HUXLEY AND THE GIRL FROM JAMBEROO:

Granted that the famous scientist Thomas Henry Huxley and his wife did not meet in Jamberoo, it remains true that the association with that picturesque place is strong. This is apparent from the influence of the place upon the future Mrs. Huxley as disclosed in her reminiscences of life there in 1843-4.

Years pass by. Miss Henrietta Heathorn has left the peaceful pastorale that is Jamberoo, and resides at Newtown, Sydney, where she keeps house for her half-sister, the wife of a prosperous merchant named Fanning. In the words of her future lover, Henrietta was “exceedingly fair, with the Saxon yellow hair and blue eyes,” though even he could not make up his mind whether she was pretty. With true scientific objectivity he was to remark that he had seen hundreds of prettier women, but, he added, “I never met with so sweet a temper, so self-sacrificing and affectionate a disposition, or so pure and womanly a mind.”

Then in July 1847 the exploring ship H.M.S. Rattlesnake enlivened the rather too even tenor of polite Sydney society. Huxley happened to be the assistant surgeon who devoted much of his time to scientific investigations, and was already doing brilliant work. He was not handsome, yet he must even then have been conspicuous because of his acute, perceptive mind, his fits of introspection and his engaging alternations of good fun. Whilst Henrietta was young for her years, he was correspondingly old for his. They were both twenty-two in 1847 when Huxley began to move in Sydney social circles, where he met Fanning, and through him his young sister-in-law Henrietta. There is nothing certain about the place of their meeting, except that it was not, as the legend has it, at an inn in Jamberoo. Probably the meeting was prosaically at “Holmwood”, Fanning’s house, which became Huxley’s “home” in Sydney during the months the survey ship was in port there, interspersed with short cruises. Often must the young scientist have ridden his horse up the curved drive of “Holmwood” to the two-storeyed villa in its bushy setting, to meet his friend Fanning’s family. As Huxley was to write to his sister, “Mrs. Fanning has a sister, and the dear little sister and I managed to fall in love with one another in the most absurd manner after seeing one another — I will not tell you how few times, lest you should laugh.”

Huxley was to keep a diary of his voyage, written spasmodically enough, and published by Julian Huxley in 1935. In it the young man writes charmingly in retrospect of the dawning of his love, and of how he was attracted to the Fanning family group, almost without knowing why. He said the attraction came about by instinct, and went on:

“Then again, I remember, I was particularly anxious to make some very proper calls — very proper and polite doubtless, but they were at New Town, and so in reflection I doubt if politeness could have been the whole and sole motive . . .

“I called at Fannings first (instinct again?) and a pleasant merry hour we had of it, Mrs. Fanning, the three girls and I. And of all subjects the one under discussion was my reception into the family. Fraternization — [Henrietta’s sister] Cary Bose would have none of it, professed to oppose me tooth and nail, in her liveliest way. Sister Alice was in my favour. And sister Henrietta, what said she? Cast down her eyes, smiled, and would take the matter into consideration. So it was agreed at last
that the decision of the matter should lie in her hand. My heart leaped. But I thought to myself, Tom, you are a fool, what on earth is there in you, and you have only seen one another four times, besides, it is wrong. So time passed on. The sisters were going to walk to Tempe, whereupon I found it highly expedient that I too should have a walk, and proposed myself as chevalier on the occasion. We set out and Sister Henrietta was my companion, not by my contriving I vow. The other two mischievous girls could find nothing better to do than plait a wreath of white flowers for her — and there was some hint about orange flowers.”

Here Henrietta was able to correct his recollection, recalling that Huxley had said he could not offer his arm to three ladies, so he had offered it to her. And he himself had twined the flowers around her hat, observing impishly that they looked very like orange blossom. The diary then goes on:

“We called at Mrs. Steel’s on our way, and renewed our discussion. I proposed myself as a son, but Mamma gave me no hope of adoption — inquired even with a very sly look whether there were no other relation I would prefer. (Tom, Tom, where are thou going to, like a lamb to the slaughter?) And then came the rest of the walk. H. H. [Henrietta] was my companion as before and I began to find that there was something inexplicably pleasing to me in the expression of her mild “seelenvoll” [soulful] countenance, in the tone of her voice, and still more in her sensible and yet thoroughly womanly conversation. I strongly suspect I was in love without knowing it, for after I left Tempe (when to my everlasting credit for discretion be it said I did not stop two minutes, the lady of the house being absent) I do remember looking back more than once. And, ass that I was, feeling half disappointed when I no longer saw her at the window.

“I got back to Fannings’ about four o’clock and immediately requested to have my horse brought round but F. requested me with so much frank courtesy to dine with them that I could not refuse. And I never spent a happier evening. We sat round the fire and I told no end of auld wives tales — there was something that put me in mind of the happy old days at S’s. I saw Mr. H [eathorn] there too, a curious man of strong natural talent evidently, but rather ingenious than sound. On the whole I rather liked him. On my ride home that night I felt happier than I had for months. Time wore away. We were in the last days of September and were to sail early in October . . . .

“A French frigate came into harbour and a grand final ball was to be given at Government House. A full dress affair. A number of us went, I among the rest, for I knew H.H. was to be there, and that night settled my fate. We danced together and when we did not dance we walked up and down the hall under pretence of getting cool. Without thought, without conversation became more and more interesting. We found corresponding events in our past life, we found that taste and habit of thought in each harmonised, and more than all each found that the other was loved.

