

CHAPTER V RAISING THE SUPERSTRUCTURE

THE foundations of the Colony had been laid, now came the work of raising the superstructure.

Of the present generation of South Australians it may be said: "Other men laboured, and ye have entered into their labours." In building up the Commonwealth it was under peculiar conditions that the pioneers had to work. Says one of the most worthy of them: "Men generally laboured from early morn till dusky eve. Restless nights were frequent, and hard work by day caused us often to feel weary by the way." Yet there were compensations. As we shall see, there was a great deal of romance about those early days that is no longer possible. If colonists are more comfortable to-day, their circumstances are more prosaic.

We saw that the first temporary settlement was at Kangaroo Island, the second at Holdfast Bay.

Here the emigrants dwelt in tents, and rude huts made of rushes and boughs. "Hutting" themselves was the term they used. Some, for the first evening or two after their arrival, had to sleep in the open air. They made for themselves beds among the bushes on the beach, just above high-water mark. One of the pioneers, who arrived on a Saturday, in January 1837, tells how himself, wife, and two children had to camp in the open air from Saturday night to Monday morning. They then set to work, cutting down trees, and covering them with bushes. In this way (as many others did) they constructed a temporary shelter. K The life was rough, but it was romantic. One is reminded of the Feast of Tabernacles, when the Children of Israel dwelt in booths made of boughs. Gentle folk and simple folk, learned and illiterate, dwelt together as one family.

One of the pioneers (Mrs. Robert Thomas) has left on record a description as to how the emigrants spent their first Christmas far away from the "dear Old Land." In her diary she writes: "December the 25th, 1836. This being Christmas Day, and Sunday, divine service was held for the first time in the hut of the principal surveyor, a short distance from our tents. We attended, taking our seats with us; the signal for assembling being the firing of a gun. The congregation numbered twenty-five persons, including the two gentlemen who conducted the service, the thermometer standing at 100 degrees, and most of those assembled being in the open air.... We kept up the old custom of Christmas as far as having a plum-pudding for dinner was concerned, likewise a ham, and a parrot pie, but one of our neighbours, as we afterwards found, had a large piece of roast beef, though we were not aware, at the time, that any fresh meat was to be had in the Colony."

Hereby hangs a tale. Where the roast beef came from was at first a mystery. It gives point to the old proverb, "It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good." It appears that the captain of one of the emigrant vessels (the *Africane*) had a cow and a calf on board. Whilst the vessel was lying at anchor, for change of scenery and food the cow and calf were transhipped to land. They were placed under the care of one of the emigrants. K Unfortunately in one respect, and fortunately in another, the cow was tied to a tree not far from a lagoon. She got over the bank, fell in, and was so much injured that death had to be decreed. She was killed. In this way some of the emigrants were supplied with a little Christmas beef.

There is one sentence in Mrs. Thomas' diary that is very suggestive: they went to the rush-hut of the principal surveyor for divine service, "taking their seats with them." Comment is not necessary. Two laymen conducted the service, because no minister of the gospel had yet arrived.

