THE MAN WITH THE DONKEY

John Simpson Kirkpatrick
The Good Samaritan of Gallipoli

by Sir Irving Benson

John Simpson Kirkpatrick

This is the fascinating story of an ordinary man who did extraordinary things in a critical situation. He was a plain private — a stretcher-bearer on Gallipoli who did not know that he was a hero.

On the day after the landing he found a donkey, and used it to bring wounded men from the top of Shrapnel Gully to the casualty station on the beach.

"The Man with the Donkey" was one of the familiar sights of Gallipoli. Day after day and into the nights he brought hundreds of wounded men down the shrapnel-swept gully. He has become a symbol of the valour and ingenuity of Anzac soldiers throughout the Campaign. Simpson and his donkey are featured on three Australian postage stamps to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Landing.

Now he belongs to the legends of the British race. The pilgrim to Gallipoli invariably asks to see Simpson's grave.

Wrapper picture: "*Murphy and his Donkey*"
By Moore-Jones

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John Simpson Kirkpatrick on his 21st birthday

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SIR IRVING BENSON

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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TO
ANNIE SIMPSON PEARSON
SISTER OF "THE MAN WITH THE DONKEY"
WHOSE GENEROUS SPIRIT AND GLOWING
MIND HELPED TO MAKE THE RECORD POSSIBLE
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
WITH AFFECTION AND GRATITUDE

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Acknowledgment

For permission to quote G. K. Chesterton's poem *The Donkey*, the author is indebted to J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., Publishers.

GLOSSARY

These notes may be of interest to readers beyond Australia.

Anzac The code name from the initial letters of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.

Black pan The remains of a meal, the bottom of the pan.

Bunkers Ship's Coal Storage. Coal.

Cobber Friend, companion.

Cotton To become attached, to befriend.

Crook Ill. e.g. to be (feel) crook. Angry, annoyed.

Dead broke Down on one's luck. Without money.

Digger Originally a Gold-miner. Later, an Australian soldier.

Duds Clothes.

Hump To shoulder, carry. e.g. humped his swag.

Padding the hoof Walking, tramping.

Pecker Keep your pecker (spirits) up.

Possum Opossum. Australian marsupial.

Stonker To defeat, outwit, put out of action.

Swag A rolled blanket containing effects. (Cf. the Australian song "Waltzing Matilda".)

P.O. Post Office Money Order.

Chuck The sack. Dismissed.

Bans Bannocks, home-made loaves.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW JACK WENT TO THE WAR

THIS IS the story of an ordinary man who did extraordinary things in a critical situation. He was a plain private – a stretcher-bearer on Gallipoli. On the day after the landing he found a wandering donkey feeding idly in a gully. He was one of the few men who knew how to handle donkeys, for he had loved them from his childhood. The idea seized his mind that this donkey would be useful to carry men with leg wounds from the forward positions to the casualty station on the Beach.

Once he got going there was no stopping him. "The Man With The Donkey" became one of the familiar sights of Anzac. Day after day and into the nights he carried an amazing number of wounded men down the shrapnel-swept valley and saved innumerable lives at the risk, and finally at the cost, of his own.

He never suspected that he was a hero; he did what seemed to him the obvious thing to do, completely free of any self-consciousness.

There were great and gallant men in the Homeric Gallipoli Campaign. Men of many nations with signal valour dared the impossible. But the vision fades and a generation has arisen which knows all too little of General Sir Ian Hamilton, General W. R. Birdwood, General W. T. Bridges, General John Monash, General Brudenell White and many another of their breed, but they know of Simpson and his donkey. The pilgrim to Gallipoli invariably asks to see Simpson's grave. He became a legend in the three glorious weeks when he made his way up and down Shrapnel Gully bringing wounded men on his donkey like the Good

Samaritan going down the dangerous pass from Jerusalem to Jericho with the man battered by brigands on his donkey.

There is a halo of romance and mystery about Simpson. He has become a symbol of the valour, courage and ingenuity which characterized the Australian soldier throughout the campaign. Simpson and his donkey are featured on three stamps issued by the Australian Post Office to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Gallipoli landing. It is significant that this young and unknown man should have attracted the glowing admiration of the troops on the Peninsula and, through their stories of him, the affection of the people of Australia.

The fame of "Simpson and His Donkey" has gone round the world. He was the Good Samaritan of Gallipoli who received no Victoria Cross or Medal – one of the multitude of ordinary men who, with unconscious heroism, battled in those desperate days and nights – with a cheer and a jest and a comradeship which turned a glorious failure into a creative tradition.

John Simpson Kirkpatrick had enlisted as John Simpson for reasons that we shall see later. All his mates and indeed most who met him regarded him as a "character" – original, forthright, fearless, ingenious, generous-hearted. He was only twenty-four days on Gallipoli before a machine gun bullet stopped his errands of mercy. Yet in that handful of days he won the admiration and affection of a surprising number of men. The gay, careless spirit in which he traversed Shrapnel Gully, often whistling as he went, bringing in wounded men on his donkey, made him a legendary figure.

The legend began even while he lived and it grew apace after his death so that it has become necessary to sift the facts from the fiction. Indeed, any student of texts will find the Simpson legend an excellent exercise in distinguishing the man from the legend and the realities from the imaginative afterglow.

It is necessary for us to see "Simpson" in the perspective

of the Anzac story and for this purpose to trace just enough of the history of the Campaign to the day of his death.

When the War began in 1914, Andrew Fisher, the Labour Prime Minister, pledged Australia to stand by Britain to "our last man and our last shilling". From Hobart to Darwin, from Sydney to Fremantle, men flocked to the recruiting depots to form the expeditionary force of 20,000 which Australia had promised.

Simpson was then a fireman on the little coastal vessel the S.S. *Kooringa** which he left at Fremantle in Western Australia and enlisted in Perth on 25th August, 1914. He was sent to the Blackboy Hill Camp, a dozen miles to the east of Perth.

It has been generally supposed that Simpson landed in Australia just as the war came and promptly enlisted in Western Australia. The fact is that he had lived here for years, humped his swag, worked on the cane fields of Queensland, as a miner in New South Wales, as a roustabout and as a ship's fireman.

The Army record enables us to picture him – with fair complexion, brown hair, blue eyes, standing 5 feet 8 inches tall, of solid build and weighing twelve stone.

Because of his obvious muscular strength he was appointed a bearer in the "C" Section of the 3rd Field Ambulance. I am indebted, for information relating to these days, to his "cobber", Captain A. R. Davidson† of Perth, who probably knew him more intimately than any other man in the Army.

Andy described him as witty, cracking jokes, happily lazy at times, careless of dress – an attractively friendly chap who quickly became popular, but he was "a handful" to Hookway, his Section Sergeant.

There was the daily routine of training, not always congenial to a man of independent spirit who liked to think for himself. His instinctive love of animals was obvious from the

* 3,174 tons. Built Glasgow 1902 for McIlwraith, McEacharn Ltd.
† D.C.M., M.M.

first day in Camp and there was usually a dog following him around – any dog he could pick up.

Blackboy Hill was fringed with tall, shapely, white gums and there he caught a young possum which he kept in his slouch hat or carried round in his tunic.

I have no doubt that the prospect of revisiting his old home, and the Mother who shone for him like the evening star was an ingredient in the patriotic motive which moved him to enlist three weeks after the declaration of war.

He wrote to his mother from the Camp on 14th October, 1914:

Dear Mother,

Just a line to let you know that we are still in camp. We are expecting to leave at any moment for the Old Country. The Transport Ships and the warships are in Fremantle waiting to take us away but there are about six German warships at large in the Pacific Ocean and I think that is what the war office out here is frightened of for it will be a great stroke of luck for the German warships if they could sink the transport ships from here with the 20 thousand soldiers on board . . .

(Later) Now Mother I cant tell you exactly when we are going to leave but I dont think that we will be long now. I think that we are going to Aldershot when we get to England so I will be able to come up and see you pretty often before we go to the front . . .

In October troopships steamed silently from ports around the Australian coast. Their then unknown destination across the Great Australian Bight was Albany, at the South West corner of the continent, where they assembled in the beautiful King George's Sound, one of the finest natural anchorages in the world, sheltered from the winds by rolling heath-covered hills.

This strange armada of more than sixty ships glided through the narrow entrance across green smooth waters in the early morning on 1st November – the day of Turkey's entrance into the War. There were thirty-six transports and three escorting cruisers. Two days later the Japanese cruiser

Ibuki with the great liners *Ascanius* and *Medic* carrying troops were waiting beside the route on the high seas. The two transports took up their places in the line. The *Ibuki* moved into position on the starboard beam, while the *Melbourne* dropped astern of the convoy.

Colonel A. G. Butler describes it as "the greatest effort of sea transportation of troops to a distant seat of war that the world has ever seen."*

The troops assumed that they were going to fight with the British in France and Flanders. Simpson had written to his mother from Blackboy camp on 13th September: "Just a line to let you know that we are still in camp yet, and we are expecting to get orders to leave at any minute for the Old Country." That was the prevailing opinion. No soldier in the long line of ships gave a thought to Gallipoli.

Simpson was aboard the liner *Medic*. Andy Davidson tells how he still had his pet possum and it was with him in his hammock when he slept on deck. It wandered about the ship and Simpson's cry "Where's my possum?" became familiar in all ears.

Through the Indian Ocean steamed this great convoy headed for the Cocos Islands. The monotony was broken on 9th November by the excitement of the raider *Emden*. The usual parades, drills and lectures were in progress when the cruiser H.M.A.S. *Sydney* suddenly left the fleet racing away like a greyhound. The men knew that she had gone to do battle with an enemy ship. The station on Cocos Islands had radioed: "Strange warship approaching." News came from the *Sydney* over the horizon to the north that the enemy ship had been sighted. This was followed by a further radio message: "Am briskly engaging enemy." Then came the final triumphant signal: "Emden beached and done for." The strict disciplinarian General William Bridges stopped the drilling and declared a half-holiday. The troops shouted like delighted schoolboys.

* *The Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914–1918*. p. 38.

Simpson wrote later:

What did the people at home think about the Sydney sinking the Emden? The Sydney belonged to the Australian Navy and she was escorting the first contingent from Australia to Colombo with five more Australian warships when she left us one morning and when she came in sight again the next day we heard that she had sunk the Emden. I can tell you that things were pretty lively aboard all the ships in the convoy there was 38 liners transporting us to Egypt. We had a pretty lively time on the Medic the day the Emden was sunk, the Medic was the transport I was on. The old Colonel shouted beer for all hands on board and we all drank the health of the Sydney pretty deeply I am afraid.

CHAPTER TWO

IN THE LAND OF THE PYRAMIDS

AFTER ADEN the destination of the troops was altered. On 3rd December the first of the Australian convoy reached Alexandria and the troops travelled by train across the green Nile flats to Cairo. So these men of the youngest nation on earth were trained to fighting fitness in the desert of ancient Egypt.

Simpson wrote to his mother in South Shields on 20th December:

Just a line to let you know that we arrived in Cairo last week. We were 42 days on the trip and we had a very fine trip right through. We are camped about ten mile out of Cairo at the entrance of the desert you can see nothing but sand, sand, sand. We have got two pyramids about 3 hundred yards from our tents it is a terrible long climb to the top of one of the pyramids. There is 100 thousand troops in this camp that is with English troops and Indians.

While he was in Egypt he arranged for his Mother to receive an allowance from his Army pay. It should be noted that the pay of an Australian private was then five shillings per day with an extra one shilling per day deferred pay while on overseas service.

Dear Mother,

Just a line to let you know that I am still in Cairo. It is Xmas Day today. I was looking forward to spending today in Shields but I was doomed to be dissappointed. I would not have joined this contingent if I had known that they were not going to England. I would have taken a trip home and had a holiday at home and then joined the army at home and went to the front instead of being stuck in the ungodly hole for all that you can see is sand and drill from morning to night and the grub is very poor

and not half enough of it. I have lost about a stone in weight since I joined the contingent for when I joined I went 12 stone 7 pounds and dont go near 12 stone now. What sort of a Xmas did you have at Shields I suppose that everything is pretty quiet on account of the war.

Now Mother when we left Australia I made out a form for to leave you two shillings per day all the time that I am in the Australian army I hope you are drawing it all right and I am having two shillings per day put to my account in the Commonwealth Bank in London and I am drawing one shilling per day for pocket money and I have to spend it all in grub for we dont get enough to eat.

You will be drawing your money through the Commonwealth Bank in London so that I hope that you are drawing it all right. I hear that we are likely to move from here in about six weeks time and whether we will go to England or the Continent I could not tell you. But I hope that we will go to England for I would give anything to have a run up to Shields to see you and Annie before I went to the front.

I see by the papers that the Germans have killed a lot of people in Hartlepool* they were pretty close to Shields. I hope that they dont get as near again for I would not like to see poor old Shields knocked about by the Germans but they will have to pay the piper for it all in the long run.

Now Mother I hope that these few lines will find you and Annie well as it leaves me at present. So with love to you and Annie

I remain

Your loving Son

Jack.

He wrote again on 3rd January, 1915:

I am sorry that there is not much news to tell you from here for life here is pretty much the same day in and out. It is just the regular routine work of the army marching and drilling... everybody is wishing they would make a move out of this place either to England or the front. I would like to have a month in England before we go to the front.

His main grievance was that he lost his pet possum! He

* The reference is to the raid by two German battleships on the N.E. Coast of England on 16th December, 1914, inflicting enormous damage on Scarborough, Whitby and Hartlepool.

had landed it safely in Egypt and carried it round with him in his shirt when he was on leave. "It was a source of great delight, particularly to girls in cafés", Andy Davidson noted. To his grief the possum mysteriously disappeared from the Mena Camp. There was great searching but nothing more was heard of it.

