

***PART 2:***

**THE FORTUNES OF FAMILY**



## 1. GETTING A LIFE

*SPRING, 1900*

In the front room, the clock struck the hour, its four chimes ringing distinctly through the early hours of morning. The familiar sound made Millicent aware she was more awake than asleep but a vivid dream floated before her, an image surfacing from the deep waters of memory. It was so clear, even though long gone, and herself a mere nymph, but she knew the place and time precisely. With it came a sadness which seemed to have borne the picture up towards her like a stream rising from some inner well that overflowed, ran down her cheek and wet the pillow. She eased herself upright in bed and groped in the dark for a handkerchief. The feeling passed in a moment though the memory, with all its colour and detail, remained vivid. It was like a gift, and she quickly got out of bed and made her way to the kitchen where there was pen and ink on the sideboard and a lined exercise book within in. She didn't bother with the lamp but lit a candle, just as they had so often done in the hot, placid evenings in the homestead at 'Edithville', on the bend of the Macquarie River. There was near-hot water in the kettle, even though the fire was out, so she poured some onto the dregs in the teapot, opened the exercise book at a new page and, as if observing herself, began to write.

*One hot, early December day in 1885 a small child with large wondering eyes sat nursing a baby brother in the kitchen of a far western pioneer's homestead whilst her mother assisted the small half caste maid of all work in preparing for the family meal. This child was not yet seven years old and had known none of that surfeit of story books and toys which is the modern child's lot. Her treasures consisted of one small doll and dearly-prized 'take off' clothes – one dress particularly her mother hand made from a muslin with wonderful green and red spots, and that small frock lived in the child's mind for always – so acute was the joy of its possession for the small dollie – and a very few penny children's books – very highly coloured. 'Ten little nigger boys', 'This is the cow with the crumpled horn', 'This is the house that Jack built' and one or two others, over which she never wearied of poring reading again and again with endless zest and*

*fresh dreams. But today as she held the fat wriggling baby on her small knee she gazed and wondered for before her gaze upon the wall of the room was a large full-page portrait of the lately deceased King of Spain taken from the Sydney Mail, while nearby were various pictures of the Infantas and Queen, the one Infanta to be Queen of Spain – wondrous. All this had been extracted from the family by much questioning. What would it be like to be a queen, and immediately before the child's eyes sway a picture once seen of the Queen of the fairies that the grown-ups portrait showed a Queen also, meant nothing; but the child to be a queen! Could that happen out of fairyland? Yet it was not regarded by her family as anything to give pause!*

*The months and years glide by as a shy sensitive and aesthetic girl of ...<sup>1</sup>*

How old was she now? At twenty-two, the shy and aesthetic girl was also domestic and pragmatic. But she'd now left behind the life she'd grown up with on the western side of the Great Dividing Range that ran like a backbone right through New South Wales. She'd ridden those plains and paddocks around 'Edithville' on horseback, knew their every hill and hollow, and every yard of the ten mile track to Trangie. There had been tedium to be sure; as the eldest she'd had to do a great deal of helping with her younger brothers and sisters. But there had been joys aplenty: such games and adventures as seemed only possible in that other time. And also terrible heartache, when Edith had been bitten by the brown snake and baby John carried away by the river<sup>2</sup> ... but she turned away from those thoughts and endings. Here, in Manly, were beginnings. When they'd come to live in the cottage on West Esplanade, overlooking the cove, the younger ones could properly go to school. This was something she herself had never been able to do, though a succession of governesses and plenty of time for books had achieved much. Most importantly, though, the village by the sea was a place they could do the sea-bathing that was the main treatment for her seven year-old brother George's paralysis<sup>3</sup> – poliomyelitis she'd also heard it called. Ironically, then, it was because of the paralysis that she was now mistress of a new life.

She poured the tea, which was weak but warm. Leaning back from the exercise book, she sipped with half-closed eyes. The most difficult and most rewarding part of the treatment had been getting George to use his legs again, or learning to move about on crutches better to increase the movement of his legs. With one arm wasted from the paralysis as well, this took a great deal of effort

from both him and his helpers. In time, it increased his independence and supported the treatments afforded by the constant current battery and doses of strychnine, but it was very discouraging at first.<sup>4</sup> However, he became more adept and stronger, although Georgiana still worried that he wouldn't be forced to use his legs as much as was necessary to regain their former strength. Thus Millicent and her other younger siblings, Macquarie and Olive, as well as her mother, found themselves employing every form of persuasion from gentle coaxing to shaming in order to stimulate his efforts. They would look for any opportunity where such encouragement might be found, the best of which involved interaction with friends and other children – of whom George had, understandably, very limited acquaintance.

Sometimes, if George had tried hard, Millicent would take him for a walk in his wheelchair to get some kind of small treat. His favourite was to visit the confectionery shop of Mary and Siobhan Devine in the Corso for a toffee apple, where the sisters would sometimes give him an extra sugar candy in his choice of colour.<sup>5</sup> After that they would stroll along the promenade or sometimes – particularly if Macquarie came along to push – take in the views from near St Patrick's seminary. Their brother, in 1897, was grown into a strapping lad, and would turn fifteen that year; however, he had to be increasingly cajoled to take his younger brother for walks and, on one particularly mild Saturday afternoon in mid-May, Millicent recalled that he would not be dissuaded from watching the cricket match in Ivanhoe Park. She'd fumed, and not in silence, but it did no good; however, she made sure by her departure that Macquarie had a few moments to consider his selfish behaviour. Still in high dudgeon, she had turned hard onto the Esplanade, crashing the wooden wheels onto the pavement.

'Ow! Mil ...' But George stopped as they heard a concentration of young voices and laughter above the usual sounds that came from the amusements on the wharf. Approaching along the footpath, they saw, on the other side of Belgrave Street and the Corso, what seemed to be a parade. A whole train of girls and boys, perhaps Macquarie's age or a little younger, and dressed in the widest variety of fanciful costumes, were turning into East Esplanade. Someone with a flute or a pipe was leading them and, as they moved off, a drum also struck up.<sup>6</sup>

'Look there Mil, there's a captain! And a peasant girl. And a ...' George stopped, never having seen quite such an assortment of characters, and unsure what they were.

'Look at that one, George,' Millicent had said. 'The girl with shepherd's crook.'

'Little Bo-Peep!'

They tried to guess some others as they drew parallel with the march, which was proceeding slowly along the Esplanade. Many girls were dressed as flowers – one was a daffodil, another was a forget-me-not, another a sunflower – while others were attired as queens with crowns and jewellery. The boys were no less colourful: there was the admiral, with his cocked hat, that George had spotted earlier, a Venetian boatman, an Arabian djinn, a very delightful Puck and several cricketers.

'Mac could have fitted right in,' Millicent remarked sarcastically.

'Is that one a lord?' asked George, pointing to one boy dressed in black and sporting a small wig.

'No – that's a barrister,' Millicent had replied, with the benefit of recent experience. Just a few years earlier, when she was only 18, she had taken a land appeal to the New South Wales Supreme Court.<sup>7</sup>

The march had come past Ashburner Street but continued up the hill into Osbourne Road rather than following the Esplanade.

'Can we go up there too?' asked George.

'It's up the hill. You're heavy!' Millicent said.

'No, I'm not. Please, Mil. I want to see where they go!'

It was hard work, as the first part of the hill was particularly steep, but it was something out of the ordinary and Millicent acquiesced. They crossed the roadway and fell in a little distance behind the marchers.

As it turned out they didn't have too far to go as the drummer, a man in military costume, stopped and turned those behind him into the garden of a tall, gracious, two-storey home Millicent knew to be called 'Hirondelle'.<sup>8</sup> She was puffing as she drew up to it, and through the iron fence they could see the

marchers had broken ranks and were making, some at a run, for decorated refreshment tables drawn up in the shade.

Turning back ahead again, she remembered finding they had come to the gate and were in front of the drummer, who was about to lift off his instrument's wide leather band. He smiled uncertainly.

'Are you joining us? Are you – you're not one of Charlie's friends, are you?'

'No, no. Not at all. We were just on our walk. If you'll excuse us.' Millicent had said, more brusquely than she intended, not wanting to be seen to be gawking. She couldn't prevent George doing so, however.

'Please sir, what are they doing?' he asked.

The young man smiled, though up close Millicent saw he was somewhat older than herself.

'It's a fancy dress party. For my younger brother Charlie's fourteenth birthday,' he said. They were silent for moment. 'I'm Edward Bryant,' he said, extending his hand.

'Millicent Harvey.' She had felt herself flushing. 'This is my brother, George, Mr Bryant.'

'Hello, George.' Edward said. There was a further awkward moment, but as Millicent made to release the brake on the wheelchair he said: 'Perhaps George would like a drink? Or some cake? And, er, you too, of course, Miss Harvey. Most welcome.'

Millicent's best instinct had been to immediately apologise and continue up the hill. Head high, gaze forwards. Then George looked up with such an expression of excitement in his face that she hesitated, pausing just too long. Mr Bryant moved to open the iron gate wide enough to allow the wheelchair through, and they passed into the garden.

Maybe they stayed an hour. Millicent did not remember. She did remember the costumes of the boys and girls, and how artful many of them were up close: Boy Blue, a toreador, a Neapolitan fisherwoman, a very convincing 'granny' who

stayed in her persona the whole afternoon, Lord Nelson – George’s ‘captain’, of course – and a couple of pages, of which young Charlie was one. She recognised Alec Dean as a ‘swain and his sister Emma as the daffodil. Though her eye was drawn to the glitter of the queens, they all, with the exception of the Queen of the Roses, quickly discarded their pomp, as well as some of their more cumbersome jewellery.

She was introduced to many mothers, including Mr Bryant’s mother, Caroline, whose home it was. But it was her own mother who, coming to mind, had spurred their departure.

Mr Bryant saw them to the gate. The uniform suited him, looking rather unlike fancy dress. For the first time, Millicent allowed herself to look directly into his face. His eyes, grey-green, were also on hers.

‘Thank you all very much,’ she said. ‘My brother’s birthday was only last week and I don’t think he had an afternoon as cheerful as this one.’

Edward was pleased. ‘I am glad. Well, happy birthday for last week, George! And I hope you, too, had a pleasant afternoon, Miss Harvey. Perhaps we may see you again?’

Millicent gave a smile, dipping her hat just a little as she turned to manoeuvre the wheelchair through the gate. Two girls in costume, who she hadn’t until then seen, gave them their last glimpse of the party. She had wondered aloud what they were dressed as, not expecting a reply, but George knew.

‘That’s Simplicity ... and Folly!’ he said.

Simplicity and Folly. Half-awake, Millicent got up and returned to bed, gazing at the ceiling for a time, as thoughts and memories seemed to play themselves on its dim, indistinct surface. Many of them were of the wedding itself but most returned to a singular point, which was Edward – Ned to her now – and herself.

She had not guessed there would be this profusion of feelings, some in harmony, some conflicting. Certainly, her mother had said nothing about it, had not warned her. Then again, her mother had said very little about what it might

be like, other than 'there will be things to get used to.' She had been a great deal of help in the preparations and practical details of what her daughter would wear, what she would take with her and what might be needed in the house. But she had not indicated much about the experience or the feelings, the comfortable ones any more than the uncomfortable.

She remembered Georgiana's surprise when, a fortnight or so after their meeting, an invitation to tea had arrived from Ned's mother. It was as if she was shocked that Millicent herself might have been the reason for such a request. It had been a pleasant occasion, the awkwardness relieved by Mrs Bryant's grace and the entertainment provided by Ned's sister, Alice, only a few years older than Millicent but already a fine pianist and organist who now accompanied the services in St Andrews. That afternoon she was at the grand piano in the front parlour, her music relaxing everyone except herself and Ned, who smiled agreeably but said very little. After that, however, he began to accompany them on picnics, or promenade after work on Saturday afternoon. He had a position in the Electric Telegraph Department, and took the ferry to the city and back. Now, Millicent thought, I know for whom the bell tolls in the morning down on the wharf.

He was a quiet person, she found, with an essentially shy nature, though he was a good height and she always had to look up at him. She discovered a new pleasure in having someone join her on the promenade and, indeed, another from the glances of other women and young ladies. His unctuousness sometimes irritated her, but this would pass when he bought tea for them at Murphy's refreshment rooms, or Mrs Prowse's, if they could get in, as she made the best scones.<sup>9</sup> It had, however, nearly brought them undone when she received an invitation to a ball at the Oddfellows Hall in Manly, to be hosted by the Mayor and Mayoress.

For the first time, she wore the dress specially made for her by Miss Rowlinson,<sup>10</sup> though she found everyone's interest<sup>10</sup> in it, and their remarks, tedious in the extreme. It felt awkward to wear, as well; the dress moved and she had to walk with it, rather than the other way around. She did, however, enjoy the looks which greeted her as she entered the Hall, even if they only lasted until

the next young lady walked in. But when she saw Ned catch sight of her, he blushed, and something in her choked on this embarrassment, as if he'd found something wrong instead of pleasurable in her arrival. He greeted her and Georgiana, of course, but fussed with refreshments for them and forgot her card. Several other young – and not so young – men asked to dance and she wrote down their names, but it was not until Ned saw her on the floor that he remembered. Finally he was down for one of the later dances and they began moving in one another's company: apart, then together, in the motion of one of the lesser waltzes. She smiled at him, meeting his eyes. He smiled back and trod on her foot. They moved on with hardly an interruption, but he was then both embarrassed and preoccupied with his footwork. She smiled again; she'd rather have laughed but didn't dare. For the first time she felt something in her strain to encourage him but there was no response; it was as if they had disconnected. The chance to be close had evaporated and didn't reappear.

'Dear goodness, be patient!' her Mother had said on the way home, but the feeling would not go away. She now sensed what it meant to be swept off one's feet: it was a sweeping away of barriers, a sweeping away of distance ... and, right then, it hadn't happened.

Yet it did happen, unexpectedly, and contrary to the judgment she believed she had formed of him. There was no breakthrough of feeling or emotion. Hardly any one thing seemed to happen that she could point to and say 'this was the moment' in which her feelings for him blossomed. But, in hindsight, something had shifted, had been swept away, even if it wasn't what she expected.

She remembered when Alice confided how he had been from bookshop to bookshop during his lunch hour to find a copy of *Enoch Arden*, after her comment that she enjoyed Tennyson. Of course, she'd dismissed the notion he'd done it especially for her: 'He probably had nothing else to do. Why, if he spent as much time as he'd like in bookshops he'd be out of a job!' But of course she was delighted. It wasn't as if anyone else bought her gifts.

Then there was the matter of the merry-go-round on the Corso with its infernal steam organ, a nuisance which had been impossible until the village's

new dam and water system had brought the supply of fresh water it needed. While the noise of amusements and pleasure-seekers both could be tedious, it was the machinery of the merry-go-round, the whistle and, above all the steam organ with its endlessly-repeated tunes going late into the night, that drove them almost to despair. After wondering aloud what could be done about it, she had been surprised and gratified when Ned added his voice to those of other ratepayers who wanted the Council to end the nuisance. It turned out not to be so easy but at least there was some abatement, with Mr Smith even going so far as to build a shed around his 'Steam Riding Gallery'.<sup>11</sup>

But it was what came to be known as the 'Maitland' gale, in May of 1898, which swept away her feelings of indifference ... and, yes, the hauteur she had begun to notice she would draw around herself at times to cover her shyness. The gale was said to be the worst for thirty years and took many lives, particularly when the steamer *Maitland* was driven onto the rocks in Broken Bay.<sup>12</sup> It also happened to coincide with Arthur's severe bout of measles. He had been ill for some days, and the familiar rash had appeared; then he became feverish and Georgiana had become increasingly anxious, indeed so anxious that Millicent was concerned for her mother. At four years old, Arthur was her 'baby' once again; Mary's passing in infancy was still a recent wound, perhaps one that, layered on those of Edith and John, would never heal completely. The great gale blew up from the south and, with the house lashed by rain and winds so fierce they feared the roof would cleave off, Arthur, as if in concert, began to thrash about in pain. Macquarie went for Doctor Andreas but could not find him. Then, just before dark, Ned arrived, worried as their cottage was right on the foreshore and directly in the path of the roaring, blustering fury that was coming up the harbour. Apprised of the situation, he said he knew of a doctor and immediately went out into the night. The rain and wind continued – as it did so for days – but around nine o'clock Ned reappeared with Doctor Thomas, well known to them from his efforts to establish the new Manly Cottage Hospital.<sup>13</sup> Both men were soaked, but Doctor Thomas immediately examined Arthur and diagnosed a severe ear infection, with the pain caused by pressure within the ear-drum. It was not uncommon with the measles, he said, but might need to be relieved by myringotomy,<sup>14</sup> a small incision in the eardrum that would help drain the fluid.

Rather than delay matters, and with hot water and help to hold the boy firmly, he performed the procedure at once on the kitchen table. After taking some tea with a little whisky as fortification against the weather, he left, waving away Georgiana's earnest thanks. Ned was about to do so as well but, in gratitude, Georgiana embraced him warmly. Millicent then felt able to follow her mother's example, and for days remembered the warm, masculine smell that somehow distinguished itself from that of wet wool and gabardine.

How much more intimately did she know this smell now, she thought. Perhaps it was that. Perhaps he'd marked her senses with it, then sealed the matter under the dripping Norfolk Pines of the Cove that day before they left the village.

News that her Father had been taken ill arrived not long after their return to Manly in the new year of 1899.<sup>15</sup> Since George had much improved, Georgiana felt her duty lay elsewhere and they need reside at Manly no longer. But when the decision to leave was made Millicent was shocked and torn. It happened so quickly. It was hard to admit, but the little cottage, 'Devon', felt more like home now than 'Pomona', the property her father had recently acquired. Ned was shocked too. He said little when they told him but, as they walked north along the Steyne he was listless and preoccupied.

As they packed up the cottage and the day for leaving drew closer, Millicent took the younger ones to play on the sheltered sands of the Cove whenever she could, enjoying the warm sea breezes and wishing, silently, that she could stay. Though 'Pomona', also on the Macquarie River but east by some eighty miles, was quite beautiful, it would not be like returning to 'Edithville'. Moreover, everyone spoke of 'going back,' but that seemed like trying to return to an earlier part of her life that had now passed. She wondered what she would do. Would it not be more of the same, until she or, more likely, her parents, found some suitable man with suitable property for whom she would bear suitable children? Helping her mother and caring for the family had mostly been her lot, but Manly had given her a new sense of independence. Despite Mother's authority, she had felt much more responsible for the everyday life of the family. Although

Georgiana's experience of teaching as a young woman had been the most important guide, it was Millicent who had done much to look after George, and pressed Olive and Macquarie on with their schooling. It was also she who'd usually dealt with the school on Mother's behalf, as well as with a good many others, from tradesmen to shop-keepers.

Besides, barely having lived at Wellington, she knew almost no-one there. Her instincts told her there would be few who would share her interests or possess a view of the world expanded by the life of the city. While her own father might, which was part of what made her close to him, she was not sure he would see her role too differently from the way Georgiana did at this point in Millicent's life. Despite her skill on horseback, she would mostly likely be employed in the home and in caring for the other children. No matter how much they wanted and appreciated her help, it was not, she had realised with a certain, cold rush of insight, something she was looking forward to.

What was she wanting then?

In the week leading up to their departure she had felt a mounting sense of despair, a feeling previously unknown to her. A door was closing. She took long walks along the Steyne, and up to Fairy Bower to look over the ocean. She slept poorly, though that might have been the heat that had been unrelieved for weeks and burdensome for everyone.

And what of Ned?

She had seen him little and perhaps this had been no small addition to her turbulence. He worked during the week, of course, but a more extreme shyness and awkwardness had returned; in noticing this, she realised it had almost dissolved during the period of their acquaintance. It was as if some barrier was again between them, as if they were walking past each other in opposite directions while speaking, and she had to guess what was meant by the snatches that trailed behind. She had a sense he did not know how to say something, or even what he wanted to say. His mother, kind as always, offered assistance to Georgiana, but it made no difference to the tension Millicent felt, the sense of departure and premonition of loss.

The evening before their departure, she went off by herself, walking along the Esplanade around to the eastern side of the Cove. She clambered down onto the rocks below Wood Street and looked back over the bay towards 'Devon', just beyond the wharf. There had been a squall and the wetness on the road and the rocks was still only half-dried. The moisture, mixing with the late afternoon air carried smells of kelp and salt, tinged slightly with horse manure. There was barely anyone about, and a momentary stillness on the bay. Not even a gull cried. Then a zephyr she did not even feel brought the faint, dusky sweetness of jasmine and, in an instant, her heart welled with melancholy and tears came between little gasps of breath. She put her face in her hands, which were soon wet, but she no longer cared.

After a time she felt exhausted but calmer. The sentiment had passed and she felt able to get up. Horrified at her state, she thought: I must do something. Even leaving is better than this. Grateful no-one appeared to have seen her, she wiped her face, adjusted her bonnet and began to walk more purposefully back the way she had come. Mother would be missing her.

But as she came back to the Esplanade and began to near the wharf, the sound of hasty steps behind her entered her awareness. Then Ned's voice, unsteady with effort, called her name.

'Millicent!'

He sat her on a wooden bench still wet from the rain and, while catching his breath and stumbling a little with embarrassment, asked the question she had not thought to hear from him.

A possibility, then, seemed real, out of all Millicent's imaginings about the future. *The child to be a Queen?* Was it so improbable?

Mother had sounded pleased, if not excited, but Father, when they arrived back at 'Pomona', was stony-faced. Though Georgiana was in no hurry for Millicent to leave home, Edmund seemed even less so, despite his daughter having been away in Manly for much of the last few years. But, as she and her

father's closeness re-established itself over the next month, he relented, eventually agreeing that Ned should come and visit and formalise his proposal.

In the meantime, they had written to each other regularly. Her letters told of country life and family, his of the city and family. She felt comfortable with his words, and could feel not only his presence in them but the pulsation of a life that was waiting for her. Every week she waited for the post and her thoughts were not of the river and hills around 'Pomona', now increasingly dry and touched by drought, but of the village by the sea. Other things seemed to affirm this, such as the kind letter from Reverend Stoddard, written from his retreat at Bowral, which said that while 'of course there was no other arrangement possible in view of your father's state of health', he was very sorry they were leaving. 'I must thank you however for all the willing and kindly help you have rendered me and the church during your stay in Manly,' he added. 'I only wish all church workers would do their work for the church with as little fuss and worry as you have done...'<sup>16</sup>

But Ned's visit, when it finally happened later in the spring, did not bode well. He was nervous, though the family were cordial and cheerful and, with the exception of Edmund, keen to put him at ease. However, it became clear over the days following his arrival that he was no countryman and that he knew little of the practical tasks that were of everyday importance to them, from milking to branding. He was also tended to be nervous with horses and overly tentative with them, even when driving in the buggy. When the time came, he returned from a long walk with his prospective father-in-law red-faced: Edmund had not given him his answer but would send it.

This made the short time left to them especially awkward and, when she returned from seeing him off on the train from Wellington, Millicent wasted no time in seeking out her father. Edmund chose his words carefully but bluntly. 'He's hasn't got much drive. He's no idea of building up property; how will he establish you?'

'He's got a good job!' she replied.

'I can see the Telegraph Department is important but will he ever earn more?'

'He will, I'm sure. He's educated, he knows his job and his Department needs him.'

'How long has he been there?'

'Fifteen years.'

'In the same job?'

'Yes. It's a good situation and reliable.'

Edmund remained unimpressed, and Millicent added: 'He has savings, as well.'

'He told me. What will he do with them?'

'He'll make a deposit on a house. Could we buy 'Devon', perhaps?'

'So you want to live in the city?'

'In Manly.'

Her father grunted. 'There are still plenty of opportunities in the country. Plenty of good land: time to buy too, with this drought. And I'll mark you, there are young men out here ... .'

'I don't want them!'

'What do you want, exactly?'

'To have my own ... .'

But she had not been able to say what she really felt. She couldn't say to Edmund's face she didn't want the country but she could not see her place in it. She no longer felt rooted in its soil. And she couldn't say, just as she had not found any other young man with whom she had felt affinity, that there had been any who had found affinity with her. This thought nagged, and she pushed it away. Maybe it was why someone older, like Ned, would suit her better.

Edmund delayed his reply, so she felt compelled to write to Ned to explain, to assure him it would not be long. Father, meanwhile, came back to the topic in various ways, with a number of alternatives ... but she could not move. She could see no other choice.

She had overheard her mother telling Father just this, when they'd thought her out of their hearing. 'She won't give, Edmund. And she's proud, which is why she's so stubborn ... .' She heard her father's characteristic grunt then her mother's addition: '... like a man, really.'

