



Jane Sutherland, born in Scotland in 1855, arrived in Australia in 1864. She studied at the National Gallery school in Melbourne from 1871 to 1885, and was interested in portraying children in the landscape. Her painting, entitled Obstruction, of a small girl hesitating at the sight of a cow on the other side of the fence, was painted at Box Hill, near Melbourne. Oil, 1887.

BALLARAT FINE ART GALLERY

CHILDHOOD

IN MARCH 1888 Edward Dyason, a Bendigo mining agent, recorded with relief the safe arrival of his fourth child. 'Thank God it is over so well ... always dreaded confinement now safely over', he wrote on the day of the birth. Four days later he noted 'wife and baby first rate', and next day that his wife, Harriet, 'wants name for the baby'. A week later, when the child seemed certain to survive, he 'decided to call the baby Roger ... after Grandfather Dyason'. The baby was registered as Frederick Cecil Roger, and the family called him Cecil.

Dyason's fears for his wife's safety and their delay in naming the child arose from the real risk of the mother's death and the strong possibility that the child would be born dead or would fail to survive the first weeks of life. Three out of ten infant deaths occurred within a month of birth. Even if the baby survived the first months, the parents' worries were not over. Dr Philip Muskett, Sydney physician and health reformer, estimated that in Sydney one in every three deaths was that of an infant under the age of twelve months. He based his assessment on the figures of Timothy Coghlan, who had shown that while the death rate for the whole population was 14 per 1000 the death rate for children under one was over 166 per 1000 births in Sydney and over 171 per 1000 in Melbourne. Cities were particularly unhealthy for babies; in the country the rate was only 100 deaths per 1000 births.

Muskett thought that the high death rate was caused by rapidly growing cities and the hot climate. In the cities overcrowding, lack of ventilation, poor hygiene and the 'gaseous and solid impurities with which the atmosphere is laden' combined to make an unhealthy environment. The dangers were most severe in the hot months; diseases of bronchitis and inflammation of the lungs were less often fatal to infants than diarrhoea and 'other afflictions of the digestive organs' during summer. The main killers of babies in Australia were infantile cholera, inflammatory diarrhoea, convulsions and infantile atrophy or marasmus.

Parents watched anxiously over their babies during the first weeks of life. In Adelaide Fred Coneybeer and his wife Maggie had welcomed the arrival of baby

Olive in the summer of 1887, but when she was three weeks old she became seriously ill. Fred wrote, 'Baby had been bad all day it had been screaming fearful and twisting and cramping its body'. Later, in agony, the baby convulsed, screaming till she was black in the face. The doctor tried medicine and soap enemas. Everybody thought she was about to die.

Poor Maggie she seemed out of her mind nearly she cried her eyes out and althow I know if its Gods wish to take the little thing from us we cant stop it I could not ceep the tears back.

Next day the crisis passed and the baby gradually improved. Fred and Maggie felt 'very queer' from lack of sleep, but their spirits rose 'a hundred degrees'. Not all parents were so lucky. The illness of babies was a common event, and most families with large numbers of children experienced the grief of a baby's death.



'A mother's grief.'

STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

PARENTS AND EXPERTS

Doctors were campaigning to improve the baby's chances of survival by educating the mother. Most children were born at home with a midwife rather than a doctor in attendance and raised without the help of the family doctor. In the preface to *The feeding and management of Australian infants*, privately circulated in 1888, Dr Muskett remarked:

In nearly every instance the cause of failure in the rearing of infants, apart from inherent or acquired disease, lies not so much in a want of will on the mother's part as it is her want of knowledge in the matter.

Muskett urged mothers to rely on scientific advice rather than on the traditional information of midwives, kin and neighbours. Other doctors agreed, motivated by their growing professional ambitions and increasing concern about a high infant death rate at a time when the birth rate was beginning to fall.

Doctors might differ about the correct scientific procedures, but they agreed that certain traditional practices were wrong. They objected to the midwife's habit of giving the newborn child castor oil, butter and sugar, or even brandy, and to her belief that it was good to delay putting the child to the mother's breast. They



Well-cared-for children. The newborn baby is watched over by a brother and sister. All three children are dressed in starched white clothes for the photographer.

LA TROBE LIBRARY

disapproved of infants being tightly bound and advised against letting them sleep in their parents' beds. They urged the mother to keep her baby's room well-aired, and to breastfeed the child for nine to twelve months. If a mother could not or would not breastfeed, doctors recommended that a wet nurse should be employed if a family could afford it; preferably a 'dark complexioned mother', one chemist suggested, as 'they made the best nurses'.

While Muskett could count on the goodwill of mothers who took the time to read his advice, many babies were born into a world far from the orderly and clean environment he presented as ideal. Statistics almost certainly underestimated both births and deaths of babies, and some deaths recorded as stillbirths or deaths from 'accidental overlaying' were in fact cases of infanticide. Coroner's inquests indicated that these deaths from suffocation were frequent. In one such case involving a four-month-old baby in the Melbourne suburb of Carlton, the doctor reported that his death 'must have been accidental as both parents were sober and respectable'. But others died in more suspicious circumstances. Newspapers often reported babies who had died from neglect or deliberate starvation as a result of the practice of baby farming. Unmarried mothers or women with too many children sent their babies out to other women's care for a fee. Mothers who had to work used the services of neighbours or local women. Many babies who died

Perambulators were elaborate affairs. By 1888 local manufacturers were complaining that the imported American perambulators, cheaper and better made, were ruining their business.