There was little poetry in his make-up, but I think of him watching the sunrises of Egypt – the glint of gold, the rosy-red cloud ridges, the blaze of amethyst and opal. The first beams tipping the ancient pyramids until the drab cones of these age-old giants shone like molten copper. Then the scene was reflected in the placid waters of the Mother Nile which skirted the camp. But his heart was with his Mother away under the grey skies in South Shields and he yearned to see her again.

From their arrival at the Pyramids there was continuous training. The desert around Mena was marked and divided into training areas. Infantry brigades marched out early in the morning to their area. All day long in the valleys of the Sahara for miles around the Pyramids companies were drilling, manoeuvring, or squatting listening to a lecture by their officers. Some of the battalions had to march for miles through soft sand to their assigned locations and back again at sunset. In the early stages they carried their full kit and heavy packs " in order to harden the troops".

Meanwhile new plans were afoot. Lord Kitchener's plan had been to use the Australian troops on the Western Front. Early in 1915, however, Russia made representations to Britain to relieve their forces battling against the Turks in the Caucasus by staging an attack elsewhere. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, suggested the strategy of a naval attack on the Dardanelles which would eventually open a sea communication with Russia.

During February and March a combined British and French fleet bombed the forts in the "Narrows" at the entrance to the Dardanelles. They managed to silence the more accessible Turkish guns which naval landing-parties

then destroyed. The naval attack on 18th March was disastrous and it then became apparent that a great combined naval and military campaign on the Gallipoli Peninsula was inevitable.

General Birdwood, who had been sent by Kitchener to report, advised that the toe of Gallipoli which formed the northern side of the Dardanelles must first be taken by the army. Kitchener then decided to send the British 29th Division and General Sir Ian Hamilton to command the expedition.

Gallipoli was to be invaded in order to help the Navy to force the Straits. This strategy was worked out at the conference of 22nd March on board the *Queen Elizabeth*, when Admiral de Robeck and Sir Ian Hamilton decided to suggest the abandonment of a purely naval attack, and the employment of the army in securing with the Navy the passage of the Dardanelles.

There came the day when all leave was stopped. Old soldiers have often told me of that memorable scene of 1915, when the men of the First Australian Division were stretched in seemingly endless array across the desert sands of Mena Camp awaiting the order to move off to war. As the word was passed from junior to senior officer, the command rang out, "The battalion will move off in column of route, A Company leading". With the crash of side-drums the band broke into the liveliest of military airs, and platoons, companies, battalions of sun-tanned Australians passed out on to the highway leading to Cairo.

As the evening sun threw a shadow from the Pyramid of Cheops, the order came down the ranks, "March at ease", and to the accompaniment of the rhythmic tread of soldiers' feet, lively voices sang: "There's a Long, Long Trail A-winding."

The troop train to Alexandria, the embarkation for a destination unknown, are still vivid memories to the ageing survivors. As they gazed from the decks of the transports the sandy shore, the palm groves, the bright white buildings of Alexandria slowly faded in the wake. Onward they steamed into the Aegean Sea.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LEMNOS BASE

THEY WERE bound for the island of Lemnos which had been selected as the base of operations. Dawn was breaking as the transports went into a bight in the land, with steep green hills 400 and 500 feet high on port and starboard. How the Australians rested their eyes – weary of sand, of orientalism, of Mena Camp! The green hills round Mudros Bay were kindly to their sand-tired gaze. Though the hills were treeless, the grass, and the profusion of wild flowers, were, after Egypt, a glimpse of fairyland.

The Australian Engineers reported that in the Mudros area where the troops were to camp the water supply was inadequate. It was therefore necessary to keep most of the force aboard the transports until they sailed for Gallipoli.

Mudros is a shapely natural harbour, one of the finest in Europe, with numerous small bays, and the Island, rather bare of trees but green after the spring rain, made an impressive background to a stirring picture of assembled sea-power.

There were battleships, heavy and squat; cruisers, more slender and graceful; low-lying destroyers, coal black or silver grey; and hospital ships in their glistening white paint and submarines that lay above the surface like the backs of whales.

The *Malda* – an East Indiaman – duly arrived in Mudros Harbour with Simpson on board and took its place among the waiting company. Day after day they lay at anchor in the sheltered waters, impatience growing with each rumour and fresh delay. Transports continued to arrive and the Bay daily became more crowded.

While the men on the *Malda* tired of the slow, long days they were constantly drilled in preparation of the assault on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Across the waters in the haze they could see shores of the Dardanelles, the Hellespont of the ancient world, and the neighbouring Aegean Sea, the most mystic of the "wine-dark seas of Greece".

Sydney De Loghe painted in words the impressions of many Australian eyes of that Island set in the Aegean.

> Never was there an early morning when skies were not blue and waters unruffled. Breezes softer and more scented than any human kisses floated perpetually to us from the green hills. Every sunrise brought the same brisk scene, when gigs, cutters and small boats of a hundred designs plied between the giant ships.
>
> But if the mornings could discover fairyland, the nights knew the secret no less. Many an evening the sun went down behind shadowy hills which circled a bay of glass, whereon destroyers had ceased to manoeuvre and last rowing boats were putting home.*

The peaks run across the island and on these heights Agamemnon, King of Mycenæ, lit a chain of fires to announce to his Queen, Clytæmnestra that he had taken Troy.

Simpson, born under northern skies, saw all this beauty and was probably duly impressed by the splendour of it all. But his prankish, daring mind turned to other things. Andy Davidson says that they did not appreciate the food on the *Malda* and discovering somehow that the ship was loaded with good food, Simpson led a small party and opened the hatch. He went below with a torch while those on top put the hatch back in position. Ten minutes later he gave the signal and up he came loaded with good things – tins of Cambridge sausages, plenty of biscuits and two bottles in straw wrappings which looked promising, but alas, turned out to be vinegar!

The troops were constantly drilled in embarking into boats and disembarking, shouldering their full kits, in

* *The Straits Impregnable*, by Sydney De Loghe, p. 67.

preparation for the assault on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Across the sea, in a grey haze, they could see the shores of the Dardanelles.

They were training for the landing – rowing ashore and rushing up the hills.

Andy Davidson was in charge of a boat and picked for his crew Simpson, Gillies, Mahoney, and Prately. After landing the men they were supposed to row back but sometimes they went off to the village and bought food and wine. "Simpson was at his best in a job like that," he says.

One of them expressed the general relief when they knew that the ships were ready to move:

We've been up and down that bally wooden ladder, embarking and disembarking, swearing and cursing in darkness, jumping into boats, going like hell for shore, charging up Mudros beach, digging trenches in the dark, and cutting back to the boats, till I'm fed up with full-dress rehearsals. Thank heaven the curtain's going up at last!*

The day before leaving Lemnos for the great attack Simpson scribbled this note in pencil on the inside of an opened envelope:

Dear Mother,

Just a line to let you know that I am still keeping well. We did not go to ..... (censored) as I expected. I have not had any letters from you for nearly a month. Just address your letters to Egypt the same as before and they will be sent on to me here. I can't tell you where we are for the censor would cross it out but you will be hearing about the Australians as soon as we make a start hoping this will find you and Annie well as it leaves me at present

With love from your loving Son

Jack

So came the day we now know as Anzac Eve and the message from General Birdwood . . .

Tomorrow at dawn we will make a landing at the Dardanelles . . . I am sure you will all do your best for Australia and the

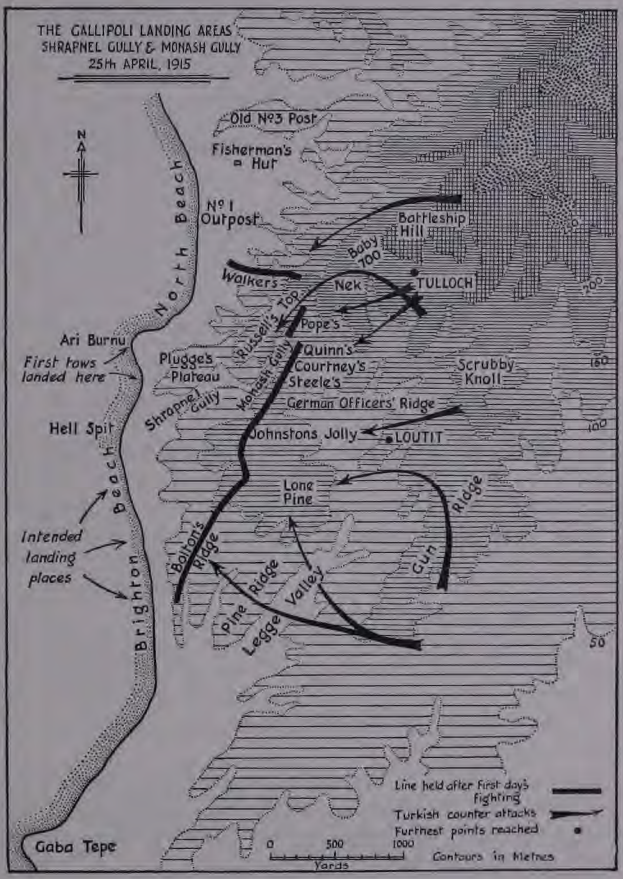
* *Coo-oo-ee!*, by J. B. Cooper.

Empire. You must all turn in early. Mails for home will leave the ships tonight.

Before we come to the Landing it may be well to make clear the objectives.

The force available to clear the way for the fleet consisted of the British 29th Division, the Anzac Corps of two divisions, the Royal Naval Division, and one French division. The main task was naturally allotted to the 29th, which was to land on the beaches at Cape Helles, the toe of the peninsula, and if possible secure the dominating height of Achi Baba, five miles inland, on the west coast north of Gaba Tepe, just north of the Narrows and where the peninsula itself is only $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles in breadth, and to straddle it. The French were to make a false landing at Kum Kale, on the Asiatic shore, a plausible threat of a major operation on that side. The Royal Naval Division was to demonstrate against the narrow northern neck of the peninsula at Bulair, which on the map looked the most suitable place for a landing but had been ruled out owing to the strength of its fortifications. These two last-named divisions were afterwards to be transferred to Cape Helles.

The Turkish commander was Liman von Sanders, chief of the German military mission. He had six divisions, one more than General Sir Ian Hamilton. He posted two on the Asiatic side, one at Helles, two at or north of Bulair, and one, his reserve, concentrated near Maidos, in the Narrows. Thus was the stage set.


THE GALLIPOLI LANDING AREAS
SHRAPNEL GULLY & MONASH GULLY
25th APRIL, 1915
N
Old No3 Post
Fisherman's Hut
No 1 Outpost
North Beach
Battleship Hill
Baby 700
Walkers
Nek
TULLOCH
Russell's Top
Pope's
Quinn's
Courtney's
Steele's
Plugge's Plateau
Monash Gully
Shrapnel Gully
Scrubby Knoll
German Officers' Ridge
Ari Burnu
First tows landed here
Hell Spit
Johnstons Jolly
LOUTIT
Lone Pine
Gun Ridge
Brighton Beach
Intended landing places
Baloni's Ridge
Pine Ridge
Legge Valley
Gaba Tepe
Line held after first days fighting
Turkish counter attacks
Furthest points reached
0 500 1000
Yards
Contours in Metres

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LANDING IN THE DAWN

At the reaping and the shearing,
At the sawmill and the mine,
In the stockyard and the clearing,
At the pressing of the vine,
By the camp-fire of the drover,
By the fence with sliprail drawn,
Men will tell the story over
Of the landing in the dawn.*

WHEN the flagship led the way out of Mudros Harbour the cheers were deafening. Ships' crews cheered to ships' crews; men-of-war's sailors to soldiers; troops to bluejackets; French to British; British to Australians and New Zealanders. There were men of many nations in that armada but for the purpose of our story the Australians and New Zealanders – the Anzacs – are our main concern.

The *Queen Elizabeth* led the line and behind her the battleships *Queen*, *Triumph*, *Prince of Wales*, the cruiser *Bacchante* and then the battleships *London* and *Majestic*; after them steamed six destroyers: then the four transports of the 3rd Brigade, in perfect formation.

The *Queen Elizabeth* steered towards the Dardanelles while the five battleships headed round the west of Lemnos. Then a destroyer came close alongside each transport and set course for the Island of Imbros.

All that Saturday afternoon they sailed through a calm sea. By 8 p.m. they were close to Imbros – perhaps the most beautiful of all the Greek islands, with its delicately etched

* Verse from the poem "Landing in the Dawn", by John Sandes, written for the first Anniversary of the Landing at Gallipoli.

outlines and masses of emerald green streaking off into the purple hills. Before nightfall the men had a hot meal. The transports moved easily through the evening sea.

It was a lovely, tranquil night lit by a bright half-moon. Soon after midnight the ships arrived off their appointed rendezvous.

The signal from the flagship came at 1.20 a.m. The men, fully equipped, took up their assigned places and the last rays of the waning moon faintly lit this muster of soldiers and bluejackets who were to man the boats.

Simpson, Davidson and their company were aboard the transport *Devanha*. The sailors treated the troops royally and bought gifts for them from the canteen.

The destroyers came alongside the transports to transfer the troops. So still was the night that when the destroyer *Ribble* hove-to, the *Devanha*'s captain ordered the gangway to be lowered and thus the men filed on to the destroyer's deck.

An hour later the *Ribble*, her decks thronged, left the transport towing behind her the *Devanha*'s empty rowing-boats. She joined six other destroyers, all crowded, all waiting in the silken sea.

There was not a light on deck, only the moonlight through the clouds shone faintly on the men huddled there on deck. Lieutenant Commander Wilkinson leaned over the bridge of the *Ribble* and said to the men below: "You fellows can smoke and talk quietly but all lights out when I give the order." Two old sailors were busy dispensing cocoa to the men chilled and closely packed about the destroyer's decks. The water darkened as the moon sank below the sea. The landing had to be effected between set of moon and rise of sun.