So her father agreed, in the end. Reluctantly, that was certain, but he knew Georgiana was right. He would allow Millicent the life she chose, though he prevailed on Georgiana not to give them 'Devon' until Ned and Millicent could put some of their own money into it. To start with, then, they would have to live with Ned's family at 'Hirondelle'. This was a sting, no doubt from Edmund's displeasure at the match but also, maybe, his disappointment at how the instinct to build wealth, which he had been pleased to support over her land purchase case in the Supreme Court, now seemed to be put aside. It was clear to him that his daughter's husband-to-be had few such instincts.

Though she understood her father, Millicent was upset; however, it was his assent that mattered more to her just then. Everything had then begun to move quickly, like water when a dam is breached, and the following months rushed by as preparations were made for the wedding. It might have been the last year of the old century but 1900 felt like a place when new things should begin.

Yet something in her had held onto a shyness. Or was it the pride she was accused of? Was there a touch of spite in refusing a church wedding or was it, deep down, something else? It was excused by the Bryants being Presbyterian, and it not being fair to expect them to come to the Harvey's church if the groom's family were attending on that of the bride. On the other hand, it was certainly pride that made Millicent privately fear who might fill the pews other than their two families. In the end it was agreed the nuptials would be at 'Pomona', under a pavilion in the garden that they decorated very prettily.<sup>17</sup> Thus it was, with Ned's mother and sisters shivering in the unaccustomed cool of the autumn breezes, that they had plighted their troth. Ned placed the ring on her finger, and it seemed the colour of the wedding band matched the gold of the elm leaves that the wind rained down on them from above like so many blessings.

So much had happened, and changed; no wonder her mind returned to it in dreams. There was the past, all her life before. And there was the present, Ned in bed beside her and the sound of the five minute bell audible from the wharf. It was no dream, though, that woke her fully a little time later and caused her to get up and rush to vomit in the lavatory.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> 'Shy sensitive and aesthetic girl ...', Writing fragment, December 1885.

<sup>2</sup> Information on dates and places of the births (and deaths) of members of the family of Edmund and Margery Harvey (née Taylor) is drawn in the first case from two handwritten records entitled 'Births' and 'Deaths' kept in a family bible owned by Margaret de Bais of Tamworth, NSW, and passed on by Beryl Harvey to Norma Meadley. They were checked by Norma and appear in her unpublished *Harvey Family History* c. 2009. I have drawn heavily on the 'Family of Edmund George Harvey and Georgiana Sarah Bartlett' chapter, in particular. This detailed work has provided the foundation and starting point for most of my information about the Harvey Family and for some of the fictional as well as the known and deduced factual material in my account of Millicent Bryant's life.

<sup>3</sup> G Hamilton Rowlands to Miss Harvey, 2 January 1897.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> John MacRitchie, 'Manly in the 1890s – notes for a monograph' (Manly: Local Studies Collection, Manly Library), 14, 55.

<sup>6</sup> 'Social', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May 1897, 7. This report includes an extensive description of the children and their costumes.

<sup>7</sup> 'Harvey v. Minister for Lands', *The New South Wales Law Reports* XVII (Sydney: Hayes Brothers)(1896), 264-70.

<sup>8</sup> Lynette A James, 'My Reminiscences of Hironnelle, Osborne Road, Manly', (Manly: Local Studies Collection, Manly Library) n.p.

<sup>9</sup> MacRitchie, 'Manly in the 1890s', 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2; 'The Recent Storm', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 May 1898, 5.

<sup>13</sup> MacRitchie, 'Manly in the 1890s', 15.

<sup>14</sup> Encyclopedia of Surgery. <http://www.surgeryencyclopedia.com/La-Pa/Myringotomy-and-Ear-Tubes.html> Accessed 2 February 2011.

<sup>15</sup> L. G. Stoddart to MMB, 14 March 1899.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> 'No Heading', *Wellington Times*, 16 May 1900, 10.

The date of the marriage was 9 May 1900. (NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages).

## 2. MILLICENT'S CHILDREN

'The English inheritance we brought with us counted for nothing, in the end,' her grandmother mused. Margery's children and grandchildren were eating and making tea, and the kitchen at 'The Retreat', the whole house for that matter, was full of people. Many had been to the graveside as well as the Church, where the Archdeacon had remembered Millicent's grandfather as 'straightforward and honourable in all his dealings, kind, courteous and hospitable'.<sup>1</sup>

'He liked people to like him. He was *so* trusting. The dear old fool,' she added.

'Oh, mother,' Aunt Elizabeth said.

Millicent drew a shawl around herself. She had not been to Oberon for some time and had forgotten how high it was and how winter was inclined to linger, although it was almost October. Then again, she had come up from Manly, where spring had been in full bloom for weeks.

'He was, Lizzie dear. You know that. He trusted so much that he paid most of the inheritance when we came out on a flock of sheep that were almost worthless and infested with scab. Thirty shillings a head! It's more than we paid per acre for our land here!'<sup>2</sup>

'That's not how people will remember him, though.'

'Thankfully, and that's what I'd rather. But not when he signed that paper for his cousin, which turned out to be a five hundred pound promissory note. "Just sign your name here, Edmund, it's just a formality!" The scoundrel! And there I was getting our farm at Hill End going with only the children for company when the bailiffs turned up and wanted to take everything.'<sup>3</sup>

'They didn't get everything, though, did they?' Millicent asked.

'I managed to stall them until the next day and during the night culled just a few of the animals and turned them into the bush, along with a few essentials, so they wouldn't miss much ...'

'I wonder you didn't tell them to come back for Grandfather!' Millicent said. Everyone laughed, enjoying the story.

‘Very nearly, my dear. Oh, it was hard! We had to start all over again. But I couldn’t stay angry with him. We just had to make the best of it.’

And they had done so, Millicent reflected on her way home in the train a few days later. But she knew that her grandfather, Edmund senior, would not leave a large fortune. Margery, now 83, would be left comfortable enough but there was only a little for Millicent’s uncles to inherit, pieces of land here and there, mostly small acreages. And, with the exception of Elizabeth, her aunts would only get fifty pounds each, it being understood their husbands would provide for them. This was so even with Caroline, who had been widowed.<sup>4</sup>

She wondered at her thoughts. Was it because of the baby she now knew was there? What would become of him? She checked herself: why did she worry so much? Here she was, newly married, in her own home, with a reliable husband with reliable employment. Still ... .

Something in her wrestled with the idea she that was expected to have so little say, so little authority in her life. So little fortune on her own account.

And so little control of her own body. Smoke coming in the window as the engine laboured towards Mount Victoria made her feel sick again. Her fellow travellers averted their eyes as she hastily rose from her seat and left the compartment.

She could not fault the care Ned took of her. He took his own breakfast early and went to the ferry in the morning after bringing her tea. After arriving home around six, depending on the boat, he would chop wood for the stove and take her for a walk before dinner if the weather was agreeable. He would occasionally bring back flowers from the seller on the wharf, or a book from Angus and Robertson, and perhaps read it aloud to her before bed. Most Sundays, after church, they would return to ‘Hirondelle’ for Sunday dinner, presided over by his mother, Caroline, which any number of family members might attend. There was Uncle John who worked as a chartered accountant in the city, and Ned’s sisters, Jane, and Alice, often a late arrival. While the regular organist at St Andrews, Alice had also consented to play at St Mary’s, the Catholic Church, earlier in the morning, but if mass had been lengthy she only just had time to get to the St

Andrews service.<sup>5</sup> Dinner was served well after noon, sometimes closer to one, to allow for this, creating an air of expectancy that young Charles, impatient to eat, likened to a railway waiting room. Fortunately, a friend or two of his often joined the family, and their skylarking or attempts to play the piano would pass the time. Charles had become interested in painting, and conversation would often drift in that direction; he had been particularly enthused after watching a friend of the family, Tom Roberts, sketch his older sister a couple of years earlier as she sat at the organ, and at how the pastels had yielded a study of grace and concentration.

After Christmas, Georgiana came down to stay at 'Devon' before the new tenant, Mr Charley and his family, moved in. She brought with her the younger boys to enjoy Manly's cooling breezes for a fortnight and, with their presence, Millicent felt a welcome burst of energy and activity which she didn't allow her condition to hinder. Perhaps this had something to do with her younger brother's progress. George could now carry himself on his legs much more easily, though he couldn't match Arthur and Vere's tireless enthusiasm for the seashore. And now some of the cries carrying over from the maze, or from 'Sovereign' Smith's carousel on the corner of Rialto Lane, were of their own making.<sup>6</sup> Ned enjoyed this boisterous company rather less, particularly when Georgiana and the boys were taking supper at 'Hirondelle', but made no complaint other than to retire early.

Curiously, her family's departure left a gap Millicent was not expecting, and the house felt overly large and empty. Perhaps it was an adjustment, Millicent thought. This is a new life, not my old one. She had to get used to it.

She threw herself determinedly into preparations for the new arrival. Her small frame began to feel the baby's weight more and more and she wished the time would go faster. In the midst of the early February heat her mother returned, this time to stay until after the birth. During the earlier visit she had confirmed the engagement of a Miss Allen as a governess for the younger children. Miss Allen was now up at 'Pomona' and had, it seemed, become well-established with the household, leaving Georgiana free to attend her daughter.

All was in order, but as the heat persisted and the days dragged on, Millicent found her mother even more restless, irritable and tired of waiting than she herself was.

Two months later it was cooler and, despite there being no sense of waiting, the days were even slower. Once again, though, all was in order.

The baby was asleep.

The room was tidy and Ned was at work.

Millicent was exhausted.

It was late morning and she sat out in the winter sun with some sewing on her lap. She could hear a sigh of wind in trees and horses' hooves on the roadway but they seemed as distant as the sound of the surf on the ocean beach. She looked down at her hands in her lap and they hardly seemed to be her own. A little while later she found herself still sitting there, her mind swimming against fatigue as if against a relentless, opposing tide.

But the familiar little cry cut through everything and, properly roused or not, she managed to get up. Lifting the child from his bed, she went back inside to feed him. George Edward Inigo had been born on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, 1901, just a month after the Queen's death, and flags everywhere were still at half mast. Georgiana, Caroline and the midwife had taken charge when the pains came and her waters broke. For the first time Millicent had felt a rising panic but had not expected her own struggle for control. As the pain increased in regularity and intensity, the reality began to dawn: it was hardly up to her to do anything. Her body, and the baby, were making their own decisions, and were not concerning themselves with her comfort. She had no choice in the matter.

It was some time after the birth before the shreds of her former self-possession seemed again within reach and, even then, not where George was concerned. There were times she found it gruelling. Perhaps her say in things had already been used up beforehand with her movement away from the family that raised her but she bridled at this thought. Was it little more than coarse

selfishness? She didn't want to think that but it didn't stop the other wishes and desires. Sometimes they came in the morning, after Ned had gone to work, or when watching and turning over the clothes in the copper. And what she wished for! Sometimes they were simple things, like a cake from Purve's bakery or a new stove they would not have to keep lit all the time, now that gas was being made at Little Manly and piped all around the village. Sometimes the dreams were more substantial, like having their own farm, or travelling to England 'for the season'. Sometimes they were quite unruly, and did not actually involve Ned. Sometimes they were things that came back, like daydreams: *the child to be a queen*.

She smiled at her own nostalgia, then chided herself. She had everything she could reasonably want. At times like this a good sermon put you on the right track, though of late she had been less inclined to involve herself in church life than she had been, despite the earnest enquiries of Mr Stoddart. The baby had drawn her away, and she was occupied now in a way she had not been before. She had to make home her cathedral.

Why is there sensation of  
almost physical pain  
in contemplation of beauty.

7

But almost before she knew it, another summer had passed and, with it, George's first birthday. He was taking his first steps well before winter, but that season had started wetter than usual and the added clothes irritated the skin on his legs and bottom, so he was always unhappy, despite the lotions his mother diligently applied. Then a stomach complaint kept them all sleepless for weeks,

until a diet of milk and water, prescribed by Dr Andreas instead of the rice and barley Millicent had weaned him on, settled things enough to add broths and fruit juice.<sup>8</sup> Soon it was spring and, with the buds on the trees, Millicent again knew herself, likewise, to be swelling, ripe for harvest in the autumn.

When her mother brought the boys down to stay that summer, Millicent was disappointed she didn't also bring Olive. Her sister was now a formed young woman, nearly sixteen, but Georgiana thought her less interested in the seaside and the company of her young brothers these days. Besides, she added rather obliquely, Olive would provide Edmund and the older boys both with feminine company and assistance 'so that Miss Allen has no need to do it alone.'

The tone was uncharacteristic but Millicent took no notice at first. One day, however, little George was taken by his uncle and older namesake, now getting strength back into his legs, to paddle on the beach with Vere and Arthur. Millicent and her mother rested and watched them from a blanket on the grass. She had become more skilful in embroidery and worked at it as they talked. It was only then, when her mother complimented her by saying how much better she was at fine work than Miss Allen, that her daughter heard the caustic note and wondered at it.

As the time for the birth approached there was both less time for the embroidery, with her preparations now having to include the care of George, and more, as her activity became more constrained by her condition. While Georgiana had offered to come down again, Ned's sisters and mother, in whose household they were resident, were warm and helpful. They had celebrated George's arrival with great pleasure and were delighted to assist with John – to whom Millicent also gave the Harvey name – when he arrived a week before Easter, 1903. His and his mother's only misfortune was to interrupt the Palm Sunday festivities, tempting rather too many well-wishers to pretend rapture in welcoming him like 'a little Jesus entering Jerusalem.'

This time Millicent recovered from the birth more quickly than with George and things seemed to return to normal in a shorter time, or the normal that things are when changed by the arrival of a child. However, in the dynamics of

their family life it was a matter of trying to manage George, who was entering a wilful stage, while trying to attend to John and look after her husband.

Ned, however, didn't seem to notice the changes this dynamic brought. He arose at the same time in the morning and made Millicent tea, but she was now already up. The shift in the household activity, where the demands of the children were becoming more dominant, made this gesture somewhat irrelevant. He hung around the stove and did not seem to notice she was trying to coax George to eat and to cook his breakfast at the same time.

It was better in the evening because he would take George down on the sand for a walk and a paddle and divert her first-born for a while. This gave Millicent time to slow a little, and she could cook dinner with Caroline or Jane's help with only one child to attend to. She enjoyed this 'slow' time, and the companionship was amiable for the most part. But there was still only the space of her room if she wanted any real privacy; outside it, despite the size of the house, there was little, even though extra space had been given them for a nursery. Things were becoming constrained but Ned didn't appreciate this. She watched him come in the entrance hall in the evening, take off his coat under the paintings on either side, and enter the drawing room, where he would sit between the fireplace and the grand piano in a large chair that was especially his. He would take George onto his lap and talk to him while having a drink; he was comfortable and content. His wife, however, didn't feel the same contentment and she began to want things to be different.

'It's a big change, isn't it?'

The shopgirl at Purve's was right but Millicent was unwilling to let this new arrival from the East End think she herself had no opinion on the subject.

'Mr Gocher was within his rights to challenge the law. But time will tell if daylight bathing will be a good thing for Manly.'

The girl, bless her, had no such reservations. 'Well, I think it's wonderful! Made myself a costume and we've all done it, me Dad and Mum too. And Mr Purve reckons business is right up!'

It surely was, Millicent thought. The summer had drawn the biggest crowds she had ever seen and, no doubt, it would stay that way. More crowds were good for the village businesses, though not necessarily for the peace and quiet of the residents. But did change always present opportunities? Mr Gocher obviously thought so. He had announced his intentions to bathe at midday clearly in his newspaper, the *Manly and North Sydney News*, and had reputedly done so several times to force the police to escort him from the water. Whether as a direct result or not, Council had finally removed the ordinance against bathing during daylight hours in November, 1903, providing that a code requiring neck to knee costumes was adhered to. The bathers had flocked to enjoy the waves on Ocean Beach ever since.<sup>9</sup>

So was Mr Gocher right? Was it for the good? They could still have been on the beach, fully clothed and doing no more than paddling in daylight hours; people had enjoyed that perfectly well. But here was someone who had pushed for change and made it happen, so perhaps it was natural to seek the removal of constraints to one's freedom. As it was to seek the removal of those constraining one's happiness.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Late Mr G. Harvey', publication title unknown, c. 30 September 1900. Newspaper clipping, MMBLC.

<sup>2</sup> Norma Meadley, *Harvey Family History* (unpublished: c. 2009). Chapter: 'Margery and Edmund Harvey', 69, 73. The information is contained in quotations from a diary by Margery Harvey, and clippings reproduced from the *Bathurst Times* of 3 August 1935, and the *Sunday Sun and Guardian* of 10 April 1938.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 122. From the recollections of Tom Bass.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>5</sup> *The Manly Daily*, 22 March 1973. Heading and page number not recorded. Clipping, MMBLC.

<sup>6</sup> Virginia Macleod, *Manly: Pictorial History* (Sydney: Kingsclear Books, 2008), 29, 180.

<sup>7</sup> 'Contemplation of Beauty'. Writing fragment, n.d.

<sup>8</sup> Dr Andreas to MMB, 3 February 1900. It is assumed this letter was incorrectly dated 1900 rather than 1902, or it would not have made sense.

<sup>9</sup> Macleod, *Manly: Pictorial History*, 61.

### 3. VOYAGES

They were not as comfortable on this journey as when Millicent had gone to Tasmania with her father nearly ten years before. The cabin was smaller, the fittings more worn and the seas choppy. Though it was summer, the wind on deck was distinctly cool and fresh; however, Millicent enjoyed this and had dragged her husband away from the saloon to watch the lights of Sydney fall astern as the steamer nudged into the gusty, southerly change.

She stood at the taff rail around the stern once more, the wind making the ensign trail almost rigidly on its staff above them. Arriving on New Year's Day, they were to spend the first part of 1905 in Hobart's cooler air, away from the Manly crowds for once and, for the first time, away from the boys, who were being cared for by Ned's mother and sisters. They stood close together, and Ned pulled his coat tighter. Instinctively, Millicent put her arm around his waist, then felt awkward. Ned should have done it, should be putting his arm around her. He had agreed to the trip, which she had much wanted; she hoped he knew why she had wanted it and felt as she did, even if he didn't say so. His arm around her would have shown that he did ... but perhaps their cheeks, close together, *meant* it. Together they stood, watching the city flatten and disappear in their wake, before finally turning inside to the warmth of the saloon.

The motion of the ship wasn't too bad and, after dinner, when Ned settled down with a book, Millicent remembered a letter from Belle, who she'd only met since living in Sydney, that the postman had pressed into her hand almost as they were leaving. She opened the letter and found, as well as effusive thanks for her gift of embroidery with all its French knots, news that Belle's wedding date had been set for March. The words were both happy and concerned, particularly when Belle wrote that: 'I have not been able to see you to have that "yarn". I wanted to see you very badly about heaps of things Millie ... .'<sup>1</sup>

Millicent felt a small rush of anxiety not unfamiliar to her. She imagined Belle, her feelings like a butterfly, up and down, back and forth, and read in her words the resignation that the feelings would not be quieted. She put the letter down. They wouldn't be back for some time, so she probably wouldn't get to see Belle

before the wedding. But would a 'yarn' have been helpful for her? Millicent suspected it would not. Realistic expectations about the person you were marrying and how your life would unfold would be ideal but were, in her own experience, almost impossible. Perhaps it was better to approach one's married life like one's wedding night: with determined goodwill.

But she wondered if she would have given Belle that advice. Or any advice about one's expectations of marriage. She herself was still learning its landscape. What hills there were to climb, what views could be had, what rivers flooded. Sometimes she was dumbfounded at what she discovered, frequently frustrated and, just occasionally, delighted. The trip to Tasmania was like that. At times the intimacy she'd yearned for since the early days of their marriage seemed within reach but, so often, Ned would disappear into a protected place, inaccessible to her. But altogether there was something more of him when they were together, with only each other, when they were exploring beauty spots around Hobart or taking the boat to Port Arthur. But he avoided exploration of the kind she sought, such as riding to the tops of promontories or the more secluded spots, preferring a trip in a charabanc around the bayside or on the coast roads. Even so, they still found room for discovery, and Millicent returned refreshed and further enamoured of the virtues of travel.

She was not enamoured of sitting still, however, nor, she began to sense, being without the prospect of forward movement in life. Sequestered with children and wondering how things might be improved in the future, her father's canny, decisive approach to building the family wealth stood out before her. Consequently, she went and examined nearby land developments,<sup>2</sup> spoke to the agent and, despite the patronising way he gave her information, felt it was an excellent opportunity. But Ned was unenthusiastic. Despite the inherent investment in land, he felt uncertain about schemes that involved a degree of risk. Nor did he trust developers. However, a sale by auction of crown lands at Wentworth Falls in February, 1905, was another matter, and the purchase price of £76 for a couple of acres felt within his means.<sup>3</sup> Millicent was exasperated,

knowing it would not make money in the period they needed it. It was little more than dabbling, not serious business.

Yet it did give him more confidence and, when another opportunity came up the following year, Ned was bolder. He examined the land and pronounced himself satisfied as to its quality and chances of success. Not having the full sum, they took a loan to make the purchase. For a time, however, conditions seemed to go against them. While she was concerned at the turn of events – and the damage she guessed it would do to Ned’s confidence – Millicent knew it would come right if given time. It was land, after all, and, around the city, that was getting scarcer all the time. Unfortunately, Ned had only negotiated a short-term loan, and they faced a significant shortfall.

‘Would your Uncle John lend us some money?’ Millicent wondered. ‘His business is doing well, isn’t it?’

‘Medium. What about your father?’

This was something of a delicate matter, given Edmund’s opinion of his son-in-law’s business ability. And she did not want to disappoint her father’s opinion of her own competence by asking for help. ‘I’d be embarrassed to ask,’ Millicent said.

She could see the stress he felt over the whole matter and almost relented, but a day or two later Ned suddenly thought of someone who might advance them the money. ‘My cousin, Arthur,’ he said.

‘Who?’

‘Arthur Triggs. He’s done well since coming out from the Old Country. And I remember he wrote to Dad years ago asking if he might be able to get him a “berth” in a company here. His own father had some bankruptcy trouble. Arthur was working for Pawson’s in London then but has done very much better since.’

So Ned wrote to his cousin, but the reply, from Yass in the south-west of New South Wales, was brief, almost curt, turning down his request for a loan or credit ‘as I operate on a considerable overdraft myself.’

Ned was horrified and embarrassed, immediately writing back with such solicitations that Arthur’s reply was more congenial and fulsome:

I am just writing to say I am not in difficulties. The fact of my mentioning that I had a considerable overdraft was not intended to convey such impression but rather a reason why it would be inconvenient to make a large loan.<sup>4</sup>

He finished by expressing his hope 'you recover it'

As it turned out, they did, without Arthur's help but with Uncle John's. While not providing them funds, he had been willing to act as guarantor so they could extend the loan until things picked up. In the end, they even came out ahead, but it was to be Ned's last foray into the world of investment and risk; he swore never to do so again. Nor, for some time, would he forgive his cousin for the rebuff and, although they stayed on equable terms, Ned never again took him into his confidence on such matters, gilding the lily on their affairs ever after. It might only have been wounded pride, but it was a wound that never healed.

Millicent, though dismayed at how her husband had taken fright, was not herself at all discouraged from further interest in property. But she knew now that Ned would be immovable and there was no point in pursuing it further for the time being. However, the exercise had made clearer her own need for movement. Sometimes it was mere restlessness, but sometimes it was a desire to push things forward. Even to rush. At the same time, however, she had George and John to look after, as well as her home and husband. Was there really need for more?

But such a question made little sense to her, and the chance visit one day of Mrs Arthur Williams, who lived at 'Weemala' in Addison Road, enabled her to set about changing things for others' sake if not her own.

Mrs Williams, bright, robust and blue-eyed, was working for a cause. 'It's the consumption,' she said, and Millicent nodded: everyone knew of people who had wasted away from it. Mrs Williams sat forward in the chair and looked her in the eye. 'This is a terrible disease, Mrs Bryant, especially for those unable to afford proper care. They end up in the most terrible places; some sanatoria are like prisons! And their family members care for them so much of the time that they are infected as well. A dreadful thing. But Dr and Mrs Goodlet made a hospital for women and children at Thirlmere, all at their own expense, and maintained it

until they couldn't do so any longer and it became publicly owned.<sup>5</sup> It's now run by the 'Queen Victoria Homes for Consumptives', which has established another for men at King's Tableland, up in the fresh air near Wentworth Falls.<sup>6</sup> Can you imagine how people who can't pay for care would manage without somewhere to go?'

