

THE  
BATTLE OF MORDIALLOC

OR,  
HOW WE LOST AUSTRALIA.



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Melbourne:

SAMUEL MULLEN, COLLINS STREET EAST.

1868.

PRICE, ONE SHILLING.

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## INTRODUCTION.

TOWARDS the close of the year 1896, when Great Britain—bent on recovering her lost Australian colonies—despatched a powerful expedition with that object in view, H.M. troopship *Euphrates* was employed to convey a large complement of the forces.

I had just been appointed first lieutenant of the same.

My friend, Herbert Ainslie, formerly of the Victorian Survey Department, but now in the service of the British Government, had been deputed to accompany the expedition in an official capacity.

One evening, when we were in the Indian Ocean, steaming rapidly towards the Australian coast, Ainslie and I were pacing the deck together, as was our custom, enjoying the cool breeze, and discussing the coming campaign over a quiet cigar.

For the first time during the voyage our conversation reverted to the terrible events which had so recently marked the overthrow of the colonies—a subject on which Ainslie had hitherto been singularly silent.

The reason for this reticence was soon apparent, as I learned from his own lips the sad story of his personal experiences in Victoria at the time.

For awhile we continued our promenade in silence. My friend's thoughts were of such a painful character that I

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felt reluctant to break in upon them with the usual sympathetic commonplaces.

Suddenly he left my side, and went down to his cabin, whence he soon emerged with a manuscript.

Placing it in my hands, he said: "As I may never return to the old country, I should like you, my dear fellow, to see to the publication of this as soon as you return. There are some few things in it which will, I think, to some extent explain how the precipitate and disastrous Separation movement came about; and which may, perhaps, prove interesting if made generally known in England."

My gallant friend was fatally wounded almost at the close of the campaign. He survived long enough, however, to see the Union Jack flying once more in triumph over his native land.

Needless to say, his wishes have been faithfully carried out.

AINSLIE'S MANUSCRIPT.

## BATTLE OF MORDIALLOC;

OR, HOW WE LOST AUSTRALIA.

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THERE never was, probably there never again will be, a people so prosperous and so full of confidence in the future as we Australians were in the year which saw us a century old.

We were proud indeed of the noble heritage which had fallen to us. Where, a hundred years before, the land was practically a vast solitude, scantily peopled by the lowest savages, noble cities had sprung up with thriving industries, halls of learning, and spires rising heavenwards.

We had an enormous territory, capable of supplying its present population a hundred times twice told. The climate was everything that could be desired; the soil generous to profusion in its productiveness; the pastoral and mineral wealth of the country vast beyond computation.

Our rapidly increasing population was prosperous and contented. Perhaps in no part of the world were the artisan and labouring classes better paid, better clothed and fed, or more comfortably housed than ours.

Our geographical position seemed to guarantee us a future of uninterrupted peace. From the wars and rumours of wars, and the perpetual unrest of the old world, we were separated by the whole diameter of the globe.

Nor should it be surmised that the national career was one of material prosperity only. The brave and enterprising men who had built up the fabric of our material greatness, had also laid deep and broad the foundations of the nation's higher life. They were now passing away from our midst—these fathers of the people—and we native-born Australians were rapidly taking their places. We latter, it must be admitted, had not as yet distinguished ourselves in any particular way. The eminent men in our midst still hailed, for the most part, from the mother country. The sun of young Australia was yet to rise. Our achievements in art, in science, and in literature were

in the womb of the future. In due time, we fondly hoped, they would be born. In due time, the Australian Shakespeare would arise; Australian walls glow with the productions of native-born Raphaels and Titians; Australian scientists and men of letters take equal rank with the greatest in the old world. The day was not far distant, we believed, when the Southern Cross would look down on a mighty Commonwealth, virtually mistress of the South Pacific, capable of holding her own against all comers, and dictating terms on a footing of equality with the most powerful nations of the world.

Such was the vision which dazzled us in 1888, our Centennial year.

Grey-haired politicians felt all the glow of youthful enthusiasm as they contemplated it. Popular preachers and orators vied with each other in depicting the splendours of the golden age, already dawning. Distinguished visitors came and went, carrying with them the story of our wonderful progress. Australian credit rose higher and higher in the markets of the world. Our prosperity advanced by leaps

and bounds. There seemed no earthly reason why we should not go on for ever, crushing quartz and exporting wool, and growing richer and richer till the crack of doom.

Thus we entered upon the second century of our national life.

But the canker worm was already at our root.

It is related that when the dogma of Infallibility was proclaimed, in 1870, one of the Cardinals assembled was heard to exclaim, with a sigh of relief, "At last, thank God, we have done with history!" True or false, the expression attributed to the Cardinal might with perfect justice have been put in the mouths of large masses of my countrymen.

An impression had long been gaining ground among us that we too had "done with history." The true conception of the Australian people as the offshoot of an old civilisation, heirs to whatever of good or evil it had to bequeath, gradually receded before the false notion that we were a young nation starting on a unique career, for whom the traditions of the past could have no interest whatever.

But if we had done with history, history had not done with us. The germs of dissension were rife with us, as with others. We had entered the promised land; but, like Israel of old, we had come up a mixed multitude.

There were parties in the State here as elsewhere. Here, as elsewhere, there were divisions in religion. Fully a fourth of the population owned spiritual allegiance to the Sovereign Pontiff on the Tiber. The doctrinal differences which separated Anglican from Presbyterian, Presbyterian from Wesleyan, Wesleyan from Independent, and all combined from the Unitarian and the Freethinker, were exactly what they had ever been.

In all this our leading public men fancied they foresaw the promise of mischief in the future. Some of them had doubtless their own theological and political notions to subserve. At all events it was deemed advisable, on grounds which need not be here entered upon, to exclude religion and history from the State schools' curriculum. By breaking the continuity of the past, it was assumed that

the rising generation would enter upon their career strangers to old world controversies, and unhampered by old world traditions.

In no country, perhaps (I write, be it remembered, of my native Victoria,) could a more dangerous experiment have been tried with the education of its rising youth.

Antiquity, which brings a people into touch with so much that is great and glorious in the past, was necessarily wanting. History we had yet to make. To the past we owed everything worth having, from the creeds which were the basis of our faith, to the locomotive which tore its way across our plains.

Sundered from the past, the rising generation grew up for the most part strangers to the traditions of religion and loyalty, and breathing an atmosphere of the densest materialism. Heirs of the ages, they knew nothing, and could know nothing, of their birthright.