From the letter of another lady pioneer¹ we got a very good idea of the pioneer settlement at Holdfast Bay, the settlers, and their surrounding: “The beach is a very fine white sand, hard close to the water, and then rises to hillocks of deep loose sand, with shrubs growing in it. When we had passed these little banks of sand, which do not extend above a quarter of a mile, we entered a fine open plain, with beautiful trees scattered over it, looking very green, also some shrubs, although at the end of a hot summer. The stores, and a few huts and tents, are erected at the entrance of the plain, and we walked on about three-quarters of a mile, to where many of the settlers had pitched their tents. It appeared like a beautiful park. Some of the trees were large and old. They were chiefly the she-oak, and tea-tree, and gum, and several others we did not know. There were wild strawberries, raspberries, and a sort of cranberry. The kangaroos are scarce, and some have been sold at one shilling a pound. We saw flocks of green and crimson parrots. They were plentiful, and very good eating; also the bronze-winged pigeon; cockatoos – black and crimson, and white and yellow. The natives eat rats, snakes, or anything they can find. They will come to shake hands very friendly. They ask for biscuit, and say ‘good-night,’ which they know to be a sort of salutation, so say it any time. There was a woman buried last night who came in the *Coromandel*. A party of natives attended, and seemed very much affected, putting up their hands; and an old man whom they called Ginykin – their chief, we think – wept. They are very superstitious and very idle, lying under a tree all day; but in the evening they have a dance, or merry-making they call ‘corrobery.’ One of the first things we noticed, on entering the settlement, was the truly English custom: I mean several printed bills – one a caution, the other a reward. The caution was a high fine on any person found giving spirits or wine to the natives; the reward was £5 for the discovery of a person who had already transgressed the orders. There were several others posted about on the gum-trees.... There was a dance in the evening, under a large tent, or rather made of one of the sails of the ship, which Captain Chesser put up for the purpose of inviting *Coromandel* emigrants from “Coromandel village,” as they call the assemblage of (tents) they are in, till the wooden ones are built in Adelaide.... We all rose early, with parrots chirping over our heads, and breakfasted with Mrs. Brown. The coffee mill is nailed to a tree outside the tent, and the roaster stands close by the side. The fire for cooking is on the ground close by. The fresh branches of gum-trees burn like dry wood; firing will cost us nothing for many years. Each family has erected a tent under a tree, and dug a well by the side of it.... Water can be had for digging about six feet – all over the plains, called Glenelg.... The trees are generally from fifty to a few hundred feet apart, and mostly without any bush between.” The above are the first impressions of one of the early emigrants, who was evidently of a very observing turn of mind.

The romance was not all joyous. One of the first settlers complained of the fleas in the sand hills, and the mosquitoes, no doubt attracted by the lagoons. The ubiquitous rat had also made its appearance, and was making inroads on scanty stores.

After the site for the city had been fixed, a move was made from the temporary settlement on the coast to the environs of the prospective town. There were neither roads nor conveyances. The emigrants had to walk through the woods to the city site (a distance of about seven miles), and transport their possessions as best they could. Some were fortunate enough to secure the services of a small hand-cart. Some had to carry furniture, as well as children, in their arms.

The land on which the city was to be built not yet being available, another temporary encampment was formed. The locality was the banks of the Torrens, between what is now called North Terrace and the river.

¹ Miss Chauncey, published by the *South Australian Advertiser*.

The settlers had few of the advantages of civilisation. There was neither slate, shingle, board, nor galvanised iron depôt. Some of the huts were composed of mud and grass, covered with reeds; others were wooden frames on which canvas was stretched. "Government House" – the "Vice-Regal Mansion," as it was sarcastically called – was a wattle and daub hut. In wet weather it was a difficult matter to keep rain out. The "hut-wife" had to resort to various expedients. Sometimes umbrellas were propped up to keep goods dry.

Some of the emigrants, before leaving England, had made arrangements for a few small houses, ready made, to be shipped. They were to come by the *Tam o' Shanter*. Unfortunately, as the vessel was sailing from Kangaroo Island to what is known as Port Adelaide, she struck on a sand bar, and had to remain there some time. Says one of the pioneers: "The sailors had to attend to the ship, and we had to do as best we could. Some cut down a few light saplings, and, putting them together as well as they were able, went down into the bed of the river, and cut some grass with which to make a kind of wurley hut, into which we had to go, and there spend the winter, improving the place a little as the days went by." We were "frequently obliged to fix up umbrellas, etc., to keep off the drenching rain, no other means being available at the time."

These privations were not without their advantages. They developed thrift, determination, self-reliance. The early settlers did not "run to the Government" when they wanted a bed or a new broom. Tradition says there was a time when the Government Treasury contained but eighteenpence.

