shiny with the oil from all the fleeces that had been spread over it for skirting. Patrons of these events brought their own drink: as often as not half a bottle of rum topped up with creek water.

The Davisons would return through the sunrise with Doris Mary asleep in the cart and Fred nodding over the reins till Kitty took over and let him sleep. Then she, too, would nod off. But Ribbons knew the way home, stopping only at sliprails, whereupon Fred had to alight so that they could pass [Plate 14]. One dewy autumn morning Kitty was thrilled to discover paddocks rich in mushrooms. She had not seen any since leaving England. Ribbons stood still while she alighted and
filled Fred's hat with them. Then, after the morning's milking, they breakfasted deliciously on eggs and bacon and mushrooms. They had to work for the rest of the day until after the evening milking when, as soon after nightfall as possible, they could turn in and catch up on lost sleep.

The next additions to their growing farmstead were three laying hens and a rooster, a gift of Bill Davies, a lad three or four years younger than Fred who was the new occupant of Portion 82 and was living up there in a humpy with only a horse for company [Plate 15]. His application had been accepted at the February Land Court. Every day or two he would ride down to the township or the railhead and unfailingly call at Sandalwood to ask if anything was needed, any mail to post or be collected. Then Kitty began to realise that three or four days had gone by without a call from Bill. Fred had instructed her that any unusual behaviour of anyone or anything in the bush was to be investigated. She spoke of it to Fred and after the next morning's milking he rode up.

It was not without trepidation that I approached our friend's humpy. It seemed strangely quiet. 'Good-day!' I shouted as heartily as I could as I dismounted. A voice, surprisingly thin and weak, answered from within. Sneaking forward I looked cautiously in at the door. The man was lying on his bunk. He was gripping one arm about the elbow, and groaning as he rocked to and fro . . .

One finger, swollen to about three times the normal size, was black and green and yellow.

'I ran a bit of fencing wire into it day before yesterday,' he explained, 'I ain't slept for two nights and the swelling's gone right up me arm.'

The man was about twenty-four hours off the grave . . . I saw at once that he would have to be attended to if his life was to be saved. There was no doctor in the township, but luckily the wife knew a good deal about that sort of thing—a sort of hang-over from war work . . .

Fred returned to Sandalwood leading Bill's horse 'with Bill hardly able to sit in the saddle he was so weak. He hadn't had anything to eat for days and had not had the use of his bowels for a week . . . Septicaemia was gradually taking over.'

The wife took him in hand. She lanced his finger and fomented and squeezed and bandaged it with medicated lint and ordered me about like a flunkey—and him like he had done it on purpose! . . .

After that he used to come down daily to have his finger fomented and squeezed and dressed. He must have gone through torture. He used to have to sit down and rest two or three times going home. I have come upon him sitting on a log nursing his hand, as white as milk and with beads of cold sweat on his forehead.

After ten days of medication and good food, Bill was able to go to Toowoomba, where his Welsh parents lived, and see a doctor who gave him 'a clean bill of health'.

He returned a week later looking fit and well. He told me that the doctor said I had saved his life. This I regarded as an exaggeration and told him so. From then on Bill was my slave. Anything I wanted within his power
he would get for me. Because I happened to say in passing I would like some chooks... the next time he went into Roma he brought back three laying hens and a rooster, and helped to build a fowl house for them. I only had to say in an innocuous sort of way that I wish I had this or that and Bill would do his utmost to get it for me. It was getting rather embarrassing, so Fred told me not to say 'I wish' any more in front of him.  

At last, in the middle of 1920, the railway line reached the Injune Creek terminus and on 30 June the entire line was opened to traffic and a five and a half hour service to and from Roma. The arrival of the first locomotive at the terminus was an occasion for local celebration.

We weren't Mount Hutton any longer, we had a definite place on the map. We all gathered around to welcome that Engine, there never was another Engine like her, she looked a beauty all shining and new. We didn't have any streamers or confetti to shower her with, but we made up for it by stroking her and patting and toasting with whatever liquor we could find. Some had beer, some had rum and gin or a bottle or two of wine. The engine driver was pulled out from his cabin, hugged and kissed by the women folk.

And no doubt Jack O'Donohue had a sly killing or two. He often received warnings, but continued nonetheless. The Davisons were now among his grateful, loyal—and tight-lipped—customers.

The Maranoa winter of 1920 was not an unusually dry one. In June, July and August, Roma's rainfall totalled almost seven of that year's twenty-three and a half inches. If the ranges to the north received as much, many of the new settlers may have persuaded themselves that the previous year's drought had been an exception. Fred was still carting his water in the two kerosene cans, and harnessing Ribbons to the sled for larger quantities. In choosing to give priority to dairying, he had probably extended his resources too far in the early part of the year to pay for a tank. 'It was my bad luck that I hadn't been able to get the tanksinkers on to my place earlier in the dry part of the year.' But his hopes and progress must have been promising enough, for apparently during that winter, he committed himself to the costliest of his investments. He brought in the tanksinkers. Three men came with four dozen horses and camped on the selection for six weeks.

Fred chose the tank site himself on the south bank of Bluey Creek down from its confluence with Deep Creek, 'a shallow, flat-bottomed gully' at the foot of the rise on which he planned to build a new calf yard and milking sheds and, before the year was out, the homestead. Along the gully ran a wash-out from the creek, now sprouting grass and other herbage. Fred calculated that after heavy rain it would carry a flow 'more than sufficient to fill the tank'.

He appears to have opted for a 2500-yard tank, to judge from a ranger's estimate of its size made nearly three years later, but Fred was to describe it as substantially bigger: 'a hole about a hundred feet square and twelve feet deep'. At the maximum price quoted by Ranger Watson two and a half years previously, a tank
of this size would have cost the selector £175. It was another year before Fred took out a mortgage on the selection, so Dad’s real estate business in Sydney most probably paid the tanksinkers’ bill. Chloe Kirilloff remembered that Fred ‘more often than not, paid his store accounts with his father’s cheques’.18

Fred must have taken hours away from his fencing to study the tanksinkers; and round their camp fire into the night he must have talked with them, as his fascination with other people’s work always led him to do.

To handle twelve horses abreast calls for strong arms and an even temper. Consider, too, the unevenness of the ground—down the slope of the tank, letting the scoop slide to where it would be easiest for Hughie to scoop it full from the earth that had been ploughed loose at the bottom; then up the slope, full; across the twenty-foot surround of level ground; then up on to the bank to where Hughie would want to empty it out in the process of building the banks; then down again, but not letting the horses rush too fast—not with Hughie having to hang back on the handles of the empty scoop. Twelve horses turning continually in a space as confined as that, scarcely ever all on even ground at once, with tight and slack traces alternately, would tread one another’s hooves off under an unskilful driver. They would knock themselves up in the first hour of a shift under a man who didn’t know exactly what to demand of them.

... Don was never in difficulties and rarely irritated; scrambling up, or jolting down a minimum of paces with the encircling swing of his team, he was worth watching, a picture of skill, care, and unstudied grace of body.19

What actually happened after the tanksinkers had departed has been lost in the limbo between the fading of memory and the focus of fiction. However, there is no question that throughout the rest of 1920 the tank failed to fill because it was wrongly sited. ‘The catchment area was not sufficient to fill it.’20 The error was Fred’s. The fault lay in his misreading of the wash-out along the gully.

There was a much better site for a tank on the back half of his selection, but he had been influenced to an extent he didn’t realize at the time by a desire to have his homestead and water supply grouped compactly. Under the influence of this he had taken for granted something that should have been investigated to the full. The tanksinkers, who were more experienced in these matters, might have warned him that the deeply scoured gutter on which he had counted was too grass-grown to be the product of recent rains and normal seasons. But the tanksinkers, though they were good enough chaps, and had done a first-class job, were contracting at prices that didn’t allow them any margin for doing the selector’s work for him.21

It was as characteristic of Fred to take all the blame upon himself without squealing as it would have been of Queensland tanksinkers to have held their tongues and harboured their doubts about the southerner’s reading of the signs.

Looking down on the tank . . . [he] recognized the choosing of the site as one of those evil occasions in a man’s life when bad luck is not a sufficient
Evil or careless, some silent governing power in the individual chooses the failure as surely as the conscious will chooses the site of it. Other motives must be sought in explanation besides those of mismanagement and errant husbandry; something extraneous to the task in hand must have been driving Fred to those self-imposed excesses of hard labour. Was it the guilt of the conscious will, protesting too much in an endeavour to shoot down his fantasies? Was it that old paternal goad again, compelling him to act out his father's gospel of work, work, work alongside that of ordeal by self-help? Before the sun crossed the Equator that year on its course towards Capricorn, Fred Davison senior was writing for public consumption:

Australians do not seem to know how greatly fortune has favoured them in that they are born to a country raw and unmade. Opportunities for worthwhile and well-rewarded work are scattered from the Leeuwin to Cape York. Opportunities for all—not for the capitalist only, but for every man of brain or muscle.

And almost simultaneously, his elder son, described by his sire as one 'who is fighting to get established on the land out somewhere near where the Australian sun sets', was writing:

We want someone to stand around and yell for the fellow who is bucking the game—and getting ahead of it. The crowd who work for fear of starvation will never get anything except the prosperity that is left after the men who work for the reward that is in it have had their share. They may, by political means, prevent him getting his whack—and then the industrial machine will slow down, or stop altogether.

(I can see the bottom of my tank, and water is giving out everywhere, but I guess we will manage somehow.)

Those words were published under a dateline of 1 September 1920; and if Fred was writing of himself in honesty and not in the guise of some composite Bush Settler of his own fabrication, they provide the only indication that his tank was installed by then. September and October brought six inches of rain to Roma and there must have been more than one occasion in those months when Fred took shelter from a storm and then, as it eased off, walked down to the creek to watch it run a banker and hope that some accident or miracle would divert it into his tank.

There is something very dramatic about the flooding of a western creek. The bed, except for waterholes and pot-holes, has lain dry for months. From where you stand the ribbon of dry sand, shingle or caked clay snakes away out of sight through the bush, between steep banks, like a disused track. Presently, round the nearest bend, comes the first head of water, a frothy trickle, pausing while the dry ground drinks it up, moving by little leaps and rushes, stirring and floating the dead leaves and chips that litter the creek bed, coming on, while far behind it sounds the roar of the following flood.
It looked like a live thing, that first dark trickle creeping around the bends . . .

Fred apparently envisaged a solution that might have filled his tank, but it was beyond all but the resources of his burgeoning writer’s imagination.

The creek, when it ran, passed his tank about fifty yards away on the lower side. He wondered if, by digging a channel from his tank to a point, say, a hundred yards up the creek, he could get sufficient fall to run enough of the creek water into his tank to fill it. He could throw a dam—'throw' was the word he had in mind; he had never tried to manhandle running water—across the creek and raise the flood to the level of the proposed channel.

Davison wrote two stories on the theme of what might have happened. They are both set in topography similar to that of his selection, and in each the foolhardy but dauntless hero is burdened with catastrophe, but not complete disaster.

The first version, 'Shifting Sands', was written while he was still determined 'to beat it some way or another'. His hero is Bill Jefferson, 'a printer by trade, a townsman by birth and heredity, and pioneer by a wayward inclination', who decides to dam the creek. When after several weeks' hard work, the dam is finally finished and in due course the flash flood comes down, Bill stands watching his handiwork with his wife and three children. At first the dam withstands the maximum flood, but then a trickle of water appears at the back of the dam close to the creek bed and slowly increases till it bubbles up through the sand.

There was a grinding of rocks and the dam settled a little! The water bubbled more freely from the sand. A pause of a minute or so, then, with a prolonged grinding and a crash, the dam settled a couple of feet. The creek gushed over the top! The flood fell rapidly, and with it—Bill's hopes.

Bill's wife stands crying behind him and they turn away under the sinking sun to hear the derisive laughter of a 'jackass' pealing through the bush.

That night brings more rain, but Bill lies in bed indifferent to it, reflecting that a chapter in his life is closed.

He had had his little flutter, and he was trying, not over successfully, to reconcile himself to returning to the city, and to the monotonous dead-level of a weekly wage.

The prospect was repellent. He was broken financially, but not in spirit. Better the continuous struggle, with hope to lead the way, than the dreariness of a bread and butter job.

But, under the heavy rains a head of water is forming up towards the range. Through the night the rain continued. The hillsides were awash with a sheet of water that rippled steadily through the grass as it flowed down to the gullies. The roar of the flood rose above the beating of the rain. In places the creek over-ran its banks and went swirling across the flat lands. Flood litter piles up against the rubble of the broken dam and forces the water above the level of the channel Bill had dug, 'and down the channel, under cover of
the night and the over-hanging bush, there ran an ample stream'. Bill rises next morning to discover that

Lying where on the day before there had been only a hopeless, gaping hole in the earth, there was now a miniature lake. Its sides were flanked by the green grass—it's surface reflected the blue of the sky, and ruffled by a passing breeze gave back the light of the sun in a thousand ripples. The tank was full!

This time the kookaburra's laughter sings through the bush in 'peal after peal of honest mirth'.

The second version of the story was originally entitled 'The Skin of his Teeth', but was later published as 'Meet Darkie Hoskins', the earliest of the fifteen stories in Davison's first short story collection, published twenty years after the tank was sunk.28 This time, the hero is a British immigrant married to an English girl, and their third child is born during their first year on the selection. The tale begins with Darkie's reflecting on the restoration of his hopes of a life on the land 'through an unexpected beneficence of nature' discovered that very morning.

Then, by a narrative technique that Davison referred to as 'a loop of time',29 the antecedent events are recounted, during which Darkie twice builds the dam and watches the floods wreck it.

He had thought himself beaten, but on the eve of abandoning the selection a third flood had found the dam effective... The floods that had wrecked the dam had packed it tighter than human hands could have done; they had also settled it on a good bottom, and the thick lower waters of the flood had gradually filled the interstices with leaves and silt, making all tight. All that remained was to keep adding to the dam, assisting nature in her good work until a large permanent obstacle should result.

There are significant changes in detail between this and the first version. Where Bill Jefferson lost his horse when a tree fell across a fence, Darkie Hoskins loses his two horses, but regains them in time for his second attempt, which takes two months. Where Bill began by carrying stones and then repaired a borrowed barrow so that he could carry twice as much stone each trip, Darkie uses his own barrow until it strikes an outcrop and collapses with a broken wheel. Thereafter, he has no choice but 'to carry the boulders down to the dam hugged against his stomach'. Unlike Bill, Darkie digs out the channel to the tank only after the dam is completed. Both Bill and Darkie have to work against the arrival of the end-of-summer rains, but Bill finishes his dam and has to wait for the rains, whereas Darkie, when the weather shows signs of breaking, makes 'a rush job of it, picking and shovelling his way around the foot of the knoll in thunderous heat, his sweat dripping in the dust under him'.

It was one of those epic feats of labour that men brag of in public bars, or, if they live, from the privileged chair of grandparenthood.

Such are the means by which a story improves with the telling. The most marked improvement in the second version is in the detail of Darkie's labours, bypassed in Bill's case by a line of asterisks and the novice's device of leaving him to
his dam-building to 'move forward to the climax'.\textsuperscript{30} And though it is doubtful whether any single-handed man, however spunky or desperate, wheelbarrow or not, could have accomplished such an epic feat of labour, the narrative detail is convincing: the principal function of the storyteller's art.

He wanted the logs as heavy as possible, so he cut them of a length and girth he could just manage to up-end on to his shoulder and stagger under . . . The weight . . . varied just a little, though not so much but that he reached the creek bank each time with his eyes blinded with trickling sweat, his body nearly cracking under the weight and his jaw clenched against the pain in his shoulder. He would stand trembling for a minute, catching his breath, wiping his face on his sleeve, and then back for another log. He wore out the shoulder of his shirt and some of his skin during the first half-day, and then had to resort to padding his shoulder with a folded bag. He prised the rocks from the sides of the hill with a pick and spud-bar and trundled them down to the dam in a wheelbarrow. This wasn't so bad, except that if a rock was really too heavy for a man to lift into the barrow he'd lift it just the same, and except that the empty barrow had to be dragged back up the hill over uneven ground.

It isn't good for a man to demand of his body a maximum strain every few minutes of a long day. He is asking for an output of strength that his heart isn't made to produce. A young muscular man can force his heart to it, but he is drawing on his capital account with life . . .

'Meet Darkie Hoskins' was considered by its author to be 'a vastly improved version in every way' of 'Shifting Sands'. He included it in his first collection to please his father 'who liked it very much—although he didn't like the revised version', but the author wished he had left it out altogether. 'It's a petit-bourgeois success story', he wrote of it in 1942, 'probably—although I can't remember for sure—written under the influence of that bloody awful rag, the Saturday Evening Post.'\textsuperscript{31} He presumably considered the tale to be a romantic untruth, not only in fact but also, more crucially, in spirit.

Since such an epic feat of labour was impossible for Fred to accomplish, perhaps it took the advice of a ranger for him to see that he would have to call in the tanksinkers again, to deepen the channel and instal a shallow silt dam into which the worst of the muddy overflow from the creek could settle before overflowing cleaner surface water into the tank.

Well, you don't get suddenly shattered in a situation like that: you get slowly ground to pieces until . . . life leads you up to the truth and you've got to look at it and you won't look at it. Oh no, I'll beat it. I'll beat it some way or another . . . And in the finish, well, you can't pay your way so you've got to go.\textsuperscript{32}

Had I succeeded, I'm the sort of man that would have spent his life living entirely within the boundary of his own selection. I'd have had no interest in writing: I don't think so. Of course, murder will out. You can't tell.\textsuperscript{33} He knew well enough that his own ignorance and folly was as much the cause of
his failure as the climatic forces and political perfidies ranged against him. 'Others survived and prospered there, I’m pleased to say.'34

But not many others. One of the few who did was to become in time the third tenant of Portion 84, taking it up ten years after the Davisons did so and farming it for ten years. At the same sitting of the Land Court which had approved Fred’s application for his lease of Portion 84, Patrick Macnamara was granted the lease to Portion 15 Injune, a waterless block on the northern boundary of the settlement opposite Kirilloff’s selection. At the previous month’s sitting of the court, he had been granted the lease on Portion 90 Injune, another waterless block to the west, some five or six miles from Mount Hutton. But before long he moved again and at the March 1920 sitting of the court he was a successful applicant for Portion 74 Injune, a two-square-mile selection on the northern boundary of the settlement, crossed by the Bluey watershed. Macnamara’s south-western corner was close to the north-eastern corner of Sandalwood. Eleven months later, in February 1921, he was granted the lease on Portion 75, becoming the Davisons’ nearest neighbour to the north. And up there on the dry ridges, working single-handed and living alone, performing epic feats of labour that men still speak of in the district, Pat Macnamara made a farm. He appears to have been a man nearly twice Fred’s age.

Old McShane’s selection was in the middle of the Big Scrub, twelve hundred acres of belah and brigalow, forty feet high and as thick as the hair on a heeler’s back, fair in the middle of ten thousand acres of the same class of country . . . He had felled and burnt off four or five acres, and there, in that rich absorbent soil, sheltered from drying winds by the walls of scrub around the clearing, he had raised crops of pumpkins, sweet potatoes, corn, sorghum, cotton, and he was experimenting with tobacco.35

The task took him several years, and during his tenure he sank a well on his own, using a rope ladder, bags for the soil, and a winch. When at a depth of sixty feet he still found no water, he abandoned it. Instead he dug a tank to collect water for his horse, carting the excavated soil in a wheelbarrow. The tank held, and is still watering cattle today, shaded from evaporation by brigalow and weeping myall.

He seems to have been a bachelor, and one of those men who appear never to have been young; ageless, or never growing visibly older, but passing from gaunt to weatherbeaten to wizened to gnarled. He wore a large drooping moustache, and when he ate his bread and cocky’s joy he would invert the slice before putting it into his mouth, in order that the syrup would avoid the moustache. It seems likely that Fred Davison did not ever visit Pat on his own ground, but heard talk of Mac’s place from ‘those who had come on his camp when looking for strayed cattle’.

I gathered that his plot was as neat as a Chinese garden and twice as lush; this in the middle of a dryish summer.