The youth, born on the banks of the Yarra, had an equal claim on the glories of Shakespeare and of Milton with the youth

born on the Thames or Severn. In his veins may have flowed the blood of heroes, who conquered at Agincourt and Crecy; of gallant Scots, who had followed the Bruce to victory at Bannockburn. For him the patriot had bled, the philosopher had painfully pondered the riddle of existence, the martyr had yielded up his soul in the fire. For him had been hoarded the lore of ages. To what purpose?

So far as the rising generation was concerned, religion and government, art, science, and literature, might have dropped down ready made from the skies.

In the supreme moment of our national life, when one of the most momentous problems of modern times was at our doors demanding prompt solution, the fate of the country was in their hands.

I refer to the Chinese question. These Orientals had domiciled among us by the thousand. They were, upon the whole, an inoffensive and law-abiding race. They lived on little, toiled like beavers, and carefully hoarded their modest gains, in the hope of



returning one day to their native land. Some few of them occupied high positions as merchants, and were held in general esteem for their probity and benevolence. The great majority, however, were content to engage in the humblest occupations. They cooked and washed, they grew vegetables and hawked them about the country, they searched for gold in old and abandoned claims. In the tropics, under conditions which rendered white labour impossible, they toiled hard in the construction of railways and other public works.

By certain sections of the community they were regarded with suspicion and repugnance. With the lowest, or "larrikin," class it was enough that they were strangers in a strange land; that their skins were yellow, and their eyes set in their heads at an angle which did not altogether square with the "larrikin" notion of the fitness of things. The distrust with which they were regarded by the artisan and labouring classes rested, it must be admitted, on more tangible grounds.

They were charged with lowering the rate

of wages; with ousting white labour in certain employments, and with showing signs of steady encroachment in others. This they were enabled to do by their style of living, so much beneath the ordinary European standard of comfort and decency.

But, over and above all this, there remained a consideration of peculiar gravity. The Chinese Empire was, comparatively speaking, in close proximity to our shores.

An exodus even on a most modest scale from its swarming myriads would simply swamp our British civilisation.

There were many signs that the long "cycle of Cathay" was at an end, and that awakened China was about to take her place in the comity of nations. She had already formed the nucleus of a powerful navy; had begun to organise her enormous army after European methods, and to arm it with European weapons of precision.

In the great military capitals of the old world her officers were studying the art of war. For obvious reasons the mother country would naturally wish to preserve friendly

relations with a growing power lying so near the frontiers of her Indian Empire.

Here then were the chief elements in a question of peculiar gravity and delicacy.

The leading statesmen in England, anxiously desirous to bring about some such settlement of the question as should safeguard the interests of the colonies without proving unnecessarily offensive to the Chinese, entered into negotiations on the subject with the Chinese Government.

Unhappily, while these negotiations were dragging their slow length along, the matter was taken up by other hands.

Ambitious, time-serving politicians, and irresponsible agitators—the curse of democracies—saw, in a skilful manipulation of the Chinese question, a sure means of personal advancement. The ever-smouldering fire of anti-Chinese feeling was blown by them into a perfect flame. An anti-Chinese literature sprang up in rank profusion. The organs of the press “run” in the interests of Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, and the rights of man, were conspicuous for their hostility towards

the unfortunate Mongols, and increasing in their demands for the expulsion of the entire race from Australian soil.

As the Chinese spectre loomed more and more portentous on the horizon, the public alarm increased. The anti-Chinese agitations spread like wildfire. Meetings were held all over the country. In every city, in every town and township, the question—whether the Chinese were desirable immigrants—was keenly debated, and everywhere answered in the negative by overwhelming majorities.

I pass over the next few years, during which negotiations were almost at a standstill.

The climax came in 1897.

Measures were simultaneously passed through the various colonial legislatures, instituting a heavy residential tax on every Chinese resident in the country, and entirely prohibiting any future immigration.

The measures in question were submitted for assent to the Home Government, and the answer was awaited in breathless expectancy by the entire community.

In July of the same year the *Argus* pub-

lished a curt telegram to the effect that the Imperial Government had vetoed both measures.

The announcement produced a tremendous uproar.

The following day another telegram appeared in the same journal, announcing that the long-threatened war between England and Russia had at length broken out, and that hostilities had actually commenced.

The excitement was now at its height. On all sides arose a clamour for Australian Independence. The various Parliaments were dissolved. An appeal was made to the country, and new Parliaments elected. Separation, or the preservation of the *status quo*, was the question put before the electors.

I was present at the first sitting of the new Victorian Parliament.

Inside, the House was crowded almost to suffocation. Outside, the doors were besieged by a surging and excited crowd.

As the Separatists were in the immense majority, the result of the evening's proceedings was a foregone conclusion.

"We shall 'make history' to-night with a vengeance," I observed, in an undertone to a friend who accompanied me, when we had each finished a critical survey of the *personnel* of the new House. My companion made some response which, however, I failed to catch, drowned as it was in the burst of cheering which greeted an honourable member who had just risen to his feet, and begun to address the House.

Of the long and vehement harangue which followed, the conclusion alone remained in my memory.

"How long, I ask," the member in question went on to say, "are the people of this growing Empire to be governed by a trumpery island in the German Ocean, hardly big enough to furnish decent sheep-runs for a score of squatters? (*Cheers and laughter.*) When the British Empire bursts up, as it is pretty certain to do one of these days, we shall have to shift for ourselves, whether we like it or no. Why then postpone the inevitable a single day longer? (*A voice, "We can't stand alone."*) Can't stand alone! I am ashamed to think

that any honourable member of this House should insult the country by so craven a remark. I see not the slightest grounds for doubting, and I am sure the majority of honourable members present will agree with me, that a united Australia should now be strong enough, single-handed, to drive into the sea any force which might possibly be brought against her.

“The old country is now at war with Russia. She may shortly be at loggerheads, for all we know, with half the world. She has been hard at it during the last half-century, cutting the throats of Russians, Bengalis, Afghans, Ashantees, Abyssinians, Zulus, Boers, Egyptians, Arabs, and Burmese. Was there a single one of these peoples with whom we Australians had even the shadow of a quarrel? Have we the shadow of a quarrel with the White Czar to-day?

“Let us resolve to have done at once and for ever with this state of things! Let us from henceforth insist upon managing our own affairs; our Chinese question and the like, without any outside interference.