The plan was for the destroyers to move through the line of battleships and go as close in shore as they safely could. Wilkinson's voice came strong and clear: "Lights out, men, and stop talking. We're going in now."

The rowing-boats they were towing pulled along both

sides and Commander Wilkinson called in his quiet way: "Man the boats, men!" A wooden staging had been rigged round the ship's sides and so the men easily stepped into the boats. The time was 1.30 a.m. It was the famous morning of 25th April.

Little did Commander Wilkinson on the *Ribble* know that these men going into battle for the first time were founding a destiny for Australia and that one of them – an unknown young private stretcher-bearer – would walk from that beach into the heart of nations and immortality.

The troops started to row for the shore. Behind them was the sense of security, the power and protection of great battleships. Each dip of the oars took them farther away from the mothering guns of the fleet, and closer to the rugged cliffs that were already looming dark, threatening and frowning.

By the time the *Ribble*'s boats pulled away the firing had begun and they could hear the sound of fighting as their comrades ahead went on the shore. All the C Bearer Section were in one boat. Simpson was the second man to get into the water and make for the beach. The first and the third men were killed beside him. It was still dark. There were flashes of Turkish rifle fire from the edge of the plateau above and there were also Turks on the beach and in the scrub immediately above it who fired at point-blank range as the men landed.

From the beach was now dimly outlined in a flattened monotint of leaden grey the darkened scrub-covered slope, gashed by water courses that stretched to the base of the sheer bluff rising 400 feet and more to the ridge.

That the landing on the beach of what will forever be known as Anzac Cove was not a disastrous failure from the beginning is astonishing and was due largely to the courage and sturdy initiative and self-reliance of the officers and men of the 3rd Australian Infantry Brigade, who were first ashore at 4.30, the critical hour between moonset and dawn, and constituted the covering force for the main body of the invaders.

In the darkness before the dawn the careful planning of months went awry, direction had been lost in the strong shore current and the troops were put ashore a mile or more north of the beach-head shown on the operational map.

The tows had converged so that battalions became hopelessly mixed up on the beach and only the roughest reorganization on the beach was possible.

General Birdwood summed up the landing thus:

Hardly waiting for the keels to touch the shore, men leaped into the water and raced ashore, dashing straight with the bayonet upon the Turks, and driving them through the thick undergrowth. This landing farther north than was intended naturally caused some temporary difficulties; for these I must take the blame, for they were caused by my insistence on landing before daylight. But the error brought great compensations also. The original spot chosen for the landing was on fairly open ground not far from Gaba Tepe, and troops landing there must have suffered heavily from machine-gun and other fire from the trenches in that locality, which had clearly been dug and wired in anticipation of an attack thereabouts. But though, by this accident, our right avoided this danger, our left came in for bad trouble farther north, beyond Ari Burnu. On the open beach near the Fishermen's huts we suffered heavy losses, some boats drifting off full of dead with no one in control. The centre landing, in the neighbourhood of what was later known as Anzac Cove, was more fortunate. The country here was very broken and difficult, and the Turks had evidently not expected an attack, for they were only lightly entrenched and were soon driven off by the impetuous Australians.*

By a stroke of irony the covering force landed at almost the exact spot of which the Commander – General Birdwood – had said in discussing possible landing-places, "the country there is so very difficult and broken that it is impossible to attempt a landing there while it is dark". Hence, the invaders were faced with ground unstudied on the maps and every movement had to be improvised. Three successive ridges barred their path, precipitous, tangled with dense scrub.

* *Khaki and Gown, an Autobiography*, by Field-Marshal Lord Birdwood, p. 257.

Once ashore the men scattered the handful of surprised defenders, ran across the beach and took cover under a sandy bank where they paused for breath and shed their packs.

General Sir Ian Hamilton, General Birdwood, indeed, every commander, had impressed upon the men of the 3rd Brigade that, as they formed the covering force, it was essential that they should advance as soon as they landed, in spite of all opposition.

And so advance they did, shouting their battle cry: "Australia will be there." They clawed the steep slopes, they grasped roots and hauled themselves up, sometimes digging their bayonets into the ground and pushing themselves up to gain a foothold. As they climbed higher towards the plateau, the sides became steeper, and more precipitous.

As the first Australians clambered out on to the small plateau, fire from a dimly discerned ridge swept fiercely over them.

Such was the assault on the broken and rugged country which was all strange to them. It was impossible to keep in touch or maintain a line. Here and there isolated groups pushed far ahead then lay down holding grimly on, trusting to the main force that only came in driblets.

The 3rd Brigade captured the first of the three Ridges and chased the enemy inland. They had no field artillery to cover their advance and consequently suffered heavily – the few guns that were landed had to be pulled up the scrub by hand and did not go into action until the evening.

Men were falling fast – half their strength seemed to be down, killed or wounded, while others were beginning to feel the effects of their hard gruelling in the sub-tropical sun and their lack of food and water.

The Turkish reserves came on. The Navy's guns were of very limited aid against the scattered troops in broken cover. They took the offensive and the Anzacs retired reluctantly, but fighting with heavy losses.

Machine-guns and shrapnel did most of the damage.

Andrew, the horse he drove for four years

The house at 14 Bertram Street, South Shields, from which John Simpson left for Australia and where his mother lived

"SS KOORINGA" in which Simpson sailed round
the Australian coast

In the camp at Blackboy Hill, Perth, W.A., 1915
Simpson second from left
(Australian War Memorial Photograph)

"Every temporary stand we made," wrote one of them, "was marked by little groups of grotesquely postured khaki-clad forms still with the stillness of death."

All the advantage lay with the defenders – they were on high ground which they had been digging for months and moreover they had many more troops which could be far more easily reinforced and supplied.

The hills were, for the most part, cliffs or steep precipices scored by deep ravines. The country was thickly covered with arbutus, dwarf holly-oak and pine from three to twelve feet high. The fighting was mainly on the ridges.

Below them and to right and left opened a deep, tortuous valley, rising to a second, slightly higher Ridge and which joined the main Ridge at Chunuk Bair and was the chief objective intended to be seized that morning by the 3rd Brigade.

The rush of the covering force took it as far as the Second Ridge. At this point resistance strengthened and shallow pits were dug, forming an irregular defensive line. Scattered parties fought their way to their objectives but with heavy losses. The 2nd Brigade, which landed between 5 and 7 a.m., moved up what came to be known as Shrapnel Gully to the open Plateau. As each company reached the crest they were met by fire from the reinforced Turks and became involved in the fierce struggle which, as the day developed, drew almost half the Australian force to this front.

Time after time they tried in vain to dig themselves in. The line had to be shortened, else they would have been outflanked by the enormously superior forces opposed to them. There was nothing for it but to retire right back to the Ridge and hold the crest – or try to!

The man who saved the day for the Turks was a young Commander, an evil-tempered soldier of native genius. Mustapha Kemal – later to become President of the Turkish Republic – saw the invaders on the left flank at 9.30 a.m. climbing up the main Ridge where it was joined to the sea cliffs by a narrow neck. He instantly launched against them,

on his own responsibility a whole division, one-third of his total force, and so held the heights. He was the one man who turned the tide of battle. His counter-attacks prevented further progress and the Turks, under German officers, dug themselves in.

At the head of what came to be known as Monash Valley a line of rifle pits were dug by scratching fiercely with trenching tools, all the while subjected to a withering shrapnel fire. The pits were held only at great cost and by desperate fighting. These strategic positions later on were designated as "Pope's Hill", "Courtenay's", "Quinn's", and "Steele's" Posts.

The fighting then consisted of desperate efforts to hold the positions reached earlier in the day. With the exception of "Walker's Ridge", the country gained on the first rush had to be abandoned. The Turkish counter-offensive which began about 10 a.m. finally thrust back the line. As darkness fell the force was precariously holding the crest of the Ridge.

The struggle that day was beyond description or praise. It was grit, tenacity, and gameness opposed to overwhelming numbers. It was sickening; brutal – and yet splendid. Men fought stripped to the waist; fought till their rifles jammed, picked up another – and went on fighting. Men with broken legs refused to leave the trench, cursing those who would have assisted them – went on firing until a second bullet crippled their rifle arm. Yet still they clung on, handing up clips of cartridges to their mates.

As one soldier said: "V.C.s were earned – but not given! Come to think of it, it would have taken a sackful to go round. Yes, that must have been the reason."

Dr. C. E. W. Bean tells in his *Official History** how some of the Australian scouts and other troops, as planned, outran two Turkish field batteries and reached the Third Ridge – which the covering force had been intending to seize – and how some of them even saw the glistened Straits beyond; and how in this strange country, amid the sweet-smelling

* *Official History of Australia in the War, 1914–18,* by C. E. W. Bean.

thyme on the uplands on that beautiful, bright spring day, the fight, which after the first rush had seemed almost over, gradually became intense again and swayed hour after hour on the Second Ridge.

General Birdwood told the war correspondent, Ashmead-Bartlett, that he could not praise the endurance and soldierly qualities of the Australians enough, and said the manner in which they hung on to the position the first day and night was a magnificent feat which had seldom, if ever, been surpassed, considering their very heavy losses, the shortage of water, and the incessant shrapnel fire to which they were exposed without cover, not to mention the unceasing attacks of the enemy's infantry.

The military historian Dr. C. R. Cruttwell describes 25th April, 1915, as "the most dramatic day of the whole World War"* – and Dr. Cruttwell is not addicted to the use of superlatives.

By nine o'clock the question of embarkation was being considered by the Commanders, but by midnight General Ian Hamilton decided that the Anzac Corps must "hold on and dig in".

Dawn on the 26th found the force clinging to the edge of the cliffs and precariously holding an area of some 500 acres almost everywhere overlooked by the enemy. The fighting on the 26th and 27th was a sustained struggle to stay there.

Most of the troops by this time had reached the limits of human endurance and many had fought for three days without rest. On the 28th and 29th, four battalions of the Royal Naval division took over part of the line above Monash Valley.

All through that Monday and Monday night transports had landed fresh troops amid heavy and constant shelling from the Turkish guns. Under cover of darkness these troops came up to the front trenches to fill the many gaps caused by the enemy's shrapnel and machine-guns, while others massed in reserve at the base of the cliff. Yet not a man of

* *History of The Great War*, by C. R. Cruttwell.

those who had stormed the position the first day, and who had been hard at it ever since, could be spared from the front line.

Most serious was the failure to capture Cape Gaba Tepe from which the beach was observed and shelled. The main objective of the covering Force was to take the Third Ridge on the first day and the titanic struggle which ensued was to hold the position achieved. The nature of the "mad-looking" country, a tangled mass of ravines, spurs and precipices, was an important factor both in the fighting and in collecting the wounded.

Thus, as Colonel A. G. Butler wrote: "The topographical accident of the Cove determined the march of events when instead of success that might have shortened the War, an appalling disaster threatened."

The small bay of some 800 yards, with its shingly beach on which the landing was made, has gained its place in history as "Anzac Cove". It was protected in front by the First Ridge. This slender arc of beach became the nerve-centre of the Anzac position with all the sights and noises of a harbour.

The end of the first week in May saw the Expeditionary Force landed and established at two places, but the hope of a rapid advance across the Peninsula was very far from being realized. Neither at Anzac nor Helles had the invaders done more than gain a foothold. They had advanced less than a rifle-shot inland.

At the toe of the Peninsula, where landings by the 29th Division on the five beaches had been accomplished under conditions no less dramatic and by fighting no less intense than at Anzac, the objective of taking the heights of Achi Baba and the Kilid Bahr Plateau had proved as unattainable as that attempted by the northern force. The strength of the Turks was increasing while that of the attackers was diminishing for lack of reserves.

The country was naturally made for defensive purposes and it would have required more men than they ever had

during the campaign to seize the country to the Narrows and hold it.

Through the grim fighting of those fierce days the Australians did not altogether lose their sense of humour. One was heard to observe as a bomb exploded over his head: "These Turks are clumsy cows; they'll be killing some of us if they ain't more careful!" With the trenches anything between ten and a thousand yards apart, there was scope for passing of compliments as well as bombs between the contending forces. It was quite common for a trooper to cry out: "Are you there, Abdul? Well, here's baksheesh." Or again, "Here you are, Mohammed, here's a Christmas box"; and a hand-grenade would accompany the sally.

The position as it developed extended along the crest of the cliff for more than two miles. Major H. M. Alexander* described it as "a bite out of a biscuit". It was a rough semi-circle, the shore forming the diameter and the trenches the circumference. The whole area was a mere four hundred acres.

Quinn's Post was not more than fifteen yards from the Turkish trenches opposite and the continuous fighting there was mostly with bombs and mines. It was a well-constructed post, with its tunnels and saps, and more than once the enemy set foot in it, but he never stayed there long, always being driven out by counter-attacks. To the left of Quinn's Post was Dead Man's Ridge, held by the Turks; from it they were able to snipe right down Shrapnel Gully. No man was safe from the snipers; they seemed to be everywhere – before, alongside, and even behind the Australian lines. The shelling of this route from the south was often severe.

Shrapnel Gully – the most considerable stream within the area of operations – entered the sea just south of the Cove. It was usually dry. Known first as "the long gully", its lower end, after 26th April, was called Shrapnel Gully from the hail of shells which the Turks flung down it.

Shrapnel Gully was the highway to the front line, where

* *On Two Fronts*, by H. M. Alexander.

death came out of the sky at every hour of the day and night. Terrible sights were never long absent. The land was churned by thousands of hurrying feet, the débris of war lay scattered on every hand, walking wounded men came down leaning on the shoulders of their friends. At the foot of the Gully the little rough wooden crosses grew in number day by day.

