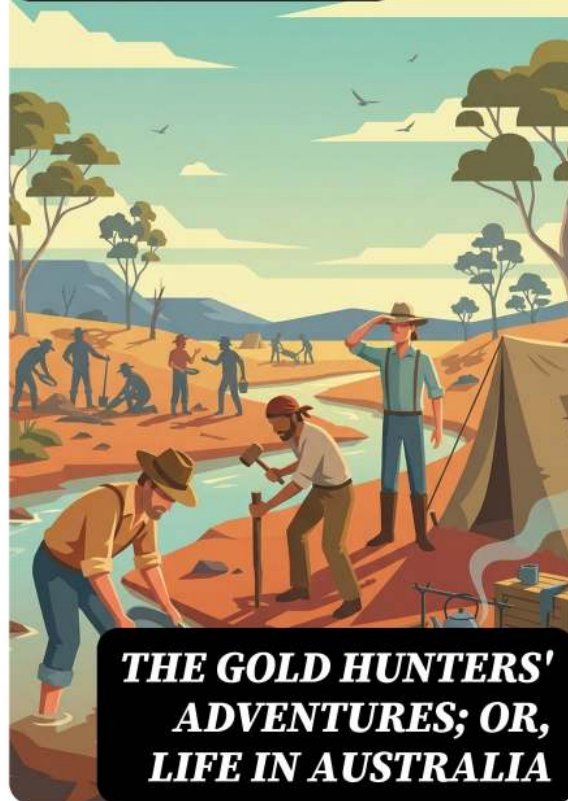


***WILLIAM  
HENRY THOMES***



***THE GOLD HUNTERS'  
ADVENTURES; OR,  
LIFE IN AUSTRALIA***

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HENRY THOMES**



**THE GOLD HUNTERS'  
ADVENTURES; OR,  
LIFE IN AUSTRALIA**

**William Henry Thomes**

# **The Gold Hunters' Adventures; Or, Life in Australia**

**Enriched edition.**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Lucas Finch*

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# INTRODUCTION.

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Since my return from Australia, I have been solicited by a number of friends to give them a history of my adventures in that land of gold, where kangaroos are supposed to be as plenty as natives, and jump ten times as far, and where natives are imagined to be continually lying in ambush for the purpose of making a hearty meal upon the bodies of those unfortunate travellers who venture far into the interior of the country—where bushrangers are continually hanging about camp fires, ready to cut the weasands of those who close their eyes for a moment—and lastly, where every other man that you meet is expected to be a convict, transported from the mother country for such petty crimes as forgery, house-breaking, and manslaughter in the second degree.

My friends have all desired to hear me relate these particulars, and have honored me with a large attendance at my rooms, and sat late at night, and drank my wine and water, and smoked my cigars, with a relish that did me great credit, as it showed that I am something of a connoisseur in the choice of such luxuries. And then they laughed so loudly at my jokes, no matter how poor they were, that, for a few days after my arrival home, I really thought the air of Australia had improved and sharpened my wit.

I should, no doubt, have continued feasting those who listened so patiently to my yarns, had not a sudden idea entered my head, one night, when the company were the

most boisterous. I was in the act of raising a glass of wine to my mouth, when it occurred to me that before I left this country for Australia, via California, scarcely one of those present had assembled on the dock to bid me farewell.

I placed the untasted wine upon the table again, lighted a cigar, and was soon buried in smoke and reflection. I thought of the time when I had not money enough to pay my passage to the Golden State—of the exertions I had made to raise the amount necessary, and the many refusals that I had met with at the hands of those who now professed to be my friends.

I blew aside the smoke that enveloped my head, and fixed my eyes upon one red-faced cousin, who owned bank shares, and bought stocks when low, and sold them when a rise had taken place. He had laughed at me for my impertinence in supposing that he could loan me money, and now he was seated at my table, chuckling at my jokes, and swearing, while he helped himself to liquor, that I was the best fellow alive, and that there was nothing but what he would do for me.

Could it be possible that the possession of fifty or sixty thousand dollars had wrought such a change? I was forced to believe it, and I grew sad at the thought, and no more jokes escaped my lips that night; but the company remained as late as usual, and declared by a unanimous vote that they would meet again at the same place the next evening, and hear further particulars.

