

In Looking-Glass Land



Noëlle C. Tolley

Since early in the morning there had been a bustle in the tents as men prepared, dressing with more than usual care, tidying crumpled jackets, tying old school and regimental ties neatly, ready to leave at the earliest possible time. Today was the day that made their exile bearable.

The groups steadily converged and mingled as the stream of men headed for the small tin shed. As they waited nearby conversation passed from one to another, a jaunty whistle here and there, as all present brightened in anticipation. Even the weather favoured them with a pleasant sun and clear blue sky of an autumn day.

Watches were discretely checked, gold hunters and chains glinting in the sunlight. As if on a predetermined signal the group moved across, covering the space in front of the little building, ready, waiting for the Post Office door to open.

Further down the street, in tents and rough bush shelters, the sly-grog dealers rubbed their hands in anticipation of takings and prepared their stock. Business would be brisk. Today was remittance day.

The Chaffey Irrigation Colony,
Renmark,
1891

Dear, Dear Sophie,

How cheered I was to have your letter, full of gossip and gleanings, so soon after my arrival. My new-style life started with a vengeance, as accommodation had not been prepared as we had anticipated.

I am staying across the River Murray at Paringa, in a house belonging to a sheep station, which every newcomer seems to rent in turn. It's a nice old building, perched high on cliffs above the river, and extremely cool in the heat, so I have not been unduly inconvenienced. The floors are individualistic, as they go in hills and hollows in all directions, and believe me it makes walking through a room quite exciting.

The group of young men living nearby, who are rather jolly company, sometimes go into Renmark town on messages for me, and either boat across, or swim their horses across the river holding onto their tails. The River is not unduly wide, well, not after the Mississippi, and it all seems great fun to them in the summer. How it will be in winter is another matter.

I trust by then I'll be safely domiciled in my own home on our own property. If the Chaffey *Red Book*, which led us here is correct, we have come to a veritable El Dorado of horticulture. How I hope and trust for John's sake that is so, and that he reaps our reward of gold. He goes off every day with such energy and enthusiasm. I am most concerned for him, but he assures me he is thriving on the new challenges presented day by day.

As he left yesterday, I told him the only thing missing in his Paradise is the ability to walk on water, which would greatly facilitate his travel to and fro across the Murray to the property. For a moment I think he suspected my comment to verge slightly on the blasphemous, until his sense of humour asserted itself.

Irrigation seems to be one of his greatest bugbears. The earthen banks of the channels bringing water through our land always crumble and cause break-aways, and so flood the wrong areas. The men seize shovels, and run to shore up the sides, but as soon as they have done one, another occurs, usually at the far end, and it is up and off again. Settlers are rostered to take shifts to keep the water going from dawn to dusk. So exhausting and never-ending.

John hooted when I told him that when people said "They had the water" I considered it an unfortunate physical ailment, and did not realise they referred to irrigating. What a new chum I am!

Church is held in a Tin Cathedral, a small iron shed erected by settlers, just out of Renmark, which serves as a non-denominational meeting place. I think it would be very easy to believe in hellfire when worshipping there in midsummer heat. I did go one Sunday, but nearly fainted in that religious oven, and have not gone back since.

Otherwise our Ministry of the Church comes to us by river, and these small boats bring great comfort in this isolation.

A Wesleyan Preacher, the Rev. Corley Butler, travels busily up and down on his Mission launch *Glad Tidings*. Everyone speaks well of him, and he has been recorded doing all sorts of things, from jumping in saving drowning people, to matters matrimonial and domestic, as well as religious. That does sound like a pure Gilbert and Sullivan patter song doesn't it?

The majority of settlers' ladies are older than I, and include some real English Pukka Mem-Sahibs, and I have a suspicion that I appear to bounce along too much, from a few of the looks I have received. However the famous *Red Book* also kindly refers to "*The adventurous and cosmopolitan spirit which is so marked a characteristic of the Transatlantic people...*" so they should all be well prepared for me.

Another enthusiastic person is Charles Chaffey's wife, Ella. She's originally from Canada but has lived in the States, and has the liveliest curiosity. She has the great advantage that, in her position as the Head of the Social Structure of the Colony, she can do no wrong.

Ella has been kind to this young bride who has so much to learn. She invited me over to stay with her for a week, when John had to go down to Adelaide on a business trip with her husband. With a good housekeeper and companion, plus general staff, she is free to do the great amount of entertaining required in her position.