“England, France, Germany, and the rest of them may go on exterminating one another in their own cockpits, for aught we care. We shall send them as much wool and frozen meat as they may require to keep up the game. (*Loud cheers and laughter.*) Our course is clear. We are strong enough, as I have already said, to hold our own. By-and-by, when we have grown stronger still, we shall add largely to what we have. The powers which have shared New Guinea and the other islands of our seas among them will one day have to reckon, not with a few easy-going gentlemen in Downing Street, but with the young, the vigorous, the invincible Australian people. (*Loud cheers.*)

“The future belongs to us if we are but true to the national motto, ADVANCE AUSTRALIA. (*Great cheering.*) Let the dead past bury its dead! With its worn-out creeds, whether religious or political, with its kingcraft and priestcraft, its crude scientific notions, its pauperism, and its crime, we free-born Australians have henceforth done for ever! (*Loud cheers.*) Be it our task from

this time forward to hold up to the admiration and envy of mankind the spectacle of an emancipated people, absolute masters of their own destiny, the possessors of a religion based, not upon old world fables, but on scientific facts ; of laws, literature, and art, purely of native growth ; of an advance in civilisation which knows no limit ; of a freedom which shall be absolutely unfettered and uncontrolled."

A perfect hurricane of cheering greeted this outburst. When it had subsided, an honourable member of venerable appearance rose and addressed the House as follows :—

"An old colonist, a member of this House during several successive Parliaments, and a loyal subject of the Queen, I have listened with indignation and disgust to the speech of the honourable member who has just sat down."

"In spite of the favourable reception accorded to it, I would fain believe that the speech in question is only the reflection of a brief popular madness which will subside as rapidly as it has arisen. If it be otherwise,

then better a thousand times that this country were what it was a century ago, when not an ounce of gold had been drawn from its mines, or a handful of grain had been scattered over its soil ; when the aboriginal still encamped on the very ground where stands this House, from which for the time being loyalty has fled. (*Interruption and groans.*)

"As I listened to the applause which greeted what I can only characterise as a tissue of ignorance, sedition, and bombast, the old Roman adage came forcibly to my mind : 'Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad.'

"The men who have made this country what it is, are one by one vanishing from the scene. In a few years the places which know them by mine and mart, and by the wild lands which their energy reclaimed, shall know them no more. Standing here as I do, almost their sole representative, every consideration of duty and honour impels me to protest against the treasonable and dangerous course to which this country is being blindly committed.

“It may be late in the day to refer to the Chinese question. There were difficulties enough in that matter, I admit, to tax the resources of our very best statesmanship. I would only ask whether the settlement of that question was the best which, after due deliberation, might have been effected ?

“Was it a settlement in harmony with the dictates of religion and humanity ? (*Ironical cheers and loud laughter.*)

“If an appeal to religion and humanity be out of place in this Assembly, perhaps honourable members will bear with me if I descend to lower ground. Was that settlement, then, in harmony with common sense and common prudence ?

“But, further. Following close on the heels of the Chinese question, and arising out of it, is that other and larger question which affects the relations that this country has hitherto borne to Great Britain.

“A wild and senseless popular clamour for the disruption of these relations is now raging in this community. To give immediate effect to that object, the majority of the members of

this House have been returned by their various constituencies.

“In this, as in the Chinese question, I shall waive all such considerations as the just claims of Great Britain and the honour of the Australian people, and shall simply regard it as it affects the safety of the nation, nay, the very national existence itself.

“This noble continent, nearly as large as Europe, is now in the quiet possession of a population which hardly exceeds, if indeed it equals, that of Scotland. How long, in the present state of the world, think you, will that possession go unchallenged ? Just so long as these colonies are protected by the strong arm of Britain—not one day longer ! (*Cries of “No, no !” and “We can defend ourselves.”*) A good deal of tall talk has been indulged in as to what we shall be and do in the future, when we have a large population. Is there a single member here so infatuated as to dream that when these colonies are no longer sheltered under the name and might of England, they will be left unmolested till their four millions have grown to fifty ? It is high

time the Australian people had outgrown their illusions. The friendly seas which surround us are no longer a protection. Every advance in science tends to shorten the distance which one time separated us from the old world. We live in the iron age ; not, as our smooth-tongued orators would seek to persuade us, in the age of gold. The questions which agitate the nations are solved not by the frothy rant of upstart demagogues, but, as Bismarck says, 'by blood and iron.' The most forcible arguments are now those which are backed by the strongest battalions—the most convincing eloquence that which proceeds from the cannon's mouth. The moment we cease to be a part of the British Empire, that moment the German, the Russ, the Frenchman will be thundering at our gates. (*Great uproar.*)

"Bear with me, gentlemen, but a few moments longer. I am an old man, whose career is almost run, and my voice will probably never again be heard within these walls. No irrevocable step has yet been taken. We are still part of the noblest Empire the world has ever seen, or is ever likely to see. For the sake,

then, of the national honour and interests ; for the sake of the many loyal and gallant hearts in our midst which still beat true to the old country ; last, but not least, for your own sake and for your children's, I implore you to preserve that connection in all its integrity.

"Let it not have to be recorded of us by the historian in days to come, that in the supreme crisis of their existence the people of Victoria were deaf to the counsels of honour and prudence ; that, seduced by the seditious rant of the political adventurer and the demagogue, they rushed blindfold into a course of the most incredible folly ; and that in the slaughter of their bravest sons, in the lurid light of their burning cities may be read the terrible story of how that folly was expiated !"

When it was all over, and the representatives of Victoria in council assembled had declared for Separation, I left the House and bent my steps homeward.

The night was far advanced, but the whole city seemed awake. In the brilliant moonlight every public building, bank and mansion stood out in bold relief. At intervals pro-

longed bursts of cheering broke upon the stillness of the night. But a weight lay upon my heart, for somehow or other the terrible conviction had forced itself upon me that my countrymen were cheering the death-warrant of the nation.

Some weeks passed quietly. During their course the famous "Australian Declaration of Independence" was flashed by cable to England. A time of almost feverish anxiety followed. Every morning the telegrams from Europe were scanned with unprecedented eagerness. The tragic drama being enacted by the two gigantic world powers was fast unrolling itself before our gaze. Thick and fast came tidings of the movements of fleets and armies; of vessels captured and burnt; of blockaded ports and besieged cities.

