

WALK-ABOUT

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Illustrated with
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AND MAPS



THE AUTHOR

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Mr Woodward soon handed me over to the care of an unromantic, residential caretaker, who was instructed to familiarize me with the general lay-out of the museum and its appurtenances. Down below the condemned cell-cum-curator's office I was taken to a dank basement, or dungeon, which I was told mysteriously had been used formerly as the solitary-confinement block when the jail had been a going concern.

In between being told by this old attendant that he had been a seaman when a young man, that he had been a thousand miles up the Amazon River and so on—which fired my spirit of adventure—I was brought back to earth by his saying, 'When there was an execution on, they used to perch like a lot of magpies on the roofs over there so as to catch sight of what was doing on the "drop."' When the big bell tolled, the show used to start and from the veranda of the pub over the street you could get a pretty good view of the scaffold.

In circumstances such as these, with blood-curdling tales ringing in my young ears of smashings and bashings, cutting of throats, the splitting-open of heads and a general recital of criminal doings that had been the order of the day in Western Australia in earlier times, I made my début as a zoological assistant at the museum, an institution in the service of which I was to travel far and wide throughout Western Australia—a great and wonderful country that I came to love as my adopted home.

The museum, in its embryo stage in the nineties, possessed a queer collection of exhibits, but very rightly the governing Board of Trustees had laid down the policy that the collection of Western-Australian fauna should be the paramount aim, with that of other Australian forms next in order of importance, whilst orders of animals extant in other parts of the world, and specimens of prehistoric monsters of past geological times in plaster casts, were to be represented by single specimens of this order or that whenever available funds made their purchase possible. Very often, therefore, specimens arrived from overseas—from London, New York, and other centres, where natural-history firms were in a position to supply museums. Thus it happened that the

CHAPTER II

NEXT day I started on my first job. An integral part of the building which houses the museum at Perth was a great centre of attraction in the grim days when Western Australia was a convict settlement, and even later than that somewhat gruesome period, for it was the *jail*, before pride of place in that regard was bestowed upon Fremantle. Whether some government works official had a sense of fun or whether it just happened I cannot say, but the curator of the museum, when I joined the staff of the establishment forty years ago, occupied as his office what a few short years earlier had been the *condemned cell*—or as it was described to me later by an old attendant who dropped his aspirates, 'the last place 'e slept in before 'e went to 'eaven or 'ell.' Close to the curator's office was the *scaffold*, then still intact, in case any museum officer became intractable or murdered his departmental head!

I was escorted by my father to this sombre block of buildings and duly presented to the curator, who for some years, as it proved, was to be my chief. He was Bernard H. Woodward, nephew of the late Dr Henry Woodward, F.R.S., of the British Museum, London, and for what 'Barney,' as we called him behind his back, lacked in zoological knowledge—for he was a geologist and mineralogist by profession—he made up by a dilettante outlook that seemed strangely out of place in the damp, eerie building, every window of which was guarded by fearsome iron bars the sight of which made one think that instead of being a budding museum officer one was a confinee doing a long 'stretch.' The introduction at an end, my father departed, and I was led by Curator Woodward to a small room like a cell which he explained would be my office. From the window of this room I secured an uninterrupted view of the scaffold-room which was heartening and encouraging, for it seemed to keep the idea of a Hereafter constantly in my young mind.

rather poor-looking *Félis leo*, with a vacant glass-eye stare that in those days represented the carnivores in the museum at Perth, came not from a steamy African forest but from the less adventurous locale of a taxidermist's shop in London, but that was long before the various zoological gardens in Australia had a surplus of locally-bred lions which even the call of travelling circuses fails to reduce to convenient numbers.

The arrival of specimens from various parts of the world lead to at least one surprise for a visitor to the museum. When the junior attendants were asked by a visitor whether there was a specimen of the *Falco subbuteo* or *Megascopus* something or other, which was not in the museum, they had got into the habit, more or less, of saying, 'No, I'm sorry we haven't got that yet, but there's one on the way out from England, and it should arrive here before very long.'

One obliging and well-meaning junior attendant had been somewhat poorly educated though he was a first-class hand at polishing the large plate-glass exhibition cases. When the museum was open to the public, it was the duty of this youth to parade up and down the Mammalian Gallery in order to keep an eye on things generally, and prevent any light-fingered person from running away with the stuffed rhinoceros or some other exhibit. One day an old gentleman approached this attendant, and in a tone of great anxiety said, 'Young man, have you a latrine here?' A look of blank amazement spread over the youth's face, but the reputation of the museum, he felt, should be preserved at all costs, even if a little knowledge was a dangerous thing. 'No, I'm sorry, sir,' he replied, 'we haven't got one of those yet, but it is on the way out from England and should be here any day now!'

CHAPTER III

GOLD in those days seemed to be in the very air in Western Australia.

The story of the development of the country is full of romance, for it was the magic of one word—GOLD—that wrought the change. In 1886 the first rush had occurred at Hall's Creek, in the extreme north of the colony, following a visit there by the then government geologist, Mr E. T. Hardman, who had recommended a systematic search for gold in that tropical district. Although eventually Hall's Creek turned out disappointingly, it at least lent colour to the general belief that the colony might in the end become a great gold-producing country.

In 1891 and the following year more than one party of prospectors, foiled in the far north, had gone out from Southern Cross, which is a few hundred miles to the east of Perth, towards Hampton Plains on a search for auriferous country, as it had been reported by one explorer in the seventies that he had seen quartz outcrops in that locality. Among these men were Ford and Bayley, and they came to what was known later as Fly Flat, Coolgardie, where in a few days they doliied out 554 ounces of gold from a reef. Returning to Southern Cross early in September, they quietly lodged their gold in the local bank, then strolled along to the mining warden's office, reported their find, and applied for a reward claim. News of the discovery spread like wildfire through Southern Cross, and almost every man in the place took to the track that led through practically waterless country to Coolgardie, a hundred miles eastwards. Some of these adventurers were but poorly equipped for the venture. It is on record that one gold-mad hero essayed the rush on a single loaf of bread and a bottle of brandy, but it is not clear whether he won through to fortune though such supreme confidence, or lunacy, was