One who came to the Colony in the early days, and who published his reminiscences at "home," thus describes the temporary settlement on the banks of the Torrens: "The huts were scattered about without any attempt at regularity or uniformity. Every man had built his house on the spot where whim or choice pointed out, or where material was easiest got; the consequence was, that a collection of as primitive-looking wigwams as can be well imagined soon lined the banks of the Torrens – some of them facing the east, some the west; in fact, every point of the compass might have claimed one or more facing it. They stood just as though a mad bull had been playing his antics among them, and had tossed them hither and thither. Nor was the appearance of the dwellings less amusing or extraordinary than their general positions. Most of them possessed an aperture to afford egress and ingress; but few, if any, could boast of a window of any kind. A fireplace was not deemed essential, though several had an opening at one end, surmounted by an empty pork cask deprived of the ends, to serve as a chimney. A great portion of the emigrants, however, contented themselves without a fire, except outside, where it might be seen blazing, with a pot hung over it *à la gipsy*." An old colonist (J.W. Bull) says: "It was not an unusual thing, in hot or showery weather, to see a lady watching a kettle or camp-oven under an umbrella."

Here and there, in the temporary encampment that we have described, there was some little attempt at order. It was only natural that emigrants who came out in the same ship would desire to pitch their tents or to build their huts together; so in the fugitive settlement on the banks of the Torrens there was a "Buffalo Row" and a "Coromandel Row." Evidently, the emigrants who had come by the *Buffalo* and the *Coromandel* had pitched their tents in a line together. "Buffalo Row" stood between the Torrens and the present site of Trinity Church; "Coromandel Row" a little eastward.

There was a great deal of romance about these far-off times. Everything was new. There was no snobbery. The settlers led a free, unconventional kind of life. Servants were difficult to get. Those who came out soon got married. Ladies had to do what is termed menial work. A pork barrel, end up, or a packing case, served as a table; boxes and trunks did duty as seats; rushes made a comfortable bed. Tin pannikins were used for tea. Ship's biscuit and salt pork was the staple food. Sometimes there was a

welcome variety in the form of wallaby or native birds. The settlers had their social gatherings in tents and huts. The red-letter days were the days when a letter was received from “home,” or an emigrant vessel came in. After a short time the “first-comers” were amused by seeing “new chums” marching up to the settlement with guns over their shoulders and pistols in their belts. Says one of our lady pioneers: “The few people here were like a happy family out for a lengthened picnic.... No person arriving now can form any idea of the life of the early settlers. It was sometimes very hard to forget all that we had left in the old country, and particularly friends, and to determine to make the best of our surroundings; but all managed to put up with the roughness, and be contented. Happily, there was scarcely any sickness in the population. No false shame troubled us. If friends came in they were welcome. We might be ironing, cooking, or working at any menial occupation, and it made the occupation pleasanter to have a friend to chat to. The first wedding I attended was in winter. It being too muddy to walk, we went in a bullock-dray.... No one appeared to fear for the future, although, of course, no one could anticipate what the future might bring forth.”

Judging from some of the letters written home by the emigrants, they seemed to be quite satisfied with their lot. The following is a copy of one: -

To -----

I write to you according to promise, hoping, at the same time, yourself, wife, and children are well, as we are at present. I did not write before, for I wished to send you some particulars of the place. We sailed from England the 25th of September 1837, and had a most beautiful voyage, for we could have come the whole distance in a longboat. We were four months on our passage.... This is one of the loveliest countries ever seen. The town is on a rising ground about seven miles from the sea,... with high mountains in the rear. It is a lovely black soil, and capable of producing anything. The trees are green the whole year. Things grow here with astonishing rapidity, and finer than ever were seen in England. The Colony is increasing very fast, and all manner of trade is flourishing, especially the builders’.... John, if you were out here you would do well, for you could start in business for yourself.... This is the land of plenty. A steady man, who is industrious, in a few years may make a comfortable fortune.... I should like very much to see you out here.... Come as soon as you can, for the early-comers get the best chance.

