Daisy Bates

The Passing of the Aborigines

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THE END

Prologue
A Vanished People

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Perth from King's Park. I can never look down on the panorama of that young and lovely city from the natural parkland on the crest of Mount Eliza that is its crowning glory without a vision of the past, the dim and timeless past when a sylvan people wandered its woods untrammelled, with no care or thought for yesterday or tomorrow, or of a world other than their own. Scarcely a hundred years have passed since that symmetry of streets and suburbs was a pathless bushland, a tangle of trees and scrub and swamp with the broad blue ribbon of river running through it, widening from a thread of silver at the foot of the ranges to the estuary marshes and the sea.

Through it all, a kangaroo skin slung carelessly over his shoulders, a few spears in his hand, strode the first landlord, catching fish in the river-shallows, spearing the emu and the kangaroo, and finding the roots and fruits that were his daily bread. His women and children meekly followed, carrying his spare weapons, their own household gods, and perhaps a baby swung in the kangaroo-skin bag. Every spring and gully, every quaintly distorted tree, every patch of red ochre or white pipe-clay was his landmark, and every point, hill, valley, slope or flat from the river's source to its mouth had its name. Simple in his needs in a land of plenty, knowing none other than the age-old laws of life, and mating, and death, that have been his through the unreasoning

centuries, he was a barbarian, but his lot was happy. As far as humans can, he lived in perfect amity with his fellows.

For hundreds of miles about him the people of the country were all his kindred, and the campfires dotting the river-flats, and the ranges, and the sea-coasts, and the great timber-forests were fires of friendliness.

As I dream, the red glow of those fires of fancy grows hard and cold and yellow, regular as the street-lights of a city, and the ranges beyond them are lost in the shadow—even as the last of their people. Of the songs that rang to the stars in the far-off time there is no echo. The black man survived the coming of the white for little more than one lifetime. When Captain Stirling landed on the coast in 1829, he computed the aboriginal population of what he had marked out as the metropolitan area at 1,500 natives. In 1907 we buried Joobaitch, last of the Perth tribe.

Chapter 1
Meeting with the Aborigines

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As I dream over the orphaned land of the Bibbulmum, [See Chapter 7] my thoughts fly back, too, to the events which brought me on a second visit to Australia after a period of journalism in London with W.T. Stead, on the *Review of Reviews*, back to the stone-age nomads whom I had but glimpsed on my first visit to Australia, but among whom the rest of my life was to be cast. It was in 1899 that circumstances made possible my return to Australia.

Just before I left London a letter had been published in *The Times* containing strong allegations of cruelty to Western Australian aborigines by the white settlers of the North-West. I called upon *The Times*, stated that I was going to Western Australia and offered to make full investigation of the charges, and to write them the results. The offer was accepted.

While friends were bidding me farewell, one of them espied a kindly old Roman Catholic padre on deck, and asked him to “keep an eye” on me on the voyage out. The priest was an Italian named Martelli, and on the deck the first evening we embarked on a delightful friendship that lasted till his death. I studied Italian under his tutelage, until one day I mentioned the subject of the Australian natives, and showed Dean Martelli the letter in T*he Times*. Italian grammars were promptly put aside as I gained my first knowledge of the remnants of a fading race, and the problem they afforded the Government and the missions in

the Western State. I learned also of the Beagle Bay Mission, away in the wilds of the North-West, where the Trappist fathers had come from their beautiful old home monasteries among the vineyards of Sept Fons in France in rigours and difficulties to minister to the aborigines in the vicinity of Broome.

Shortly after I landed in Perth, I obtained a buggy and horses and camp-gear, and journeyed by sea to Port Hedland. Arrived at that remote port, I stayed at a licensed shanty with earthen floors and blue blankets, where the hermit crabs from the seashore nibbled my feet every time I put them to the floor. I then traversed in my buggy eight hundred miles of country, taking six months to accomplish it. I could not prove one charge of cruelty, except that of "giving offal to natives instead of good meat," and "sending them away from the stations without food when work was slack." So far as these were concerned, I found that the favourite parts of any animal, large or small, were the entrails, which were torn out of the beast and eaten half raw. Later, on my own station, I discovered that the blacks insisted on a "pink-hi" or walkabout season—they could not live without it—and that they would not carry flour and tea, preferring their own bush tucker. Once in my inexperience, I myself packed up a plenitude of provisions for them, tied neatly in bundles on their heads, with new shirts and trousers and medicines and other conveniences I thought they might need. A few days after they had gone, riding to an outlying windmill, I came across a snow-storm of the flour that they had playfully thrown at each other. The tea

and sugar had been consumed at this first well, and the trousers and sundries were deposited in a tree-fork.