The burials were mostly in the evening. The padre came along, and a few of the dead soldiers' friends straggled down from the trenches. The services were short but impressive. The shallow grave was filled in, and a rude cross marked the spot.

Shrapnel Gully is the centre of interest for our main theme. Sydney De Loghe describes those who passed up and down it.

> All manner of men went, and at all paces they went. There were curious, lonely infantrymen, who came out of the valley and disappeared towards the Beach. There were those who passed at a walk, and those who went by at a halting run, dodging before the guns and losing themselves in no time. Several lines of stretcher cases arrived at slower pace, or a single stretcher advanced down the road, or even a walking wounded man appeared, leaning on the shoulder of a friend. Not one who went that way but was dusty, parched and tired.*

General C. H. Brand told me that the Gullies were often more dangerous than the actual front line. Water and ration carriers could pick their time to hurry through these danger spots but the stretcher-bearers who were anxious to get their badly wounded men to the Beach never flinched. They kept going.

The Ambulance Bearer divisions landed with their respective brigades. They took no medical equipment except surgical haversacks and water-bottles.

The 3rd Field Ambulance, which had landed with the covering party, had three men killed and fourteen wounded. At daylight they attended to the stricken men on the Beach

* *The Straits Impregnable*, by Sydney D. Loghe.

and then made their way under fire behind the positions captured. Collecting-posts were established.

The chorus of praise for the stretcher-bearers came from all men's mouths. The Army Medical Corps had been regarded by some as a soft job. They had been the butt of flippant remarks and dubbed "Linseed Lancers", "Body Snatchers" and other such jovial names. But on the Peninsula wherever the cry "Stretcher-bearers!" went up, day and night they performed miracles of bravery. It was impossible to land transport for the wounded. They had to be carried – often for a distance of a mile and a half in a blistering sun and through shrapnel and machine-gun fire.

Ask any Australian who were the bravest men at Anzac and you will almost certainly hear the unhesitating answer: "The stretcher-bearers."

I have seen them carrying wounded men down those hills up which we pulled ourselves by ropes passed from tree to tree, (wrote E. C. Buley). The bullets were spitting all round them, and they were checking and going slow, their only concern being not to shake the tortured man they were carrying. I know an officer whom they carried down through shell fire, and every time they heard a shell coming these two men put down the stretcher and threw themselves across his body to protect him from the shrapnel. The proportion of their dead and wounded in the casualty lists shows how these non-combatants did their work.*

* *Glorious Deeds of Australia in the Great War*, by E. C. Buley.

CHAPTER FIVE

A LIGHT SHINING IN DEATH VALLEY

SIMPSON BECAME the glowing symbol of the courage and service of the stretcher-bearers. On the day of the Landing he carried with the other bearers, but was reported missing from his unit on the second day. Having carried two heavy men in succession down the awful slopes of Shrapnel Gully and through the Valley of Death he annexed a donkey that he found nibbling in one of the gullies. It responded to the sure touch of the friendly man with the experience he had gained as a boy in far-away summer holidays on the South Shields sands and probably welcomed his company after the terrors of the Landing and the pandemonium that followed. They were a quaint pair and from that day they were inseparable.

So he began to work as a lone unit and his Colonel, recognizing the value of his service, allowed him to continue and required him to report only once a day at the Field Ambulance.

His daily trail was up Shrapnel Gully and into Monash Gully and the deadly zone around Quinn's Post. He brought out the men to where he had left his donkey under cover and took them to the dressing-station on the Beach. Fearless for himself, he was always considerate for his donkey. On the return journeys he carried water for the wounded.

He called the donkey by a variety of names according to his mood. Sometimes it was "Abdul", mostly "Duffy", occasionally "Murphy" – reminiscent of Murphy's Circus at South Shields. Brigadier-General C. H. Jess remembered one night when he heard a quick patter of feet outside his dugout and the cheerful voice of Simpson calling, "Come

on, Queen Elizabeth" – calling his donkey after the great battleship.

He himself was variously called Scotty, Murphy, Simmie and generally "The Man With The Donk".

General C. H. Brand described Simpson with his donkey as he often saw him wending his way to the Beach.

> Almost every digger knew about him. The question was often asked: "Has the bloke with the donk stopped one yet?" It seemed incredible that anyone could make that trip up and down Monash Valley without being hit. Simpson escaped death so many times that he was completely fatalistic. He seemed to have a charmed life."

Simpson was frequently warned of the peril he ran, for he never hesitated or stopped in the most furious shrapnel fire. His invariable comment as he went on his way was "My troubles."

E. C. Buley tells how:

> When the enfilading fire down the valley was at its worst and orders were posted that the ambulance men must not go out, the Man and the Donkey continued placidly at their work. At times they held trenches of hundreds of men spell-bound, just to see them at their work. Their quarry lay motionless in an open patch, in easy range of a dozen Turkish rifles. Patiently the little donkey waited under cover, while the man crawled through the thick scrub until he got within striking distance. Then a lightning dash, and he had the wounded man on his back and was making for cover again. In those fierce seconds he always seemed to bear a charmed life.
>
> Once in cover he tended his charge with quick, skilful movements. "He had hands like a woman's," said one who thinks he owes his life to the man and the donkey. Then the limp form was balanced across the back of the patient animal, and, with a slap on its back and the Arab donkey-boy's cry for "Gee", the man started off for the beach, the donkey trotting unruffled by his side.*

Most of his casualties were wounded in the legs and so could not walk to the clearing-station. Sometimes he was seen

* *Glorious Deeds of Australia in the Great War*, by E. C. Buley.

holding an unconscious man with one arm and guiding the donkey with the other, and having handed him over to the Medical staff he returned for more.

I have talked with several men who rode on the donkey. One of them is P. G. Menhennett who told me how:

On the evening before our first attack on Quinn's Post (2nd May) we came down from Pope's Hill, which our Battalion – the 16th – had occupied since the Landing to prepare for the dawn attack. It was fierce and many of us were soon out of action and placed out of the line of fire for evacuation when possible. After a terrible night daylight eventually arrived and soon after came Simpson. Some of our cases were pitiful, but this cheerful digger had a word and a smile for all. He came to me and asked me what was wrong and when I told him I'd been shot through the right leg just above the knee, he asked me could I walk. I told him I might have been able to a few hours before had I known the way down, but now it had got cold and stiff I doubted my ability to do so. He re-bandaged my leg and helped me to his famous donkey. Two or three times on the way down he grinned at me and said, "That was a very nasty spot we have just passed. Jacko's snipers are wonderful shots. It doesn't do to loiter in such spots." When you realize that he knew the extreme dangers to which he so constantly exposed himself in his self-imposed errands of mercy you can only marvel at the cheerful way in which he carried out his duties. He brought me safely to the Beach clearing station and when I thanked him he smiled and said "Glad to help you."

An officer he brought down to the Beach fumbled in his pocket and produced a gold sovereign which he held out to him. "Keep your blinking quid. I'm not doing this for money," said Simpson.

Time after time he climbed the gully. Day after day and into the night he smiled and carried on. He was always cheerful and never tired.

In the official record there is this entry:

May 1: No. 202 Pte Simpson has shown initiative in using a donkey from the 26th to carry slightly wounded cases

and has kept up his work from early morning till night every day since.

There is some evidence that in his eagerness to help he sometimes used a second donkey.

It is quite clear that Simpson made a profound impression on those who saw him at work. Reinforcements soon heard of him when they landed.

Padre George Green said: "If ever a man deserved a Victoria Cross it was Simpson. I often remember now the scene I saw frequently in Shrapnel Gully of that cheerful soul calmly walking down the gully with a Red Cross armlet tied round the donkey's head. That gully was under direct fire from the enemy almost all the time."

Durham men can be dour but no portrait of Jack would be true to life without a sense of his ready wit, gaiety of heart and infectious cheerfulness. Mixed with his strong, vibrant manliness and hard-headedness was a tincture of the mother he adored and in whose heart was a vast, catholic compassion. The words of cheer and comfort which he gave to the succession of men who rode on his donkey were not the least quality of his calm, compassionate service to the wounded.

When he spoke in his cheering, comforting way as he bent over a wounded soldier, his voice sounded like a voice from Heaven.

F. W. Dyke, one of the Gallipoli originals, told me of a rare occasion when his donkey was proving obstinate. A Padre was standing by waiting to accompany Simpson, but with all his coaxing the donkey wouldn't move. At last Simpson turned to the Padre and said, "Padre, this old donkey has been tied up with some mules and has acquired some of their mulish habits. Would you move along the beach a little way, as I'll have to speak to him in Hindustani, and, Padre, I wouldn't like you to think I was swearing at him."

He camped with his donkey at the Indian Mountain Battery Mule Camp and seemed very much at home with them. But he slept little and begrudged time to eat. The

Indians had their own name for him – "Bahadur" which, being interpreted, means "the bravest of the brave."

Not all the men he took down to the Beach were wounded. One day he saw a figure moving in the bush and shouted: "Halt! there, who are ye?"

"I'm a warrant officer of the 3rd Field Engineers."

"Come out, then, and let's have a look at ye," replied Murphy. He examined the suspect and bluntly said, "I don't like the looks of ye."

The warrant officer stared and said: "Don't be foolish. I'll report you. I'm making levels for the excavations for a new road here."

"Maybe, maybe, but ye'll come down to the station with me all the same." Arrived there, the warrant officer was, of course, identified.

"Oh, well," said Simpson, flicking the donkey as he spoke, "he's dirty enough to be a Turk even if he ain't one, isn't he, Duffy?"*

Apparently Jack wrote no letters from Gallipoli. But, on 9th May, he sent off a printed Field Postcard to his mother in South Shields. He crossed out with indelible pencil the irrelevant words leaving the lines: "I am quite well. I have received your letter dated March. Letter follows at first opportunity. Signed Jack Simpson, 3rd Field Ambulance."

On Saturday, 15th May, General Bridges set out at 9 a.m. on his daily excursion to see his men, accompanied by Colonel C. B. B. White and Lieutenant R. G. Casey. They took their way into Shrapnel Gully and on through Monash Valley. Bridges stopped to talk to the medical officer at his aid post. When they moved on he was hit.

Lord Casey (then Lieutenant R. G. Casey), who saw Simpson a number of times, tells me that Simpson came up to the dressing-station with his donkey soon after General Bridges was mortally wounded. Simpson made a friendly remark to the General as he lay on the ground with a medical officer trying to stop the dreadful bleeding from the wound in

* I owe this incident to Ernest Bailey, Chief Librarian of South Shields.

his groin: "You'll be all right, Dig. I wish they'd let me take you down to the Beach on my donkey."

Bridges had said to Captain Clive Thompson: "Don't have me carried down. I don't want to endanger any of your stretcher-bearers." But Thompson said: "Nonsense, sir, of course you've got to be carried down."

In the middle of May, the Turks made their most violent attempt to drive the Anzacs from the cliffs and throw them into the sea. They had greatly increased their guns, all well posted and concealed. The German General, Liman von Sanders, had brought up reinforcements amounting to 30,000 and he personally took command. When the moon set on the night of the 18th–19th a tremendous fire of guns and rifles burst from the Turkish lines. Then at 3.30 a.m. a mass of silent figures were detected in the darkness creeping towards the Australian trenches.

Directly the sentries fired, masses of the enemy came rushing forward, yelling their battle cry of "Allah!" The assault, though most intense at Quinn's and Courtenay's Posts, extended along the whole front. The Turks came across the narrow strip in such masses – in places only a few yards between the confronting trenches – that the Anzacs firing point-blank into the darkness could not miss the enemy.

Morning came, the sun rose behind the teeming hosts, machine-guns and rifles mowed them down in rows and piled them into barriers. Still they came on, rushing wildly at the sandbag lines, scrambling over them, only to die at the ends of rifles which scorched their skins.

The conflict raged on until nearly eleven o'clock in the morning. The great assault had finished and failed. No trench was taken.

It was on the final fling of the attack on the morning of the 19th that Simpson made his last journey with his donkey up the Gully.

That morning Simpson went up the valley to the water-guard where he usually had breakfast, but it was not ready

so he went on his way. "Never mind," he called cheerily to the cook, "get me a good dinner when I come back."

On the way down he was shot through the heart by a machine-gun bullet at the very spot where General Bridges was killed on the 15th. Andy Davidson and others who were carrying from the top of the Gully had just spoken to him as they were going up. When Simpson fell beside the donkey, Davidson says: "We went back and covered his body and put it in a dugout by the side of the track and carried on with our job. We went back for him about 6.30 p.m. and he was buried at Hell Spit on the same evening." They made a simple wooden cross and set it on his grave with the name "John Simpson" – nothing else.

One of the First Battalion missed him from the Gully that day and asked "Where's Murphy?"

"Murphy's at Heaven's gate", answered the Sergeant, "helping the soldiers through."

There was a hush through the trenches that night when the news was given that the man with the donkey had "stopped one" at last. He had been so much a part of Peninsula life that it was hard to realize that he had gone.

Colonel (later General Sir John) Monash wrote to Headquarters, New Zealand and Australian Division:

> I desire to bring under special notice, for favour of transmission to the proper authority, the case of Private Simpson, stated to belong to C Section of the 3rd Field Ambulance. This man has been working in this valley since 26th April, in collecting wounded, and carrying them to the dressing stations. He had a small donkey which he used, to carry all cases unable to walk.
>
> Private Simpson and his little beast earned the admiration of everyone at the upper end of the valley. They worked all day and night throughout the whole period since the landing, and the help rendered to the wounded was invaluable. Simpson knew no fear and moved unconcernedly amid shrapnel and rifle fire, steadily carrying out his self-imposed task day by day, and he frequently earned the applause of the personnel for his many fearless rescues of wounded men from areas subject to rifle and shrapnel fire.