Before sunset the next day I had changed my apartments, and taken private lodgings with a friend who had visited me but once since my return, and had then

refused to accept of the hospitalities that I was disposed to offer him. He had lent me money without security—he had declined taking interest for the same—he had welcomed me on my arrival as warmly as I expected—he did not ask me how much dust I had brought back and he never said a word about his wish to be repaid the few hundred dollars that he had advanced me when I left home to seek my fortune. When I did offer him the money, and thrust a diamond ring upon his finger as a token of my esteem, he blushed like a young school girl, and declared that he didn't deserve it.

At his house, then, I took up my abode; and while his family treat me with respect, they possess none of the fawning which characterizes my other friends. As the latter have frequently expressed their sorrow for my sudden removal, and their anxiety to know what events befell me in the mines of Australia, I have come to the conclusion that I would put them in print; and now those who used to drink my liquor and feast at my table will learn how I acquired my fortune, and then, if so disposed, they can follow in my footsteps and gain a competence for themselves.

This much I have told the reader in confidence, and with the hope that it will not be repeated, as my red-faced cousin, who every day is to be seen on 'Change, might be seriously angry if he was suspected of mercenary motives. With this introduction I will commence my narrative.

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## **LIFE IN AUSTRALIA;**

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# CHAPTER I.

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## **FIRST THOUGHTS OF GOING TO AUSTRALIA.—DEPARTURE FROM CALIFORNIA.—LIFE ON BOARD SHIP.— ARRIVAL AT WILLIAMS TOWN.— DESCRIPTION OF MELBOURNE.—A CONVICT'S HUT.**

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It was as hot an afternoon on the banks of the American Fork as ever poor mortals could be subjected to and still retain sufficient vitality to draw their breath. Under a small tent, stretched upon their backs, with shirt collars unbuttoned, boots off, and a most languid expression upon their faces, were two men—both of them of good size, with a fair display of muscle, broad-chested, hands hard and blackened with toil, yet not badly formed; for had they been but covered with neat fitting gloves, and at an opera, ladies might have thought they were small.

These two men, one of whom was reading a newspaper, while the other was trying to take a *siesta*, were Frederick Button, and his faithful companion, the writer of these adventures, whom we will distinguish by the name of Jack, as it is both familiar and common, and has the merit of being short.

As I was reading the paper, the contents of which interested me, I paid but little attention to my friend, until I

suddenly laid it down, and said,—

"Fred, let's go to Australia."

"Go to the d——l," he replied, turning on his side, his back towards me, and uttering a long w-h-e-w, as though he had found it difficult to catch his breath, it was so hot.

"We should find it hotter in the regions of his Satanic Majesty than here; but that is something that concerns you alone, as no doubt you are fully aware."

Fred uttered a grunt—he was too warm to laugh, and I again returned to the charge.

"Gold mines have been discovered in Australia, and ships are up at San Francisco for Melbourne. A party of twenty left there last week, and more are to follow."

There was no reply, and I continued:—

"It is stated in this paper that a man took out a lump of gold weighing one hundred and twenty pounds, and that he had been but ten days in the mines when he found it."

"What?" cried Fred, suddenly sitting up, and wiping the perspiration from his brow.

I repeated the statement.

"It's a d——d lie," cried Fred.

"Then let's go and prove it so."

"How's the climate in that part of the world—hot or cold?"

"About the same as here."

Fred meditated for a few minutes, lighted his pipe, and smoked on in silence; and as there was nothing better to do. I joined him.

"We are not making a fortune here in California, and if we don't do any thing in Australia, we shall see the country, and that will be worth something," I said.

"Then let's go," cried Fred, refilling his pipe; and that very evening we commenced selling our stock of superfluous articles to our numerous neighbors, saving nothing but tent, revolvers, rifles, and a few other articles that would stand us in need when we reached Australia.

A week from the day that we made up our mind to try what luck there was in store for us in Australia, we were on board of a clipper ship, and with some two dozen other steerage passengers (for Fred and myself were determined to be economical) we were passing through the Golden Gate<sup>[1]</sup> on our way to a strange land, where we did not possess a friend or acquaintance that we knew of.

"Well," said Fred, as he stood on deck at the close of the day, and saw the mountains of California recede from view, "it's precious little fun I've seen in that country; and if our new home is not more exciting, I shall be like the Irishman who pined away because he couldn't get up a fight."

"Don't give yourself any uneasiness on that score," replied the mate, who chanced to overhear the remark. "I'll warrant that you'll see as many musses as you'll care to mix in."

"Then, Australia, thou art my home," cried Fred, with a theatrical wave of his hand, as though bidding adieu to the Golden State forever.

Fred was one of the most peaceable men in the world, and never commenced a quarrel; but when once engaged in a conflict, he was like a lion, and would as soon think of yielding as the royal beast.

