

Robert Henderson Croll



*The Open Road
in Victoria*

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A SURVEY BY WAY OF PREFACE

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Bed in the bush, with stars to see,
Bread I dip in the river—
There's the life...!

—R.L.S.

Man took to walking when he became upright. And still he walks, despite the "many inventions" he has found to keep his foot from the good green earth and his body from health. Once he tramped because he must; now he usually does so for pleasure. The devil called Speed possesses him at times, but in his saner moods he confesses a value and a charm in pedestrianism that nothing else yields. The train, the car, the buggy, the bicycle are excellent means of getting from place to place; none of them gives him leisure to note what lies between. That is peculiarly the walker's gain. It is then that he gathers the harvest of the quiet eye, and he sees not only the widespread landscape, but also the details of Nature's plan. The great mountains raise their heads for others as for him, but for him only does the ground-lark betray her nest and the tiny flower shine in the grass. Alike to him are the high-road and the "little vagrant woodland way, grey-ribboned through the green." He may go where no vehicle may follow, and at night, with twenty clean bush miles behind him, he can know what rest really means as he takes his ease at his inn, or, stretched by his camp fire on a quiet hill-top, seem so removed from the

troubled world as to feel that he owns the sunset, and that the whole round earth and its fulness are his.

Never has walking had a greater vogue than it enjoys today. A few years ago an epidemic of walking-races raged like a disease, and everyone took off his coat and did ridiculous things in fast time on suburban roads. It was essentially a class craze—stockbroker competed against stockbroker, butcher against butcher. Even telegraph messengers were affected. But all that was a form of what is technically known as track walking, and it has little connection with the walking with which this book is concerned. So distinctive, indeed, is the action of the expert who can do his mile in seven minutes or less that the cognoscenti, feeling it was neither natural walking nor yet running, coined a special name for it. They called it "gaiting." Some interest attaches to the fact that Australia was the first country in the world to supply a reasonably satisfactory definition of walking and make laws for its control as a sport. Possibly few people realise the exact difference between running and walking. The former is a series of leaps from one foot to the other, and the runner is in the air most of the way; in walking there is constant contact with the earth. The back foot must not leave the ground until the front one has made connection.

Mercifully, definitions do not trouble the stroller in woodland ways. He has more attractive stuff to think about. He may walk fast or he may walk slow, as his age or his inclination suggest, or as time and distance dictate. It is a game for all ages and both sexes. Young lads are showing an increasing desire nowadays to test the back-country

tracks, and one of the most devoted followers of the footpath way is a citizen of Melbourne who confesses that he has passed his seventieth birthday. He will go alone rather than lose a holiday or a week-end in the bush, and with his sleeping-bag on his shoulder he meets philosophically all that chances, sure at least of his bed for the night and buoyed by the knowledge that every trip means renewed health. Women and girls, too, have taken kindly to the open road, and yearly their excursions grow bolder. At first, one found them exclusively in such places as Lorne and Healesville, with one day as the limit of their outing from hotel or boardinghouse. Gradually the horizon has widened. Now they "dare do all that may become a man." Three feminine walks within the writer's knowledge in recent years were Warrnambool to Queenscliff; Lilydale to Warburton, Wood's Point, Darling-ford, Buxton, Marysville, Healesville and Melbourne; and, more greatly daring, Bright-Harrietville-Feathertop-Omeo-Ensay-Buchan-Cunninghame. On the Wood's Point excursion a caravan conveyed the food and bedding, but they disdained a lift for themselves.