People accepted his dramatic if rather unpractical achievement as a bolster to their own hopes. ‘It just shows you what the land will do,’ they said. Most likely Old Mac would be able to make some sort of a living for himself, what with growing his own vegetables, keeping some fowls and a pig, potting a scrub turkey now and again, and perhaps doing a
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little wallaby scalping during the season; but of the vision that must have taken him into the heart of the Big Scrub, a vision of twelve hundred acres felled and sown to grass, there seemed small likelihood of fulfilment; it would have called for twenty years of a strong young life, and a man would need his feet planted in open country while he tackled the thick stuff.36

But Pat probably knew what he was about better than most of his southerly neighbours in the farrago of plunder and folly that was the Mount Hutton Settlement. Perhaps that was why he continued re-selecting until he found the topography that suited his more modest vision. His dreams may not have been of monoculture at all, 'twelve hundred acres felled and sown to grass' to run a mere one hundred and twenty dairy cattle. He seems to have been one of those rare husbandmen of the twentieth century, left over from an earlier one, with a deep natural feeling for the earth and its needs and rhythms, a sense of what has come to be called the ecology of his environment. He must have perceived that the towering scrub growing in deep loam would provide sanctuary and shelter from the elements for a modest smallholding placed there with a proper humility. 'His type is Celtic', wrote another Celt, Ranger 'Scot' Cumming, in 1944 when he identified 'the dreamer' of 'A Letter from Colleen', the tale Davison wrote about Old Mac. 'I can see Pat McNamara in his grey flannel shirt and carrying his two billy-cans of water.'37

A third Celt, who by local gossip was to become suspected of uxoricide, functioned at the other extreme, one in which Fred himself was to see the abuse of husbandry. 'A neighbour of mine', he was to recall of George Ferguson as late as 1962, 'an old Scot who had one of those immemorial waterholes on his property, ringbarked the immense and ancient apple-box trees which overhung it, because he begrudged them the water they used. A likely upshot would be that the dead trees would fall into the water, and the banks would then cave in and fill up the hole. I left before this could happen; but to this day I hope it did happen! In any case, increased evaporation through loss of shade would have balanced accounts quite neatly. (Strange, isn't it, how things that happened as long as forty years ago can go on mattering to you as much as if they happened this morning?)38

By the end of the winter of 1920, the settlement community, as Hunter and his push had envisaged it, was about as close to being stabilised as it would ever be. An Injune Progress Association had been established; and as early as April a letter from the Lands Department had informed its secretary that of the portions of Mount Hutton estate 'open for perpetual lease selection with a maximum area of 640 acres, and with a condition of personal residence, only two remain unselected'. The secretary was in fact Jack O'Donohue, who also won the first butcher's licence in the new township.

Many more of the larger portions of land, however, remained unselected. In some cases, selectors had either not taken up their allotments or had simply walked off them without telling anyone. A ranger would report that so-and-so had not been on his block for three months and in due course a public notice would be published naming an absentee selector as not having been in occupation of his
portion and warning him to notify the department before a certain date six weeks away of his intention 'to proceed with selection and enter into occupation', failing which the allotment would be cancelled and the portion again made available for soldier settlement.

The danger from those unoccupied or unselected blocks was the spread of prickly pear. Ranger Cumming, who was now stationed on the settlement with responsibility for the Injune area, reported on the problem to Land Commissioner Hooper, and in early July Hooper and Cumming undertook a tour of inspection. Hooper subsequently recommended to the Department that seven large blocks of 'dense brigalow and belah scrubs, fair soil, light pear in patches, no water' should be redesignated as prickly pear selections at an annual rental of ten shillings each to encourage selection. These were the two portions between Bill Davies and the western border and five to the north of them along the northern border up to Pat Macnamara's western boundary. The easternmost prickly pear selection, Portion 75 Injune, was the one Old Mac selected early the following year.

A similar recommendation relating to those and several other unselected portions of dense scrub was made on 1 September by the acting supervisor of the settlement, D. S. Armstrong.

There is hardly a portion of the whole of the Mount Hutton closer settlement area which can be declared as entirely free of the pest, while in some places it is practically uncleasable. I would recommend that strict and prompt action be taken to compel settlers to clear the scattered pear in their area with a view to hemming the thick pear in on its present boundaries.

As the pear closed in, the new township crept outwards, and some of the settlers, preoccupied with less prickly and more immediate concerns, began to stake out claims of a more familiar nature. The Western Star of 11 August, for example, carried a new auctioneer's notice.

D. J. O'Donohue, auctioneer, stock and station agent of Injune. Saleyards in course of construction. Secure paddocks. Every convenience for buyers and sellers. First sale to be advertised.

A stationmaster's house was built and a stationmaster, James Cronk, was posted there. He became notorious as one of the most widely despised and hated men on the settlement. He was later fictionalised by Davison as Grimwade in the story that celebrated Old Mac.

I had driven to the railhead to pick up mail and also a couple of rolls of wire netting I knew to be waiting for me in the goods shed. The up train from Wilgatown had arrived, discharged mail and passengers, and the engine was fussing about, pushing trucks up to the shed and carriages over on to the shunting tracks. We, the settlers—thirty or forty of us—were grouped around the open door of the station office, where Grimwade, the stationmaster, was calling names as he delved into the mailbag and brought letters and packages to light.

He was a mean customer, this Grimwade, a petty bureaucrat, and a smooger, to boot. When business brought any of the scrub aristocracy to
the station he was more than a model of willingness and eagerness to oblige. ‘You’ve an hour until the train goes, Mrs Brigalow Downs. If you come across to the house Mrs Grimwade will give you a cup of tea.’ ‘Would you care to have lunch before starting for home, Mr Hereford Bullock?’ He was fishing for invitations to the cattle stations beyond the settlement. At the same time, I’ve seen a settler’s wife sitting in the broiling sun in a cart outside the goods shed for half an hour waiting for Grimwade to make his leisurely appearance. You’d think it would be easy to catch him out over something like that; plenty of us were just waiting a chance; but he could always produce the Regulations, and the Regulations, it appeared, could always be interpreted to the inconvenience of the public.

When Grimwade was calling the mail you’d think he had written the letters himself and was now regretting his good nature. It would be hard to find a character in the entire Davison oeuvre limned from so alienated a viewpoint; further evidence, perhaps, that he was sketched straight from life, because a credible character reconceived from an author’s imagination would inevitably contain some of the lineaments of charity. Yet Grimwade, a totally unlikeable automaton, is credible. ‘You have got Cronkie right’, Ranger Cumming told Davison of Grimwade in 1944.

Grimwade deeply disappoints Old Mac by telling him, ‘not without relish’, that there is no letter for him. Later, the narrator spots a letter addressed to McShane which had been lying face downwards on the office floor.

It must have fallen unnoticed from the bag. I handed it to Grimwade. He glanced at it, expressed no regret in the matter, but shot it into the box where the left-over mail was kept and grunted, ‘He can get it next week,’ almost as if matters couldn’t have arranged themselves more to his liking.

Another settler with plenty of reason to remember James Cronk was Jack Kirilloff, who knew that the stationmaster would never turn a blind eye to irregularity and maintained a mean surveillance over all the goods coming up by rail for the universal provider’s store. But, if Jack brought in his sly grog by rail, he was never caught. His public presence was that of shrewd businessman and member of the race committee and the school committee. At the races on the township reserve he sold cold drinks from Coolgardie safes. The school was opened in tents on 23 October 1921.

Kirilloff’s store was successful enough to keep McNaughton and Co., the Roma traders and Hunter’s competitors, out of the district for several years; and when Jack and Chloe acquired their permanent store building on the township reserve it became a venue for “us copperbottoms” to exchange gossip and grouses. The store is commemorated in one line of Davison’s late stories.

I was with half a dozen others in Charlie Kirilloff’s store one train day ...

Some say that the name was first given to Injune Creek by the explorer, Ludwig Leichhardt, when he carved on a tree there: ‘Leichhardt in June’. Others hold that records of the explorer’s travels suggest that he was never there in June, and the
word is aboriginal for a flying squirrel that inhabits the locality. By late August 1920, the name Injune had been officially accorded to a new urban identity, and the outback name for the railway terminus, Injune Creek, had fallen into desuetude.

While Fred waited through that spring for either the miracle that would fill his tank or the return of the tanksinkers, he set about building the new homestead of sandalwood logs packed with mud. It had a verandah at the front with a floor of logs laid corduroy fashion and a pitched roof of iron, the first material to be removed after the settler and his family abandoned it. It measured approximately sixteen feet by fourteen feet nine between its four cornerposts. It stood in a nook of briga low and belah, facing south to the road half a mile away. Behind it, a little less than half a mile down a gentle slope slightly to the west of north, was the tank and, just beyond that, the Bluey. About a hundred and fifty feet behind the homestead was to be the new calf yard with the milking shed and bails under an iron roof; and below the yard, stretching to the south eastern edge of the tank, the ten-acre horse paddock [Plate 17].

The tanksinkers returned early in the new year; and before they departed with their job finished, Kitty took Doris Mary on a trip to Sydney, visiting Bill Davies's parents at Toowoomba en route. One reason for Kitty's holiday was to allow Dad and Mother to see their two-year-old granddaughter for the first time in fifteen months. Doubtless Kitty also needed a taste of metropolitan life. But there may also have been an ulterior motive: Fred may have been sending emissaries charged with the task of pleading for a subsidy, or perhaps in token of thanks for gifts already received. On Saturday, 5 February 1921, he took up a pencil during a pause in his household chores ('I have a batch of bread in the oven and am all of a flutter') and wrote to Kitty that the silt dam was finished. He also committed that common error of the first weeks of a year and dated his letter a twelvemonth early.

... I am getting along tip top so you need not let any misgivings spoil your enjoyment. I get up earlier and go straight out & milk. The cows are camping well. After breakfast I do the separator, wash up, make the bed, sweep out & set 'me prunes' to soak. Then I pass the hat round behind the hens. I finish up earlier in the evening. The dam is finished & we have had two dry storms, maybe the next will fill the tank. And I am getting on with the new yard. It is very quiet and lonely. Nobody to agree with me when I think Strawbery will calve before next Sunday, nobody to encourage me, & nobody to guide my stumbling footsteps & nobody to say 'Daddy, very good?'

Traddles is a bit better, Nell follows me from daylight to dark & the puss also.

That cheque was stopped alright. I hear that you did visit the Davies. I am glad of that.

What does mother say about coming up here. It would be fine to have her and think she would enjoy it. I have just taken my bread out of the oven. It is so light I have had to put a flat iron on it so that it won't float away.

I guess I will get a letter from you today and will hear about how you
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are enjoying yourself in Sydney. There is not much to tell about things here except to say that I am doing fine. I tucker pretty well & don’t take things too hard. I will be glad when you are back here again but I am glad that you have been able to go for a change.

I did not realise that you were gone until I got back that night & you bet I felt lonely. The shanty was like a tomb.

I guess this is all just now Kitty dear. Make the most of your holiday & don’t worry about me. If things go right we will have one together before long. What do the folks think of Baby. Don’t let her forget me. Give my love to everyone.

With love from
your B x x x x x x
Fred K x x x x x x

Traddles was shortly to die of distemper. Nell, a fox terrier, was an addition to the menage.

The first two months of 1921, usually among the wettest, brought only an inch and three quarters of rain to Roma. Three more inches fell in March and there was a completely dry April. Even so, it seems likely that by the time Kitty returned to Sandalwood, the tank was full. It might well have been the means whereby Fred met Pat Macnamara.

I met Old Mac first when he came to my place for water. He looked like a scarecrow coming through the bush; a gangling figure, youthful in proportions but moving with the rusty agility of spry old age, his flannel and dungarees faded and patched, the dungarees bagged at the knees and showing an inch of bare shank above the top of his blucher boots. Two seven-pound syrup tins dangled from a big brown hand at the end of a skinny brown arm. Hair like silver duff stood out below the rim of his shapeless old hat. His face, when he came close, was as kind as I have ever seen, features big and bony, but fine in their massive way, and blue-grey eyes that were startlingly clear and liquid for a man of his years; a dreamy Celt, gentle—as I later came to know—with the gentleness of an old horse.

The weather was dry and the little gilgai on which he had been depending for water had failed; could he take what he wanted from my tank until rain fell? It wasn’t much to ask; my tank was brim-full, two thousand cubic yards. With his two empty syrup tins, his gaunt physique, his comical get-up, his years, his gentle diffidence, he made me feel ashamedly rich.

The reason he hadn’t brought larger vessels, kerosene tins, for instance, was that he wouldn’t be able to carry them the four miles across bush to his camp. While the dry spell lasted he came every second day, eking out the water for cooking and washing, a syrup tin each twenty-four hours.

If he saw me about he would turn in my direction to exchange civilities and perhaps have a short yarn before going to the tank to dip his water. Sometimes he would bring a scrub turkey that he had shot,
pleased, I could see, to have hit on a way to return a kindness for a kindness.45

By the time his tank was full, Fred must have grown aware of riches other than water, also won from a dry season, often muddied and cloudy, and always wrested out of drudgery, anxiety and fatigue. For during those flat, depressed months of spring 1920, while he was assimilating the full folly of his instructions to the tanksinkers, a reappraisal was taking place deep within him: a reorganisation for another destiny, a truer one, but still prepared for him by his father. At a small writing table he had built for himself under a window space in a corner of the little homestead, late into the night and for much of every Sunday, young Fred, aged twenty-seven, strove again to do his father’s bidding while his wife grew angrier at what was being demanded of him out of the lees of his labours, and at what he was expecting of himself.

The letter Fred wrote to Kitty in Sydney was addressed to her care of the Australian Post, 26 Jamieson Street. By the time she received it, the final issue of that short-lived monthly magazine was lying, virtually untouched, on the shelves of the newsagents. Fred, the toiling dairy farmer, had been conscripted to write something for all six issues of it; and Kitty thought he deserved whatever payment she could get. In fact, the Australian Post was to prove one of Fred junior’s greatest debts to Fred senior; but, as is usually the case with debts beyond price, he never publicly acknowledged it.
Fred Davison's North Shore real estate business was prospering enough by the winter of 1920 for him to establish a one-man political platform in the guise of another new magazine. He took rooms in the city, on the south side of the harbour, in the same building as the offices of the Ladies' Sphere at 26-28 Jamieson Street, where he established his first Sydney printery and the Australian Post Publishing Company.

Volume 1, Number 1 of the *Australian Post* was dated 1 September 1920. Describing itself as 'An Illustrated Magazine of Fact and Fiction', it sold at sixpence for a copy of forty-eight royal quarto pages and a cover. The first cover, printed blue-black and red, carried a picture of a three-dimensional relief map of Australia and the slogan 'AUSTRALIA FIRST!' A banner at the foot of the cover read:

In Ten Years We Paid to Other Countries £626,000,000 for Goods Most of Which We Should Have Made for Ourselves.

Its four-column pages gave a total of 43 column inches to the page; or 192 columns, in the first issues, of editorial matter, half-tone illustrations and advertising, plus three cover pages of advertisements. The column ratio of editorial and pictorial matter in the inaugural issue was 116:76; almost forty per cent of space went on advertising. James Taylor, the director of advertising, had clearly done a sterling job in selling space to forty-three advertisers, including several of Sydney's leading businesses, such as Anthony Hordern's, David Jones's, Lasseter's, and the NSW Government Tourist Bureau. One of the advertisements was for a season opening on 28 August at Sydney Town Hall with Lowell Thomas, the American war correspondent who told the world about Lawrence of Arabia. His subject, illustrated by 'precious films', was *With Allenby in Palestine. An American Tribute to Anzac Valor*. He was to make nightly appearances, with matinees on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and appeared by invitation of the Commonwealth Government and under the direction of J. C. Williamson Ltd.

No fewer than seventy columns were written under various pen names by the magazine's managing editor, the polypseudonymous Fred. Fourteen more columns were taken up with a story entitled 'Dear Seventy-Seven' by Dulcie Davison. It was a sentimental romance, overwritten from outside the writer's experience, about the private doubts of two young people arranging to meet
through a lonelyhearts advertisement. The twenty-four-year-old Dulcie also had some verses published over a pen name that she was to use several times again: Una Dee.

One other set of verses appeared in that issue: the nine stanzas of ‘The Warrigal’ over the name ‘Fred Davison, Junr. Queensland’. Frederick Douglas Davison had done his utmost to prevail upon his young brother to use his second given name, Thomas, in order that Fred could call himself Douglas; but understandably Doug refused. So Fred continued to write most of his verse in his own name, first as ‘J unr.’ then as ‘Fred D. Davison’. Only a few of his short poems in the Post appeared over pseudonyms. It was for his prose that he chose to be almost as polypseudonymous as Dad, as if his principal literary aspirations were committed to becoming the farmer poet. His stories were written merely to help out the Old Man, so they appeared in the sort of mask suggested by Dad’s example.

Dad used two pen names for his two stories in that first issue: Holt Gibbons and Gibson Field. Under the former name, the first of several episodes appeared in a saga of boyhood on Bendigo, Baldy Johnson—and Duck. Gibson Field’s story was entitled ‘The Telephone Teaches Simpson’. It was a crude and loosely-written morality tale about a Freemason grocer and his problems over the installation of a private telephone in his shop—the wrong numbers, crossed lines and missed calls that cost him money—all because he was foolish enough to place his trust in the efficiency of the ‘Government Job’.

Simpson was a pretty patient man—beside, he had always been accustomed to the Government Job and its ways. Not only had he lived all his life with the thing—but he had got so that he kind of hugged it. ‘No monopolies for us Australians. We own our public services ourselves—it comes cheaper,’ he would say.

Simpson was to learn a lesson—and his telephone was to be the teacher. In his didactic incompetence, the author could be touchingly ingenuous.

Shortly after Simpson got his telephone a cheap lot of sugar came to hand (this is not a tale of the olden time, though the mention of cheap sugar might give that impression. Sugar is chosen by the writer as the ‘cheap’ line to help persuade the reader that he is reading fiction, and not an article on telephones). Two days later Simpson met his friend in the street.

The Australian Post apparently functioned without a telephone.

Dad wrote the first of a monthly series on Americans at home ‘By an Australian’, and otherwise editorialised without signature. In his page one introduction to the magazine, ‘The Australian Post—Its Job’, he explained that the Post would not ‘fill its columns with dry, argumentative articles’. Presumably the argumentative articles with which it did fill its columns were not thought by the editor to be dry. One of these was a weighty and liberally capitalised fable around a polemical pill entitled ‘The Hidden Hook. Shall We go Bolshevik?’ It began: “Two Fisherman Went A-fishing. One was an Honest Man—and the Other had Ordinary Sense. The Honest Man bought a Thick Rope and tied a Large Hook to One End of it.” Three and a half thousand words later, it concluded: ‘But beware
of Fishermen who Bait their Bolshevist Hook with the Big Fat Worms and Dangle them for our Catching'. On the way, it exhorted the reader in such terms as the following:

Any man who wishes to get anywhere or do anything, or any man who would have his sons and daughters after him have an opportunity of winning life’s prizes, or any man who would have Australia rank high among the peoples of the world, must realise that neither the Government Job nor this latest fraud of Social Ownership offers to the individual anything but the drabbest way of spending one’s life or the poorest possible method of nation-building.

The managing editor’s other unsigned contribution was a facetious sermon on elementary economics entitled ‘High Prices—and Moses. A Tale of Then and Now’. It counselled ‘folks’ to use their ‘mind boxes’ to think about why 1914 prices and 1920 wages were an impossible combination without ‘greater production’.

Prices cannot fall while the maker is paid high wages except the worker increases his output—and the only way worthy of this twentieth century to increase that output is by increasing the worker’s efficiency by mechanical means. Labor-saving machinery! More labor-saving machinery! And still more labor-saving machinery!

Moses (‘my information does not disclose his second name’) provided an allegorical peg for the argument because he staged a walkout of brickmakers who ‘walked clean out of the country’ and ‘headed for the bush’.

Moses was a good bushman and could find food of a kind, but the brickmakers didn’t think too much of the nuts and roots ration he served out. Moses’ stomach had got accustomed to fodder of that kind, for he had lived quite a while in the Never-Never before he started in as a trouble-maker around the brickyards . . .

The fault with the brickmakers was that they could ‘see only one thing at a time’. When they ‘went bush’ they found that meat meant more to them than straw did—and they let Moses know it.

Of the two contributions from outside the Davison family, one was a serial which was to run through every issue of the Post: monthly chapters from Alfred Searcy’s book, *By Flood and Field*. Searcy had been one of the honorary vice-presidents of the Australasian Society of America, was the author of *In Australian Tropics*, a fictionalised work of descriptive travel first published thirteen years previously. *By Flood and Field* was already nine years old, having been published by George Robertson in Melbourne in 1911 and in London by Bell in 1912. Its subtitle was ‘Adventures Ashore and Afloat in Northern Australia’. Its appeal for the editor of the *Post* was apparent in such paragraphs as this:

To the young man with courage and industry I would say: Go to the Northern Territory; I know of no better field for such as you.

The other external contributor was Dr Earle Page, MHR for Cowper, NSW. He was a founder of the Northern New South Wales Separation League and at that time, in the second year of his long parliamentary career, leader of the Country Party.1 His article, ‘The Proposed New State’, presented the case for de-
centralisation by the creation of a rich state of New England from the headwaters of the Darling to the coast, the whole area of which was ‘almost entirely adapted for closer settlement and the output of primary productions’.

‘The Australian Post’, declared its inaugural editorial, ‘is out to preach the gospel of individual self-help. Reasonable governmental regulation—Yes! Life Under the Government Job—No!’ The propagandist continued:

The Post will be Australian right through. It will be hopeful in tone—giving no space to doleful articles or to stuff written to show that nothing is as good as it used to be. The world is a better world than it ever was—and it is going to be better still . . .

This journal will tell its story by means of fiction and illustrated ‘human nature’ articles. The world is full of folks, and they all like to hear about other folks and their fortunes—good or bad. A journal that is not read from cover to cover fails to accomplish its full purpose—and to be read from cover to cover it must be interesting. We will remember that.