No wonder that there was a fascination for English folk about letters like this, especially when they were garnished with references to blackfellows, kangaroos, and emus. The “comfortable fortune,” of which the emigrant above quoted speaks, was more imaginary than real.

After Colonel Light had fixed the site for the city there was considerable dispute. Some wanted it in one place, and some in another. Governor Hindmarsh was pleased with the surroundings, but thought that the city would be too far from the harbour. He expressed a preference for Encounter Bay. Fortunately, Colonel Light’s power in the matter was absolute. He manfully stood his ground. Experience has demonstrated the wisdom of his choice. A more suitable site for the city (after more than sixty years’ experience) it would be difficult to find. It was within easy reach of the sea, and was surrounded by good country, and on rising ground. There was fresh water in the Torrens, and the eastern hills formed a beautiful background. Some of the descendants of the pioneers may imagine that the city site and its environs were densely covered with scrub. Such was not the case. To the north the country was open. There were belts of gums lining watercourses. To the south the country was well wooded, in many places resembling an English park.¹ Fifty years after the site for the city had been

¹ The nature of some of the suburban country is evident from the names given to it by the early emigrants: “Goodwood Park,” “Unley Park,” “Black Forest.” These places have lost their park-like

fixed, when celebrating the Colony's Jubilee (1886), Sir Henry Ayers, one of the most worthy of the old colonists, said: "Can any one at this time, after fifty years' experience, and will all the knowledge possessed of our extensive seaboard, point out any other site so well adapted in all respects, or indeed approaching the suitability of the one chosen? Harassed and annoyed by the interference of some, and the criticisms of others, Colonel Light ... fearlessly acted on his own good judgment, leaving it, as he said, to posterity to decide whether I am entitled 'to praise or blame.' Posterity speaks out to-night, as succeeding generations will through all time to come, loudly in praise of the man who, by the exercise of his ability, was indeed the founder of Adelaide, and whose dying wish to be so regarded has been so singularly fulfilled."

The same wisdom displayed in the choice of the city site was manifested in laying it out. The city lies foursquare. Provision was made for wide streets, public squares, and a park around the town. At the request of King William IV it was called "Adelaide," in honour of the Royal Consort. In his important work Colonel Light was ably assisted by the Deputy-Surveyor, George S. Kingston (afterwards Sir George), father of the present Premier of South Australia. The Colonel's life in the Colony soon came to a close. Hard work and worry undermined his constitution. He died of consumption in 1839. His heart was always in the city, and his body is buried in one of its squares. A monument marks his resting-place. No such monument, however, is necessary. From the top of the Post Office tower to-day a vaster monument – the creation of his genius – may be seen.

To the new Colony the dark figure of dissension came. It appeared in official circles. There were disputes between Governor Hindmarsh and Colonel Light over the city site. There was some wrangling over the naming of the squares and the streets.¹ In a previous chapter we stated that the interests of the Colony were vested in Commissioners appointed by the Crown. A Resident Commissioner was sent out. This dual arrangement – Resident Commissioner and a Governor – did not succeed. It led to divided authority. They came into conflict. The result was, that before Governor Hindmarsh had spent two years in the Colony he was recalled. On the whole, he had served the Colony well. He made himself one with the people, and was highly esteemed. His farewell words recall the lofty tone of his Proclamation: "If the colonists do themselves justice; if they respect the laws, and attend to the ordinances of religion; if they continue the same habits of temperance and industry which have so happily prevailed, South Australia must... realise the most ardent wishes of its friends, and acquire, in a few years, a rank among the provinces of the British Crown without example in colonial history."

The next representative of the Crown to take up his residence at "Government Hut" – still a mud cottage – was Colonel George Gawler. He had been in the Peninsular Campaign, in which he was wounded, and had fought with great gallantry under Wellington at Waterloo. He arrived on the 12th of October 1838. The Colony had now to pass through a very critical time. Various causes contributed to this: the tide of emigration was too strong; the money received by sale of public lands was not employed in reproductive works; the Colony was ruled by a body of Commissioners the other side of the world. In spite of depression, great improvements were made. The city and Colony grew. Huts were superseded by well-built houses, bridges were constructed, and macadamised roads made.