Simpson and his donkey* were yesterday killed by a shrapnel shell, and inquiry then elicited that he belonged to none of the Army Medical Corps units with this brigade, but had become separated from his own unit, and had carried on his perilous work on his own initiative.

Dr. C. E. W. Bean noted in his diary a remark of Monash that Simpson was worth a hundred men to him.

Entries in the Diary of Lieutenant-Colonel Alfred Sutton,† Commanding Officer of the 3rd Field Ambulance, reveal that he endeavoured to secure recognition of his heroic services:

May 19 – Attended funeral of poor Simpson.

May 24 – I sent in a report about No. 202 Pte. Simpson J., of C Section, shot on duty May 19th, 1915. He was a splendid fellow and went up the gullies day and night bringing down the wounded on donkeys. I hope he will be awarded the D.C.M.

June 1 – I think we'll get a V.C. for poor Simpson.

June 4 – I have been writing up poor Simpson's case with a view to getting some honour for him. It is difficult to get evidence of any one act to justify the V.C. the fact is he did so many.

How many lives he saved only the angels know – some say scores, some hundreds.

No posthumous decoration was awarded.

There were frequently wild flowers on his grave – the tributes of the men who admired and even reverenced his spirit. The Indians brought their wreaths and solemnly laid them in honour of his heroic spirit.

Pilgrims to Gallipoli invariably seek the grave of this most symbolic figure of the campaign. In after years a commemoration stone replaced the simple cross set up by his mates on that May night long ago. The inscription reads:

John Simpson Kirkpatrick served as 202 Private J. Simpson, Aust. Army Medical Corps. 19th May, 1915. Age 22. He gave his life that others may live.

* This was a mistaken report. The donkey was not killed.

† Deposited in the Australian War Memorial Library.

Harry Sawyer, a stretcher-bearer with the 2nd Field Ambulance in after years, was one of the group gathered round Simpson's statue near the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne. He told how one day in Shrapnel Gully he sheltered under a rock from the flying shrapnel. Simpson came along with a man on his donkey and Sawyer called him to come over until the shelling eased. He waved the invitation aside with a sweep of his arm and went on his way. "He was a practical Christian," someone remarked. "He was like Christ," said Sawyer softly.

Sapper F. D. Burrell, who served with the Signals Engineers of the First Light Horse along Shrapnel Gully, told me that when Simpson was shot, an artilleryman said to Captain J. T. Evans, the Officer commanding the Indian Field Ambulance: "Evans Sahib, what do you think? Murphy's stonkered." Evans did a thing which astonished all who knew him. "He sat on a packing case and covered his face with his hands and prayed aloud. 'O God,' he ejaculated, 'if ever a man deserves Heaven, he does. Give it to him!' "

The Indians gathered round and asked Evans Sahib what was the matter and he told them that Murphy Sahib was killed. They immediately went down on their haunches and wailed and threw dirt on their heads. "I never seen them show such sorrow for one of their own," said Sapper Burrell.

Years later, in 1918, Burrell came in contact with the 21st and 26th Kowat Mountain Battery in the mountains of Moab near Amman. He asked the Major of the Indian Battery about some of the personnel he had known on Gallipoli, only to learn that they had all gone. "But I will tell you who you are," said a Captain. "You are a countryman of Frank Sahib or Murphy Sahib." He went on to tell of "an Indian Signaller, Kahn Singh, who sits cross-legged at the bazaar at Peshawar. He is blind – his eyes were blown out with shrapnel. He has a pension of about eight annas a month and tells anybody who will listen about his Australian friends and Murphy Sahib and his donkey." So there,

in the faraway mountains of Moab, the story of Simpson was on its way round the world.

Captain Evans told the story of Simpson in a very moving letter to his father in Wales in which he said:

He always used his little donkey. He had some others but they got killed . . . Shrapnel Valley was a mass of bursting shells the day Jack Simpson was killed . . . the poor little donkey was left without a guardian and the mystery was cleared up by Jack Simpson proving mortal like all the rest of us. My fellows were in tears when his body was brought down and they called him a "Bahadur" – that is, "The Bravest of the Brave". After he had been buried and a cross put up, I found to my astonishment that these Indians had placed wreaths of wild flowers on his grave.

As I have said, there was no Victoria Cross, not even a medal but he was mentioned in Despatches, as the following letter indicates:

War Office,
Whitehall, S.W.
10th April, 1916.

Madam,

I have it in command from His Majesty the King to inform you as next of kin, of the late:

Private John Simpson.
No. 202.

of the Australian Army Medical Corps, that this private was mentioned in a Despatch from General Sir Ian Hamilton, dated 22nd September, 1915, and published in the Supplement of the "London Gazette" dated 5th November, 1915 for gallant and distinguished service in the Field.

I am to express to you the King's high appreciation of these services and to add that his Majesty trusts that these public acknowledgments may be of some consolation in your bereavement.

I have the honour to be,
Your obedient Servant,
M. D. Graham.
Lt. Colonel, Assistant Military Secretary.

Mrs. Sarah Simpson.

Captain Hemmett Fry wrote to his sister Annie from Gallipoli on 2nd September, 1915, and after describing Jack's work, concluded:

The work your brother did was so exceptionally good that his name was mentioned in orders of the day. We hoped that one of the military decorations of honour might be awarded him, as he fully deserved it, but unfortunately all who deserve cannot receive the special rewards. Your mother and yourself can at least take comfort that he gave his life in the performance of gallant and dutiful service that has been excelled by none.

I am enclosing with the letter a set of the Ambulance Regimental Badges. Your brother's effects have been sent to the Base and will be forwarded in due course to you.

In conclusion I wish to express the deep sympathy of our whole unit with your mother and yourself in your sad bereavement.

Believe me,

Yours sincerely,

H. Hemmett Fry Capt.,

3rd F. Amb.

His Mother's Last Letter

Among the effects returned after his death on 19th May, was this letter written by his Mother – the only item I have seen of all her correspondence through the years.

14 Bertram Street,
So. Shields.
May, 1915.

My dearest Son,

I received your very kind and welcome letter dated April 23rd yesterday to let me know that you were keeping well and I was very thankful for it, but my dear lad it was a very great disappointment to me that you were not sent to either France or England as you expected – but I read later on that a fleet of transport had been sent to the Dardanelles and I made sure that it was The Australians and I was right.

You said in your letter that I would find out where you were when the Australians made a start. Well my son, the Australians

have done gloriously – they have made England ring with their bravery. Mr. Asquith said in The House of Commons that the Australians had fought like heroes and that they had surpassed themselves in the annals of British warfare with their bravery. The Red Cross, he said that they worked like heroes to save and rescue the wounded.

Jack my son, my heart is fairly bursting with sorrow and with pride to think that you are amongst such a lot of brave men – but mind they have paid dearly for their bravery. I saw the Australian list of casualties this morning and I am sorry to say that it's very heavy.

I see that the 3rd Field Ambulance has got some wounded but thank God that your number was not there. I was thankful I can tell you that God had spared you to me as yet.

My dear son I wrote to you last week – you said that you hadn't had a letter from me for a month, but Jack my dear lad I didn't know where to write to you for you wrote and told me that you were leaving Egypt and you were coming either to France or England. I didn't know where to write to but I wrote you last week on speck and I addressed it to The Dardanelles, so that I hope you have got my letter.

Now my dear son write and let me know how you are keeping, for mind my lad, that this is a terrible anxious time to me. I am anxiously following the war in the Dardanelles. I am thirsting for every detail of news that I can get for I still get my papers night and morning. I couldn't live without them.

Now my dearest son hoping and trusting that the Lord in His great mercy will guard and protect you in these terrible times and that He will hear my prayers for you.

From your ever loving and affectionate

Mother

CHAPTER SIX

THE RETREAT AND THE RETURN

AFTER EIGHT MONTHS of unrelenting struggle, of hand-to-hand fighting, of heat, thirst and flies, of dirt, disease and death, evacuation of the Peninsula became inevitable. It was not due to any decline of the magnificent fighting spirit which won fame for Australians the world over.

Liddell Hart states his conclusion:

"Sired by strategic confusion and damned by naval negation, the landing on Gallipoli was born – and marred in delivery by muddled military midwifery."*

The attack on the Dardanelles is one of the tremendous "ifs" of history. The story of the campaign itself is an exasperating series of "ifs". Nevertheless a successful advance across these five miles of the Gallipoli Peninsula must surely have altered the course of the war, and almost as inevitably have shortened it.

John Masefield saw the campaign, not as a tragedy, nor as a mistake, but as "a great human effort which came very near to triumph, achieved the impossible many times, and failed, in the end, as many great deeds of arms have failed, from something which had nothing to do with arms nor with the men who bore them. That the effort failed is not against it: much that is most splendid in history failed, many great things and noble men have failed."†

Gallipoli is no longer a narrow neck of land set in the blue or the grey of the sea. If it is anything at all, it is a country of the mind. There never was a nobler story in the annals of our race. We need not hide the fact that the enter-

* *A History of the World War, 1914–1918*, by Liddell Hart.
† Gallipoli.

prise failed in its objective to drive a way to Constantinople. For the story of Gallipoli is the story of men who dared an "impossible" thing and nearly did it. They dared a thing which those who knew said never could be done and only a tragedy stayed them from doing it. The tragedy was that at a critical moment a hundred thousand men could not be spared to reinforce the sadly dwindling ranks. The story of Gallipoli in so far as it relates the triumph of human endurance over suffering and peril is an epic.

General Birdwood recalls how on the last day before the evacuation by night he was passing one of the cemeteries and talked with a "Digger" who was giving a final touch to the grave of an old friend. He said, "I hope they won't hear us marching to the beach tonight."* But that was not the end. In the three intervening years after they slipped silently away from the beaches, the game losers of Gallipoli had avenged themselves at Bagdad, Jerusalem, and Aleppo. In every field the Turkish Armies had been destroyed: and then the forts of the Dardanelles were surrendered, and the Narrows thrown open to the Allies. As Ernest Raymond said:

> One wished that the dead on Gallipoli might be awakened, if only for a minute, at the sound of the old language spoken among the graves, to see the khaki ashore again, and British ships sailing in triumph up the Straits.†

* *Khaki and Gown*, by Field-Marshal Lord Birdwood.
† *Tell England*, by Ernest Raymond.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN SEARCH OF SIMPSON

DRIVING DOWN the East coast of England I saw South Shields on my map. "South Shields?" I said eagerly, "why that's where Simpson was born!" I had long been tantalized with the little that could be gleaned about him beyond those twenty-four days on Gallipoli which set a plain man among the legendary heroes of his race.

So I drove into the city. I walked the streets in search of a man whose mortal dust lies in a far-away grave within sight and sound of the waters of the blue Aegean Sea. Yet he seemed strangely alive and near me – a pilgrim from the Australia that became his second home. Here began a life that won the admiration and homage of millions of hearts. How little could he have imagined as he walked these streets in childhood that children everywhere would hear his story and memorials be carved to honour his shining courage and devotion and that his name would be linked with the nameless Good Samaritan of the dangerous Jericho Road.

I found South Shields set on hilly ground at the mouth of the River Tyne, a town with two faces – that of a thriving industrial centre with factories, warehouses, transport systems and all the atmosphere of a busy port, and that of an attractive holiday resort. It is a town of strange contrasts – of mean streets and pleasant parks and of golden beaches crowded with Tynesiders on holiday. Smooth sands stretch southward to Trow Point and away past the rocks to Frenchman's Bay and Marsden Bay.

In my quest I went where all wise men in search of information go – to the Public Library. The Deputy Librarian welcomed me and produced a file of references and news-

paper cuttings relating to Simpson. Most of these cuttings were from Australian newspapers and yielded few grains of new material other than references to an annual memorial essay prize at the Mortimer Road School.

What did please me was the statuette of a wounded soldier supported by Simpson on his donkey. This realistic sculpture by A. Bertram Pegram would have satisfied me anywhere, but in his native town it stirred my heart.

I suggested that the Librarian take me to see the Editor of the *South Shields Gazette*. He was "putting the paper to bed" when I arrived but arranged for his secretary to show me all the indexed references to Simpson. I searched eagerly but again the result was disappointing.

When I talked with the Editor I said: "Here is this son of South Shields whose fame has gone out into all the world and very little is known of him beyond the three weeks during which he unsuspectingly covered himself with glory on Gallipoli. There must be people still living who knew him . . . Let's have a fishing expedition!"

The upshot was that the *Gazette* carried an interview the next day, with an appeal to anyone who had known Simpson in Shields. Results came slowly.

First I met a businessman, W. J. Bowman, who seemed to have prospered more than the others of Jack's generation. His father, he told me, was a Master Mariner who had been in Australia during the gold rush. Jack and he went to Sunday School together at St. Mary's Church. They played cricket using wickets chalked on a brick wall. He had presented a trophy, in honour of Jack, to the Mortimer Road School to be awarded annually for the best swimmers.

Next I met William Lowes, a quiet, delightful man, living alone in his neat little well-kept home. He walked with a heavy limp, the legacy of war days. He also had been a school mate of Jack Simpson. They both kept pet rabbits. Bill had "Flemish Giants" while Jack fancied "Belgian Giants" – a black and white strain – and sometimes they "swapped" their pets.

In the 1914–18 War he was an Able-bodied Seaman who served with the Royal Naval Division. He had been at Gallipoli! He showed me his papers and the bits and pieces that an old sailor keeps. With the Royal Naval Division he went to the Dardanelles on the *Minnetonka*, transferred to the torpedo boat H.M.S. *Savage* and landed from a barge at Gaba Tepe at 4 a.m. on 29th April, 1915. The Division had been sent to reinforce the Australians. Lowe described to me how they toiled up the hill in single file with their gear. The moon was shining as they dug themselves in. On 3rd May he was wounded by shrapnel in the thigh. He was unconscious but he remembered being taken down to the beach on a donkey. He produced the little linen tag signed by the Medical Officer. From the dressing-station Lowes was quickly taken to a hospital ship and on to Alexandria.