Occasionally interspersed with the war telegrams were brief extracts from the *Times*, *Standard*, *Daily News*, *Morning Post*, and other home journals, commenting on the Australian situation. Beyond the instant recall of the Governors of the various colonies, no

single hint as to the intentions of the Home Government had yet reached us.

But come what might, there was no divesting the popular mind of the false confidence in which it lay wrapped.

That England would fire a shot, or risk the life of a single soldier in the attempt to restore the *status quo*, was, to say the least of it, highly improbable.

Unfortunately, England was not the only power with whom we had to reckon. Here it was that their unreasoning optimism fatally misled the Australian people.

It was taken for granted that the dangers which had hitherto menaced the colonies as dependencies of Great Britain no longer existed, now that that relationship had come to an end. Having ceased to be a part of the British Empire, we flattered ourselves we were no longer in a position to need the protection of her ironclads. The attitude of Russia and of other European powers to a non-combatant State, intent only on peaceful and commercial relations with the rest of the world, could hardly be other than of the most friendly nature.



One morning these confident surmises received a rude shock. The daily journals appeared minus their European telegrams. What had been predicted over and over again in military forecasts years ago had actually come to pass.

The Russians had cut the cables. The handwriting was now on the wall clear and legible, and needing no prophet to interpret.

Alas! the only prophets who had a hearing now were engaged in predicting the winner of the Melbourne Cup. Against all others the public ear had long been closed.

Cup Day came, and all Victoria flocked to Flemington to lay the odds on the favourite. Flemington racecourse is, perhaps, the finest in the world. The gently sloping hills surrounding it form a fine natural amphitheatre, from every point in which can be seen the whole sweep of the course. Here, in the lovely spring of each November, the sport-loving Australians had many a time gathered from all quarters to enjoy their favourite pastime.

On this occasion the vast concourse was the

largest ever assembled. The weather was everything that could be desired ; a bright sun in an almost cloudless sky, and a south-westerly breeze which tempered the fierceness of his rays, without raising the dust. The summer toilettes of the ladies—more charming, if possible, than ever—lent animation and colour to a scene scarcely to be paralleled in any part of the world.

It was well on in the afternoon, somewhere, I should think, towards four o'clock. The last race prior to the event of the day had just come off ; a splendid struggle, ending in a dead heat. The hum of voices had gradually ceased, and all eyes were turning to where a dozen thoroughbreds were getting into line for the great contest of the year.

At this moment something very unusual was taking place in the vicinity of the grand stand. The Premier and other leading members of the Government had hurriedly quitted their places, and were entering their carriages. Another instant and they had driven rapidly off in the direction of the city. All over the place others were preparing to follow their

example. There were evident signs, in fact, of a general stampede. What could have happened! The astonished onlookers were not kept long in suspense. All at once the shrill voices of newsboys broke on the ear—

“‘ARGUS,’ SPECIAL EDITION. Large fleet bearing down on the coast of Australia!”

I pass over the scene which followed upon the startling announcement—the rush for papers, the sudden break up of the vast throng, the noise and confusion, and the wild surging of the human torrent back to Melbourne.

It was nearly six o'clock when I reached my home in Clarendon-street. Our housemaid, Mary, opened the door with her usual pleasant smile. As I entered, the familiar strains of a favourite old ballad fell upon my ear. It was my sister's voice. The dining-room door was ajar, and I entered unobserved. My father had just finished preparing the discourse he was to deliver the following Sunday morning at St. Clement's, and was now seated in his arm-chair listening, with closed eyes, to the music, as I had often seen him do.

My sister Kate was at the piano. The

rays of the setting sun streamed through the open window full upon the graceful figure, and upon the fair face and shapely head, with its wealth of dark brown hair. The clear rich tones of her voice, the tranquil surroundings, and the serene expression of my father's face, made me for a moment almost doubt the reality of the scene I had so recently witnessed.

Neither my father nor sister had evidently heard the disquieting news of the afternoon. It had fallen to me to enlighten them, and I shrank from the task.

Upon my dear sister, especially, the blow would fall with cruel force. She had been for some time engaged to Captain Hastings, a young officer of the Defence Force. That day week they were to be married.

How could I tell her that before then? Hastings, myself, and all the available manhood of the country would, in all likelihood, be fighting for hearth and home.

A little later on in the evening, when they had heard all, and we were talking matters over together, a rapid footstep was heard in

the hall, and Hastings entered, a handsome Victorian, in the uniform of the Mounted Rifles. He was about to proceed to headquarters, and had run in for a few minutes in passing.

The news he brought was of the gravest importance, and fully confirmed the first startling report, while it threw a new and unexpected light on the situation.

A Sydney telegram had come in announcing that the steamship *Cathay* had just arrived from Hong Kong, having narrowly escaped capture by the way. Her captain reported that the long-standing difficulty between Russia and China about Manchooria had been patched up, and that a secret treaty had existed for some time between the two powers for the invasion and partition of Australia.

The Chinese Government and people had long resented the treatment of their countrymen in the colonies, and had determined to exact vengeance at the earliest possible opportunity. To that end they had been for months past busily engaged in fitting out a huge expedition, ostensibly for the purpose of settling

some old scores with Japan or the Corea, in reality to co-operate with Russia according to the terms of the secret treaty.

With the Australian Declaration of Independence, and the outbreak of war between England and Russia, had come the golden opportunity.

The Chinese fleet, officered for the most part by Europeans, had at once effected a junction with the Russian Pacific squadron, which had recently been greatly strengthened, and the whole were steaming rapidly southwards, under the command of a Russian Archduke. In three or four days at furthest they would be upon our coasts.

"Of course they will meet with a warm reception when they do come," continued Hastings, in a tone of easy confidence, meant to reassure my sister, who had been listening, pale and in silence. "The Defence Forces are in splendid condition, and to-morrow and the next day there will be no end of volunteering."

The reference to volunteering reminded me I had important business to transact before

enrolling myself next morning, as I intended to do. My father and I accordingly withdrew to talk matters over, leaving the lovers to exchange their last farewells alone.

A short time afterwards Hastings and I left the house together. For some time we walked along without a word on either side. Just as we were passing the Treasury, however, on our way down Collins-street, Hastings suddenly broke silence.