Millicent's conscience surged at the injustice of things and the opportunity to work for a correction. Immediately she made a pledge, which was accepted with thanks, then Mrs Williams gave her a shrewd look. 'I wonder,' she said. 'We need to raise £50 pounds to pay for and maintain one bed, the "Manly bed". We need to go all around the village. Do you know other people who would be willing to support it annually?'

It took little time for Millicent to agree to sharing the task of collecting subscriptions. 'It will be the "Manly" bed that some poor soul from these parts will occupy,' Mrs Williams said as she was leaving. 'And, if there's no-one from here – all the better – whoever has it will know they can thank the people of Manly.'

It was a less than easy task but Millicent persevered. No home or business was avoided, despite refusals that frequently surprised her. Ned just shook his head and smiled indulgently at her efforts, but she was irritated by his placidity: he did not know what it was like to nurse a sick person for a long period. Still, his support made a difference, and knowing it was there gave her confidence to be enterprising in her search for subscriptions.

Such an opportunity came late in May, 1906, with a navigational mistake by the master of a French barque. Coming slowly down the New South Wales coast at the end of a voyage from Yokohama, the *Vincennes* was sailing into heavy seas and driving rain as she neared Sydney. Believing himself near the harbour, the master burned blue lights as a signal for the pilot but, while doing so, allowed the ship to drift towards the surf at Manly, where she became grounded, stern first, opposite Pine and Carlton Streets. Apart from becoming stuck, the ship was fortunately not in danger but, for a short time, she became a tourist attraction. Extra ferries were put on as people rushed to Manly to see her, and the beach took on a carnival atmosphere. Photos were taken and postcards were sold,

deckchairs were rented and advertising bills were even posted on the ship's side.<sup>7</sup> To this scene Millicent took her subscription pad several days running, and the bed was soon almost fully subscribed. Mrs Williams sighed in wonder, and with the eye for an opportunity that had already served her well, enlisted her former protégé to manage the whole subscription process and submit the annual balance sheets as Honorary Secretary of the Manly Bed fund.

Millicent gained some pride from her success in this work, and received very appreciative letters from the Board. It also had positive effects at home, settling some of her restlessness for a time and arresting the sense of dissatisfaction that had been inclined to smoulder. A tangible indication of this was the arrival of another child on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1908. They named him Bowen.

The new boy was welcomed but the extra work began to swing Millicent's life balance in the other direction. In April, 1909, with Bowen sickly and John not yet ready to follow George into Manly Public School, she found herself struggling. This was despite the good news that, due to Mr Charley giving notice that he and his family would be moving, 'Devon', was free once again and had been offered to them. But with the added effort of the move, the 'Manly bed' became a heavy burden on top of the demands of Millicent's family life. It had brought the recognition of Life Membership from the Board – an honour Millicent had firmly redirected to Mrs Williams – but this did not change the fact that, over the last few years, she'd started to become prone to fatigue and illnesses that often lasted for weeks. She began to suffer again, and, while Ned was concerned and could be helpful, he wasn't there when she really needed him to assist with the boys during the daytime or even just to let her cry on his shoulder about her frustrations – although this was a rare occurrence, in actuality. Unfortunately, if it did happen, and before she had moved past the feelings, she might say something to express them and, so often, the words seemed to come out wrong. The result was that Ned would retire to the bedroom with his feelings hurt. She could see why this might be a misunderstanding once or twice, but not why he couldn't come around to see her feelings for what they were.

With being unwell and the Manly bed requiring constant activity, something had to give and, in March 1910, she resigned as Secretary of the fund.<sup>8</sup> This eased matters remarkably and, as winter approached, she found herself re-energised and again pursuing the interest in French language and culture her mother had introduced her to years ago. Indeed, applying herself to French grammar came more easily than she expected, as John began to learn it with her and it became a game. Novels also began, again, filling snatches of her time, as if she sensed in the literary works wisdom not yet revealed to her. These, and a matching desire to experience the culture and art she had heard about but never seen, began to fill her vision. It all seemed to make sense of one's daily struggles and helped her forget being unwell. It made her feel alive. So she approached Ned with a proposition: they should travel again, but more extensively this time. They had always yearned to go to England, so why not now before George had to take his place at his father's old School, Sydney Grammar?

As she knew it would, the proposal was met with resistance initially. There was the expense, which would be considerable: how could that be met, Ned asked? And how could he leave his job for the six or eight months she suggested?

His wife had answers to both questions. In the first case, she expected to receive an amount of money from her grandmother, who had passed away in December, which could be used partly for this purpose and partly for the land they were looking at buying and building on near Addison Road. As to the second, might not there be an opportunity to see how the London Telegraph Department worked? Might that not be of great use in his position?

If anything, it was the second that persuaded Ned, for whom his job was as important an anchorage as his family. Enquiries were made and, almost to his surprise, the response was positive. An arrangement might even be possible for his salary to be paid for some of the time. Gradually, the plans fell into place, with invitations soon being received from English cousins anxious to see them, the offer of storage space for their furniture at 'Hirondelle' – they would have to let 'Devon' go – and news of accommodation in London and of a possible school for George and John. Finally, in the second week of March, 1911, there came both a letter of introduction from the Deputy Post-Master General<sup>9</sup> and a passport

letter signed personally by the NSW Premier, Mr McGowen, and which bore his seal.<sup>10</sup>

So it was that later that month, on a sunny afternoon, they left Sydney Harbour on the Royal Mail Steamer *Otranto*, of the Orient Line. Millicent, as always, stood near the stern, this time carefully holding onto Bowen. She glanced across at Ned who was standing with George and John, just as the sun, which had lit all their faces, passed below the horizon.

The older boys, particularly, took to shipboard life, resisting sea-sickness in the Indian Ocean by dint of pure enthusiasm for the motion it seemed. They gaped at the exotic differentness of Colombo, but avoided venturing far from the ship, even with the protection of the smallpox vaccination which had made them feel sick before leaving. As they 'crossed the line' of the equator and passed into the Red Sea, even Ned was relaxed enough to be enticed into singing for the Easter concert on board; his rendering of 'Life' by Blumenthal, though tentative, showed his tenor voice to be surprisingly resonant.<sup>11</sup> After passing through the Suez Canal and the sunlit ports of the Mediterranean, it was a moment of special excitement when they finally sighted the coast of the England before docking in Southampton.

Taking in the misty glories of the English spring from the train, they made their way to London and found the city a spectacle that, especially at night, Millicent had never imagined. It was also girding itself for one of the great events of their age, the King's coronation in June. A Festival of Empire would be part of the celebrations, and was shortly to be opened in the Crystal Palace. The city thronged with people, the parks and gardens were blooming, the streets and shops and monuments were just as they had been told and, in a way, *more* so. It was like feeling that something you've dreamed is true, Millicent thought. It really is here: the Thames, the Houses of Parliament, the people, rich and poor. It also cost just as much as they'd imagined, and George and Jack would be going to school when she and Ned and Bowen went to Paris in July. Fortunately, Mr Newton of Loudoun House School had agreed to take both of them for reasonable cost provided they got the few school colours required. 'I should then

look upon the two as one,' he said in his letter, offering as a suggestion the rate of £30.<sup>12</sup> Another benefit was its location in St John's Wood and that they were able to find rooms close by in Queens Road.

From the start they felt scooped up by the city. Londoners seemed to know what it represented to them and shared their knowledge of the history they knew the 'colonials' had come so far to see. But it was even more than that. Millicent tried to explain it to Ned's cousin, Fanny, with whom she quickly felt a rapport when they met.

'There is the most wonderful excitement,' she said. 'How can I describe it? I imagined what it would be like but didn't expect it to be quite like it is.'

'It is a very large place with a great deal to see. It can be exhausting,' said Fanny.

'Well, there is a little of that, but you must realise we are used to travelling much greater distances in New South Wales. No: you've always lived here, but for us it's like coming to the centre of the world for the first time. Especially now, because the Coronation will be in few weeks. Something we feel we belong to, the Empire and what it stands for, is here – and now it feels like it belongs to *us*.'

Their attendance at the Festival of Empire had, of course, had a great impact. The All-British Exhibition of Arts and Industries, which occupied the Crystal Palace itself, as well as part of the adjacent grounds, showcased everything from the latest advances in applied chemistry to pianos, engineering, motive power, photography and agriculture, both British and colonial. The Fine Art Galleries contained a magnificent collection of oil paintings, watercolours and sculpture by the leading modern British artists. But if they were awestruck by the scale of the exhibition they, and especially the boys, were entranced by the pageants, which depicted scenes from the Empire's development going back to the dawn of British history and Roman London in which hundreds, perhaps thousands, of performers participated, along with an orchestra and a chorus of five hundred. They felt especially proud to see the Empire in miniature, complete with three-quarter size replicas of the parliament buildings of all the dominions built of timber and plaster, with exteriors architecturally complete to the smallest detail.<sup>13</sup>

‘If you stood at the upper end of Empire Avenue in the Festival, Fanny, you’d have the Parliament Building of South Africa on the left, then on the right, the Government Building of Newfoundland at St. Johns. Then, lower down, past the Central Bandstand, the Parliament Building of New Zealand at Wellington and then, on the right, our Federal Government Building in Melbourne!’

‘I had no idea there was so much to see.’ Fanny shook her head in wonder.

‘I didn’t know whether we could see it all, and if the boys would last,’ Millicent added. ‘But ...’

‘There was the train!’ George piped up enthusiastically. ‘A little train that ran right around. You could get off and see a South African diamond mine, an Indian tea plantation, and a Canadian logging camp!’<sup>14</sup>

As visitors to the Festival of Empire they were also invited to visit Oxford, lunching at Magdalen College on May 27<sup>th</sup> with the staff and the President who, to Ned’s pleasure, engaged him in a lengthy conversation about Australian poetry.<sup>15</sup> But with the courses between the *filets de soles mayonnaise* and *crème caramel* washed down by wines of several vintages,<sup>16</sup> Millicent was almost giddy by the time lunch gave way to the Vice-Chancellor’s afternoon function at the Examination Schools,<sup>17</sup> and she found herself dreaming hazily in a chair with Bowen in her arms, soothed by the light classical and popular pieces of Yantian’s Orchestra.<sup>18</sup>

The soft afternoon breezes became a stronger rush of air in her dream, and she dwelt on the excitement of the last few weeks. It felt like she was in mist, with the sun quite dim, then the mist fell away and she found herself not in London but seeing it as if viewed from above. There was the Crystal Palace, and she could again see the parliament buildings of the Empire close up in all their detail, then the doors of a church surrounded by people. Then rain came, making her shiver ... She opened her eyes; Bowen had fallen asleep and that side of her dress and coat were soaked.

The city was both vibrant and exhausting. Bowen had been unwell again and Millicent had found it hard to sleep in the flat’s small, close bedroom. She started

to look forward to seeing something of the countryside, and had quieter days to make plans for visiting Ned's other cousin, George, and his wife Bessie, and possibly the Triggs at Liphook, while Ned went to inspect the working of the London Post Office.

But before that was the Coronation. It had been in their thinking before the trip and much talked about on the ship, but neither Ned nor Millicent had suspected the impact it would have on their stay in London. They now understood the reason for the excitement they'd felt on arriving: it was as if the whole city, if not the whole country, was in a fever. In and around Westminster, in particular, there were new constructions and large stands along many parts of the procession route. One of these, on the Mall opposite Stafford House, was mainly for colonials and Ned, with his Postmaster-General's credentials, sought and secured a place for them there. He did not tell Millicent the cost.

They left their rooms early on the morning of Coronation Day, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, which dawned dull with a little drizzle.<sup>19</sup> But it could not diminish the splendour of the occasion and the old streets of Westminster had been transformed. Everywhere there were masts with flags, connected by festoons, while pillars and arches had been erected along the procession route, some with armorial shields as well as flags. A few days before they had seen the New Zealand arch at Whitehall, which sported the country's new coat of arms, capped by the Imperial Crown and sporting medallions of the King and Queen as well as Edward VII and Queen Victoria, Captain Cook and Sir Joseph Ward on decorated pilasters. The whole thing was an incomparable sight, as were the crowds of people, which would have made the effort of moving through the city almost unbearable were it not for the joy in people's faces and their remarkable patience. Despite this, they were grateful only to have to negotiate Piccadilly as far as St James Street, though it took quite some time to pass St James' Palace and Marlborough House to reach the stand.

Their seats, to the boys' excitement, afforded a good view of much of the route from Buckingham Palace to Admiralty Arch and, a little after nine-thirty, the procession began. Some twenty-four carriages made stately progress down the Mall, the royal families of Europe and their mounted escorts of troops in a blaze

of colour and panoply, which made the American Special Ambassador, Mr Hammond – almost the only one in a plain morning suit – stand out conspicuously. Each carriage, with its princes and princesses, was acknowledged with greater and greater adulation by the crowd until, at last, the gold State Coach, with Lord Kitchener riding close by the back wheel, came into sight.<sup>20</sup> As it passed, Millicent glimpsed the figures of the King and Queen for barely a moment before everyone rose to their feet and, though the boys stood on their chairs and Ned held Bowen up high, she herself could see little more than backs and heads and hats amid a tumult of cheering.

It seemed the rest of the morning would pass in the affable company of other Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders while they waited for the return of the procession after the ceremony in Westminster Abbey. Ned took the three boys to find refreshments while people moved in and out of the stand and rearranged themselves. The space immediately next to Millicent was free but something made her look up and her eyes met those of the man in the next seat. She looked away but there was a quick, genial laugh and a voice said: 'I bet you are from New South Wales.'

Irritated, she pretended ignorance in the midst of the general din.

'Certainly not from Worcester. Though possibly Windsor.'

She could not avoid looking up and found herself addressing a youngish man in a fashionable linen suit. 'You sir,' she said, 'are certainly from neither.'

'True – though obvious. Then again, it's not obvious where I *am* from. But you are from New South Wales?' He had taken off his hat and she imagined his voice matched the colour of his hair, a warm, light sandy colour with an uneven fringe. She considered.

'You're not English but you're not colonial either. But perhaps you were. Yes, I am from New South Wales.'

He smiled with his eyes, and she wondered how it was noticeable with some people and not others. 'I've been in America. My father is English-born but my mother is Canadian. How strange to be telling you this.'

'Yes, indeed.' Finally, she smiled back. 'Then you are from the Dominions? Or not?'

'Certainly. I'm from Melbourne, actually. I'm a solicitor – though I once tried to be an actor.'

She gave an ironic laugh. 'Perhaps you're just a player in a play.'

He smiled from the corners of his mouth this time, returning her gaze with curiosity as they exchanged further conversation. 'I wonder,' he said, 'have we met? It seems to me we have.'

'I think not.'

'I do think so, ma'am.'

'You don't know my name.'

'Nor you mine. But ... He reached into his jacket and pulled out a card. 'Now you do.' He looked over his shoulder, then back. 'My party are leaving.' He stood and held out his hand. 'I'd be honoured if you'd call on me if you are in the city again.'

A little taken aback, Millicent accepted the card, and the hand. His brown eyes met hers again, for a still moment. As he stepped away, there came the sudden boom of salutes from the Tower and Hyde Park; a roar from the crowds spread like a wave, and everyone leaped to their feet to sing the national anthem.

While the general euphoria lasted for days and marked a high point of their stay in London, something about the meeting in the stands discomfited Millicent and made her want to be free of the throngs. She yearned to see more of the country, to escape London, and looked forward to leaving it behind for the duration of their trip to France.

After returning the older boys to Loudoun House, they sailed for Dieppe and arrived in Paris in the second week of July. Millicent determined to occupy herself by recalling all she saw, so she bought a little, narrow, hard-bound book with grid-ruled pages that would fit in her handbag and which she would use as a diary. She was determined it should mostly be a factual exercise, a way of

reconstructing what she had seen both for family and relatives as well as herself. And it would serve to keep the real structure of the trip in perspective, with the occasional descriptive comment.

It seemed to work well. First there was Fontainebleau, then Versailles: 'Saw fountains play – most lovely gardens, scale and beauty far exceeding my expectations. Boat to Dèvres and then home, river as lovely as a dream.'<sup>21</sup> She and Ned spent days at the Louvre but mostly in turn and alone, as Bowen found little entertainment in looking at pictures. They took a bus tour of the boulevards in the evening and she found herself struck by the sense of animation created by the dozens of brilliantly lighted, thronged cafes.

On the return trip they stayed in Rouen, a peaceful place of ancient streets and markets, but also the site of Joan of Arc's martyrdom; the great monument to Joan was arresting, and Millicent copied out the Latin inscription. They then took a tram to Bonsecours, with its extensive views of Rouen, its southward surrounds and of the Seine winding from east to west. They had some quiet days rest, glorious solitude away from other tourists, and Millicent felt the urge to stop, enjoy the sun streaming into the room and the breezes rich with the scents of flowers from the fields beyond the city. When Bowen found a friend in the little son of the family who owned their small hotel, something else stirred; perhaps the chance for a moment in which to turn things back, even to possess something anew that seemed in danger of being lost. With her French serviceable enough for short conversations, she asked Madame if they could care for Bowen for the day. With a smile, the woman agreed.

They took lunch at a café not far away. To Ned's surprise, Millicent ordered wine, declining at the same time his suggestion that they could then take in the Musée des Beaux-Arts or the Cathedral. Instead she wanted simply to wander, her arm though his, her head against his shoulder. They crossed the Seine and came eventually to a large botanical garden once owned by a Scottish banker. It had apparently hosted a number of balloon ascents, and a woman named Elisa Garnerin had also jumped from one and descended by parachute.<sup>22</sup> They laughed at the thought but the idea appealed to Millicent. 'Let's take a stroll,' she said, still laughing. It was a very warm afternoon and they saw no other visitors as they

passed by the lawns and formal garden, as well as a greenhouse for dahlias. Millicent stopped under what looked like a spreading yew tree surrounded by shrubbery and flowers and lay on the grass. The buzzing of bees was the only sound. Ned sat, and she looked up at him as he filled his pipe.

‘Put it aside,’ she said, softy. He looked down in surprise. She smiled. ‘Ned.’ She reached up and pulled his shoulder down. It came reluctantly; he turned towards her but propped himself on his elbow. Her hand was on his neck as she looked up; he seemed to smile too but would not meet her eyes. Or her lips. She felt suspended. Then he pointed. ‘Look at those butterflies!’ And they watched as a pair with brilliant yellow wings danced around the shrubs then away into the shadows of the yew tree.

Wed morn. Left for Dieppe and London 12 noon. Reached London 8pm

Much of the rest of the trip was so punctuated.

Thursday. Packing.

Friday. Boys from school. Uxbridge aft to secure rooms.

Sat. Uxbridge in afternoon.

Monday. Train to Slough. Walk to Stoke Poges – lovely walk through lanes. Old church. Milton's tomb yew tree...

Monday. Ned and Jack to Windsor – fly fishing got small fish.

Wednesday. Windsor Castle – very hot day – impressive old castle covering great space.

Thursday. Left Uxbridge 2.42pm for Canterbury. ...

It was not a long trip to Canterbury, but curious that there were adjacent rail-lines in places and even stations close by each other in the same town. ‘That’s before the two railways joined,’ said a gent in their compartment as they pulled out of Sittingbourne. ‘It’s just the South Eastern and Chatham now.’ He leaned forward and pointed out the window. ‘That’s the Sheerness Line. For the Isle of Sheppey.’<sup>23</sup>

Ned shook his head. 'We've come across almost as many places we haven't heard of as places we have.'

'Ah, well, you haven't heard of Sheppey? It's where the Royal Aero Club has a field for flying machines. They actually rise into the air. Before that it was balloons.'<sup>24</sup>

'How high do they rise? How far do they travel?' Millicent asked.

'Can't tell you that ma'am. Never seen one meself.'

'Imagine what that would be like. I wonder if they fly over the sea.'

'Dangerous things I heard. Charles Rolls was killed in one just a year ago at Bournemouth. He should have stuck to motor cars! But a month before that he flew across the channel, turned round and came right back. Only took 90 minutes ... faster than Blériot, ha!'<sup>25</sup>

At Canterbury there seemed time to reflect, to find her feelings in the things she *was* experiencing rather than in the things she hadn't. The result was that she wrote lengthy descriptions of the cathedral, the Huguenots and Thomas à Becket in the travel diary. Matins in the Cathedral moved her deeply, due to the splendour of the music rising up to the soaring vaults and the preaching of Canon Stuart, but it was the walks, through the town and in the countryside and parks of country estates, which offered something to put in place of the yearning and confusion that had followed Rouen. When she sat and wrote in her diary at Sevenoaks, as the end of August and of the summer neared, she felt herself in its sway.

Nothing could surpass the leafy seclusion of the woods – one feels so far from habitation and the struggle of life with the soft embrace of the woods round one and ever and anon the silence is startled by the passing of some deer with their light and graceful gait – yet there is ever a gentle murmur for autumn is near and the leaves hastening to obey in anticipation are falling gently, making a soft brown carpet over which one is wont to linger – and dream of fairy feet pressing the fairy carpet and glancing here and there ...

They returned to 'South Hall' at Guildford for a pleasant enough fortnight with George and Bessie and the family, which brought their stay in England almost to a close. But that was not before a final visit to London prior to their departure on the *Orvieto* at the end of September. On Wednesday the 27<sup>th</sup>, Millicent spent the afternoon in Westminster Abbey with Geo and Jack. The next morning it was St Paul's, St Bartholomew, Smithfield and Temple Church, followed by an early luncheon with Cecil Matthews.

Then 'odd shopping', she wrote in the diary. 'Ned with Geo, Alan and Charlie'. But she went alone, the odd shopping incomplete and the afternoon ahead of her, to the address on the card which had lain deep in her bag since the Coronation. Pausing to catch her breath and gripping on to what she hoped was a casual dignity, she knocked.

The door opened.

Friday at St Pancras. Bessie, Alan, Carrie, Alice, Nettie and Charlie.

Boat departed about 1pm Friday, September 29, 1911.

Gib Tuesday third of October, 1911

Marseilles Thursday, October 5th 1911.

Naples

Like stepping stones, all ports led to home.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Belle to MMB, 29 November 1904.

<sup>2</sup> Pauline Curby, *Seven Miles from Sydney: A History of Manly* (Manly: Manly Council, 2001), 178.

<sup>3</sup> Portions 210 and 211, Parish Jamison, County Cook, 2 acres, 19½ perches. Purchased by 'Edward James Bryant, Telegraphist' on 18 February 1905. NSW Government Land and Property Information.

<sup>4</sup> A.B. Triggs to Ned (Edward Bryant), 17 June 1906.

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- <sup>5</sup> Paul Cooper, 'GOODLET, Ann Alison (1822-1903)', [http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/adeb/g\\_/goodlet-ann-alison-1822-1903/](http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/adeb/g_/goodlet-ann-alison-1822-1903/) Accessed 10 January 2011.
- <sup>6</sup> 'Queen Victoria Homes for Consumptives', *The Sydney Mail*, 24 December 1902, 1651.
- <sup>7</sup> John Morcombe, 'The Vincennes', Fact sheet (Manly: Local Studies Centre, Manly Library, c.2004), 2. Reproduced from *The Manly Daily*, 13 March 1996, 10.
- <sup>8</sup> Annie Hughes to MMB, 4 March 1910.
- <sup>9</sup> Deputy Postmaster-General to the Secretary, General Post Office, London, 10 March 1911.
- <sup>10</sup> 'Passport letter', dated 8 March 1910.
- <sup>11</sup> 'Grand Sacred Concert' programme, RMS *Otranto*, Red Sea, Good Friday, 14 April 1911.
- <sup>12</sup> S. C. Newton to Mr Bryant, 6 May 1911.
- <sup>13</sup> 'Festival of Empire Imperial Exhibition and Pageant of London Crystal Palace 1911'. <http://www.studygroup.org.uk/Exhibitions/Pages/1911%20Crystal.htm> Accessed 20 January 2011.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> 'Visitors to the Festival of Empire – Visit to Oxford' invitation card, n.d.
- <sup>16</sup> 'Menu Card', handwritten, with printed crest, n.d.
- <sup>17</sup> 'The Vice-Chancellor and Miss Heberden', invitation card, n.d.
- <sup>18</sup> 'Programme', 27 May 1911.
- <sup>19</sup> 'No Heading', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 June 1911, 9.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> 'MMB Travel diary', narrow with blue board covers and ruled gridlines, covering period from 12 July 1911 to 5 October 1911. *Passim.*
- <sup>22</sup> 'Rouen Jardin des Plantes', <http://www.rouen.fr/jardinplantes> Accessed 10 February 2012; 'Jardin des Plantes de Rouen', [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jardin\\_des\\_Plantes\\_de\\_Rouen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jardin_des_Plantes_de_Rouen) Accessed 10 February 2012.
- <sup>23</sup> 'Kent Railways diagram', [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Kent\\_Railways.svg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4e/Kent_Railways.svg) Accessed 19 February 2012.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Five Golden Years of Civil Aviation on Sheppey', <http://www.eastchurchpc.kentparishes.gov.uk/default.cfm?pid=3941> Accessed 19 February 2012; 'Aviation on Sheppey', <http://sheppeyonline.co.uk/index.php/Aviation-on-Sheppey/> Accessed 19 February 2012.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Charles Rolls (1877-1910)', <http://www.earlyaviators.com/erolls.htm> Accessed 20 February 2012.