Young Fred’s only prose contribution to the September issue was the letter of a ‘Bush Settler’ in which he confessed to seeing the bottom of his tank, but he supplied the page one story of the October number and so donned the persona of his first pen name since F. Myall Davison and The ‘Roo. Seven years of wanderlust, war, work and worry had contributed little to the refinement of his nomenclature. The name he chose for his alter ego this time was T. Bone.

‘A Bit of Australia’ was the first of five first-person accounts, sparsely and somewhat gratuitously fictionalised, of the adventures of a returned soldier selecting a block in southern Queensland. They contained descriptive passages of great vividness and immediacy, but were otherwise laden with the commonest faults of the novice: overwriting, cliché, facetious attempts at humour, and an excruciating archness. Examples of all four are apparent in the opening paragraphs of Davison’s first published story.

It was cold, frosty, pitch dark and 4.30 in the morning when I got to Aulahlah, after an uncomfortable night in the railway carriage. The usual people had got in at the wayside stations and brought a draught with them; the usual people had got out and left the door open; and the usual idiot had dropped the window of the door at the stations and draped his body in the aperture, asking the usual idiot question of the usual station loafer: ‘I say! Are you the mayor?’

It was faintly amusing at first. None of his victims were able to think up a suitable retort, though the effort to do so was always very visible. Much repetition weakened the joke, and before the night was over his fellow-travellers were hoping that someone would stop his mouth with more than words. However, his luck held good. The fairest inference to be drawn is that the train journey, though uncomfortable, was probably uneventful or mainly forgotten, but the writer felt that to record the mere fact of its having happened was insufficient and an ‘amusing’ anecdote was needed to flesh it out. The incident, if it ever happened, seems more likely to have
been transferred from a troop train to serve some notion of obligatory fictioneering.

Only two paragraphs later, however, he was describing Roma from experience and achieving the ring of truth with details selected from all the impressions that must have assailed him on his return to a bush town for the first time since adolescence: 'the weatherboard houses behind the picket fences; the pepper and locust trees that line the streets; the sales yards; the creek, with its sandy bed and sprawling gum-trees, and the half-tipsy men who leant against the pub verandah posts'. But such felicities were largely undesigned, for the other faults persisted through the three and a half pages of the episode. Even the storyteller's fascination with the minutiae of existence and with imparting information, which destroyed the point of the fictionalising, was marred by didacticism and the kind of comment approved by Dad and probably requested by him.

I have learnt since that putting on the billy for travellers is one of the considerate little ways they have in the bush, and you may ride up to a man's camp at midnight and he will appear in his shirt tails, invite you in and announce that he was just going to put the billy on. This is a land of long distances, and dry distances, and the camp that fails to offer refreshments to a traveller gets a bad name—and deserves it. Putting on the billy for the stranger is a good Australian custom. May it never fall into disuse.

Orallo was called Oogara; Dave Wills's store became Tom Wilson's; Mount Hutton became Mount Barrimundi; Stewarts Creek became Sewells Creek; and Bungie Dam was probably derived from Bungil, the shire that contained the settlement. The first episode ended with the narrator setting off to follow the blazes. The account resumed under the same title in the November issue of the Post, where it occupied a subsidiary position between pages 33 and 37.

The chap who had blazed the line I was following had not been enthusiastic about it, for the cuts were as far apart as a man could see. Axeman to a survey party is evidently part of the Government Job.

In many respects that second episode was an improvement on the first. For one thing, it contained no other attempt to grind the axeman's axe. Perhaps that is why the managing editor chose to relegate it to the latter part of his magazine, some distance past a page of narrative doggerel in twenty stanzas by Fred D. Davison, Queensland. Dad illustrated the story with pictures of a resting camel train, the Mitchell Library, an uncaptioned sketch of what might be an engineer's scaffolding design for an early stage in the construction of Sydney Harbour Bridge, and an underexposed photograph of some flat grassless farmland, uncultivated and unfenced, with a couple of dead ringbarked trees in the foreground. Dad's appreciation of the nature and function of literature was consonant with his understanding of the design and function of magazines. He was a man with 'a high resistance to mere practicality', as his candid son described him some years later,
who 'would always be seeing short-cuts to paradise—and getting bushed trying to
follow them'.

Not that T. Bone had by any means begun to solve the technical problems of
storytelling. He could interpose a line of asterisks and explain:

The row of stars represents the trip back to Oogara and two days' wait at
that place. It would also represent the journey from Oogara back to
Aulahlah but for an incident which occurred, and which shows how
zealous some railway employees are in the interests of the public they
represent.

There followed an anecdote, taking most of a column to relate, in which the
traveller was unable to pay for his ticket at the end of his journey because nobody
moved to take his money. Since soldier settlers travelled free on Queensland
railways, he surely invented the incident to supply the conclusion of this tale with a
dutifully filial sideswipe against the Government Job.

He was also a tank of information, well ordered and inserted with a scrupulous
sense of sequence, but discursive and hence seeming like padding.

Outside of duck, pigeon and turkey, an Australian will not eat the game
found in the bush. That is to say, he will not eat it while he has the price
of beef, and even when he is out of funds he does not care to have his
neighbours know that the wallaby or kangaroo he is taking home is
destined to appear on the family menu. He is always taking it back 'for a
bit of meat for the dogs; likes to see the dogs get a bit of fresh meat
sometimes!'

Wallaby, unless well camouflaged, is certainly not the most tasty of
meat, but if there is anything finer than kangaroo steak I have yet to
sample it. Kangaroo will be a delicacy when the animal gets so rare that
his flesh will be beyond the reach of any but the best-lined purse. There is
no explanation of this prejudice.

When I say that he will not eat certain sorts of game, I mean that he
never mentions having eaten it, and never speaks as if he believes that the
person he may be speaking to has eaten it, but there are very few people
who have gone through the early struggles of pioneering who were not
at one time glad to get clean meat at the expense of a cartridge.

Fictional transpositions included a tour eastwards from the railway instead of
westwards, leading the walker to 'the old Myall Downs homestead' instead of the
old Mount Hutton outstation. Myall Downs contains an echo of 'F. Myall
Davison'; but it was also the name of a cattle station bordering on the Mount
Hutton lease. And in that second episode, Bungie Dam became Bungil Dam, so
perhaps the former version was a misprint, easily caused by the author's clumsily
cursive hand.

In December issue, the third episode was headed 'T. Bone's Horse Deal'. Here
the author introduced his partner, The Bushman.

The Bushman's name is Syd, and he is nine or ten years younger than
me—and about twenty years older. By the time we have both moved
along another decade he will be ten years younger than he is now; that
may require working out on a slate. But to save trouble I will say the answer is that The Bushman is getting his old age over and done with during his early years.

It was young Fred's portrait of his brother. It was also the facetious detachment of the novice fictioneer lacking empathy with his characters. The inference is that Doug/Syd was an earnest youth, an old head on young shoulders, but the reader was given only the author's word for it, and no example of how his condition was made manifest. Fred's observations of Doug contained a deeper truth than he could have known: those months could well have been Doug's old age, for he was not to know another.

Fred also indulged in nudging his reader with ridicule for the narrator, whose horse dealings exemplified the countryman's popular caricature of the new chum.

I tried to throw some assurance into my manner and to behave as though I were accustomed to dickering over horse flesh. I even ventured so far as to try and find a blemish in the animal. 'He's got lumps on both his hind legs,' I said.

'Whire,' said the Irishman, squinting.

I laid a timid forefinger on each of the lumps in turn.

'Thims her hocks! Thims joints! All harses have thims. They couldn't walk without thims.'

Fred's eye was clearly keener than his ear. When, later, 'the brown earth, the deep blue sky, and the subtle undercurrent of excitement' fills his hero with 'a great content' he remarks, anxious to share his feelings with Syd, that it's bonzer.

'What's bonzer?' asks Syd. 'It's just sky, isn't it?'

There was no affectation about Syd's indifference. It was genuine. A fair scene will cause me to catch my breath; and I would willingly walk a mile out of my way at any time in order to visit some picturesque place.

The man who was ignorant of a horse's sex and hocks was not the same as he who would 'catch his breath' at 'a fair scene' or, later in the story, as he who could observe the horse's skill in drawing the cart through difficult terrain.

The episode ends upon the partners' making their second night's camp, with the obligatory homily and predictable disaster attendant upon the making of damper.

Under the crust there was half an inch of good damper. The rest, with the exception of the cremated portion at the bottom, was hot, sticky dough.

I squatted looking at the disgusting mess and waiting for the blow to fall. It fell.

'What do you call it, anyway?'

'Damper.'

There was a pause for a moment.

'Couldn't be much damper, could it?' said the Bushman.

'Get out!' I snatched up a lump and flung it at him.

Following as much as seven years after that short sketch of matey horseplay, 'Campin' Out' in 'Roo Thuds', such a dénouement suggests that the writer's engagement with the outer life had left no time for the inner development of a
literary sensibility, despite the continuing evidence of that 'innate feeling for prose' first discovered during his mid-teens in America.

The episode in the January number was entitled 'In South-West Queensland', the geographical location by which Davison always described the area, although Roma, little more than two hundred and fifty miles from the coast, is almost five hundred miles from Queensland's nearest western border. The narrative began with breaking camp in the early morning and ended with their first night's camp on the selection. The brothers became Duncan and Donal Cruikshank; 'they were Scotch-Americans—with the accent on the Americans'. The two creeks on Portion 82 became 'Quart-Pot Creek, running through the back half of the selection, and Blackfellow's Creek, through the front half'. The Government Job was supplied with a token appearance.

Our place lay about eight miles from where the terminus of the railway would be when Messrs Go Slow and Day-Labour had completed the job. The indications were that that would not be very soon. After the elections, probably. Our electorate was pretty evenly balanced, and Fathead was out to have as many of his cobbers as possible in the locality on polling day.

It was the accusation answered by John McEwan Hunter in Roma in May 1919 as part of his speech during his last visit to his electorate. For the most part, T. Bone's tale kept moving like a horse and a laden springcart picking a track through the bush, with only an occasional halt for facetious comment and euphemistic badinage.

'Well, where the deuce do you think we're going—to the bloomin' Tivoli?'

'No, but we ought to be travelling in a north-westerly direction from the railway, Syd.'

'Woah! Well, which is the north-west?'

'Across there, I think.'

'No! It's across here!'

Then we became engaged in a polite but spirited discussion on the points of the compass. A favourite subject of debate, incidentally, among city people, as soon as the town hall clock is hidden by the gum trees.

With adroit use of a blue pencil, an editor whose space was precious might have made it into an absorbing reminiscence; but the managing editor was by now anxiously trying to fill mounting columns of editorial space. The fifth issue was reduced to forty-two pages, of which hardly more than seven were filled with advertisements, as compared with nineteen pages at the start. That was why the sixth issue of the Australian Post, in February, was its last. Its forty-two pages contained only five pages of advertising, with ten of its features written by the elder Fred and only one by the younger: 'Corned Beef and—Goannas'. It was T. Bone's farewell to the griller.

The ubiquitous Davish dash which padded the title was symptomatic of the padding throughout its five thousand words, spread over four pages by the same generous leading used for all the text in that issue. It consisted of reminiscence,
'colour' and callow anecdote about, as the title implies, the problems of food gathering in Queensland 'west of the coastal range and east of the wool track'. The reader learnt that Syd's name for his partner was Ned, that 'the sort of heat that makes strong men wilt' was to be experienced in New York, USA, about the middle of July, and some elementary natural history about marsupials and the iguana, or goanna.

The fat of a goanna is made into a salve which is claimed to be a sure-fire cure for rheumatism. It is certainly penetrating. A thick bottle filled with goanna fat and hung in the sun will in the course of a day or two become greasy on the outside.

To obtain the fat it is necessary first to catch the goanna and then kill him—he won't like that, but it is for his own good if you look at it the right way. Next slit him down the back and hang him by the tail with a tin under him to catch the fat as the sun melts it out of him, which it will do in the course of a week or so . . .

Now, a goanna, though in life inarticulate, after lying dead for a couple of days in the sun can hum a little. I don't care for music of that sort around a camp, so that it fell to my lot to take 'goanna' by the tail and tow him out into the bush, where he could croon to himself.

But after all, young Fred was a pall bearer at a funeral, and was writing without conviction for the Old Man's sake, though doubtless learning in the process. He was never really able to write to order, and was never happy to write for money.

Under the heading, 'Maybe Our Last?', on page one of number six, Dad wrote: 'With this issue the Australian Post will in all probability cease publication'. He thanked 'the considerable number of readers in all parts of Australia who have supported the magazine, and especially the writers of some very encouraging letters'. He explained: 'Readers are necessary to the life of a journal—but advertisers are ten times more necessary'. The paper alone of each copy of the Post cost about sixpence, and his return from wholesale distributors was threepence. 'The cost of writing and printing the magazine had to be added on to that', he said; although it seems unlikely that he paid a penny directly for any contribution to its pages. He thanked the firms 'who have consistently advertised', recognising that the magazine's policy of 'opposition to Government ownership of trading concerns, and undue Government interference in business, is for the best interests of the country as a whole, and for business in particular'.

The editor has made an honest effort, accompanied by much hard work, to place at the service of Australia a journal that might have some influence on public thought, teaching that business is a friend and not an enemy to the general welfare.

But the existence of all journals turns on the presence on the staff of an efficient advertising man—and they are scarcer than hens' teeth. The Post has to thank the men who have given part of their time to its advertising affairs, but the time has come when it needs someone who will take on the whole of the work of keeping in touch with the Australian business firms. Failing connecting up with such a man, not as an employee, but as
one of the firm, the Post will cease with this issue—while the managing
editor is in a position to pay all liabilities—and then some.

If other and more persistent men think they can carry on the good
work, The Australian Post has a small printing plant for sale—also some
unexpired advertising contracts to hand over.

The Editor with the best of good feeling, wishes his readers goodbye,
and retires, a wiser, but by no means a sadder man. There is still corn in
Egypt.

There was corn all right; but the colloquialism had not entered into currency at the
time, although even if it had, Dad could never have seen how it applied to the
work of a Davison. He could scarcely have admitted, even to himself, that any
experience had made him a sadder man; otherwise he would have rewritten his
editorial to silence its whinge. Hence there is reason to suppose that he gained no
wisdom from it, either. The sum he lost in the venture is not recorded; and neither
is James Taylor's response to the above obloquy, supposing he was more than
merely another pseudonym. The advertising manager Fred sought would
certainly have needed to be more than an employee. A superman was required, not
only to persuade new advertisers or disenchanted old ones to support a
pseudoprophet crying in a self-induced wilderness, but also to agree that the
difference between an employee and a member of the firm was probably that the
latter would be unpaid.

In all but the last issue, Fred junior had more than one contribution, usually in
verse. One of them, by T. Bone, was nine lines in the January issue entitled 'My
Camp'. The diction is as trite as the sentiments, but the lines do describe the scene
from the nook of brigalow and belah where, by this time, Fred had built the
homestead.

I've built my camp on a low hilltop
Where the sandalwood and native hop
And the purple lupines grow;
Where brigalows wave aloft their plumes,
Where the air drifts sweet from wild bush blooms
And the bluebells nod and blow.
Afar I can see the low range lie—
A dark blue smudge on a turquoise sky—
And the green vale down below.

His other poet's name was John Sandes, and in the December issue he apotheosised
'My Sweetheart' in seven couplets of iambic tetrameter.

No lass with mine can well compare,
None half so dear, none half so fair.
She has two merry dark brown eyes,
Full innocent, yet quaintly wise;
In her soft cheeks wild roses blow;
The sweetness of her lips, I know.
Her dimpled smile, her spun-gold hair,
Earth has no fairer things I swear;
Nor sweeter bliss holds heav’n above
Then when she says to me ‘I love’.
But if by this you have been led
To think we two shall some day wed,
Then I’m afraid that you’ve been had—
She’s two years old, and I’m her dad.

Doris Mary’s second birthday had been celebrated in October. That token of it must have overjoyed her grandfather.

It appeared at the foot of a half page that carried three verses over the name of Fred. D. Davison, Queensland. They were entitled ‘Australia’, subtitled ‘Dawn’, ‘Noon’ and ‘Night’, and bore the following first lines:

I have seen the daylight stealing
I have seen the white clouds sailing
I have seen the night shades rising

The last six lines of ‘Dawn’ read:

Noisy magpies chatter loudly,
Cowbells jingle eerily,
And the ‘burra sees the sunbeams
From the dead and topmost limb—
Loudly rings his herald laughter,
Sometimes jeer and oftentimes hymn.

‘Eerily’ had been rhymed with ‘ceased to be’; and the other verses contained such ornaments as ‘guilty waters’ gurgling softly and ‘trickling seaward ‘neath the fern’, a ‘shy grey ‘roo’ hopping ‘to the forest mirror’s brink’, and Australia sinking to slumber ‘neath the starstrewn dome of night’. He committed two other comparable lyrics in the November issue as Fred. Davison, Junr. ‘Dawn on the Plains’ consisted of five quatrains of which the second is a fair sample.

The grasses stir and insects creep,
And murmurs waking life;
The east is streaked with dreary grey—
The dawn with night makes strife.

And he endeavoured to evoke scenes familiar in his childhood with ‘The Yarra Stream’, which streamed through sixteen quatrains predictably from the source to the sea.

1 lark, the little stream is singing
Where the wild bird’s notes are ringing,
Far below the sunny treetops,
’Neath the tree fern’s canopy.

Leaping little mossy ledges,
Where the lichens and the sedges
Trail their streamers in the water—
Wending swiftly on its way.

Singing a ‘mystic song that has no ending’ the stream continues ‘laughing’ and ‘crooning’ till other creeks, hearing ‘the music of its fountains’, hasten to blend with the Yarra stream, which then runs
Winding through the Baw-Baw ranges,
Aisles of woodland waterway.

After six more stanzas passing through night, morning and dawning in rhyme, the noonday sun, drowsy cattle, a waterwheel, and 'on 'twixt orchard hillsides'

Where the earth in golden springtime
Buried lies, 'neath clouds of bloom

it reaches the Melbourne suburb of Glen Iris. Doubtless the poet also had Glenferrie in mind, and the river beyond the end of Lisson Grove.

Through the glens with iris blowing,
Slowly to the city flowing—
'Tcross the heavens drift the smoke bar—
Buildings looming in the haze.

At the bridges, swirling under—
Hark, the city's tread and thunder!—
Feel the nation's life-blood pulsing!—
Commerce's throbbing arteries.

Now amid the shipping drifting,
Where the creaking derricks lifting
Load the steamer, bark and schooner,
With their freight for foreign lands.

Through the dreary mud flats lying,
Past the city, slowly dying,
Used and sullied and forgotten—
Drifting, drifting to the end.

O'er its grave the gulls are winging,
Nature's dirge the seas are singing,
And the spent and weary river
Sinks into its ocean home.

The scansion is near perfect, but the scene evoked is essentially an English one, or rather an Eng. lit. one: the School Paper regurgitated. Those trite paraphrases of lyric verse were false, yet their significance as juvenile projections of inner experience should not be underrated. Fred was evidently experiencing the dawn of conscious creativity making strike with the night of the preconscious, a night which, as in the case of so many of his generation, had been prolonged by the war, in many cases for so long that 'dreary grey' was all the survivor ever knew of the days of his life. But for Fred, the plains about him that were growing lighter after the complaint of the night bird's cry seemed open with promise and the potentialities of flight.

The wild geese rise from out the swamp
High in the windtorn sky,
The chill earth warms—the King of Day
Rules from his throne on high.

Fred the poetaster was more impressive, however, when at his most conventionally Kiplingesque, writing the rollicking narrative verse of Banjo
Paterson’s and C. J. Dennis’s legion of imitators. The Post published four, including ‘The Warrigal’. The second appeared in the October issue, also over the name of Fred Davison, Junr., Queensland. ‘The Golden Reef’ consisted of thirty-nine quatrains with only the second and fourth lines rhyming.

This is a tale of a man and his mate,
And the girl both wanted to win;
Of gold and of hate and of treachery—
And the Devil—whose joy is sin.
The name of the first was Billy McGee,
And the name of his mate, Moran.
Each thought of his mate as the best of mates—
And each of himself as a man.

The pair are gold prospectors, the good McGee and the evil Moran, who go out into the desert together where the stuff they are made of is tested.

Now a cur may pass as a full grown man,
If he keeps to the well-trod track,
Where a man is weighed by his bank account
And the clothes he wears on his back.

But he’d best stay east of the last wire fence,
Should he have any cause to doubt
The strength of the fibre which makes his soul,
Or the desert will find him out.

Moran hates McGee when he finds him to be the better man: McGee who cooks for them, who toils and keeps faith, while ‘twas Moran who whined’. Then ‘one day while McGee was away’, Moran kicks his mate’s swag aside and a photograph of Moran’s girl falls out, for

neither knew that the girl he loved
Was loved by the other one.

Though they strike the gold, Moran’s hatred grows and fester. The crisis is reached when, on the return journey, a waterhole is found to be dry and their water runs low. While McGee sleeps, Moran gets up and drains their water bag.

When they rose to start as the growing sun
Dropped down to the earth’s hot rim,
And McGee picked up the empty bag
The truth was plain to him.

He turned on Moran, and he struck him down,
And he booted him where he lay,
And the bag he flung in his hang-dog face—
Then he turned and stumbled away.

