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MEMORIES

OF

EARLY DAYS

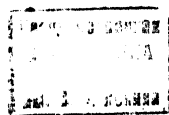
IN

SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

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PREFACE.

THIS narrative of family life in the early days of the Colony, between the years of 1837 and 1845, is dedicated by the writer to her *nieces*, in whose happiness and welfare she has ever taken a warm and loving interest. It was begun to amuse them and a few intimate friends some years ago, before a sorrow too deep for words to express visited and made desolate her once bright and happy home. For a long time it was impossible to proceed with the work, and then it was only continued at the particular request of a dear sister—the “Lena” of these pages. She encouraged the writer with the thought that the narrative would be valued by her young relatives when the hand that penned it was at rest in the grave; and so, notwithstanding its numerous defects, and though the revival of old memories and happier years brought many a heart-pang with them, the task was resumed, and is now brought to a hasty conclusion. Added are two pieces of original poetry which the author ventures to publish, as they, with the memoirs preceding them, are only intended for the indulgent eyes of friendship and affection. Not without difficulty, and solely because it gave her sorrowing sister, in copying out and arranging them, the occupation she sorely needed, was Lena’s consent gained to include her letters in this volume.

MOUNT LOFTY, 1881.

MEMORIES OF EARLY DAYS.

CHAPTER I.

DEPARTURE FROM ENGLAND.

IT must have been in the early part of the year 1836 that a gentleman, whom we will call in these pages Mr. A——, came to the determination to leave the overcrowded land of his birth, to seek a home for himself and large family where there was more elbow-room—in one of the Australian colonies. Through his long-connection with the members of that well-known banking firm, the Messrs. H——, of Fleet-street, and from his acquaintance with several influential men of note, he had but little difficulty in making preliminary arrangements with a company, who at that time were intending to open a bank in Western Australia, and who offered Mr. A—— the post of manager, and his eldest son—then a clerk in a London bank—that of accountant.

Accordingly books were procured, and every scrap of information was eagerly sought for by the various members of Mr. A——'s family respecting the climate, productions, and general capabilities of Swan River. The Commandant of that settlement, to whom Mr. A—— had been introduced, being then in London, he was invited to their pleasant home in M—— Square, where he not only gave the elders of the party the information they desired, but entertained the children greatly with his droll accounts of the novel style of living adopted in a new country; together with the singular makeshifts, mishaps, and difficulties the early settlers had been forced to encounter.

Instead of being deterred by the privations he warned them they would have to meet with, these thoughtless young people—adventurous spirits that they were—were delighted with the enchanting prospect; and without one dissentient voice were all eagerness to leave their native country for the “sunny South.” And doubtless many wild fancies were conjured up, in the minds of these children, of that unknown land where—

“Strange, bright birds, on their starry wings,
Wore the rich hues of all glorious things”—

and their lot, whether for weal or for woe, was to be cast.

But fortunately for everyone concerned, the Swan River idea was abandoned, and South Australia was fixed upon instead as the scene of this Company's operations.

At last, after some month's delay, in consequence of the alterations in their plans, the arrangements were completed, and it was finally settled that on the 7th of May, 1837, the whole family—at that time consisting of Mr. A——, his second wife, and young infant, together with nine children, six sons and three daughters, by a former marriage—should embark on board the good ship H——, bound for Kingscote, Kangaroo Island.

And now the fiat had gone forth, all was bustle and excitement in that household. The home of their fathers was to be forsaken, with its many happy associations—and, alas, its sad ones too—for the remains

of the pure-minded, sweet mother of those nine boys and girls—too early taken to her rest—must be left behind, lying alone, “no loved one near,” in the quiet country churchyard of M——, in Surrey, and never again to be re-visited by some of the number.

But the bright example she set before them of all that was lovely in womanhood, and the early lessons so unremittingly and judiciously instilled, were never wholly to be effaced from the minds of her children, but like an inextinguishable beacon, pointed out to them in after years the rocks and shoals and quicksands they had to encounter, ere their barks were wafted to that shore

“Where billows never beat
Nor tempests roar.”

In those early days, when so little was known of this vast Australian Continent, it was thought by some of Mr. A——’s friends that he was taking a most hazardous step—in fact, a veritable “leap in the dark,” in leaving a comfortable home in England, where he was much esteemed by many around him, for this *terra incognita*, and indeed, as some thought it, this waste howling wilderness at the antipodes. One warm-hearted individual, in particular, was so persuaded that the little ones would perish, either from starvation, exposure to the elements, the attacks of savages, or from the fangs of wild beasts, that he invariably spoke of the ship that was to convey them to their destination, as nothing better than “a floating lunatic asylum.”

But now, looking back through the long vista of years, the writer of these pages has a shrewd suspicion that Mr. A—— was not quite so rash as his friend thought him—for this family, only then ten in number, increased as time advanced to an alarming extent, and there might have been some difficulty in obtaining employment for fifteen fine intelligent boys, and a suitable maintenance for the half-dozen daughters, had they remained in the old country.

However, whether right or wrong, the decision had now been made, and the important day of sailing at length arrived. The outfit, which had assumed such gigantic proportions, was completed and on board, together with innumerable packages of furniture, stores, &c., necessary for their comfort, from a piano to a fryingpan! valuable presents, which were afterwards found of great service from their useful nature, came pouring in from friends in all quarters; the last farewells were taken, and on that bleak May morning of 1837 nearly the whole of the family saw for the last time in their lives the white cliffs of old England.

I will not stay to describe the ship, suffice it to say it was small, only some 350 tons burthen, and terribly overcrowded, but on its decks was formed a friendship between two as liberal-minded, excellent Christian men as ever left their native land for Australia. Hand-in-hand these pilgrim fathers worked together for the good of their adopted country, and in the cause of that Divine Master they both so devotedly served, for a quarter of a century, overcoming by their perseverance and purely disinterested efforts obstacles and difficulties of all kinds, so that at length they had the satisfaction of finding that, in conjunction with others like-minded as themselves, they had helped materially to lay the foundation of that enlightened form of constitutional government and large amount of religious liberty which the people of this colony are fortunate enough to live under and enjoy.

After enduring the heat and burden of the day for all those years, respected and beloved by parties of every shade of opinion for the purity of their lives and true Christian consistency, the summons came from above to call these warriors home in the same year, within a few