LA TROBE LIBRARY



Quiet study, by Tom Roberts. A picture of Roberts's young niece, Eleanor Simpson, reading the illustrated paper Harper's Weekly, advertised as *The Leading American Illustrated Weekly*. In the best sense of the term it is an American educator. It fills a large place in the minds of coming men and women.' Oil, c1889.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

because of careless treatment were buried as stillborn infants, for whom the law did not require registration or a proper cemetery burial.

Advice manuals were written for a middle-class audience, and assumed that the woman's chief role was child rearing, and that there would be money to spend on children and time to play with them. Philip Muskett followed up his manual on the care of infants with *The health and diet of children in Australia*. He concentrated on the 'alphabetic quadrilateral' of health: bathing, clothing, diet and exercise, and hoped to 'impress parents with the fact that there is a good deal of method called for in the management of their offspring'. The book included a chart showing the height and weight of normal children, and detailed instructions on how to rear the healthy Australian child.

Muskett devoted a chapter to the 'well-ventilated and orderly bedroom', suggesting that it should be upstairs, provide 1000 cubic feet (28.3 cubic metres) of space for each person and have the bed placed north and south. He gave instructions for correct bathing and advised that wool should always be worn next to the skin. He had 'no doubt the modern pyjamas are a great improvement on the old-fashioned bedgown'. He championed exercise to develop both body and brain, applauding the fact that Australian children spent a lot of time playing outdoors and declaring that training in gymnastics made for balanced physical growth. He deplored the relative neglect of gymnastics in girls' schools and saw 'no reason why girls up to the age of about twelve should not have similar games to boys'.

As a medical man, Muskett opposed 'cramming' for examinations, and more generally 'the dangerous mental pressure and misdirection of energies and aims, which are to be found in nearly all parts of the present educational system'. Finally, he devoted half the book to diet. He warned against eating too much meat, recommending soups, vegetables and salads instead, and praised the properties of oysters which though 'not an article . . . of daily consumption [were] fairly within the reach of all classes'. He advised against giving tea to children, preferring milk, coffee and cocoa as aids to healthy growth.

Following Muskett's advice might produce a clean and healthy child, but not necessarily a tractable one. Commentators on the character of the Australian child were generally dissatisfied. N. Sisca, author of *The management of children in health and disease*, thought that children here showed little respect for their parents, and were too independent. Boys called themselves men as soon as they could 'fasten a pair of braces to their knickerbockers', and a son referred to his father as 'the old man' and his mother as 'the old woman'. Girls were a little more restrained, but from the age of ten or twelve 'their chief occupation seems to be how often they can go, and how long they can remain, out'. The journalist R.E.N. Twopeny admitted that he had 'a holy horror of babies', but believed that 'for general objectionableness . . . there are none to compare with the Australian baby', and that 'public feeling' strongly favoured 'the naughty boy and the wilful girl'. Australian children, he suggested, had breathed the free air of Australian independence too early to have much regard for the commandment that told them to 'honour thy father and thy mother'. 'An Old Housekeeper' declared bluntly in *Men and how to manage them*, published in 1884, that children should be kept under strict control, and only presented to their fathers 'as you would your tablecloths, spotlessly clean, perfectly smooth, well-aired, and when wanted'.

Other advisers believed that fathers should take more responsibility. The Reverend H.L. Jackson, an Anglican, gave a series of sermons in Sydney on the subject of parents and children in which he noted 'the growth of a spirit of lawlessness' as children were allowed to go their own way and became 'impatient of restraint'. He was critical of the father who 'elects to perform his parental duties

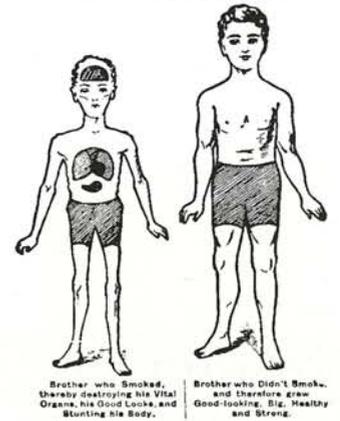
in the shop, or the office', leaving the mother 'to do the best she can by herself'. Jackson even cast doubt on the use of Sunday school, suggesting that many parents regarded it 'as a convenient institution for enabling them to get rid of their children' on Sunday afternoons. He recommended 'Parents' Unions' for 'uniting, strengthening and assisting fathers and mothers in the discharge of their duties', and advised the introduction of religious teaching in state schools to inculcate virtue.

Virtue could also be taught by books. On 9 January the *Adelaide Register* called for the establishment of a lending library for boys and girls. The education system was teaching every child to read, but many lived in homes without books. A children's library should be stocked with books such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Arabian nights* and the exemplary tale *Sandford and Merton*. Later, children would need Thomas More's *Utopia*, Francis Bacon's *Essays* and the poems of Sir Walter Scott. Four days later a correspondent reported that a children's lending library was attached to the Unitarian Church of Adelaide, stocking books by R.M. Ballantyne, Lewis Carroll, Louisa May Alcott, Charlotte M. Yonge and Mary Louise Molesworth. The library also had copies of Scott's poems, Macaulay's *Lays of ancient Rome*, and biographies by Washington Irving.