Moran’s eyes blazed, and he jumped and hurled
A stone at the other man’s head;
It struck with a sickening crunch of bone,
And McGee pitched forward—dead!

As Moran continues the journey alone, he is followed closely by a phantom:
He could not out-distance the ghastly thing,
For the name of the thing was—Fear.
It falls behind only when he finds his place 'on the well-trod track'.
But there he met his former self—
A man whom he understood.
But the time was not long before he found
That another ghost came to him,
Whenever the voice of the crowd grew faint,
And whenever the lights turned dim.
And never again will he be alone,
As long as he travels life's course;
For, lest he forget, it stays close to him,
And the name of the ghost is Remorse.
He never was able to face the girl;
But he wrote a letter instead,
Which told her of thirst on the hot dry sands—
And the fact that McGee was dead.
To her, McGee's but a memory now;
For the passing of time heals grief,
And the whitening bones that once was McGee
Guard the track to the Golden Reef.
The November issue contained 'Jim Hurley', by Fred D. Davison, Queensland.
It begins:
Jim Hurley selected on Coolibah Creek,
A neat little place near the foot of The Peak;
A rather lone spot, but adjacent it lay
To a big cattle station owned by Mulray.
Now Jim was inclined to be wild, just a bit—
A fault of the lads of the west, I admit—
He'd honour with women, he'd stick to his mate,
But his feet led him oft from the path that is straight.
Jim's crooked path leads him into cattle duffing and he confesses it to his true love, Nell Ross.
The very same night that he plighted his troth,
He got his first taste of his future wife's wroth.
She extorts a promise from him that he will give it up. But then she learns of the arrival of two mounted policemen who put up at Flynn's farm where she works.
So when tea was over, Nell strolled to the gate
And loitered about, for she'd noticed of late
That Trooper O'Shane, when time could be found,
With his eyes and his feet would follow her round.
Nell exploits her situation to find out that, as she feared, they have come for her Jim. She slips out at night to warn him, but O'Shane discovers her doing so and as she rides out of the yard, he gives chase.
She picked up the track that led to Jim’s place—
Then steadied herself and her horse for the race;
And skirted and booted and seated astride
She rode then as only a bush girl can ride—
Light in the saddle, and low on his mane,
Firm-handed, but giving him plenty of rein;
The rush of the cool wind that blew on her face,
Brought the blood to her cheek—gave her strength for the race.

She has fourteen miles to go, but knows she has no chance against O’Shane.
From the wrath of the law, for gain or for loss,
Ride hard to the side of your lover, Nell Ross!

By the bend where the track winds down and around,
Was a boulder-strewn scrub, through which scarce could be found
Enough room for a rider, even by day—
The girl turned her horse from the well-trodden way,
And, bent flat to his mane, she raced down the slope,
White-faced and defiant of death, in the hope
That the trooper would falter, and then in the end,
Not daring to follow, would go round the bend.

But O’Shane does the following and is reaching for her rein when they approach a fallen ironbark tree.
Nell snatched off her hat as she felt her horse rise
To the jump, and she clouted his horse on its eyes.

Finally:
’Twas many hours later ere the trooper arose,
A bit heavy-limbed, as one wakes from a doze—
And found, after closely inspecting his hide,
That his principal hurt—was one to his pride.
And Nell and Jim Hurley, ere dawned the new day,
With bright hopes to guide them, were riding away,
To start life anew many miles from the place
Where Jim did his duffing—and Nell rode her race.
Now, happily married, they’re doing well
Near—a town I could name if I cared to tell.

All good clean fun, bathos, and Boys’ Own Paper fantasy, bearing as much relation to reality as an emigration booklet issued from Australia House. These were the beginnings of Davison’s bush romance mode; and although they bear many signs of having been conceived in the rhythms of labour, smokos, and journeys from homestead to work, then dashed off with a stub of pencil with scarcely a thought of diction, scansion, or any but the most colloquial syntax and jingling auditive rhymes, they nevertheless imposed upon their immature and poorly-lettered author some disciplines: a precision in choice of words, pace in narrative development, economy of incidental detail, and control of dramatic content. Banjo Paterson would never have misused the adjective ‘wroth’ as a noun.
merely in order to achieve a rhyme with ‘troth’, nor perpetrated a colloquial line like

He’d honour with women, he’d stick to his mate
in which the word ‘he’d’, tellingly repeated with a stressed meaning on an
unstressed syllable, means ‘he had’ in the first use and ‘he would’ in the second.
And the yet poorer-lettered Henry Lawson would never have tried to get away
with a blunder like

‘Twas many hours later ere the trooper arose
A few moments’ conscious craftsmanship could surely have wrought a more
satisfactory line. Although Dad imposed obligations up to a point, the time and
energy for such niceties were doubtless as scarce as enthusiasm for Dad’s manifestly
failing venture.

The fourth and last of the narrative poems Davison wrote for the Post was, with
one notable exception some fifteen years later, a farewell to his poetic muse. Here
the potent symbolic figure of the dog reappeared, this time as ‘The Old Cattle
Dog’. These verses were attributed to Fred D. Davison, NSW, perhaps because
they were used as a filler in the January issue at the foot of the fourth T. Bone tale,
and the editor was concerned to elude any association of the poet with his other
staple contributor, whose episode that month was titled ‘In South-West
Queensland’. The dog, presumably a blue heeler, was given the antonomastic
name of Bluey. He was too old for work, and in five octaves he relived past glories
in his dreams.

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Again he races up the ridge} \\
&\quad \text{To turn the scrubbers back—} \\
&\quad \text{Or tails the dusty lowing herd} \\
&\quad \text{Along the droving track.}
\end{align*}
\]

The first and last stanzas are a fair sample of the rest.

Poor Blue is limping down the track
Towards his setting sun—
Grown old and stiff and past his work,
His day is nearly done;
A younger dog has learned to do
The old dog’s well loved tasks,
And room to drowse beside the fire
Is all that Bluey asks.

So though his usefulness has gone,
When winter nights are chill,
Beside the fire a place is found
For good old Bluey still.
The thieving years steal swiftly past,
And well I know that I
Some day will find—that nought remains
But dreams of days gone by.

Those verses are of interest for three more reasons. They contained the earliest

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reference in Davison’s writing to the scrubbers. They limned a portrait of an animal which fairly rigorously avoids anthropomorphism, save for the presumption, by no means unfounded, that a dog can dream. And thirdly, as an imaginative projection circumscribed by a young man’s misapprehension about the essential nature of old age, they might also embody the farmer poetaster’s own fatigue as the initial failure of his tank prefigured the ultimate failure of the selection; and, to some degree perhaps, reflect a growing discomfort in his intellectual isolation.

The Post poems were fostered as much by the convenient rhythms of English syntax as by Fred’s growing friendship with RANGER GUMMING. John Gibbon Cumming was eleven years older than Fred, and in the year of Fred’s birth he left school in Scotland to emigrate to Australia where he started work on a raw selection in the Maranoa. At the age of twenty-four, after a run of crop failures, he suffered a nervous breakdown with attendant insomnia, which he set about curing for himself by reading. The only books available were those the family had brought out with them from the Old Dart. To forget himself and his troubles he started committing poetry to memory. ‘I suppose’, he wrote to Davison twenty-one years after they parted, ‘subconscious imitation set in. Anyway, I cured my nerves.’ Cumming became a compulsive versifier, and in a letter he wrote to Jack O’Donohue from the Dalby Land Office in October 1943, he recalled days of yore.

A lot of milk has been put through the separator since . . . and I suppose the old spring carts, sulkies, buggies, gray horses we used to travel in and on have all gone to rest. Where the wiry, bearded stockmen clad in shirt and snowy moles chased the scrubbers through the wattle with the trapyards for their goals. Where there were not any fences and the run was wide and free, They are feeding dairy poddies where the scrubbers used to be.

The rest of the letter was arranged in quatrains. ‘I started to write to Jack O’Donohue and broke into verse’, he explained to Davison in a handwritten footnote to O’Donohue’s letter.

Neither Cumming nor Davison pursued their poetic leanings much further, but in later life Davison became a sensitive critic of poetry. Privately, only for his poet friends, he showed that he could make a sympathetic adjustment to the modes and bearings of modern poetry. ‘Poets these days’, he wrote to the poet Robert Clark, ‘seem to allow themselves more licence in the matter of rhyming than they did in those very distant days when I was a hopeful young jingle-smith’.

Fred was not the only member of his family who continued to fill the growing spaces between advertisements in the Post and provide relief from the prodigious flood of rodomontade spawned by the head of the family. Stories and features were supplied by Janet Fargher, Berenice Baynham, and Dulcie Davison (who were one and the same person) and Eunice Moore, better known before and afterwards as Amelia Davison.

On the editorial page of the second issue, Dad wrote that the magazine was in the market for short stories, preferably of five to six thousand words.

Those of Australian interest will be given preference. It is not absolutely
necessary that they should deal with Australia, or that the plot should be laid here, but they must be Australian in sentiment. Up to the present, most Australian tales have dealt with life out back—and largely with the hard toil side of that life. Has Australia no other side—or is it that it lacks romance and so writers are forced to tell about its heat, drought, rabbits and beer in terms of real life?

Surely, there is a story worth telling hidden away in the business houses of our cities—a story of business and its opportunities for those who are willing to put their backs into it. And what of our shipping? . . . the story of our commerce? . . .

Then there are the tales of our streets. Other countries have men and women who can pick the points of interest out of the swirl of life on the highways. Australia has them, too, and The Australian Post offers real money to such in return for their work.

But there were few opportunities for the promises of money to be tested, even had they been sought; the single exception, probably, being the occasional cheques, not in direct payment for work published, that were sent to that little family of bush settlers in the north, toiling against heat and drought, if not rabbits and beer. Apart from the half-dozen instalments from Alfred Searcy's book, the six issues carried a total of eleven articles by non-Davison hands, one of which was that in the inaugural issue by Earle Page. Four more were reprints from other sources. Of the remaining five, one was an article on wool prices by 'Merino' (November), one a short report of an address on Aborigines given by Sir Baldwin Spencer, the President of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science at its first congress (February), and one a report of a talk in unrecorded circumstances by the Rev. James Watson on how he founded the Methodist Mission on Goulburn Island (February). Lastly, there were two articles by A. N. White, one on early aviators (January) and the other a long, inept and sentimental description (February) of the writer's attempts to secure an interview with the Prime Minister of Australia, William Morris Hughes. It would appear to be further evidence that, by February 1921, Fred was scraping the barrel.

The rest of the contents were written by the managing editor, anonymously, editorially, or under pen names which even the most casual reader could have described were all masks of the same bigot. No team of amateur writers could all have been so consistently and narrowly obsessed. Episodes from Baldy Johnson—and Duck appeared in all six issues, as did 'an Australian's' homiletics about the American way of life. Gibson Field put in one more appearance, in the second issue, with a feature called 'Railroading a Continent', a sermon in dialogue between four travellers, from Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, en route by train to Perth, discussing railway economics and the virtues of private enterprise compared with the Government Job. In the same issue, another pseudonymous contributor appeared recalling 'Dooley', the author of 'Dobbie's Diversion' in the May 1897 issue of the Advance Australia. This time A. J. Dooley was the signatory to a rambling morality tale of the kind found in church magazines. 'Next-Door Neighbours' was about two suburban wives who
bickered over their husbands, one of whom was a home-loving gardener and the other a pillar of the local community who was seldom at home. The story in passing refers to 'captains of rifle clubs who shoot their matches at billiard rooms', with the implication that playing billiards is a less worthy pastime than rifle shooting. Fred was too extroverted to have perceived that he was both his suburban husbands, although he probably thought his own energetic life an exemplary solution to the dilemma.

A. J. Dooley also contributed to the third and sixth issues with two tales about a cardboard character named Doran. The first, 'Doran: Real Estate', begins with an Australian soldier in the trenches correctly predicting the end of the war and asking the medical officer on Armistice Day for an immediate discharge. He gets it, as he also predicted he would, because he tells the truth.

... Most of the lads are younger than I am—let them carry on, and go and see the German frauleins. I've got fewer years ahead of me than some of them—and so can't afford to waste any time. The war is won—let me go.

Later, he is boasting:

I joined the AIF because it suited me—and I left when it suited me.

Always tell the truth—that's the secret.

But perhaps Doran had never posed as a sergeant for a photographer, nor carried a bottle of black hair dye in his kit. Back home, Doran decides to take a line that 'gave quick returns, and didn't need much capital', so sets up as a real estate agent, with his own singular emphasis on the 'real', and starts on the outer edge of Melbourne trying to sell subdivisions left over from an old land boom. He is obliged to buy a block himself and broadcast the fact that he has sold one before potential buyers begin to show an interest. He plays off one against the other, exploiting others' needs and vanities to ensure his own commission.

Nobody but himself knew how badly he needed the commission. Financially, he was balanced on the edge of nothing at all. Office rent due—house rent due—yes, he was married—had got that habit early in life, and it was about the only good habit he had—money wanted to eat with, and for other purposes. Doran was getting scared—if he didn't pull this sale off, he would have to give up estate agenting, and go back to work. So who could blame him for using strategy? Foch, Haig, Monash and Doran had won the war by strategy. Estate agenting is war—so why make a noise about using it in that business?

'Doran's Progress Society' (February), which rambled as incomprehensibly as the worst of Dad's fustian, inadvertently shifts the estate agent to Sydney, for although the district of his operations remains unspecified, Doran is obliged to miss a Sunday afternoon trip to Watson's Bay. But such inadvertence was characteristic of the entire Australian Post adventure: frequent turnover continuations between the first and second halves of each issue, a poor choice of pictures with a wide range in the quality of their reproduction, often unrelated to the text and unimaginatively related to the layout, and too often used without captions merely as fillers. Above all, the most distinguishing characteristic of its content was the
garrulous colloquialism of its writing. An editorial policy ‘giving no space to
doleful articles or to stuff written to show that nothing is as good as it used to be’
would seem to be too unattractive to support the economics of any publication
aimed higher than the average church magazine. And in his unregenerate failure to
raise it above that level, Fred Davison senior revealed himself to be, in fine, the
completist philistine.

The best of the six issues was the fourth, in December, for which the managing
editor had written his minimum of only three articles: an editorial page, the Holt
Gibbons episode, and the feature on Americans at home. That issue, and maybe the
entire Post venture, is most notable today in that it carried the first excursion into
ture prose fiction of Fred the younger, under a new pen name which he used on
only two occasions: Scott McGarvie. The first occasion was above a bush romance
of tear-jerking sentimentality, derivative of a protracted adolescence of second-
rate reading, but it told a wholly invented tale with an attention to detail and a
sense of drama that prefigured the accomplished short story writer. The second
occasion was for another wholly-invented tale in the January issue, a petit-
bourgeois success story entitled ‘The Paint Ladder’, which fails because it was
written entirely from outside the author’s own experience, although in some of its
elements he may have drawn upon what he supposed to have been his father’s
experience. Perhaps one paragraph of revelation about Fred’s view of his father at
this time was the reason its two pages were excised from the only copy of the
bound volume of the Australian Post which is in the possession of the family. The
excision also removed some lyric verse by T. Bone used as a filler, two imperfectly
scanned octaves entitled ‘The Mountain Stream’.

‘The Paint Ladder’ tells of a poorly-paid worker in the paint manufacturing
trade named Tom Wilson, whose technical knowledge of paint and inventive skill
with it is superior to that of his employers and is exploited by them. In language
liberally padded with redundancies, the author spends his first thirty-two column
inches, or fifteen hundred words, describing how the firm’s attitude to its talented
employee brings about bankruptcy so that Tom falls out of work. As life for Tom,
his family, and the reader goes from bad to worse, the author explains why Tom
(unlike the author’s father, presumably) is unable to do more than search for a new
employer.

Some men, those of predatory instincts, can make a living anywhere at
any time. When all else fails they break out as house and land agents, float
a poultry paper, or indulge in some other form of sandbagging. Tom
lacked genius for the nothing-for-something method of keeping the home
fire burning. His sole talent was in the steady job.

After thirty-three column inches of hardship, Tom learns of a job in the mixing
room of a paint factory and secures it ahead of the queue by ensuring that he
catches the same suburban train as the firm’s personnel manager and sitting in the
adjoining seat. In next to no time, or twenty-seven inches, Tom’s ‘mental
surefootedness’ wins him promotion to the firm’s laboratory.

During the next month Old Mat. visited the works more often than
usual. Each time he went to Tom’s workshop-laboratory, sniffed about,
barked a few questions, and departed wagging a metaphorical tail.

At the next meeting Tom was again summoned. He entered the room a workman on weekly wages—and came out of it an expert on a salary computed per annum.

He is also given an opportunity to buy shares in the firm. He is paid, nevertheless, weekly and in cash; and ‘on the first Saturday he received his increased pay’ he places his money on the table before his wife, who is thus given her first intimation that her husband is a Success!

Her expression was that of one who is watching something afar. Probably it was the return of her hopes.

The End; after more than five thousand words. Perhaps the worst of the story is its insincerity: false not only because it lay outside its author’s experience but also for its embodiment of the standards of his father’s bombast, betraying the very values that his own independent travail was striving to reject. For all his youthful follies, the younger Davison was never a sycophant.

The first Scott McGarvie story was about a dog. ‘Ted Allen’s “Spud”’, was accorded pride of place in the December issue under the page one masthead.

This is a love story. It has two heroes and no heroine. It concerns a man and a dog, or, perhaps, a dog and a man.

Spud is a heeler that Ted buys as a pup for a pound from a selector further down the creek.

Ted had a grazing selection up near the range, eight miles from the nearest neighbour. His mob of cattle had a big run of rough mountainous country. They were wild. He lived and did his work alone, so he needed good dogs. Many pups had ridden up the creek to his place on the pommel of his saddle, and a few months later most of them had trotted down again to be given away or sold. They had not proved good enough to hold down a cattle dog’s job in the mountains.

Spud, of course, is the exception, and after a closely observed program of training and work, an affection develops between master and servant.

All this was good for Ted. He no longer suffered from ingrowing thoughts. It was good for the dog. His intelligence, stimulated by his close companionship with the man, developed until it would be a prejudiced person who would say that the Creator had denied Spud the faculty of reason.

Spud was not a super-dog, but every mental and emotional possibility he possessed was employed to its utmost in his association with his friend of another species.

The drama begins when, miles away from possible help, Ted and his horse take a fall while mustering and Ted regains consciousness to notice ‘that his leg was bent under him and a jagged piece of bone was sticking through his trousers’. He pulls himself over to cut down some saplings with his pocket knife and make some splints which he bandages on to his leg with his shirt.

Then he started to crawl to the nearest neighbour, dragging his mangled leg. He had nine miles to go.
With Spud in dogged attendance. By the end of the night when he reaches a waterhole, he has covered half a mile. After dismissing the thought of suicide by pocket knife, a light comes to burn in his eyes, 'a stubborn flame kindled by a spirit determined to endure'. He undertakes a journey of pain, hunger and exhaustion during which his mind begins to wander as his body crawls forward and he collapses unconscious for many hours at a time. Two nights and three days pass. In the evening of the third day he sat up, quite clear-headed. He called Spud to him and buried his face in the hair of the dog's neck.

'It's pretty near over, Spud, old man,' he said.

At last, Ted lies down, not to rise again. 'The lamp of life was flickering.' Spud keeps a vigil through the night, and when the Southern Cross lies low on the horizon, he stirs uneasily, the hair on his neck bristling, and voices a hoarse wail. Something was in the air. All animals recognize it instinctively. Spud had not met it before—but he knew It. It was Death. Spud got up and walked around Ted. He lay down beside him and pushed his nose against Ted's cheek. There was no response. He moved away and lay down to watch, but he could find no rest. Presently out of the chaos one idea leaped insistent. His man-friend was dying. Obedient to an impulse he got up and sniffed at Ted—then turning he swiftly disappeared among the timber.

Spud returns to his birthplace and awakens Ted's neighbour, who infers from Spud's hollow ribs that something is wrong. He sets off immediately, led by Spud, and in 'the first pale dawn' encounters Ted's body. What he saw brought an ejaculation to his lips that was either a prayer or an oath. The next minute he was mounted again and was galloping through the timber for dear life—Ted's life.

Within an hour he and his wife were back with a buggy and a pair of foaming horses.

Spud, forgotten, makes his way to a hill near the neighbour's house overlooking the yard and the road, and there resumes his vigil. When the buggy returns, he continues to wait, and the next day he is seen by the neighbour's wife, who feeds him.

Some understanding came to her of the faith that kept the blue dog to his lonely watch, and thereafter she fed him every day.

It was the faith of a friend in a friend. There had only been one real thing in Spud's life, and that was his love for Ted...

... The moon left the sky and in her time reappeared again, but still the man did not come. The dog kept his watch, nor as the weeks became months did he waver.

Then one day the buggy arrives with two men in it, one who moved with a limp. The limping man put his hand to his mouth. A shrill whistle split the air. It rose and fell slowly in a manner there was no mistaking, and ended with a short sharp blast.

It was Ted.
With a bark that choked in his throat the blue dog went racing to his friend, every atom of his body vibrant with joy.