So these two men, from far-away Shields, who had been school mates and ridden donkeys together, went down Shrapnel Gully without recognizing each other!

I listened eagerly as Lowes told me how twice in the year there was a Fair at South Shields Market Place for which Murphy's had the contract. Everybody far and wide knew of Murphy's Fair, with roundabouts and all the usual sideshows, where Jack always found something to do.

He spent the whole summer holidays with a Mr. George who had a group of donkeys – providing rides for children up and down the sands at a penny a ride. "He was used to donkeys," said Lowes. He looked after them from 7.30 in the morning until nine at night when he rode them home two miles away. For this he was paid sixpence a day . . . I was now well on the trail of the Man With The Donkey.

Jack had an instinctive attachment to animals, he understood them and they somehow felt and responded to his caring. He was devoted to a toy Yorkshire terrier which he left with his Mother when he went away.

Looking over the beach that summer day I thought long, deep thoughts of a laddie who liked to be with donkeys,

and learned to know and handle them in preparation for a destiny that he could not see.

And then through the Librarian came the reward of my search – I met Annie, Simpson's wonderful sister. It was one of the great experiences of my life. More than anything I gleaned from her, she in her own personality helped me to feel and realize the spirit of the Man With The Donkey. They had grown up together, they were knit in close bonds of origin, growth and affinity. Her generosity of heart, practical ability, sound sense, and instinctive kindness made Jack live for me. Here was the mind and heart that had come from their Scottish parents planted in an English North-country home. I saw it all. I was at the fountain head of a hero's life.

She called me "Honey" in the affectionate manner of North-country people. She was a rare cook, insisted on my sharing their tasty meals, and, backed by her devoted husband, Adam Pearson, tried to persuade me to leave my hotel and stay with them.

So I came to the beginning of our story as Annie gave it to me.

The Kirkpatricks were Scots – their father hailed from Leith and their mother from Glasgow. Captain Robert Kirkpatrick sailed for twenty years as mate and master in ships of the London and Edinburgh line. The sale of a ship which he delivered to South Shields brought him to the Tyneside and there he made his home. For years he was at sea on Fenwick's ships. Then a serious accident in 1904 left him permanently incapacitated until his death in 1909. There was no compensation in those days and it was difficult to maintain the family.

John Simpson Kirkpatrick was born at 10 South Eldon Street on 6th July, 1892. "He was a lovely lad," his mother crooned to herself in after years. There was a more than ordinary tenderness in the relationship of Jack and his mother. She had lost three boys with scarlet fever and had a dread of losing him.

Annie took me to the Barnes Road School where he was

educated to his tenth year. I stood looking at the stone Norman arch through which a little boy passed feeling strange and lonely in the new experience of starting school. Later he moved on to the Mortimer Road school. He was an ordinary boy with little relish for scholarship but delighted in pranks and games and an occasional escapade.

I was taken to the "gutt" near the entrance of Tyne Docks. This is an inlet with stone paving sloping down into the water constructed so that horses could back carts and take their loads of coal from barges. Two children fell into the water there one Saturday and Jack promptly jumped in and rescued them.

I sat with Annie in a pew at St. Mary's Church in Eldon Street, both of us thinking of Jack. I offered a thanksgiving and prayed within the fellowship of the Communion of Saints. Here and in the Sunday School a lad had heard the good news from Galilee and the story of the Good Samaritan and his donkey.

The Rev. T. P. Williams, a relative of Baden-Powell, was vicar in Jack's time.

I wondered if the laddie heard there a story of the Dardanelles? Paul the dauntless, that little Jewish scholar in travel-worn cloak and sandals, stood on the shore of that strip of water at a place then called Troas, near the western entrance, and looking across from Asia to Europe, coveted what he saw for his Christ. That traveller saw a vision of a man in Macedonia crying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" The incident is one of the critical moments in the history of the world, for it gave Christianity to Europe.

The family intention had been to apprentice Jack to engineering but times were bad and unemployment was widespread. The wages of an apprentice were a mere trifle. "What's the use of serving my time to walk the streets?" he asked.

The death of his father was a day of destiny in Jack's life. He immediately felt a great responsibility for his mother which he sustained through all his wanderings in the subsequent years. This strong sense of duty to provide for his

Mother is the main theme of most of his letters that have survived.

When he left school he drove a float for four years delivering milk. Jack and the dappled grey pony became close friends. His devotion to "Andrew", to whom he talked like a human, was known to everybody on the milk rounds. Annie put into my hand one of Andrew's shoes which Jack had kept and left behind when he sailed away.

It was during this period that the Territorial Army sprang into being. In 1908 Mr. R. B. Haldane, as he then was,* introduced Army reforms in which volunteers were organized into brigades and divisions with their proportions of artillery, engineers and other supporting arms.

At seventeen, Jack joined the Durham Territorial Howitzer Battery as a gunner and a faded photograph survives of him in camp at Fleetwood on the West Coast. These volunteers came from every walk of life – men from the professions, from commerce and industry and busy men with careers to make and families to support. They came from the factories, offices and shops, from the mines and farms. And they served for different reasons – for companionship, for the change military training offered from the routine of civil life, for a cheap holiday by the sea perhaps, and some, so the cynical said, to escape from a nagging wife! But underlying it all was the spirit of service – a desire, often inarticulate and unexpressed, to be ready in case of need and to play their part in the defence of Britain.

After four and a half years as a dairyman, the sea that was in Jack's blood began to call. So on 14th October, 1909, two days after the burial of his father, he sailed from the Tyne on the S.S. *Heighington*.

He was then turned seventeen years of age.

My three exciting days in South Shields came to a reluctant end. At supper on the last night Annie and Adam begged me to stay and I would fain have lingered in South Shields with its thronging memories and visions.

* Later Viscount Haldane.

She put in my hand the white metal identification disc taken from Jack's neck before they buried him at Hell Spit, with the inscription:

202 J. Simpson
C3 – F.AMB
CE

Annie told me how on 19th May, 1915, Mother Kirkpatrick was nursing her daughter's baby. She evidently dozed and then started up from what she said was a terrible dream. She had seen Jack helping wounded soldiers and he was killed. The daughter brushed it aside and said with the practicality of a Durhamite, "He's all right – he's too much sense to go where it's dangerous." But she would not be comforted and quickly put on her things and hurried home saying: "Our Jack's dead – I know it!" As she opened the door of the house in Bertram Street, there, slipped through the letter-box, was the Field Service Card – Jack's only communication from Gallipoli.

Finally as we said good-bye Annie asked quizzically: "Could you stay until ten o'clock in the morning?" I gladly agreed. "Will you meet me at Barclays Bank at ten?" This was a mysterious request and I went to sleep and awoke early speculating on what it might portend.

I drove to the appointment and there she was waiting on the pavement. "I'm going into the Bank – I won't be long," she assured me. The minutes dragged achingly. Then she emerged and handed to me a large handkerchief tightly knotted. I stared at it wonderingly. "Here are all the letters Jack wrote to his Mother from the day he sailed on the *Heighington*!" I had no words. I was dumb with incredulity. Here was Eureka beyond my brightest hopes. Had the kerchief been full of hoarded golden sovereigns they would have seemed less than the dust in the gutter. Now I could *know* the man I had crossed the world to find – the man behind the legend.

I stammered out what I could from a heart full of gratitude.

This was Annie's response to a man who had come from Australia for the sake of "Our Jack".

There in the street I kissed her, for in three days I felt as if I had known her for a lifetime. I agreed with all that Jack thought of her – "Wonderful Annie!"

When later I untied the knots and opened the precious bundle there fell out a pile of letters and post-cards, many of them worn with much handling, some crumpled and stained – almost illegible – and others mere tantalizing scraps.

Now I could trace the unknown story of the well-known Man With The Donkey.

He wrote his first letter home (undated) from the *Heighington* at Madeira:

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that we arrived at Maderia this morning after a twelve days passage and I can tell you that we have had a rare old putting up right from the time we left the Tyne until we got through the Bay of Biscay. We were very nearly four days in the Bay instead of about 38 hours and not only that but the forecastle has been flooded all the time everything floating about and in the bunkers you are very nearly up to the knees in water. She is a proper wreck and nearly every body is about full up with her already. We are just calling at Maderia for bunkers and we will leave tonight again for Valparaiso after that we expect to go to Sydney and if she does everybody will be clearing out for she is a rotten packet altogether and the grub is not up to much either so that we are not getting much encouragement to stop in her. Now Mother I think I have given you all the news at present so give my love to Annie and with best love to yourself

I remain
Your loving and affectionate son
Jack.

On 26th October, 1909, the *Heighington* sailed into Genoa and he wrote up his news to date.

Dear Mother,

I received your welcome letter this morning at 10 o'clock when we arrived making it a 14 days trip which I quite enjoyed I can

tell you. Now I hope you are keeping your pecker up and not worrying yourselve about me for you have no call at all. Here I am having grand weather and little work and plenty of good grub* and eating any Gods amount of it. I think I have eaten more in this fortnight than I have eaten for the last six months. I eat enough for two men at meals still I am always feeling "ungry" I am getting an appetite like a horse but there is one consolation there is plenty always of grub more than is used, they do live high in this mess room they are fed like fighting cocks I can tell you.

I get up at 4.45 in the morning and make tea and toast for the second engineer and you bet I have my own tea and toast. I then work on till about 1.30 and then I have my afternoon nap. O I have a pretty soft time of it "it is money for nowt" and I get on that well with the engineers they are three fine fellows, If I keep on the way I am going on now I will be like a pet Elephant by the time I get home for the sea air is doing me a lot of good.

Now after we left the Tyne we did catch the weather until we got through the Bay of Biscay but she can roll for she has no balancers on her bottom. The first Sunday after we got out I had a good laugh they were having dinner when the ship she took a big lurch to one side then over come the soup, vegetables, meat and puddings all on top of the engineers knees and they could not stop them for they were hanging on to the table for all they were worth they did look dignified scraping all the rubbish off their pants and jackets and all the plates and dishes were smashed.

Now I cant tell you anything about Genoa yet for I have not been ashore yet and I am not going ashore till Saturday night. Now about these photos you can send them out as soon as you like they will be very welcome . . . Solong for the present.

A Post Card went to his sister from Genoa dated 2nd November, 1909.

Dear Annie,

Am sorry I did not bid you goodbye but never mind I expect that we will be home for the New Year. Now I do hope that you are getting on orl right at work and that you are a good girl to your mother or else you will catch it when I get home. Now this is the 2nd and I have not been ashore yet for you have to pay so much for the boat but I am going ashore on Sunday to the

* Note how he had changed his opinion from the previous letter.

cemetary. It is the finest in the world. Now this is all at present with love. Jack.

Sightseeing and Football in Genoa

November 9th 1909

Dear Mother,

Just a line to let you know that we are leaving Genoa tonight or tomorrow morning bound for Tunis and Susa on the North coast of Africa where we will load part of general cargo at each port for London and Aberdeen . . . I have been to see the cemetary at Genoa it is a sight worth going to see there is hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of statues and monuments on the graves all cut out of marble they say it is the finest cemetary in the world and I believe it is, it is beautiful. Now on Sunday 7th I was playing at a football match a team picked out of the ships in the harbour, and we played the Genoa College boys an unbeaten team and we beat them four to one. Now Mother if you answer this sharp I will get it at Tunis and write it C/O British Consul. Now Mother this is about all at present so give my fondest love to all at home and with love to yourselve

I remain

Your loving and Afectionate Son

Jack.

PS. Hope you received them Post Cards all right. Now Annie you are a long time in sending that Post Card. If it does not come to Tunis I will pull your nose for you when I get home, O! I forgot to tell you what I thought of the Photos they are champion but Mother I think you might have tried to look a bit pleasanter you look as if you had lost a tanner and found a threepenny dodger you know I want something better than yourselve not worse for I know you can look better than that photo when you like. Now dont forget to write sharp Solong

Tunis – A Pretty Little Place

November 16th 1909

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that we arrived at Tunis on Saturday morning and we are loading Barley and locust Beans

and we will next go to Bona instead of Susa and from there we will go to Phillip Vale and then to Algiars to load for London and Leith instead of Aberdeen now Mother I do hope you are keeping all right . . . I forgot to tell you in my last letter that I had a letter from Bob and he tells me that you have not got the insurance yet. Now Mother it is going to be hard time after all the struggling and depriving yourselve but I hope by the time this reaches you that you have got it all right. I was ashore in Tunis last night with a young Arab the Ship Chandler's son and a nice young fellow he is to He took me all round Tunis. It is a pretty little place and it looks well to see the Arabs dressed in their long white shirts and white turbans Now Mother we expect to be leaving here tomorrow for Bona but I dont think we will get as far as Algiars for we will have our full cargo by then Now Mother this is all at present so give love to all at home and with best love to yourselve

I remain
Your loving Son
Jack

Fijelli
Nov. 30th 1909

Dear Mother

I received those welcome letters and Post Card as we were leaving Tunis so I could not answer them from that port. But I wrote as soon as we got to Bona and the steward forgot to give them to the old man to post he put them away in the drawer and never came across them agian until we were leaving Phillip Vale. So here I was expecting a reply when my letters had never went. We arrived at Fijelli this morning. In fact we are not in yet for we are lying outside waiting for the pilot. So you can see I am taking the First opportunity of writing. Now Mother I am glad to hear that you are all keeping well at home and Peggie tells me she had you out for an afternoon at Sunderland. Well done I glad to hear that you are keeping up your spirits and keeping your heart up . . . Now tell Annie I received her PC all right and I am very sorry to hear that she had been paid off but never mind kid. I do hope that you will get another canny little job soon. Now Annie I am sure it will be hard for you now when anybody asks you what you are working at you will not be able to blow out your chest and tell them that you are a "Lady Clerk" but never

Mrs. Sarah Kirkpatrick – the mother John Simpson adored

Annie, John's sister at the age of 17. The photograph was taken at John's request – 1910

The only authentic snapshot of John Simpson with his donkey, taken at the foot of Shrapnel Gully
(Australian War Memorial Photograph)

mind kid I am sure some better job than that will soon turn up. Now right up to now we have been having splendid weather better than it was in the summer at England. We are going to Algiers from hear and then to London but I will write from Algiers and let you know the London address. Now Mother I think this is all at present So with fondest love to yourselve and all I remain

Your Loving and Affectionate Son
Jack

London
Dear Mother December 16 1909

Just a line or two to let you know that I have just received your letter. And I am writing back by return of post as you ask I wrote on Tuesday Night home and I see that you have not said anything about receiving it. Now it seems as if my letters are not getting sent, you see I just take them Aft and the skipper he stamps them for me and sends them off. Now Mother I sent you a letter from Fijelli and a post card from Algiers with the London address on it. I had no time to write more and you have not mentioned about receiving neither PC nor letter in your letter.