I found her children dears. She firmly believes in developing their self-reliance at the earliest age, and the small children all adore her, although it sounded a bit Spartan to me. Whilst I mention Sparta and the classics, one of the new settlers is an ex-Cambridge Don, who majored in Greek. My John was so delighted, and wants to see more of him.

In the assortment of types here, one remarkable group of transplants are the Remittance Men. At monthly, or quarterly periods, they are to be found clustered around the little tin shed which is our Post Office, desperately searching their mail, or awaiting wired monies to enable them to live.

A lot of titled and wealthier families in England who have problem sons or relatives, shipped them out to take up land with the Chaffeys, and promised them a regular remittance—but only paid while they remain here at the other end of the world. So here they are, suspended as if between heaven and hell, in a horticultural limbo.

I stared the first time I drove in for my mail and watched them turn out for their collections. I had never seen so many white drill suits and topees together before. You could imagine you were in India. Their families apparently decided Renmark would be equal to the tropics or the Equatorial territories, and before shipping them off, kitted them out in this fashion. They freeze in the winter, and have the greatest difficulty in retaining a clean appearance for the rest of the year, due to stains from the grey mud of the flats, or the red sand of the higher ground.

Their problems come from gambling and other scrapes, although

I believe drink in the main. Renmark was chosen because of the Temperance principles espoused. Most of them are tremendously polite, almost overmuch, as if to compensate for their temporary downturn of fortune. Amongst the group, are some I would definitely categorise as mad, bad, and dangerous, and who naturally could be tremendous fun and fascinating.

A few of the younger men have metaphorically and literally rolled up their sleeves, and are working hard at a new start in life. One can only hope that their will to succeed will hold firm. Unfortunately most of the others get into a very sad state indeed from sly-grogging.

They gather, drink and talk of "Home" to which they can never return, and dwell upon "What might have been". They give roaring parties when allowances arrive, live in state until that money vanishes, and then it is a long, lean spell of waiting until the next remittance.

John explained how every so often, a man quietly disappears, because his allowance has reached its conclusion, or is arbitrarily cut off when his sponsors at Home die. Then, penniless, he has have no option but to walk away from here, hoping to find work on distant sheep stations along the river.

An old station owner taking tea with us the other day, told us he sees lots of these men coming through his land. There have been sad cases reported by shepherds, of bones of unknown men found by the river, some with pathetic last words scribbled just before they died. His phrase about their passing through has stayed etched in my mind. "Some wos flash, and some wos finished".

Life in the little township presents its moment of drama. Last time I was in shopping I was nearly knocked over by a stocky, red-headed woman. She charged past me, skirts kilted up, wildly brandishing her umbrella, setting of in vain pursuit of two scruffy young lads. Eventually she desisted in the chase, and came puffing back, trying to put her fiery flying hair back into confinement.

She told me that she'd "Give them wot ho" if they let her clothes-line down again and spoiled her day's washing, and I do believe she would. I rather thought she looked a bit like a Boadicea of the Murray and told her so, but I don't think the allusion exactly registered. My

discovery, named Ethel, should prove quite a character. When I come in to shop again I'll keep my eyes open for her.

I often drive my rig down beside the River Murray, to sit in the shade of some huge gum tree listening to the cicadas, and contentedly watch the water as it ripples past. Of all the rivers I have seen I feel this is my favourite. Water may just be water when all is scientifically said and done, but somehow, this river has a strong personality of its own.

It's neither a soft nor small stream, nor a giant like the Mississippi, but meanders slowly across the countryside in swollen serpentine loops. To calculate river distances between points you multiply road miles by three, so that gives you some idea of its convolutions. I have been told that in drought years it can be so dry you can walk right across the bottom from side to side, but in flood time lacking deep confining banks, it rises slowly and steadily until it is a 'big-fella flood'.

You will note my use of the native pidgin English. A few people of the local tribes sometimes pass me by the river on their food gathering, and I always greet them as a sign of goodwill. They are darker than Red Indians, and do not have tepees but live in scrappy low bough shelters called wurleys, with no apparent possessions except hunting implements of the men, and string bags and bark carriers for the women.