Care-free and unclad, gathering their native foods and bending to drink at the soaks and water-holes, the natives had taken a hundred-mile trail to anywhere, to call on their friends and relations, where they could play and quarrel till the desire for damper and tea saw them homing to the station again. So much for the allegations that awakened my interest in the Australian aborigines, and which were the beginning of my life's work among them. *The Times* published the result of my investigations and the matter dropped for a decade.

It was while I rested at Sherlock River Station, near Roebourne, in 1900, that I gained my first knowledge of the natives' social organization, and the classes into which they were divided, and was myself entered into one of these classes. The white people of the station, the well-known pioneering families of Withnells and Meares, were West Australians, and father, mother and children had all been classed by the natives according to their aboriginal relationships. I was so much interested in the systems of these primitive people that I inquired if I also had been classified.

"Oh yes," Mrs. Meares told me. "You belong to my husband's class, and you are his sister and my sister-in-law, the paternal aunt of my children."

Before I left Sherlock River, I had discovered the fundamental simplicity of the system. Later, at Beagle Bay, I found myself entered in exactly the same class division. This

was enlightening and good news to me, and I utilized it later among the Broome groups, with excellent results.

It suffices to say that in every native group throughout all Western Australia, and passing from group to group in South and Central Australia, I assumed as a matter of course my proper relationship. Even when I went to my camp in the desert at Ooldea, I found the natives there in touch with those of the west a thousand miles away across the border, and the western class divisions remembered.

On my return to Perth, Dean Martelli invited me to the Bishop's Palace to meet Bishop Gibney, Roman Catholic Bishop of the State of Western Australia. Bishop Gibney and the Dean were about to pay a visit to Beagle Bay. I was invited to go with them and see this Mission for myself, and to tell of its benefits, or otherwise, to the natives. I was told that the fate of the Mission hung on the report of the government valuator, who would make a patrol almost immediately to see if the scheduled improvements that would entitle the Mission authorities to a fee-simple over 10,000 acres had been carried out. These improvements must total £5,000, otherwise the grazing lease must be forfeited. I accepted with alacrity, and made my preparations, with stores of clothing, food and sweets for distribution.

In July, the two priests and I were under way for the port of Broome, from which we were to tranship to Beagle Bay. At Broome the *Sree pas Sair*, at one time the yacht of Rajah Brooke, was placed at our disposal. It had been stripped of every comfort. Cleanliness there was none, as it was the "feeding-lugger" of the pearling-boats owned by a Manila-

man, and brought back the shell from the luggers. After an interesting voyage round the fleets in the *Sree pas Sair*, we returned to Broome, and with three of the Trappists waiting there, loaded up the yacht. I learned that not only was there no accommodation for a woman at the monastery, with all its rigid poverty and simplicity, but, according to Trappist principles, no woman except a queen could be allowed within its walls. However, there I was, and the dear little acting abbot took it upon himself to grant a dispensation, and went out to see what furniture he could buy for me, making wild guesses at what a female might need. His bewildered and exaggerated idea of hospitality filled me with astonishment.

We all worked hard at the loading and packing of the lugger, and in the beginning of August the *Sree pas Sair* set out northward. There were eight of us on board—the Bishop, the Dean, the acting abbot, two brothers, Xavier and Sebastian, the owner and helmsman, his Malay uncle and a small Malay child. We reached Beagle Bay on the high tide that rises thirty feet in a few hours, and the whaleboats took us, and eventually the stores, to land. Just near the beach was a primitive turtle-soup factory and in the fenced-in enclosure an unfortunate turtle awaited transformation into eighty tins of soup. We inspected the factory, but were not impressed by the dirty native women and girls loafing about it, so we did not accept the turtle soup.

