

Macedon, 17th November 1853

To His Excellency C. J. La Trobe, Esq.,
Governor of the Colony of Victoria, &c., &c..

DEAR SIR,

I had the honour, on the 10th instant, to receive Your Excellency's letter dated 29th October, requesting information as to the time and circumstances of my settling in Port Phillip. Please forgive the lateness in reply but matters relating to my recent settlement of the district have been of prominence in my mind. Any superfluous matter I hope you will excuse, and anything wanting I shall be happy to supply at any time you may require me to do so.

In the year of 1849 I was a resident of Van Diemen's Land when the report favourable to Port Phillip being a grazing land was heard. This induced a desire in me to make a voyage to spy out the land. Upon arrival at Melbourne I was quickly encouraged to journey north west as the rumours of alluvial gold deposits in great number passed in an exaggerated manner from hand to hand. Before such a journey I did call upon your office for intelligence useful to such an endeavour and did receive the writ referred to in your letter.

You must forgive me at this juncture as recollections from departing your offices to my arrival somewhat south west of the Macedon Station are scant. The reason for this lapse is not forthcoming other than to advise that the company of Messrs Cowie and Stead is best avoided. Having found myself within an unknown location of bushland, I made my way best as could to an area of hills with the view of ascertaining a bearing or two.

The scrub of this particular area was of a variety that made progress a difficult and slow one. There were a few flowering trees that I believe are the yellow wattle though they were somewhat the worse from the effects of the previous years savage bush-fire known as Black Thursday that had raged throughout the district. My hesitation in naming the local fauna must be excused as it is the case that in almost every tree, shrub and plant here look to my eyes like what it really is not. I would see a tree and declare it a willow but it is not and has rather a long botanical but no household name.

Despite the nature of my position I was not concerned for as long as I had the ranges in sight I was certain to find either the road to Ballarat or to Mount Alexander and from whence it would be short order that an inn or station would be found suitable for my purposes. Presently I had every intention to continue my journey to McIvor where an acquaintance would be sure to set me right.

I did at the time have about my person a few items that I could use for various means but to all else I was alone. So with no swag or even blanket to fend the night chills I had little choice but to make haste. Around this place were a few trees. In one place a gigantic tree, which had stood in the very centre of my view, had been burnt by fires made repeatedly against it, til it had fallen. With this sign I supposed that there should be a track somewhere that would eventually lead me to a station or inn.

Traversing across the land here was made in a regular fashion with an accompaniment of magpies and laughing-jackasses to lighten the mood. It would not be impossible to imagine that a gentleman with the right and proper accomplishments could indeed make a good life for himself here with ample land in need of the civilised hand.

This reverie of an Austral Eden soon vanished from my thoughts as the way ahead assumed a character of a savage and abandoned horror. The signs of bush-fire had turned the paddocks of a gully into a sweeping floor of the charnal house. Blackened stumps assume the shape of corpses, pointing charred fingers to the heavens while others of their number lie scattered about their feet, beyond the moment of death. Some still have aged in the relentless sun till they appear of stone and remain in a grotesque shape.

One has heard many of the stories emanating from those old hands that have settled within the colony for the last twenty years, about the aborigines and their sanguine temperament, and of how they attack settlers with fire and spear. I have never experienced a single outrage committed by one of them and indeed have only a passing reference to them as for the most part I find them unable to converse with Europeans. Despite this momentary eerie, this recollection of a dark past that existed in these lands, this soon gave way to a

happier disposition as the foliage soon showed the welcome signs of recovery.

Amongst the trees and taller bushes flit the cockatoo, parrots and paroquets with strange voices that announce their existence with a neverending chorus that may turn the ear of a recent arrival but do in fact have a charm and melodious quality all of their own. Though they are, to be sure, no match for the sonorous tones to be found in an English garden, their lilt does strike one as being wholly appropriate, if not strangely appropriate, for this Antipode.

It was not long from passing through the gully to arriving at a slight incline that I espied what appeared to be a track. A change in direction to a more easterly heading was made and in quick time the track received my weary footstep. This slight track over sandy soil, guiltless of Macadam, and through the occasional bracken stream and bog was a tiring process of slow march and scramble. If ever a land was in need of labour it is this one but as you can attest, the mania for gold has made many a man lose wit and wisdom and those that once could wield the tools of industry now dig themselves into the quagmire of this Australia Felix.