“Her hand trembled on my arm, but when, half mad with excitement as I was, I would have taken it, it was drawn back with such shrinking maidenly modesty that I feared after all I had mistaken. No word of love was spoken but we understood one another. As I handed her to the
carriage we appointed to meet again on Monday. Those miserable three
days. I was half mad, unable to apply myself to any occupation or to
rest anywhere. I felt that my happiness depended upon the issue of our
next interview. I felt that I had already in honour pledged myself, and yet
I would have given worlds to be able at any personal sacrifice to retract.
What had I, a young man, poor, prospectless, I had almost said hopeless,
to do with her? What right had I to disturb the even quiet tenor of her
life, to give her new anxieties and undeserved cares, to take her from her
pleasant friendly circle, to what, even after years, must be the hearth of a
poor and struggling man? At times I cursed myself, and then as I thought
over each look and word I felt so happy in the belief she loved me that
all obstacles were forgotten. Anxiety brought on my old nervous palpitation
and I became less and less fit for quiet thought. Her image was ever before
my eyes waking and sleeping, and her voice, sounding softly in my ears:
"We shall see you on Monday?" In utter perplexity I determined to con­sult
McClatchie who introduced me to the New Town folks, and had I not
had other reasons I should have acquainted him with my state of the case
as I strongly suspected him of leanings in the same direction. His advice
was that of a friend of us both, advising strongly to let the matter drop,
as a matter of duty, so after I had had some hours' conversation with him
the end was as might have been expected. "Go on Monday I must and will,
come what will of it." Poor fellow, I fear he had sadly wasted his breath.
But I rather look upon him as a particeps criminis as he promised to ride
over with me — and not stop.

"But I, on my part, promised to behave very prudently. And so I did.
For blessed be the Gods (and Mrs. Fanning), Netta came down alone to
receive me. She tried very hard to look indifferently at some prints on the
table, but it was no good. My secret (and hers too) was soon out and we
were both very, very happy when — when what? why that abominable
soft-stepping butler came in to announce lunch. But I admire that man —
he never changed countenance a muscle.

"And this is what you call prudence, Signor Tom, is it? Certainly.
Waste of time is the highest improvidence, and I lost none.

"Happy day, short happy week that followed . . . . I felt awakened
to a new life, pledged by all the confiding tender love of that dear girl,
to a new course of action — nobler and purer. My personal character,
my personal devotion is all I have to offer her in return. And shall not
that be made worthy of her?"

Well, he proved himself entirely worthy of her, of course — and she
was a remarkable personality, too. "As I tell her," he wrote later, "the
only great folly I am aware of her being guilty of was the leaving her
happiness in the hands of a man like myself, struggling upwards and certain
of nothing." Indeed, the future was very uncertain; Huxley ended his
Pacific voyages, and renewed their close association for a few more months
in Sydney, until in 1849 the ship returned to London. It was a cruel
wrench for the young lovers. Years were to go by until Huxley's circum­
stances could improve enough for the devoted girl to travel to England
for their marriage.

Suddenly as the attachment had sprung into being, it was certainly
of life-long duration, continuing just as strongly until Huxley's death in
1895 when he was famous throughout the world. His wife, too, was
honoured when she died at the age of ninety, honoured by the world at large for her part in her husband’s pre-eminent life’s work, and by the family she had borne, so many of whom were people of sheer genius.


MAY MEETING:

Through a most unfortunate and regrettable combination of circumstances, the scheduled speaker, Mr. B. E. Weston, was unable to attend the May meeting of the Society. Word having been received only an hour or so before the meeting, a desperate situation required a desperate remedy. The previous month’s speaker was brought on again to continue the story of Dapto, this instalment covering the clearing-lease period, the making of early roads, and the development, up to about 1860, of the township which grew up around Brown’s inn and mill at the point where the main road crossed Mullet Creek.

The course taken was without precedent in the Society’s history, and no one hopes more fervently than the speaker that it will not be taken as a precedent for the future!

We all greatly regret having missed Mr. Weston’s address, but the Society hopes that it will be possible for him to speak later in the year.

PERSONAL:

Our old friend and Past President, Mr. Norman S. King, now a Life Member, has taken up residence at Unit 405, Diment Towers, and sends good wishes to all.

We have also heard that foundation member Cyril Law, now a stalwart of the Sutherland Society, has had a spell in hospital and is now on the way to recovery. —A.P.F.

DENTISTRY AT LITTLE MILTON:

News of the threatened demolition of “Little Milton” has prompted Mrs. Elizabeth Bland, of Lithgow (before her marriage Miss Elizabeth Gallagher of Keiraville) to write to the Society, recalling that as a girl she worked there for three years for Dr. Lee and his family. She recollects that the Lees had a monkey which used to climb the big pine tree in the garden, and that when it was suffering from toothache Dr. Lee extracted the tooth under an anaesthetic — better treatment than most human sufferers received from the dentists of those days.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE WAS A MR. GEARD!

In the course of discussion after the May meeting a question was raised as to the origin of the name of Geard’s Hill. No one knew who Geard was, and it was suggested that Gerard Gerard, Esq., of Kembla Grange, might have spared one of his names for the hill and that this might have become slightly garbled with the passage of time.

It appears, however, that Geard and Gerard were not identical. Edmund Geard, apparently a confirmed petitioner, is on record among the signatories of petitions in 1844, 1845, 1848 and 1851; and in 1856 a “Mercury” ad offered for sale his “very choice and valuable freehold