

## MY TWO HUTS

*Life on opposite sides of the world*  
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BERKSHIRE, England September, 1931



I am the owner of two "Huts", on opposite sides of the earth. The first was built about twenty years ago, at the top of the Dandenong Ranges, some thirty-five miles from Melbourne, on which it looks down from a height of nearly

2000 feet. The Spot was picked for its surpassing beauty on the edge of a forest of giant Eucalyptus trees, where the mountains are cut in all directions by creeks and fern gullies.

But I must not begin to recall the delicate green glimmer of the daylight that filters down through the fronds of the tree-ferns roofing those gullies, nor yet the night view of the great city far on the horizon, with its street lamps twinkling in rows, like a fairy market garden planted in drills. To do so makes an exile's heart



*Here are some snapshots of the hut I had built for me in the middle of two-and-a-half acres that once were included in the estate of a world-famous journalist. I have called it The Hut in Bear Copse and as may be seen, wild flowers and tame flowers bloom here in rich profusion. The windowed room shown in the larger picture is my sunlit studio-work-room.*

ache and eyes grow dim; and besides it is not what I want to say!

My cottage in Australia was built by a bush carpenter, of rough timber cut on the ground. Its water supply is rain from the roof, collected into iron tanks which hold about 1000 gallons each and which have convenient taps piercing the walls into the rooms, so that no water has to be carried. The fuel is logs about two feet long cut from the gigantic trunks of felled or fallen trees, and is burnt in wide, open fireplaces of concrete. For years we used kerosene lamps of the same shape, size and material as those in the windows of every country town in England. And the oil for them had to be carted up the rough mountain road to a little bush store.



In twenty years the village has grown to a mountain township. The little store, whose customers, when they met, used to talk of nothing but what the store hadn't got, is now three stores; the rough bush track is not a fine motor road, winding in and out among the hills with a new prospect at every few feet of rise; electricity has been brought to light, and heats every cottage; telephones and wireless are in many houses; yet Melbourne, the mother of this and many similar townships and villages will not be 100 years old till 1937.

That one, compelled now to remain in England, but who has lived for years in the aromatic gum forest, should find London air smoky and unbreathable, and go in search of another Hut in another forest, is not strange. To find it required some searching, for there was little money to spend on it, but at last it was found near a Berkshire village, thirty-one miles from London, the same distance that the other village is from Melbourne.

A great estate – that of Walter of the Times – was being parcelled into building allotments, along one of England's most popular roads, and tucked away behind some of these allotments was a dear little wood or copse of two and a half acres, with only a narrow drive leading from it to the road. Through the copse, which, besides nine full-grown oaks, has many birches, hazels, hollies, elderberries and alders, flows a stream about two feet wide in a bed some fifty feet wide. You may call this a rill or a ditch, as you please, but it is just the right size for the little copse, and the water is clean and tumbles along musically with quite a good opinion of itself, proud of its three little rustic bridges and the blocks of small birds that slight on its miniature banks, and after a wild splashing of mixed bathing, find plenty of twigs, the right size for their tiny feet, while they preen and dry their wings. The alders grow densely along its banks, and in summer make a green shade that reminds me of my fern gullies. Blackbirds, thrushes, cuckoos, nightingales,

tits, robins and many other birds sing and play, court and quarrel, roost and build there.

On the only clear patch of ground, amid bluebells, primroses, wood anemones, violets and other lovely wildings in their season, the second Hut was built about four years ago. Besides housing me, it serves to protect this garden as a sanctuary for wild birds and flowers, much to the chagrin of those who have stripped it ruthlessly in the past.

The nearby village is mentioned in Domesday Book, and is, as I have said, only 35 miles from London; and London has been growing since Julius Caesar, 2000 years ago. It has no water supply, but wells of doubtful purity, no sewerage, no gas, no electricity, no school nearer than a mile and a half, while a stagnant pool of green water lines at the door of the only inn, the only store and the gate of the manor house.

It is hard to believe, but so obsessed are the English with regard to antiquity that they call any attempt to bring the common decencies of our own day into the lives of the villagers, "spoiling the countryside". It must be admitted that the ancient cottage, even when falling to pieces, is often very beautiful with its quaint thatch, latticed windows, and, in summer, its delightful garment of climbing roses, but that does not prevent it from being a damp, dark, freezing, draughty comfortless hovel.

We in Australia need not regret having no antiques of this sort. It is easier to make a good coat from a piece of new cloth than from a worn-out garment, from which one is not allowed to cut away very much lest its "old-world" charm be lost.

There is too much stopping to look behind in this country, but oh, the temptation to do so into a past so glamorous as England's! I have had to nail up a placard on my study wall with ADVANCE AUSTRALIA, in big letters, just to remind myself that I belong to a pioneer land that strains towards the future, and not one dreaming over its past.