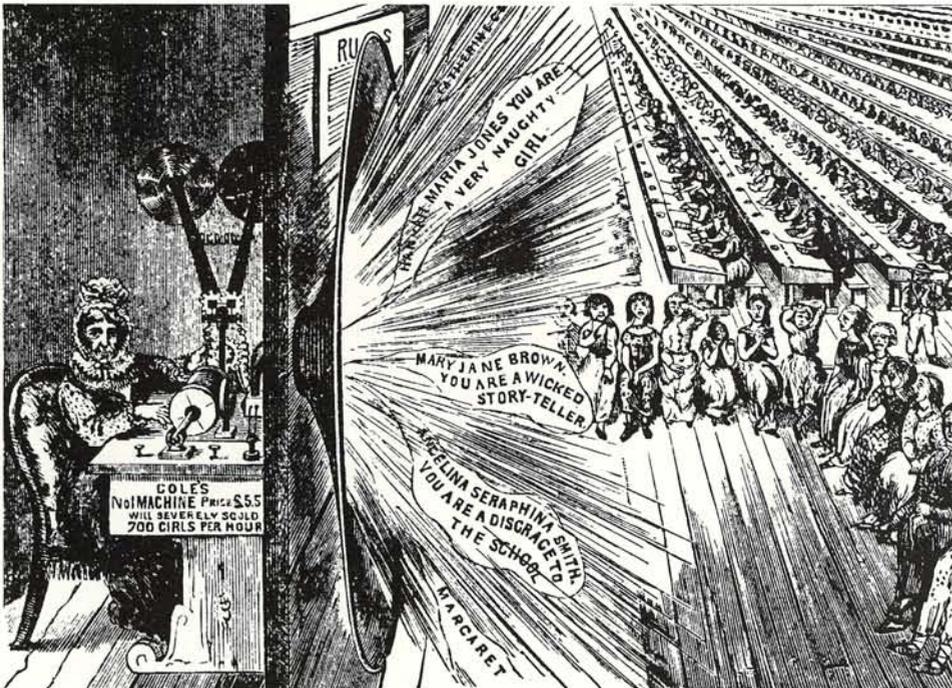
Many adults favoured books like Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton*, the story of an obedient, kind and generous orphan, a model to less virtuous and more fortunate children, or the stories of Mrs Molesworth, whose children were naturally sweet, and devout. As the new word 'goody goody' suggested, however, sensitive adults recognised that the young might prefer more spirited exemplars. A writer in the *Australasian* recommended adventure stories and tales of pirates, and praised G.A. Henty, author of *Bonny Prince Charlie*, for his 'desire to instruct while he amuses'. Most children's literature still carried an obvious message, and one popular Australian work, *Cole's Funny picture book*, made no secret of its aim to instruct as well as amuse. E.W. Cole had first published the *Funny picture book* in 1879, 'to delight children and make home happier'. His stories illustrated children's vices in the lands of temper, pride, greediness, laziness, cruelty and stealing.

E.W. Cole warns against the evils of tobacco. E.W. Cole, Cole's funny picture book.

TWIN BROTHERS.



Cole's Electro-Micro Scolding Machine for Scolding Naughty Girls. E.W. Cole, Cole's funny picture book.



Moralists worried about children in the slums of the large cities, the waifs and strays who lived on the streets, neglected by their parents and surrounded by associates who would lead them into lives of crime. One boy in Melbourne had 'early learnt the juvenile vices of the streets, and early and late pursued games such as pitch-and-toss, until Mr Policeman, the terror of gutter lads' arrested him 'gambling with his pence over a boat race on the gutter in Bourke Street'. The later reform of this lad was told as 'The story of a young gambler' in a leaflet published in Melbourne to promote the Try Excelsior Club. This was one of several interdenominational societies established by those who wished to improve the health and morals of neglected children. The Try Society was formed in 1883 when a saddlery merchant, William Forster, invited boys he found wandering the streets to spend an evening with his family in Toorak. Soon the gatherings at his home became so large that he moved them to a church hall, and later he joined forces with William Groom, a journeyman hatter who had formed a similar club, the Excelsior Class, in North Fitzroy. Groups of Try Excelsior were formed in the suburbs, and in 1886 the Newsboys' Try Excelsior Class was established in the city.

Walter Brown, a member of the Try Excelsior Society.

LA TROBE LIBRARY



Societies of British origin such as the Boys' Brigade and the Young Men's Christian Association were planted in the colonies by adults as anxious as were Forster and Groom to entertain the young, keep them off the streets, and educate them in the Protestant virtues of self-help and responsibility. Try Excelsior aimed 'to spread a little honey on the crusts' of waifs and strays, and the boys were encouraged to run their own meetings and organise their own activities. Work was sometimes found for them in the more wholesome environment of the country, and in 1888 a property at Lilydale was donated to Try Excelsior so that city boys could be trained for farm work. There were few societies for girls, who were not so often seen wandering the streets, but who were more likely to be removed from their homes because of 'exposure to moral danger'.

The men and women who ran voluntary societies were aiming to reform the young and help them avoid falling into the hands of the state as colonial governments were assuming greater responsibility for child-saving. Through agencies such as the State Children's Council in South Australia and the Department of Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools in Victoria, governments sought to intervene and regulate childhood experience. Yet these institutions, both state and voluntary, touched the lives of only a small proportion of Australian children—the destitute, the homeless, the uncontrollable and the black.