Walking means most, perhaps, to the middle-aged. A man grows definitely old as soon as he gives up exercise, and it is not everyone who plays well enough to be welcome at golf, bowls, tennis, or the other pastimes commonly sought by those who have "come to forty year." But in this most natural of all the sports all are on an equal footing, and an agreeable lone hand may be played in the unlikely contingency of there being no partner available. Several associations exist in Melbourne for the very purpose of providing the walker with company to his liking. One of the

oldest established is the well-known Wallaby Club, which attracts largely the professional man, who finds in the week-end stroll and the good fellowship relief from the woes of his clients or his patients. Another, which has reached the respectable age of over 30 years, is the Melbourne Amateur Walking and Touring Club. Its main intention, in the beginning, was the cultivation of speed walking, and for many years it supplied the men who won Victorian and Australasian championships and put up records. Now the tail wags the dog, for touring is the sole activity of the club. Racing is left to a body of younger men, who style themselves the Victorian Walking and Field Games' Club. The Young Men's Christian Association used to encourage a rambler's section before the war, and there are many smaller organisations which are doing good work.

All of these bodies protest their willingness to make available such knowledge as they have recorded, but the means of giving it publicity has been lacking. The problem for the would-be tourist is ever where to go. In this volume that question will be answered to a certain extent. Some of the most attractive of the Victorian walks are here described and the best way to accomplish them made clear, while hints are given regarding equipment, accommodation, camping places, care of the feet, and other matters of moment to the walker.

CITY STROLLS

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COLLINS STREET

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Melbourne, on her cleansing river,
Offers thanks to God, the Giver,
For frank, wide streets and sunny ways,
For parks with golden blooms ablaze,
And, bending low her folk to greet,
The cool, green trees of Collins Street.

—R.H.C.

Of all Melbourne's thoroughfares I like Collins Street best. In its measured mile it provides at least as much variety as any of our highways, and a certain quality at one end gives the whole a distinction possessed by no other street that I know.

Time was when, as a wit remarked, this thoroughfare resembled an insolvent's account book—it was Dr. Dr. all the way. It is still the right thing for doctors, especially of medicine, to show a name plate somewhere between Russell Street and Spring Street, but the old exclusive possession has departed.

One by one the shops are stealing into the sacred preserve, and the wrecker is busy on more of the ancient Victorian buildings, destroying to give their fronts the modern touch. Three or four porches have been permitted, but the scandal of a verandah has so far been avoided, and

the trees stand as a living monument, so much more beautiful and effective than anything carved by man, to those wise burghers who thought to plant them for a later generation to admire.

The Victorian who is proud of his capital city, and would show it to advantage, should take his visitor at sunset to a point a little east of Russell Street, where he may have the two church towers (particularly Shirlow's "Gothic Spire"—that capital piece of work, both in reality and in the etching), rising high from the crown of the hill and the western sky glowing for a background. Then he should walk to the intersection of Russell Street, and, standing where the Burke and Wills monument once dominated the rise, look down the stretch of Collins Street, which ends with Spencer Street clock tower. He will see much there to please his sense of fitness and beauty. Finally, as the light fades, let him follow Enid Derham's advice ("O city, look the Eastward way!") and turn to see the shadows trooping to their homes in the green trees, and the attractive lamps, which civic authority has recently placed beneath them, opening like flowers to add a new charm to the scene.

Eastward, too, are some of the finest specimens of the city's architecture, notably the cool sandstone front of the Old Treasury, with its numerous windows reflecting the last of the daylight. There is an air of cultured reserve about this building. It suggests a wise old man, quiet, introspective, with thoughtful eyes. Near by broods the bronze figure of Chinese Gordon, one of the better statues of a city with a few good examples (and some pretty bad ones, too), of that medium in art. Immediately behind is the famous Stanford

fountain, so much admired for its chaste lines and so romantic in its history. Is it generally known that it was designed and carved by a prisoner in Pentridge? He was a man of quite unusual talent, and the monument may be regarded as the price of his liberty. He was paid nothing for it, but was released from gaol with six years still to serve. The material is bluestone from the Pentridge quarries, and the design took four years to execute. Stanford's death, it is said, was hastened by the work. His lungs became affected by the dust inhaled while he chiselled the stone.