Sentimental and predictable though the story is, overstuffed with redundancies, glutinous with the clichés and melodrama of pulp romance, its worth is in the integrity of its observation of the dog and the background. It was Davison’s first published protest against the anthropomorphism of the conventional animal story. ‘I don’t like animal stories’, he said in 1969, ‘I don’t like them at all. I read a number and had a lot of fault to find with them: talking animals and that sort of thing, and sentimentalizing of animals.’ The sentimentality of ‘Ted Allen’s “Spud”’ lies not in the characterisation of the dog, but in the long, unlikely journey of the injured man, snatched in the nick of over-protracted time from the jaws of death, in juxtaposition with its inducement to the reader to weep over that innocent canine symbol compensating for the reader’s own feckless inconstancies. At the same time, that sentimentality may be seen as the author’s unconscious expression of an unfulfilled longing of his own: the need of a Friend, an inseparable companion, whose fidelity could save his life. It was a stirring that foreshadowed the assumption of his own creative vitality.

The story is important for one other reason. Davison was to acknowledge it, or his recognition of the impulse that inspired it, nearly twenty-five years later when, also wounded and alone, that same ‘spirit determined to endure’ was snatched from the jaws of another death by another blue-clad Spud.
Fred never reached his objective of the one hundred and twenty dairy cattle, nor fulfilled the rest of the cornucopian dream, which was only to emerge in the fantasy of storytelling.

Among the timber he had ringbarked the year before, the grass was like a paddock of wheat. His stock were in great nick. When he drove to the station with the cream the horses rattled along with high heads and swishing tails as if an eight-mile trot was their idea of an outing. The poddies were doing well in the little paddock he had made for them. Milking was a pleasant ritual, with buckets foaming full from sleek cows, contented and big-bellied with green feed. It was a full and flowing summer, with a promise of a winter of comfort and plenty.\(^1\)

If milking were ever a pleasant ritual for him, it was certainly far from pleasant at times. His wife remembered all her life occasions of outrage when, knowing his frustration and despair, she nevertheless fiercely upbraided him because he kicked a cow for failing to give down her milk.

I used to go out with my hair flaring and absolutely red in the face because he would kick Strawberry . . . He’d have her tied up where she was absolutely defenceless.

She wouldn’t give her milk down and he just used to put the bucket on one side and stand up and kick her in the ribs like anything . . . Absolutely cruel to her . . . I said, ‘Of course, every time we put Strawberry in the bails, she knows what’s going to happen; and she’s not going to give her milk, so you might just as well forget it!’\(^2\)

Even so, he still refused to let Kitty have anything to do with the milking. But he could not manage without her help when he met the crisis of a bogged cow.

On the occasions when their silt dam was not dry-cracked into lattices like the faces of shrewd old drovers, the mud there, an unusually viscous variety with that milk-chocolate soil, was an open hazard for thirsty beasts. Thus one of the commonest tasks jointly performed by the pioneer and his wife was that of roping the horns of a severely weakened animal and hauling it through the mud up to some firm ground at the edge of the dam. Then, as soon as their backs were turned, it would as often as not immediately head for the bog again so that the entire messy rite had to be repeated. ‘There’s nothing sillier than a bogged cow!’\(^3\)
Although Kitty was to retain a distinct recollection of a filled tank, there is no evidence that it refilled from the generous rains of 1921, nor that the channel from the creek did not become quickly silted up. The only evidence of the tank's condition thereafter was supplied in July 1924 by Ranger Watson, after he had valued the improvements on Portion 84 Injune.

Tank, about 2500 cubic yards, including silt tank of 500 yards.
No good. Only holds water about three feet in the bottom.

Full value to an incoming tenant £20 0 0.
The rainfall at Roma in 1921 was the highest during those few years: a total of nearly twenty-five and a half inches. Even the normally dry month of July brought nearly seven inches, and nine and a quarter more fell in the following five months. So even if their tank had failed by then, the waterholes and gilgais must have been more dependable than usual.

It is quite likely, therefore, that the year was a full and flowing one, a caprice to tease hopes into some regeneration before grinding the dream more finely into dust. Early in that fullness Kitty gained the luxury of a small wood-burning cooking stove, with two hot plates and a little oven, to relieve her from stooping over the 'galley' in the corner. And then followed the reckless indulgence of floorboards, for as part of the fullness Kitty was pregnant again through the gathering heat of that summer.

The floorboards may well have been paid for out of the money Fred raised by mortgaging his lease to the Government. The value of the mortgage is unrecorded. The standard printed memorandum was signed by Fred on 22 June 1921 before D. S. Armstrong, JP, the settlement supervisor. He paid a fee of five shillings for its registration in the Department of Public Lands on 4 July. The money was advanced for improvements to the selection or for stock, machinery or implements. It may also have been used to buy the stove, because 'all stoves tanks ovens and grates' were held to be fixtures and attached to the land. The mortgagor undertook to 'farm cultivate and manage the said land in a proper and husbandlike manner' and to 'keep the said land free from all noxious weeds and plants particularly prickly-pear china apple noogoora burr and bathurst burr', in default of which the Minister could 'enter upon and take possession (for that purpose using such force as may be necessary to eject any occupant) and sell the whole or any part of the said land with all improvements thereon'.

But the problem for the Minister was not to be that of raising the force to eject defaulting mortgagors, so much as finding the power to discourage them from ejecting themselves. It was in response to some such need that he and his staff dreamed up the great cotton-growing experiment.

As early as July 1920, the Maranoa Progress Association had begun to cotton on, and its monthly meeting was reported in the Western Star of 24 July.

With the idea of encouraging farmers to plant cotton, it was decided to apply to the Department for supplies of seed which would be distributed free by local stores to farmers. Another suggestion was also made to grow cotton in garden plots and give prizes for competition amongst the children producing the best samples.
At the Mount Hutton Settlement, the experiment began with one of the occasional weekend gatherings of settlers at the Gunnewin township reserve by the 51-mile peg.

The meeting was for the purpose of hearing a government expert, sent purposely from Brisbane, discourse on the great profit to be gained from growing cotton; the new crop that was going to revolutionise Queensland agriculture.4

The scene Davison later described contains the ingredients of any of a dozen of the open-air meetings that took place in those early days of the settlement, before Injune became a township and the Injune School of Arts was built to contain such assemblies.

There were well over a hundred men squatting on their heels, sprawling on the grass or perched on convenient heaps of railway construction material. There were men with beards, men without beards, men with hair growing out of their ears or with whiskers sticking up out of the fronts of their shirts; men whose over-long hair advertised the fine opening for a barber among us; men with cropped heads, like cannon balls, men whose ridgy haircuts proclaimed the industry of domestic scissors; men who looked as if they had just come from the paddocks; men in a fresh change of working clothes and a best hat as a mark of respect to the day and company; men in slop suits that travestied the human body; men evidently acquainted with a tailor; young fellows whose white and skin-tight cord trousers and concertina leggings proclaimed their readiness to straddle a rough horse; everywhere strong brown faces and large brown hands.5

One of the men, 'an undergraduate patriarch, and a fine chap'5—it could well have been Jack O'Donohue—mounted an ironbark stump and welcomed 'the gover'ment expert'.

The present representative—one of many cotton experts the Agricultural Department had spawned in view of the sudden urgency of the topic—wore a new dustcoat, a battered felt hat, and was one day behind with his shaving. He had a large pale face, fat pale hands, and spoke very well. We were to some extent familiar with his subject as a result of leaders and articles in the Press—even the Wilgatown Bugle had been discoursing learnedly on cotton.7

The settlers learned that cotton was necessary to the country, that free seed and a guaranteed price were to be provided; but they received 'with a proper measure of doubt' the intelligence about the great ease with which cotton could be grown. Australia was free of the boll weevil, the great curse of cotton growing in America, and an interjector observed: 'Well, I'll bet we have some other bloody thing!'8 They were told that the deep tap root made cotton a marvellous drought resister, an ideal dry farming crop; and they were shown 'nice pictures' of various stages of an abundant cotton harvest.

For a start we were doubtful. We took the booklets home and turned the pages with horny thumbs and lingered at the enticing pictures; but we
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suspected the organised bally-hoo. The promised rewards sounded too
good to be true. No man wanted to prove himself a mug, least of all the
solitary mug of the district.9

So when one or two local identities were discovered putting down ten acres, even
forty acres, to cotton, the rest were caught up enthusiastically.

Whenever men met the talk was of cotton. A new future had dawned.
There was a fever in the air, as if it were the days if old gold diggings.
Free seed! Guaranteed prices! A man would look a fool in a few months' time if everyone was joyfully carting bales of highly profitable cotton to
the railway and he had none at all.

Looking round from the top of any hill, any day, a dozen smudges of
smoke rising distantly among the trees would mark where men were at
work preparing land for tillage.10

Faith germinates out of toil: the illusion that putting in guarantees taking out.
Working single-handed, I had to limit myself to about four acres. With
me, as with my neighbours, ventures like cotton had to be worked in
between morning and evening routine farm work which provided the
immediate living. I had a long narrow strip of creek flat, timbered with box
and gum, and a sprinkling of saplings. I ring-fired the big stuff—a method
that kills the tree, roots and all, in a couple of weeks. It sounds easy, but
you know how it is; after a big quick showy job is done, comes the
cleaning up. Burning off the tall grass revealed more stumps and fallen
timber than I had counted on. Old tree-roots that had to be grubbed
seemed to run just beneath the surface for a mile before they dived down
out of the way of the plough, and for every inch of the mile they seemed
to be fastened to the ground with invisible chains.11

Ring-firing involves cutting trenches round the butts, filling them with small
wood, and setting it alight.

Then the cattle tracks cutting into the otherwise unscalable creek bank
had to be blocked off; the fence-posts had to be carted further than I had
reckoned on; it hadn't rained for some time and the ground was hard, so,
in digging the post holes, I had to punch with the spud bar right from the
surface.12

... Perhaps when I saw how the job was dragging I should have
shortened it a little; but you know how it is when you've set your mind
on carrying out a job: you'll do it—or bust your guts trying.13

It is doubtful whether Fred's cotton patch was more than about half an acre,
apparently fairly close to the homestead on the west side, where there is a strip of
creek flat above the silt dam. He used no plough, but loosened his soil with a
mattock.

Not many people invested in new machinery; they couldn't afford to,
most of them.14

The horses weren't used to ploughing; Rowdy, on the off-side,
would walk anywhere but in the furrow, so we switched them over; but
Ribbons was worse.15
We were lucky in the planting. We got the last seed in just at nightfall at the end of a thundery afternoon, with the lightning slicing the cloudy darkness and the first big raindrops spattering on our backs as we came to the end of the row. We trudged for shelter through the thrashing storm. We hadn’t a run in us.16

The rain gave the cotton a good start, but ‘what we needed was a good soaking fall when the cotton was well up’. The western side of the settlement got it, but ‘we eastern-siders’, Davison wrote, transposing east and west as usual for fictioneering purposes, ‘kept hoping for a while—but the cotton withered and failed’.

The only people who did any good were the Durwards . . . and McShane, a gentle old recluse who had borrowed his way into the big belah scrubs.17

Going from the main settlement to his modest couple of acres, protected from heat and drying winds by the pent walls of tall scrub, was like going from a bakehouse into a greenhouse.18

And indeed, Pat Macnamara did grow cotton. The main uprights of his cotton shed were still standing in 1971, albeit in the middle of a vast treeless plateau.

For the rest, people picked cotton only from moist patches, in a gully or at the foot of a hill. The women picked it. They had helped, dropping the seed, at the planting; now they were gathering the few pounds’ worth of cotton that had resulted, while the men had turned again to other work . . . My four acres yielded about a chain of real cotton bushes. Near the centre was a depression, a sort of gilgai, that I’d almost neglected to plough. You’d have thought that anything planted there would have drowned in the first rain. I had turned it over only for the love of seeing the fat black earth curl over the mould-board. In it the cotton bushes grew six feet high and as wide as the spread of your two arms. They were lovely symmetrical plants with straight rough stems, branches like red-brown wax, gleaming, and broad dark leaves; then came the large creamy-coloured flowers, followed as their petals fell by the little green bolls, like peas, swelling to the size of walnuts, to be burst at last into a carved claw by a snowflake, incredibly white, soft and large, fluffing between the woody segments of the boll.

I didn’t pick them; there wouldn’t have been the tight filling of a sugar bag. But I often passed that way, just to see them, each a miracle of snowy down, blossom of a blossom. I left them, while the leaves dried and curled up and the white cotton-puffs, loosening in the boll, dropped softly back to earth, one by one, with infinite slowness, something like the falling of hope from a stout heart.19

Fifty years later, his wife recalled: ‘I don’t think we ever reached a stage where we had to pick it. There was no water. It grew, and had little cotton bolls on it. But I can’t remember ever picking it or sending it away or anything.’20

We saw through the game a few weeks after the end of the cotton season. It turned out that one special part of the country—the Dawson Valley—was best suited to cotton. The farmers there did very
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well out of the crop; and thitherward went the ginning mills, the brokers, agents, every one who had anything to gain from cotton in bulk—the bright commercial lads! Get the idea? The whole of the State had been used as an experimental plot. There had been some lobbying. The public had been persuaded to provide the information, the seed, and the guaranteed price. We had supplied the soil, the sweat, and the blasted hopes.21

The lint and plaster were beginning to wear off the facade of the dream, the shoddy fabric of the framework was beginning to show; and from at least one stout heart, hope was already falling. It is realistic to infer that the cotton experiment germinated Davison’s political consciousness in soil already ploughed by the mould-board of his father’s certitudes. Socialists have ever been created by their own political opponents. After another fifteen years of growth, the poor harvest was to be picked in occasional speeches from platforms of the Australian Communist Party.

In 1944, when ex-ranger Jack Cumming wrote to Davison from the Dalby Land Office with his comments on the stories collected in The Woman at the Mill, the most succinct of his observations was reserved for the cotton episode. ‘“Fields of Cotton”: Don’t I know it?’

For another of his stories, ‘Flooring Boards’, a more advanced excursion into fictiveness published in a women’s magazine in 1933,22 Davison combined the two elements of Kitty’s pregnancy and the floorboards with a third: the death of Little Mrs Fergy. The tale resolves with an irony redolent of Fred’s old exemplar, O. Henry, for, after being laid, some of the floorboards are discovered to have been removed to make a coffin for the young wife who died in childbirth. The description of the city girl sitting on a kerosene case at the door of the humpy, listening through the falling dusk for the sounds of the horses and dray returning from Roma with her husband and the boards, may well have applied to any of Kitty’s evenings awaiting Fred’s return with the springcart from some errand.

She considered going indoors and lighting the kerosene lamp. But she decided that would quite definitely bring night about her. Her eyes had accustomed themselves to the gloom, and she could persuade herself that there was still a little daylight left. The row of posts enclosing what was to be a garden were discernible, and if she looked toward the open box forest it was appreciably lighter; but the track from the gate of the selection came winding through the dark wall of brigalow and belah scrub. She preferred to face in that direction.

All through the roughnesses of life in a new settlement she had forborne to complain. Cooking in a camp oven and cut-down kerosene tins, bathing without a bath, washing without conveniences, using clay-yellow water for all purposes, inventing contrivances to confound the ants in their determination to invade the food safe, the isolation and the harshness, she had made comedy of it all . . . She had taught herself to see mirth in mishap, romance in hardship, and beauty in strange places. Although it was accurate enough in its description of circumstances, in its

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romanticised account of the waiting woman as model helpmate it was perhaps less
a portrait of the author's wife than of the author's anima. Yet Kitty would have
been as overjoyed with floorboards as she was with the cooking stove.
If of all the wilderness just a few feet within the humpy were floored!
Just a little space where she could get off the dirt, and she felt she would
be able to meet her small difficulties at an advantage. The want had
become increasingly insistent now that the baby's time was so close. She
had seen babies on dirt floors. Like the birds that line their nests with
down, she felt that in hers she wanted cleanness . . .
Actually it was here! So fresh and clean and sweetly smelling—cypress
pine—and so longed for! Val put her hands on it. She felt she must do
something demonstrative. She could have embraced it . . .
Next day the work went forward with promising speed. By mid­
morning Peter had the floor joists all in position, and then came the
positively exciting process of sawing the flooring boards into lengths and
laying them down. The part you could walk on grew in six-inch jumps.
Peter—he was hardly more than a boy—had red hair and a jutting chin.
His colouring and features emphasized the intentiveness with which he
applied himself to his work.
As soon as the first three boards were down Val clambered over the
joists and stood on them. She walked up and down along their length;
and, kneeling, ran her hand along their comparative smoothness.
'I'll be able to keep it scrubbed,' she announced. 'And we'll get a
couple of nice clean wheat bags for mats.' Her voice was jubilant.
The woman's death at night, while a neighbour is riding hard to call a doctor on
the nearest telephone, which is twelve miles away at the railhead construction
camp, is not described, but only alluded to. The doctor arrives from Roma in the
dawn, after a breakdown with his car. He is too late. Someone remarks that it is the
first death in the new settlement. 'It seemed somehow to bond them together.' The
climate demands a hasty burial, and the next day four pall bearers enter the house to
take the coffin to a grave about two hundred yards from the humpy. They are
warned to mind the gap in the floor. One of them remarks the home-made coffin
and another observes: 'Flooring boards'.
With its allusiveness, its indirect recording of the worst, looking away from the
fire, as it were, to allow the sight to settle down, that story represents a major
advance in technique on any of Davison's work done for the Australian Post. It also
came nearer than anything else in Davison's work to the mean ugliness of everyday
life in tight rural communities: a meanness that he needed a metropolitan setting,
and another half a lifetime, to encompass. His common touch in all his
countryman's tales was always felt in an antipodean ambience of a largely
innocent fellowship of light.
Little Mrs Fergy's unexplained death may well have been the first in the new
settlement. The first news of her illness was brought to Kitty by George Ferguson,
who surprised her by riding up to the homestead one day. She invited him in for a
cup of tea, and it was not until he had finished it that he revealed the reason for his
visit. Would Kitty go down and have a look at his wife, who looked a bit crook? She told him to return home, and she would follow. She left a note for Fred, and with Doris Mary walking part of the way and being carried for the rest, she arrived about an hour after Ferguson. Kitty saw immediately that her friend needed more nursing experience than was hers to give. The sick woman had not eaten for several days and wanted nothing. Kitty asked Ferguson to stoke up the fire, and she made some weak tea and toast. With an arm supporting her patient, who was too weak to sit up unaided, Kitty fed her the toast soaked in the tea. She ate it all, then slipped off Kitty’s arm and fell asleep. Kitty made some more toast and instructed Ferguson to repeat what she had done if his wife should wake before morning. Kitty advised him to send Wully into Injune for some oranges and Aspros for his mother.

Fred took the springcart down for his family when the milking was done. ‘God knows how long she’s been like that’, said Fred on the way home. ‘She’s beyond anything you can do for her.’ They agreed that Ferguson ought to have taken her to hospital long before, and that Kitty should return in the morning to urge him to do so.

After a sleepless night, Kitty rose early, prepared Fred’s lunch and filled his water bag, fed the poddies and set off again down the creek. Little Mrs. Ferguson had weakened during the night, though she had slept again after taking some more tea and toast. Wully had gone into Injune. Kitty prepared to wash her patient and change her bedding. She was able to lift the old lady easily, estimating her weight at about six stone. Her blankets and mattress were wet through to the bed. Horrified and angry, Kitty called for sheets and dry blankets. Ferguson replied that they didn’t use sheets and there were no spare blankets, so Kitty demanded the blankets and mattress off his own bed, ordering him to take the others out and burn them. She put her own nightdress on her friend and Little Mrs Ferguson smiled her appreciation and kissed her nurse on the forehead. Kitty gave her some more toast, with warm milk and water, and she went to sleep again. When Wully appeared, she asked him to return again to Injune as soon as he had eaten his lunch and buy some Bovril, for the Ferguson’s cupboard was almost bare. It was late in the day before she saw George Ferguson again, and when she begged him to go into the township and telephone the doctor in Roma to arrange for a hospital bed, he replied that it didn’t seem necessary to him: Kitty was managing quite well. But the old woman’s moans were growing in frequency. She took some Aspro crushed in orange juice, and some warm milk and toast later. When Fred came to collect Kitty, he urged Ferguson to get help immediately, but he replied that his wife seemed to be recovering. Kitty asked Fred if she could stay the night with her patient. She had developed a sinister pallor, and Kitty had not liked what she saw when she lifted her eyelids. But Fred said she had two men to sit with her, and Kitty had better come home. She held her friend’s hand for a moment and kissed a brow which was damp with perspiration.

It was another sleepless night for Kitty, worrying about her friend and wanting to be with her. She rose before sunup and lit the fire to make tea. She felt an almost irresistible desire to go down to the Fergusons’ immediately. Fred rode off to bring in the cows for milking while Kitty cooked the breakfast as usual. It was while they
were eating that they saw Ferguson approaching. Kitty clutched at her husband’s arm. ‘Oh no, Fred! Not that. It can’t be!’