Mounting from the ship’s deck on horseback, we set out, the Bishop and I, across the nine miles of bleak flat that lay between the beach and the Mission, Dean Martelli and the brothers following with the bullock-team which had been

sent in for the stores. I rode side-saddle on a stride-saddle—a painful ordeal. A few half-clad natives straggled along behind us. As we jogged on through the heat and flies and blankness, the Bishop intoned the rosary, and the natives joined in when they knew the words. The horses were Trappists, too, skin and bone in their poverty. They stopped so often for their meditations and devotions that the bullock-team arrived before us.

At last in the early moonlight we pulled in to a few tin buildings in a clearing. About 150 natives, men, women and children, shouted a welcome to us from the shadows. None of us had eaten anything to speak of for three days on the *Sree pas Sair*, and the lay brother had set about unloading the stores and preparing a meal.

Beagle Bay had been founded by Bishop Gibney ten years before when, with two little exiles of Spanish priests, he had taken a long pilgrimage through the bush from Derby, at last finding suitable country with ten precious acres of wonderful springs, natural wells and extensive swamps, the best water in the North-West. He had secured a lease, under certain conditions, of 10,000 acres, and the native reserve which extended for 600,000 acres about it. The Trappists there established the first Mission in the far North-West. Unable to speak English and quite unused to Australian conditions, the two little pioneer priests and the sixteen ordained men who had followed them from the old French monastery had endured years of unbelievable hardship in a remote wilderness. Some had died there, under the saddest conditions. Others, blind and emaciated, had been rescued from their fate and invalided home.

When I arrived, the Mission was but a collection of tumbledown, paper-bark monastery cells, a little bark chapel and a community room of corrugated iron, which had been repeatedly destroyed in bush fires and hurricanes. There were four monks left on the station. They were Abbot Nicholas, a Catalonian Spaniard, father confessor, doctor, teacher and overseer; Brother Sebastian, a Manilaman who was the cook; Brother Xavier, a Broome constable who had laid down his baton for the rosary-beads on the Bishop's first visit, and was gardener, store-keeper and handyman, and Frère Jean, stockman.

Frère Jean had been dedicated to the service of God at Sept Fons in his early childhood. I was the first white woman, other than his mother, he had seen or looked at in his life. As I came into the community room, which had been set aside for our living-place, eager for my supper, Frère Jean fled from the world, the flesh and the devil that I represented, but before I left Beagle Bay he had so far overcome his religious horror of me that he made and fitted me with a neat little pair of kangaroo-skin shoes, and even slept trustfully in my company when we all camped out on our survey expedition.

At the Time of Presentation to the then
Duke and Duchess of York in Perth, 1901

The Trappists led a life of rigorous poverty, intensified in this barren remote land to the point of starvation. There were cattle on the station, but meat was excluded for religious reasons, and the monks existed on one meal a day

of pumpkin and rice, and a little beer they had made from sorghum grown in the garden. Rising at 2 a.m. they kept vigil in the dark chapel till dawn, then worked till daylight's end, speaking no word save in necessity, and closing the day with some hours on their knees on the bare earth. I was the first white woman to appear among them at the Mission, and the first that the natives of the region had seen.

From the newly arrived stores, Brother Sebastian had provided a strange and varied meal for us according to his lights, extraordinary stews and puddings served in any order and all strongly flavoured with garlic; milkless tea in a huge jug that was both teapot and cups for us all. Poor Brother Sebastian may have been a paragon of piety, but he was no cook. In my keeping today is a fragment of petrified bread roll he made for me in 1900! It has been mistaken for a geological specimen, and, always carried with me in loving memory, it has survived, without losing a crumb, thousands of miles of rough transport.