"Why, Melbourne is not flat!" exclaimed a Sydney visitor recently. She was surveying the rapid fall of Collins Street from Russell Street down to Swanston Street. The effect is the greater since the tall buildings have gone up on the south side. But for its width they would make a canyon of this part. Its steep footpaths repel the tide of traffic that surges along "the block" on the level stretch from Swanston Street, the south side so substantially built, the other with such an irregular sky-line. But the tide persists beyond Elizabeth Street, changing in character from that of the idler to that of the busy professional man (and woman), for here is the country of the banker, the insurance clerk, and the lawyer.

Again is a mingling of the old and the new in architecture, good examples of the parvenu Age of Reinforced Concrete in the distinguished company of chaste creations like the Bank of New South Wales. The foot traffic thins out; no one comes shopping down here. That quaint break in the regular formation, Market Street, tops the rise

where, just a short block away, the city's founder, John Batman, built his home some ninety years ago.

A measured mile of wealth, with much beauty added, this street should be preserved by civic pride from desecration in any form. What a specially glorious thing it would be, a joy for ever, could the planes and elms of the east end be extended the full length. Never have those trees been more beautiful than in this present spring. Collins Street is a great street and they are its crowning glory.

THE OPEN GARDEN

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Art is but Nature to advantage drest:
Look well on Nature—and you'll know the rest.

—(Pope—adapted.)

Our Botanic Gardens have been acclaimed one of the three finest in the world. No Melburnian with an eye for beauty fails to recognise their great charm. But Sir Frank Clarke's book (surely the most delightful thing of its kind published in Australia), has said the last word about this beautiful collection and arrangement of plant life, so I shall pass it by, assuming that all Victorians know and are proud of it.

The Fitzroy Gardens are quite another matter. They seem to be all too little known to the man in the street. Yet they lie in the very bosom of the city, and are lovely both by art and by nature. Traffic roars past in all the nerve-racking tumult of the modern street, and they dream on, undisturbed, an oasis of peace in a desert of noise.

They are a testimonial to Melbourne's good citizenship, these Gardens. Like most of the cultivated reserves, they are now fenceless, their lawns are open and inviting to all, and the freedom is not abused. The result of this removal of restraint suggests that that wise old humorist, Mark Twain, was right when he thought Adam ate the apple solely because it was forbidden. "The obvious mistake," he added, "was in not forbidding him to eat the serpent."

From the city the way is short and agreeable. Only the width of the Treasury Gardens separates the Fitzroy reserve from the top of Collins Street. Enter the Treasury Gardens at the Clarke Memorial and you are at once in the dappled shade of a varied avenue of oaks, elms, palms, pines, Moreton Bay figs, a white poplar, a willow, and others. Below, on the right, is the enclosed lakelet (now bright with water lilies), with its ring of special plants. This is known as the Japanese garden. It is told that a party of Japanese visitors were taken to it. "Garden," said their guide. "Yes," replied the taciturn visitors, after due consideration. "Japanese," added the guide. "No!" came the prompt reply, with emphasis.

The glory of the Fitzroy Gardens is their avenues, and in these they excel their Botanic brother. A tunnel of green coolness is created by the great elm avenue which runs as far east as the central creek, branching off there in several directions. Just now the stem of every tree is decorated with the nymph cases of cicadas, and the air vibrates, each warm day, with their strident song, while birds "wax fat and kick" (like Jeshurun) as they dine sumptuously on the soft green bodies.

There's a bewilderment of choice in the paths. All are good, and all lead to the central core, a choice portion which, mistakenly, I think, actually has a fence. Within its bounds is a minor heaven, if heaven be a place of peace and beauty. Here poetry might be born, here youth dream dreams and old men see visions. The green lawn is hedged about by tall trees, goldfish nose the banks of a papyrus-edged pool, a little fountain splashes coolness, and narrow paths, emerald lanes formed of soft-foliaged bamboos and other evergreens, wind about and lose themselves in the most entrancing fashion. A reminder of ancient days is the butt of a giant gum tree, brought from its native hills in sections and set up here to waken in a new generation thoughts of what our country was like

"When wild in woods the noble savage ran."