Ferguson reported that his wife had died in the early hours of the morning. ‘Are you sure she’s not in a coma?’ Kitty demanded. She walked straight out of the hut, alone, and found Little Mrs Fergy lying still and peaceful. She washed the body and combed the hair, then walked back home, where Fred was waiting. He gave her a cup of tea and what comfort he could. Kitty was always to remember her friend’s tiny hatless figure, her brown wrinkled face, walking booted across a paddock bearing two pails of milk whose weight made her seem even smaller. Like the wife in ‘Flooring Boards’, she was hastily buried in a grave dug in a corner of her husband’s selection, in a home-made coffin that was her own son’s work. Her death was never registered; but as in Scottish tradition, and in an absence of anything but wildflowers (which would have been considered unsuitable), her grave was marked by a cairn that Kitty helped to build, a cairn long since ploughed away and scattered with superphosphate.

That death was by no means one to band the community together. Rather the reverse. For to this day the ghosts of long-dead rumours still haunt the Bluey, murmuring that before old George Ferguson left the district for new pastures in the tropical north he used something slow and undetectable to do his missus in.

Kitty was safely delivered of her baby in the hospital at Roma on 25 February 1922. With Doris Mary, who was to be cared for by friends in Roma named Winneke, Kitty had cautiously left the doctorless settlement six weeks previously. Fred was unable to take himself to Roma at all, for he was milking twice daily without help.

Kitty had told the family in Sydney of her pregnancy as soon as she had known of it. Their reply was full of excitement and congratulations. If it were a boy she must, of course, call him Frederick. Every letter that came thereafter contained a postscript from Dad: ‘If it’s a boy, call him Fred’.

My reaction to this was one of rebellion. There were already too many Freds in the family and another one would add to the confusion already established.23

So on the Saturday of Peter’s birth she sent a telegram to Dad: ‘PETER ARRIVED TODAY BOTH OF US ARE WELL’. And there was no further discussion on the matter.

This time, too, Kitty insisted on a christening; and the opportunity arose when Peter was a few months old and the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, the Most Reverend Gerald Sharp, visited the settlement. By courtesy of Queensland Railways, he stayed at the house of the local snoozer, Stationmaster Cronk, who must have excelled himself in truckling. Thitherward Kitty took her children, with Netta Stewart to stand godmother to Peter. Fred had other business to attend to in the township.

Meanwhile, the spread of prickly pear continued to keep pace with settlement. On 17 January 1921, Jack O’Donohue had written to the Lands Department as secretary of the Injune Progress Association asking who was responsible for clearing pear off roads and reserves.
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The spread of this pest is getting rather serious and unless it is soon checked will cause a lot of hardship in this district.

He was told it was the local authority's responsibility. Eighteen months later, on 27 July 1922, Armstrong the settlement supervisor sent a special report to the chairman of the Land Settlement Committee in Brisbane, with a copy to the Premier, E. G. Theodore. 'Knowing that you are interested in rural matters', he wrote to the Premier, 'I take this liberty of thinking that some of the information I have gained during a lifetime spent in country districts may be of value to you'. His report recommended a number of Injune blocks for revaluation to a capital value of nil, at least for the first fifteen years of settlement. One of the blocks he listed was the Davisons' Portion 84.

In my opinion the capital value placed on portions densely timbered with belah and brigalow is unwarranted and is retarding settlement. Many of these portions are at present unselected and prickly pear is gaining ground . . .

The country in which this scrub is growing comprises some of the best agricultural land in Western Queensland. The present drawback is the labour necessary to place the land in a profit earning condition. The settler coming on to such a block will have to fall and burn at least one hundred acres before he could hope to get any return whatever. He would have to find water, and securely fence area cleared with wire netting, as marsupials are plentiful in these scrubs. He would then have to grow a crop. This would be his only chance of a first return, but his work would not then be ended and it would be necessary for him to clear or ringbark another three or four hundred acres before he could run any stock. He would not be in a position to dairy until he had this area under grass and in my opinion a man would have to work hard for two years before reaching this position, and the value of his labour doing this work would be at least ten shillings per acre.

Compare such a settler's position with that of a man selecting a portion timbered with open ironbark and box timber. If he fences his block, puts water on it, and buys cattle, he can commence dairying right away on natural grasses at a small cost compared to the other man and generally he can place a small area under cultivation without doing much clearing and has the big advantage of being able to get a living right away. In spite of these facts, the same capital value is placed on both the blocks . . .

There were about forty thousand acres of scrub land in the district, most of it unselected. It was practically free of pear, but the pear would quickly spread if the land lay idle much longer. Armstrong added that settlers on the scrub lands were asking for relief. He cited two case histories. Fred Davison, who had no capital, may well have been the unidentified subject of Armstrong's second case history. Another settler here on a similar block, who is acquainted with scrub lands, commenced by fencing in his portion and providing water. He purchased a few cows, thinking that if he could manage to milk about ten cows a day they would keep him in food and clothing while he was
clearing his scrub. He found that there was hardly enough grass growing on the block to feed his cows and keep them alive and certainly not enough for them to milk on, and further it took up most of his time looking for his cattle in the scrub and left him no time to do any clearing. He has now turned his cows out and started on his scrub, which he would have been wise to do in the first place.

But all Armstrong got for his pains was a reprimand; and a month later he was told that no further action would be taken. His immediate superior, Land Commissioner Hooper, reported to the Department that no legal provision for revaluation existed.

I pointed this fact out to Mr Armstrong, who said that it was his intention to recommend that the law be amended to admit of such revaluation.

One of the unselected blocks across which pear was spreading was the rectangular one that lay between Fred Davison and Bill Davies: Portion 83 Injune, of 1271 acres. Davison fictionalised it later as a block (significantly) of an irregular shape in one of his finest stories, which describes it lovingly and with exasperation, a metaphor of his own eccentric dream. He called it 'The Wasteland'.

Lot 32, comprising 438 acres... was an almost useless piece of land, mostly ridgy and barren, its few fertile patches scattered and varying in character. In a semi-arid region such as ours, where it required ten or twelve acres of good land, well-improved, to carry a beast, its area was insufficient even if it had been good...

In an earlier version of the story, it was ten or a dozen yearling heifers, which was probably nearer the truth, for the water was giving out again, and on Portion 83 there was plenty of succulent pear to keep them alive. They would return with their mouths all swollen and inflamed from eating it; and with their droppings full of its fertile seeds.

Bill Davies did the same thing, but formally applied for the lease of Portion 81, the block on his western boundary up towards the mountain. 'The only way to make a success here', he wrote to the Lands Department in November 1922, 'is by dairying and grazing.' His 1280 acres were insufficient for the purpose. Portion 81, a pear-infested block, was open for selection at too high a capital value. If it were reduced, he would select. He asked for the capital value to be reduced, priority to be given to him, and that he should be allowed to pay the survey fee in instalments over five years. By then, Bill had his father and sister living with him. Land Commissioner Hooper supported his application and recommended that the capital value should be reduced.

Of course, priority cannot be granted him, but it is desirable to make effort to have clear of pear as much land as possible.

That Christmas, the Davisons celebrated with the Davies family up on Portion 82. Against the background of what appears to be a tent, a photograph was taken of them all, excluding Peter, probably by Netta Stewart. 'Not as sad as we look', wrote Fred on the back of his print. 'Just a bit shy.'

In January Bill learnt that the law would not permit his being granted priority,
but he was given permission to pay the survey fee in five annual instalments and
told that the capital value of the 1279 acres would be reduced to five shillings per
acre and the period allowed for pear destruction would be extended from one to
three years. It was almost all the disgraced Armstrong had proposed; and the
Davies family, whose stock had doubtless been wandering westwards for some
time, had little to fear of competition from selectors clamouring for a lease which
had been available for selection for over four years.

One individual from Bill Davies's stock had been in the habit of wandering
eastwards.

Is a khaki-tinted bobtailed terrier named Digger, who was pupped in a
hollow in the butt of a gum tree, who received his first hiding with a bit
of greenhide for chewing the lining out of a Weineke stock-saddle, and
whose favourite pastime is waiting behind a bush near the fowlyard to
catch egg-stealing goannas, an Irish terrier—or is he one of us? . . .

Digger belonged originally to a bachelor neighbour who lived a mile
or two up the creek. He was a good neighbour but he had a theory that a
dog liked to spend most of his time on the end of a chain, and that dogs
were quite indifferent as to whether they were fed today, tomorrow, or a
couple of days hence. The consequence was whenever Digger was given a
little liberty he would make a straight bolt for our place.25

The story Fred wrote about Digger a few months afterwards was another of
those excised by the author from his own bound volume of the magazine that
published it. The reason is not difficult to guess. Digger was a bone of contention
between Kitty and Fred.

'You know,' I said, 'it's hardly fair of us to try and steal that man's dog.' I
thought that way of putting it was a fair blend of candour and diplomacy . . .

'We're not trying to steal his dog!' said my wife, looking up indignantly
from her sewing.

'He'll think we are, anyway.'

'Well, he should feed his dog and then he'd stay at home!'

'Y-e-e-s. But if we didn't feed him he wouldn't come here, would he?'

'He'd go somewhere else!'

'I think it would be better if he did,' I said.

My wife regarded me thoughtfully while she bit the cotton off close to
the 'stuff'.

'Anyway,' she said, 'we don't feed him.'

I coughed. 'You do, my dear,' I protested.

'I don't!'

'My dear!'

'I don't. He just has what the other dogs have. I put ALL their dinners
out in that big old pan and they just help themselves . . .'

Ali his life Davison insisted that the dog had been enticed.

Fifty years later, Kitty recalled Bill's gift somewhat differently.

One day when talking to Bill I said I would like—I didn't demand—I
said how nice it would be to have a dog. And he went into Toowoomba
one time and he came back with an Irish terrier. Apparently it wasn’t meant for me. He was going to keep it for himself. He came down to visit us one day and brought Digger down with him. Fred told me most emphatically at the time that there was one law of the bush: you never took any notice of anybody else’s dog—a working dog. It was quite, really, a crime, almost, in the bush. A dog was just the same as a man and under no consideration was I to coax them away or take any notice of them.

So O.K. . . . he was sitting outside and all the time Digger was looking in, looking around—had a very soulful look in his eyes. But I didn’t say a word to him. I absolutely ignored him. Then he went back home with Bill and first thing in the morning there was Digger down, with his claws on the door and a very soulful look in his eyes as much as to say, ‘This is the house I want to be. This is my house. I want to stay here.’ Bill came down and called him back again, but Digger kept coming down. So Bill said—in the end he gave up—he said, ‘Oh well, you keep Digger. Digger’s yours.’

Fred was obliged to admit that Digger had his uses, especially as companion for Doris Mary.

One of the first duties Digger took over when he became permanently installed at our place was that of escort to Tiddlums. Tiddlums was three, and had a dangerous habit of wandering off into the bush by herself. After Digger’s arrival the two used to wander around hand in hand—or as near to that as a small child and a dog can get. Actually she used to steady her rather wobbly legs by clutching Digger’s ear. He didn’t appear to mind. If he wished to investigate a hollow log or the tangled grass near an old stump, she would let go his ear and stand with her thumb in her mouth until, having exhausted his interest in whatever had attracted him, he would rejoin her and they would progress as before, slowly, but apparently with a good deal of pleasure and contentment on both sides...

If they wandered out of sight the wife would just stand in the doorway and call. Digger would come racing at her voice, and it was then quite simple to find Tiddlums. Among other things he would bring her down to the stockyard where she used to like to talk to me through the rails at milking time.

Bill Davies had brought Digger from Toowoomba, where he had gone to visit his family after his close shave with septicaemia. In his story, Davison had the narrator ride up to his neighbour’s place when after three days he failed to come and collect Digger from his persistent trespassing. Thus he finds his neighbour with a poisoned finger, within twenty-four hours of the grave.

The rest of the seven-thousand-word tale concerned the enmity between Digger and ‘a big black brute’ who would await the family’s passing on their route to the township and hurl himself on Digger ‘with his jaws slavering and the hair on his neck standing like the bristles on a brush’. Digger is always mauled, but the mauling never seems to make any difference to him. Because he holds no memory
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for defeat, an occasion arrives when his owner can decide to let the dogs fight for
long enough to give Digger a taste of his adversary's meat and mettle. The next
time they meet, the black dog's villainy is exhausted by the time he reaches the
indomitable Digger. He wags his tail and rolls over with his paws in the air.
Thereafter he barks at them only from the safety of his own house. It is the age-old
triumph of good over evil, but perhaps in this recurrence of the potent dog figure
there is an unconscious projection of Fred's upon something else big, black and
brutish that he sensed existing further down the creek, some bogy which, properly
challenged or assimilated, would prove to be only a bundle of stuffed rags standing
guard over a cairn.

Other additions to the household about the same time were a pair of pigs and a
possum. The ringtail possum had been found by Fred in a big tree he had been
cutting to make a corner post for a fence near the house. He caged it in chicken wire
with a tree up the middle. One night when they returned from a visit to the Davies,
Kitty went to feed the possum while Fred, as usual, walked down to the tank to
collect the two kerosene cans of water that he left at the edge of it whenever they
went out. As Kitty put her hand in the possum's cage, she realised that something
was on the top. Sinuous, moving. It was her second night-time encounter with a
snake, this time a live one. But it proved to be only a harmless carpet snake.

The pigs, Percy and Margaret, were installed in a sty Fred constructed beyond
the calf paddock and fed on the farm's by-product, skimmed milk. One day they
got out.

They were only little tiny things then. They squeaked and squeaked. They didn't snort—they squeaked. And they got out. And I thought: There goes my pocket money! The pigs are out and I'll never get them in! Fred came to help me; and that house up on the hill . . . they went round and round . . . One went round this way and the other went the reverse way. And you try and catch those pigs! Squeak, squeak, squeak—and away they'd go! Then we put little pools of mash all the way round and we thought . . . when they were going to eat, we'd just grab them. But it didn't work; and presently they started streaking down towards the dam. And I said to Fred: There goes my little pigs! What are we going to do? And I thought: There goes my pocket money!

Well, he said, we'll get them . . . and he got a twig and he shooed them back up again. And then we had this business, round and round the house. And it was a hot day. And Fred said: We'll leave them. They'll get tired in the heat. Eventually, they just lay down and we were able to pick them up and take them. But what a time we had!*

During their forty-odd months of branding by beast and bush, Fred and
Kitty must have become familiar with almost every tree along that dirt track from
Sandalwood to Blue Lagoon. Family trips into Injune for supplies would be
relieved, as often as not, by calling in on the Stewarts for afternoon tea, a halfway
stage on the return journey. Theirs was a substantial house, big enough for parties;
and Netta Stewart's parties became another well-remembered feature of those
years. A boy of nine or ten named Pat Sorensen, youngest of a large family of

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brothers, took part in some of the party games and watched and listened while the
grownups played guessing games, noting that Kitty Davison was always one of the
quickest contestants. Sometimes, no doubt, that gathering drifted into political
discussion, and young Pat was reminded of his father’s admonition whenever his
brothers fell into political wrangling. ‘Listen, boys. There’s only one government.
And that’s the rain.’

One of the guests usually at Netta’s parties was ‘Scot’ Cumming, the Crown
Lands Ranger, whose nickname and companionship may well have contributed to
the naming of ‘Scott McGarvie’. By the time Jack Cumming came to know Netta,
he was a shy bachelor nearing forty with a deep love of the bush, and long past his
youthful decision when he refused to bring out from the Old Dart the childhood
sweetheart from whom he parted at the age of eleven, to come with his father,
mother and sister to Australia and take up a selection in the Maranoa.

Cumming, the compulsive versifier, with dreams of becoming a writer
himself, was fictionalised by Davison in an unpublished story written many years
later. The ‘Crown Lands Ranger’ was called Phil Macfarlane, who for the
purposes of fiction was a decade older than Cumming.

In talk people took light from Phil; he saw things large; he had a simple
power over words, and a way of talking about commonplace things that
put a bloom on them. People’s enterprises and projects gained value in
their own eyes through a yarn with Phil.

Davison described the family selection where Phil, his sister Jess, and their parents
had tried to wrest a living from the poor earth. Phil and his father ‘with bent backs,
dug forty acres of stunted scrub roots, roots matted, intertwined, more roots than
soil. Phil, the grown man . . . still had nightmare dreams of roots writhing in the
soil, and of Jess and his mother stumbling over the broken ground, gathering the
roots for burning.’

Four submissive fools, but valiant in their submission, saying to
encourage one another, ‘Perhaps we’ll be all right after the harvest.’ Year
after year of that, but the harvest never found them better off. The debt at
Graham’s store in Wilgatown grew larger, always a little larger, after
each harvest. In the end it became a mortgage, and the pre-harvest tune
changed itself to ‘Perhaps we’ll have enough wheat to pay the interest on
the mortgage’ with a variation that went ‘If it wasn’t for Mr Graham’s
great trust in father’s personal character we’d have lost the farm by
now!’ . . . There was no room for youthful dreams on a farm like
that . . . The swish of skirt . . . was something to which you turned eyes
but briefly; mostly because you were tired out, or because it was one of
your sick days, also because you were very poor and owed a stern duty at
home. You didn’t go flying off to concerts and dances in Wilgatown,
because you badly needed boots, maybe, or perhaps the arms of your suit
were halfway up your elbow; anyway you didn’t have the price of
admission, and your feeling for the old man in his struggles made you
hesitate about appealing to him; and anyway, your general plight made
you feel that even if you did go the girls would think you comical. So
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you got down one of the set of Scott's novels that your father's father had brought out with him, and you sat down by the old kerosene lamp, and slid away into another and more heroic world, and forgot yourself until the old man put his hand to the lamp and said, 'We'll have to be rising early in the morning, my son.'

After his father's death, which occurred one day after he went home from piling prickly pear for rotting, Phil carried on with his sister's help. 'In a sense he and Jess husbanded and wived each other, thought for one another, felt for each other, depended on one another in every pinch.' At the end of ten years, when he was forty, 'he owed the storekeeper not one penny more than was owing when his father died: five hundred pounds.'

It was Graham, the storekeeper, who pulled strings and got him the job as crown lands ranger; a word to the local member; a little patience; a period of alternating hope and fear in the Macfarlane homestead—and then the job!

Phil had had a long delicate spell during his late thirties; he was no longer a fair farming risk for five hundred pounds. He felt enormously grateful to old Graham, who took over his worthless land.

'Of course the land is no good to me, Phil; you know that; the pear will have it in a couple of years. I'm looking to you to repay your father's debt out of your salary.'

'Every penny, Mr Graham!' . . .

Looking back, a few years afterward, Phil wondered how he could have been so innocent as to have talked that way such a short while ago; how he could have been so undeveloped in one part of his mind. He had paid off the debt by this time, with compound interest—and he had become familiar, too late, with the idea of insolvency. He saw Graham differently then; sincere and decent enough in his way, but in the nature of things a smug trafficker in the virtues, a go-between, yielding too willingly—and for a consideration—to the pressure of circumstances.

If that much of the fictional account were founded in fact, the storekeeper would have had easy enough access to the ear of the local member. In the corrected typescript of Davison's story, that last and the next three references to Phil were all substituted for the deleted word 'Jack'. 'Like you', Jack Cumming wrote to Davison in 1944, 'I do not count the years as a loss and under the same circumstances and relying on my own experience instead of that of those who ought to know but didn't, I could make a success of it. You may say that I was long enough at the job to gain from experience but by that time the opportunity had done, that is, when the surrounding [sic] was taken up and when the prickly pear got a hold.'

Jess stayed on alone at the little homestead until the debt was paid off—it was cheaper that way—stayed while the pear advanced across the now uncared for paddocks. Occasionally she went out and grubbed up a little of the advance guard, in the ragged little orchard, or the paddock where Phil grazed his horses when at home; but it was only a gesture, really, in
honour of past lives and lost battles; the flag had fallen to the deck; and the knowledge of defeat soon brought weariness to her arms and spirit. Towards the last, when Phil came home, he had to clear the cart track from the front gate to the house, and the path at the back from the door to the closet...

... For Phil, the new settlement, which had been a big cattle station in his younger days, had come like the opening of wide horizons. It lifted his life from the humdrum of a ranger's days on too-familiar ground. Here was a fresh new world in the making, and new men and women come to make it; strong hopeful folk with good sweet soil to tread; folk with a fighting chance, with axe-worthy, sweat-worthy ground to work on. Though he was just an onlooker, a custodian of the public domain, a mere advisor where advice was asked, a man with half his life behind him, it sent a flush of new blood through his veins. Through the channel of his impersonal interest in other men he came to a richer personal life than he had ever known. He was an elder brother to any man who sought that quality in him; and an unobtrusive tier-up of loose ends.

Jack Cumming was undoubtedly an elder brother to one young man who was to find the courage to admit defeat rather earlier in life than the Calvinist Macfarlanes. And he was an elder brother to Netta Stewart. 'Referring to the "romance" part', he replied to a lost letter of Davison's in 1944, 'you may not be far out if you do state that the ranger had a disappointment, but that is just between ourselves and forgotten with other things'. Davison had evidently told Cumming that his sudden reappearance by letter had caused him to abandon the story, which was initially entitled 'The Level Road'. Among those who remember social life along the Bluey when the acreages of many of the blocks were still numbered in three figures, it is still rumoured that there was 'something' between Jack Cumming and Netta Stewart; but Davison's invention is now the only available account of what might have happened.