#### 4. DELOS

Returning to Manly felt like returning to a world that was less real, less significant, than the one they had left; that world made this one seem as fixed as a shred of drifting cloud. It did not matter that as Millicent walked down the sunny streets and entered the familiar shops she found everything to be in its place and everyone carrying on just as before. Somehow, it was because of this very fact. It was like entering a charade in which all the participants colluded in the make-believe, because it was not so anchored, not stable. She felt it. She *knew* it.

‘You feel a little uprooted, dear, that’s the word for it,’ Caroline said soothingly. ‘You’ve seen so much and been so far.’ There was the ring of truth in what her mother-in-law said but that did not make the feeling, no, the *certainty* of it, go away.

Nor was it helped by the need to find a place to live, for the rents in Manly had risen and they had to make do with a place in Bonner Avenue<sup>1</sup> for more than a year before the house in Stuart Street was completed.<sup>2</sup> They’d only been able to afford an average block, though it benefited from facing north towards Manly village and west over the waters of the cove. It had no name to start with, but when Ned suggested something English like ‘The Wood’, or even ‘Mayfair’, Millicent found the idea unbearable. She couldn’t find the words to say it but that was the sham; they really had no such roots. They were more like Delos, the sanctuary in the Aegean that the *Orvieto* had passed to the south of during their return voyage, and that was said to have been a floating island until Poseidon fixed it in place so Leto could find shelter from a vengeful Hera and give birth to Apollo and Artemis.

Ned shrugged. ‘Well, it sounds a bit odd. But it’s nice enough I suppose.’

‘Delos’, then, it was. Millicent determined to try, at least, to make her house a sanctuary while they lived there; somewhere that would re-establish the boys’ lives after being away and, perhaps, re-settle her own.

But there was more than the sense of being uprooted. Millicent had returned not only *feeling* a lack of something she needed but knowing it. Something within, something close. Bessie reflected a little of it when she wrote in the new year after their return that 'I do wish you were nearer to us and I could occasionally run in for a chat, or have you to stay for a few days. Wouldn't it be nice for us both. I would most certainly give you all the petting you want. I have felt the want of it lots of times myself, and some people like your warm-hearted self respond to the petting so much more than others.'<sup>3</sup>

Her need was no passing emotion it seemed, but, when Fanny wrote in March of 1912, she touched on it in a different way and turned it around.

Now as you have to live for a bit in New South Wales you may as well like it. 'If we cannot make love to the lips that we love, it's as well to make love to the lips that are near'. That's wrongly quoted (for I haven't Moore handy) and highly immoral, but it's common sense. So try and recognize the go-aheadness and broad spaces, and democracy, and find some sort of good in everybody standing on their merit instead of their ancestors'.<sup>4</sup>

How right she was. But how difficult, at the same time, to accept. Millicent was reminded of Ned's Aunt Julia, who they'd managed to visit briefly in England before she passed away, and with whom she'd felt a real affinity. Aunt Julia had lived in the reigns of five sovereigns and seen many strange happenings; she was also 'a woman with an unusual mind having original ideas' as Fanny put it in her letter, and though Aunt Julia had probably not been given to turning things over and over in her mind and being so unsettled, this made Millicent feel a further affinity. Perhaps things would be clearer if she wrote them down one day, all of them ... . But she put this thought aside. It couldn't be done now, not while the boys were so young.

What she did write, more and more, were notes to herself: ideas, thoughts, promptings and drafts of things she wanted to say in actual letters. Of course there were also letters themselves, the time and places in which her writing truly resided; correspondence was one's conversation and sharing of thoughts and feelings, especially when it couldn't be done in person. But as well as to her

family and others she also wrote to *him*. It was covert, as though she were writing her own secret feelings and locking them in a drawer, except that he wrote back: remarkable letters, full of insight and feeling that made her body feel warm to read them. Through them she began to sense what her years of marriage had perhaps withheld, something of the depth and breadth of true companionship. In some ways the energy she poured into her letters reduced the time and inclination for other creative endeavours, though Millicent was doubtful she knew how to go about them even if there had been. But her ability to be thoughtful and interested was reawakened and, though she chose not to keep a journal or diary, the ideas and thoughts appeared on scraps of paper, receipts or theatre programs – whether to be ruminated over later, or kept for inspiration, she didn't know.

As a family they were all writing more, as well as reading. She had read stories aloud since the boys were young and, though George and Jack were now doing their own reading, they still liked to listen to the stories she read aloud to Bowen. Ned had always read but it seemed to keep him distant; whether he was finishing the paper, which he'd often bring with him from the ferry, or reading a book of poetry, he would settle into one of the new checked-leather armchairs in the corner of the parlour and, screened by a potted palm, they would forget he was there. Increasingly, he would withdraw to his study, irritating his wife with his disconnectedness and being irritated in his turn when the boys went in to ask him something.

What was surprising was that this was happening more since George had started, in April, at Sydney Grammar School, and it was surprising because George was entering territory familiar to his father and about which he might be expected to guide him. While George was beginning quite well, his naughtiness, as well as bouts of ill-health, had increased markedly, causing Millicent to come down on him much more often, especially if he'd led the other boys on. Ned preferred to stand back, saying it was more her realm than his, but Millicent disagreed; the scope of George's transgressions seemed to have increased since his eleventh birthday.

It was as though he could not keep still. He had always to be doing something and it was as though he could not see the consequences beforehand. Things would be broken, or carelessly forgotten, as if left behind in a rush. Millicent didn't recall this with her own brothers, though the truth was they always had farm work or chores to occupy them.

It was different for her boys, growing up away from the land and, as this realisation grew, she made her mind up that they would get a home with at least a little land space so they could have a decent garden, chooks and maybe even a horse. 'Delos', despite its beauties, simply did not have this. Even with the healthy sunshine and sea bathing that everyone did now, and which was so pleasant in the hotter months, she was less sure about where George's adventures would lead him and his brothers. One had led them to find an Aboriginal man living in a cave somewhere around the shore; George was evasive about exactly where. Although she couldn't be sure this didn't present some kind of danger – her grandmother's stories came to mind – the boys' singsong rhyme made it sound like *they* weren't worried:

*Old black Sam, the dirty old man*

*Combed his hair with the leg of a chair*

*And washed his face in a frying pan.*<sup>5</sup>

Boyish bravado it was, but George didn't seem to know where to stop. On one occasion, when he had involved the other two in a prank then goaded them on to support his story, she had been so infuriated that she locked the three of them in the pantry to learn their lesson. But things went from bad to worse, with plaintive cries exuding from the pantry an hour or two later about 'feeling unwell'. She was ready to ignore George and John but not Bowen, so she opened the door to find her sons had eaten the jam: plum, strawberry and apricot.<sup>6</sup> The bottles lay about the shelves and on the floor, as did the boys after they'd been sick, the only moment of grim satisfaction the whole incident afforded her.

These escapades paled, however, before the one which could not be ignored, even by Ned. George had been up on the heights one Saturday with Michael Dooley, a freckled boy with red hair whose parents lived on the other side of the Sydney Road. As George told it, they'd been scrambling up some steep, rocky

rises near the top of the ridge, the coarse sandstone making handholds relatively easy. Resting and taking in the view, they watched the magpies soar easily overhead.

‘Gee, wouldn’t it be good to fly down like that.’ Michael had said.

They speculated about how it could be done. ‘We could glide with a sheet.’

‘Like a parachute! We could make one.’

They returned to Michael’s home nearby but there were no sheets his mother was prepared to give them for their project. There was, however, an umbrella by the front door.

‘That’s just what a parachute looks like!’ said George, and they took it and climbed back up to their vantage point on the ridge. They found a small drop-off but Michael looked dubious. ‘It mightn’t work,’ he said.

‘Don’t be scared,’ said George. ‘Try it. Or give it to me!’

So challenged, Michael grasped the open umbrella tightly and jumped. For a brief moment he seemed to gradually sink, then the umbrella turned inside out and he fell with a sickening crunch, breaking his leg.<sup>7</sup>

The seriousness of the injury and George’s involvement meant that, clearly, Ned would now need to say something, and do something, about it. When he came home, and was told of the incident, he frowned and said nothing. He went into his study and, after a short while, called George in. From outside Millicent could hear no words but a sharp cry came through the door, followed by another and another. The punishment continued until she could bear it no longer and opened the door.

‘Stop!’ She cried. ‘Stop. Ned, this is enough!’

Her husband looked around. In his hands was his belt, which he had evidently used on the back of his son’s legs. George, holding on to the corner of the desk, was red-faced.

‘Leave this to me, Millicent.’ Ned said. He was breathing hard and his face was red as well.

‘You can’t keep on hitting him!’

'He's got to learn. He's old enough.'

'He's a child!'

'He's at school now.'

'Just stop!' She placed herself in front of George and looked Ned straight in the eye. He looked down at her, frowning, his mouth a little open, continuing to breath audibly, then took a step back, still glaring at her, winding the belt around his hand, then loosening it. Then he turned and left the room without a word. George sniffed, looking at her. 'Go!' she said, indicating the door.

There seemed to open a narrow, watery chasm between her and Ned after this. Maybe it had been there all along and became visible when she questioned his authority. It might have closed again if she'd apologised, but it was right to stop him and this prevented her from reaching out. Now he held himself back distinctly, except where there was the chance for resistance, and it caused something inside her, equally stubborn, to refuse to give way. So she persevered on her own with George over the summer; he'd also been unwell, mostly with digestive complaints, over the last few months, and perhaps better health, which was something she could, at least, support, might help him settle. Then, as the new year got into its stride she felt able to write to the Headmaster, Mr Northcott, about her several concerns and what she wished to be done. She was gratified to receive not only an immediate and charming reply but one containing vital intelligence.

I am delighted to have your views set out so fully. You may rest assured that all your regulations for your son's health have my most cordial approval. He is quick at his work, but should not be pushed into undue precocity. I'm glad to learn that his health is now stable and assured, and hope it will remain so. I acknowledge that I set myself to help the little chap to conquer some of these problems, mischievous habits, and have been glad to notice the improvement, due more to his own inner resolve than to anything I did. I availed myself of a unique opportunity to prove myself his friend without his knowing it. I found him being bullied, and at once held out the direst threats of the law to the bully, to George's evident relief.

I sincerely trust that your dearest hopes concerning your little son, of whom one might be justly proud, will be fully realised, and shall do anything I can to help make him a scholar and a man.<sup>8</sup>

This communiqué softened and allayed her concerns about George, at least for the time being. Perhaps it might also head off future struggles.

She then turned her energies to making 'Delos' an elegant and comfortable home that would also provide a good return when the time came. But a little extra money was required on top of the building outlay and, at this, Ned had dug in his heels, saying they could not afford it.

'Ned. We must. The house has to look attractive. And finished,' Millicent countered.

'I'm already extended. There are also the school fees to consider.'

'Ned, we need to get a good price. The place must appeal to a well-to-do family.'

'I think we'll have to make do. Can't you make it nice? Mother and the girls are always making things.'

'All we have are some old things from 'Devon', Ned. Look at them! What will a prospective tenant or buyer think of that?'

She was furious that he refused to grasp the simplicity of the arithmetic. 'Ned, we need to spend a bit more to get things right. Can't you grasp that?'

But she'd gone too far and these words now served only to make her husband immovable, no matter his grasp on the arithmetic, and he indicated this by an actual movement – from the armchair and out of the room. Millicent was left thwarted and seething; were even simple practical matters too much for his pride? This stood out so clearly it blinded her to other possibilities, including that Ned might not be as disinterested in building their wealth as he was about leaving Manly and the close little circle of his mother and sisters. Except he didn't speak of this attachment, preferring to get his way without an argument, especially on grounds he would not particularly have wished to defend given

both the necessary priority of their own family's interests and the distance of his wife was, after all, from her own kin.

But this tactic turned out only to be effective as a parry of sorts, a temporary deflection insufficient on its own without a counter attack. Indeed, seeing the matter as now one of necessity, Millicent turned to her father for a loan. Edmund agreed, adding in his reply, however, that 'I am now £5000 behind and will not be able to get the advance on wool until shipped and no sailing vessel until January'. He would therefore offer her the £65 she requested at the same five and a half per cent interest rate he was paying.<sup>9</sup>

Thus it was that Ned arrived home one day to find new furniture in the house and the issue concluded, unless he chose to send it back. But that was beyond the pale, so he could only be dour about the arrangement. He also had to admit that the furnishings were not only attractive but of a quality that would last. In due course there was a matching sofa and settee in the sun-room, armchairs, rugs, a glass-fronted cabinet, mirrors and paintings in the parlour. Photographs on the mantle and on the wall. Wedgewood plates sitting on the picture rail. Large, accommodating cushions and the gramophone in the corner. There was a sense of light, quality and ease. Millicent had a photographer come and take pictures, as was the fashion, fixing the view of the rooms through the archway with a chair drawn out in welcome to those who weren't in the picture.<sup>10</sup>

Though it was empty of people she sent a copy to Fanny. One of her letters had exhorted Millicent to 'yarn away about your own dear selves – individually and collectively ... Nothing is too small to be said, every tiny detail helps us to realise the home we shall never see. I shall never cease to be glad you have been to England. You were myths before, now you have consolidated into real, lovable relations.'<sup>11</sup>

In Fanny's estimation she felt held up. It was the kind of warmth and exchange she should have liked from her mother, except Georgiana could never see Millicent as the person Fanny now knew. Father always had business to discuss in his letters, and she usually heard even less from her brothers and sister, except for Vere. Her second youngest brother had grown into a fine man, vigorous and confident with a warm humour, but he, too, was now far away.

Ever vigilant for property, Edmund had helped his two youngest sons find a place they could get going, though it was on the other side of Cobar, much further to the west than the other family holdings. It was also a somewhat harder proposition than 'Edithville' or 'Pomona' and now 'Apsley', the property facing 'Pomona' on the other side of the Macquarie River – it was only with Mr Gaden's death that Edmund had finally been able to prise it from the old man's grip in order to make most of the valley his own.

Vere would write regularly from 'Koonaburra', as their place was called, always on behalf of Arthur as well as himself. Though his letters spoke of sheep and weather almost as much as Edmund's, they were also imbued with an easy mateship and down-to-earth sensibility he had long shared with his older sister. Lately he'd written of the progress they were making, putting a new tank in, and that how, with the arrival of a new cook, the vegetable garden had become an important matter. Without dwelling on the hardships, he added they were getting a cow and calf as 'we have not had any milk since before Xmas and so we will be able to make a little butter for a while.'<sup>12</sup>

In the spring of 1913, 'Delos' lay in the sunshine above the glittering waters of Manly much like its namesake in the Cyclades. But in it, Millicent herself was floating, as if she herself were unattached to the earth. Though her days were full of activity, she wondered for whom it should be done, to whom it meant something. The obvious answer, of course, was for the boys, and for Ned and herself, yet the latter two often now seemed to live in the same house separately, as if 'Delos' were two islands rather than one and they were caught in different currents.

There were the common eddies, of course. Lunch at 'Hirondelle', though no longer every Sunday, was still relatively frequent thanks to Ned's sister, Jane, who, with Alice, looked after most of the household affairs now their mother was in her seventies. While Caroline loved to see the boys, they found it hard to behave at the table or to allay their curiosity for the many interesting things their grandmother's parlour contained. After one Sunday lunch, when they had

been finally allowed out into the garden, they had set to some kind of construction. Millicent noticed George come in while they were talking and glimpsed him looking around while waiting his turn to speak and, presumably, ask for some assistance. But when she glanced around again he was gone and, following some maternal instinct, she left the table to see what they were up to. Coming outside she found them constructing a makeshift bridge over the pond, and about to fix a small piece of wood to a fence plank.

She was just in time to prevent nails being hammered, whisking the smaller piece of wood out of George's hand. The surprise on their faces had barely time to change to puzzlement.

'Where did you get this?'

George realised what was coming. 'Inside.'

'Where?'

'On top the fireplace.'

'On the mantelpiece. George! I'm sure your father told you this isn't just an old bit of firewood.' She turned the piece of wood, grey and smooth and hard, in her hands then held it close so they could both see. 'It's a piece of the original London Bridge, maybe going back to the time of King John.<sup>13</sup> It might be seven hundred years old.' The faces now expressed disbelief, so she tried another tack. 'We crossed the Thames on the new bridge when we were there. Do you remember? It's stone. This is a piece your grandfather was given after they pulled down the old bridge about eighty years ago.'

'Well,' said George after a moment's consideration. 'We were going to use it for one.'

It was now more difficult to get away from the city and see her own family, whose visits were infrequent and tended to coincide with events such as the Royal Easter Show. George had gone up with Edmund for a fortnight after this year's show but, more usually, they would all go up to 'Pomona' in the August holidays. She found it somewhat different these days, as though her parents now lived in some other world and almost as if they were some other family. Edmund

was always caught up with the business of being a grazier, and an increasingly wealthy one at that. Mrs Gavin and her husband oversaw the day to day running of the household and garden respectively and Miss Allen ... what did Miss Allen actually do, now that there were no children to look after? Her mother, relieved of some of the duties of the household, seemed a little scattered in her activities but diverted at least some of her energies into being a grandmother. There was plenty to occupy her in this regard, though her children, other than Millicent, were scattered to the west. Macquarie and his family were at 'Edithville' near Trangie, George and his new wife, Eileen, at 'Myall Grove', were a little further west in the Nevertire area, and Falkner and Nance were at 'Toucan', near the town of Warren. Olive, even further away towards Coonamble, had recently had her third child.

With Millicent's boys, Georgiana's grandchildren thus numbered well over the dozen. But none was close and, visits aside, Millicent sometimes wondered if her mother also felt uprooted. Not needing to work much at home now, Georgiana drove into Wellington, mostly in her buggy, far more regularly. She would visit friends and go shopping, always returning home with new stores, clothes and other items. The problem was, little of it was needed, and a spare room at 'Pomona' was even beginning to fill with store-bought items that remained unused and, in some cases, unopened. <sup>14</sup>

While strange for someone who'd rarely thought of spending money, no-one mentioned it. Even her father would not be drawn, though these days a little extra spending was not of such concern to him. Millicent remembered a letter in which her mother had said she was on her own as 'Dad is often away', how she had 'two days collecting to do for the Hospital. How I am to manage I don't know. ... I have a bad head tonight, things are worrying me lately ...'.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps this added weight to the feeling that things weren't right; indeed, Millicent could see a change and it troubled her. It was not because things were really very different in her mother, or because it was unexpected, or even because she didn't quite know what she would inquire about if she were to ask; it was more to do, perhaps, with detecting a faintly familiar scent she did not wish to name.

your real self has not spoken more than  
a few dozen words to me in your whole life  
yet by the light of those few involuntary  
<sup>calls</sup> messages of one soul to another. I have  
much vision. why have you not.  
why placed this double locked  
barrier between us for all time. Why?  
what curse hangs over the days?

16

Of course, one avoided publicly parading one's difficulties in life, and growing up in a farming household also left little time for complaint. Hard work was a necessity and others could always be found who had more to complain about. Things operated differently in Sydney, however, and, with less to complain about as Millicent saw it, she suffered unkindly those who did complain. These even included those who sought to strengthen the rights of women and balance inequities, such as Mrs Lawson. Perhaps it was their stridency as well as her own prejudice that made it hard not to be critical. Bessie, in England, agreed, writing in July how the suffragettes had been to the fore in Guildford.

Marching and gathering as they marched, to London – the pilgrimage, they called it. ... Though these are said to have been non-militants ... the militants have brought the cause into such ill-repute that many sympathisers are alienated; if a plebiscite were taken of all the women in the kingdom I do not believe the majority would be on the side of the vote.<sup>17</sup>

While Millicent instinctively concurred with this sentiment, women already had the vote in Australia and she would have been scandalised by any attempt to turn back the clock. But, almost on the same page, Bessie offered another, quite different facet of this empowerment when she wondered what Millicent would make of Jessie Triggs, Arthur's daughter, who had grown up with enough to

thoroughly spoil her. Her doting father had even bought her own motor, and Bessie was scathing about the life Jessie was leading.

‘Things are indeed *fin de siecle* when two girls without any chaperone stay in Paris and career about with Australian and American students,’ Bessie wrote. ‘I think – strictly between ourselves – parents have only themselves to blame if girls go wrong. When they give them such liberty as that – I may not be very straight-laced, but I draw the line at that.

‘I did not care for Jessie’s style. Aspiring actress in dress – and priding herself on her ignorance – and afflicted with the inability to see the necessity of educating herself – poor little girl – it makes me feel quite sorry for her.’<sup>18</sup>

Bessie might have been judgemental but Millicent could hardly disagree. Yet ... *she* had been to Paris. If she had the chance to experience those freedoms ...

What freedom might she have found?

Now, it seemed, that freedom of voice and feeling existed only in letters she kept locked away. Instead, it was consolation that was offered, and Bessie herself had expressed it, with all of its comforting, dun-coloured inadequacy: ‘don’t be too downhearted,’ she had written. ‘Life has its compensations. And it helps to make things pleasanter in this world of sin and woe, if we fix our minds on the compensations.’<sup>19</sup>

This was the practical way, the right way, the clearer way. Only it was the harder way, the more frustrating way, the way that seemed to give up hope of what freedom she might still find.

Except that freedom began to seem a less personal matter as the machinations of the great powers in Europe grew confrontational into 1914, even though the sun continued to shine over Sydney and the rumblings were a half world away. In the west of New South Wales it seemed even less real as the Harveys continued their seasonal tasks. Vere wrote of life’s essentials, tomatoes, eggs and bacon, and of travelling long distances for letters and news – ‘21 miles to get mail and 21 back’ – as well as dealing with their neighbours and the new manager they’d nicknamed ‘grizzly bear’. There were also photographs taken in

Cobar with a couple of girls, along with some budding interest of his own in photography, though the everyday shooting there was pigeons, rabbits and game. Yet he added laconically: 'you will make another soldier of me if the Japs come along.'<sup>20</sup>

Millicent noted this with a smile, as it seemed a remote likelihood indeed, but not to Mr Roach, who'd lost a son fighting the Boers.

'All these alliances and treaties ... just like a mousetrap waiting to go off,' he ruminated, tapping his cane on the pavement outside Purve's. 'If that South African war spilt blood what will happen when all the big nations are at each other's throats?'

'Well, we have the Fleet. Britain will be safe,' Millicent replied.

'We do, ma'am, and that's a blessing. There's no greater power on the seas than the Royal Navy. But if Britain has to come in and support the French on their soil things will be much less certain.'

It was no more than a month or so later that the Prime Minister, Mr Cook, was telling the country that 'when the Empire is at war, so also is Australia'.<sup>21</sup>

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Sydney Grammar School Enrolment Register (Libre Vermell) Vol. 2. Address from record for George Bryant, 1911/1912.

<sup>2</sup> Purchase by Millicent Maude Bryant, wife of E. J. Bryant of Sydney, Commonwealth Officer, from William Usher, 11 August 1910. Transfer no. 573998. Mortgage no. 592715 registered 18 January 1911. NSW Government Land and Property Information.

<sup>3</sup> Bessie Bryant to MMB, 23 January 1912.

<sup>4</sup> Fanny Bryant to MMB, 18 March 1912.

<sup>5</sup> Recollection of Marion Alford, pers. conversation, 5 December 2010.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> C. H. Northcott to MMB, 29 April 1913.

<sup>9</sup> Edmund G. Harvey to MMB, 15 October 1912.

