

Arch 334

Account of journey from
Melbourne to Limerick in the
winter of 1864. M. Kridge

As it is over thirty four years since our family came to New Zealand, a few reminiscences of that time and our journey over from Melbourne may be interesting to my children, their mother being then a little girl of seven. In that interval of time the facilities for travelling have so increased and the very route and mode of getting from Lyttelton to Christchurch so totally changed that the veritable simple details of my early travels may read to my children like "a story". As I was very young and in delicate health after a long and severe attack of scarlet fever, I can not give a very copious narrative. But my memory was remarkably good for a child, being a family gift, and what I do remember is accurately stated as far as it goes. Then the wonderland of our journey, the unaccustomed scenes into which I was plunged, made a deep impression upon a shy reserved child who

was yet very observant, who had already read a great deal and yearned to see and hear of other places and things. The retiring again after a couple of months into a very dull round of life and lessons deepened the effect upon the mind which naturally fed for long upon the complete change into her little life which this journey had brought about. We stayed at a hotel in Melbourne for some time before embarking. I can recall now the large dining room with its tall mirrors touching the floor and lining the walls, so bewildering the little girl who saw numerous counterparts advancing to meet her as she walked. Also on the few occasions when I was taken out with my mother, having to wait a very long time at the crowded street crossings to re-join her and my little brother who had got safely across and were waiting impatiently on the other side. How my heart can be at the

crowds, the horses and carriages - the passage was never clear of traffic, I believe a policeman occasionally took pity on the frightened child and led her by the hand across in safety. Then as in a dream we were on board the Alhambra bound for Lyttelton. I was very ill and retain little but an abiding memory of the misery of the voyage with its constant cold and rain. It was mid-winter, June ~~July~~ 1864, so the weather was naturally cheerless. The Lyter Opera Troupe were on board and a large number of passengers, making a full steamer. Once or twice I heard beautiful strains of music, probably the prima-donna and the tenor giving a concert in the saloon. How heavenly it sounded in the ears of the miserable sick child who could seldom get up. My mother was very ill on the voyage and her little son occupied nearly all the attention she was able to give. One of the Opera troupe was made known to me once in an interval on deck, he wore a large

red neckerchief round his throat probably to protect his voice - or he may have had a cold. I took a strong dislike to him, he wore such a disreputable air in my eyes, accentuated by a slightly unkempt & haggard appearance and the red neckerchief. He made many kindly efforts to amuse me, they were all in vain, I shrank from his advances. But he made a profound impression on my youthful mind all the same, for ever afterwards my childish prejudices associated the theatrical profession and large red neckerchiefs as inseparably connected, much to their disadvantage in my regards. The next thing I remember is our arrival in Lyttelton, a maze of hurry and bewilderment to a young child in a strange land. We went to the Mitre Hotel for a day I think - at any rate for a meal. Then we all went away ^{one afternoon} in a waggone over the hills to Christchurch.

along with several of our fellow passengers from the "Alhambra". No railway line and comfortable carriages as in these days, the tunnel being only then in course of construction. The Summer Road, then always called the zigzag from its turns and twists round the Port Hills, was the only thoroughfare for traffic, the Kridle Path being made use of by pedestrians or solitary horsemen, now it is an honoured short cut and excursion route for tourists and walking pic-nics. Well, our waggonette starts, and to this day I remember my state of terror through the long weary drive. I had never seen anything the least like the precipitous road up which our heavily laden vehicle dragged at least one frightened inmate. The dangerous slopes over which I expected every moment to be hurled down into the sea below us, the heights towering above us on the left, the sharp curves, the

crush of passengers and my unfortunate position in having to stand part of the way at the outer end of the vehicle — all these discomforts and nervous terrors produced a state of acute misery, the memory of which has never been effaced. To beguile the tedium of the journey for the innocent new arrivals the driver considerably rehearsed the local traditions of the road, pointing out sharp corners at which accidents had occurred, and dilating cheerfully on caprices and other tragic incidents. I distinctly remember thinking how beautiful the harbour looked that afternoon as we took a last affectionate look at the Alhambra lying out in the stream, while we slowly climbed the hills which would so soon shut her out from our sight. She was going on to Suva with cargo and our furniture, it was the first time I believe that a Melbourne steamer visited that open roadstead, It was