One of the unusual avenues is that of Himalayan cedars (the Deodar which gives the title to an early book of Kipling's), shielding the two ribbons of garden that rise towards East Melbourne. Another good double row of trees meets over the plane tree walk, and there are lines of Lombardy poplars (tall, stately chaps with their cloaks held tightly round them), American maples, flowering chestnuts, Queensland silky oaks (covered at present with their honeycomb-like bloom), lindens and araucarias. Individual trees stand out, such as the Queensland Kauri near the south-eastern corner, a paper-bark on a western lawn, some redwoods (the giant tree of California) also on the western side, and a Moreton Bay fig near a noble jacaranda. Finest of all is the slim, graceful lemon-scented gum at the back of the deodars. She is always a delight, and never more so

than when, obviously conscious in early summer of her new, close-fitting dress of silver bark.

The population of the Gardens is varied and numerous. Birds abound. The Kookaburra may be seen (and heard) constantly, thrushes, blackbirds, minahs, doves and blue wrens treat the grass plots as their own. Two pairs of the white-shafted fantail built last season in bushes in the main walk, and the sacred Kingfisher nests not far away, for the mother was seen the other day feeding a hungry young one. One morning I noted a land rail at the creek, and a rabbit nibbled at the grass close by. Possums are plentiful, as anyone who strolls through by night can testify.

Reluctantly one leaves these Gardens. Pan, outcast from a war-smitten world overseas, might well be hiding here. The statues, showing in glimpses clown the leafy aisles, encourage the thought.

Memory brings away pictures of sunny lawns, shady groves, peace and beauty.

THE NEW AND THE OLD

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A stately city—mark her lofty towers,
Her league-long streets with myriad lights agleam;
Here wealth and pride exhibit all their powers—
Is this the "village" of John Batman's dream?

—R.H.C.

For all its spreading acres how young Melbourne is! A native-born friend could tell me yesterday (and he is hale and hearty and good for many years yet) that his mother

used to do the family washing in a tiny creek. That is the creek which runs through the centre of the present Fitzroy Gardens. It was then a pleasant burbling little stream, with its source near where the Presbyterian Ladies' College stands.

There was but small settlement in the neighborhood in those times. Later my friend and some other youngsters discovered a delightful playground which kept them in games for many a day. It was the foundations of the Public Offices, known to their generation as O'Shanassy's Folly. But O'Shanassy builded better than his critics knew; the huge pile is more than fully occupied, and the situation is one of the very best for its purpose—completely in the city, yet cut off from its noises.

Have you ever asked Young Australia what he thinks of a place? He has one superlative: "It's not bad!" Well, the view from the corner of Spring and Finders Streets, just below the Public Offices, is "not bad." That corner might well serve as a starting place for a little "walk-about," with an eye open for things of interest.

The first is certainly the outlook over the sunken railway lines which edge Flinders Street on the south. By the way, the advent of electric trains has pretty well removed the old name of "Cinders Street," which used to be applied to this part. Beyond is the Domain (where sometime, it seems imperative, our National Art Gallery must be), the outstanding point being Federal Government House on the crest of the rise. The slopes can look particularly attractive from here, especially in the Spring, when the long line of trees in Alexandra Avenue is breaking into soft bud. Even

the raw redness of the railway structures in the middle distance is not without its value at certain times, as when a winter sun, about to set, catches it "in a noose of light."

The tall radio mast, lifting its head over the hill, has long been noticeable from this point, and now, midway between it and the outstanding bulk of the Victoria Barracks, a new note is struck by the fluttering flag which marks where the Great War memorial is to stand.