At fifty, Phil Macfarlane, one-time cocky farmer, now a crown lands ranger in the service of the Queensland government, was recovering, from the unrequited love of a woman more than twenty years younger than himself. Phil was a bachelor. This was his second defeat. In all the years there had been only these two defeats: these and one or two passing fancies; but no affairs, and no commercial transactions. Well versed, now, in the poetic and imaginative side of love, he was a complete theorist in respect of its elemental basis. He expected to remain a theorist; he now had no other desire.

The woman is Belle Marsden, daughter of a Riverina family which 'occupied a couple of very good selections on September Creek'. Surely Davison had 'In-june' in mind when naming the creek: later, when he did complete the story, the name was changed to Christmas Creek.

One of the selections belonged legally to Belle, although she didn't belong to the selection. She belonged to the city, having left the Riverina farm for an office billet in Sydney a year or two before her parents.
moved to Queensland. Old Marsden, a decent enough fellow, but one who wanted all he could get of a good thing, and who knew how to make use of his family in order to get it, had selected the extra area of land in her name. There was a personal-residence clause attaching: three years; although a wisely indulgent government would probably not demand fulfilment to the letter provided the land was fenced, stocked and brought into profitable use . . .

. . . Belle and Phil met when he called at the Marsden selection for the first time, in the course of duty. He had to see—tempering the law with commonsense—that settlers were in residence and carrying out specific improvements, also to assist them in problems in any way that lay in his power. The crown land ranger’s visits were official, but Phil was friendly and people found it natural to make his calls a friendly occasion. He took a sincere and understanding interest in the settlers’ difficulties. He would spend all day going into something with a new-chum selector, out of sheer interest in his welfare, reflecting only afterwards that it had been worth while because it made a friend for the department. Phil had good fame throughout the settlement; there were few places where he was not welcome. You could tell the sort of talk children heard about him from their own grown-ups by the way adolescent boys thought they were in a way to being men when they got around to calling him by his front name . . .

. . . Belle sat listening, mostly, observing Phil, his homely natural manners, his slow and studied movements, his big brown hands that were never clumsy and had a beauty of their own, his great gaunt face with sizeable nose, wide full-lipped mouth under a straightly-clipped moustache, his attentive thoughtful eyes, deeply set under the pale cliff of his forehead. He was the most interesting man she had so far encountered on the new settlement, and the most interesting, for his age, she had ever met; a man to be encouraged in the matter of looking in when passing. Their friendship ripens; he partners her ‘to a bush hop at the old out-station’ after Belle, by some adroit manipulation of younger admirers, decides to make it Phil’s night.

She had looked the field over during her first few weeks on the settlement, sorted out the brumbies from the double-harness pairs, noted whose attention she had succeeded in catching . . . [now] she was sampling something different. A gentleman of quality had put himself at her service; and very distinguished he looked—as distinguished as he really was—when he turned up, with the buckboard washed clean at a creek, and he in a neat dark suit with striped tie and gate-ajar collar.

Later, one evening when Phil is staying overnight at the Marsdens, he acknowledges to himself that he is in love with Belle.

It was late, and he was leaning on the verandah rail, watching the night for a few minutes before turning in. He had to be away early in the
morning, to meet the district lands officer at the Washpool before nine o'clock . . .

A light step behind him made his heart jump. Belle, with her dressing gown held about her, had come from inside the house on her way along the verandah to her bed. She saw Phil standing there and of a moment decided to see if he would kiss her. It was short work for experience and a cool head; but she was startled by the fierceness and hunger of those kisses as his arms went about her and held her to him, then responsive as she felt how firmly soft were those lips under that prickly moustache, how arms could be at once so gentle and so strong. But even while taking her pleasure in the moment she guessed what she had done, and was a little aghast. She pushed him away and looked at him searchingly, understandingly, gave him her lips again to stifle his words, then pushed him away again. It was quite easy despite his great arms. With a word of goodnight that acknowledged only a passing kiss she turned and flitted round the corner of the verandah to her bed; there to lie and think out just what had happened, and what she wanted from it.

She left behind a man looking after her, crazy drunk in every cell of his being. He passed a night of wakefulness—too exalted to waste a minute in sleep—and left at dawn, grey-faced with weariness, but with eyes burning like a pilgrim come at long last in sight of his goal.

With the use of the characteristic 'loop of time', Phil's antecedents are recounted to sustain the dramatic moment—'life had starved him in more ways than one'—and then, before seeing Belle again, he writes the first love letter of his life, addressed via the store at the railhead.

With Belle in his thoughts he imagined he could see at long last how life worked. He had come to this point by a heavy road—long slow pulls and desperate steep pinches—but now life was about to compensate him, to reward him more richly than he had dreamed or deserved . . . And so Phil drove along the road to Christmas Creek, as eager as a lad, as trusting as a dog.

But Belle is dreaming of 'a smart little home in a good suburb' and plans to return to the city and a job as soon as she can manage: 'to the lists of conjugal opportunity'.

She was grateful to him for the attention he had shown her, and sorry if she must hurt him, but she really couldn't accept responsibility for the feelings disclosed in his letter.

Belle was not sure that she would care to experience—or even fully understood—feelings of that sort. They were something to be appreciatively accepted from someone else, in proper circumstances, but a handicap to be avoided by oneself if possible. Belle had a trick of poisoning her well before she dipped the water; a habit for which life might exact retribution in due course.

She apologises to Phil for the misunderstanding.

He maintained a very steady if somewhat formal front during the brief
remainder of his stay at the Marsdens', hoping that the old people would notice nothing unusual; and then he drove back along the road from Christmas Creek, hoping only for a hole to die in.

He is observed to be less patient thereafter, hard to rouse from himself, short in speech; 'a starved life had been stirred to knowledge of its hunger; an imaginative man roused to feed with his strength a dream of beauty past his power to grasp or his strength to subdue'.

The story returns to its beginning, in 'moonlight on the clumpy brigalow', a transcendental beauty like that which Belle's image took in his thoughts. He reflects that 'a return to sanity and a normal way of living had been contingent upon the destruction of his dream'.

He couldn't have it, even as something perfect in his imagination. His strength couldn't sustain life at two levels. Belle was not the creature of his need and of his inflated imagining, but just another person, different from himself, with a life to live and her own way of living it . . .

He stayed for a while with the horses, patting them, scratching a poll, talking to them, watching them graze; then he walked back toward the camp. The horses belonged to the world of work, the world he must keep his thoughts in. Phil was now reciting his little book of words. He had dragged himself up a steep pinch in the last half hour, and now must stay on the level road. It was a good road, a road where there were men and women who needed him, who welcomed him to their homes.

It is work of Davison's maturity, displaying an apperception of sequential process in the growth of human relations of which the 'younger brother' to Cumming would not have been capable.

Janet Stewart never married. She went to Melbourne and became a nurse in the hope of fulfilling her ambition to become a doctor's wife. Jack Cumming died a widower.

Unlike the Stewarts, the Davisons can hardly be said to have kept open house up at Sandalwood, even after the 150-link road along the Bluey was completed in September 1922. Visitors, for one occasion only, were the Kirilloffs. Chloe's account of their weekend call was drawn from notes and memories half a century afterwards.

They so often asked us to come and visit them on their selection, that once we did so. It was on a Sunday. From our own selection . . . to the 'Sandalwood' and was no less than 12 miles and the ride in a sulky proved to be tiring in the extreme. His log cabin was set in a pine and brigalow thicket which impressed me rather unfavourably. On coming home the following was what I penned in my Diary:

'One could not possibly be happy in a closed-up spot like this.'

Mrs Davison was busy washing her hair outside the only door they had to the cabin. 'Oh, hallo!' she said without any enthusiasm, and continued not only to wash her hair unhurriedly, but also bath her baby son in the same water, making small talk the while. Only when she finished all she had to do, she asked us in. Frank Davison looked a little confused as he
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rose from a tiny window, where he was, to all appearances, writing and came to shake hands with us. The cabin was filled with a smoke issuing from an open hearth, where a few pieces of wood were smouldering under a blackened kettle. The smoke smartened our eyes. The cabin revealed no affluence of any sort, which plainly meant that Frank's dairy-farming did not pay, may be, because neither his mind nor his heart was in it, either being bent in the creation of his first novel. After partaking of a cup of tea with some biscuits and jam, we went home wondering why they so persistently invited us.

'To think that a budding Australian novelist should work in such uncongenial surroundings,' I mused to myself.33

One other occasional visitor appears to have judged the homestead, and been received there, with more courtesy, according to another of Davison's tales. He was Bobby Cameron of Glentulloch, one of the family that leased the cattle station to the west of the settlement for a short and probably disastrous period during those years. Davison fictionalised the station as Glen Lomond and its occupants as the Campbells, which led to a mild rebuke by Jack Cumming when he read the published story, 'Soldier of Fortune'.

Here the author has perpetrated a calumny on the clan Cameron by transposing the name to Campbell. These two clans have been enemies from time immemorial.34

Campbell is on his way from Glen Lomond to the railway, taking the liberty of passing through the narrator's property to save himself about four miles of travelling, when they first meet.

I thought of a large gnome, or a diminutive Father Christmas. He was of less than medium height, and was dressed in tight white cords, concertina leggings, elastic-side boots, and a soft white shirt pulled on over a grey flannel. He was about fifty years of age, but he had the sprightly tread and nimble-looking limbs of a lad of twenty. He had a bushy coal-black beard and bright black eyes in a nut-brown face. His nose was smallish.35

When the story was revised subsequently, 'he had a beard as dark and bushy as a swarm of bees',36 a more exact and telling description of it.

We were living, at that period, in a box-bark humpy; neat, clean and comfortable of its kind, but still, a very small and crude habitation. As far as Campbell's behaviour was concerned it might have been a large and luxuriously appointed homestead. From the way he removed his hat and paused just a fraction of a second before entering, I suddenly realised that he would pay just precisely the same respect to another's dwelling whether it were a mansion or a blanket and billy beside a camp-fire. After being introduced to Molly and pleasantly acknowledging the presence of the children, he accepted a seat on an upturned kerosene case with a slight bow of thanks. . . .

His manner toward Molly was courtly. Not forgetting for a moment that she was present, he assumed that her interests ranged as widely as ours. He invited her comment and gave full attention and careful reply to
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whatever she had to say. She appreciated this; her manner said plainly, ‘Here is a gentleman, indeed!’37

He is invited to dinner.

Hash and mashed pumpkin, it was, with steamed pudding and golden syrup to follow. It might have been a royal spread as far as Campbell was concerned. I don’t mean that he exclaimed over it, but that from instinct he paid his respects to wholesome food. He handled the sauce bottle and the salt shaker as if, during the moment they were in his hands, he acknowledged their worthy place in the human scheme of things.38

On his departure, ‘he expressed his thanks very graciously, made his bow to Molly, suitably recalled the presence of the children, then walked briskly to where he had left his horse’.

An overnight stay was one actual incident from Fred’s and Kitty’s acquaintance with Bobby Cameron that was transposed into ‘Soldier of Fortune’.

We had only moved into the new house that evening, and the beds were still on the floor. He and I hung up a blanket between his bed and ours, so that we could retire in decency; but we hung it too high, and when we lay down we could see each other in bed, anyway. That was a great joke.39

One visitor to Sandalwood could neither be discouraged nor joyfully and wholeheartedly welcomed. Dad took it into his head to see at first hand how his grandchildren were growing up and how his son and heir was getting on with the work of building a nation. He also happened to be burning, like the natural gas sometimes accidentally encountered by bore sinkers around the settlement, with a majestic new scheme to enrich the nation’s cultural soil and preach ‘for the good of the Australian soul’ his text that ‘the business of the Government is to govern—not to trade’. Dad was pregnant with a new magazine.

But his impending visit confronted Fred and Kitty with more mundane problems. It would be necessary to build a dunny. Their own custom was freeman fashion, taking a shovel into the bush when appropriate and otherwise watering the most convenient tree or bush. Even when sister Doris came of age and took a short holiday with them, they found no reason to change their ways. But Dad was another matter. Accordingly, Fred built from logs and some spare roofing iron what they usually referred to as ‘the wee hoose’.

It is unlikely that Dad saw the joke of the circumstances in which he found his son of toil; but it does seem likely that his counsel, if not his authority, was the ultimate provocation of their decision to walk off. Young Fred knew that he wouldn’t be among the first; and Dad was offering proven opportunities to profit from land, to milk people rather than cows, to sell space to advertisers rather than be sold on advertised space. This time, Dad doubtless prognosticated, the new magazine need not fail, for he had learnt a lot from past mistakes and the real estate game had by now provided him with more capital than was available for the last venture. Perhaps, indeed, his need for all available capital would have meant the reduction or withdrawal of subsidies for Fred and Kitty. He was resolved to begin with an all-out drive to attract advertisers, he wanted Freddie to be the advertising
manager and to take part in the real estate business. He would assuredly publish more of Fred's stories, even if he couldn't pay for them until *The Australian*, as he proposed to call it, was established. He perceived that Kitty, whom some might call flirtatious, but of whom he was growing fonder, would be more than content to abandon the selection and return to the city. How could young Fred, already lined and careworn beyond his years, possibly resist their conspiracy for his welfare?

There had not been another good season. The total rainfall in Roma in 1922 was down again to less than nineteen inches, close to the average for the previous six years; and nearly five and a half inches of that fell in December. In the first quarter of 1923 the total was little more than five and a half inches, and that was the end of the wet season.

When the cattle with the swollen tongues from up on 'the wasteland' were sold, they were worthless. They were sent to the Roma saleyards during the slump in cattle prices and didn't even fetch the price of their hides. Fred was sent a bill for the freight. All but six of the dairy herd were sold, and Bess, the cattle dog, went too. On Tuesday, 24 April 1923, Jack Cumming called at Sandalwood with a pro forma letter to the Under Secretary for Public Lands. Fred filled in the gaps ([italicised]) and Jack witnessed his signature.

**SIR,**

I hereby surrender all my right, title, and interest in and to the lease of selection No. P.L.S. 5207 held by me under Land Act 1910 and to the land comprised in such lease being 84 portion county of Westgrove parish of Injune and containing 1234 acres, 2 rood 0 per. situated in the Roma land agent's district.

I have the honour to be, Sir,  
Your obedient Servant,  
Frederick D. Davison

Fred's lease had existed for 1547 days. On 17 November the Queensland Government Gazette announced that the lease of 84 Injune, selected by Frederick Douglas Davison, had become forfeited under the Land Acts, 1910-22, 'for failure to pay the annual rents and survey fee due'.

It is not known exactly when the Davison family caught their last train to Roma, but it was almost certainly before 23 May, the date on which the Department in Brisbane received Jack Cumming's valuation of the improvements on 'F. Davison's Por. 84 Injune'. Before they could leave, a domestic altercation arose. Fred told Kitty that before they left she would have to dispose of Digger. She was ready enough to get rid of her chooks. The ringtail possum was given to the Stewarts. Percy and Margaret had probably already gone bush, their progeny to plague the cockies of the future by damaging the mud walls of the mallee tanks at their bores. But Digger was one of the family, and Kitty was defiant. 'If Digger can't come', she declared, 'then I don't come and that's all there is to it'. She could not forget what a faithful friend he had been, protecting them from snakes and
keeping the goannas away from her chooks and the eggs. But Fred was equally adamant; and although there were certainly turbulent undercurrents complicating the motives for their conflict, Fred probably thought he was justified in objecting to the cost. It would be hard not to resent paying rail fares for a dog when you had confessed yourself beaten, were virtually penniless, and in all probability were doubly humiliated by knowing that Dad had guaranteed your fares. Young Fred could never have been called an even-tempered man, and he must have been hard to live with during those last days as he prepared to abandon his poor handful of possessions to help pay off some of the mortgage, to jettison the unripe fruit of so much thrift and toil and hopeful husbandry, and to take his farewells of so much that he had loved.

We drove along the road to the railhead through a fresh and dewy morning... The earth was moist, dark, and sweet-smelling. Between the scattered beards of old grass the soil was covered with a green mist of new-sprung blades, just peeping through. Hillsides that had been lost in the white glare of refraction now stood close. On them the box-tree trunks were dove grey against the tender green. At the bottom of the first hill, where scattered turkey bushes stood around like big green pompoms, the little tits flew from bush to bush with saucy chirrup... There was a flash of green and crimson wings among the clumpy brigalow near Kennedys'. A flock of cockatoos, like little white clouds, were floating above Black Horse Hill. The fence wires along the roadside were beaded with large dewdrops, all sparkling in the sunrays. The bush spiders had come out, following the rain, and spun from wire to wire and from bush to bough. Dew-bows glistened in the wet cobwebs as we passed.

Big Gilgai, whose bed had lain black and netted with cracks, was abrim with a smiling sheet of water. The little black ducks had come back and were rippling its blue. Near Burnetts' gate a sandalwood, overhanging the road, had come into bloom. It was covered with tiny cream blossoms that scented the air around it honey-sweet. Around the margin of Bluey Lagoon the charred tufts of the burned-over reed beds were pierced with a million pale green shoots, like the spears of an army marching underground. The bush was heavy with moisture. Trees seemed to have added to their foliage. In place of searching glare real shadow was patched with lively sunlight. The air tasted different. Voices seemed to carry. You no longer went with senses fortified against assault, but with eyes opened and senses eager.

Is it possible that while he toiled Fred allowed himself to be distracted too often, like a romantic land-crazed townsman, by the enchantment of the natural beauty about him? And was that rapture not an eruption of the still-unconscious knowledge that man could ensure himself the victor in his contest with nature only by assimilating her: that she had to be re-created from within? It may have been too early in the year for just such a fresh and dewy scene to have impressed itself on Fred's prodigious visual memory on the day that Bill Davies drove the family eastwards along the Bluey for the last time. But it was just the kind of ironic
resource with which that landscape was so prolific; and if it was not conjured on that particular morning, then it may well have presented itself to Fred like that only after his decision to leave. Once the way out had been acknowledged, the observer in that part of him which had begun to relax would have appreciated the joke.

They drove, that final morning, with Digger and the chooks. Kitty took the chooks to Kirilloffs' store and told Chloe why she needed the money. Digger's fare changed hands. Whenever the train stopped for long enough, Kitty bought a meat pie out of the few shillings they travelled with and took it along to Digger in the guard's van. The guard kept him supplied with water and exercised him along the platform.

Ribbons had stayed behind, together with the springcart. Jack Cumming valued her at seven pounds, two pounds more than the cart. Six cows, keeping her company, were valued at two pounds each. It was a generous valuation. Grand total of all moveables and improvements was £359.10.9.

Portion 84 Injune was not reopened for selection after Fred surrendered it until the Department of Public Lands had received a report on it from the Roma District Office. The report, prepared by Ranger Kenneth Hunter and dated 17 July 1924, recommended that it be opened as a Perpetual Lease Prickly Pear Selection at a capital value of nil. The valuation of improvements had dropped to total £84.1.4. It was estimated that four years should be allowed for destruction of pear.

At the end of July, hardly three months after the Davisons' departure, the Chief Supervisor of Soldier Settlements, C. T. O. Shepherd, wrote a letter about the Mount Hutton Settlement to the Department of Public Lands.

The whole of the country inspected, with the exception of the land lying towards the mountains, is in a particularly dry and deplorable condition due to excessive dry weather and, in some instances, over-stocking. I have regularly visited this settlement each year since its inception and I have found that it is an impossibility for settlers to get a livelihood from the areas which have been allotted to them, each one of them being too small an area to run a sufficient number of stock with which to gain the necessary return required to give each settler a living and be in a position to repay his responsibilities incurred through the loan, £625.

From past experience it has been proved that the land on this settlement is only capable of carrying one beast to 25 acres, therefore on a 1280-acre block the greatest number of stock that could be carried is from 50 to 55 head. This therefore precludes any chance of a settler being able to retain the progeny from his dairy herd, which is absolutely essential, and he perforce has no other option than to destroy them.

The only solution for these settlers is extended areas, and I strongly recommend that in every instance the present selections be duplicated. There are many abandoned holdings on the settlement today, and the present difficulty could be overcome by adding these abandoned holdings, at a valuation of improvements, to the settlers' portions who are at present in occupation. This is the only means by which the settlers will
become contented with their lot and finally become successful.

A deputation, armed with a petition signed by each settler on Mount Hutton Settlement, is already being arranged, to present the Hon. the Minister for Lands with these facts and other settlers' demands.

With regard to the question of increasing the areas on Mount Hutton, I strongly urge that consideration be given immediately. The ultimate success or failure depends entirely on the decision. Should duplication of areas be not considered, I am doubtful whether any of the settlers will remain, and inside two years the whole of the holdings will be abandoned.

At the present time, most of the undesirable settlers have left the settlement, either surrendering or abandoning their holdings, and the ones who are left, with the exception of possibly four men, are hard triers. It is more preferable to have these remaining men settled on an area that would give them a chance of making good, than allow them to finally give up the holding and make statements to the effect that they have been starved out.

Shepherd received his reply by a memo dated 19 September.

The matter has been given consideration and action is now being taken to increase the maximum area for Perpetual Lease Selections in the Mount Hutton area of the Roma District from 1280 acres to 2560 acres. Settlers will also have the opportunity of obtaining additional land under Perpetual Lease Prickly Pear and Grazing Tenures.