Perhaps the first woman in history to sleep in a Trappist bed, I was allotted the abbot's bag bed and seaweed pillow, and the sawn-off log for my chair or table. I woke to hear the natives singing a Gregorian chant in the little chapel near by. Half clothed and, for all the untiring work of the missioners, still but half-civilized, they comprised the Nyool-nyool tribe, of the totem of a local species of snake. Most of the women and men had their two front teeth knocked out, and some still wore bones through their noses. Infant cannibalism was practised, where it could not be prevented —as it still is among all circumcised groups. One of the old men, Bully-bulluma, having been an epic meat-hunter in his

day, had eight wives. Another, Goodowel, was dressed in trousers and shirt, one stocking, his face painted red with white stripes from each corner of his mouth in broad lines. A red band was round his head, the hair drawn back to form a tight knob, and stuck in the knob was a tuft of white cockatoo feathers and a small wooden emblem. I know now that he was in the sixth degree of initiation.

Although they had tried their hardest, with prayer and precept, to teach these natives cleanliness and Christian living, giving their very lives to the work in torture and privation, those Spanish priests could hope for little headway in the first generation. There was one terrible manifestation of savagery that I can never forget.

A man had been found dying of spear-wounds out in the bush, and carried to the Mission as he was breathing his last. I watched two of the lay brothers bearing the stretcher to one of the huts, a horde of natives following. I noticed that they held their burden curiously high in the air. Suddenly, as it was lowered for entry to a doorway, the natives crowding round, to my horror, fell upon the body of the dying man, and put their lips to his in a brutal eagerness to inhale the last breath. They believed that in so doing they were absorbing his strength and virtue, and his very vital spark, and all the warnings of the “white father” would not keep them from it. The man was of course dead when we extricated him, and it was a ghastly sight to see the lucky “breath catcher” scoop in his cheeks as he swallowed the “spirit breath” that gave him double hunting power.

Chapter 2
In a Trappist Monastery

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I was awakened by the sound of the conch shell which did duty for a monastery bell in that primitive spot, and when I went out into the open I was surrounded by all the women and children, a bright, pleasant little crowd, but oh! how dirty! Although the monks for some years had issued the dictum “No bath, no breakfast,” the natives preferred the lesser of two evils, and went hungry until the ban was lifted. Shack dormitories had been erected for the unmarried girls and men, but most of the natives came in from the camps in the bush where they slept under the trees. Their beds were hollows scooped in the sand where a fire had been burning, the sand and the stones sometimes so hot that they left raw wounds in the flesh. Father Nicholas told us that they ate dirt in handfuls, and that the women sometimes ate their new-born babies, but that since the advent of the Mission, with its admonitions and its daily distribution of pumpkin and rice and tea and flour, cannibalism was not nearly so much in evidence.

Immediately after our monastic breakfast of coffee and Brother Sebastian’s rolls, we started off to inspect the Mission property and set it shipshape for the valuator’s visit. A survey of the whole lease was to follow. Although I had come up merely as a “child taking notes,” I started on the very practical manual labour necessary to improve the appearance of the place, sharing the toil with the brothers and the blacks, and the Bishop in his shirt-sleeves. The four

months that I spent there were nothing but the sheerest hard work under the most trying conditions.

Manual labour has been the keynote of all my work for the aborigines. I have never made servants or attendants of them. I have waited upon the sick and the old, and carried their burdens, fed the blind and the babies, sewed for the women and buried the dead—only in the quiet hours gleaning, gathering, learning, always hastening, as one by one the tribes dwindled out of existence, knowing how soon it would be too late.

At Beagle Bay, the Spanish priests and monks had performed almost incredible labours in their ten years' isolation, but there was little to show for it. Willie-willies and fires and tropic conditions had taken constant toll. When houses and crops and gardens were burnt, they had to start all over again. When their horses were lost, or died from eating poisonous weed, they harnessed themselves to the carts and logs, yet the conditions of the Mission seemed hopeless. The bark huts were dilapidated, the gardens smothered in growth of saplings and suckers, and some of the wells had fallen in.

