

**STORIES OF  
AUSTRALIA IN THE  
EARLY DAYS, PP. 1-199**

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Stories of Australia in the Early Days, pp. 1-199 by Marcus Clarke

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**MARCUS CLARKE**

**STORIES OF  
AUSTRALIA IN THE  
EARLY DAYS, PP. 1-199**



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# STORIES OF AUSTRALIA

IN THE

## EARLY DAYS

BY

MARCUS CLARKE

*Author of "For the Term of his Natural Life," "Heavy Odds," etc.*

LONDON :

HUTCHINSON & CO.,

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## BIOGRAPHY.

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MARCUS ANDREW HISLOP CLARKE was born at Kensington—the Old Court suburb of London—on the 24th April, 1846. His father, William Hislop Clarke, a barrister-at-law, was recognised as a man of ability, both professionally and as a *littérateur*, albeit eccentric to a degree. Of his mother little is known beyond that she was a beautiful woman, of whom her husband was so devotedly fond that when her death occurred some months after the birth of the subject of this biography, he isolated himself from the world, living afterwards the life of a recluse, holding of the world an opinion of cynical contempt. Besides his father, there were among other brothers of his two whose names belong to the history of the Australian colonies; the one is that of James Langton Clarke, once a County Court Judge in Victoria, and the other, Andrew Clarke, Governor of Western Australia, who died and was buried at Perth in 1849. The latter was the father of General Sir Andrew Clarke, K.C.M.G., formerly Minister of Public Works in India, and Governor of the Straits Settlements. To the colonists of Victoria he will be better known as Captain Clarke, the first Surveyor-General of the colony, the author of the Existing Municipal Act, and one of the few lucky drawers of a questionable pension from this colony.

The late Marcus Clarke claimed a distinguished genealogy for his family, which, though hailing as regards his immediate ancestors from the Green Isle, were English, having only betaken themselves to Ireland in the Cromwellian period. And among his papers were found the following notes referring to this matter:—

In 1622 William Clarke was made a burgess of Mounstjoie, Co. Tyrone, and in 1658 Thurloe wrote to Henry Cromwell, desiring him to give Colonel Clarke land in Ireland for pay.

With an inherited delicate constitution, and without the love-watching care of a mother, or the attention of sisters, he passed his childhood. And that the absence of this supervision and guidance was felt by him in after years, we have but to read this pathetic passage from a sketch of his:—

To most men the golden time comes when the cares of a mother or the attention of sister aid to shield the young and eager soul from the blighting influences of worldly debaucheries. Truly fortunate is he among us who can look back on a youth spent in the innocent enjoyments of the country, or who possesses a mind moulded in its adolescence by the gentle fingers of well-mannered and pious women.

When considered old enough to leave home the boy was sent to the private school of Dr. Dyne in Highgate, another suburb of London, hallowed by having been at one time associated with such illustrious names in literature as Coleridge, Charles Lamb, Keats, and De Quincey. Here he obtained whatever scholastic lore he possessed, and was, according to the opinion of a schoolfellow, known as a humorously eccentric boy, with a most tenacious memory and an insatiable desire to read everything he could lay hands on. Owing to his physical inability to indulge in the usual boyish sports, he was in the habit of wandering about in search of knowledge wherever it was to be gleaned, and not infrequently this restless curiosity, which remained with him to the last, led him into quarters which it had been better for his yet unformed mind he had never entered. Here especially was felt the absence of a mother's guidance, which was unfortunately replaced by the carelessness of an indulgent father. Of his schooldays little is known, save what can be gathered from a note-book kept by him at that period; and even in this the information is but fragmentary. According to this book he seems to have had only two friends with whom he was upon terms of great intimacy. They were

brothers, Cyril and Gerald Hopkins, who appear, judging from jottings and sketches of theirs in his scrap album, to have been talented beyond the average schoolboy. Among the jottings to be found in this school record is one bearing the initials G. H., and referring to one "Marcus Scrivener" as a "Kaleidoscopic, Parti-colored, Harlequinesque Thaumotropic" being. Another item which may not be uninteresting to read, as indicating the turn for humorous satire, which, even at so early a period of his life the author had begun to develop, is an epitaph written on himself, and runs thus:—