Jack Cumming commemorated the affair in the course of a dozen verses that sang the history of the Mount Hutton Settlement from its beginnings to the outbreak of the next world war. They were found among his papers after his death. Here are the last of them.

It was good to be among them when their hopes were running high,
But the odds were great against them when the seasons turned out dry.
Their was no fault for failure when at last they turned it in,
With no profit from their labour they could never hope to win.

Then the stranger came in buying and the broken soldier sold:
Just the same as it had happened in land settlement of old.
You and I have always seen it, that the settler, old and grey,
Does the spadework through a lifetime that is often thrown away.

With the areas adjusted—two selections forming one—
It was found another era on Mount Hutton had begun;
With the paddocks dogproof netted now, again the sheep are there,
And the phut of milking engines breaks the silence of the air.

That inter-departmental memo in September 1923, together with the Government's appointment in the same year of a Revaluation Board to revalue improvements on soldier settler holdings in an effort to recover bad debts, marked the beginning of the end of Queensland's soldier settlement fiasco.

The true motives of the old men in charge are discernible in Premier T. J. Ryan's revealing observation that soldiers would make excellent settlers because life in the army had made them accustomed to a life of hard work, continual hardship, and
tremendous strain. This, 'together with the little knowledge necessary to be a pioneer', would make the soldier an ideal settler.41

Davison had a different diagnosis. In a facetiously satirical piece published in the month he walked off (and also excised from his bound volume of Dad's magazine, *The Australian*, that contained it) he described a disease called 'Land Crazy'.

No son of Adam is entirely immune against this complaint, and no man knows when it will take him. He may be a clerk, or a butcher, or a college professor—it makes no difference, for the land bug is no respecter of persons. He may be walking along the street and get the smell of a lorry load of baled hay, or he may be at home and read a paragraph in the paper about a celebrated cow who earned £50 for her owner in a year. The bug has bitten. He pulls a pencil stub out of his vest pocket, and starts doing sums on the newspaper margin.

The analysis continues to describe the sufferer devouring the agricultural weeklies, reading every advertisement for agricultural tools, scouring public libraries for books on farming, 'and when the supply of literature dealing with farming runs out he starts on bush romances—anything containing the flavour of the soil'. He talks to suburban dairymen at weekends and spends hours watching cows eat grass. In the next paragraph comes a homely paternal interpolation from the editor.

Poor fellow! He has no doubts about his ability to succeed on the land. If he is a native Australian he thinks that he is qualified for farming by virtue of his nationality. (There is no greater mistake than this.—Ed.) Perhaps when he was a boy he spent a long holiday on a farm. Many an unfortunate wretch in the throes of land craziness has based his claims to agricultural proficiency on less than that.42

Without the distorted dreams of servicemen acted out in the aftermath of terrible privation, without their ignorance, misplaced enthusiasm, naive trust in the probity and guidance of venal politicians, there would either have been no soldier settlement scheme in Queensland or it would have taken a different course. But given those facts of human nature, for which the hapless settlers were responsible but scarcely culpable, the whole farrago of frustration and failure, of administrative ineptitude, of personal deficiencies in incompetent settlement supervisors, and unsophisticated agrarian methods, must be attributed, as with most other schemes which go awry, to having been poorly planned because dishonestly motivated.

The reason no returned soldier was allowed to hold more than 1280 acres was that all the land was classified as agricultural so that the selectors could borrow money from the Queensland Government Savings Bank under the more liberal terms it offered on advances for agricultural lands.43 Although the conditions laid down by J. M. Hunter in 1917, that land recommended for resumption and subdivision must be fertile, well watered, near to railways and markets, and relatively free from diseases and insect pests, may have been observed in most cases, the soil would soon have become impoverished and the produce pest prone due to the indiscriminate destruction of the natural vegetation, encouraged and rewarded by 'experts' and authorities alike. Brigalow and belah scrubs in particular grow in
humus-rich soil that gives an impression of prolific fertility for a season or two after ringbarking and clearing, but thereafter the soil is not enriched by falling leaves and other scrub litter, and its last remaining deposits of plant food are soon leached away in the rains.

The soldier settlement scheme was finally abandoned in 1929, when returned soldiers ceased to receive preferential treatment, and the 1917 Act and its subsequent amendments were allowed to fall into desuetude. At that time, a total of 1184 settlers remained on the various soldier settlements. The Revaluation Board had written off £91,687 of a total liability of £750,590. In all, the scheme had cost the Government £1,853,315. In 1921 the rural population of Queensland comprised 33.8 per cent of the state's total population of 756,000; by 1933, the closer settlement fantasy had achieved a rural population of 32.8 per cent of a total of 948,000. It was fortunate that the Yellow Peril never materialised.

The homestead that was Sandalwood was never inhabited again. Some months after the Davisons' departure, while they were still corresponding with Netta Stewart, she took a photograph of it and sent it to them. The iron roof had been removed and, so far as can be seen from the tiny sepia print, a creeper had begun to spread between the rafters. The floorboards had apparently also gone. Over the years it toppled backwards, leaning down the slope towards the tank and the creek. Then, in some spring burnoff, fire took it down to the ground. Maybe it was several fires. No one cared enough to notice.

Davison may never have seen Jack Cumming's valuation of his improvements. He certainly never saw the valuation of Kenneth Hunter in July 1924, when he made his recommendation to reopen the block for selection. Late in 1971, Davison's helpmate over those improving years was shown a copy of Ranger Hunter's valuation. 'Oh, my dear to goodness me!' she exclaimed with a shocked sadness. 'All those years and all that hard work, and that's all it was worth!'

Frank Dalby Davison would not have agreed. The worth for him was embodied in two of his books and most of his stories, but perhaps most concisely in 'The Wasteland', the story that he once said contained a portrait of his father; although it is no less a portrait of the artist as a young romantic, as well as a picture of Portion 83 Injune, where the cattle grazed on the pear. And to all those who would see a wasteland in his commitment of nearly four years' hard labour to a quest for the Australian Dream, he might have been shouting his defiance when in that story he wrote: 'But poetry—in living, I mean—isn't something you set out to do, it's something you find you did while you were trying like hell to do something else'.
References

Abbreviations

FDD  Frank Dalby Davison.

AP  The Australian Post, edited and published by Fred Davison in Sydney between September 1920 and February 1921 inclusive.

WM  The Woman at the Mill, FDD's first short story collection, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1940.


TV interviews refers to four hours of videotape recorded for television on 18 and 19 March 1969 by FDD in conversation with the author. During late 1969 and early 1970, one hundred and six minutes were eventually broadcast in three programs. A copy of the material is in the archives of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Original program number: V 455A.

QPD  Queensland Parliamentary Debates.

Chapter 1. Jane

1. Anne Brown to Jane Davison, 31.8.1870.
3. Anne Brown to Jane Davison, 14.3.1871.
5. Anne Brown to Jane Davison, 31.8.1870.

6. Anne Brown to Jane Davison, 24.11.1871.
7. Fred Brown to Anne Brown, 4.6.1892.
11. Anne Brown to Jane Davison, 14.3.1871.
12. Lists of discharges and desertions from ships in Melbourne have not been kept from before 1878.
15. Anne Brown to Jane Davison, 14.3.1871.
17. Storm Bradley, p.15.
18. AP, November 1920, p.3.
21. Storm Bradley, p.73.
22. Storm Bradley, pp.74-5.

Chapter 2. Amelia
2. Storm Bradley, p.61.
8. Storm Bradley, p.11.
10. Amelia Davison to FDD, 17.3.47.
11. Amelia Davison to FDD, 17.3.47.
12. Eunice Moore [Amelia Davison], 'Teens and Good Times', AP, January 1921.
13. Harvey Brown to Jane Davison, 8.5.1889.
15. Fred Brown to Anne Brown, 4.6.1892.
17. Amelia Davison to FDD, 9.10.46.
18. Amelia Davison to FDD, 17.3.47.

Chapter 3. Fred
1. Amelia Davison to FDD, 5.3.47.
2. Amelia Davison to FDD, 17.3.47.
3. Amelia Davison to FDD, 23.1.46.
4. Amelia Davison to FDD, 17.3.47.
5. Scott McGarvie [FDD], 'The Paint Ladder', AP, January 1921.
7. FDD to Amelia Davison, 5.5.47.
8. FDD to Amelia Davison, 6.7.47.
9. Amelia Davison to FDD, 17.8.45.
10. FDD to Amelia Davison, 10.11.48.
11. FDD to Amelia Davison, undated, c. August 1944.
12. TV interviews.
13. Amelia Davison to FDD, 22.9.50.
14. Amelia Davison to FDD, 22.9.50.

Chapter 4. Freddie
1. TV interviews.
3. FDD to Robert Clark, 19.5.63.
4. FDD to Robert Clark, 16.8.61.
5. FDD to Robert Clark, 17.2.67.
6. FDD to Amelia Davison, 3.11.46.
7. FDD to Amelia Davison, 13.4.45.
8. TV interviews.
9. TV interviews.
10. A. J. Dooley [Fred Davison], 'Doran: Real Estate', AP, November 1920.
11. 'Doran: Real Estate'.
12. Amelia Davison to FDD, 17.8.45.
13. FDD to Amelia Davison, 14.12.47.
14. FDD to Don Meacham, 22.8.42.
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15. TV interviews.
16. TV interviews.
17. FDD to Don Meacham.
18. FDD to Robert Clark, 25.12.61.
19. TV interviews.
20. TV interviews.
21. TV interviews.
22. TV interviews.
23. FDD, 'The Road to Yesterday', RY, p.245. Subsequent unnumbered quotations from this source.
24. FDD to Amelia Davison, 10.8.47.
25. FDD to Amelia Davison, 26.1.49.
26. FDD to Amelia Davison, 30.9.49.
27. FDD to Amelia Davison, 4.1.47.
28. FDD to Amelia Davison, 3.6.45.
29. FDD to Amelia Davison, 29.7.45.
30. FDD to Amelia Davison, 6.1.46.
32. TV interviews.
33. TV interviews.
34. FDD to Amelia Davison, 12.8.45.
35. FDD to Amelia Davison, 11.1.48.
36. FDD to Amelia Davison, 6.1.46.
37. 'The Americans at Home', AP, September 1920.
38. Weekly Times, Melbourne, 5.9.08.
40. FDD to Amelia Davison, 10.3.46.
41. Storm Bradley.
42. FDD to Amelia Davison, 6.4.47.
43. FDD to Amelia Davison, 10.3.46.

Chapter 5. Columbia
1. Except where otherwise indicated, all the anecdotes about Fred Davison's American experience have been culled from six articles he wrote entitled 'The Americans at Home', by An Australian. AP, September 1920 to February 1921.
2. TV interviews.
3. Amelia Davison to FDD, 23.1.46.
5. TV interviews.
6. AP (cf. n.1).
7. AP.
8. AP.
9. AP.
11. TV interviews.
12. TV interviews; and FDD to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
13. TV interviews.
14. TV interviews.
15. FDD to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
16. TV interviews.
17. FDD to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
18. TV interviews.
19. FDD to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
20. TV interviews.
21. FDD to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
22. TV interviews.
23. FDD to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
24. FDD to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
25. TV interviews.
26. FDD to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
27. FDD, Caribbean Interlude, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1936, p.1. Subsequent unnumbered quotations from this source.
28. TV interviews.
29. FDD to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
31. FDD to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
32. TV interviews.
33. TV interviews.
34. TV interviews.
35. TV interviews.
36. TV interviews.
37. TV interviews.
38. TV interviews.
40. TV interviews.
41. 'Fathers and Sons'. WM, p.117; RY, p.211.
42. TV interviews.
43. TV interviews.

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Chapter 6. Agnes
1. 'Fathers and Sons', WM, pp.117-18; RY, pp.211-12.
2. FDD quoted the chorus as epigraph to an unfinished, unpublished sketch of cavalry training, running to about 800 words and entitled 'Sword and Saddle'. Other material and quotations on the topic from this source.
3. FDD to Robert Clark, 28.11.66.
5. FDD to Don Meacham, 20.10.42.
6. 'Fathers and Sons', WM, p.119; RY, p.213.
7. 'Fathers and Sons', WM, p.124; RY, p.216.
8. 'Father and Sons', WM, pp.124-5; RY, pp.216-17.
9. TV interviews.
10. Kay Davison to the author.
11. This is the book that the narrator of 'Fathers and Sons' takes from a dead comrade's kit after risking his life to recover his body from the barbed wire. WM, p.136; RY, p.224.
15. TV interviews.
17. ThornTree, p.4.
20. ThornTree, p.4.
21. TV interviews.
22. 'Fathers and Sons', RY, p.212; In WM, p.119: 'We had very high-flown romantic notions about war'. Subsequent unnumbered quotations from this source.

Chapter 7. Earth
1. QPD, Vol. 98, p.1198.
2. H. McDougall to Department of Public Lands, 24.9.12.
3. John B. O. Evans to Under Secretary for Public Lands, 15.10.12.

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11. Water finders’ report attached to departmental memo, 29.10.17.
12. Under Secretary for Public Lands to Under Secretary to the Treasury, 31.10.17.
13. H. H. Hamley, engineer in charge of PEI works, 12.3.18.
14. Hamley, 22.4.18.
15. Watson, 26.1.18.
16. Watson, 1.2.18.
17. Watson, 18.2.18.
18. Watson, 4.7.18.
19. Watson, 1.8.18.
20. Watson, 18.9.18.
22. Watson, 30.9.18.
23. Western Star, Roma, 12.10.18.
25. The Castlereagh, Gilgandra, 10.1.19.
27. Watson, 12.3.19.

Chapter 8. Selection
1. T. Bone [FDD], ‘A Bit of Australia’, AP, October 1920. Subsequent unnumbered quotations are from a series of five articles by T. Bone in AP, October 1920 to February 1921.

Chapter 9. Settlement
1. Kay Davison to the author.
2. Kay Davison to the author.
4. AP, (cf. Ch.8, n.1).
5. TV interviews.
7. For an account of the poetic meaning of the dog, see Robert Graves, The White Goddess, Faber, 1961, Ch.3.
10. ‘Shifting Sands’.
12. Notes on Man-Shy MS.
15. Western Star, 28.8.18.
16. TV interviews.
20. Kay Davison in conversation with the author.
21. FDD in conversation with the author.
22. Kay Davison in conversation with the author, 8.11.71.
23. ‘Joe Takes It On’.
24. Kay Davison in conversation with the author, 8.11.71.
25. Kay Davison, 8.11.71.
27. Kay Davison, 8.11.71.
31. ‘Shifting Sands’.
32. ‘Shifting Sands’.
Chapter 10. Husbandry
1. Kay Davison to the author.
2. *Western Star*, 17.5.19.
4. *Western Star*, 17.4.20.
5. FDD, 'Soldier of Fortune', *WM*, p.59; *RY*, p.102.
7. Frederick Douglas [FDD], 'One of the Dinkums', *Australia*, April 1924.
8. Kay Davison to the author.
9. 'One of the Dinkums'.
10. Kay Davison to the author.
11. Kay Davison to the author.
12. FDD, 'Tank Sinkers', *RY*, p.43.
14. 'Meet Darkie Hoskins'.
15. 'Meet Darkie Hoskins'.
16. John G. Cumming to Department of Lands, 23.5.23.
17. 'Shifting Sands'. See also 'Meet Darkie Hoskins', p.161. These dimensions may have included the banks made from the excavated soil: 2500 cubic yards of water would occupy a volume approximately 82 feet square by 10 feet deep.
18. C. P. Kirilloff to the author, 6.8.71.
19. 'Tank Sinkers', p.46.
20. 'Meet Darkie Hoskins', p.160.
22. 'Meet Darkie Hoskins', p.166.
25. 'Meet Darkie Hoskins', p.167.
26. 'Shifting Sands'.
27. TV interviews.
28. *WM*.
29. e.g. in a letter to Don Meacham, 5.9.42.
30. 'Shifting Sands'.
31. FDD to Don Meacham.
32. TV interviews.
33. TV interviews.
34. TV interviews.
35. FDD, 'A Letter from Colleen', *WM*, p.214; *RY*, p.75.
36. 'A Letter from Colleen'.
37. John G. Cumming to FDD, 21.8.44.
38. FDD to Robert Clark, 4.9.62.
39. Hooper to Department of Lands, 12.7.20.
40. 'A Letter from Colleen', *WM*, pp.218-19; *RY*, p.78.
41. John G. Cumming to FDD, 21.8.44.
42. 'A Letter from Colleen', *WM*, p.221; *RY*, p.80.
43. FDD, 'Sojourners'. *WM*, p.250; *RY*, p.136.
44. 'Transition', p.182.
45. 'A Letter from Colleen', *RY*, p.76; in *WM*, pp.215-6, 'spry' reads 'active'.

Chapter 11. Publication
1. The Right Hon. Sir Earle Page was Prime Minister for nineteen days in April 1939. He was Federal Minister for Health between 1949 and 1955, when he became the first Chancellor of the University of New England.
3. John G. Cumming to FDD, 22.5.44.
4. FDD to Robert Clark, 28.11.68.
5. TV interviews.

Chapter 12. Defeat
1. 'Meet Darkie Hoskins', p.163.
2. Kay Davison in conversation with the author.
5. 'Fields of Cotton, *RY*, pp.155-6; *WM*, p.180: 'There were from a hundred and twenty to a hundred and thirty men squatting . . . industry of the
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domestic scissors; . . . change of working clothes—and mayhap a best hat . . . to the day and the company; . . .’

6. ‘Fields of Cotton’, WM, p.180; phrase deleted from RY.


8. ‘Fields of Cotton, in WM, p.183: ‘Some other ———— thing!’

9. ‘Fields of Cotton’, RY, p.158; WM, p.183: ‘Cotton—or any other crop, for that matter—only pays consistently for growing when it comes to perfection. This is the story of how we made that disappointing discovery . . . For a start we were doubtful. We suspected the State-wide ballyhoo. We feared a catch. No man wanted to be the mug; and least of all to be caught alone in being a mug.’

10. ‘Fields of Cotton’, RY, p.159; WM, p.184: ‘The news settled our minds for us. We weren’t going to be left out of cotton growing. Guaranteed prices. Free seed. A man would look a fool in a few months’ time if every one was joyously carting bales of highly-profitable cotton to the railway, and he had none at all.

‘On practically every selection on the settlement men went over the ground, choosing a piece they could get under plough with a minimum of labour. Those without a patch of plain had to consider lightness of timber as against suitability of soil. Strange was the way every one encouraged every one else. I heard Harry Griffith deprecating his plain. The soil was heavy. He was just bunging the seed in on the off-chance. Maybe it would prove to do best in the timbered country. He wished he could get around to clearing a few acres of that red sandy cypress pine country at the back of his place.

‘Looking around from the top of any hill, any day, a dozen smudges of smoke rising from the trees would mark where men were at work, preparing land for tillage.’

11. ‘Fields of Cotton’, RY, p.160; WM, pp. 187-8: ‘With me, as with my neighbours, the improvement of the selection, or special ventures like cotton, had to be worked in between morning and evening routine farm work, which provided the living. I had a long narrow strip of creek flat, timbered with large but sparse box and gum, and a sprinkle of saplings.’

12. ‘Fields of Cotton’, WM, pp.167-8; omitted from RY.


16. ‘Fields of Cotton’. In WM: ‘We were lucky in the planting; got the seed in just before the rain fell, the last of it in cloudy darkness, with the first big drops spattering on our backs’.


18. ‘Fields of Cotton’, WM, p.190; omitted from RY.


20. Kay Davison in conversation with the author, 8.11.71.

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22. FDD, 'Flooring Boards', Woman's Budget, 29.3.33. Subsequent unnumbered quotations from the same source.

23. Kay Davison to the author, 18.2.74.

24. 'The Wasteland', RY, pp.144, 145; WM, p.83: 'I turned loose on it ten or a dozen yearling heifers'.

25. 'One of the Dinkums'. Subsequent unnumbered quotations from the same source.


27. See page 184.


29. John G. Cumming to FDD, 22.5.44.

30. FDD, 'Crown Lands Ranger', unpublished. Subsequent unnumbered quotations from this source.

31. John G. Cumming to FDD, 22.5.44.

32. John G. Cumming to FDD, 4.7.44.

33. C. P. Kirilloff to the author, 6.8.71.

34. John G. Cumming to FDD, 21.8.44.

35. FDD, 'Soldier of Fortune', WM, p.52.

36. 'Soldier of Fortune', RY, p.97.

37. 'Soldier of Fortune', WM, pp.54-5.

38. 'Soldier of Fortune', WM, p.55; RY, p.98: 'golden spread'.


42. Francis Daly [FDD], 'Distant Fields Look Green', The Australian, May 1923, pp.18-22.

43. Milton.

44. Milton.
Owen Webster was perhaps more widely known as a columnist than as a writer of books, and his projected work in two volumes on the life and times of Frank Dalby Davison was his first major literary venture. He was supported in it by the Australia Council which awarded him an Australian Literary Fellowship. Owen Webster's death in 1975 occurred before the second volume of the work, provisionally titled *The Inward Journey*, could be completed.

Other books by Owen Webster:
*Read Well and Remember*, 1965
*What We All Wear*, 1968
*Disenchantment* (ed.), 1972

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