Once, beside a lagoon near twilight, we watched them catching ducks by throwing boomerangs, a light piece of angle-shaped wood. When well thrown, it traverses a wide arc, and returns back to the sender who often catches it. They are extremely skilled in this. John tried and tried under their guidance, but couldn't do it, and finally abandoned his attempt because he and his techers were laughing so much.

Women and children paddle by, perched upon unstable looking canoes, formed in a very primitive fashion, and used for gathering fish and other river food. A lot of the larger gumtrees have deep scar indentations where the bark has been cut out to form their canoes.

They seem to be happy enough people, but there are tales of a massacre of them near here, not so long ago, because natives were

killing stock for food. I find that disquieting, but no one wants to say much about it.

I raised the subject a few times, but conversation veered away and the subject was smartly changed. In fact word was discretely passed to me, that it is considered *infra dig* to discuss them. I did not take too kindly to that.

I am slowly becoming accustomed to the look of this different vegetation. Remembering the symmetry of our pines and maples back home, Australian Eucalyptus trees appear an untidy straggle at first sight, even though bigger specimens of River Red Gum do have a rugged grandeur in their girth.

On the river flats there are bushes called lignum and box trees, but away from the river, growth changes into smaller Mallee trees, with some scattered slim native pines on the little sand hills. We go hunting Kangaroo out there next week. One does not require a licence, but must not shoot on Sundays, nor of course in the Closed Season.

What would you think of finding a cockatoo-tree? A gumtree more clothed with these large white birds than leaves. They are like clowns as they swing on branches and when I clapped my hands with pleasure, the sky immediately filled with white wheeling wings as they took off, shrieking in alarm.

We are still enthusiastic about the magic of this different new life. Papa proposes to come out next year, and it would be wonderful if you could come at the same time, and he could assist you during the voyage. Try and visit in our autumn, as the weather is lovely then.

Friends are calling shortly. We are being given a ride in their new drag, and go to a watermelon picnic, which sounds tremendous fun. I must race to prepare my hamper, and try to be on time for once in my life.

I have a smart new frock to wear, with a matching parasol. These should dazzle the attentive bachelors, who always follow us, and I find them great fun for flirting. No lectures please!

Your dearest friend Clare.

Outside the sky was blue, the air warm.

Well secluded inside her drawing room, Lily kept the curtains drawn tight against light. She found it all too much. Too blue, too bright, too harsh on the eyes, and certainly too hot.

She sighed as she gazed at the watercolour of the misty rolling downs, which her dearest friend had painted especially for her to take to Australia. Delicately, she dabbed her eyes with a lace handkerchief.

Oh, how she yearned to be back there, enveloped for weeks at a time by grey mist and rain, shrouded in winter fog, and deliciously cucumber cool in summer.

“Shangri-La”,
Renmark
1892

Dearest Audrey,

I proudly advise you that our first orchard plantings grow well at “Shangri-La”, and it all looks first class. Bertram was moved to verge on the lyrical when he said that his trees stand in well-ordered ranks, as did his troops on his parade ground.

He is busy supervising his men checking the dirt channels that run river water along the rows of trees. Some settlers are a little caustic about him employing so many men, but he is used to command from his Army life and, as we have adequate funds, it would appear absurd for him to indulge in field labouring.

He decided to train his field staff Army fashion, so has them on the double up and down the tree rows, and lines them up each morning for inspection of tools, which are presented properly cleaned, prior to the commencement of the day and his orders. He says the brain is the first thing, then the chain of command and, as always, I quite agree with him.

Now, let me itemise for you the fruits we grow: citrus (which includes oranges, lemons and mandarins), pears, peaches and apricots; and also grapevines.

The vines are already well up on their trellis supports. In the evenings as he savours a post-dinner cigar, Bertram has confided to me that we may well produce our own “Shangri-La” vintages. Our land, previously undisturbed Australian bush, is a testament to the

results of all the care and thought that Bertram has expended upon it.

First plantings of apricots are well up towards six feet high, and soon shall be well laden with fruits. He decided to always commence our harvest, by bringing me a carefully selected basket of his finest first fruits. So delightful and touching. The dear man says he knows I have given up a great deal to be here beside him in this colonial environment, and it is the least he can do. A charming gesture don't you think?

We discover we have difficulty in deciding exactly what to do in the orchard. Specialists and authorities from California and Europe continually descend upon us like the proverbial locusts, each espousing his own theory, and the multitude of these quite bamboozles us.