Now it is a bit thick if my letters are not being sent for I will be charged for them just the same when I pay off. I hear we are going to pay off at Leith . . . I think that I will be getting the chuck when I get to Leith for I hear that they are going to send a lad from the office I warned he will be coming for about 30 bob or two pound but he will not get a great catch for the engineers and mates do their own washing. The cook said he has never seen a chief engineer doing his own washing until now but never mind I expect I will be able to get along without thier washing. Now Mother I think this is all except that I have a dose of cold since we left Algeirs and a sore throat . . . It is now 3 o'clock we expect to leave about 4.

His next letter was dated Leith, 18th December, 1909, and he told his Mother:

I was ashore last night and I had a look round Leith. I was in Leith Walk and all over the shop but it was terribly cold there was a very severe frost on and this morning it is snowing but I have got a good stove in the mess room and it heats the place up a treat . . . Now Mother I do hope that you are keeping well your-

selve for mind I am, eating like a horse, the steward and me have a row every afternoon for I gorge and worry all the roast beef that there is left at dinner and take him the bare bone to cut cold meat and make stew for the tea and he does growl I can tell you but then you see I blame the engineers for eating all the meat and then you see it is all right. Now Mother I think we will be paying off here so I will be home for my Duck at Xmas I say do you remember when I pinched that duck. So mind you watch it well this time I am very fond of poultry we have had a good few chickens on the voyage but they were about the size of bantams and nothing else but skin and bone but never mind I got my share of them the first day we had chicken they wolfed the lot but mind they didnt after that I watched them, for I had my wack shoved in the cubourd before I told them dinner was ready so you bet I had my chicken as well. Now Mother I think that this is all at present. So give my love to all at home and with love to yourselve I remain

Your loving Son
Jack

Presumably he spent Christmas at home in South Shields. Then he sailed on the S.S. *Yedda* which ultimately brought him to Australia. We shall trace his wanderings through the great Southland in another chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SIMPSON IN AUSTRALIA

"My heart is in Australia," he often said to his sister Annie. "I'll get out there some way or other."

Simpson had lived for a longer period in Australia than I had suspected. The idea that he was on a ship when War was declared in August 1914, landed in Western Australia and enlisted within a few days has persisted. The letters which I discovered in South Shields are the main source of tracing his movements in this Southland. Actually, he had seen more of Australia than most of who went to the War. The letters have no literary merit – they are the writing of a plain man of limited education to report his doings to the folks at home. Shining out of them is his great love for his Mother and almost all of them reveal his concern for her. He constantly sent her money even in times of hardship when he had little for himself. Every day was Mother's Day for Jack Simpson.

On 12th February, 1910, he joined the crew of the *Yedda** as a stoker.

His first letter dated 16th April, 1910, does not give the place where it was written but probably it came from Valparaiso.

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that I received your letters all right I am glad to hear that you are keeping all right for I am I can tell you. Now Mother we had a very good passage from Madeira to Valparaiso and we were all pretty glad when we got in and got a spell for we were fifty days from the time we left the Tyne till we got to Valparaiso and I can tell you that it was hot right until we got in, we were all rare and thin when we arrived

* Built Glasgow 1901. Owned by the Ocean Navigation Company, London.

for we had been getting fed on all sort of rubbish for we had no potatos shortly after we left Madeira it was nothing but preserved spuds and peas and beans but we have been making up for it since we have been in here we are getting fed well and I am getting as fat as can be and feeling as fit as a fiddle. Now Mother they are a fine lot of men and respectable so I have a pretty good time of it among them. Now Mother you will have had two halfpays by the time you get this letter and I think that you will draw a good few more before we get home again. Now Mother I cant tell you were we are going to for she is not chartered yet but if they get no orders by the time we are finished unloading we will be going on to Newcastle, New South Wales, and I hope they do for if things is all right out there I am going to have to try at the pits. Now Mother send that photo where you are taken in the group for I think you look best on that one and I meant to fetch it away with me but forgot so mind and be sure and send it. Now Mother I think this is all at present so give my love to Annie and with love to yourselve

I remain
Your loving Son
Jack

PS. Now dont forget that Photo and write Sharp.

Early Days in Australia

The next letter is under date 31st July, 1910 – apparently from Coledale, New South Wales.

Dear Mother

I am writing you a few lines and not before time you will be thinking, but never mind better late than never. Now I told you that I was clearing out of the Yedda in my letter which I wrote from Newcastle on the 6th May* well I stopped by her a fortnight in Newcastle until 13th. I did not want to leave her before the 12th of May because if I had the skipper would have wired home and stopped the halfpay which was due on the twelveth so I knew you would draw it on the 12th so on the 13th there 14 of us firemen and sailers cleared out. There was another man and me

* This letter has not survived. Evidently he deserted the *Yedda* at Newcastle and dropped the surname "Kirkpatrick" to hide his identity.

beat our way down to Sydney we were knocking about Sydney for about a fortnight and we could not get a days work nowhere. I was properly sick of it so I worked my passage right away up into the north of Queensland and I got a start cutting sugar cane on the plantations but it only lasted a week and I wasnt sorry either for the heat was terrible it was 110 degrees in the shade and the money was small so me and another chap bought a swag between us and the blankets billy can and tent and beat our way through the bush for about 150 mile till we struck the first cattle station. We got a start for ten bob a week and our keep but at the end of the week the boss sacked my mate because he couldn't manage the job but he offered to keep me on and give me 1 pound but I wanted thirty bob a week and he would not give me it so I told him to keep his quid and get somebody else.

I always fancied when I was in the old country that a job riding about on a horse all day would be all right but I had my belly full of riding in that one week you get in to the saddle at daylight and you are galloping about till dark and change your horse twice a day. I soon found out that a cowboy's life was no catch so we "padded the oof" down the coast again we struck the coast at Cairns and I left my mate there and I came down south. I worked my passage down from Cairns when one of the firemen took sick and the chief engineer offered me the job until the man got better and you can just bet your life I jumped at the chance of getting a bob or two. Well I was on her for about a fortnight we came down (to Brisbane) from Brisbane to Sydney, Sydney to Melbourne – Melbourne back to Sydney. Well I got a couple of quid off the chief and ten bob off the second so I made off for the mines at once so by the time I paid my train fare down to Coledale and bought some working clothes I have not much left I am sending you a post office order for a quid I have got to start at Coledale pit on Monday night and I will have to work 3 weeks before I get pay so it will be three weeks before I can send you any more money. Now Mother when you answer this letter address it to me C/O Post Office Coledale, New South Wales because it is only a little township and there is no postman. Now give my love to Annie and with love to yourselve

I remain

Your loving and affectionate Son,

Jack.

Longing for News

He wrote on 29th September, 1910, by which time he had moved on down the East Coast from Coledale to Corrimal – a mining town between the sea and the Illawarra Range.

Coledale and Corrimal are attractive towns in a strip of coastal country which has come to be called the Illawarra Riviera and runs sixty miles south from Sydney between the Illawarra Range and the Pacific Ocean.

Illawarra was a name used by the Australian aborigines to describe "a pleasant place". It is a very pleasant place, indeed, one of entrancing beauty. The view from Sublime Point, near the head of the Bulli Pass, is one of the most famous in Australia, commanding miles of silver coastline and far reaching vistas of the blue South Pacific Ocean.

The towns in this coastal reach have preserved their picturesque features and the mines, which are, in effect, tunnels cut into the side of the mountain range have not detracted from the natural beauty of the landscape.

As Simpson strolled or fished on the ocean beach at Corrimal with its rolling white-combed surf his mind must have often winged away to the beach of his native South Shields. But there were no donkeys!

Dear Mother

Just a line or two to let you know that I am still keeping well which I hope you are doing as well. Now Mother I suppose you have got that first letter which I sent from Corrimal and I sent you a quid in it and I am sending you a quid in this one as well I only sent you 15 bob last pay as I had only a bad pay last pay . . . Now if you only had a lodger and Annie working and the ten bob a week which I send you I dont consider you would be doing too bad. By the way how is Annie getting on I sent her a PO last pay but I dont suppose she will get that for another fortnight or so I often wonder if "Peur wee Annie has the worrums" yet if so tell her to try wormcake Martha will tell her what that is like. Now Mother I have not got much more to tell you except that I am dying to get the first letter and get some news of Canny Auld Shields you know it is such a hell of a long time to wait for a letter

it is two months and a half from the time you send it to the time you received it. Ah weel wel hae tae mak the best oo it so dont forget to write pretty often. Now Mother I do hope you are keeping well so give my love to Annie and with love to yourselve

I remain

Your loving & affectionate son

Aye Jackie Maa Lad* Jack

Humping His Bluey

His Mother had been concerned at the hardships he had experienced when he carried his swag up to Queensland. In his next letter from Corrimal on 27th November, 1910, he reassured her that it was a good life.

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still alive and kicking . . . Now Mother what were you making such a song about those socalled hardships there was no hardship about it at all it is just about the best life that a fellow could wish for "carrying his swag" or "Humping his bluey" as the colonials call it going all over the country with all your belongings strapped on your back that is your blankets a change of underclothing "if you have got any" and a billycan. Now Mother you will think that we would be like the tramps in the old country but what a mistake the best of respectable men with a house of his own when he gets out of work he will just pack his swag and off he goes to where he hears the work is on. Now Mother I am sending you a new year card I think that it will just about get home by about the New Year. I say I wont be home this Christmas to help you to eat that goose mind I did use to help with the goose if it was only to eat it. I wish I was at Canny Old Shields for the Christmas this place is so quiet in fact I can feel my whiskers turning grey all ready. Now Mother I hope you like this card. Now Mother I will now conclude with best love from

Your loving Son

Jack

PS. I am enclosing P.O. for a quid.

* A frequent saying of his Mother.

A Long Walk Up The Mountain

The next letter, 27th November, 1910, was to Annie.

Corrimal N.S.W.

Dear Annie

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still alive and kicking. Now Annie I am very sorry to hear that you are not keeping well I think you will have to come out to Australia and see if that will do you any good and I hear you are growing like a leak in fact they tell me you are getting quite a tall young woman there that should give you a swelled head. Now how is things going on at Shields just about the same I reckon as they were when I left them you can give my love to all my friends and wish them a happy New Year for me and I also wish you a happy New Year. Does the old woman still eat "cocoanut bans" I could do with one now . . . Now Annie I have not much time to say as it is three oclock and I have to get changed to go to the pit I go in at five and I have a long walk up the mountain. Now Annie I am sending you a card I hope you will like it. Now Annie that is all at present so with love

I remain
Your loving brother
Jack

In Western Australia 16–1–11

By January he had left the mining life in Corrimal and taken to the sea again. He wrote from Albany from whence, three years later, he was to sail on the great adventure which took him to Gallipoli.

S.S. *Corringa*
Albany, West Aust.

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that I have started work again I left Corrimal about a week after I wrote you that letter with the Xmas cards in it I went from Corrimal to a place called Mt Kembla but I only stopped there a week for it was right up on top of the mountain and it was a very quiet place so I left and worked my passage to Fremantle in Western Australia. I went up the

country about 800 miles but things were rotten. There has been a very big gold rush here but all the good it done was to simply cover the country with men right from Bulfinch* to Fremantle and work was bad to get. There was men working for three and four bob a day. So that was no good to me so I went back to the coast again. I got the chance of a second stewards job on the Corringa† so I took it for the time being until I can get something better. Now Mother I can't send you anything with this letter as I am dead broke until the end of the month they pay the last day of each month so I will send you something then . . .

Round The Coast

17-2-11
Bunbury, W.A.

Dear Mother

Just a line or two to let you know that I arrived at Bunbury this morning from Sydney via Fremantle we are going to load timber for Adelaide in South Australia and Melbourne and Sydney. Now Mother how is things going on at home. I suppose you have had one of those English winters about a foot of snow and a lot of frost we have had a hot summer here you see we are having our summer when you are having your winter. It is very hot out in the West where I am just now but I stand it all right a lot better than I think that I would stand the cold at home now. Now ask Annie how is she liking her job in the fruit shop. I suppose she will give you a pound of grapes now and then when you go in for a hapenny turnip. Now Mother I am very sorry that I had nothing to send you in that last letter but you see I was right up agian it at the time or in other words I was dead broke but I am sending you a quid in this one. I had very little to take and I had some duds to buy for I only had what I stood up in. If I get to Adelaide and get paid there I will send you a couple of quid I know it will be acceptable as I expect things are still bad at home. Now Mother I hope that you are keeping all right

* Bulfinch is on the Yilgarn goldfield. The rush to the "strike" in 1910 has never been exceeded in Western Australia. It caused a world-wide sensation. The early crushings were rich and a phenomenal mining boom resulted. The mine consistently produced gold until 1920. Whether Jack went as a prospector is not disclosed in this letter.