For nearly fifty days did we roll on the Pacific, amusing ourselves by playing at "all fours," speculating on the

chances of our arrival, and making small wagers on the day that we should drop anchor; and after we had all lost and won about an equal amount, we were one morning overjoyed by the sight of land. Standing boldly in towards a low coast, with no signs of a harbor, it was not until we were within half a mile of the shore that we discovered a narrow entrance that opened into Hobson's Bay; when we dropped anchor opposite to a town consisting of a dozen or twenty houses, and over one of them floated the flag of England.

"Well, Mr. Mate," asked Fred, as the men went aloft to furl sails, "do you call that densely-populated city Melbourne?"

"That!" replied the mate, with a look of contempt at the scattered houses. "That be d——d. That's Williams Town[2]. Melbourne is a fine city, seven miles from here, and where all the luxuries of life can be obtained; but tobacco is the dearest one—so be careful of your weed."

As the officers of the custom house were even then coming on board, we thanked him for the hint, and put ours out of their reach.

Williams Town is situated at the mouth of the River Zarra, on Hobson's Bay, and at one time actually threatened to become a place of considerable importance; but the water for domestic use was too bad to be tolerated, and most of those who had settled there were glad to retrace their steps to Melbourne, where a better sort of article exists.

"How are the mines? Do they still hold out?" I inquired of one of the crew of the custom house boat, who was leaning against the rail in a languid manner, as though he had been overworked for the past six months.

"Yes, I s'pose so," he answered; and he spoke as though each word cost him an immense amount of labor.

"Then, Fred, we are in luck," I cried, turning to my partner who stood near at hand.

"Intend going to the mines?" the man asked, with a sudden show of interest.

"Such is our intention," I replied.

"'Mericans, I suppose," he inquired.

"Yes."

"Then don't go if you want to keep the number of your mess," the boatman said.

"Why not?" Fred ventured to inquire.

"'Cos they kill Yankees at the mines. Jim," he continued, turning to a comrade, "how many 'Mericans were killed week afore last at Ballarat?"

"O, I don't know," replied the individual referred to. "A dozen or twenty, I believe. Might have been more or less. I'm not 'ticular within a man or two."

"Thank you for your information," cried Fred. "And now one question more. Can you tell me how many Englishmen were killed by those same Americans, before they died?"

This question appeared to astonish the men; for they looked at each other, and then examined Fred with scrutinizing glances.

"I guess he'll do," they said, at length; and finding that we were not to be frightened, they turned their attention to passengers more credulous, and actually made some of them believe what they said was true.

The next morning we hired a boat to take our luggage to the wharf, where the steamers, which ply between Sydney,

Geelong, and Melbourne, stop. Our traps did not amount to much, as we had no money to spare for freighting, and when we first stepped upon the soil of Australia, our worldly possessions consisted of four shirts, do. pants, two pairs of boots, blankets, tents, &c., the whole weighing just one hundred and fifty pounds—not a large amount, but sufficient for two men, whose wants were easily supplied.

There were a dozen rough, loaferish looking men, whiling away their time upon the wharf; but as they confined themselves to simply asking a few questions as to what part of the world we came from, and received satisfactory answers, they soon lost all interest in us, and began to speculate what time the steamer would arrive.

She did not reach the dock until noon; and as we had seen enough of Williams Town, we readily embarked, and in an hour's time were at Melbourne, gazing with interest at every thing that met our view.

The city was full of life and business: heaps of goods were exposed ready for transportation to the mines, and large, lumbering carts of English build were crawling slowly through the streets, drawn by five and six yoke of oxen, while the drivers, armed with whips, the lashes of which were of immense length, though the stock or handle was barely two and a-half feet long, whirled them over the frightened animals' heads, and whenever they struck the poor brutes, a small, circular piece of skin was taken out, leaving the quivering flesh exposed to the sun, and a prey for the numerous insects that hovered in the air.

We carried our stuff on shore, and then considered what was necessary to get to the mines; and while we rested

upon our bundles, and ate a portion of the salt junk and biscuit that the cook of the ship had insisted upon our taking with us, we took a calm survey of Melbourne—its advantages and disadvantages. The city occupies two sides of a valley, called East Hill and West Hill, and is well laid out.

The streets are broad, unpaved, and formed so that during the heavy rains the water will centre into the gutters, which are flagged with a substantial kind of stone to prevent the sidewalks from washing away during the rainy season, when the gutters resemble small mountain torrents, and enough head is obtained to carry half a dozen sawmills.