CHILDREN'S CULTURE

Removed from the world of adults, and beyond their control, a children's culture flourished. Although parents might buy toys and games from city stores, children could also create their own. Even in the most supervised households, a great deal of time was spent out of doors in unsupervised play. Country children explored the bush; Miles Franklin recalled that 'the open air furnished with miles of flowers, streams, orchards and mighty trees was my nursery and there was a variety of living toys'. City children played in parks and streets, explored railway tracks and swam in rivers and creeks.

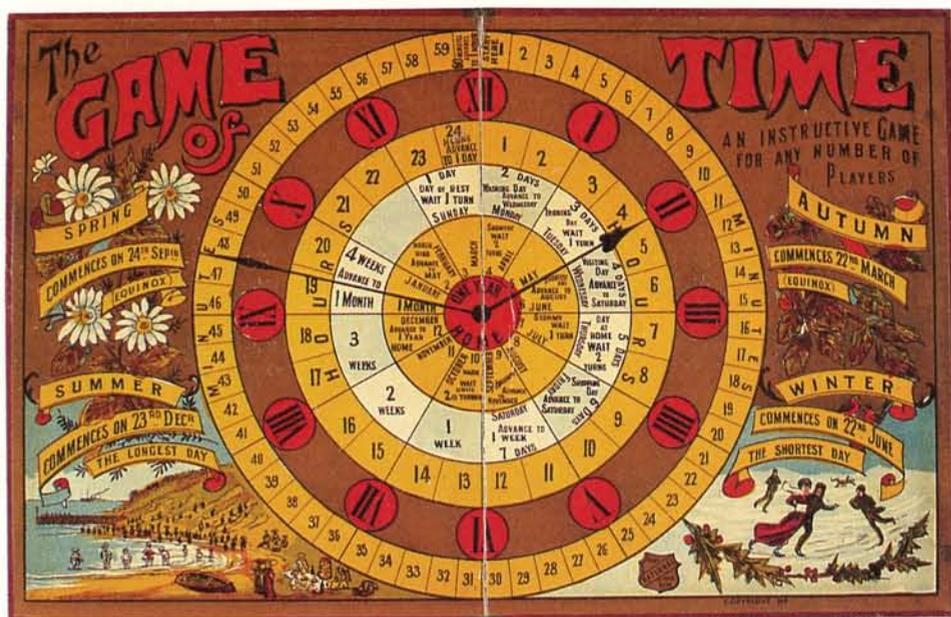
Many of the rituals and rhymes used in children's games stretched back to England and earlier centuries. Australian children adapted old English rhymes in games to determine who was 'he' or 'out'. They played tosspenny, doodlum buck and high cockalorum. They played string games possibly learned from Aborigines. Skipping and hand-clapping games were mostly played by girls, but both sexes played hopscotch, marbles and knucklebones. Boys played football and rough



versions of 'keepings off'. Games came and went with the seasons as marbles gave way to tops, and alleys and taws were replaced by gummies, tops made from the wood of a red gum tree.

The wealth or poverty of parents made a difference to the length of childhood and the speed and harshness of the change to adulthood. As children grew, the lives of boys and girls diverged in preparation for their future adult roles. The children of the rich were born into secure and ordered households. Marjory Gilbert was born in June 1888, the seventh child of William and Mary Gilbert of Pewsey Vale in South Australia. The Gilberts owned properties of over 8000 hectares. Marjory was born at home with the aid of a midwife, and began her life surrounded by women in a large household. Her mother had the help of a companion, a nurse

*Children playing,
Queensland, c1888.*
OXLEY LIBRARY



*'The Game of Time', for
Australian children. Days are
divided by tasks. Monday is
washing day, Friday is
shopping day. It is a southern
hemisphere calendar, with
north winds in February and
a stormy July.*

LUCY COLLECTION, STATE
LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

and under-nurse to look after the children, as well as a cook, parlourmaid and kitchenmaid to run the household. The younger children were educated at home by a governess; the boys were sent to board at St Peter's College in Adelaide from about ten years of age.

The Gilbert children followed the daily and weekly routines of the household. They rose to be bathed about seven and the bell sounded for family prayers at eight. Breakfast followed, with porridge, eggs, bacon and chops, the older children eating in the dining room with the adults and the younger ones in the nursery. Lessons started at nine, with a break at eleven for 'a wild run in the garden, a glass of milk and a biscuit'. The younger children played in the nursery. After a substantial lunch at 12.45, the older children returned to lessons for an hour, and then played or rode horses until 5 pm, when all the children assembled in the nursery for tea.

The best part of the day followed when, washed and tidied, they were ushered into the drawing room for the 'children's hour'. In the presence of their parents and other adults, girls and boys alike cross-stitched or sewed while listening to fairy tales or stories such as Mrs Ewing's *Amelia and the dwarfs* or, as they grew older, stories from Shakespeare, the classics and European history. They played card games and sang songs around the piano, or played draughts and backgammon with their father. In summer the children's hour was often spent in the garden learning how to trim flowers, feeding the deer on windfall apples, or cooling off in the swimming bath. Then the children returned to the nursery to prepare for bed.