"Look here, Ainslie, old fellow, we are in a devil of a mess, I can tell you. There's no use disguising the fact. These fellows in there," he said, pointing with flashing eye in the direction of the House, where Parliament was at that moment sitting, "have brought the country to a fine pass with their confounded clap-trap about independence. They are at it now concocting measures for the national defence, or some other foolery, as if all the talk in the world, at this time of day, could add a single man or gun to our fighting line. I'd give the world, if I had it, if only our Colonel would order me to go in with my troop and turn the whole

rabble into the street." Hastings spoke bitterly, but not more so than the circumstances warranted.

"How many men," I asked, "do you think we can muster for the defence?"

"If we can manage to get 6000 men together, we may consider ourselves very lucky;" replied Hastings. "We have splendid fighting material, if only there were time to lick it into shape. That's about the worst feature in the whole business. With a month's warning, or even less, we should have mustered 20,000 men at the least. Now it will be as much as we can do to get the handful of troops we have into position at the right time and place. Given 6000 Victorians, how to dispose of a force backed by half the human race? That's the problem we have got to solve. And a pretty tough one, too. However, there is nothing for it but to make the best of things, and show the world that if Victorians have for once lost their heads, as they certainly have done in this miserable Separation business, their hearts are as stout as ever.

"But I'm already due at headquarters, so must be off. Good-bye, old fellow."

"Good-bye, Hastings. When and where shall you and I meet next?"

"Ah! that depends on our friend, the Archduke;" and with a laugh and a warm grasp of the hand, Hastings strode off.

Hastings was right! We were in a mess, indeed, and every hour brought the fact home to us with a logic not to be gainsaid. A federated Australia, with a fully developed defence scheme, would, without doubt, have offered a formidable resistance to the invader. But a federated Australia, though it supplied our Parliamentary rhetoricians with a never-failing stock subject, was not yet, and in all probability never would be. There was not an arsenal in the whole country. We had not even a small-arm factory. There had long been talk of establishing one, but for some reason or other the matter had hung fire. Our whole system of defence, be it remembered, was created in view of an entirely different contingency than that which now threatened.—A sudden dash through the

Heads to Melbourne. A levy of so many millions in specie. In default, the bombardment of the city.—The most thorough-going alarmist among us rarely, if ever, contemplated anything more serious.

In addition to these and other causes for disquiet, which everywhere agitated the public mind, was the uncertainty as to where the enemy would land.

Next day, Wednesday, I enrolled myself as a volunteer in the 1st Battalion of the Rifles. Some three hundred young fellows who had received drill instruction in the Public and State Schools, many of whom were old school-fellows, joined at the same time, the other infantry corps being strengthened in like proportion.

It is unnecessary to enlarge upon the events which crowded the remainder of the week. How Friday evening brought tidings that the enemy were bearing down upon the Heads, and how the fleet went off to engage them. How the land forces hurried off to the same quarter. How on Saturday it came out that the threatened attack on the Heads was only a

feint after all, and that the main portion of the expedition had effected a landing at Westernport, and were strongly entrenched near Hastings, and how the troops were hurried back to Melbourne, and then on to Mordialloc to intercept the enemy's march. All this is matter of history, and need not be detailed here.

It was late on Saturday evening when our battalion arrived at its destination. All sorts of rumours had been flying about, but the most prevalent belief was that the enemy were marching on Frankston, and that we were to meet him there. We were considerably surprised, therefore, when the train halted at Mordialloc, a small watering township some sixteen or seventeen miles from Melbourne, and we were ordered to get out of the carriages and form up.

Whether from the numerical weakness of our little force, or the short time left us for acting, or whatever the cause, it was evident there had been a change of plan on the part of our leaders at the last moment. I forbear enlarging, however, upon the purely military

aspects of the campaign, more especially as the admirable work lately written by an Engineer officer who was present, has already familiarised the public with the whole affair, and shall simply confine myself to what fell within my own personal experience as a private volunteer.

The sun had gone down on the other side of the bay a full half-hour when we moved off from the station, to take up position under the guidance of a mounted officer of the Staff. As we marched along in the rapidly growing dusk, the wild-fowl, scared by our advance from their quiet haunts by the little Mordialloc creek, flew circling overhead with startled cries. Here and there the tall gum trees loomed into sight above the surrounding bush and thick under-wood growth, like so many giant spectres.

It was almost dark when we reached our halting ground and formed up in column of companies on the left of the whole position. To the right, some distance off, we could make out an infantry battalion drawn up in similar formation, and further still in the same direction the bivouac fires of the rest of the army were

gleaming at regular intervals right along to the shore.

Patrols having been sent out, sentries posted, and the usual precautions taken against surprise, the welcome order was received to pile arms and fall out. We were one and all thoroughly fagged out with the hurry and excitement of the last few days, and, as we had eaten nothing since morning, were pretty well famished into the bargain. The commissariat were, however, equal to the emergency, and a substantial ration of bread and meat was served all round. With this and a liberal supply of tea, which was soon got ready, we made a tolerably comfortable meal.

By-and-by, as we were smoking and chatting in groups round our watch-fires, some late editions of the newspapers which had found their way into the lines, fell into our hands. From them we gathered the first authentic news we had as yet of the enemy's numbers and probable intentions.

According to the leading journal, their strength could not be far short of 55,000 men. Of this number fully 20,000 were Russians, for

the most part veteran troops who had already seen more than one campaign. The remaining 30,000 were Chinese, accustomed to European drill and training, well armed with the newest repeating rifle, and to a large extent led by European and American officers. Their rôle would, in all probability, be to attack as soon as they came up with us, which they were certain to do early next day, and simply crush our little army by sheer force of numbers, before it could be reinforced by contingents from the other colonies. With Victoria at the mercy of the enemy, any attempt in the way of a united defence on the part of the other colonies would be simply hopeless.

All this was anything but pleasant reading, only we had already discounted the worst, so far as the odds we had to contend with were concerned, and far from feeling dispirited by the news, every man was only the more resolved to stand firm when the hour of trial came.

There was one piece of news, however, which raised our spirits to such a degree that it was with difficulty we could be restrained from bursting into cheers. New South Wales and

the other colonies were already straining every nerve to send assistance both in men and material.

The New South Wales contingent, numbering some 2500 men, was already on its way, and if all went well should arrive next day about noon. Now that the hour of danger had arrived, the best qualities of my fellow-countrymen were coming to the fore. Mutual jealousies had altogether vanished before the paramount claims of patriotic feeling, and the strong sentiment of brotherhood, which had till now so long lain dormant.