At the place where we landed there is barely sufficient room for the steamer to turn round for the bay, or arm, of the River Zarra is small, and the water shoal. Every available place near the landing was crowded, however, with crafts of all descriptions, from the light-draughted schooner to huge launches, with loads of goods which they had received from ships lying in Hobson's Bay. Altogether, the scene reminded one very much of San Francisco; and so our spirits rose as we contemplated the bustle going on.

"Well, my men, are you in want of work?" asked a well-dressed elderly gentleman, who had arrived in a carriage driven by a coachman in livery, and a footman, dressed in the same garb. He appeared to own every thing that he looked at; for we had seen half a dozen men take his orders, and then proceed to obey them with alacrity.

"We thought we'd try the mines first," I replied, in answer to his question.

"Hard work—hard work," he said, with a smile. "Americans, I see—smart men in that country. Hope you'll

do well here. Afraid not if you go to the mines. Want men to help get these goods under shelter. Like to employ you;" and off he bustled.

"A pretty good sort of man, I guess," remarked Fred.

"I say, stranger," I asked, turning to a person with a cartman's frock on, who was seated on a box smoking a pipe, "can you tell me who that gentleman is?"

"I didn't see any gentleman," he answered, without even taking his pipe from his mouth.

"Why, I mean the one who just spoke to us—the man with the white vest and gold buttons."

"Him—he's a ticket-of-leave man[3], and has more money than half of the merchants in Melbourne," replied the cartman.

"What, that man a convict?" I asked, with surprise.

"Just so—transported for fourteen years[4] for house-breaking. Behaved himself, and so got liberty to enter into business; and now he is at the top of the heap. In two years his time will be out, and then he can stay or go where he pleases."

After this piece of news the convict became an object of curiosity to us, and we watched him until he entered his carriage and drove off, his coachman treating him with as much respect as he would the governor general.

"I say," asked Fred of our new acquaintance, "do all convicts get rich? Because if they do I want to become one as soon as possible."

"Not all," replied the man; "but some blunder into luck, and others are shrewd and look after the chances. I don't

suppose I shall ever be rich, although I am doing pretty well."

"And are you a—"

I didn't like to say convict, and so I hesitated.

"O, yes; I was sentenced to ten years' transportation for writing another man's name instead of my own on a piece of paper."

"That is forgery."

The convict smiled, as much as to say, you have hit it, and continued to smoke his pipe with infinite satisfaction.

"I should like to know if the company we are likely to meet in the mines are of the same class?" muttered Fred.

"Most of them," replied the man, who appeared to be a man of education; "and you'll find them more honest than those never sentenced, because they know that their freedom depends upon their reputation."

We sat staring at our informant for some time; but after a while he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and arose as though going.

"If you want your traps taken to the mines at a reasonable rate, I'll do it for you, as I start to-morrow with a load of goods for Ballarat," he said, after a moment's hesitation.

"Is that mine productive?" we asked.

"It's as rich as any of them. You may sink a shaft and strike a vein, and you may get nothing. It's all a lottery."

We consulted together for a few minutes, and concluded to try our fortunes at Ballarat, and so signified to our acquaintance.

"Then shoulder your traps, and I'll show you my shanty. You can sleep there to-night, and, let me tell you, it's a favor that I wouldn't grant to half of my countrymen."

As we considered pride out of place in that country, we readily accepted his offer, and in a few minutes were walking through the streets of Melbourne with a convicted felon.

We found his hut to be built of rough boards, with but one room; and the furniture consisted of a stove, wooden benches, a pine table, and a curiosity in the shape of a bedstead.

That night we learned more of the customs of the Australians from our host, who gave the name of Smith as the one which he was to be called by, than we should have found out by a six months' residence.

Over a bottle of whiskey, which was made in Yankeeland, we spent our first night in Australia.

"Come," said Smith, about ten o'clock, "it's time we were asleep, for we start early in the morning, and before to-morrow night you'll not feel as fresh as you do at present."

As he spoke he removed the whiskey, and in half an hour deep snoring was the only sound of life in the convict's hut.

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historically explained as ignited marsh gases or as a superstitious phenomenon.

**147** A port town in Cornwall, England; in the text it is cited as the last known location of a character's mother, indicating a British origin.

**148** A named gang of bushrangers in the story; "band of bushrangers" denotes an organized group of outlaws operating in the Australian bush during the goldrush era.

**149** A verb meaning to emerge from a narrow or confined space into open ground; often used in 19th-century military or hunting contexts to describe troops or people pouring out of cover.