These improvements were made in the face of great difficulties and dangers. A great deal of labour had to be spent in clearing ground. The means of transit were slow,

appearance, but the writer, as a lad, roamed over them when they were studded with trees. The picture, "A Primitive Australian Scene," will give the reader some idea of the virgin character of the country on which Adelaide and suburbs are now built.

¹ The main streets and squares are named after men who took an active part in founding the Colony.

and very defective. Nature was not always propitious. The blacks were often a source of trouble, and so were a class of men termed "Bushrangers." These were desperate dare-devil fellows. Some of them were ticket-of-leave men, or convicts who had escaped from some of the older settlements. They were handy with firearms, and sometimes were well mounted on stolen horses. They "stuck up" travellers and out-stations. They made raids upon horses and cattle. Sometimes, under the cover of night, they would visit the city, and commit depredations. "Bail up!" was the demand, enforced at the point of a pistol. There was nothing to do but to surrender. Their rendezvous, near Adelaide, was the "tiers" in the hills. Here they lurked in densely-wooded and almost inaccessible gullies. They knew the country well, and police, in the early days, trying to thread their way through the "tiers," would be at the bushrangers' mercy.

Fortunately, in those early days, there were two or three police officers as bold as lions. Two of them deserve special mention. Their names were Alexander Tolmer and Henry Alford. They passed through some thrilling experiences. In his *Reminiscences of an Adventurous and Chequered Career*, Alexander Tolmer describes how himself and others captured a party of bushrangers on Kangaroo Island. They were living in the bush, in a wurley, some blacks being with them. "Having obtained all the necessary information I required respecting the kind of wurley, its position and surroundings, and it being dark, we again moved forward cautiously, to avoid stepping on any dry twig, for fear of giving an alarm, by which means we reached within twenty yards of the camp, and heard the men laughing and talking. Considering the position of the open wurley, the darkness of the night, and the dense scrub that surrounded the place, I deemed it expedient, upon reflection, to defer the capture until morning, which would give us a better chance of success, and accordingly made a sign to the police and our guides to fall back, and we then retraced our steps to where we had left our blankets, etc., under a bush, and there passed a wretched anxious night, supperless and without fire, the only solace being our pipes. At dawn we again approached the camp of the ruffians with cat-like silence, and, when near enough, crouched behind a bush – not a moment too soon, however, as one of the fellows got up and threw a log on the fire. After waiting until everything was silent, we once more moved forward, and then rushed simultaneously upon the fellows. They struggled desperately, however, and endeavoured to get possession of their weapons; but we were too nimble for them, and soon had them secured and handcuffed. They turned out to be two men of the 50th Regiment who were transported to Van Diemen's Land, and made their escape from the *Vixen*. Our approach to the wurley was so noiseless that the pack of fierce kangaroo dogs (twelve in number) did not hear us; but when we rushed in they commenced such a furious barking, that, added to the screaming of the native women, the imprecations and deep anathemas of the convicts, the noise was perfectly deafening."

The financial position of the Colony, during Governor Gawler's term, became so depressed that he was recalled. His expenditure may have been lavish, but he was an able and energetic officer, beloved by the people. Out of their reduced resources the colonists contributed £500 as a testimonial. Such was Colonel Gawler's regard for the Colony, and faith in it, that he left the sum to be invested in land on his own account.

Captain George Grey (afterwards Sir George) took up his residence at what was now "Government House." During his administration – wise and effective as it was – the Colony reached its lowest ebb. A policy of retrenchment was put into practice. Valuable mines were discovered. The British Government came to the rescue. A tide of prosperity set in. The success of the Colony was assured. It had now – at the close of Governor Grey's term – been established nine years.