About nine o'clock the orderly sergeants came round the various companies to read orders. As the enemy had been reported in force at a point some six or seven miles distant, and we might expect an attack early the following morning, we were ordered to lie down at once, and get all the rest we could. The troops were to fall in next morning at daybreak, in light marching order, each man to carry a hundred rounds of ammunition and two days' rations. A number of important details followed, and the whole concluded with an ex-

pression of the implicit reliance the General in command placed on the courage and steadiness of the troops, and of his full confidence in their ability to hold their ground until the arrival of reinforcements, when the whole army would assume the offensive and advance upon the enemy. Before lying down for the night a ration of rum was served out by the Colonel's orders, and very acceptable it proved under the circumstances. We had no tents, our camp equipage and baggage having been unavoidably left behind in the hurry and uncertainty of our movements during the last few days, but as it was a warm night it did not much matter. Wrapping myself in my great-coat I lay down, fully accoutred as I was, on the ground, my rifle at my side in case of a sudden turnout.

A profound silence reigned everywhere. There was no wind, not even the slightest breeze. Not a leaf quivered in the branches, not a sound broke the stillness, only the occasional challenge of a sentry, and the quiet monotonous murmur of the sea. The night was clear and the stars were shining brightly.



The Southern Cross, so often linked by a poetic fancy with the destinies of Australasia, was tranquilly shining overhead, as it had shone ages before upon our virgin forests and boundless plains, as it would shine to-morrow night on the upturned face of many a gallant Victorian in his last sleep; as it would continue to shine when our brief national story would be but as a tale that is told.

Next morning the battalion formed up in silence, just as the first streaks of grey appeared in the east. In a short time the sun rose, and for the first time we were able to form a tolerably correct notion of our position.

To our front the country was little other than a flat plain, to a large extent clear of bush and offering no natural barriers to speak of, to the advance of any number of troops. Away to the left stretched the long range of the blue Dandenongs. On the right the magnificent sweep of the bay carried the eye onward, past miles of shingly beach, bordered with forest and dense scrub, and dotted with country villas, till it rested on Point Nepean, just faintly discernible in the distant haze.

Our battalion, I have already stated, was posted on the left of the position.

The Mounted Rifles, a magnificent body of horsemen, fully a thousand strong, and drawn up in column of squadrons, under cover of a patch of gum tree forest, protected our left flank.

A little distance to our right was the 2nd Battalion of infantry.

Further still, in the same direction, was the 3rd Battalion, two companies of which lined the mouth of the creek before mentioned, under cover of the ti-trees and other bushes which lined its banks.

The 4th Battalion was formed up in double column of companies, some distance in rear of the centre of the whole, and constituted the reserve.

On a slight eminence, in rear of the township, was a battery of field guns, completely screened from view by a thick hedge of prickly cactus, and commanding the approach from Frankston.

A short distance in advance of our left were two more batteries, drawn up a little behind the crest of some rising ground.

An hour passed and still no signs of the enemy. As we stood quietly leaning on our rifles, I thought the time had never dragged along so slowly. As there now seemed no prospect of an immediate attack, we embraced the opportunity to fall out and have breakfast, after which we all felt in better trim for anything that might turn up.

It might have been about a quarter of an hour or so after we had fallen in again—I cannot pretend to state the time with exactness, though I had mechanically consulted my watch at least a dozen times that morning—when suddenly the booming of heavy guns in the distance sent something like a thrill through our ranks. It was evident we were to be simultaneously attacked both by land and sea. The enemy had begun the day's operations by an attempt to force the Heads, and were already hotly engaging our fleet and shore batteries.

We had little time, however, for speculating about matters at the Heads, for at this moment we observed a staff officer coming along at a hard gallop to where we stood. He had just delivered orders from the General in com-

mand to our Colonel, and was riding off when the report of a field gun, away a considerable distance in front, followed by others in quick succession, drew our attention to a point some two miles off where a cloud of smoke was slowly curling upwards in the still air.

The enemy at last!

We could distinctly make out their dark masses, as they gradually emerged into the open from behind some ridges of wooded country, which had hitherto screened their advance.

As they came near our picquets fell back all along the line on the main body, followed by a small party of the Mounted Rifles, which had been out scouting since daybreak. In command of the latter was Hastings, whom I now saw for the first time since we parted on the Tuesday evening before. As he galloped past where I stood on the left of my company, we recognised each other with a wave of the hand.

At this moment the enemy opened fire, and a shell flew screaming overhead, and burst some distance behind, close to the 4th Battalion,

wounding two privates, and killing the adjutant's horse under him.

I shall never forget the curious sensation produced in us, as we all instinctively followed its rapid flight. Another and another came in rapid succession.

Our guns in front now opened in reply, and for some minutes kept up a vigorous cannonade. For nearly two hours this artillery duel went on, with but little damage to either side, owing to the greatness of the range.

About eleven o'clock, the enemy's guns—by this time largely reinforced—advanced to within twelve hundred yards and opened a tremendous fire, under cover of which dense columns of their infantry began to move forward to the attack. At the same time our batteries, unable to hold their ground any longer against such odds, were withdrawn to less advanced positions, having already suffered heavily in both men and horses.

In the meantime we had thrown out four companies in skirmishing order, our remaining half battalion retiring a short distance to where a light dip in the ground afforded some

protection from the incessant rain of shot and shell.

On came the enemy, in alternate battalions of Russians and Chinese, their drums beating, and their bayonets glancing in the sun.

It was an exciting moment, and our hearts beat high as we awaited their attack, a death-like silence pervading the ranks. At this moment the voice of our brave old Colonel rang out cheerily above the din:—"Now, men, be steady, and mind what you're about; keep cool, and don't fire a shot till you can tell the colour of the enemy's pigtails, then let them have it hot."

Immediately in front, extending along nearly the whole of our position, and varying in breadth from 350 to 400 yards, was a tract of ground entirely denuded of cover, and which the enemy would have to cross. Just as their skirmishers were swarming over it, followed by the reserves, we opened upon them all along our front with a terrific storm of shrapnel and musketry.

In spite of it, however, they continued to come on pluckily, firing and advancing steadily

in a series of short rushes, their batteries meanwhile plying us vigorously with shell. It was clear they were bent on carrying the position at all hazards, by sheer force of numbers, cost what it might.