The eye travels comfortably along the green line of St. Kilda Road until arrested by the dome of Flinders, Street station. Sundown is the time to see it from here; then you will realise why that keen recorder of Melbourne's picturesque points, John Shirlow, has so frequently etched this dome. Against the background of a brilliant sunset, or outlined on a pile of cumulus, the effect is striking. Well down the street shows the more formal tower of the Fish Market, which recalls the fact that the dome of Flinders Street station covers the site of an older Fish Market still.

It is good to stroll on, noting in passing that St. Paul's spires are assuming definite shape, and that Flinders Street is rapidly being rebuilt. Resist for the present the fascination of the wharves, just a couple of blocks along, but pause long enough to reflect that it was probably about the Queen's Bridge (earlier titled the Falls Bridge) that John Batman, on June 8, 1835, wrote in his diary: "This will be the place for a village."

Then it was unbroken wilderness; to-day there are nearly a million people in the "village." And this has all happened within three generations. Turn up Elizabeth Street and mark the busyness of this thoroughfare—which runs all the way to

Sydney. Note the huge buildings, so large that even the Post Office tower is hidden. Yet here was a watercourse a very few years ago. In my own time the digging of the street to lay foundations for the cable trams revealed a stretch of redgum corduroy which our fathers had found it necessary to put down to keep the street from swallowing travellers completely in wet weather.

The land rises on either side of Elizabeth Street as in a veritable stream. Come up to Queen Street, on the ridge, and stroll north a few blocks. The enclosure where Franklin Street crosses is the site of the Old Cemetery. The remains of the pioneers who slept here, and all their memorials, were recently removed to Fawkner to make way for municipal markets. An exception is the monument to John Batman, now re-erected at the corner of the Amateur Sports Ground (the old Friendly Societies' Reserve), in Batman Avenue.

But there is an older cemetery still, for the beautiful little Flagstaff Gardens, within a stone's throw of where we now stand, was once called Burial Hill, because of a few very early graves within it.

Times are changed indeed! This Flagstaff Hill was the centre of the social life of Melbourne in those early years, when Mr. Superintendent Latrobe controlled the destinies of the Port Phillip Settlement, and he might be seen taking the air here of a fine Sunday afternoon. In the memory of veterans like Mr. E. C. O. Howard and the late George Gordon McCrae it was one of the really charming spots of the locality. Its grassy surface was lawn-like and pleasant, and from its base stretched a beautiful blue lake—a real

lake, nearly oval, and full of the clearest salt water. "Only man is vile"—the "improvements" of civilisation have not only obliterated the lake, but have supplied its place with a rubbish tip.

Another great attraction for our forefathers was the notice board with the latest shipping news, for the height of the hill (now apparently so much reduced) commanded a view of Hobson's Bay, and here stood the flagstaff which signalled the arrival and departure of the shipping. That was the link, almost the only one, with the world which these pioneers had left so far behind them. Isolated as they were, news was news indeed. It is easy to imagine their interest in this spot.

How much may be packed into '90 years! And in an hour we have walked across that period into an age differing tremendously from our own, for then there were no mechanical aids to work and play, and, as Blamire Young once pictured it:

"Men wore curly hats and funny clobber."

ONE DAY WALKS

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ST. HELENA

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Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours' march to dinner—and then to thinking!

—Hazlitt.

Here is one of the many little walks, full of interest, which Melbourne folk may enjoy in the compass of a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday. It is essentially a meditative outing, one which may be taken alone without disadvantage. The distance is just right for the time, or, what is equally good, may be made so. The views are excellent, the road as winding as even Hazlitt would have it, and at one point the walker may pass at a stride through the whole period of Victoria's history and find himself contemplating what to us constitutes antiquity.

The Way.

Whether you go by the afternoon train on Saturday or by one of the Sunday morning trains, alight at Greensborough. The question of lunch on Sunday can best be answered by taking some with you. There are, however, hotels both at Greensborough and Eltham, and the two townships are only three miles apart. The train journey through Ivanhoe and Heidelberg, two of the most picturesque of our suburbs, is an attractive prelude to the run which follows across the