*Hic Jacet*  
*MARCUS CLERICUS,*  
*Qui non malus, 'Coonius*  
*Consideratus fuit*  
*Sed amor bibendi*  
*Combinatus cum pecuniæ deficiente*  
*Mentem ejus oppugnabat—*  
*Mortuus est*  
*Et nihil ad vitam restorare*  
*Posset.*

To his schoolmaster, the Reverend Doctor Dyne, the following dedication to a novel (*Chatteris*) commenced by his former pupil shortly after his arrival in Australia was written. From this it is apparent that the master had not failed to recognise the talents of his gifted pupil, nor yet be blind to his weaknesses. It reads—

To  
T. B. DYNE, D.D.,  
Head Master of Chomley School, Highgate.

This Work  
Is respectfully dedicated in memory of the advice so tenderly  
given, the good wishes so often expressed, and the  
success so confidently predicted for the author.

But whatever good influences might have been at work during his residence at Dr. Dyne's school, they were, unfortunately for their subject, more than counter-balanced by others of a very dissimilar character met with by him at his father's house. It seems scarcely credible that so young a boy was allowed to grow up without any restraining influences except those of a foolishly-indulgent father, as we are led to believe was the case from the following extract, which the writer knows was intended by the subject of the biography as a reference to his boyish days when away from school. Doubtless the picture is somewhat over-coloured, but substantially it is true:—

My first intimation into the business of "living" took place under these auspices. The only son of a rich widower, who lived, under sorrow, but for the gratification of a literary and political ambition, I was thrown when still a boy into the society of men twice my age, and was tolerated as a clever impertinent in all those witty and wicked circles in which virtuous women are conspicuous by their absence. I was suffered at sixteen to ape the vices of sixty. You can guess the result of such a training. The admirer of men whose successes in love and play were the theme of common talk for six months; the worshipper of artists, whose genius was to revolutionise Europe, only they died of late hours and tobacco; the pet of women whose daring beauty made their names famous for three years. I discovered at twenty years of age that the pleasurable path I had trodden so gaily led to a hospital or a debtors' prison, that love meant money, friendship an endorsement on a bill, and that the rigid exercise of a profound and calculating selfishness alone rendered tolerable a life at once deceitful and barren. In this view of the world I was supported by those middle-aged, Mephistopheles survivors of the storms which had wrecked so many Argosies, those cynical, well-bred worshippers of self, who realise in the nineteenth century that notion of the Devil which was invented by early Christians. With these good gentlemen I lived, emulating their cynicism, rivalling their sarcasm, and neutralising the superiority which their existence gave them by the exercise of that potentiality for present enjoyment, which is the privilege of youth.

Again, in another sketch he wrote, referring to this period of his life:—

Let me take an instant to explain how it came about that a pupil of the Rev. Gammons, up in town for his holidays, should have owned such an acquaintance. My holidays, passed in my father's wild-wed house, were enlivened by the coming and going of my cousin Tom from Woolwich, of cousin Dick from Sandhurst, of cousin Harry from Aldershot. With Tom, Dick, and Harry came a host of friends—for as long as he was not disturbed, the head of the house rather liked to see his rooms occupied by the relatives of people with whom he was intimate, and a succession of young

men of the Cingbars, Ringwood, and Algernon Deuceacre sort made my home a temporary roosting-place. I cannot explain how such a curious *ménage* came to be instituted, for, indeed, I do not know myself, but such was the fact, and "little Master," instead of being trained in the way he should morally go, became the impertinent companion of some very wild-bloods indeed. "I took Horace to the opera last night, sir," or "I am going to show Horatius Coclès the wonders of Cremorne this evening," would be all that Tom, or Dick, or Harry, would deign to observe, and my father would but lift his eyebrows in indifferent deprecation. So, a wild-eyed and eager school-boy, I strayed into Bohemia, and acquired in that strange land an assurance and experience ill suited to my age and temperament. Remembering the wicked, good-hearted inhabitants of that curious country, I have often wondered since "what they thought of it," and have interpreted, perhaps a bit unjustly, many of the homely tenderness which seemed to me to be so strangely out of place and time.