On Saturday afternoons the children often went with their parents to visit friends on nearby properties, or to watch the men play polo. On Sundays the children had a short Sunday school class after breakfast, and then attended the church on the property. Sunday afternoon was special, as their father always set it aside for the children. On family outings in winter the children built huge bonfires of trees felled during land clearing and in summer they scoured the pipeline and picnicked beside the reservoir. They returned in time for tea and the children's hour, when they played games with a biblical setting and sang favourite hymns before going to bed.



'Family cares' Illustrated Sydney News, 27 Dec 1888.

Moyes Bay, Beaumaris, by Frederick McCubbin. A mother watches over her son as he sails his boat in the pools left by the outgoing tide. Oil, 1887.

ART GALLERY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Few children were as fortunate as Marjory Gilbert. Awaiting her was a nursery supplied with toys, puzzles, and mechanical toys such as a bear on wheels and a peacock that raised its tail as it strutted. She was surrounded by attentive women and saw much more of her mother than her father, who remained to his children a rather remote, but respected and well-loved figure. As Marjory grew older, she would be prepared for the role of mother and mistress of the house, while the boys were prepared for the world of work and public affairs. The girls would be expected to dress the young children, feed the fowls and tend their own garden plots, but they would not be required to work to maintain the household.

Children of the rich in country and city had long childhoods, and their lives were so arranged as to restrict casual contact with the adult world until they were nearly twenty. Their years of exposure to nurses and governesses might not have made them happier, but it separated their childhood experience from that of other children. Most middle-class families could afford only one all-purpose servant girl and most families did not employ servants at all.

Middle-class children had less formal relations with their parents and were sent to day schools away from home. The five Johns children lived with their parents in a two-storeyed terrace house in Fitzroy, an inner suburb of Melbourne. Their father, Reynell, was a clerk of the court of petty sessions, and earned enough to employ one domestic servant to help his wife Alice. The children spent much time with their mother and father, who organised excursions for them as well as frequent visits to friends and relatives. With their servant, a parent or older relation, the children went on picnics, visited the circus, the exhibition, the beach, concerts, and fireworks displays. The oldest boy, thirteen-year-old Harold, attended Carlton College. He had few chores in his spare time except for occasionally helping his father in the garden or with carpentry jobs.

Reynell did not set aside a special children's hour, for he spent most of his free time in the company of his sons and daughters. One Sunday he helped Harold make a play for the other children, May and Nell, aged ten and seven, three-year-old Arthur and baby Clare. The play was set up in Reynell's workshop, 'where it will be a nuisance, but better than in the wood-shed by the closet—the only other place available', he noted with resignation. During his school holidays Harold sometimes visited Reynell at his office, or wandered around Fitzroy and Collingwood, 'visiting the neighbouring factories and works'. Occasionally Reynell took him to the public library on Saturday afternoon. Harold was not always amiable. On Clare's first birthday in April, their mother took all the children, except Harold, 'who was teasing and sulky' to the beach at Sandringham. Harold roamed Melbourne alone, returning at lunchtime mercifully in a good temper.

Far from the carefree life of Harold Johns, and a long way from the sheltered childhood of Marjory Gilbert, the Currie children worked beside their parents on a farm in Gippsland. Bert Currie was twelve years old in 1888, and had left school two years earlier to help his father on the farm. His two younger sisters, Fernie and Rose, were still at school, but even they were sometimes involved in the work of the farm. An older brother and sister did the heaviest work with their father. Bert Currie's childhood was brief. At the age of ten, when the Gilbert sons were sent away to board at St Peter's, Bert Currie left school. Much of his time he spent fetching free food for the family, such as fish, mussels, hares and honey. Bert trapped wallabies and sold the skins. He did a regular mail round to bring money in. He was just once reported in his mother's diary to have been playing with his little sister Fernie. Six-year-old Fernie walked to school alone each morning, until Rose joined her later in the year. The mother's diary rarely mentioned the small girls' activities: they fitted into the work rhythm of the household.



Anna Florence and Harriet Adelaide Stirling, aged about nine and ten in 1888. Anna (on the swing) and Harriet were cousins of Marjory Gilbert, and the oldest of seven children born to Jane (nee Gilbert) and Edward Charles Stirling, surgeon, scientist and parliamentarian, who lived at St Vigeans at Mount Lofty in the Adelaide hills. Although the Stirlings were a more urban family than the Gilberts, the children's lives were similar. Harriet and Anna were born at home in Great Cumberland Place in London and grew up at St Vigeans in a household that included a governess, a head nurse, under-nurse and nursemaid as well as a cook, a cook's assistant, a scullery maid, a housemaid and a parlourmaid. St Vigeans, like the Gilbert home at Pewsey Vale, had its own schoolroom, where the Stirling children and the sons and daughters of friends in Mount Lofty were educated. Two sons died young—one as an infant and the other after falling from a tree when he was seven.

ES. BOOTH

A group of workmen employed on construction of the Beetaloo reservoir in South Australia collect firewood in their bullock dray. Children use a smaller vehicle for the same job.

STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Bert often felt the strain of a life filled with hard work. 'Bert in his usual temper ... very cross,' his mother wrote one day when things had gone badly. But the family economy demanded his labour and got it. There were no servants or governesses, there was no time for children's hour or wild games in the bushes for Bert. But the record of his life was made by an adult, and there is no way of knowing whether or not he enjoyed his hours spent collecting honey, trapping wallabies and earning money.