"One is told to prune high, or prune low, and even prune in between. What the devil is one to do I ask you?" exploded Bertram in frustration to me the other evening. I had to confess Audrey, that I really did not know.

Prior to coming out, when one read the *Red Book* it made it all sound so very simple, as if fruit trees were just planted, grew, were harvested. Then we in turn reaped the profits. There was no mention, nor did we ever envisage, so many vexing and perplexing decisions to be made each day. I try not to ponder it all too much, as it raises such dreadful furrows and wrinkles on my brow, which are not in the least becoming.

We are following the example of Charles Chaffey, in planting a grove of olive trees at our drive entrance. Bertram is delighted with this concept, as it makes him remember wandering amongst the olive groves during his Grand Tour of Tuscany. Have you any instructions you could send me on soap-making? One never considered how these things were done at home.

Mrs. Ella Chaffey could see I was not quite coping with the demands of this new style of life, and kindly suggested a maid who might suit me. Although only fourteen, she seems keen to progress, is cheerful and honest, and one cannot ask for more. Well certainly not out here, where one has no choice of servants at all, as there is

nobody to choose from. This young person exhibits a distinct tendency to waste time prinking and preening in my mirrors, but I shall address that firmly in due course.

As yet, we have not added more rooms to our house. The original bricks Bertram supervised in manufacture worked well, although we did experience a tiny problem at the onset of the rains last winter with various leakages. However all is patched up and ship-shape again, and my lovely Persian carpets eventually dried out well.

“Olivewood” is quite the social hub of the district. I am certain I have already advised you that we are often invited there for dinners, or to make up a table for cards. We have met several other new members of our Colony at these events, and all in all I think we shall achieve quite a pleasant, if restricted social circle.

One couple who seem agreeable, although perhaps not quite of our standing, are former apple growers from Kent. Bertram is of the opinion that the man, Algernon, should be an invaluable source of information for him on what one has to do on the land.

He could best be described as an honest farmer, whilst his wife Gertrude appears positively provincial, but pleasant in her unaffected way. She’s a rather large raw-boned woman who speaks loudly, and fairly dwarfs my *petite* self. They have a young family with children about Montague’s age, so I daresay they will play together eventually.

I find Mrs. Charles Chaffey charming, so refreshing in her enthusiasms, and she is always so smartly dressed in the latest fashions from abroad. She went to a Finishing School in Switzerland, and has travelled widely in Europe, so she and Bertram have great conversations about the classical monuments and sights that they remember from journeys in younger days.

She seems a self-sufficient person, and cheerfully offered to give me useful tips on firearms, as she has been an excellent shot since childhood. She often joined her brother on holiday shooting expeditions in the Everglades of Florida, which abounded with poisonous water snakes. Ella. Even Clare, a new arrival from Canada, admitted she carries her own pocket gun. I was quite aghast when she said so.

I am absolutely petrified that one day one of them will actually

arrive with a firearm, to teach me. You know how distressingly frail my nerves are Audrey. I think I should faint dead away when the weapon went off.

Bertram, to my utter mystification, thinks it a huge joke, and keeps guffawing that he cannot wait to see me rival the famous Annie Oakley.

I gave my full attention to the dinner table conversation at Chaffeys the other week. The Hon. Herbert had returned from Adelaide with advice that plans are afoot, to plant acres of White Mulberry trees in suitable dry areas of the Colony of South Australia, for the purpose of establishing a Silk Industry.

All gentlemen present, except the Hon. Herbert (who is always unduly optimistic) seemed sceptical of the great deal of work entailed in gathering all the little silkworms, but in the end, joint opinion was that it could be worthwhile.

As we drove home Bertram sagely remarked it is very important to keep one's eyes and ears open to new ideas for the future. One never knows what may prove successful. I now plan to discretely talk Bertram into planting a patch as soon as possible. Then one day I can wear my very own material as a frock, and Bertram can have some splendid silk weskits to dazzle the assembly when we grace evening functions. I feel quite the settler's wife as I assist with these important decisions.

At last we virtually have a newspaper. One of the men in town set up a weekly sheet, done as manuscript and multiplied by chromograph. It gives us all something to gossip deliciously about. News is circulating that many of the Nobility are taking up land here, even some quite closely connected with Royalty. It does presage a sparkling social life when they are established.