At two hundred yards distance the advance perceptibly slackened. Our fire by this time had wrought frightful havoc in their ranks. Most of the mounted officers were already down. To add to their difficulties, the various battalions had got mixed up in apparently inextricable confusion, and, abandoning their extended formation, had crowded together into what were little better than so many densely packed and unmanageable mobs.

They were now entirely at our mercy. For a few minutes more they made a desperate but ineffectual attempt to come on, our incessant and well-directed fire, meanwhile, literally mowing them down by heaps. It was too much for flesh and blood to stand. The bravest and best disciplined troops in the world could not have been expected to advance further in the teeth of such a withering fire.

The attack was now clearly a failure. The

whole mass of the enemy halted, wavered, and finally fell back.

A wild cheer now burst from our ranks for the first time, and the whole line prepared to dash forward with the bayonet.

At this moment our bugles sounded the "cease fire." Glancing round to my left, I could see the Mounted Rifles deploying rapidly, preparatory to charging. Almost in the time it takes to relate, they had swept past our flank like a whirlwind, and with ringing cheers were soon lost to view in the dense smoke which now hung all over the field. A few seconds more and they had hurled themselves upon the broken and retreating foe, sabring and riding them down mercilessly.

When the smoke lifted, a terrible spectacle presented itself. The whole plain in front of us, right up to the limits of the enemy's advance, was strewn with the bodies of men and horses, many of the latter still rolling about in their agony on the sward.

Here and there among the dark green of the enemy's infantry one could descry, only

too frequently, the uniform of our own gallant horsemen.

There they lay, friend and foe alike, some 3000 human beings, rigid and silent in death, or writhing in agony under the fierce noonday sun, gasping out piteous appeals for water, which never came.

Looking on at the awful scene, I realised, for the first time in my life, something of what the "horrors of war" actually were. With an enemy in front, however, nearly ten times as numerous as ourselves, and burning to dispute with us the mastery of a whole continent, there was no time for moralising.

We had repulsed the enemy's first attack, but a few more successes of the kind would ruin us. In spite of the excellence of our position, our losses had been very great, the killed and wounded in our battalion alone, already reaching a total of 160. The Captain and senior Lieutenant of my own company—the latter an old schoolfellow, who had been captain of our football team at the Grammar School—were both among the slain. Among the first to fall was the member for

X——, the fiery young barrister who had so lately harangued the Legislative Assembly in favour of Separation. His body was lying in the scrub a few paces off from where I stood, both hands still firmly grasping the rifle. A fragment of shell had carried away the whole of his lower jaw.

The 2nd Battalion had suffered even more heavily than ours, having lost all its field officers, and nearly 200 officers, non-commissioned officers and men.

The special correspondents of the *Argus* and *Daily Telegraph* had both been killed.

It was long past noon, but the expected reinforcements had not turned up. Many an anxious glance now began to be directed to the railway station, where our gallant comrades of New South Wales were expected to arrive. Two o'clock came—three o'clock—still no sign.

The weather was dreadfully oppressive. A hot north wind had set in, and many of our fellows were getting exhausted.

It soon became evident that another attack was imminent. Nearly the whole of the

enemy's troops were now in position, and large bodies of their cavalry could be descried working round to the left, obviously with the intention of threatening our flank.

Between three and four o'clock the enemy's guns re-opened fire. For some time a furious cannonade was kept up on both sides. Then the fire of our batteries began to slacken; and soon ceased altogether. The ammunition had given out!

The situation had now become most critical. Retreat was impossible. Surrender—with our defenceless capital scarcely more than a single march behind us, and in front the overwhelming array of a hostile army, composed, for the most part, of merciless Asiatics—would be sheer madness.

To crown all, it began to leak out that a part of the railway line between Sydney and Melbourne had been destroyed by dynamite—in all probability by some agent of the enemy—thus cutting off all hope of timely aid from New South Wales.

There was nothing for it but to face the worst like men.

As we lay there, awaiting the foe, that November evening, the fast westering sun flecking the thick foliage with a myriad golden shafts, and the gum trees casting long shadows across the scrub, the thoughts of many a brave fellow sped homewards for the last time.

On came the enemy with a hoarse murmuring roar to the final assault; for all the world like the swiftly advancing succession of waves on a storm-tossed sea.

Victoria's hour had struck!

Four battalions of Russians, with four more in support—the famous Penzansky and Volhynia regiments, as I afterwards learnt—bore down upon our single battalion.

I have a vivid recollection of their steady advance, in spite of the awful hail of lead we showered into them; how, at fifty yards distance, the swarming mass of skirmishers halted, and got into close formation for the final rush; how their drums beating “the attack,” and the officers waving their swords, the whole mass surged down upon us with the bayonet.

What followed may, perhaps, be best told in a short extract from Major Zotof's "Histoire de la Guerre Australienne :"—

"Though complete annihilation now stared them in the face, there was something truly heroic in the way the mere handful of Victorians met their fate. Just as we had got within a dozen paces of them they sprang to their feet, poured a last volley into our midst with terrible effect, and with a loud cheer, and shouts of 'Advance Australia,' hurled themselves upon us with the bayonet.

"For a few seconds our troops, frightfully cut up as they had been by the enemy's fire, and a good deal blown by the rapid rush across the open, were driven back, and it began to look as if the repulse of the morning were about to be repeated on even a more disastrous scale. Quickly recovering themselves, however, they dashed forwards once more, and a furious hand to hand encounter ensued.

"Back to back, and shoulder to shoulder, with teeth set hard, and eyes flashing defiance, the doomed Victorians fought on till the

ground was slippery with blood, and the dead lay piled in heaps. Not till almost the last man of them had been shot down or bayoneted did the unequal struggle come to an end.

"The day was ours, but at a heavy cost. In the two assaults our force alone had 3000 men placed *hors-de-combat*, and the loss to our Chinese allies could not have been far short of 5000.

"With the exception of some prisoners, who fell into our hands, and a small party, principally of horse, who succeeded in effecting their escape, the whole Victorian force perished where it stood."

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I had escaped—to this day, I can scarcely tell how—and with some others was galloping at full speed on the road to Melbourne.

Behind us lay Mordialloc in flames. On our left was the calm expanse of the bay—no longer ours, I reflected with bitterness—but a Russian lake. Behind it the fiery sun was sinking rapidly in a flood of crimson—true

type of the national sun which had just gone down for ever in blood.

On we went in the deepening twilight—on and still on, till the lights of Melbourne came in sight.