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- <sup>10</sup> Based on photographs in the MMBLC and informal analysis by Megan Martin, Historic Houses Trust, Sydney, in March 2010.
- <sup>11</sup> Fanny Bryant to MMB, 15 March 1913.
- <sup>12</sup> Vere and Arthur Harvey, 9 May 1913.
- <sup>13</sup> James, 'My Reminiscences of Hironnelle', n.p.
- <sup>14</sup> Meadley, *Harvey Family History*. Chapter: 'The Family of Edmund George Harvey and Georgiana Sarah Bartlett', 2.
- <sup>15</sup> Georgiana S. Harvey to MMB, 7 May 1912.
- <sup>16</sup> 'Your real self has not spoken'. Writing fragment, n.d.
- <sup>17</sup> Bessie Bryant to MMB, 23 July 1913.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Vere Harvey to MMB, 4 May 1914.
- <sup>21</sup> 'Australia's Patriotism', *The Argus*, 1 August 1914.  
[http://www.abc.net.au/federation/fedstory/ep5/ep5\\_culture.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/federation/fedstory/ep5/ep5_culture.htm)



## 5. THE FORTUNES OF WAR

June 11<sup>th</sup> 1916 - early morn. beloved cher  
ami - your visit - whence, or, whence.  
so vivid - can life be long enough to grow  
even a little worthy.

1

Following the war's early progress in news reports was a bit like reading a serious, sometimes dramatic and complicated serial; however, the increasingly frequent appearance in Manly of men in the khaki uniforms of the new Australian Imperial Force soon began to make it seem more real. The young men Millicent met, or heard talking, were excited and keen as they enjoyed their leave, wondering if they'd get a chance at the enemy before it ended. As some predicted, that would be by Christmas. Or next Christmas ... .

Millicent was in admiration of their willingness, and wanted to do something herself. To do her bit. She made contact with the St John Ambulance Association and, in December, attended a course in the Town Hall to qualify her to render 'First Aid to the Injured', as the certificate read.<sup>2</sup> But as the fighting in Europe became more entrenched, Millicent thought of the countryside and old towns now being devastated. It was too frightful. She thought of peaceful Bonsecours, and the sound of it resonated: it would be the name of their next house, even though it wasn't theirs to own. With 'Delos' already too small for their family and with little gardening room, it made sense to move up to the more spacious areas opened up to the north of the city by the north shore railway line. Though well away from the sea, this was an area where there were both fine houses as well as acreage still available, and they could move there and look for land that would suit them while renting 'Delos' at a profit. While the move did not please Ned, 'Bonsecours', in Grosvenor Road, was close to the railway station, and the train would take George into school via the Milson's Point ferry as easily as it would take his father to work.

Her own and Ned's prospects together, on the other hand, seemed increasingly difficult to secure. Millicent now knew that the connection and closeness she so yearned and hoped for in the first ten years of their marriage would never come. Was it because of this disappointment that she had changed towards him, and treated him with less consideration? He certainly seemed, increasingly, to resent her, and she could barely speak lest there was some bitter comment from him. Uncaring? Headstrong? Selfish? The words all wounded her, and wounded the boys. The most hurtful was that she did not behave or maintain her place as 'a woman'. 'Well, I do the things you don't.' she rejoined.

But even these matters paled beside the news that Arthur and Vere had decided to enlist. Though this had certainly been in the offing, and they had been part of the picnic held at 'Apsley' to rally local recruits, it was confronting to think these two boys, as Millicent still saw them, would be putting their lives at risk. But, as with all the young men, their eyes were bright with the prospect of a grand adventure across the world. Even Vere's book requests in the last six months, including such titles as *Catriona*, the sequel to *Kidnapped*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *The Last of the Braves*, pointed that way.<sup>3</sup>

They enlisted in the first week of July, 1915, and were sent to the Liverpool Training Camp for basic training even as news had broken, in the very same week, of an extraordinary attack, in the Parliament, on conditions in the camp by the Member for Nepean.<sup>4</sup> The allegations were disturbing but Arthur and Vere were set and confident of being sent overseas without too much delay.

They were soon disappointed. Word came to Millicent from her mother that their daily routine was composed mostly of drill and marching and that the boys only had training uniforms. A photo they sent up showed them in featureless jackets and what looked like white cloth 'helmets'.<sup>5</sup> While the latrines were not to be discussed, she said there had also been mention of draughty huts and chilly winter nights – 'like our camp at 'Koonaburra' but with fog,' Arthur had apparently joked, adding, on the positive side, that since Mr Orchard's statement in Parliament, quantities of mattresses and greatcoats had appeared. A Royal

Commission under Justice Rich was investigating the administration and taking evidence in the camp itself, which would surely improve matters.<sup>6</sup>

Millicent was shaken, therefore, barely ten days later, to receive word that Arthur was ill and in hospital. Could she go and see him? She took the train out to Liverpool and eventually found her brother in Ward 'K' of the camp field hospital. She was horrified: he looked weak and tired, a far cry from his usual vigour.<sup>7</sup>

'What's it feel like, Art?' she asked, gently. His forehead felt hot.

'Dunno, Mill. Not too good, though ... .' He trailed off tiredly.

She saw an orderly and asked if there was a diagnosis.

'Influenza, I'd say.' The man was vague.

'He has a temperature?'

'Yes. 103 this morning.'

'May I see the doctor? Is one here?'

But a doctor wasn't, and the orderly seemed disinclined to find one, telling her with a soothing tone that there was no need for anxiety. Millicent left, bubbling with anger, telling Arthur she would return the next day.

'Poor Arthur is in a very bad way.' she told Ned. 'But I was treated as if I should not trouble them. I think I need a man to come out.'

Ned could not at such short notice so she phoned her cousin, Gregory Matthews, who agreed to come out with her the following afternoon. They attended the ward at 4pm, and found Arthur no better. Worse, if anything. Millicent had brought a thermometer and took his temperature.

She looked at the scale, then at Gregory. '104.8!'

'Goodness,' he said. 'You are sick, old boy.'

They saw the orderly approaching, irritation in his face as he saw the thermometer. 'Private Harvey is doing well enough,' he said. 'You must take it he's being well looked after.'

‘Then perhaps you might take his temperature. It would so reassure us,’ Millicent replied in her most unctuous voice.

The orderly was about to respond but, after a glance at them both, thought better of it. ‘104.8’.

‘We’re in agreement then. That’s very high ...’

‘What treatment is he being given?’ Gregory asked.

The orderly looked around. ‘The doctor’s here now. Maybe he can tell you.’ He returned with a large man with red hair and matching moustache who strode towards them. A coat covered his military uniform, and the orderly introduced him as Dr Moir, the Doctor in charge.

‘I must ask you to leave treatment and care of the patient to us,’ Dr Moir said abruptly. ‘There is no need to check his temperature. He is better and his condition is improving.’

‘Can you please tell us what’s afflicting him, doctor?’ asked Millicent

‘A sharp attack of tonsillitis and influenza. I will see Private Harvey in a short while, in his turn, if you’ll excuse me.’

‘May we see you later about his condition?’ Gregory asked.

Dr Moir made a show of checking his pocket watch. ‘I’ll see you in the office at 5pm if you wish,’ he said curtly. ‘Now, if you please. This is a military hospital. There are no facilities for visitors, only treatment of the sick.’

They withdrew to the office and waited. ‘Did you see how weak he was?’ Millicent said. ‘Oh, Gregory, I’m afraid for him.’

They waited until the appointed hour but Dr Moir did not appear. Nearly half an hour later the orderly opened the door.

‘Doctor Moir has seen Private Harvey but can’t come back now.’ The man dropped his eyes. ‘He says you are refused further admission to the patient.’ He quickly closed the door before anything could be asked of him.

As they made their way back to the station Gregory was almost as scandalised as Millicent. ‘Appalling. Do they think having a war means all decency is suspended? The poor lad. We must take this further.’

He phoned Millicent in the morning saying he'd made an appointment with a senior medical officer called Colonel Perkins. 'I can't be there today but see what you can get out of him,' Gregory advised needlessly.

Millicent did not find Colonel Perkins much more helpful; he clearly wanted to avoid going over the heads of fellow officers and medicos if he could help it. He listened earnestly but, despite Millicent's concerns, could not quite see his way to grant permission for the visit of a specialist. 'The other men might think we're not giving them all care if he's made to be a special case,' he said. 'But I'll do this: I'll give you a letter of instruction to Major Lawes at the Field Hospital asking him to give you all the particulars about the patient's condition and to assure you that every care and attention will be given to him. You could also ask Lawes if he'd permit you to supply a trained nurse to attend your brother,' he added.

She saw Major Lawes about six in the evening – and learned to her astonishment that 'Private Harvey has measles' and couldn't be visited. However, Major Lawes sent a Captain Manning to make enquiries as to the patient's exact condition. The Captain, whom she couldn't question, returned briefly to say that his temperature was 103 and condition was satisfactory.

'I followed the Colonel's suggestion and asked if we could employ a trained nurse to look after Arthur but he *declined* to consider the matter and told me to go away, in effect, by saying Arthur would be carefully watched and he'd inform me if serious symptoms arose. He's had serious symptoms for a week or more! Oh, Ned, I so fear it's pneumonia.'

'Did you tell him that?'

'Yes, I did. But I'm afraid it brought the veil of medical authority down. He just would not budge.'

The days that followed were equally frustrating. When Ned himself went to Liverpool the following afternoon he was simply told that Arthur was 'doing well'. He was 'a little better' when Gregory enquired by telephone that night and Millicent was told he 'would probably be up on Sunday' when she went out again on Thursday.

But Saturday brought news from Vere that Dr Retallack said Arthur had had a 'bad turn'; yet, the word from the hospital, when Gregory phoned in the early evening, was that the patient was slightly better. He went out to Liverpool the next morning, a week after Millicent's first visit, and saw Dr Retallack personally.

'This fellow was more sympathetic, and honest, I think, though in terms of Arthur's actual condition, which he said had been bad, no less worrying,' he told Millicent. 'He was a little encouraging – he said Arthur might have bananas and oranges – but when I asked if he could be moved he said not. And just assured me he'd be well cared for and that friends would be advised if there was any change in his condition.' Friends, however, had not been allowed to see him for more than a week.

Then, just after lunch on Wednesday, Millicent received a call from the Field Hospital to say Arthur had been moved to another ward, Cottage No. 8, and invited her to visit him. Unsure of what this portended, Millicent rang Gregory and found he'd been issued a similar invitation.

She reached the hospital at 4pm, looking forward to seeing Arthur at last. But when she was ushered to his bedside in the cottage the pleasure departed instantly. He could barely speak to her, drifting into a sleep continually, and she was alarmed by his general appearance. Then the nurse confirmed her fears: broncho-pneumonia was developing.

When she spoke to Georgiana later on the telephone, her report was far more grave than on previous evenings. 'He's very low, mother. Yes, come immediately. No, the doctor in charge could not be found. And Major Lawes was also absent,' she added caustically.

Her mother came on the early train and they met Gregory at Central, transferring immediately to the Liverpool line. On arrival the doctor in charge and Major Lawes were both present, clearly supporting each other. They now admitted Arthur was in a serious condition, offering the alarming suggestion that they should 'telegraph for his father.' Millicent again asked if they could provide a special nurse, but the pair united in their refusal of her request, adding that Arthur could not possibly be moved. After seeing her son, Millicent held her

mother's arm as they returned to the train. 'He's so weak. And so thin!' she said. 'Oh, Millicent. Millicent.'

The next day, Friday, her mother and Gregory went straight out to Liverpool in the morning, while Millicent went to see Colonel Perkins, who seemed not to want to prolong their interview and agreed to her request to take up a specialist and private nurse. This took most of the day to arrange, but Dr Bickerton Blackburn finally arrived at the hospital around 7.30 in the evening. He consulted with the doctor in charge and carefully examined Arthur, who drifted in and out of consciousness throughout.

'It's very serious indeed now,' he told them. 'I have to tell you there is no possible hope of recovery without an operation.'

'Why, doctor? What has happened?' Georgiana asked, her voice strained. Millicent held her arm.

'The illness has advanced and has filled his lung with diseased fluid – empyema. Only an operation can offer the chance of removing it at this point.'

'Will you ... perform the operation? Can he stand it?'

Dr Blackburn shook his head. 'It can't be done here. But I am arranging for him to be moved to the Garrison Hospital at Victoria Barracks tomorrow morning. Dr Wade will perform the operation.' He hesitated. 'It's the best hope.'

Little sleep was to be had that night and they were at the barracks early, though Arthur was not conveyed there until nearly noon. They sat in a room where other sick men in uniform were waiting to be treated. Some had family or wives with them but the atmosphere was listless, with a smell of contamination. There were occasional arrivals and departures just outside and around twelve they heard a motorised vehicle arrive. They went outside and found Arthur being unloaded in stretcher. His eyes were closed and Georgiana rushed forward to see him, Millicent close behind.

'Arthur.' Georgiana called out softly.

'Don't think he can hear you, ma'am,' said the orderly as they carried him inside. 'He's not been awake much at all.'

They were met by a nurse, then Millicent saw a doctor rise from his desk behind a glass door. 'That's the doctor in charge, Dr Furber,' the nurse said.

Dr Furber opened the door and strode out. 'Who's this then?' he asked.

'Private Harvey, sir' said the orderly. 'We've transferred him from Liverpool.'

'What's the matter with him?' He took the papers offered to him and frowned. 'A bronchial infection? Well, what's he doing here? He just needs rest, that's all.'

'Excuse me, doctor,' Georgiana stepped forward. 'I'm his mother. He's very sick. He's been sent for an operation. What was it called, dear?' She turned to ask Millicent but Dr Furber interrupted.

'That's for me to decide,' he said abruptly. 'You'll have to wait outside, please. I'll examine your son when his turn comes.'

But the younger woman before him stood her ground. 'Doctor,' she said, 'My brother has to have empyema removed. He can barely breathe. We were told Dr Wade would be operating today.'

Dr Furber coloured; he was unused to being challenged in this way, especially in front of his staff. 'That would be my decision and no-one else's. Who told you this? A fuss is being made about nothing!'

'Dr Blackburn. He examined my brother and the transfer and operation have been at his recommendation.' Millicent flashed back.

'Bickerton Blackburn?' Dr Furber's eyebrows went up. 'We'll see about this. In the meantime I'll trouble you to wait outside please. This is not a civilian hospital.'

'Appalling man!' Millicent could hardly contain herself when they returned to the waiting room. But she checked herself; her mother wasn't listening. The lines of worry and fear were set in her face, and only Arthur was in her thoughts.

But a short while later, Dr Furber came into the waiting room, his demeanour much less bullish. He brushed his hair back with his hand. 'I have – ah – talked with Dr Blackburn on the telephone,' he said, avoiding their eyes. 'We believe the

case is very serious indeed and I have asked Dr Wade to do what can be done. He'll operate at three. We'll let you know developments.' He excused himself.

This would be some hours away, so Millicent took her mother for a walk out of the barracks then down to Oxford Street. They took tea but, while neither felt like eating, they lingered, dreading the atmosphere of the waiting room.

At about half past four, the phone rang at 'Bonsecours' and the boys raced to pick it up. 'Hello?' said John, having got the better of the scuffle.

'Oh darling, is your father there?' His mother's voice sounded thick, but Ned had been close behind. 'Hello?' he said, placing the earpiece hard against his left ear. 'Millicent?'

There was a short silence. 'Ned, Arthur's passed away.'

'Good God ... .'

Her voice was now more composed, but flat. 'They did the operation. The surgeon found he was in a very bad condition. One lung was quite solid. He died about four o'clock. Broncho-pneumonia and syncope the cause of death.'

'Syncope?'

'A death faint – the heart gives out suddenly, it seems.' He heard the shake in her voice now. 'Ned, they've killed him. The military have killed him.'

Indeed, that same day, the papers reported that the Royal Commission had found Mr Orchard's claims proven and supported his recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

The other, small services, when she had said goodbye to Edith and John, had been so different to this. This time, the family attending was much larger and had many more adults as well as children. Her mother and father, at the centre, seemed swallowed up in a large pool of grief. Not only that, despite the short notice, a large number of local militia, and members of the expeditionary forces had also come down to Wellington Station to meet the train, along with other friends and people from the district paying their respects. But when the train came to a halt, a space expanded in the midst of the crowd near the doors of the

mail car. The doors opened and out stepped a man in AIF uniform. With a shock, Millicent recognised her brother, Vere, his face shaded and inscrutable under the peak of his cap. Young men from the guard assembled by Mr Barker stepped forward and withdrew a silver mounted cedar coffin, draped with a Union Jack from the Garrison Hospital. They placed it in the hearse, and the town band led the cortege off towards St John's to the strains of the Dead March from Handel's 'Saul'. No voices could be heard, only the sound of many feet, until they arrived at the church and Archdeacon Howell from Blayney began the service. In the absence of Canon Brown it was short, and the address brief, but he spoke feelingly about Arthur's loss to his parents and family and also to the Empire. It was then, and during the hymns sung by the choir, that the tears flowed most freely, and she felt Jack and Bowen's hands tightly clutching hers while Arthur's coffin was transferred back to the hearse. The band took up the Dead March again as they started for the cemetery, the military marching with reversed arms and a long line of vehicles following behind. The church bells tolled and, as they passed the Shire Hall, they saw the flags were at half mast. Then it seemed only a short time later that the burial service was being read and they were lowering Arthur's coffin into the ground, the slow, steady rhythm of events suddenly broken by the crack of volleys being fired into the air.<sup>9</sup>

Despite having spoken to Mr Shakespeare, the funeral director, Millicent hadn't realised how the ceremony of the occasion would overtake their own heartbreak. It became a public and community grieving none of them had imagined being called to, laying bare not only Mother's and Father's concerns for the boys when they enlisted, but the potential sacrifice this had silently implied. The war was not out there, across the seas, but with their own family – though it wasn't long before George and Jack and Bowen were skylarking with the other young ones following afternoon tea under cool, sunny skies. Millicent's eyes, however, kept moving to Vere, to the bowed shoulders of her mother and father as they received a stream of condolences, and back to Vere again. He was not the sole person in uniform, but it reminded her he was only lent to them. In a short time he would have to return to his unit, and, even though he and his brother

had been placed in different battalions, she knew how much he would miss Arthur. They had been together all their lives; now he would go to war alone.

That the family's fears were now focused on him prompted Vere to write more regularly, even though his basic training continued just across the other side of Sydney. Edmund was pushing for him to seek a commission, doubtless with the feeling he would be better valued and looked after by the military, but there was the question of when, if the offer were made, he could undertake training. However, he applied to enter the officer's training school at the end of September, his father having been to see the Officer in Command personally. In the meantime, in his thoughtful way, Vere arranged for Mr Eyles at 'Koonaburra' to send up a flitch of bacon for Millicent and her family and – having handed back the uniform he was loaned for the funeral – finally received his own: 'trousers too small, hat too big, jacket fair,' he commented dryly.<sup>10</sup>

Then, suddenly, the date for the Battalion's departure was set, and it was all he could do to arrange to meet Millicent in town one evening, having to be back in camp the same night. Their talk was light-hearted and of small things, despite not knowing how long it would be until he returned. What they now knew was that the transfer did not eventuate but Vere was unconcerned; he was as happy to be embarking as Private Harvey on the TSS *Euripides* as anything else. The next she heard he was in Egypt.

As the year moved to a close it seemed there had been little progress in the war, with the Germans being pushed back no further than where they had been stopped near the River Marne in northern France the year before. Things were not going well elsewhere either, with rumours of large casualties in the Gallipoli campaign. But the Christmas season was further subdued by worrying news that Vere had been taken ill. Millicent immediately contacted the Red Cross, which, just before the new year, passed on news received by cable from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian General Hospital, Mena, saying that Vere was 'doing well and will be discharged in the next few days'.<sup>11</sup> With Arthur still fresh in their minds this was not as reassuring as Millicent wanted, especially when, with the arrival of a letter

from Vere in the new year, they were shocked to learn that he'd also been struck down with pneumonia. Fortunately, the letter told them he was feeling good now 'bar a tender feeling on one of my lungs and being rather weak through my long fasting at the beginning but I can walk all right and can expect to have a look around the pyramids in the course of a few days.' He added that when the doctor did see him it was decided 'there was nothing the matter with me other than wanting a bit of building up so there is no need to worry about me at all.'<sup>12</sup>

He enclosed a stamp for Jack, and a short postscript reminded Millicent not to forget 'to draw my pay at the barracks, three shillings per day made payable to Mrs Millicent Maud Bryant.' She was inexpressibly touched that he had been thinking of her, and to have arranged for his earnings, small though they were, to support her through what might be a difficult time.

Millicent woke that night, feeling the constriction in her own chest like it must have been not only for Vere but perhaps for *that* other, *he* who had also been in pain and had struggled with illness. Close to him, in the dream, she felt it directly and intimately, writing a few days later that

... through tingles in my flesh and via sensation all illnesses that assail you are reproduced. I dreamed of you a few nights ago but some part at least was a healthy dream for you seemed in such good health and happy way – sometimes again at quite odd times you seem to be beside one often quite suddenly when my mind has been otherwise occupied – perhaps it is only the flashback of thought to where it really far too insistently dwells that lights up your image so vividly or perchance it is some travel worn thought that you have liberated.<sup>13</sup>

His letters to her were themselves like dreams, because no-one spoke to her as he did; neither had anyone else ever heard her most intimate thoughts. And, like dreams, her thoughts of him had most freedom in the quiet hours and tended to disappear with daylight, when the others, whose life connections with her were of blood and family, occupied her thoughts. *He* had no place except her heart.

Vere's next letter seemed to foreshadow some movement taking place in secrecy, being addressed only 'from the sands of time'.<sup>14</sup> There was then a lapse

in communication, though Millicent continued to write nearly every week. But it was a busy period for the family, encompassing the need to move from 'Bonsecours' to a better place only a few blocks away over the railway line in Gerald Avenue, Roseville, named 'Wyvern' after the two-legged dragon of myth. They would make a further financial saving with the move, although, while making her inspections of property and clarifying their options for purchase, it also seemed likely to Millicent that two houses would be required in the future. She had confided this to Vere more than a year ago; he had not judged her, as she had feared he might, but listened with that thoughtfulness and compassion that was part of the depth of his character. It was at that time that he had simply offered her the full amount of his army pay and, in line with this gesture, she put it wholly aside to invest in meeting future needs.

Present needs, however, were assisted by the earlier loan from her father which helped them purchase their first motor car. It was not new, but the boys were delighted and George, being old enough, was particularly keen to drive – a matter in which, for once, Millicent and Ned were united in opposition. Ned himself was cautious in operating the vehicle, particularly in starting off, though once moving he avoided using the brake overmuch. Many of the roads had been upgraded to bitumen in recent years and, though good spare tyres were essential, it was a joy to be able to explore where one wanted and to make visits to people who lived away from the railway with much greater ease and speed than a sulky could manage. While they could now also respond to needs like those that Arthur's illness had demonstrated so vividly, one of its main tasks would be to allow them to view property for sale in the area.

Millicent herself got straight into the driver's seat and drove, considering it little different to taking charge of a horse. What mattered was that you had to be firm, aware and decisive. To do this you also had to take reasonable care of the machine, and to have some idea *how* to do so, what's more. She therefore made a point of familiarising herself with its parts and bothering the mechanic whose garage on the highway they took it to. Within a few days she had mastered the controls fully, and become quite competent, if not expert, at the starting procedure and in putting up the fold-away hood.

It was nearly May when she received Vere's letter telling them that he was now in France. Soon after his arrival, his camera was taken from him, as they were strictly prohibited; sad to say, his photos around Cairo were stolen, so he had nothing left to send them.<sup>15</sup> But on Easter Sunday he wrote that they had been to church and were having a few days out of the trenches: 'today has been a boshier day, not been a shower of rain at all, the first day for over a fortnight that has been fine. It is rather muddy in the trenches and very slippery walking about.'<sup>16</sup>

His cheer and steadiness touched Millicent with a pain that was distinctly maternal. 'How I longed to know how you fare this very moment – and where you are – ' she wrote back.

I will not weary you by recounting the pictures that flood my mind of all you are enduring – you have them in the flesh and don't want to see them on paper, too, do you, but I feel that they are such that I never go to bed, or take a comfortable bath, or meal but a silent prayerful thought goes out to you for all your hardships, and a tingle of shame touches me for being able to bear so little of all this load of sorrow, suffering and misery.<sup>17</sup>

Knowing that her friend, Ralph Upton, though struggling with the health problems that had until recently kept him out of the military, could soon be in France as well, she told Vere: 'One never knows what strange things happen, and should you ever chance to meet him, you may trust your heart and soul to him, do not tell him I said so, but you can ask him if he knows me and you will have found a brother – he is quite young, 30, and one of the men that make all this rotten world worth living in for.'