I was sent in charge of some native women to do some "scrubbing"—that is, hoeing up the small shoots, or saplings, of uprooted trees, and to open up the fallen wells, of which the flooring was as shaky as an Irish bog. I worked like a Trojan, but the force of my example failed dismally. Day after day those women played with the babies, and laughed both with and at me, full of merriment and good feeling. Now and again, a few of them took up the spade or the hoe in a stirring of conscience, but not for long, and all

my efforts to make it an interesting game failed to produce results. I tried to gather the babies and children and play with them, and let their mothers do a little manual labour, and I started “Ring-a-ring-a-roses.” No sooner had we got into the swing of the game than every woman and girl “downed tools” to join in. I compromised. We adults must work, and when the rest time came at hot midday or evening, we would have games. The little plan worked, and so we worked and played merrily throughout. As I worked they talked to me, and told me a little of their laws. Curiously enough, they had entered both the Bishop and me, believing him my brother, into one of their four-class divisions, the abbot and the monks belonging to another. The women quite frankly admitted to me that they had killed and eaten some of their children—they liked “baby meat.”

There was a fight, apparently to the death, between two of these women one day, one of them heavily pregnant and the other an aged creature, nothing but skin and bone. It was the old story, an eternal triangle. Some time before, a boy had come down from Sunday Island, and being of good conduct and a fair worker, had been duly married to one of the unallotted girls of the station, which was what he had come down for. All went happily until, with another batch of visitors from the northern land, there arrived an old lady with prior claims, and maledictions and a yam-stick to prove them. The women fought steadily, blow for blow alternately, each blow well-timed and aimed for the direct centre of the skull. As each one took her turn the other passively

submitted. At length the younger woman fell unconscious, and the fight was over.

When these purely personal quarrels took place, the Trappist found it best to let them run their course, so that there would be no subsequent ill-feeling. In this case the old woman lovingly attended the other, and stayed with her peacefully in the camp until she returned home, minus the husband, but quite satisfied. This was another “law” universal throughout the groups. Twins were born to the young woman shortly after, and the Trappists named them Matthew and Daisy, in honour of the Bishop and myself—a doubtful compliment, but appreciated.

So far as the safety of the missioners was concerned, there had never been any trouble at Beagle Bay, but at every layingup season, when the pearling ships were off-shore, practically every boy who had a woman took her down to trade her with the Asiatics. These women returned dying and diseased, after the boats had resumed pearling. It was an iniquitous thing, but it could not be prevented. Some boats laid up at Beagle Bay during our stay, and to keep the women and girls away from them, the Bishop told Father Nicholas to lock them in the store for the night. There was only one small opening high up in the wall, fifteen or twenty feet above ground and no ladder. Even so, at daybreak when we went to the store there was not a woman there. They had piled up the store cases and climbed to the little window, dropping without hurt on the soft sand. The Bishop hurried down to the seashore to reclaim the girls, and ordered the coloured men away. Next night the blacks and their women joined them at another anchorage.

The association of the Australian native with the Asiatic is definitely evil. There were four Manilamen at Beagle Bay married to native women. By tribal custom the women had all been betrothed in infancy to their rightful tribal husbands. They were therefore merely on hire by their own men to the Asiatics, and, in spite of the church marriage, remained, not only their husband's property, but that of all his brothers, and all of the Manila husband's brothers who paid for the accommodation. It was hard to convince the Bishop and the little abbot of this fact and of the terrible cruelty to the women and girls of such a system, and I had to show the two priests a poignant example. I had visited the Manila quarters in Broome, and in one house found a poor aboriginal woman, the "wife" of a Manilaman, with five of his "brothers" waiting to have and pay for intercourse with her. The poor soul told me that this happened daily. A few days afterwards I took the two priests to this hovel, choosing the Manila rest hour of the day for our inspection. I knew the terrible shock this would be to the little abbot and the Bishop to realize what Manila-Aborlginal marriage meant for the native woman: but with these facts the Bishop gave his direct veto on the dreadful system and in future such marriages were prohibited.

For three months, and more, we had worked on the reclamation of the place, and the valuator arrived just as we had cleared the last corner. He was surprised to see a thriving property where he had expected ruin and decay. Every screw and post, every fruit and vegetable, buildings, wells, trenches and implements were meticulously valued, and with the livestock on the run, the supplies in the store,

the sorghum and sugar-cane fields, the tomato and cucumber patches, and the orange, banana and coco-nut and pomegranate groves, the sum reached over £6,000. Even one Cape gooseberry bush and one grape-vine had to be valued. The Mission was saved for the natives. All together and in much jubilation we made the first bricks of sand and loam and clay for the new convent and monastery, of which I laid the foundation brick.