As we rode in, we found the whole place in an awful uproar. The railway stations were choked with crowds of people, flying to Ballarat, Sandhurst Adelaide, and other places. Thousands more were hurriedly quitting the town on foot, on horseback, and in every description of vehicle.

Large numbers had thrown themselves into the various public buildings and churches, where they were preparing for a desperate resistance.

Worst of all, the suburbs, and some parts of the town, were almost entirely at the mercy of the lowest of the "larrikin" class. These scoundrels, true to the instincts of their kind, from time immemorial, had seized the moment of their country's misfortune as a glorious opportunity for perpetrating every species of devilry.

Hotels were broken into and plundered of

their stores. Private mansions sacked and burned. A large part of Toorak, Armadale, and Malvern was in flames. All night long the game of robbery and murder was kept up.

In the early morning when the Chinese swarmed into the town, these miserable ruffians, still bemuddled with the night's orgies, fell in large numbers into their hands, and were slaughtered without mercy.

It is unnecessary to relate in detail all that occurred from the time I turned my horse's head homewards, till I had the inexpressible relief of seeing my father and sister once more, safe and uninjured.

On reaching home, it may be briefly stated, that I found the place wrecked by the mob, and its inmates gone, and that, after an anxious search, I came upon them in St. Patrick's Cathedral.

The visitor to Melbourne, in times past, will readily recall to mind the noble Gothic pile, which crowned the eastern slope of the city. St. Patrick's had been nearly half a century in building, and was still unfinished. Its foundations were laid while Victoria was still



in its infancy ; it had grown with the growth of the colony, and was now about to witness its disastrous end. To it some hundreds of families had fled for safety, as many a fugitive crowd had formerly done to the cathedrals of the old world.

The scene which met my gaze on entering was a most striking one. The whole area of the building, nave, aisles, and even the chancel, was crowded with people of every age and condition, conspicuous among them being priests, nuns, and other members of the various religious orders.

Most of the men had procured arms, and all who could were straining every nerve in the work of preparing for the defence of the place. Benches were torn up and piled upon each other to enable firing parties to reach the windows. The butts of rifles were ruthlessly dashed through the rich stained glass by way of forming loopholes. All the entrances to the building, with the exception of that by which I entered, were strongly barricaded.

It was expected that the Russians would occupy the town on the following day, and

proceed at once to restore some sort of order, but there were terrible misgivings that at any moment the Chinese troops, bent on massacre and pillage, might pour into the town before the former arrived on the scene. Hence the preparations for holding out to the last.

The loud babel of male voices, the crash of timber and noise of falling glass, the wailing of children, the feeble glimmer of wax lights falling here and there upon the pale countenances of anxious and terror-stricken women, the whole, overshadowed by the deep funereal gloom of the vaulted roof, is indelibly imprinted on my memory.

In a recess, in the chapel of Our Lady, I found the objects of my search. My sister, who was the first to recognise me, threw herself into my arms with a half-suppressed sob. Poor girl, the past week had been a fateful one for her, as for many a maiden besides whose life's promise had been blighted that day at Mordialloc ; for there, on the chancel floor, wrapped in his long grey military cloak, his eyes closed, and the deadly pallor of his face contrasting strongly with the deep jet of

his hair and moustache, lay her lover, unconscious of all around. He had received his death wound while charging with his regiment in the morning, and had been sent up with the first party of wounded early in the day. My father, looking, I thought, years older than when I saw him last, was kneeling by Hastings, reciting, in low tones, the prayers for the dying.

But I must not dwell longer on a scene which revives such harrowing recollections.

Some hours after midnight I was awakened with a touch on the shoulder from the heavy sleep into which I had fallen from sheer exhaustion. It was my father, come to announce the end. I got up at once, and in a moment was at my old friend's side. As I knelt and took his cold hand in my own, he opened his eyes, and a faint smile of recognition flitted over his countenance. It was his last. With his head resting on the shoulder of his betrothed, and her name upon his lips, he passed away, just as the faint streaks of dawn began to steal through the cathedral windows. It was the morning of their bridal day.

With a sinking heart I turned away from the painful scene, and passing along the aisle, soon found myself in the open air. The sun was already above the horizon; a cool breeze from the bay had succeeded the oppressive north wind; and the birds were twittering joyously in the trees which grew in the cathedral enclosure. In the grey of the morning, everything looked so cheerful and matter-of-fact, that, for a moment, I felt tempted to doubt the reality of the scenes I had so lately witnessed: the crowds at Flemington, the sudden alarm, the marching and counter-marching, the night bivouac at Mordialloc, the battle, the flight, the death of Hastings—all passed before me as if they were but the phantoms of a disordered brain.

Suddenly the distant rattle of musketry put an end to my reverie. Nearer and nearer it came, louder and louder, and intermingled with the din the exulting shouts of the rapidly advancing foe. Our worst forebodings had come to pass—the Chinese were in the town.

Here, with the shores of my beloved native land again looming into sight, I must draw this brief narrative to a close. Some future day, should I survive the coming struggle, sufficient leisure may be afforded me to complete the task I have here so imperfectly essayed.

I would fain have recorded, with all the fulness the subject deserves, how stubbornly the cathedral was held against the Chinese hordes for seven long hours, and how, among the many lives sacrificed on that terrible day, was that of my dear father, struck down by a bullet while ministering to the needs of the wounded. Not till the Archduke entered the town with his Russian troops, and restored order, did we capitulate.

Our city in flames, our people slaughtered by the thousand, our fleet captured or sunk, and all hope of succour gone, there was nothing for it but to drink the cup of humiliation to its very dregs.

One after another the other colonies fell before the invaders, till—of the mighty con-

continent which had hitherto owned our mastery—we could not call a single foot our own.

For myself, as for many others of my fellow-countrymen, accustomed as we had so long been to breathe the air of freedom, the galling yoke of our new masters proved so intolerable a burden that we made our way, in the course of a few months, to the old country. There we found a respite from all we had undergone, and there, before the year was out, I laid my broken-hearted sister to rest in a quiet old Devonshire churchyard.

It may be that in the days to come another Australia shall arise to take the place of the old, clearer of vision than we, and wiser through our mistakes. But, however that may be, I can never recall to mind the closing scenes in our national history without the most bitter and unavailing regrets, that a career so brilliant, and a future so full of promise, should have thus been wantonly flung away.