She paused, emotion welling up within her. 'Goodnight now my darling brother mine. I seem to see you here so plainly tonight, or rather morning, it's the "wee small hours" now and am off to bed – I pray for your health, your welfare and safe return. If only one might go instead of you, men whom one cannot spare, it would seem easier, or so it seems when one is just waiting, waiting, praying. Again God bless and guard all your splendid selves, yours, Millie.'<sup>18</sup>

She woke from sleep that night – or was it another night? – with *his* presence so strong and loving ... she rose and, sitting in the kitchen so she could hear anyone else stirring, immediately wrote

June 11<sup>th</sup> – 1916 – early morn. Beloved cher ami – your visits whence, oh, whence. So vivid – can life be long enough to grow even a little worthy ... .<sup>19</sup>

News was slight for the next fortnight and, like most other people with loved ones in the war, her appetite for it was insatiable. The news, and thoughts of it, inhabited many of her wakeful hours, especially when busy with hum-drum tasks that left her mind free. She had not heard from her mother for some time and wondered if she was angry at her somehow, but towards the end of the month got news from her father that Mr Barker's son had reported 'Vere Harvey and Dick Wilkins was with him and were going into the firing line in the morning'.<sup>20</sup>

Her anxiety at this intelligence was eased somewhat, despite knowing it was weeks old, when two letters came from Vere within a few days. One was a cheeky French postcard addressed to Bowen, showing a child using the Kaiser's helmet as a potty and wiping himself with papers like the 'Proclamation of 93', and 'Deutschland uber alles'. The words to a little ditty were written alongside.<sup>21</sup> It cheered them all up somewhat. His letter spoke about how splendid the country was, with strawberries and cherries beginning to ripen, but his assertion that he was 'Ok, still dodging the bullets and very little the worse for the military life' admitted the plain realities he was facing.<sup>22</sup>

Bowen began the next letter to Vere, late in June. But, as he condensed all the news into about four lines, 'I shall just have to be content to elaborate his or shut up letter shop,' Millicent observed.<sup>23</sup> Recovering the pen, she realised it was now five years since they were in Paris, in July 1911. 'The whole world seems changed to me since then – isn't it strange how quickly at some periods of life things move, literally everything seems to be changed? Both outward and

inward things. Could one have imagined you fighting in France five years ago?' she wondered.<sup>24</sup>

And there was still more that was changed. 'George has gone to Hawkesbury Agricultural College for four weeks' course in poultry farming. Don't smile – I know that presently I shall have to earn the family living and feel I ought to make some preparation and of the very few things that I might be able to do with a family is poultry – it seems to pay, properly conducted. I have started with half a dozen good fowls with your money and they have rewarded me by laying all this autumn time with eggs at from 2 shillings 7 pence to 3/3 a dozen – generally over two dozen a week. I couldn't go to the college myself but it was a chance as it came in the school midwinter vacation, for Geo will be able to give me the notes on the lectures and his "valuable advice" and perhaps help ... '

But it was then back to the only thing one could really think about. 'Capt. Bean had an interesting short letter in the paper a few days ago upon your arrival in France. We simply devour every word that helps to show how you live. Please do say if you could use a knitted scarf, another balaclava cap or thicker socks ... goodnight now, God be with you darling boy.'

'What weak silly things words are,' she added in a final line.<sup>25</sup>

Yet they were not so weak. She knew letters were as much sustenance to him as food, and would be to any man at the front, far from home. Even more, without doubt, than his news was to her – though when she heard, through her mother, that Vere once again had leave in London, it made her feel like skipping. Wonderful London! Metropolis of the world! It offered a short chance for him to be normal, to get some fun. She wondered if her mother's parcel, with the £25 in it, had gotten to him in time.<sup>26</sup>

But when she next wrote she was seething. 'We have no conscription ... against it cry all the unions in this joyous land (for them the cowardly beasts) others still more cowardly beasts of leaders – Hughes in England giving advice by the yard. Bad and all as England's been over the war she has sent a far higher percentage than we ... .' And she turned back on Hughes: 'his own house he leaves to be run by others and is seemingly afraid to come back and administer

his own medicine to his own flock here! You never heard anything like the squeals “crime of conscription” and such muck. They are in fine print and all the politicians licking around them horrible; goodness knows if they’ll have any conscription until it’s too late. And then they will manage to scramble into training a month before peace and then claim equality with you.’

She was spluttering again: it was time to end. ‘God bless you darling, I’m so happy tonight to know you are well and able to enjoy yourself, it is like sunshine after rain ... other times one lives in constant pain and fear.’ Again she sent her loving thoughts and prayers.<sup>27</sup>

Though it was winter in Sydney it was summer in France. There were still no letters, but Millicent headed ‘no. 17’ on July 16<sup>th</sup> and spent most of the letter discussing money and the problems of getting some to him over in France. It was afternoon for her, but she imagined how Vere would be seeing the dawn, the light being different there – ‘unless,’ she concluded, ‘it be like Miss Allen and perpetually looks the same – by the aid of hair “lotions” etc.’<sup>28</sup>

She did not trouble to question why she should have been so sardonic.

It was the last Friday in July, late in the afternoon. It had been raining for days and she had to dodge large pools of water and keep a coat and heavy boots on to tend the chooks. She had barely begun to check the enclosure when John came outside. ‘There’s a telegram!’ he shouted excitedly.

‘Coming dear,’ she called, without thinking. But on her way inside something froze. She quickened, breaking almost into a run despite the boots. Unconsciously holding her breath, she almost tore it from John’s hand and scanned it for military markings: there were none. She breathed, and sat down to open it. She was still. She stared at it for a few moments then put it down. It was from her father but she could not speak.

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Vere killed in action  
3<sup>rd</sup> July France  
Harvey<sup>29</sup>  
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Sobs wracked her, and John and Bowen as well. It was good they were there, except there was no comfort. This boy, and this fine, fine man, she would never see again. He would never grow older; he would be only a photograph ever more, no real, live person. The light seemed to rush out of the sky and it became even more watery and soft. He seemed to appear through it, calling to her as if she were drowning, until other arms pulled her up and she ascended, through tears.

The next day a letter arrived from her father with the official message from Victoria Barracks copied out. Floods have held up other family members, so don't come, he said. 'Mother well so far Ida is here and she is mother's strong hold'.<sup>30</sup>

The other letters that now came were of condolence, providing neither consolation nor comfort. Even that from Vere's commander, Lieutenant Wood, which praised him as 'a good soldier ... always doing the work allotted to him without fuss' and passing on the sympathy of the officers and men for the loss of someone they regarded as a good comrade and friend, could not escape its own formality.<sup>31</sup>

But in August, Georgiana wrote saying she was getting copies made of a letter Edmund had received from one of Vere's mates from their own district, Dick Wilkins, who had been with him in the trenches. 'God help us all to bear this sorrow,' her mother said desolately in her letter but, when the copy did arrive, Millicent felt it was one of the few things that did.<sup>32</sup>

France, 2nd July, 1916

Dear Mr Harvey,

It is with a very grieved mind I write you tonight. Long before this reaches you the sad news of my mate's and your son's death will have been cabled by our platoon commander.

The task of writing this letter I would to God was imposed on some other, but it strikes me as a duty to my mate and it is the fulfillment of a solemn promise made between Vere, Harry and myself to write home the facts if either of us struck bad luck. I was not with him when he was hit, as he had only a few days ago joined the machine gun section and I was away training for raiding party when he joined. He was wrapped up in the machine gun and has been some time trying for a transfer. His knowledge of machinery and his desire to acquire more made him keen on this branch. I felt the separation then, but ever since we left Australia he and I have worked on fatigue together, on guard, sentry etc., ate meals from the same mess tin, slept in each other's blankets, in fact, what was his was mine and mine was his, and now it's ended.

I feel the loss after nearly 12 months of constant friendship, which in all the time of hourly companionship only brewed one squabble, which thank God, only made us better pals. It is the grief I feel and the promise I made to him, prompts me to write to you the full circumstances, and when you know all they will help to soften the blow. He had just taken post on the fire step and was observing over the parapet, and while turning round to speak to his corporal a bullet struck him near the back of the head and under his steel helmet and came right through, so death was instantaneous and painless. It was about midnight last night and while a very heavy bombardment was in progress. His job needs courage and nerves and no one was better equipped than Vere. What the boys in the company, and more particularly those in his own section, who were always with him, thought of him is plainly shown by a little token given him prior to leaving for the trenches. He was always the same, straight, honest, cheerful, a heart as generous as it was true – and a man's manly man, a good mate.

I cannot put into words how deeply he is missed by us. We get hardened to seeing our lads go, but when one who has been an example to us joins hands with the spirits of the Beyond, it is then the grief and bitterness of this struggle surges to our hearts and the sympathy so long closed in loses control and no man is ashamed of his tears. You have reason to be proud of him. He died a soldier's death, doing his duty for his king and country. No action of use will ever make you feel anything but pride in having such a man for a son, and while I most sincerely regret his death I feel

proud to have had him for a mate, and I trust the knowledge of his manliness, steadfastness to duty, a clean life, and clean record will help to soften the blow to his mother, his family, his many friends and yourself. I cabled home only a few days ago saying we three were well, and now I have written this. I must close as I cannot write any more.

My deepest sympathy to you and yours, now and always.

Dick.<sup>33</sup>

Another letter from Dick was also sent up soon after, which was almost as moving. Dick had spoken to the lad who was on post with Vere and was at pains to say that he had actually finished speaking and had turned back to observe over the parapet when he was hit – the bullet passing in the front of the head and out the back. While this seemed important to the men, what touched Millicent were the efforts taken to make her brother a proper grave.<sup>34</sup>

On Monday morning the 3rd, Joe Mewkell and myself got permission from our platoon commander to go to the cemetery and do what we could for Vere's grave. We only had 4 hours leave, 2 of which were taken up walking to and from the grave. We carried bricks from ruins nearby and put a row right round – levelled the grave neatly and put a cross of broken red tiles in the middle. That evening I arranged with a carpenter and signwriter from the Pioneers to make and write me a cross for him. Today they brought it over finished and considering the time and tools at their disposal made a very nice piece of work. Harry Bestwick found the necessary cash as I am broke at present. This afternoon Joe and I again obtained permission from our OC and went out again to erect a cross. I am enclosing a sketch of the grave done by Bill Wilson, another one of our pals. A photo is impossible to get, else I should get one for you – so the sketch is the next best I can do. We leave here any moment now and feel grateful to our officers for their sympathy in allowing me the opportunity of doing the last few signs of friendship to my mate and I know how grateful you and your family will be to them, when you fully realise what the granting of leave under present circumstances mean. ... I may not have a chance of seeing the lad's last resting place again but I can assure you that if an opportunity ever arises I will take it ...'<sup>35</sup>

In November, when Millicent heard Dick himself had been wounded in the thigh and been evacuated, she made it her business to write to him. She arranged to also send a photo of his family. Dick didn't reply for many months but when he

did from France, in April of 1917, she could see how much it had meant, as well as his frustration at the petty and self-serving public quarrels that were taking place at home while men were still suffering and dying at the front.<sup>36</sup>

There were not only changes at home confronting Dick, however: Millicent herself felt the tide rushing forward. Not only was John now in his second year at Sydney Grammar but also George was considering engineering as a future profession.

She took him out to the University of Sydney in August. They were received by Professor Russell, who told George and several other potential students about the many things engineers were needed to do. George was animated, and she was proud of the intelligence of his questions; however, sensing her presence was not required she took herself for a stroll. She had not visited the University before, and couldn't help but be reminded of the dreaming spires on which its impressive buildings, archways and grassy quadrangles were modelled. Here were the books of knowledge, and their keepers, and their doorways were open to those who showed themselves qualified, as George was attempting to do. It aroused a certain chagrin that she herself could not study there; the books of knowledge were closed to her.

Or so she thought, until she mentioned this disappointment to George.

'There's nothing stopping you,' he said. 'The entry requirements are in the Calendar. But of course you wouldn't want to do engineering.'

'I might. I like to know how things work.'

Her son guffawed indulgently – something she was unused to from him – but added: 'I heard they also hold courses of evening lectures.'

She enquired, and was told of a new lecture series beginning shortly in Japanese language and literature, made possible through a Parliamentary grant to assist in the teaching of languages that would be useful in developing commercial relations between Australia and other countries.<sup>37</sup> This time the family all guffawed at her, as well as George, but Millicent felt Japan to have a culture of considerable refinement. Its delicate paintings and fabrics were

particularly admirable. Moreover, it was an ally in the war, a matter which, for her, was of most important currency. Rather to her satisfaction, the guffaws were silent when she announced she had enrolled to attend the course of lectures, which were to begin the following month in the Michaelmas term. It would cost £2/2 for each term, and lectures were scheduled at 6pm on Monday and Tuesday. They all grumbled at this, of course, because dinner would have to be late on those nights or overseen by someone else.

She was both horrified and exhilarated when the lectures began. The language seemed impossible, though most of those present were in a similar predicament. But to immerse oneself in the history and culture, to have 'the book' opened by someone with Mr Murdoch's depth of knowledge, was thrilling, and she immediately acquired Latourette's *Development of Japan* and Lange's textbook of colloquial Japanese. Another student, Mr Ryan, himself with a Master's degree, in due course lent her Rhys David on Buddhism, W. G. Aston's history of Japanese Literature and, not least, the first volume of Mr Murdoch's own substantial *History of Japan*.<sup>38</sup>

Nothing, however, removed the war from one's everyday consciousness. Britain and their own nation were engaged in a titanic struggle, for which even more men were needed. Enlistments, however, were lagging, and the Prime Minister, Mr Hughes, proposed a second referendum to enable conscription of eligible men to make up any shortfall of volunteers. With Vere and Ralph always in her mind and now Dick Wilkins, a sense of injustice increasingly upset Millicent as the year went on. Thus, when she received an invitation to attend a meeting at the Roseville Hall with the purpose of forming a ladies committee for the referenda, she jumped at the chance. She spoke passionately, telling those present that 'the formation of a women's committee seems to me the most apposite first action in any district – women possess a right ... to ask that we defend our liberties since they will not ask us to defend them ourselves. It is incomparably more fitting for us to ask this thing, though perhaps no more congenial, than for men to do it. ... A vote is a vote wherever it comes from. We

can do this district thoroughly in half the time at our disposal and I would urge that we arrange to do what we can for less favoured parts.

‘Taking the basic arguments of Mrs Shelley I speak literally to heart – have we no appeal to make to the less cultivated feelings – the other side do it liberally and do it all the time. We have such an appeal and it is our own responsibility to make it – we are our brothers’ keepers.’ Pragmatically, she added: ‘it is more than probable that a team of unhurried girls would be especially welcome for canvassing.’<sup>39</sup>

Despite their efforts – and a strong ‘Yes’ vote on the north shore, according to her own tally<sup>40</sup> – the referendum was lost when the day came in December, 1917. At this time she particularly thought of Dick. His wound had gone bad, and he had been brought to a home in Kent to recover. But there, his suffering was even greater because of what he saw going on around him after being at the front. He complained bitterly about the men back home who wouldn’t sign up to go to war, describing as ‘scum’ the men and women who ‘shirk their job’. He expressed to her how hopeless he felt about his leg not healing, and continual disappointment about nothing getting better. ‘I’d rather come home without than go on with the disappointment,’ he said.<sup>41</sup> Sadly, this was what had transpired by the time he finally returned to Wellington in April, 1918, nearly three years after he and Vere had embarked so eagerly for France.<sup>42</sup>

The loss of the referendum, though it exposed a deep division on the issue and did not quicken reinforcements, was just another battle on the path to victory. As 1918 progressed and the entry of the Americans helped to turn the tide, there was a similar change in momentum for Millicent and her family. They were able, in June, after much patient searching, to install themselves in large, modern bungalow in Pymble, a little further up the north shore line. They named it ‘Grenier’, after the corner of France in which Millicent’s brother had been laid to rest.

On the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918, *he* wrote again to her – though, by the time the letter reached Sydney, the news was old if not less portentous.

We have been dismissed for the day after hearing the wonderful news that the Armistice has been signed. One can hardly realise that this is the end but the cheering coming in through the little window that faces me as I write cannot be mistaken. One gets bewildered when one tries to think of all that it means: one can't help having regrets ... that one is in England instead of on the road to Germany. I have been longing to set out to France again but it was not to be.<sup>43</sup>

Millicent wiped away a tear. He had been through so much to serve – been to America, seen specialists – before finally gaining his commission and being sent to France. And he had survived. At least *he* had. She read the rest of the letter, written on blue paper of a good weight from his lodgings off Pimlico Road. The Saturday before, he had been decorated by the King at Buckingham Palace – and had ventured to remind His Majesty of the previous time they had shaken hands. That had been at the prize-giving for the Victorian Public Schools at the Exhibition Centre in Melbourne, when the King, then Duke of Cornwall and York, had come to open the first Australian Parliament. But it was typical of him, too, that on this occasion, he noted how the King had looked so worried and imagined his concerns about other kingdoms as well as his own.

How she had thought of him all these years since their meeting in London; how their letters had joined them in feeling and soul. If only it might be. But who knew, as he had said, what would happen now? The world had changed, its spirits were burned and maimed. So would they all just get on with life and try to forget?

Perhaps that must happen, but she could not forget. There were hollow spaces in her heart, including those that Ned had never occupied; however, there were parts inhabited by this one she did not see, and those who she would never see again: Arthur and, of course, Vere.

She felt another tear fall, landing on her wrist as she sat in the quietness of the afternoon in the shade overlooking the front garden that occupied a chunk of 'Grenier's acre and four and a half perches.<sup>44</sup> Yes, it was finished, and the guns

were silent at last. Because of all their sacrifices, this new garden, named after Vere's resting place, would be free to prosper and grow. And so, she hoped, would those within, building with their lives warm and happy memories of him. She closed her book and put away the letter.

12:10 am. Jan. 1<sup>st</sup> 1919.

Another year beloved soul - God keep & bless you every hour -  
give you wisdom in all your difficulties - Your dear visit has made  
happy the long day - every moment of it - when at night, when  
you I will not complain - your dear kisses on my lips - Goodnight  
Cher ami.

45

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> 'June 11, 1916. Early Morn.' Writing fragment.
- <sup>2</sup> 'St John's Ambulance Certificate' in name of Millicent Bryant, 10 December 1914.
- <sup>3</sup> Vere Harvey to MMB, 26 August 1913.
- <sup>4</sup> 'Friday, July 2, 1915', *The Argus* (Melbourne), 2 July 1915, 6.
- <sup>5</sup> Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour: Arthur Allen Harvey.  
[http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/roll\\_of\\_honour/person.asp?p=476999](http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/roll_of_honour/person.asp?p=476999)  
Accessed 13 March 2011.
- <sup>6</sup> Peter Hopper, 'The 1915 Royal Commission into the Administration of the Liverpool Camp' (The Free Library: 2006). [http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The 1915 Royal Commission into the Administration of the Liverpool...-a0148480460](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+1915+Royal+Commission+into+the+Administration+of+the+Liverpool...-a0148480460) Accessed 13 March 2011.
- <sup>7</sup> 'Account of the treatment and death of Arthur Harvey', apparently by MMB. Typed and longhand versions. c.1915 (undated). It is possible the account was typed for submission to some enquiry, e.g. the Royal Commission. The narrative of Arthur's death is based closely on this account.
- <sup>8</sup> 'The Camp Royal Commission', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 August 1915, 13.
- <sup>9</sup> This account is drawn from several original newspaper clippings preserved in the MMB Letters Collection. They are not dated or labelled but appear to be from newspapers in the Wellington district.
- <sup>10</sup> Vere Harvey to MMB, 15 September 1915.

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- 11 'Information bureau for the obtaining of information about sick and wounded soldiers' to MMB, 27 December 1915.
  - 12 Vere Harvey to MMB, 19 December 1915.
  - 13 'MMB personal note', n.d.
  - 14 Vere Harvey to MMB, 26 February 1916.
  - 15 Vere Harvey to MMB, 5 April 1916.
  - 16 Vere Harvey to MMB, 23 April 1916.
  - 17 MMB to Vere Harvey, 14 May 1916.
  - 18 *Ibid.*
  - 19 'MMB personal note 2', n.d.
  - 20 Edmund G. Harvey to MMB, 26 May 1916.
  - 21 Vere Harvey to Bowen Bryant, 14 June 1916.
  - 22 Vere Harvey to MMB, 10 June 1916.
  - 23 MMB to Vere Harvey, 25 June 1916.
  - 24 *Ibid.*
  - 25 *Ibid.*
  - 26 MMB to Vere Harvey, 6 July 1916.
  - 27 *Ibid.*
  - 28 MMB to Vere Harvey, 16 July 1916.
  - 29 Harvey to Mrs Bryant. Telegram, 28 July 1916.
  - 30 Edmund G. Harvey to MMB, 29 July 1916.
  - 31 *Ibid.*
  - 32 Georgiana S. Harvey to MMB, 22 August 1916.
  - 33 Dick Wilkins to Edmund G. Harvey, 2 July 1916.
  - 34 Dick Wilkins to Edmund G. Harvey, 4 July 1916.
  - 35 *Ibid.*
  - 36 Dick Wilkins to MMB, 9 April 1917.
  - 37 University of Sydney, *Calendar* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1918), 615.
  - 38 *Ibid.*, 540-541.
  - 39 'MMB speech notes', written on back of invitation from A. R. Croft, Hon. Sec., Roseville Referendum Committee dated 22 November 1917.
  - 40 MMB in 'Psychology - extracts' notebook.
  - 41 Dick Wilkins to MMB, 4 December 1917.
  - 42 Dick Wilkins to MMB, 25 April 1918, in which he says he says 'the leg' has turned for the worse and he could not wear his 'artificial'.
  - 43 'Unsigned letter on blue paper' to MMB, 11 November 1918.
  - 44 Purchase by Millicent Maude Bryant, 28 June 1918. Lot 40, Pymble Ave, Pymble, NSW. Government Land and Property Information.
  - 45 'Jan 1st, 1919. Another year.' Writing fragment.

## 6. FERMENT

Closer observation of people shows, it is true, that calm is maintained at the critical moment; but certain results occur wh. fall into two categories

First, the suppressed effect comes to the surface immediately afterwards; seldom directly, it is true, but ordinarily in the form of a displacement to another object. (eg. a person is, in official relations, polite, submissive, patient & so on, & turns his whole anger loose upon his wife or his subordinates)

1

The mustering of painful words was not something Millicent wanted to do; it was something she couldn't avoid, and the anger was tempered by the act of writing.

If there is no spiritual possession between two souls, or union, then law is powerless except to cause bitter suffering to both sexes with no corresponding good to the race – what can children bred between two antagonistic parents be? ... What has their birthright been – is it what they as innocent souls ought to have to face [in] their pilgrimage[?].<sup>2</sup>

The pain, though, was in the experiences which gave rise to it, and it was additionally sad that these should take place, perhaps even have expanded, following their occupation of the new house. Seizing whatever notepaper was available, she scribbled down in pencil the responses that were so difficult to bring to mind when there was an argument.

... you may cite law and custom forever – [but] you must ... give up the idea of possession and set about evolving a more enlightened scheme whereby to live in

future generations ... possession is rapidly slipping from you never again to be yours in the sense you worship.<sup>3</sup>

Arguments, skirmishes and tactical withdrawals were the main features of the landscape between her and Ned now, a conflict that had been taking place during the Great War but now was free of its shadow. Though, at 55, she knew him to be disinterested, it wounded her that they no longer shared a bed. This was a matter of mutual agreement, as things stood, but it was a loss which, while she had difficulty putting it into words even for herself, was one of touch, of closeness, even of balance. It affected her in ways she resented: she found herself being more impatient, more irritable, more direct, and, as a result, maybe even less feminine. She now cared less about being reticent, about speaking her mind, or deferring decisions or preferences to Ned. What was the point, after all? He didn't care to make them, only to be seen to be in control of them and to possess this control, just as he possessed his family.