Although I count myself as one of the immigrants from Van Diemen's Land, I have not considered myself to be amongst that rude mass of ex-Convicts, or Penton-villains, old-hands and Californians who come into extraordinary sums of money, such as they hitherto have had no conception of. Their vulgar tongue and extremely rude behaviour is a nuisance that needs a stop put to it that would surely arise with a society more demanding of order, cleanliness and good taste from its people.

You may recall Sir John Franklin's statement with regards to a prior speculative era that resulted in a country scattered with champaign bottles. Now it is likewise for at every tree and fence stump lie the shattered remains of some or the half full of others. I am convinced that should a man of endeavour choose to reclaim these bottles of their contents he would soon find himself the proud purveyor of enough grog to warrant his own inn.

This is not the most noble situation for a town which may find itself with an opportunity to make the principal seat of government. Its people continue to look upon this country as if it's some sort of temporary exile where they may help themselves to as much property as in their power. While thieves which England has transported to this region may be a very active class of gentry, it is still every other man's business to adhere to the principle of the Dutchman - "Get honestly, if you can; but at all events get."

And much to this you will find the whole town aswarm with diggers in slouching wide-awakes, with long untrimmed hair and beards and like navvies in their costume. Yet these diggers are styled The New Aristocracy, and they are flattered at every shopkeeper's door. It can be of little wonder that this plundering of a town can only encourage the bushranger, who are practising at the very gates on the most frequented highway to the village of St Kilda.

You must forgive me for what appears to be any capriciousness on my part in this account but I feel I must inform you of some of the least savoury aspects of our little colony in the hope that it will prove of the value to you that was requested in your initial correspondence. I will now leave this particular extract and return to my own personal narrative of before.

The track that I had discovered proved to be one that eventually joined a much larger track that could pass as a road for it was wider and seemed of a more permanent nature. Though the amount of huge boulders and other stones of a porous quality lying across the path or strewn as if by some giant, make the use of the word road an ill-advised one. The track also had the signs of great traffic as the earth was churned into muddy banks by the bullock teams frequenting any road to the digs.

Given the appearance of the sun lower in the sky than from whence it had situated itself high and burning some time ago, I made preparations to encamp for the night with the hope that an agreeable bullock driver or cart-man would pass and oblige me so that I may travel with him. It was not long before the sounds of an approaching dray made itself known to me predominately with the swearing made by the driver at each turn of a wheel.

'D—n this road!' was the most common utterance from a rather burly fellow, with ragged blue shirt, trousers yellow with clay, huge beard and a cabbage-tree hat. As this fellow passed my location I attempted to gain attention with a hearty hullo but all that I could muster by way of response was a rather desultory, 'Mind 'ow ya go.'

Admittedly I was beginning to doubt the hospitality to be found in this country, known as it was that the influx of rude diggers had made the prospect of chancing upon an English gentleman rather unlikely. With little else to amuse myself with while I awaited the next traveller, I proceeded to gather branches for a camp-fire.

It was by now perhaps about seven o'clock and thoughts of hunger were occupying my mind as I gathered enough wood to make a reasonable fire that I saw a single horse with cart approach. The driver seemed rather jovial despite the cumbersome veil he wore on his straw hat. When I chanced a signal with the intent to discuss the possibility of travel I was rewarded not with derision but instead a hearty and welcoming hullo. Indeed, as he came up I could now distinguish none other than a fellow passenger from my voyage here in a Mr. Burnhard Bateman. I had at first not recognised him in his Australian disguise of scarlet blouse, revolver and white wide-awake.

This most fortunate turn of events led forth into a proposition for business as Mr. Bateman informed me of his intentions and reasoning for travelling this road. He joined my camp-site and improved its furnishings with kettle and assorted provisions from his admirable equipage. Immediately, with his conversation and hot billy-tea in good supply, we hit on the idea to join together in a venture for settling some land that he was aware of.

The following morning we set our course for the Mount Macedon Station where we were met by the cordial and most efficient Edward Dryden who was busy depasturing cattle at that time. He provided us with advice that a suitable run could be found adjoining his north boundary and so it became of great import that I make my way back to Melbourne and make arrangements for the transference of all my capital, about £3000, to invest in stock, stores, tools, &c., &c., necessary.

This period proved uneventful and leads me up to the time of writing this account to you. Should the foregoing remarks prove any service to Your Excellency, it will afford gratification to

Your most obedient servant,

M. ADAIR.