In the Sydney suburb of Botany, Thomas Dobeson had time to spend with his two children during the many times he was unemployed. As he worried about the state of the world and his own prospects, one bright spot, he reflected, was his children. 'I don't think the children could be better than they are, in Lively, Noizey, jumping, romping, Laughing, crying, eating, drinking, singing, rude Health', he wrote. His five-year-old son took 'more looking after than a coach and four'; the little fellow buried his father's tools in the sand, badgered him to play cricket, and demanded that he come out to judge his attempts at the long jump. Tom did not complain. Little boys, he supposed, were 'the same all over the world. We would not like to part with him because we love him.'

Industrial Botany might have seemed like one large playground to a five-year-old boy, but the adults were aware that it was filled with dangers for the energetic and unwary. Tom noted a grave event one day.

My little shaver, the heir to all my property, was playing about and fell into a small lake of slaked lime. I just happened to see him topple in head over heels. I had him out and into a well that was near it in a couple of pat snifters. Nearly drowned the poor little fellow but I saved him from the hot lime. It was a narrow escape.

These parents were on hand to keep their children out of danger, and also to dispense punishment. When fights broke out, Dobeson explained, 'the mother sails in then and makes things lively with a leather strap'. Most children were watched over by adults concerned for their safety and welfare, though the degree of supervision varied according to the wealth or poverty of the family.

SCHOOL AND WORK

One institution transformed the experience of growing up for nearly every child. By 1888 all colonies except Western Australia had moved to establish state systems of education, and in the west the Central Board of Education was about to be transformed into a government department. Most children received their schooling in state schools. Although the systems differed in each colony—Victoria and Queensland provided free education, others did not—they were based on the same model of ‘efficient and rational’ schooling. All were designed to provide secular instruction, although Catholic minorities in each colony tended to view the schools as Protestant institutions. All made provisions for compulsory attendance of children of schoolgoing age. All were highly centralised: control over teachers, curriculum and students was closely supervised by departmental inspectors who enforced the regulations.

Until 1870 parents decided when and for how long children went to school, but since then five colonies had passed Education Acts: Victoria in 1872, South Australia and Queensland in 1875, New South Wales in 1880 and Tasmania in 1885. The state now compelled children to attend for a specified period of time. The reasons advanced were social as well as educational; members of parliament agreed that schooling would reduce crime and vice, hasten economic development and prepare children to act responsibly in a democratic society.

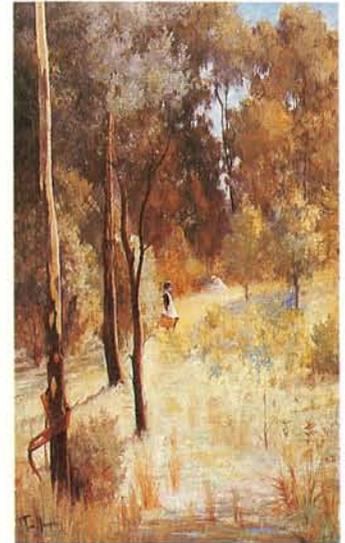
When the Victorian act came into force the government took responsibility for designing and building new state schools. The buildings, declared one member of parliament in 1874, would give ‘an outward and visible sign to the world that [the act] was something more than a name and an abstraction’. Many mayors and local residents agitated for fine buildings that would add to the prestige of their towns and suburbs, and were proud of the gothic structures that soon rose as monuments to learning. The new permanent institutions contrasted greatly with the schools conducted in church halls and private homes they were designed to replace. Country people had to be content with small wooden schoolhouses and in some areas with portable buildings, but in the city the passing taxpayer could see that his money had been well spent and parents were impressed by the ‘outward and visible signs’ of education.

The buildings, however, were designed to impress parents rather than teachers and children. The building program was costly, and economies were made on those parts of the school not on public display. The rear of the building that the children saw from the playground was unadorned. Playgrounds were small, both to save money and to make easier the close supervision of girls and boys as they played in their separate yards. Inside the schoolroom, students sat in large unlined rooms with high windows and ceiling, cold in winter and badly lit and ventilated. Bare brick walls were coated with a pigment that could not be washed and that rubbed off on children’s clothes as they brushed past. Around the side and back walls were pegs for hats and coats, where belongings were hung neatly. Children sat facing the teacher. High windows behind them had been designed to cast light on blackboards and wall maps at the front of the room and to keep the strong Australian light out of children’s eyes. The teacher was forced to squint into the glare and the department refused to supply blinds, which were too expensive. The cheaper solution was to frost the windows by spraying them with drops of green paint, thus dimming the whole room. In small country schools, verandahs were sometimes added to shade windows from the summer heat and glare, but these, too, cut out the light.

Efficiency and economy were emphasised, and much of the teacher’s time was

Tom Humphrey, The way to school. A girl carrying her lunch basket to school is dwarfed by tall gum saplings. Tom Humphrey was working as a photographer in Melbourne, but spent weekends painting with Roberts and McCubbin. Oil, 1888.

