

Symon letter 8

Private Mail Bag, Wynbring Siding, SA, 14/2/42

My eyes are all right again and I work my hand and arm and give them only the night's rest.

Dearest Kilmeny,

Ask your dear Mater if she received Valentines in her young years? I can remember the first one I ever received, which must have come to me in 1869!!! I was nine years old and every Valentines Day since then I've repeated the little verse when I am lying awake on the 14th Feb. We old people lived in a brighter simpler and quieter age and as I lie awake at nights now, my mind and heart go happily back to the XIXth Century and on the 14th Feb. my Valentines throng to my memory.

It was most lovely of you to send me those Home Pictures dear young friend. They are such a joyous touch of the dear old England we are fighting for. Every one of them carries the peace of home life that has made England Mistress of all that is best in mind, heart and soul. There are three short prayers I repeat every night when lying awake. God save the King and Empire, God save England and the Empire, God save Australia for the Empire. I would fret over my helplessness but God will not let me fret. He gives me a brighter memory as I grow older. I long to do some Service but in those positions where my old and long associations with Australia and her passage thro' the years would make me useful in a quiet way. I've had 60 years of full knowledge of Australia and her Law Makers... but it seemed "physical fitness" counts above mental and world knowledge.

I haven't written to friends for months Kilmeny my young friend. First my wrenched wrist hand and arm which will never be all right again, as I couldn't keep them in slings. Then my eyes gave me trouble and I had to employ a fettler's wife to make me a daily meal which I went to the Siding to bring back with me. I could just see my way under a black double eye shade for about six weeks till past Christmas Day I closed down on all correspondence so that I should quietly live my life, in this most trying time for us all. I missed my friends and their letters but I remember always an old saying of my fathers when we would ride together and he wanted me to be a good horse rider "Head and Heart – Up! Hands and heels DOWN and I've remembered that in all those little circumstances that call for it. And so I got through. I hoped I would have my old native women and they came to me, all so glad to be with me, and in their train, poor souls, came their young people, the young fellows grown into camp and [?] thieves, the young girls and children most dreadful and then came a day when I had to send them all, young and old, away from me. They've learned English in its worst and dirtiest aspects and I couldn't bear to hear them talk among themselves. I gave them their last meal, a Christmas Day feast and I stressed every little gift that I knew would remind them of our many Christmas Days at Ooldea Camp. (it is 100 miles west of Wynbring thank Heaven) and a few days afterwards I told them to go away from me – everyone – young and old – until they became "clean inside" and they all went from me. They understand those two words in their own way and I helped them to do so by bringing before them, the old Ooldea Camp and their own dying and dead whom I tended and buried there.

I am too old to keep them here, trying to oust the terrible change in them all. Think of them being familiar with the awful moral beastlinesses of low whites in this century! I spoke their dialects at all

my camps and they knew very little English. I kept in mind always the fact of the fringes of our civilization in containing always so much humorous flotsam and jetsam.

I miss my old friends, old Thanngarri, Bajjing, Beenuga, Oomaji and all of whom had worn, in the last war many and many of dear Lady Symon's "Belgian Rejects" of clothing.

I am most frightfully lonely without them and am worse than Robinson Crusoe as he had Friday and a parrot!! However "God is in his Heaven and every night I make ready to take God's Hand" to lead me Home".

Read this to your own dear self, Kilmeny and no one else. I am sure of your reticence in this respect. The Comth Government appointed me "Honorary Consultant on Native Affairs" and so I do not speak of my natives to anyone unless the Govt officially desires me to do so, to the minister in Charge of Native Affairs.

God bless you, my dear young friend. Take my old motto and you'll find it will be a tonic to you.

Lovingly Daisy M Bates