In the midst of this peculiar and doubtful state of existence for a youth his father died suddenly, leaving his affairs in an unsatisfactory state. This unexpected change brought matters to a climax, and at seventeen years of age Marcus Clarke found that instead of inheriting, as expected, a considerable sum of money, he was successor to only a few hundred pounds, the net result of the realisation of his late father's estate. With this it was arranged by his guardian relatives that he should seek a fresh field for his future career, and accordingly in 1864 he was shipped off to Melbourne by Green's well-known old liner, "The Wellesley," consigned to his uncle, Judge Clarke, above mentioned. Referring to this episode of his life, he has written in the following sarcastic and injured strain:—

My father died suddenly in London, and to the astonishment of the world left me nothing. His expenditure had been large, but as he left no debts, his income must have been proportionate to his expenditure. The source of this income, however, it was impossible to discover. An examination of his bankers' book showed only that large sums (always in notes or gold) had been lodged and drawn out, but no record of speculations or investments could be found among his papers. My relatives stared, shook their heads, and insulted me with their pity. The sale of furniture, books, plate, and horses, brought enough to pay the necessary funeral expenses and leave me heir to some £300. My friends of the smoking-room and of the supper-table philosophised on Monday, cashed my I O U's on Tuesday, were satirical on Wednesday, and cut me on Thursday. My relatives said "Something must be done," and invited me to stop at their houses until that vague substantiality should be realised, and offers of employment were generously made; but to all proposals I replied with sudden disdain, and desirous only of avoiding those who had known me in my prosperity, I avowed my resolution of going to Australia.

After one of those lengthy voyages for which the good old ship "The Wellesley" was renowned, the youth of bright fancies and disappointed fortune set foot in Melbourne; and, after the manner of most "new chums" with some cash at command and no direct restraining power at hand, he set himself readily to work, fathoming the social and other depths of his new home. The natural consequence of this was that one who had prematurely seen so much "life" in London, soon made his way into quarters not highly calculated to improve his morals or check his extravagantly-formed habits. In other words, he began his Bohemian career in Australia with a zest not altogether surprising in one who had been negligently allowed to drift into London Bohemianism. And naturally, a youth with such exceptional powers of quaint humour, playful satire, and *bonhomie* became a universal favourite wherever he went, much, unfortunately, to his own future detriment. But, in due course, a change came of necessity o'er this Bohemian dream, when the ready cash was no longer procurable without work. It was then, through the influence of his uncle the Judge, that the impecunious youth was relegated to a high stool in the Bank of Australasia. As might have been expected of one who spent most of his time in drawing caricatures and writing satirical verses and sketches he was a *lusus nature* to the authorities of the bank, and this is not to be wondered at when one learns that his mode of adding up long columns of figures was by guesswork, to wit, he would run his eye over the pence column, making a guess at the aggregate amount, and so on with the shillings and pounds columns.

After a patient trial of some months it was considered, in the interests of all concerned, that he should seek his livelihood at a more congenial avocation, and thereupon he left the bank. But here must be mentioned the manner in which the severance took place, as being characteristic of him. Clarke applied for a short leave of absence. The letter containing this request not having been immediately answered he sought the presence of the manager for an explanation, when the following scene took place:—Clarke: "I have come to ask, sir, whether you received my application for a few weeks' leave of absence." The Manager: "I have." Clarke: "Will you grant it to me, sir?" The Manager: "Certainly,