WARRNAMBOOL ART GALLERY



than that they should understand the method by which it was obtained. In mathematics, students learned how to deal with practical problems of compound interest, money, cost and profit. Geography taught them to memorise lists of places, products and populations, and about the trade and commerce of the world. In grammar they learned the rules of parsing and analysis and sometimes practised them on works of literature. Writing consisted of copying from the blackboard, and reading was done from Nelson's *Royal reader*. Victoria had introduced history and general lessons in 1885. History began with the study of articles in the *Royal reader*, but soon became a matter of reciting dates and facts. General lessons aimed at instilling 'knowledge that will be of direct practical value after the close of a school career'. It began with object lessons, proceeded to 'useful knowledge', and finally included some elementary science and studies of the animal and vegetable kingdoms.

Boys and girls were given training for their future jobs in life; boys did military drill and girls learned needlework, often while the boys did extra work in arithmetic. Lessons about the roles of the sexes were not confined to special subjects, as Edgar Bartlett's exercise book showed. Diligently Edgar, a pupil in a New South Wales primary school, worked through this question.

If 8 men, 6 women and 12 boys do a work in 24 days of 9 hours, in how many days of 8 hours will 12 men, 15 women and 10 boys do 3 times as much work, supposing 2 women do as much as 5 boys and 1 man as much as 2 women?

The answer was $50 \frac{104}{215}$ days, and Edgar got it right.

Clear messages about the proper behaviour of boys and girls rang out from the students' readers. While pains had been taken to cut out stories which might carry a religious message—'Paul at Athens' replaced by 'the wonders of cotton manufacture', for example, in the edition of *Royal reader* Nelson prepared for Australia—the chosen extracts were filled with lessons about order and obedience. Stories, poems and fables taught the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. One fable showed 'the folly of those who set their hearts on fine clothes, and who try to lead a life above their station'.

In 1884 a new subject, morals and manners, had been introduced into Victorian schools. Children were taught self-help and economy, thrift and perseverance, values that would keep them from becoming a burden on others in old age. 'Under what circumstances is an insolvent justified in subscribing to a charitable object?' 'The early bird gathers the worm'; but to gather the most worms demands persistent industry:

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

'Perseverance most frequently commands success; and where it does not, it at least deserves it.'

School taught that there was a correct way of speaking that should be substituted, if necessary, for pronunciations brought from home. Children were not to drop their 'itches', not to pronounce 'a' as a mixture of 'a' and 'i', nor 'ow' in a drawn-out and nasal fashion. Modes of time-keeping, dress, and speech were enforced through strict discipline. Disobedience was punished, and although corporal punishment was to be 'inflicted in extreme cases only', it was widely used to 'correct' instances of disobeying teachers' orders, swearing, whistling, climbing trees, impertinence,

sulking, talking, lying, inattention and truancy. The reward for conformity and perseverance on the other hand was success at the annual examination and promotion to the next grade.

The children who grew up in Hindmarsh, a working-class suburb of Adelaide dominated by brick making, tanning and the city gasworks, were part of the first generation of compulsory schoolgoers. Compulsory schooling for children between the ages of seven and thirteen was introduced in South Australia in 1875, and the Hindmarsh model school was established in 1878. It was erected in the heart of the suburb, a large building designed to house 1000 pupils and containing an infant department and a primary school of five graded classes. Throughout the 1880s the school had difficulty filling its classrooms, since it competed for students with Catholic schools and many small private schools, usually run by women. These schools had a direct impact on the age and sex structures of the state school's population. They catered for young children and for older girls in particular, which meant that boys formed a majority of the Hindmarsh model school's student body. The sons and daughters of skilled workers and labourers accounted for more than sixty per cent of students.

Most children in Hindmarsh started school at about five years of age. They had two or three years in the infant department or in a private school before entering the primary school. About twenty per cent of students entered the primary school from another state school, indicating the high level of geographical mobility in the area. This was also evident among those who left the school in 1888; over half were under the age of eleven and were heading for another school. The headmaster had observed in 1881 that the population of Hindmarsh fluctuated: 'There is scarcely a year that a fourth of the children do not leave, and another fourth come.' He complained that this made it difficult to classify the students, and that it 'pulled down our percentages wonderfully' at the annual inspector's examination. Though the leaving age was thirteen, a certificate had been introduced to allow children under thirteen to leave school legally by achieving the required standard at the end of class four.

Most students who left had not experienced an ordered progression through the graded classes, although the boys had done better than the girls. These features were also obvious among the whole population of the Hindmarsh school in 1888. While about 80 per cent of the boys and 72 per cent of the girls who sat the annual examination passed, only 14 per cent of the boys and 8 per cent of the girls were in class four. In contrast, 60 per cent of the boys and 71 per cent of the girls were concentrated in classes one and two. The age range in these junior classes was very wide, with students as young as seven and as old as twelve in the same class. Only a minority of those who entered the school in the 1880s managed to reach the higher classes before they left.

Most Hindmarsh children failed at least once in their school careers. The sons and daughters of labourers were more likely to fail than those of skilled workers, who in turn were less successful than the children of merchants and manufacturers. Most children failed to complete their schooling, even though the teachers concentrated on the narrow range of subjects examined at the annual inspector's visit. In 1881 the headmaster had blamed the fluctuating school population for some of these failures. He advanced other reasons as well:

The children of respectable parents with good home influences can always be taught more easily to understand the language and teaching than the lower classes, where you have to give them a language before you teach them anything at all.