I had then, and have now in retrospect, the greatest admiration for the Trappist missionaries, and nothing I may say about the sometimes incongruous results of their self-sacrificial work implies any inability to understand its sacred purpose. Although I am an Anglican, I attended all religious ceremonies, morning and evening, during my stay, and loved to listen to the natives, with their sweet voices, intoning the Latin chants and responses as much as I loved to listen to their own weird music. There were innumerable baptisms and weddings. On one occasion a little wisp of a girl about 12 years old was married to a man old enough to be her grandfather, who had always been lucky in the allotment of wives. He was a good hunter, and the unborn babies were betrothed to him to excite his generosity. If they happened to be boys they became his brothers-in-law. I spoke to the child-bride, Angelique, intending to rescue her from unwilling bondage, but she told me that she “likim that old man all right.”

The wearing of a wreath and veil at religious ceremonies is an old Spanish custom, and the Trappist fathers kept wreath and veil in stock. All of the newly baptized and the brides wore it in turn, a delightfully ludicrous touch it

seemed to me, worn above wild hair and matted beards, and no respectable clothing to speak of.

Knowing that he would probably never pay another visit to the Mission, the Bishop announced his intention of making confirmed Christians of all the natives in the district, and I shall never forget the occasion. Dean Martelli and the brothers rounded up the mob. Crowded into that little bark chapel, and smelling to high heaven, sixty-five wild men and women and babies of the Nyool-nyool stood before a prelate of the Roman Church, in all his ceremonial robes of lace and purple and mitre, to be anointed with the holy oils and receive the papal blessing and the little blow on the cheek of the “Pax tecum.” Some of the men wore nothing but a vest or a red handkerchief, some a rag of a shirt, and the fraction of a pair of trousers. They had been told to keep their hands piously joined together, and their eyes shut—and the flies were bad.

Standing behind them, close to the door for a breath of air, I tried in vain to maintain a solemn countenance and a reverent mien, only to explode at least once in choking laughter at the antics of one boy. Knowing that I was behind him, he was at the same time desperately trying to keep his hands clasped in prayer, and a rag of decency well pulled down over his rear elevation. A frown of disapproval from under the dazzling mitre and an impatient jerk of the sacred crook in my direction sobered me up, but that afternoon, hearing a succession of loud shrieks of laughter from the camp, I went along to see how the newly-confirmed Christians were progressing.

Imagine my mingled horror and delight to find Goodowel, one of the corroboree comedians, sitting on a tree-trunk with a red-ochred billy-can on his head, and a tattered and filthy old rug around his shoulders. In front of him pranced every member of the tribe, all in a line, and each wearing a wreath and veil that were a bit of twisted paperbark and a fragment of somebody's discarded shirt. As they passed Goodowell each received a sounding smack under the ear with a shout of "Bag take um!" Hilarious and ear-piercing shrieks of laughter followed each sally. I went back in glee to tell the Bishop. He shook his head. "Ah, the poor craytures!" was all he said.

There was yet another ordeal before us, a never-ending ordeal it seemed. In a few days' time, we set out again, with the natives and the bullock-dray, to survey the whole leasehold of 10,000 acres. Our only surveying instruments were the compass of an old lugger and a chain. The Bishop and I were the chairmen, and we walked in a steamy heat, of 106 degrees at times, sometimes twelve miles in the day. Over marsh and through the pindan, now lame from the stones and prickles, now up to our thighs in bog, we plodded on, the Bishop in the lead, throwing down a small peg to mark the chain limit, the brothers and the blacks and I behind him. I was always in difficulties owing to my small stride and high-heeled footwear, and many a time, seeing me perched perilously on the edge of a bog, the Bishop would give a mischievous twitch to his end of the chain, and land me deep in it.

