

**SEVEN YEARS IN  
THE  
AUSTRALIAN BUSH**

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Seven Years in the Australian Bush by James B. Stevenson

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1880.

## PREFACE.

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"Sit down, and tell us how you were lagged," is a common form of greeting between bushmen when they meet on their travels, and is, I believe, a relic of by-gone days in Australia. Now, I have repeatedly been asked to sit down, and tell, not exactly how I was lagged, but "how I did my lagging"—in other words, how I spent my first seven years in the colonies. I have, therefore, written the following account of my life during that period, which I now beg to lay before my readers, who will, I trust, bear in mind (when inclined to criticise) that there is considerable difficulty in keeping up the interest in a narrative which contains nothing more exciting than the commonplace occurrences of every-day life in the bush.

JAMES B. STEVENSON.

SYDNEY, N.S.W., 1877.

## CHAPTER I.

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EARLY in the month of January, 186—, I found myself, along with my friend W—, and some five hundred others, who, like us, had left home, to try their fortunes in Queensland, on board the good ship lying in Moreton Bay. We had made what was then thought an excellent passage, viz.—ninety days, and had just dropped anchor, to await the arrival of the health officers, who were to inspect us before we were allowed to go on board the river steamers that were to carry us to Brisbane.

How welcome the sight of land was after three months of nothing but sea! Moreton Island is anything but a verdant or inviting-looking place; but how we then feasted our eyes upon it, and lounged for a scamper upon the smooth sand which formed its beach! Away to the westward, with the aid of a glass, we could distinguish Sandgate, the Brighton of the Brisbanites; and, following the coast line to the north, we could see the glass-houses towering above the horizon. It was with less pleasurable feelings that we gazed upon a green, hillocky island to the southward, which was pointed out to us as the quarantine station. About a month before we made the land, a malignant fever broke out on board, and by the time we made Moreton light, twenty-five or thirty of

our fellow passengers had fallen victims to it. In fact, the last one had been lowered over the side very shortly before the pilot boarded us. It was, therefore, with mixed feelings that we saw the health officers arrive; and none of us felt very comfortable until we had seen them off without hearing the order given to hoist the yellow flag at the main. How the clean bill was obtained is not for me to conjecture; and I (among many others) have only to thank those who obtained it for us, as the prospect of a long detention upon the before-mentioned island was anything but agreeable.

The morning after the visit of the officers, some small river steamers arrived to convey us to Brisbane. The river was not at that time navigable for anything larger than coasting steamers, although it has since been deepened so as to allow ships of the largest tonnage to go right up to the wharf.

Those who have not seen it can form no idea of the scene on board an emigrant vessel upon the day of landing. It is impossible to describe the awful confusion. The scramble for boxes and cases, the gruff voices of the sailors and male passengers, mingled with the shrill cries of women and children, all form a babel, which must be seen and heard to be properly appreciated. After this had continued for some hours, we were at last all stowed on board the steamers, and, giving three cheers for the old ship, were soon steaming away for the entrance of the river. The Brisbane, like all other tidal rivers that I have seen in Queensland, is very uninteresting. The banks are low, and, in many places, fringed with low mangrove trees, which sometimes bear a strong resemblance to the trimly



cut laurel hedges so often seen in the old country. But tame as the scenery would appear to most of us now, everything was of interest then.

I cannot make out why emigrants are so fond of cheering, but I have always noticed they cheer at everything or anything they see upon their arrival. Our fellow-passengers were no exception to the rule. They cheered everything—a boat a mile away, a beacon on a mud bank, or a humpy on the bank of the river,—nothing came amiss to them. One or two had merely to start, and in a second five hundred lusty voices took up the cry, which made the bush ring again. A horse came in for quite an ovation. He was the first we had seen, and was espied by a veritable cockney who was in the leading steamer. An 'orse! An 'orse! he cried, frantically waving his arms about, and performing an *impromptu pas seul* on the bow of the boat, at the same time pointing to the unconscious animal which was quietly grazing on the bank, and was, by the way, a very wretched apology for the species. But it *was* a horse, that was enough, and away they went again, yelling as if their very lives depended upon it. Such incidents as these beguiled the time until we arrived at the wharf where we were to land, which is situated on the southern bank of the river, or, to speak properly, in South Brisbane. Here the same scene was again enacted with, if possible, greater confusion than before. Escaping from the crowd, W— and I, with one or two others, made the best of our way to the ferry-boat, which conveyed us to the north side, where Brisbane proper is situated. After a little trouble we found pleasant quarters at a private boarding house, kept by a lady and

gentleman who afterwards built and opened the Queen's Hotel, so favourably spoken of by visitors to Brisbane. As it was late when we arrived, we soon tumbled into bed, and slept soundly notwithstanding the mosquitoes, which absolutely swarmed, and managed to reach us in spite of the curtains. Who has not heard of the Brisbane mosquitoes?—the fattest, boldest, and most insinuating insects in the world. Why not, when they are supplied with the very richest draughts of their favourite beverage, continually imported for their benefit (no doubt they think so) by the paternal government of Queensland!

The morning after our arrival we sallied out, arrayed in white flannel and Panama hats, to do the lions of Brisbane, fancying that we looked like natives. But that we were the veriest new chums was evident to anyone who looked at us, for our faces and hands bore the unmistakable "Emigrant's Brand"—mosquitoe bites.

Having made an arrangement with the captain of the ship to go on a riding excursion with his daughter and some friends, our first visit was to a livery stable where we were supplied with a couple of hacks which were anything but perfection. The one I bestrode was a rawboned chestnut, only half mouthed, with a great partiality for pig-jumping on to the foot-path at very inopportune moments. W—'s was a model of sobriety, and belonged to that class of horse which requires you to do quite as much work as itself if you wish to move at all. In fact poor W— had, literally speaking, to work his passage. However, we managed to reach the place of meeting without accident, where we were joined by the captain, his daughter, and another lady and gentleman. The

Ipswich road being chosen, we were conveyed across the river in punts, and then got fairly under way. After a pleasant ride of about ten miles along the road, we made a detour to come back to Brisbane, but somehow got separated, and I found myself alone with one of the ladies in the bush, no track or fence to be seen. We took it very coolly, and cantered gaily along as we thought in a straight line; but as it turned out such was not the case, for after riding in this way about an hour, we found ourselves back where we had started from, having actually ridden in a circle. Here we found the lady's husband in a most distracted state, standing upon a stump, "co-oeying" himself hoarse. He felt greatly relieved when we put in an appearance, as he very naturally did not place much confidence in my bushmanship. I fancy I hear some would-be bushman say, "Pooh, what a fool the fellow must have been. Why didn't he look at the sun, or why didn't he do this or that, and he would not have lost his way." But it must be remembered that it was my first experience in the bush, and I was not troubling myself much about the sun or anything else. However, the adventure proved of use to me, as I have never committed the same error again. Nothing further happened to us until we neared South Brisbane, when, from some cause, the horse the captain's daughter rode took fright and started off at a terrific gallop. The girl was utterly unable to pull him in, and the captain, in spite of my warning, started off after her, which of course only made her horse more unmanageable. Seeing this, and knowing that my chestnut was fast in spite of his failing, I came to the conclusion that the only chance of preventing a bad