**150** Refers to the head of a bullock (an ox or castrated male bovine used for draught work and transport in 19th-century Australia); bullocks were common on stations and for heavy farm tasks.

**151** A named figure in a frightful local tale mentioned in the text; context suggests a folkloric or story-figure used to frighten characters, and it is not identified here as a documented historical person.

**152** In this text a 'station' means a large pastoral property (similar to a ranch) in colonial Australia; 'Hawswood station' appears to be the name of a local station in the narrative (possibly fictional or specific to the story).

**153** A rendered form of a stockmen's or bush call used in the text as a signal; such shouted calls were commonly used in the Australian bush to communicate across distance or to organise parties.

**154** Another form of a loud shepherd/stockman call or response used in the bush to attract attention or signal, here shown as a sharp, far-carrying cry used by the shepherd to answer or mimic the bushrangers' calls.

**155** Gold coins originally minted in Spanish America (and widely circulated internationally) during earlier centuries; in 19th-century contexts the term often denotes older or foreign gold coinage found among treasure or payments.

**156** A military officer acting as a confidential assistant or attendant to a senior officer or dignitary; in the narrative an aide-de-camp is described as an officer who interacts with the stranger at the governor's residence.

**157** The Loddon River in Victoria, Australia, a regional watercourse mentioned here as a local landmark and source of drinking water for travellers.

**158** In 19th-century Australian usage a 'station' is a large rural property for raising sheep or cattle; Wright's station denotes the farm or pastoral run owned by Mr. Wright.

**159** A lead projectile for a musket or smoothbore firearm weighing about one ounce; used here to describe a heavy musket shot that narrowly missed the speaker.

**160** Narrow openings built into walls or structures through which occupants could fire weapons while remaining protected; commonly used in fortified or defensible buildings.

**161** A type of rum mentioned as being used to make punch; the name suggests an imported spirit labelled for a port or locality called 'Santa Cruz,' but the precise origin is not stated in the text.

**162** An Irish term for smooth, flattering, or charming talk intended to persuade or ingratiate, often used jocularly in 19th-century English.

**163** A 19th-century phrase in the text referring to Aboriginal Australians, the Indigenous peoples of the continent who were often employed as trackers and labourers on colonial properties.

**164** A matched pair of single-shot pistols made for use in formal duels; in the 18th and 19th centuries such pistols were heavy, single-barrel weapons fired at close range.

**165** The Old Bailey is the Central Criminal Court of London, long associated with major criminal trials and public accounts of executions in 18th–19th century Britain.

**166** A gibbet refers to a gallows or a structure used for hanging condemned prisoners, and sometimes to the public display of an executed body; it was a common term in 19th-century British usage.

**167** The ‘prize ring’ refers to organized bare-knuckle boxing contests in London during the 18th and 19th centuries, governed by informal rules and admired by some as a sporting institution.

**168** Poteen (also spelled poitín) is an illicitly distilled Irish spirit, a form of strong home-made whiskey historically produced and consumed in Ireland and by Irish emigrant communities.

**169** Bendigo is a city in Victoria, Australia, known for major 19th-century goldfields and rapid population growth during the Australian gold rushes.

**170** Tares Creek (also spelled in the text as ‘Tarres Creek’) refers to a mining locality mentioned in the narrative

and likely denotes a creek or diggings in Victoria associated with the goldfields of the 1850s; exact modern place-name forms vary.

**171** This refers to the monthly mining licence fee imposed on prospectors on the Victorian goldfields in the 1850s (thirty shillings equals one pound and ten shillings), a charge that provoked widespread resentment among miners.

**172** A stage company ran horse-drawn coach services for passengers, mail and freight between towns; the adjective 'American' indicates either U.S. ownership, equipment, or an American-style service rather than a railway.

**173** A demijohn is a large, narrow-necked bottle often enclosed in wicker or a basket, traditionally used for storing and transporting liquids such as wine or spirits.

**174** A palisade is a simple defensive enclosure made from upright timber posts or stakes driven into the ground, commonly used as an improvised fortification in frontier or military contexts.

**175** A 'twelve pound' denotes artillery that fired solid shot weighing about twelve pounds; twelve-pounder cannons were typical mid-19th-century field or siege pieces capable of breaching wooden fortifications.

**176** 'Brogue' here denotes a strong regional accent, especially an Irish accent; in 19th-century English it was commonly used to identify speakers from Ireland by their pronunciation.

**177** 'Knucks' appears as colloquial or slang in the text (*italicized*); in context it seems to refer to rascals or criminal