It is therefore important I obtain your opinion of the latest fashions. I have been studying with intense interest, the French illustrations of these new "*Leg of Mutton*" sleeves, which appear to be all large at the top, like their name, then fitted on the lower arm, ending with a frill. My "*Illustrated Paper*" declares it gives entire freedom to the elbow joint, which has previously been sacrificed with tight sleeves.

While that may be very true, it will wreak havoc with my entire wardrobe, which will require radical changes. I consider it might be as well, that in Renmark we do not keep so scrupulously in step with the current mode.

I was singularly disturbed the writer felt the sleeve was being adapted to assist the Women's Suffrage Movement, to enable them to wield parasols more freely in decisive action when fighting for the Vote. Thank heavens we do not have that sort of aberration here.

Mind you Audrey, I suspect quite a few of the younger ladies here are not entirely of the same persuasion, and they have actually raised the topic as a debate at their "Mutual Improvement Society". I heard these ladies were given quite a heckling on the evening they attempted to defend the Suffrage Movement against a team of men.

I did not attend that evening, as Bertram specifically requested I remain at home. He would have an apoplectic fit at the very least, should I consider espousing such a cause. However nights with more serious topics such as "Ethics of Wood Cutting" and "Are the Poor Deserving?", do not cause him the same concern for me, and he cheerfully drives me in on those times.

Under the chairmanship of Charles Chaffey, my dear husband has been asked to join in deliberations of a group of men planning how to market their first fruit. I think they recognise his experience in commanding a force on the Indian Frontier.

He remarked to me the other day, that he was finding it was actually a rather different thing in Renmark. In India everybody did exactly what he said, and that is very far from the case here. In fact, I think only the men he employs do that, although I could never express such a thought to Bertram himself.

Teams of Gentlemen and Others gave us an excellent cricket match last weekend. "Gentlemen" are from the Settlement, mostly Army and the Titled men. "Others" are members of the town and general settlers. A person called Joe, who does occasional labouring work on our property, made up numbers.

He turned out to be a demon bowler and caused quite a degree of havoc. He even clean-bowled Bertram first ball, which I felt was completely *infra dig*. However, with his station in life, how could

one expect him to comprehend what was fitting in this type of encounter with his employer?

That busy-body Ethel tells me of new families arriving here, quite unsupplied with goods for their future homes. The latest family do not even have so much as a hair mattress between them and their string of children, and the parents sleep on top of the kitchen table, while their children are stacked like logs underneath. What rosy vision can these people have had, when they set sail from Great Britain in such a feckless condition, so full of optimism, but so unsupplied with goods?

I give devout thanks in my prayers at night, that we have our own splendid brass bed upon which to lie down, with a most comfortable mattress and down pillows, my embroidered linen sheets with my monogrammed crest, my eiderdown of finest duck, and all my lovely cedar chests of drawers full of my best clothes.

As I write I can but think nostalgically how dearly I long to see Home again. Alas, Bertram does not think we can make a journey back until he has finished all his irrigation and planting. Then following that there will also be the birth of the new baby, which I now announce to you, will be arriving in five months. When the time for confinement nears, I shall depart for Adelaide, whilst I await the accouchement.

It is such a fatiguing process to travel to Adelaide as we are so far up-country. It takes a couple of days passage by steamer between Renmark and Morgan, and then several additional hours onwards by rail from Morgan to Adelaide. One then has to put up at a Boarding House until the baby arrives.

A pleasant couple have been extremely well recommended to me. They utilise their large home as a guest-house, and are said to look after we country ladies particularly well, so I shall patronise their facility. Then one has to wait for yet another month or so, to slowly recover strength, until finally comes the time when one can pack up and return home with the new infant. That is, assuming the river height is sufficient to enable one to take the Steamer.

Such a long procedure and I do not like to think of Bertram having to manage without my gentle guiding hand to oversee house and

home. However Cook, Ethel, and the maid, declare they will 'do' for Bertram, and care for Montague during my absence. At least I shall have an opportunity before returning to Renmark, to inspect and purchase some of the newest fashions in the Adelaide emporiums.

Newcomers are still arriving, and I discretely check to see if they may prove socially suitable. Bertram jokes at my little lists of my "*Renmark Debrett*", but one cannot be too careful in choice of friends in a restricted society. As we drove past the wharf the other day, I heard some of the general townsfolk calling us 'Nobs', but one cannot help being what one is, can one? All one can do is keep up the standards one is used to, and believe me my dear, that is no easy thing in these wilds of the Empire.