He blamed poor teaching in the small private schools that were beyond the reach of the education department inspector and that many students, especially girls, attended before coming to Hindmarsh. He also noted that it was difficult for teachers in the neighbourhood because 'the particular occupation engaged in . . . has a tendency to keep the children from regular attendance'.

Regular attendance improved the student's chances of success. The education act required attendance on thirty-five days each quarter out of about fifty-five. Few children attended every day. Attendance was highest in the autumn and winter months, when the annual examination was held, and lowest in the spring and summer. Yet even in the winter barely half the students attended for fifty days or more and a large minority failed to attend for the minimum thirty-five days in each quarter. Girls were less likely to attend regularly, and irregular attendance spanned the parents' occupational structure.

Investigations by the authorities found that most absentees had a good reason for being away. South Australia experienced a depression in the mid-1880s and parents sometimes found difficulty in providing adequate clothes and footwear or in paying the weekly fee, although those in distress could apply for their children to attend free. Sometimes illness kept a child away from school. While diphtheria, croup and typhoid were the major killers of children aged from five to ten, epidemics of measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough, dysentery and 'sore eyes' might empty a school. Yet sickness and poverty did not explain all absences. Students came and went at all times, and while attendance was most irregular among children of poor labourers and widows, the sons and daughters of skilled workers, shopkeepers, masters and clerks attended irregularly as well.

For most children, schooling was a part-time activity and the minimum attendance requirement provided parents with a two- or three-week leeway each quarter in which to use the labour of their children. In times of family crisis, children were needed to help support the family. In February 1888 the *Sydney Morning Herald* carried a story entitled 'Georgie and other waifs', which told of Georgie, a 'preposterous little merchant' who at four years of age was selling

Hindmarsh model school. Girls walk or stand talking quietly, boys run or play marbles. Woodcut by W. Hitchin.

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Children help to store the harvester. Photograph by Charles Kerry.

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matches on Sydney streets to help support his mother. In Melbourne a poem called 'Newsboys' jubilee' extolled the sacrifices of newsboys who by 'toiling early and late' earned a few pence for their families. Girls, though less visible, were more likely to be kept home to mind younger children, to help with washing and other domestic chores, or to release mothers for outside work. In households with a male breadwinner, they were less likely to meet the thirty-five-day requirement and more likely to attend the small private schools that were more flexible in their attendance requirements.

This need to labour sharply divided the experience of Hindmarsh children from that of Marjory Gilbert or Harold Johns, though it united them with Bert Currie and most Australian children, both urban and rural. The minimum attendance requirement had been introduced with country children in mind. It recognised the importance of children's labour on family farms. Children attended school when they were not required to work on the farm, their attendance being governed by the seasonal rhythms of the agricultural calendar. They helped in planting, harvesting, clearing and burning. Usually their attendance was highest in winter months and lowest in summer. Often boys worked in the fields and girls in the house or the dairy, although some tasks demanded the mobilisation of the whole family. As with city children, these demands for labour were usually accommodated within the requirements of the education acts. It was in times of family crisis, such as illness of a parent, a father's prolonged absence from home or an epidemic, that children failed to meet the minimum attendance requirement.

Country children often found difficulty in getting to school. Those who lived at a fair distance could not attend until they were old enough to plod the five or six kilometres each way. Inspectors often noted the hardships created for teachers when children of nine and ten arrived at school for the first time. Buggy tracks made it hard for children to walk to school in the wet. Struggling pioneering families needed all their resources to establish the family farm.

The theme of irregular attendance rings through the reports of the colonial education departments in 1888. In Western Australia, the central board complained of unlicensed private schools in Perth in which 'attendance was irregular' and 'instruction inefficient'. In South Australia a decline in average daily attendance at state schools was put down to a slump in copper mining. In Queensland, attendance at state schools had increased, partly due to 'favourable weather', but inspectors commented on the difficulty of achieving regular attendance, even though they defined it as four out of five days a week. While in all colonies the authorities laid the blame on indifference and neglect of parents, there is little evidence that parents were unwilling to send their children to school, and nearly all those in reach of a schoolhouse were on the rolls. The long distances children travelled on foot to country schools proved that their parents wanted education for them.

But the demands of the family economy intervened. This was true of small-producer householders and families living on wage labour in country and city. Their children experienced a blurred transition to adulthood, assuming adult roles when necessary from an early age. In the same day, week, month, year, a ten-year-old could be both dependent and responsible, student and worker, playmate and stand-in parent. The idea that the business of children was to be schooled was only partly accepted.

What, then, was it like to be a child in 1888? If a child survived the diseases of infancy and early childhood, there was a chance she or he would meet death by accident. Diphtheria and accidental death by fire, traffic and drowning accidents were the leading causes of death among five- to fifteen-year-olds. Childhood could still be a brief experience for many who lived to be adults. Whether children grew up in the country or the city, many were expected to combine their schooling with work. Most did not live in a household where the daily activities centred on the children and their needs. Despite the doctors' advice and the new ideas of compulsory schooling, few could live carefree lives, supported by parents until they were nearly twenty. Childhood was a different experience for rich and poor, bush dwellers and city dwellers, boys and girls; but most young Australians grew up and entered the adult world in a relatively unsupervised way.



Lower Wallamba public school, near Taree, New South Wales. Girls and woman teacher to the left, boys to the right.

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