She guessed that in his eyes she had long ago crossed the line, usurping authority that was rightly his and making decisions that he viewed as his own prerogative. While he never sought this role openly he viewed it, deep down, as his *due*: she ought to come to him and suggest decisions rather than take them herself. It was what other wives did. He seemed to feel she ignored, or breached, certain unwritten terms of the contract between them, and consequently felt himself less bound by the obligations of courtesy and magnanimity implied in it – and, even more, that it was justified to set these aside to invoke his wife's 'obligation', that of deference to his wishes. But she wondered he didn't see the effect of his behaviour on the boys. The criticisms, and the sly and vicious utterances were not lost on them. For the younger ones who were at home most, it was devastating. And it put them on her side. Even so, she wrote

I do not understand you – the seeds of misunderstanding that you laboured so hard to sow that dreadful day that their roots seemingly might pass back through all our intercourse to poison it have lain perhaps ungerminated but potent – you repudiated by constantly reiterated implication every word you had ever spoken – not even having the candour to speak directly as if fearing that to kill outright were too kind. The word I could not have doubted at any bidding but your own ...<sup>4</sup>

She paused. At such times her correspondence with *him* – also a man – seemed all the more precious. If only they could meet again. This possibility seemed no closer, however, while he was in England, and at times she was pained by the distance that words, however true, sometimes represented. He was not here, after all. He had not come. Were these, too, just the ways of men?

They were ways she had increasingly to contend with, even if they were in those not yet fully formed, such as her sons. In the case of George, however, this had been a happier contention of late.

He had done well in his mathematics and science, matriculated to the University of Sydney and, indeed, been awarded an Exhibition, exempting him from payment of matriculation, tuition and degree fees.<sup>5</sup> At age 18 he had lost none of the quick energy that would scatter itself from one interest to the next and the next, without easily settling. Thus she had her misgivings about his enrolment for engineering, though it fitted well with his practical skills and interest in construction and making things work. Her concern, however, was that he would find it difficult to stick at, or be distracted by something else that came along. So he surprised and pleased her with his application and will to tackle the thing; they went out to the Engineering faculty, made arrangements and checked timetables and he had it confidently in hand. They looked up book lists, he made choices and they went to Angus and Robertson's. It dawned on her that he had moved closer to manhood than she'd realised.

He reminded her, in some ways, of her father. Though nearly seventy, Edmund had lost little of the vigour and drive that had established the family's prosperity, nor the instinct for further property opportunities. He was now looking at land further east, close to the Oberon district, in the Kanimbla Valley just below the Blue Mountains. The place was spectacular, with the rugged, yellow-orange cliffs rising away towards Mount Victoria, and Edmund was looking to acquire most of it. It would be a holding larger than any of those currently in the family, even combining 'Apsley' and 'Pomona'. So she was astounded when, half way through the year, he told her that he wished a large part of what he called 'Kanimbla' to be in *her* name.

'You've always been keen on property,' he said plainly. 'It's as well you have something to your name, not just the boys.' He didn't say something to 'fall back on' but she suspected he meant it, as her difficulties with Ned were known in the family. As were, more obscurely, Edmund's own difficulties: when Millicent voiced her doubts about Mother's interest in moving from the Wellington area, her father looked down, shook his head slowly, and said 'I don't think she will be.' She did not care to ask how he would manage.

Thus it was that in September, 1919, deeds to just under a breathtaking five thousand acres of the Kanimbla Valley were transferred to her name<sup>6</sup> – as was a considerable acreage to her younger sister, Olive, she learned. This was for safekeeping in the family, it was clear, though she presumed there might be tax advantages. Her father also had in mind 'your young men', and, if not George, John at least would go up, work on and learn the running of the place.

It was only some time later the realisation came to Millicent that a property in her name would not be part of any divorce settlement, should her mother or father ever have contemplated such a possibility.

Her daily life brought its own, similar realisations, though no answers ever seemed given fully. Maybe this was why she found herself now reading more than ever, her interest spilling out into new areas. Attending the Japanese lectures had opened a door to an infinitely vaster world beyond the literary works she had grown up with. Having liked to make up notebooks of favourite quotations and poems, she began to keep a more detailed record of her reading which became, in itself, a source of satisfaction as well as a reference for the new ideas and inspirations that crowded in. This was despite not returning to the lectures after the Lent term, much to the disappointment of Mr Murdoch, lately elevated to Professor of Oriental Studies, and even Mr Koide, the reader in Japanese and assistant with their language study, who concurred that she had been an 'excellent student'.<sup>7</sup>

Her withdrawal might have had something to do with seeing Mr Barnum's production of *The Willow Tree* at the Criterion, a version of the Pygmalion story from a Japanese perspective<sup>8</sup> that she found not only touching but unexpectedly

confronting: the play's theme of love with its modern ending drifted dangerously close to her own, hidden feelings. As likely, though, was the desire simply to pass through other doors, peek into the chambers beyond and open other 'books', and there was only so much time for it all. What was this hunger for stimulation, this need for new conquests? Were the qualities she saw in George really her own? Or was it the mood of the time, affected by the war, and the losses it brought? There must, surely, be some compensation for these. Was this why she was, at forty, dissatisfied and discontented, for all that she did have. Would she ever be satisfied?

George passed his first year exams;<sup>9</sup> Jack, on the other hand, did not distinguish himself in the Leaving. Not that George was known as a scholarly type but Jack never considered he would be going to university. Instead, in preparation for going on the land, with the expectation of establishing himself at 'Kanimbla' in due course, he would go to Hawkesbury Agricultural College at Richmond. Both he and George spent time during the summer at 'Pomona', the latter with somewhat less enthusiasm except for the opportunity of learning to drive without the distractions of traffic – Millicent groaned inwardly at the thought of George being in charge of a car. Nevertheless, Bowen missed them and so did she, the house being strangely quiet until they returned, late in January, looking sunburnt, healthy and ... more like men.

But they were together relatively briefly. George went back to his second year of engineering, choosing now to go into Mechanical and Electrical.<sup>10</sup> His days were longer, however, and when he returned it would often be late; sometimes, to her irritation (because he would usually forget to phone) he stayed in town with friends. When he did come home by himself he usually just wanted food and had little to say into the bargain.

Jack, on the other hand, was only home for a weekend once, perhaps twice, a month during the term, as it was compulsory for all students to 'live in' at Hawkesbury and to work on the farm one weekend in three.<sup>11</sup> She found herself missing him particularly. He was the more warm, jovial and considerate, and the

older he got the closer she felt and the more they seemed to have in common, often sitting up late talking about agricultural techniques and crops or comparing notes on books they were reading. She now had a pet name, 'Itz' – no longer 'mother', or 'mum' but a name born from the more companionable relationship they now enjoyed.

It was also a boost to have someone else become interested and provide new knowledge about the garden. 'Grenier' soon had large and varied crops of vegetables and, in the spirit of science that Jack began to bring to the project, she noted down the plantings, soil preparation and so forth: cow manure and composted leaf mould applied at this time, green beans planted, peas, etc. The corn crops, especially, thrived the next year, growing taller than herself; Jack proudly took a photograph of her and Bowen standing in front of the waving stalks with the box camera he'd received for Christmas. He'd become a keen amateur photographer, often pointing out pictures and portraits he liked in the newspapers and magazines, and, when at home one weekend, suggested she should have her portrait done.

'You should go to May and Mina Moore in the city,' he enthused.

'The ones who've done the actors and musicians?' she asked.

'That's Mina Moore. She's based in Melbourne. But their style is modern; it's not fussy. You'd approve the way they do it.' Millicent agreed: the style pioneered by the Moore sisters was close-up, mostly just head and face.

They made an appointment and Jack came with her to the King Street studio. They liked May Moore, in her loose, flowing skirts; she was handsome and witty.<sup>12</sup> She did her best to put Millicent at ease, joking about the differences in their height – May being even taller than Jack – but her subject did not quite relax.

The result, when they saw it, had a plain warmth but was a little serious.<sup>13</sup> 'Well, I like it,' said Jack. Millicent doubted she ought to have allowed May to loose her hair, but her son placed the photo prominently on a shelf.

Millicent had imagined 'Grenier' as a refuge for the family though, increasingly, it was just herself, Ned and Bowen. It certainly had a more peaceful rural aspect than Manly, and more space; visitors had somewhere inviting to come to, and the tennis court was well used. Among those who did use it were friends George began to bring from university, such as 'Bob' Charley, whose father, coincidentally, had a large estate at Richmond as well as connections to Hawkesbury College – Jack knew of them but it was actually through George that Bob first became a friend of the family.<sup>14</sup> This led to other meetings, such as with the Robson-Scotts and their daughter Lillias, a vivacious young woman who, at 17, had conspired to go to France as a nurse and drive ambulances during the war. An active tennis player always keen to make up doubles partnerships, she thought it odd that Ned never seemed to come out and join them, preferring to stay in his study.<sup>15</sup>

'That's Dad,' said Jack. 'He feels a bit stiff and slow, I guess. Itz's the active one.' Lillias could only agree, as Millicent not only played tennis but was becoming a keen golfer. She was almost a regular at the Killara Club, finding the game a good mix of the social and the physical. She began to watch her score, enjoying the improvement in her game that was reflected in her handicap. She looked forward to getting George and Jack on the course when she could, and to teaching Bowen. Ned, however, could not be persuaded, though this was not a surprise: 'I won't be bossed around the course too,' was his only comment on the matter to Jack.

Then, one Sunday after a weekend with Bob out at Richmond, George came home bursting with excitement: 'I've been flying!' he announced. 'I've flown!'

'In an aeroplane? When? Where?' he was quizzed.

'With a friend of Bob's who runs a flying business and owns a hangar on the aerodrome at Richmond.'

'What was it like?' Bowen wanted to know.

'The air rushes past, you lift off the ground and suddenly you can lean over and see everything below you. It's magnificent!' He described how they had

flown over Richmond and the farms in the area, and seen the Hawkesbury snake away into the distance. 'It's totally different seeing things from the air: I'm going up again!'

Not many weeks later a motor came up the driveway with George in the passenger seat and a tall young man at the wheel. Handsome and charming, Edgar Percival was a couple of years older than George and had gained his 'wings' towards the end of the war.<sup>16</sup> It was clear they shared a similar enthusiasm for things mechanical, as well as being possessed of the same zest for activity: as they got to know each other, they spent much of their spare time together 'rushing around', as Ned put it. Jack had also met Edgar, whose family farmed 'Clarendon' near Richmond, and, in due course, was taken for a flight himself.

'Itz, you have to do it,' he said.

But she didn't seem to get around to it. Not just then. Her sons were caught up in the spaciousness of life and its opportunities, and maybe they should have it to themselves.

However their increasing absences in these pursuits left silences and spaces which were left unfilled and, when Bowen started at Sydney Grammar in 1922, it stared Millicent in the face even more strongly.<sup>17</sup> At first, she busied herself in the way she had been accustomed, subscribing to the Alliance Française<sup>18</sup> to brush up her French and applying herself in a disciplined way to the language. However, the people in the group didn't enthuse or interest her. She found them staid or too old for the most part, and perhaps that was her fear: in them she saw the endlessness of older age, its hopeless docility, and shuddered. She did not feel it in herself and did not want to, though she felt it reaching for Ned. Or was he reaching for it? This brought her back to the sense that they both seemed burdened by the other. If marriage offered nothing else, she considered, it ought to offer companionship and a way to maintain life's zest. But the warnings she'd been given before marrying Ned, and which she'd sought to circumvent for more than two decades, now came to a further fruition. He was wearying of his job, having been in it nearly forty years, and began to talk occasionally about his

pension. Looking at him across the table, Millicent recoiled guiltily at the thought of his presence in the home by day as well as by night. His antagonism to her suggested the same, and though this made her feel less guilty, all her notions of love and marriage were brought up short. She felt challenged by the ignobility of her own sentiments.

New light, however, came to be shed on these feelings from an unexpected quarter. Informal meetings with other students she'd met at the University had led to discussions touching on topics far removed from Japanese, such as the psycho-analysis of Professor Freud and another doctor, Carl Jung of Zurich. She had lately been able to borrow the latter's *Psychology of the Unconscious*, and found herself writing out long sections.<sup>19</sup> In it were arguments about the power of the unconscious that challenged verities she herself had long held. For instance, the repressing of painful experiences could lead to complete suppression, which corresponded to a strong self control. 'Unfortunately,' the doctor asserted, 'self control has limits which are only too narrowly drawn.' Although calm might be maintained at the critical moment, the suppressed effect comes to the surface afterwards, seldom directly, but ordinarily in the form of a displacement to another object or person, meaning that the person would turn 'his whole anger loose upon his wife or his subordinates.'

This was something Millicent had certainly experienced, and it was illuminating to find explanations for some of what she considered her own failings. So much was below the tip of the unconscious iceberg, so much motivation invisible. If nothing else it prompted some feelings of sympathy towards Ned, where there had been few remaining, as she could now imagine reasons for some of his less rational reactions. And, certainly, some of her own ... but did that change anything? She determined to appraise him of these thoughts. Perhaps they might find a way back.

But when she did, the result was a catastrophic failure – which, in hindsight, bore out the doctor's insights. Having persuaded him to sit down and listen as she read some sections of Jung aloud, he silently became more and more agitated. When she finished and speculated that some of the doctor's thoughts could be applied to themselves, he could contain himself no longer, furious that

she could find still further ways to ridicule him. It was she who was tricked, deceiving herself about her own intelligence and coming up with convenient and manipulative conclusions. The tirade only ended when Jack, who happened to be home, came in, white-faced, and said stoutly: 'Steady on, Dad!'

All down the section of cars  
is it ever to be thus - our lives be  
set so far apart we cannot hear  
each others voice - oh this wanton  
to aim!

20

After this, it seemed there was no way back. She now knew there would definitely be a separation, and though her father's impending move to 'Kanimbla' seemed rather different, it had enough in common that she felt she could say little about *his* arrangements. It had been not much discussed until Falkner told her that mother would stay at 'Pomona'. 'But Dad will get on all right,' he added: 'Miss Allen will be keeping house for him.' There was a definite distaste in her brother's words but acceptance as well. Neither of them felt able to tell Father what he should do.

Might it even be preferable for Mother this way? Millicent was unsure, but knew her parents' situation had been like Ned's and her own for many years now. She had also been reading about neuroses and hysteria in the Introduction to Jung's *Psychoanalysis and Analytic Psychology*<sup>21</sup>, and it dawned on her that her mother's state could hardly be more difficult than it had already been. All the visits to the stores, the unopened goods she had wrapped but did not pay for and which filled areas of the house<sup>22</sup> ... no doubt it was a neurosis of the kind Professor Freud described and, no doubt, occasioned by feelings Georgiana found too painful to recognise, let alone discuss. Thus suppressed, the feelings were displaced and came out in the 'stealing' and hoarding behaviour. Though it

really wasn't ordinary stealing at all – especially as her father always paid the store – the term kleptomania had an unpleasant sound. She felt sorry for her mother even while feeling critical she'd not been able to speak openly and directly. Yet, of course, it was the unspeakable, never to be discussed.

Except, in her case, she was determined it would be discussed, no matter the twinges of guilt that made her feel, both ashamedly and unashamedly, in her father's camp.

But the confrontation with Ned, when it came, surprised her.

She had been dreading sitting down and having the 'talk' as much as she dreaded each day it was not resolved. It was up to her to choose the occasion and the moment, because Ned would not. She also thought he would fight her every step of the way, or oppose her out of pride. But he didn't. When she sat down in the small corner chair near his armchair after Bowen had gone to bed, her manner had already given her away: she fiddled with the long necklace, fingering the chain, steeling herself. He looked up from his book, over his spectacles, down, then up again. He placed a card in his book and closed it with only a soft snap.

'I can't go on like this, Ned' she finally said. 'We can't go on. It's no good for anyone.' He said nothing, so she plunged in and told him they should live separately. Not divorce, for the boys' sake, but live in separate dwellings and go in their own directions. Bowen should come with her, naturally, as he was still at school, though she would also seek to provide accommodation for George and Jack while they needed it.

Such a proposal, out in the open could not be ignored. In any event, he replied with a single word. 'When?'

She thought not immediately. They would need time, and the boys would need time. And there would need to be some agreement about finances and arrangements decided. He looked at her keenly, and said: 'You may have the house but not a penny of my salary.' He then re-opened his book.

It was all they said but a marker had been placed, an ending and a new beginning signalled. From then, the mood of 'Grenier' shifted. It felt vacant, empty of something, as if they were already absent, because, certainly, it would have to be sold and they would have to leave.

While his response felt a little ungenerous – George and Jack thought it spiteful – Millicent determined not to argue for more. Was it fair? She didn't know. She didn't know anyone in her situation, at least anyone prepared to take the step she had. She thought, though, that Ned would support the boys at university and continue to pay Bowen's fees at Sydney Grammar. That was something, but responsibility for her own and their living expenses and maintenance would fall to her from the time they parted or sold 'Grenier'. It was a gruelling business, but no less gruelling than the many years she had endured his distance, and what had been, for the most part, quietly-attempted domination.

It did, on the other hand, prompt Ned to press for the promotion that had really been due to him for so many years and which she had given up ever seeing him get. However, the opportunity that had seemed so open to him after returning from their European trip was now apparently closed, despite the length of his service.<sup>23</sup> The matter disrupted his work, and he returned home irritable and tense and did not hide his feelings. Millicent saw it as another example of the 'displacement' Dr Jung had written about, and it did no more than strain her frayed sympathies. She no longer cared whether he got the promotion after all this time, but simply wished to avoid the unpleasantness which came her way. Her only suggestion was to 'find someone who will press your case for you, someone higher up', and it was one she had repeated many times. It was somewhat ruefully, then, that she heard that, thanks to a friend of Ned's in the Breadalbane district with some influence, the Member for Eden-Monaro, Austin Chapman, would follow the matter up on his behalf.

Whether through Mr Chapman's intervention or more the natural progress of his case within the Department, they heard the result in August: Ned was promoted to Assistant Manager, 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, at the Telegraph Branch. While maybe

not the elevation he might earlier have hoped for, it was better than 'Supervisor, 3<sup>rd</sup> Class' and brought his salary up to £420 plus £50 per annum living allowance.<sup>24</sup> It nettled Millicent that it had happened now, when she herself would not benefit from all the support she'd given him over the years, but there was nothing to do but be civil and offer congratulations.

Ironically, it held up their separation. Ned decided that he would stay a little longer in the job, so as to benefit from the new salary level.<sup>25</sup> This was excruciating to Millicent because it probably meant putting up with things for at least another year before there would be change. But rather than stew over it, she turned again to activity, as a distraction as well as an outlet. At home she had already set herself to widen her reading, discovering stimulation in literature and ideas from many directions. Outside the home, though, the public arena beckoned.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> 'Closer observation'. Notes from MMB 'Psychology – Extracts' (black notebook, pages unnumbered).

<sup>2</sup> 'MMB personal note 3', c. 1917-20. 4 pages, memo paper.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> University of Sydney, *Calendar* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1919), 422.

<sup>6</sup> Instrument no. 474841, register 2973, book 33. NSW Government Land and Property Information.

<sup>7</sup> Millicent Jones, 'Millicent Bryant, Australia's first woman aviator', in *Women in Aviation* (Canberra, ACT: Royal Aeronautical Society [Australian Division - Canberra Branch], 1975), 1

<sup>8</sup> 'Music And Drama', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 January 1918, 8.

<sup>9</sup> University of Sydney, *Calendar* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1920), 497.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 624.

<sup>11</sup> John R. H. Bryant, pers. conversation, 5 January 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Hall, 'Moore, Minnie Louise (Mina) (1882-1957)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* [online edition], National Centre of Biography, Australian National University. <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100724b.htm> Accessed 7 January 2011.

<sup>13</sup> 'MMB portrait photograph' signed 'May and Mina Moore', n.d.

<sup>14</sup> Dr Jim Charley, pers. conversation, 10 January 2011.

<sup>15</sup> MEJ, pers. conversation, 2 March 2009.

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- <sup>16</sup> Service Record of Edgar Wikner Percival, Series no. A9300, control symbol: Percival E. W. National Archives of Australia.
- <sup>17</sup> Sydney Grammar School Enrolment Register (Libre Vermell) Vol. 2, 164.
- <sup>18</sup> 'Alliance Française subscription receipt 1922'.
- <sup>19</sup> 'Psychology – Extracts' (black notebook, pages unnumbered), n.d.
- <sup>20</sup> 'Pain', writing fragment, n.d.
- <sup>21</sup> 'Psychology – Extracts' (black notebook, pages unnumbered), n.d.
- <sup>22</sup> Meadley, *Harvey Family History*. Chapter: 'The Family of Edmund George Harvey and Georgiana Sarah Bartlett', 2.
- <sup>23</sup> E. Young, Deputy Postmaster-General, to E. J. Bryant, November 1911.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Official memo (ref: SB'22/1266)' from E. Young, Deputy Postmaster-General, to Mr E. J. Bryant, 5 September 1922.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Memorandum, Deputy Postmaster-General' (signature unclear) to Mr E. J. Bryant, 23 November 1923.



more familiar English sensibility through his stories of women trapped in unhappy marriages.

Perish the thought, Millicent muttered to herself, but was confronted by a fear that the values and beliefs she'd come to treasure over the years, and in which she found much inspiration, might shrivel under the same light. Or had the war achieved that? It had certainly made the sentiments of some literary works she still enjoyed now seem more naïve – although Ned had years before disparaged her affection for Longfellow, Thomas Aldritch and, especially, the less worthy Eric Mackay,<sup>3</sup> whom he labelled 'a scoundrel'. Of course Ned could also be too serious and judgmental, and she thought it sad he couldn't enjoy a good ballad or verse such as Roderic Quinn's 'Camp within the West', which always brought a tear to her eye. Instead, he had to point out the line early in Chesterton's play, *Magic*, where the doctor says 'I've no use for the Celtic twilight myself. It has a tendency to get on the chest.'<sup>4</sup>

While she could also appreciate Chesterton,<sup>5</sup> Ned's puncturing of her own pleasure was unnecessary. It smelled of 'war weariness' and the fashionable scepticism that seemed often to go with it, an attitude which was too ready to dismiss qualities of spirit one could believe in. Ned might want to denigrate much of what he saw, but this didn't help his sons, who had to go out into the world and make something of it. Millicent agreed with him that literature could make the world wiser and more beautiful; it could, though, also make it lighter and more bearable.

In fact, reading more and more widely came to reassure her that Longfellow or Quinn had something to contribute in addition to Ibsen and Chesterton, so she determined to share as wide a variety as she could with the boys – or with Jack and Bowen at least, George mostly being in too much of a hurry. This was aided by reading aloud and, especially when it came to plays, this became a pleasure they started to enjoy regularly, exploring drama ranging from A. A. Milne to Molière and Eduardo Marquina, as well as the work of writers from J. M. Barrie to Tolstoy.<sup>6</sup>

But while everyone liked a story, they had, inexplicably, little more patience than Ned when Millicent turned to psychology, so she wrote down, on her own

account, quotations at length that she felt explained some human tendency or motivation. But neither did the others get as interested as she in some matter of public interest or other reported in the newspaper, even though, for Millicent, attending to such matters was each citizen's serious responsibility. Perhaps they took their cue from Ned, who had come to be scathing of anyone in politics.

'But how can our society function without them?' she challenged him one night. 'We'd have no organisation and society wouldn't work.'

'That it works now is a miracle of chance,' Ned replied.

Millicent could not hold such a passive view. She saw it as an evasion of responsibility, and those who genuinely bore this burden were worthy of far more admiration and support than they often got. And, as far as New South Wales public life was concerned, there were few whom Millicent admired as much as Thomas Rainsford Bavin.

Now the State Member for Ryde and Attorney-General in the coalition government of Sir George Fuller, Mr Bavin appeared to be someone who was genuinely trying for the good of the country, and not merely his own interests or those of his party. Formerly a Nationalist, he had found himself strongly against his own government and had resigned from the party before joining the Progressives.<sup>7</sup> Then, having supported compulsory service for those without domestic responsibilities, and been a member of the Universal Service League, he'd put principle into practice and served with the Royal Australian Naval Brigade as a Lieutenant-Commander, doing part-time intelligence work despite being refused service in the regular forces because of a recurrent illness. This, alone, placed him on the side of right as far as Millicent was concerned and, though she'd met few politicians, this one seemed not only to reflect many of her own views but to be a decent human being.

Mr Bavin lived in Chatswood but she'd only met him for the first time when he was beginning the campaign to be elected for the Progressives in 1920. She found him handsome in a sober kind of way, and somewhat reserved, as well as intelligent, cultured and forceful enough to get things done; an ideal man, in her mind, to lead the state if he ever had the opportunity. While no longer in his

electorate since moving to Pymble, she'd offered him campaign help; he was unable to accept this, but had written expressing his thanks. Considering his chances of success, he added that the 'unwieldy' nature of the Ryde electorate made it 'quite impossible to form any accurate estimate of probabilities'.<sup>8</sup>

He'd won then by a narrow margin. When Millicent offered again in 1922, this time he was grateful to accept. Despite late February heat, she tirelessly knocked on doors, wrote letters and corrected the misinformed, while also making sure that the electors knew of Mr Bavin's virtues. Her tenacity was rewarded on election day and Mr Bavin wrote to her on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1922, in his own hand.

