

# A

# Life Story

*By*

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*As told to*

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My birthplace was Casino, N.S.W., but I went to school in Kyogle at the school which was allocated for the Aboriginal children of that decade at South Kyogle. In a way it was one of the luckiest things that really happened to me, because then we were so fortunate to have an excellent teacher, Miss Nellie Montgomery. I shall never forget her, she was not only refined, but wonderful to the children placed under her care. She was in every sense of the word a "true lady"; she came from a refined family. Later on in life she married and became the wife of Mr. Harold Cullen; the Cullen family were amongst the first early white settlers in the district. But back to Miss Montgomery, I cannot express enough gratitude to her for the benefit I derived as a pupil under her tutelage. All the success I had later on in life began in that humble little school.

When I reached the age of 13 years I left school, with my parents' consent and, of course, the Government's too. I was then placed on a farm to work. I worked there for eighteen months. At that time the white settlers going on the land were either English or Irish, and when on the farm I had to "muster up" enough English to speak to my employers. Somehow the idea occurred to me then that, to get on in what was rapidly becoming an English-speaking world, I needed an even greater knowledge of English. This idea

became more accentuated in my mind as I worked in other places, particularly when working amongst cattle.

The desire to have a greater and a proficient knowledge of English became an actuality and materialized, for one day when I was carrying my "swag"—another chap was with me at the time—and going along the road we picked up a magazine. In this magazine there was an advertisement for a correspondence course in English. Somehow this advertisement appealed to me as the very thing I'd been looking for. I liked the idea of the course, and all that the instructor had to say. When I obtained employment I sent for this course in English and studied it religiously. The entry fee was 30s., and then another 30s. each month. But it was worth it, every penny of it, and it helped me a lot.

Another thing which helped me a lot also, was the family I worked for in Queensland. They were a big family, four of their children were boys, the other two were girls, and every member of the family subscribed to a different periodical. So, as you can guess, reading matter was plentiful in that family circle. One paper which I liked very much was the "Sydney Mail"—a paper which is now out of publication. I used to read every paper these people subscribed to. They, too, were exceptionally nice people, and they treated me as if I were a member of their own family, and not as an employee of theirs.

The books that I have read most are the works of Charles Dickens. My favourite work of his being the Pickwick Papers. Mr. Pickwick was my favourite character. He was the kind of friend that I always wanted to have. Mr. Pickwick was a "faithful" sort of a character to me; I liked the way he would admonish the young people he came in contact with; the way he'd admonish the older ones sometimes appealed to me, too. "David Copperfield" was another favourite work of Charles Dickens that I liked immensely. The conversation about expenditure was good, and the sentence which says: "If one's income is greater than one's expenditure" and vice versa. I think I've remembered those words more than anything else. It's a long time since I've read "David Copperfield", so I hope I've quoted the sentence correctly. Sentences like that are good advice, and the perfect command of English appealed to me immensely. Dickens was a great writer.

When I was young I was delicate, and even when I was what is now called a "teenager" I could not take any part in sports the way others could, in both football and cricket. So once again I decided that something must be done about it, and again I saw an advertisement in a magazine which seemed to be what I needed, a course in Physical Culture. This course was given by a Mr. Don Harold, who was reputed to be a strong man. All I know is that I did do all the exercises, practising regularly, and the result was amazing, for I found that in doing Physical Training, I could compete with anyone doing "hard work", such as splitting fencing posts, fencing, ring-barking, and scrub felling. I gained strength and endurance, which I never had before. This was