7
borne in upon me that it was a special thing for the Alhambra to do, and I had a peculiar mixture of feelings about it, a shy secret pride that we had so many possessions and should be the cause of such a marked event, and also that it was very tiresome of us to be giving the steamer people so much trouble in causing a special journey. At Sumner we halted to rest and change horses, and the hotel where we all got out was close to the sea. We reached Christchurch at dark, and without misadventure. My father took us to Kirdsey's Hotel where we remained for some time. The two little daughters of the landlord used to pass me sometimes on the stairs or in the passages, and we indulged in many shy peeps at each other, longing yet fearing to speak. Further than this we never got, being too well brought up and too shy. I was much interested in them as being New Zealand children, having had a vague idea that all

8
the little girls and boys might be brown like the Maories. After some weeks it was announced that we were to leave Christchurch and go to Timaru. This journey took place at the end of August 1864, the date being impressed strongly on my mind by the fact of my eighth birthday coming very quickly after in September. My first New Zealand birthday! We left Christchurch very early one dark cold morning, the coach with its four fresh horses starting from Cobb and Co's office in the Triangle. The Canterbury Cobb and Co were two brothers - Messrs Lee and G. Cole - and their manager was Mr. W. H. Mitchell who I understand remained with them till the firm ceased to exist owing to the construction of the main line of railway through the Island. From Christchurch to Ashburton was a long day's driving, from Ashburton to Timaru another, two full long days being spent in doing what now takes exactly three hours and forty

minutes including stoppages by our present Express train. ~~There were no passengers bridges over the dangerous rivers in those days.~~ When we came to the Rakia we had dinner at the Accommodation House kept by a Mr. Flowers, or Flower. The place was always spoken of as Flowers - and the name struck me as being so odd for a man, I had never heard it but in connection with roses, buttercups and daisies, ~~and~~ ^{and} ^{was} ^{not} ^{at} ^{all}. Nearly all the hotels or stopping places were called accommodation houses, probably because of their primitive style and conveniences. Now came the most astonishing episode in my life. There were no bridges over the dangerous and often turbulent rivers in those days, and the Rakia had to be crossed in a bullock dray. Never before had I ~~heard~~ ^{seen} or ~~seen~~ ^{heard} of bullocks, and to be actually drawn by them seemed incredible. However we were got safely over, to our relief, and the river was high enough for the bullocks to swim in some places,

and there was much talk about fords and their shifting, and the number of horsemen who got drowned in going over because the ford was carried away. We reached Ashburton in the dark, being all thoroughly tired out, and of course spending the night there. We dressed and breakfasted by candlelight once more. I think we crossed the Ashburton river in the coach, but am not sure, only remembering that it was very wide. At the Rangitata we had dinner and think we crossed this river in a boat, if not it was in another bullock dray. I can recall looking down the river at the coach being taken across in a punt to the other side, where we presently got in again and drove away along the Great South Road, as the main road was called, towards Timaru. This punting over of the coach most probably took place at the Rakia also, but I am not clear about it. We reached Timaru without any mishaps of broken poles, or bolting

bolting leaders or fractious wheelers of which we heard a good deal during those two days, and drove up in fine style in front of the Royal Hotel, where the coach always ended that last stage and deposited its passengers. The Royal was then and for long after the crack hotel of Timaru, but some years ago the Grosvenor superseded it and still ranks first, though the Royal makes a good second. Cobb and Co's Stables and booking office were very close to the Royal, situated in the same street, and the coaches always made their arrival and departure from the hotel. My father took rooms for us there till we found a house to suit us, and here the journey and my early travels came to an end.

M. Bridge. Christchurch.
April 1899.

Marian Bridge
Christchurch, January 1889

The Family Sketch Book.

Being a record of excursions of interest made by various members of the family.