My dear Mrs Bryant

I know you don't want to be assured of any more of my gratitude for all the help you gave me. But you must put up with just one more expression of it. You really were a brick to work for me like you did. I wish I deserved it better. This is not as you may think, the regular polite humility of a candidate. I really do feel sufficiently doubtful about myself to make me wonder why people should work so hard and so unselfishly as you did to put me in. Anyhow I'm really very grateful indeed.<sup>9</sup>

For Millicent the result was highly satisfying, particularly with Mr Bavin returning to the post of Attorney-General, which he had initially held only for a matter of hours during the coalition's failed attempt to form government prior to the election. A renewed sense of purpose flowed into her life, sweeping over the more difficult and arid times at 'Grenier' like a high tide. She had followed Mr Bavin's progress for several years, but now made it something of a discipline to cut out and collect the more prominent newspaper reports to keep herself well informed. She found it an exciting time to watch from the sidelines; the Act to build a bridge over the Harbour from Milsons Point to Dawes Point was passed in November,<sup>10</sup> and the Ministry started to get to grips with the cost of state schooling, creating controversy with a plan to reintroduce fees for high schooling past the Intermediate.

But an era of schooling of a more personal kind was completed that year, with Jack coming to the end of three productive years at Hawkesbury. Though Bowen was still at Sydney Grammar, she began to see an end to the time the boys would be with her. It was strange to think of. And, no longer counting on Ned, would

there be another partner in life? *He* seemed more distant now as the years passed, and the letters she collected at the GPO irregular. If her own wistfulness suggested something about this she chose not to notice.

Jack was unaware of such undercurrents but others were to give him a shock, one of the largest in his life thus far. The expectation that he would go up to 'Kanimbla', learn its management and eventually take over from his grandfather had been plain though unspoken since Edmund had moved there two years before. He'd thus only ever stayed there briefly; most of his jackarooing for Edmund, to that point, had been with Uncle Mac on 'Pomona' or 'Apsley'.

When Millicent spoke to her father about the arrangement just before Christmas, 1922, there was a degree of vagueness she thought odd from Edmund, but which gave no cause to change their expectations. So Jack took the train up in January, getting off at Mount Victoria rather than continuing to the more familiar stop further on at Wellington. Then, after barely three weeks, he arrived back with all of his kit and a look of confusion and disappointment.

'Grandad is fine, happy to see me there but ... well, it's not what it seemed it was going to be.'

'What do you mean?' Millicent asked.

'Grandpa, well ... it's Miss Allen. I'd didn't realise, but she's around Grandpa like ... like she's ...'

'Dear boy, I'm afraid she is.'

'... in charge of his life. In charge of the place. And wanting me not to be there. I expected Grandpa to make me stay, but he didn't. So I didn't feel I could.'

The title deeds in her name made no difference to the situation. Hurt and downhearted at the development Jack may have been, but he didn't sit around. After a few weeks and some enquiries from his Hawkesbury contacts, he went back to Richmond to cart cabbages to market for Phillip Charley and to ponder his next move.

Though little more was said about it, Millicent felt this disappointment keenly. It was harder when it was against one of your children, not just yourself, and it was wounding when such a setback came from one's own family. At a time when things seemed suddenly more uncertain than they ever had been, Millicent responded by busying herself with activity, as if this itself would alleviate the hurt and the anxiety it fed. Her attendance at the Killara Club and her golf game both improved markedly as a result, and she made an effort to do more to support the raising of funds for Sydney Grammar School. But what carried her out of home and into the public sphere, however, was a phone call.

'It's a Mrs Earle Page. For you.' Bowen said.

'Mrs Bryant?' said the voice. 'It's Ethel Page here. I'm calling to see if you might be interested in helping to form a new political party.'

It was fairly clear that Mr Bavin must have been the route by which Mrs Page, the wife of the Deputy Prime Minister, had come by to call Millicent. Ethel Page was an energetic and enthusiastic supporter not only of her husband, but also of country and women's issues and organisations. Since returning to live in Sydney she had joined the Feminist Club, the Lyceum Club and the National Council for Women, as well as being active in the Red Cross and the Country Womens' Association.<sup>11</sup> Although her husband had helped to form the Australian Country Party in Federal Parliament, and had led it since 1921, it was still known as the Progressive Party in New South Wales. Mrs Page explained her feeling that women needed their own avenue to support and advise the Party and there would be a meeting of those interested around Easter to consider the matter and take appropriate action. Would she be interested to attend?<sup>12</sup>

Within a few months the Women's Country Party had been formed and Millicent was elected to the new Party's Central Executive, along with Mrs Earle Page, who was President, Mrs Hazlett, Mrs Osbourne England, Mrs Otway Falkiner, Mrs MacArthur Onslow and a number of others.<sup>13</sup> When they met they discussed advice they thought the Party needed and ways of supporting the re-election of individual members. As well, there was occasionally a forum on some

pressing subject, perhaps inspired by a guest speaker, and it was an intelligent and engaged meeting.

Millicent was particularly inspired by the speech of a noted woman 'aurist' and doctor who, after speaking passionately on the compulsory education of 'deaf mutes' urged 'my fellow country women to form branches and take up some of these measures. ... Let us women want a reform or beneficial legislation of any kind and it is ours for the asking,' she said.<sup>14</sup> Her address was applauded, and though there were those who foresaw larger difficulties, for Millicent there was profound and fervent agreement. It was time to be forthright and for women to take such a role in civic life! So enthusiastic did she wax on this point that she found herself invited to contribute to a lunch hour gathering of young people with the intention of inspiring them and educating the young women about what roles they could now play. This was both daunting and exciting. She had rarely spoken formally but this was 'doing her bit' and an opportunity to speak up for ideals that were close to her heart.

She presented herself one hot afternoon to what could definitely have been both a larger and more attentive group of young people. However, she was determined not to let the moment slip. Pointing her audience to Sir James Barrie's stirring Rectorial address on courage to the Red Gowns of St Andrews University the previous year, and to 'In your hands, Australians' by Captain Bean, she spoke of the joyful service of trying to attain an ideal.'

'I think the world is ripe as not perhaps often before for youth to try its wings. The Great War has cleared, ready to your hand, whole tracts of human superstition and convention. It is for you to till those vacant fields, build upon the sites of those demolished superstitions. It's not easy devil-may-care work – it wants vision and enthusiasm – you have both if only you look into your very souls. ...

'Worldly wisdom is very well and necessary as an adjunct to your visions ... you will have to employ its tools to work in the world, of course, and the older generation will offer it you in armfuls, you will find. Don't refuse – take it, sift it and choose what serves your purpose. In all this I would not have you feel, or think, that many who seem old in years have not vision too – all the really great

have – that is the mark of their greatness. The books of poems and pictures that live – they are the very essence of Beauty and Truth.

‘Nothing comes without hard seeking so you mustn’t mind if avenues for your ideals do not always seem at hand. They are to be found for the seeking, but don’t lose faith in yourselves, thoughtful faith I mean, and remember the world wants you dreadfully, it is so sick in part because it lost the youth of last decade in that terrible struggle so lately past. You must therefore hurry into the breach. The one great avenue of work is to crystallise your visions in the governing of your country, the welfare of the state is the welfare of its citizens; the two cannot be separated and it is the highest duty of everyone born to contribute what of “light” he holds for the governing of his land.

‘Grab the cloak of your enthusiasm around you and plunge in – but always have before you from the first the ideal of serving mankind – it is the highest joy and satisfaction; and keen, unremitting interest in your civic and state governments, your avenues for most effective service in general, because wise community government removes many of the hardships that seem to beset us and call for our energies and sympathies. Au revoir.’<sup>15</sup>

She had warmed to her subject and finished with this small flourish. The result was polite applause but she sensed an air of indifference as well. Even though the two earnest young women of her acquaintance who had introduced her were gushing in their appreciation, there were no other questions or responses. Perhaps the war had already provided them with as much exhortation to self-sacrifice and service as they were prepared to swallow. This thought prompted a tinge of disappointment, but then, immediately, a renewed determination to speak up for such ideals as the world so sorely needed them replenished. Yet, she remembered a note she’d written to herself not long before: ‘The public cannot become ripe for a new ideal or form until they have been nourished upon examples of its operation – its failure – its success – had concretely set before them.’<sup>16</sup> Inspiration and pragmatism. Each needed the other, she must remember again.

Such things certainly vexed Mr Bavin at times, his government passing the Monopolies Act on one hand but trying to reform the arbitration system, to the

considerable disquiet of public servants, on the other. His health had also fluctuated, and though she felt guilty asking him to support the Grammar School fete next Easter he replied, just before Christmas, saying 'I need not tell you if there is anyone whom I should like to help it is yourself. There is no earthly need to feel a thief' – even though, as he put it, 'I am so hard up just now as a result of my political adventure.'<sup>17</sup>

The cheque, as promised, duly appeared the following March. That it came without the need for a reminder made Millicent aware of how keeping promises, one's word and the ideals of service were values the world seemed to be floundering to grasp since the war. Or was it just in her world?

She had a sense of it crumbling, what with the door to a life on the land being closed to her son by her own family. And the promises she herself had made at her marriage would be dishonoured within twelve months, despite the absolute necessity of doing so. What's more, Ned, though not ready for retirement, seemed in less than the best health; he had less energy than he used to, and even moderate efforts seemed a strain. She did not know how to feel, other than guilty and justified at the same time, and there were nights she struggled not to be overwhelmed by realities that were hard to accept as being her own.

The forthcoming sale of the house – she would need the money to live on and create some kind of livelihood – represented the failure of the dream she had always known and accepted. The dream everyone supposedly accepted. It now lay in pieces despite her efforts; Ned's too, she had to admit. It was a sad legacy and an embarrassment for the boys, even though they seemed accepting and even unconcerned. That was partly because they were wrapped up in their own different lives, which would take them away from her in due course. Though Bowen was still happily involved in school life, George was about to finish his engineering degree and Jack was bringing to fruition an idea to go to England to see if agencies for agricultural machinery could be developed into an import business. He would probably go in a matter of months, and this loomed as a kind of loss which might be especially hard.

Yet there was one more loss, as wrenching and searing as a fishhook being pulled through flesh. While she could comprehend its bald fact, the possibility had been put from her mind for so long that it did not seem real.

*He* would be marrying. The news had come in a letter both wistful and decisive. They had dreamed together so long it had become, for him, a dream of a dream. There was something real now, someone real to hold and commit his life to. It had not been so for her: the dream had nourished and sustained in its richness her ideals and inner life, colouring all her experience. It suddenly seemed bitter irony that she was parting from Ned now and, small though the opportunity might have been ... it maybe *could* have been.

Beside her was the little book in which she had been recording memorable passages from her reading over the last few years. She picked it up and opened it to a quote from 'The Joy of Living,' a play by Sudermann that Edith Wharton had translated.<sup>18</sup> Tears filled her eyes as she re-read the words Beata had written to her lover, Richard:

I don't want to sleep, dearest. The night is too bright and my happiness too great. The moonlight lies on Likowa, and already the dawn shows red through the network of elms. The blood beats like a hammer in my temples – I scarcely know how I am going to bear the riches of my new life. Oh, how I pray God to let me live it out beside you – not as your wife, that would be too wild a dream! – but as an unseen influence at your side, faint as the moonlight which rests upon your sleep, or as the first glow of dawn that wakes you to new endeavour.

Some time later the door opened. There was a pause, then she felt Jack's hand on her shoulder. For once, she had been unable to prevent the tears, but, after a while, his comforting presence stemmed them. While he could not understand this, he knew of her other losses. He gave her a handkerchief and spoke soothingly, something she could not remember needing since being a girl but which she was grateful for in that moment.

It was some solace. And the act of releasing what she was feeling helped her remember – with one exception – that most of her concerns were not only in the

future but might be exaggerated in her mind. With that one exception they were not happening yet, so she still had 'tomorrow' to get up and get on with things.

But for the exception there was no solace. Something had not permitted her to conceive of such a possibility. She had held their companionship within and allowed that love to shine into everything she'd contemplated and strived for in the last fourteen years. Now, it was like a candle snuffed, the smoke from the wick winding upwards in the darkened, still air of her heart. Though it dwelled in no mere room, a door had to be closed. Slowly, over months – though she could not have said how long it was – she pulled it closed until, after one long, sleepless night in high summer, it was shut. Afterwards, Millicent knew she was not the same, and did not want to be. No longer could she bear to think of *him*. Yet something did remain, and the ideals and thoughts nurtured between them in that time came forward of their own volition.

Her activity in the Women's Country Party was a case in point. She canvassed. She discussed. She helped organise, wrote minutes and letters. She made cakes. And, as well as speaking up, she drew herself up and spoke. This was especially so if there was a chance to enthuse young people, to draw them towards the more 'corporate' life of the community: its parliament and politics. An unexpected result was that, at the end of January, 1925, a letter arrived from the Women's Country Party telling of a resolution, unanimously passed by the Executive, that she be elected a Life Member 'in consideration of the splendid work' she had accomplished.<sup>19</sup>

Millicent was still inclined to be dismissive about such things but, as the state election began to loom, she became even more energised, especially when talking to other women or thrashing out tactics with her peers in the party. It was as though the ideal still shone but was not fixed in some particular place or person. Rather, it was in *all* people, as electors, and the need was to prod them into making the effort of uncovering this inspiration and acting on it. She tried to sketch out the practical implications of this and, at meetings, expand on them, especially when it came to the participation of women in the political process.<sup>20</sup>

However, it was clear after the election, held on Saturday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, that Millicent's assumptions about the state of the electorate were justified. The mass of people were less concerned with getting involved than with having Lang and Co. look after them, though it had to be conceded that re-introducing the 48-hour week was not likely to appeal to many a working man.

Though Mr Bavin had himself been re-elected, the campaign had left her bone weary and her disappointment at the result led to a despondency about the state of things. Without the activity of the campaign to occupy her, moreover, she was left to contemplate her circumstances without distraction, including the fact that Ned had found comfortable rooms in a boarding house in Manly. He took many books, though little furniture, with him. The property being in her name there had been little to discuss, as there had been no desire on either part for formal proceedings. It was just finished. She stood on the porch and watched him get into a car and be driven down the driveway for the last time. There was an end, after twenty-five years, and she sat on the balustrade and stared into the garden and over the empty driveway.

The reverie lasted until Jack interrupted it. Sitting down, he gave her a jovial hug and said: 'Itz, we're going for a drive.'

'Where to, darling?' she was able to ask.

'You'll see soon enough. But bring your coat.'

The afternoon wasn't cold, however. It was sunny and pleasant as they headed west, eventually passing market gardens as they drew near to Richmond. She wondered if they were going to the river, but Jack continued towards Windsor, then pulled up by some big sheds at the edge of a large, open field that gave way to river flats and more gardens on its northern side.

Just as he stopped and turned off the motor, Millicent saw Edgar appear from one of the sheds. He waved and smiled, then went inside again.

They got out of the car and, there being more of a breeze, Jack helped her on with her coat. As he did, something began emerging from the front side of the shed: a flying machine, with several men holding it by the wings and rolling it

forward. Edgar came out again, this time in a coat and with a leather helmet and goggles on his head. He was carrying another cap and spinning a second set of goggles by the strap with his free hand. Jack looked at Millicent and raised his eyebrows; she could see he was doing his best not to smile.

‘Well, guess what. Edgar’s going to take you up, Itz. You’re going flying!’

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> ‘MMB reading diary’ (index book, brown hard cover, entitled ‘Where is it?’). Several pages from 1922 have been reproduced.
  - <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
  - <sup>3</sup> Quotations and some complete poems from these authors are recorded in MMB’s ‘notebook of poetry extracts’ (black, soft cover, pocket size).
  - <sup>4</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Magic* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1913). Accessed as an ebook [2006] through Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/19094> on 19 January 2011.
  - <sup>5</sup> ‘MMB reading diary’.
  - <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
  - <sup>7</sup> John McCarthy, ‘Bavin, Sir Thomas Rainsford (1874-1941)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* [online edition], National Centre of Biography, Australian National University. <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070213b.htm> Accessed 15 December 2010.
  - <sup>8</sup> T. R. Bavin to MMB, 17 March 1920.
  - <sup>9</sup> T. R. Bavin to MMB, 10 April (year not given – c.1920-22).
  - <sup>10</sup> ‘State Session’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 November 1922, 10.
  - <sup>11</sup> ‘Ethel Page’, <http://primeministers.naa.gov.au/primeministers/page/spouse.aspx> Accessed 29 January 2011.
  - <sup>12</sup> Paul Davey, *The Nationals: the Progressive, Country, and National Party in New South Wales 1919-2006* (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2006), 362. [http://books.google.com.au/books?id=fpyw6Oncs5QC&lpq=PA362&ots=mShfjFzi2A&dq="women's country party"&pg=PA362 - v=onepage&q="women's country party"&f=false](http://books.google.com.au/books?id=fpyw6Oncs5QC&lpq=PA362&ots=mShfjFzi2A&dq=) Accessed 27 January 2011.
  - <sup>13</sup> ‘The Women’s Country Party of N.S.W.’ This pamphlet was reprinted from *The Land*, c. 1923. Clipping in MMBLC.
  - <sup>14</sup> ‘Notes for a speech’, n.d.
  - <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Small changes to grammar and, in particular, punctuation, have been made to create a more readable text from Millicent’s notes. While a careful attempt has been made to avoid changes to the original substance or voice, in some degree these may have resulted.
  - <sup>16</sup> ‘MMB personal note 3’.
  - <sup>17</sup> T. R. Bavin to MMB, 22 December 1923.
  - <sup>18</sup> ‘MMB reading diary’.
  - <sup>19</sup> Hon. Secretary, The Women’s Country Party of N.S.W., to MMB, 30 January 1925.
  - <sup>20</sup> ‘MMB meeting notes’ (lined notepaper with red keylines, 9pp). n.d. As with the previous section, some changes have been made to create a more readable text.



## **FROM EARTH TO SKY**



NOVEMBER 5<sup>TH</sup>, 1927

Nowhere Bowen looked could he escape the faces: both sides of the road were lined with them. As the car rounded the corner behind the hearse, he could see people – dozens, scores of them – turning to watch as the cortege came in sight of the cemetery. The car slowed, almost to walking pace and people’s eyes searched for his. He faced rigidly ahead but was unable to stop himself glancing out to the side now and again, and all the eyes beside the car seemed to meet his, searching for his sorrow, his loss. His tragedy. He felt a sob rise up at this thought but bit his lip so hard that the metallic taste of blood came into his mouth, just like it had when he’d been kicked in the face during the rugby game a couple of months back. It steadied him a little; he also felt less alone now than that first night before Grandpa had arrived on the first train he could get from Mount Victoria. Edmund had put his arm around him, as he always had, not something Bowen ever remembered his own father doing since he was small. When they looked at each other, however, he could see a greyness of the skin and the strain behind the neatly-trimmed white beard. He looked as tired as Bowen felt and had, no doubt, slept just as little, but Bowen was thankful for his presence and that he himself could now be relieved of the burden, that weight of responsibility *for what had to happen next*. It was a different story when Grandma arrived later on from Wellington, with his uncles, Mac, Falkner and George. His uncles had awkwardly shaken his hand and asked how he was, but there was nothing much to say. Then Georgiana had taken him into her arms, and the tears had come from both of them. Yet the nature of her grief at the church had not been of an order even he could understand; some part of him was glad she wouldn’t be coming to the graveside.

Ahead, the hearse came to a halt. So did his car, and Grandpa said ‘Come on boy, we’ll walk now.’ He and Uncle Mac opened their doors and got out. Bowen followed and found himself in the middle of a crowd of hundreds of people as Edmund spoke briefly to the Rector of St Matthews, Reverend Ebbs; the latter and the other clergyman then walked around to the front of the hearse, their surplices billowing around them. To his horror, Grandpa said ‘We’ll walk beside

the hearse, Bowen. You walk in front, behind the Rector.’ There was no question of doing anything else so he took his place, trying to shut out the looks and the snatches of conversations ‘... her son’ ‘... only a boy ...’ ‘... how dreadful ...’ . He could do nothing about it.

He heard the hearse engine grind into life behind him. The churchmen moved forward, and he fell in behind their solemn pace. Ahead, the horizon seemed full of hats; people were everywhere. It seemed inconceivable there should be so many. They approached the thickest part of the crowd, and he saw with surprise that sailors were lining the path; their heads were bowed, and they leaned on their rifles.<sup>1</sup> Abruptly the two churchmen peeled off to the left and right and he found himself staring into a long, freshly-dug hole in the ground. He averted his gaze immediately, realising at the same moment his responsibility at the back of the hearse. He and his uncles eased the coffin out and carried it at waist high to the edge of the grave, where the funeral director’s assistants were waiting with the ropes. A modicum of quiet came over the crowd as Reverend Ebbs began the burial service but Bowen hardly noticed; he felt nauseous and light-headed at the same time, and tried to steady himself inconspicuously. Let me stand straight, he told himself. Straight. He tried to calm his breathing then noticed it was getting hard to hear what the Rector was saying. Something was clattering, noisily, brashly, persistently. He glanced around then realised the noise was coming from above or, at least, somewhat above. Then he saw them, coming towards him at the same time as the rest of the crowd did: aircraft. Moths. Five of them, and they were flying down directly towards the cemetery. He wondered what an earth they were doing when a murmur of appreciation swelled from the crowd and he understood.

It was for her. They were from the Aero Club, and had come across the harbour from Mascot – she would have flown in most of these very machines. A tingle of excitement came over him; he even saw a smile come over weary Edmund’s face. He found himself smiling too, picturing his mother in her flying coat and cap, her small face framed by the fur lining. And remembered her will to do the thing, ‘to try flying’, as she’d said very nonchalantly to the reporter.<sup>2</sup> Yet she was so much more full of energy, with the glow of passion that expressed itself when she took on a challenge, than most other people ever saw. He

pictured her once more going to the airfield in the morning, her dark brown eyes bright with determination. She would do it, not to show anyone else, particularly, but to succeed, to fulfil the goal she had set herself, and to exult in being in the air.

The aircraft – five of them – held formation. They wheeled around the cemetery only a few hundred feet up,<sup>3</sup> continuing as the Rector resumed the service in a louder voice, though Bowen doubted many of those present could now hear. His mother had flown with calm and a self-possessed steadiness and would return home with that same steadiness, even when expressing the elation she also felt. He wanted to wave to the circling planes but the Rector was coming to the end of the service. The coffin was shadowed and dark in the ground and he turned his eyes away; then, looking up, he saw one of the aircraft had detached itself. While the others continued their pattern above, it was descending in a gentle spiral. Lower and lower it came and, as Reverend Ebbs raised his hand in blessing,<sup>4</sup> it came overhead so low he could recognise Captain Leggatt himself leaning out of the cockpit with something in his hand. He let it go and the crowd murmured again, but they could all see, blue and red, spinning down, a wreath. It fell only fifty yards or so away from him and, within a moment or two, had been passed through the crowd and handed to one of the funeral director's men who knelt down in the dirt and placed it on the coffin. Delphiniums the flowers were, and indeed blue and red: the Aero Club's colours.<sup>5</sup>

The blessing was given and, like his grandfather, he picked up a handful of loose earth and shook it over the coffin. It rained on the delphiniums and Bowen took a step back. Away from the grave. She was not there any more. Shading his eyes, he looked up at the aircraft, which were lifting away, rising higher and turning south. He watched them become less distinct in the haze, fixing his eyes on the aircraft in the rear. He wondered who was at the controls, gazing forward over the propellor as the air rushed past and the earth dropped away and settled into its horizon while the sky grew bigger and brighter and bluer until there was nothing else.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> 'The Funeral of Mrs Bryant at Manly Cemetery', photo and caption, publication title not recorded. c. 7 November 1927 n.p. Clipping from Bryant Scrapbook.
- <sup>2</sup> 'First Woman to Fly', *The Brisbane Courier*, 8 November 1927, 13.
- <sup>3</sup> 'At the funeral of Mrs Bryant, Manly ...' photo and caption, no heading, publication title not recorded, c. 7 November 1927 n.p. Clipping from Bryant Scrapbook.
- <sup>4</sup> 'Five aeroplanes ...', no heading or publication title recorded, c. 7 November 1927 n.p. Clipping from Bryant Scrapbook.
- <sup>5</sup> 'Late Mrs M. M. Bryant', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 November 1927, 12.