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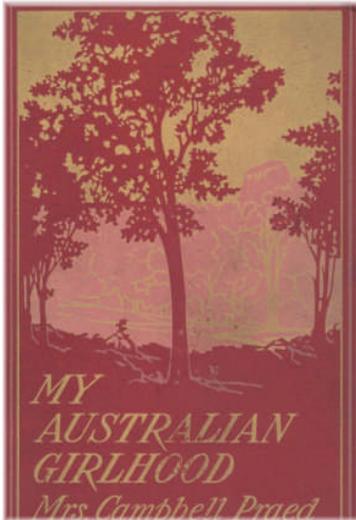
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MY AUSTRALIAN GIRLHOOD

*SKETCHES AND IMPRESSIONS OF
BUSH LIFE*

BY

MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED

AUTHOR OF "THE INSANE ROOT," "NADINE," "THE SCOURGE-STICK,"
"AS A WATCH IN THE NIGHT," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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CHAPTER IV

NARAIGIN

ALMOST the first thing which I can remember in any consecutive fashion is that journey through the bush. It seems to stand out like a sort of hegira in these insignificant annals. Scenes rise from it, vividly illuminated for an instant, and the next a blur—vistas of giant gum-trees and of a buggy toiling among them along a bush-track with a small retinue of blackboys and packhorses before and behind, and two figures always prominent in the picture—one a dark-whiskered, bronzed, and resolute person of picturesque, not to say buccaneering, aspect, who is mixed up in my child's mind with a bright Crimean shirt and poncho, a carbine, and with long cantos from "Childe Harold" and "Mazeppa," which he taught us to recite of evenings by the camp fire; the other a frail, delicate-complexioned being, helpful and gay, dimly photographed on the memory page against a background of forest, wearing a large hat, bending over pack-bags, and holding horses, with us two babies clinging to her skirts—the queen, as the dark-whiskered, buccaneering man is king—of my phantasmagoric world.

CHAPTER V

THE BLACKS' CAMP

THE woolshed is fixed in my imagination as the most delightful playground that the heart of child could long for, with its many pens, its empty wool-bales and presses, its slanting log floor, and all its queer nooks and corners. I think of it only as a playground, for we were never allowed to go within earshot of the place in shearing-time, lest our baby ears should be polluted by the shearers' oaths. Outside the woolshed were two great pits dug in the ground and filled with tallow, those vilely odorous, three-legged, rusty iron boiling-down pots being put again to their ancient use.

And thereto hangs a tragedy. The scab broke out among the sheep. They died by hundreds and thousands, and were boiled down for the tallow; and so it came about that the poor pioneer was almost a ruined man again. He re-stocked with cattle; and we had to abide on at Naraigin afterwards, through many troublous years.

One time there was a strike among the shearers, and the young men on the river tackled the shearing



CHAPTER XIII

UNUMGAR

WE met a party of policemen at the Unumgar Crossing.

“You haven’t come across a queer-looking cove on foot about the Border?” said Macnab, the chief constable. “He’s a horse-stealer, and a real dangerous character. I’ve been telling the Captain up there to arrest him if he turns up at Unumgar. It’s pretty clear that he’s followed Graeme’s Creek, thinking it the river, and he’s bound to come back for he can’t get out of *that* country.”

We hadn’t seen anything of the dangerous character, and the policemen went on their way; Captain Sherborne ran down to the sliprails to meet us and asked the same question, his fine eyes bright with excitement. Handsome as he was, and with all his soldier-like bearing, he looked a comical figure enough—a white apron tied round his waist, a floppy felt hat fastened under his chin, a large paste-brush in one hand, his coat bespattered, and the ends of his moustache plastered to his face. He told us that he was whitewashing his dairy, and on the lookout for the horse-stealer.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BUSHRANGER AND THE ONE-EYED GIRL

AFTER the Cape Clangour expedition our men and the Poet went back to Marroon, but two others of the little party stayed on for several weeks at Unumgar.

It appeared that "dangerous characters" were at this time plentiful along the border. A little while before the word had been passed down the river that an escaped bushranger named Leeson was wandering in these parts, and Captain Sherborne went about with a loaded revolver, and tingled with excitement whenever he espied a stranger approaching the station.

An ordinary - sized, muscular man would have answered sufficiently to the meagre description given by the police of Leeson. Thus it was better, just then, not to be a harmless traveller crossing the river to Unumgar, for such an one was liable to be detained according to Captain Sherborne's discretion.

Every now and then he would rush into the parlour, his eyes alight and his voice trembling with eagerness as he exclaimed: "By Jove, I'll swear that's Leeson.

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All of this and more may be available in a seemingly mundane book such as a directory. Learn much of the background of life at the time, even if your ancestor is not listed there.