We were all always hungry. Brother Xavier, in charge of the commissariat, was very good so far as he went, but he

never seemed to come as far as we did, and we were always faint from lack of food. In the simplest meal—and they were all simple meals, of bread and beef—he would forget the salt, or the bread or the meat, or the place where he had arranged to meet us, or that we existed at all, but in hunger and hardship we managed to keep our good humour throughout our whole long stay, strange companions in the solitude of the bush.

On the night-walkings, rosaries were chanted all the way home, the natives and brothers responding. I often stumbled and fell in the dark, but that rosary never stopped. Sometimes we washed our faces in water from a bottle-tree. Felix, the native guide, chose his tree, chopped at a spot with his tomahawk, left the axe sticking in the cut, and the water came out clean and sparkling like a miniature waterfall. One morning, just before dawn, we came to Argomand Water—a glorious pool of still silver, where there was a sudden whirr of myriad wings to greet us, and thousands of birds of brilliant plumage rose in a cloud, screaming. That was the happiest circumstance of the long and arduous circuit. I compiled all the survey notes at night. Those survey notes were later a source of great amusement to the Bishop and his staff, but the Bishop received the title-deeds of his ten thousand acres, so the mud-stains and blots scarcely mattered. Later, in Perth, he presented me with an inscribed gold watch, in memory of our survey work, and the saving of the mission for the natives.

The valuation was satisfactory, and the valuator departed. Travelling with the bullock-dray our next journey was to Disaster Bay, twenty-five miles north, to bring the

consolations of religion to those not yet converted. The Bishop and I rode ahead, with two native women, the bullock team, Father Nicholas and the boys bringing up the rear.

It was a two-days' journey, and on the first we out-distanced the bullock-dray, camped in a good spot, and hobbled out the horses. Hour after hour we waited in the moonlight, but no dray appeared. At length we made back on foot to meet it. We found it three miles behind, all its party settled down for the night and fast asleep. The bullocks refused to move on after that day of blazing heat. Coffee and damper improved our spirits, and then we too settled down.

In the morning, Father Nicholas made some coffee of the last little supply of water left on the wagon, and we were on our way before the sun was up. It rose hot and fiery. There was no more water, and no water-hole until we reached Disaster Bay. We had been able to find neither drum, keg, nor water-bag at the mission. We tried to hurry, but our horses were bad-tempered and thirsty. Now and again we dismounted to let the black women ride. Lake Flora we found to be a hard, dry claypan, which would not yield to spade or shovel. We went on as quickly as we could, the black women leading, the Bishop keeping them in sight, and I vainly trying to keep the Bishop in sight.

That night again found us far from our haven, as we had been zigzagging to try and find water. The Bishop suffered greatly from thirst, but he was a good bushman, and plucking a gum-leaf held it between his teeth to stimulate the saliva. At length one of the women cried "Ngooroo!"—

fire or camp—and in a few minutes we were beside the water. Everybody rushed to the open well. It was sweet magnesium water, but they drank and drank, insatiable. I wisely waited for the boiling of the billy and the making of tea. During the night, or what was left of it, the whole party was convulsed with sickness and pain, and I produced my flask of brandy, that I have always carried throughout my travels, to accord each of them, Bishop and monks, a little relief.

I camped in the hut that the previous missioners had erected at Disaster Bay, and the others camped outside it in the moonlight. I had scarcely snatched an hour of sleep in one of the four dust-bag bunks that hung to the walls when I was rudely awakened by the presence of thirty naked women, of all sizes, giggling at me. From the neighbouring camps the natives had been rounded up by one of the Beagle Bay boys for the Bishop’s visit. Being quite unsophisticated they were as much amused by my appearance as I at theirs. I have always preserved a scrupulous neatness, and all the little trappings and accoutrements of my own very particular mode of dress, sometimes under difficulties, but I think I never made a more laughable toilet than that one. Every motion of mine, as I laced my corsets and eased my shoes on with a shoe-horn, brushed my hair and adjusted my high collar and waist-belt, was greeted with long-drawn squeals of laughter and mirrored in action, though the slim black daughters of Eve about me had not even a strand of hair string between the whole thirty.