I am slowly achieving a distinctive effect to ameliorate our surrounds. I do not pay any attention to the desert land outback, as being of no immediate interest. Sometimes Bertram insists I join a picnic outing, but I usually plead a violent migraine. I do not care for the Australian outdoors. It is too harsh, too large, and contains altogether too many insects.

To look after my skin I find I have to stay indoors for much of the summertime. The scorching sunshine makes me squint, and produces unwanted wrinkles.

I shall look earnestly for your next mail, and have enclosed a list of things I would greatly appreciate you procuring for me. All the little things that make one's life so much smoother—including the French skin cream above all, please dear. That is an absolute necessity for my life here.

Your friend Lily

Gertrude opened the oven door, and tested her sponge with a straw. It was ready. She carefully lifted the pan onto the cooling rack.

*She thought back with pleasure to her last successful tea-party. It had been a special occasion. To celebrate Clare's birthday, and also to congratulate Ella on the publication of her first book, *The Youngsters of Murray Home*, newly printed in England.*

All ladies present had produced their volumes, for personal inscription on the fly-leaf by their friend the Authoress. The announcement by Ella that she was honoured with her book being one of those chosen for the library of the children of the Royal Family caused a further flurry.

Gertrude smiled wryly as she remembered what a study Lily's face had been when she heard that piece of news.

Lily had promptly requested twenty copies, and told Ella she would now carefully mark any page with possible or probable reference to herself, or her own children, for the edification of friends in London. Obviously of course there existed a distinct possibility that the Queen herself might read of them, and remember her.

The Church Ladies Guild were asked for boxes of clothes and goods for a Village Settlement that was to be started in the next month. They in charge and duly sent off several large boxes.

She smartly got a note back, from the downstream Women's Committee that: "A much better field for such charity is ready to be found in the outside world ... Of course it will be understood that at the present time we are very glad to receive any useful presents of implements, such as, given by our friends and contraband in a brotherly spirit, as assisting the cause in which we are embarked, by helping to enable us to attain our share of our class the way to a position of reasonable independence, and comfort in the land to which they are entitled."

Poor Lily was totally overcome.

“Cornucopia”,
Renmark,
1896

Dear Aunt Lucy,

Since the Chaffey Crash, each day produces surprises in our lives. I think my greatest may well have occurred yesterday, when I looked out of my window and saw Lily driving up. A most unusual occurrence, as we are not on private visiting terms, a point made abundantly clear to me at the outset of our acquaintance.

Lily sailed into my parlour wearing a splendidly decorated hat, elegantly dressed in silk as usual, promptly reducing my cotton print morning gown to its proper place of the kitchen.

After fidgeting with her reticule, and chit-chat about the weather and children, she sat wringing gloved hands. She finally blurted out that she simply had to learn to cook, as they have been forced to dismiss all staff.

By the time she finished talking she was no longer her usual shade of white, but crimson with distress. I could only feel sorry for her, and took her into the kitchen. This was no time for fiddling with style, so I made a big pot of strong black tea and we sat down and talked together.

To the credit of the poor soul, she is determined to do everything she can to assist her Bertram. I told her we too are holding on here like grim death.

It is utterly amazing to me that she has no idea whatsoever of what to do, or how to economise. She only has pages of grand London

dinner party menus sent by her mother, featuring spatchcock, roast pheasant, giant hams, and turkey, none of which are any help whatever, now she faces provender of lean mutton chops and stews.

I suggested she send Montague over, and he can learn a bit of game catching from Harold and Emmy. That young lad has been coddled unmercifully, as she is still convinced he is fragile, and it will do him good to run freely with other children. It might be the making of him.

She and I came to an agreement that I would teach her cooking one day a week, and keep this entirely on a confidential basis. She went crimson again, when she said she couldn't offer any recompense.

Then she brightened up, when she came upon the idea, that should the girls require linen, she possesses stacks of fine embroidered linen sheets and table cloths, far more than she requires. I agreed that when we do a reasonable amount together, this will help Hope and Charity. Faith could well do to put some in her Glory Box, which despite her protests I insist she accumulates ready for the day she finds a husband.

