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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IN THE

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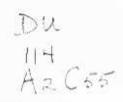
BY

MARCUS CLARKE

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

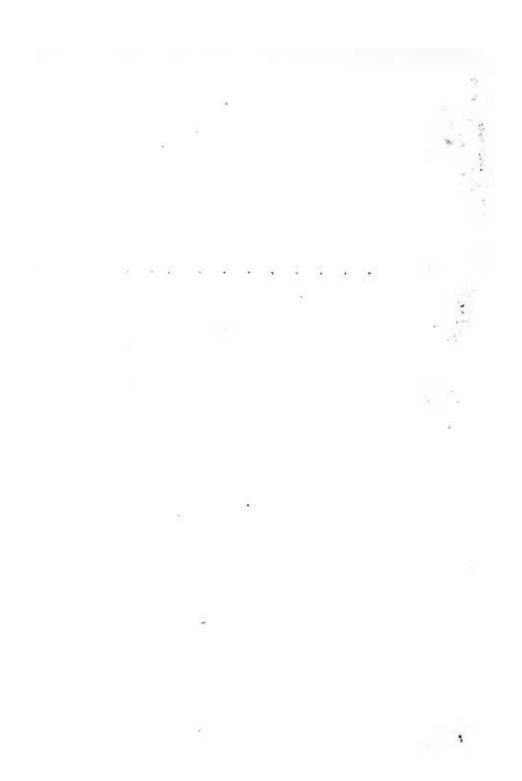
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BIOGRAPHY,

M ARCUS 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 *little atom*, 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 inuncdiate 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 1612 William Clarke was made a burgers of Mountjoie, Co. Tyrone, and in 1658 Thurlos 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 cager soul from the blighting influences of wordly 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-manuered and plous 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 Thaumatropic" 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 Consideretus fuit Sed amor bibendi Combinatus cum pecuniæ deficione Montem 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. DVNE, 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 offer 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 counterbalanced 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 insimilation into the business of "living" took place under these ansolves. 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 imperiment in all those withy and wicked circles in which virtuous women are conspicous 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 tohaceo; the pet of women whose during benuty made their names famous for three years. I discovered at twenty years of age that the pleasarable path I had trodden so gaily led to a hospital or a debtors' prison, that love meant momey, friendship an endorsement on a hill, and that the rigid exercise of a protonud and calculating selfshnoss alone rendered tolerable a life at once decircifo and horren. In this view of the work I was supported by those middle-aged Mephistopheles (survivors of the storms which had wrecked se many Argosies), those cynical, well-bred worshippers of and hor realise in the interteenth cesarry that notion of the Devil which was invented by early Christians. With these good gentermen I lived, emulating their cynicism, rivalling their sarresm, and neutralishing the sopenfority 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. Cammons, up in town for his holidays, should have owned such an acquaintance. My holidays, passed in my father's wid-wed house, were enlivened by the coming and going of my cousin Tom from Woolwich, of cousin Dick from Sandharst, 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

BIOGRAPHY.

men of the Cingbars, Ringwood, and Algernon Deutreacre sort made my home a temporary roosting-place. I cannot explain how such a curious *minarge* came to be instituted, for, indued, 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 imperiment companion of some very wild bloods indeed. "I took Horace to the opera last night, sir," or "I am going to show Horaius Cocles 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 evelows 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 solide to my age and temperament. Remembering the wicked, good-hearted inhalitants of that curious country, I have often wondered since " what they thought of it," and have interpreted, perhaps not unjustly, many of the homely tenderness which seemed to me then 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 delta; his income must have been proportionate to his expenditure. The source of this income, however, it was impossible to discover. An examination of his hankers' 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. Any relatives stared, shook their heads, and insulted me with their pity. The sale of furniture, books, plate, and horses, brought crough to pay the necessary funcral expenses and leave me beir to some Goo. 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 ton Thursday. My relatives said "Something must be done," and invited me to sign at their houses until that vague substantinity should be realised, and offers of employment were generously made; but to all proposals I replied with sudden disdain, and, desirons 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 *bonhomic* 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 lunus 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 i-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,