We could not spend more than a few days at this outpost, and next morning my Lord the Bishop baptized and confirmed every man, woman and child that could be gathered in, including babies in arms. Father Nicholas dutifully had brought along the wreath and veil, and there it was, the only article of wearing apparel in evidence. Vividly I can see again the spectacle of a hairy savage with a bone through his nose, a wreath and veil, and nothing else whatever.

Food was given to the natives from the bullock-dray, also the rest of the clothing I had brought for them from Perth, but they had in mind the tail of a "'gator" they had seen in a nearby creek, so, eager for my first sight of a crocodile, while the priests were attending to their plans and duties, I rambled away with them. Wading barefooted in the shallow waters of the mangrove flats, now deeply embedded in the grey mud, now scratched by the shells and suckers, my feet immediately swelled with some swift poison, until I could fit them into nothing smaller than two sugar-bags. There was little pain but much inconvenience as, with my poor nether limbs like hills in front of me, I endured the carriage in the dray back to the Mission at Beagle Bay.

The valuator with Dean Martelli, an aged man worn out with his exertions, had made overland with the only horse vehicle, to Broome, but the ship was again waiting for us. So the Bishop and I, and the four natives carrying our luggage, set out to walk the nine miles to the Bay, anxious to catch the tide as the ship's captain, Roderiguez, was eager to be off. After a last meal of grimly abstemious Trappist fare, we bade farewell to the heroic little brothers, and began our

journey at 2 p.m. on a day of century heat in November. We talked as we walked, of the work done and the joy of its successful accomplishment. But presently the Bishop, who had never lagged before, showed signs of collapse. He laid his hand, and then his increasing weight, upon my shoulder, and so we crept on.

The journey would ordinarily have taken three hours, but we had only reached the five-mile well when darkness came. The Bishop showed signs of slight delirium, calling me “Margaret,” the name of a beloved sister in Ireland. It must have been ten o’clock when the natives whispered to me that we were at the beach, where he sank down unconscious. We straightened his weary body, the natives and I, with part of my rug-strap under his head. There we camped, unable to see the ship offshore, and I quite ignorant of our surroundings. The only sound I heard was the tide sucking at the mangroves. To make matters worse, the natives came, in frightened whispers, to tell me that “big pindana (inland) mob blackfellows come up” close by, strangers from the inland bush. I said “Don’t be afraid. Eebala (father) and I will take care of you.” Then I placed two of them lying one at each side of the Bishop, and I lay down with my head on the rug-strap and my feet in the opposite direction, the other two natives on either side of me.

The Bishop slept in utter exhaustion, and I not a wink. Stamping of feet and wild cries came to us clearly. Now and again a black form between me and the stars told me that our natives were listening, and in terror they would whisper to me of these bad *pindana-womba* who sometimes hang

about the outskirts of the Mission to steal their women and to fight. I changed the subject to the stars and the sky, and they told me of the dark place in the Milky Way which was once a native road to the sky country, until one day some women on the way lighted a fire and burned the road, which was really a sacred wooden emblem. Our heads were together as we whispered, the Bishop's white unconscious face beside us. Then a fiercer chant and the mound-beating of the pindana men would send us all noiselessly on our backs again. Through the false dawn we were particularly watchful, but nothing happened.

Broad daylight brought a boat from the *Sree pas Sair*, four months dirtier than when we boarded it at Broome in August. The Bishop was laid on deck. Only Manilamen were on board, and I sat near the Bishop through the hundred-mile journey. An uncle of the Manila owner there was, a naked cheerful old man, who sang one tune the whole way down. That lilting little tune always brings the scene vividly to my mind—the filthy boat that was once a miniature floating palace, the sleeping Bishop lying on a sail-cloth, and the Manila helmsman looking up at a sort of calico cornucopia which, when filled with the winds, was his steering compass.

Just before we entered Broome waters the Bishop opened his eyes and looking round wearily, saw the old Manilaman lying naked and unashamed nearby.

"Go and put your clothes on!" he called to the poor old fellow, who had neither clothes nor need of them in his rough life on the sea.

A typically Irish ending to a difficult work accomplished.