The more I consider it, the more I am taken with Lily's idea of exchanging goods, rather than making a monetary transaction.

All in all, I know Lily felt much better for coming to me. I have never disliked her, just been unable to bridge the gap she kept between us with her airs and graces. We arranged to meet at each other's house on alternate Mondays.

I told her to wear a plain print frock, a no-frill apron, and to ensure her kitchen fire is well stoked with a good supply of mallee roots, with extra on hand in the wood box to see us through the day. I'll start her off with a simple nourishing stew, some fruit pies and put a large fruit cake in the oven at the end. It is going to be a real challenge.

Lily has swallowed her pride, no mean feat for her. A great many silly women here will not.

When Algernon recently called on a friend, he found the poor chap attempting to cook for the family, as well as handle the orchard.

His wife flatly declared she couldn't cook, never had and never would. Without domestics it was either the poor chap did it, or he, wife and children, all slowly starved.

The major problem, is that there is absolutely no money to pay anybody to stoke the boilers, so irrigation pumps cannot send water to our orchards. If water does not come soon we shall have to watch our plantings shrivel. Herbert and Percy are joining one of the volunteer groups going out to cut mallee wood, to keep the boilers fired.

When they rode off this morning they declared they have put so much sweat and tears into this settlement, a bit more expended will not be felt. Faith and I shall drive by later with a large fruit cake and biscuits, and boil some billy tea to cheer them along.

Our financial futures are now in the hands of others than the Chaffeys, and we appear to be at the mercy of unknown Bankers and Financiers. Algernon will be mauled financially, but a lot of Settlers could be wiped out. It's a critical period for the Renmark Fruit Packers Union, but provided the growers remain in cooperation we'll get through.

Women with sewing machines have been busy. A Board meeting of the new Packing Union, passed a motion to purchase 150 yards of double width calico, to be sewn into bags for our dried apricot crops. I hear my sturdy Singer machine whirr away as our girls take turns, and earn themselves a small credit.

Our apricots are popular in Queensland and New South Wales, but we face stiff competition with imported fruit from California. You would think the Governments would do something to assist in our struggle. They were all so laudatory when we started here, but these days it is just all words, words, words from them, and not a politician in sight.

Nobody can afford to pay labour and all families go together to get their crops in. We rise before dawn., and joke as we pile onto a trailer, for the draught horse to pull us down the block.

After lunch when the heat is exhausting, women carefully prepare the Muscatels, or 'London Layers' for drying, to avoid spoiling the

bloom on the berries. Some of these boxes go on strings of camels from Broken Hill out to cattle stations in the furthest desert regions of Australia.

Ridiculous restrictive inter-colonial duties infuriate us so much. The Customs House at Port Murthoo, at the border between the two Colonies, charges duty on anything going up or down river. For example, machinery which breaks down in Renmark is sent to Mildura for repair, and charged duty fees both ways. The authorities also cause such undue delays by holding up passage of goods.

Herbert favours peppering them with buckshot, but if the nincompoops do not lift this wretched law, the men forecast we shall be forced to attempt to sell our entire crops to England and Europe to avoid strangulation by our own red tape.

As it is, whichever settler goes Home, he is charged with organising the sale of whatever fruit pack accompanies his ship. That happens less than ever these days, now money is so tight, and Home becomes further out of reach.

Drainage at the end of our block continues to plague us. Algernon is digging the wretched drainage line up for the third, and he hopes last time. Using hollow mallee boughs as drain pipes worked well, but the wood rotted too rapidly, and overlapping bundles of river reeds didn't succeed either.

Now he has scoured the town and river bank, and accumulated piles of bottle 'empties'. He burns a kerosene soaked wick to remove their bottoms, then lays bottle-necks into bottoms to make, what he hopes at last, will prove to be a permanent drainage line. My normally placid husband becomes quite cantankerous when he surveys the chains still stretching ahead.

Fortunately the children thrive, and are a comfort to us all. We struggle on to assure their futures. I am well, but there are some days I find it a great effort to continue to jolly everyone along, as they look to me to do. I suppose even the girls could see I was becoming fatigued, for they badgered me into undertaking a weekly social outing, as a break away from the property.

I took up tennis. Now Algernon has called out that he has the

horses ready and the trap waiting in the drive, so I must gather my racquet and boater and dash.

Today is the Championship Silver Cup and I intend to win.

With affection,
Gertrude