† He sometimes spelled Kooringa as Cooringa and Corringa.

and well for mind I am. I was weighed today I was 12 stone 4 pound I am getting an awful size I am filling out fine of course it is a very light job far different to pitwork or Firing. Now Mother have you still got Lil* yet? Mention me to my friends and give my love to Annie and with love to yourselve

I remain
Your loving Son
Jack

The Gold Rush

SS Corringa
Port Melbourne
Victoria
19-4-11

Dear Mother

Just a line or two to let you know that I received your letter this morning and I am glad to hear that you are keeping all right. Now I wrote from Fremantle in the first of this month and I sent a couple of quid in that letter I hope you are getting it all right that is a fiver I have sent you since I joined the Cooringa. I sent a quid from Fremantle the first pay that I drew the next I sent a couple of quid from Adelaide then I sent you a couple of quid from Fremantle on the 1st of this month. Now Mother I sent you five quid altogether from Corrimal I sent 1 pound a fortnight for 2½ months until I cleared out of N.S.W. and went to the West but as I told you before I never did any good out there until I joined the Cooringa. I suppose that there was a hell of a fuss of the gold find in the West it was only a boom nothing else for the last time I was in Fremantle the head men that floated the company and the directors were on trial in Perth for fraud so I dont think it did much good for anybody except fetch the wages down in the West. When I left there was men working for four bob a day and glad to get it to get enough money together to clear out I was pretty lucky to get out the way I did. I have turned the Messroom job up and went Firing again I have been in the Stokehole about a month. Now of course it is much harder work but then the money is a lot bigger . . .

* See pages 56 and 76.

SS Cooringa
Newcastle
2-5-11

Dear Mother

Just a line or two to let you know that we arrived here today from Melbourne we are going to run from Newcastle to Melbourne for a few trips. Now Mother I am sending you a couple of quid in the letter. Now I got a letter from you the other morning in Melbourne I suppose that was a reply from the first one that I sent when I signed on in Fremantle because when you write you want to let me know whether you got any POs in the letter so that I will know whether you are getting the money that I am sending you with this two quid it will be seven quid in all since I joined this boat. Now Mother I hope that you and Annie are keeping all right for I am pretty well at present . . .

Reporting from Newcastle, 31st May, 1911

We have been running between Melbourne Sydney and Newcastle for a couple of months but we are going to take our old run up agian that is between Port Kembla and Fremantle

And after the usual details about sending money he went on to say:

Now Mother I do hope that you are keeping all right and that you are getting on all right with your shop but I am very much afraid that you are in the wrong district* to make a fortune for the people round there would rob "Old Nick" himself if he gave "Tick" and I suppose you will know that there is no hope unless you give the good old "Tick". I wasnt four years going round with the milk without finding out a little of there weak points.

Now tell Annie that I am very sorry to hear that she has been crook agian but tell her I hope that she is all right by the time this reaches you. I often wonder what she is looking like I suppose she will be like all tall young "Women" of her age Long, Lean, Razerfaced, and all legs and wings but never mind things was never that bad but what they couldnt be worse. Now Mother I have not much to add except I am still in the best of health I was

* The proposed shop was to be in Edward Street, but the scheme did not eventuate.

weighed the other night I was the heaviest man in the fireman room I was twelve stone 3 pounds we were all surprised because I have not got any sloppy fat about me but bone and muscle and the things that weigh. PS write soon.

Send a Photo of Lil

The letter of 9th July, 1911, does not give the place of origin:

. . . Now Mother I am thinking of going across to Vancouver* to British Columbia my mate is going across and he wants me to go with him but I dont know yet what I will do yet so you can still keep on sending your letters to the Cooringa and if I do happen to go across I can easily get my letters sent on to me until I write and give you my address. Now Mother I hope you and Annie are keeping well and that you are doing well in your shop I suppose in a very short time I will be hearing of all the horses and carts that are running about with your famous "Cockonat Bans" . . .

PS. Have you still got Lil† if so would you get her photo taken and send it out to me for I would like to show it to the donkeyman of this ship he is a S. Shields man.

To Rockhampton

5–8–11
SS Cooringa Adelaide

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that we arrived here this morning from Newcastle I got three letters from you and a Post Card from Annie this morning. I am glad to hear that you are both keeping well and that Annie has got a good job. How is the shop doing you have never mentioned in your letters whether you are doing well or not. Now you were telling me that J.F. has got married Poor B. tell him I am sorry to hear of it and give him my deepest sympathy but tell him that he is silly to waste his time loading hay

* He did not go to Canada.

† His Yorkshire Terrier dog, see page 56, had been poisoned but they never told him.

for his old man he wants to keep his eyes open for a ship coming out this way and get out with her even if he has got to work a passage out for it dosnt matter in what part of this colony he lands he will get as much work as he wants that is of course if he isnt frightened of a bit of hard work if he does manage to ever get his wife and kid out for about a fiver . . .

Now Mother I got your Photo and it looks very good I will get mine taken and send it to you. We have been a trip to Rockhampton right up in the North of Queensland and it was terribly hot it was as far as 115 degrees of heat in the shade when we were up there. PS. I am enclosing PO for 2 quid.

Port Kembla to Fremantle

21–8–11

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that we arrived at Fremantle today from Port Kembla. We were at Kembla on the first of the month but we dont get paid there so I could not send you any money but I am sending you a couple of quid in this letter and I will be sending you another couple on the First of next month . . . We have had a very bad passage to the West this time we have been 20 days instead of about 14 we have had two life boats washed away coming across the "Bite"* and the second cook was washed oboard and drowned.

8–11–11
SS Kooringa
Adilade

Dear Mother

Just a line or two to let you know that we arrived here this morning from Bunbury in the West. Now I am sorry that I could not say more in my last letter as I had to run from the P.O. to avoid losing my passage I sent you a PO for two pound in the letter I hope you got it all right . . . I suppose you are having terribly cold weather at home just now . . . it is very hot here now but it is nothing to what it will be by about Christmas we get it about 125 degrees of heat here in Midsummer and that is in the shade. Now Mother I suppose that you will soon be making preparations for Christmas by the time you get this letter so I am

* The Great Australian Bight.

sending you a couple of quid extra this month for your Christmas box so dont forget to drop it in your stocking for me . . . PS. I am sending Annie a PO for a quid for her "Crist" (Christmas).

A Lively Christmas at Sea

7–1–12
SS Kooringa Melbourne

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that we arrived in Melbourne today from Bunbury W.A. I received 2 letters from you and 2 from Annie and three papers. Now Mother I see in the letter that you and Annie both received what I sent you for your Xmas box. I am sorry to hear that you both spent a very quiet Xmas but you could not have spent such a quiet Xmas as I spent for we left Kembla NSW about Xmas Eve for the West of course we had a good dinner. We had goose and Plum Pudding & Brandy Sause and of course we drank each others health quite a number of times until each man thought he was Jack Johnson champion of the world then my mate suggested going over and having a fight with the sailers of course that was heriled (heralded) as a noble idea and as the sailers feeling a bit lively themselves from sampling the bottle too much things went pretty lively for the next half hour you couldn't see anything for blood and snots flying about until Mates and Engineers came along and threatened to log all hands forward.

We all had trophies of the fray someone bunged one of my eyes right up and by the look of my beak I think someone must have jumped on it in a mistake when I was on the floor but as they say alls well that ends well so I suppose it must be for both my eyes and my nose are all right now so that is the way I spent Xmas. Now Mother I hope that you and Annie are keeping all right for I am keeping pretty good myself seeing that the weather is so hot it has been a 112 degrees of heat in Melbourne today it was pretty warm I can tell you and we had a very hot passage from the west the whole 12 days we just about cooked after doing four hours in the stokehole for she has a pretty hot stokehole at the best of cool weather. Now Mother I am sending you my Photo it is not a good one but it was only taken by an amateur. We happened to be coming along the wharf just as we knocked off in the engine room

that night at 5 oclock we were going along the wharf for a swim before we had tea and he asked to stand for him so we did but the sun was right in our eyes and I wanted a haircut badly. (The conclusion of the letter is missing.)

10–1–12
SS Cooringa
Fremantle W.A.

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that we arrived here this morning from Kembla NSW. We called at Melbourne coming across and I got three letters and two Xmas Cards one from you and one from Annie. Now Mother I expect that you and Annie have received what I sent you for your Xmas boxes before now and I hope that you have both spent a very pleasint Xmas and New Year. I had both Xmas and New Year at sea for we left Port Kembla on Christmas Eve and we lay off Melbourne for about 2 hours on boxing day we had to call there to pick up an old three masted Barque that they used in Melbourne for keeping coal in and as they were sending her to Fremantle for our company we had to tow her round to Fremantle and it made it pretty heavy for us chaps down below for she is heavy enough for us to Fire without having a great big hulk to tow and at the very hottest time of the year. We have been working with as far as 135 degrees of heat in the stokehole there is none sorry to get a spell for four days and then we will be off agian for another 15 days run east. Now Mother I am sending you two pound in this letter this makes the last for December 1911. Now if you reckon up you will have received 25 pound from me since I joined the Corringa . . . Now Mother I will be going and getting my Photo taking when I get my next new suit and will send it on to you. Now Mother I think I will now conclude so give my love to Annie and with love to yourselve

I remain
Your Loving Son
Jack

1–3–12
SS Cooringa Newcastle

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that I am still going strong and in the best of health which I hope that you and Annie are still

enjoying. We arrived here this morning from Melbourne we have been laying in Melbourne for 16 days. While we were in Melbourne I met J.W you know his Mother lives in our old house in Corbridge St. He is donkeyman on one of the Port Boats which sail from London to the Colonies. So he will be calling when he gets back to Shields and telling you that he met me. He was giving me all the news about his three sons you know I used to be in the same class as his second son at the Barnes and Mortimer Rd school but he will hardly believe it when he looks at me but then he says he remembers me as a kid when we used to live in Eldon St. I did not see him again the time we were in Melbourne so I suppose that he will be home in about six weeks time . . .

1–4–12
S.S. Kooringa
Albany

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that we arrived here this morning from Fremantle. There has been one of the big passenger boats went down with all hands and two sailing ships with all hands. I am sending you a P.C. of the "Koombana"* that was the name of the passenger boat there was 147 people on board her she was built on the Tyne . . .

4–4–12
SS Kooringa
Bunbury

Dear Mother

I have just received your letter 4 days ago in Gerarlton (Geraldton) and a paper and P.C. I am glad to hear that you and Annie are keeping well I see that the miners have started work agian and by the accounts in the papers out here they have not got what they came out for. It is damned hard when you come to think of it the way they have been treated it is a pity they had not waited for another two or three years until they had plenty of money in there union so that they could have hung on a bit longer then the Government would have forced a settlement one way or another . . . I hope that you and Annie are keeping all right I am not looking too well myself for I went greasing a

* The *Koombana* left Port Hedland for Broome, 20th March, 1912, and foundered off Balla Balla near Candon Creek, with all hands during a hurricane; 138 lives were lost.

The original wooden cross at Private John Simpson's grave at Hell Spit

The bronze statue by Wallace Anderson to the memory of "The Man with the Donkey" at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne

couple of months ago and I dont think that the engine room agrees with me I have lost about 4 pound in weight since I started so I think that I thrive better on the hard work in the stokehole off course it is a very light job I have got and a responsible job to but I am thinking of turning it in as it does not suit me. I see the Titanic has went down with above 1000 people.

On 9th August, 1912, he wrote from Geraldton in Western Australia acknowledging a letter and newspapers and continues:

I met a fellow called Cockburn in Fremantle he has just come out they used to live beside us in Eldon St. He is firing on one of the [indecipherable]. Now Mother I think I will leave the Kooringa when we get east agian because the greasing is knocking me up I have been getting very thin and as pale as a ghost. I weigh above eleven stone and a half now. I cant eat I have lost my appetite for when I was firing I could eat like a horse for the Kooringa is a pretty heavy firing job and very hot so I think I will have a months rest and then look for another firing job. Now Mother I am enclosing a PO for three pound. So give my respects to all my friends at home and with love to you and Annie.

A Week in Melbourne

A letter on 3rd November, 1912, tells that he spent a week in Melbourne but gives no details and concludes: "Now Mother I have not much to say in this letter as I have to go on watch now."

Another letter from Melbourne, 12th December, 1912, mentions: "I think I will leave the Kooringa after the New Year and go across to the New Zealand coast and getting tired of this side so I think that I will have a change."*

A letter from Bunbury, 11th January, 1913, is concerned with the money he is sending to his Mother whose welfare is his constant theme:

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that we arrived here this

* There is no evidence that he went to New Zealand.

morning from Gerarlton. We have had a very fair passage the weather here just now is terribly hot, yesterday the heat in the engine room was 125 degrees so you will see that it was kinder hot. Now Mother I am sending you a PO for three quid so that this one will be the last one for 1912. I have sent you 12 PO for three quid with this one for 1912 making it 36 pound for last year so when you answer this letter you can let me know if you have received the 36 pound all right counting this in with it.

Like a Ghost

9–2–13
SS Kooringa
Port Kembla

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that I am still alive and kicking. We arrived here this morning from Sydney where we have been lying for a week it was all right in Sydney and we missed our passage from Sydney to Port Kembla . . . Now Mother how are you and Annie getting on. I hope you are both keeping well. I am not keeping too good myself just at present I am very white and thin I am more like a ghost than a man as far as colour goes but I am making this my last trip on the Kooringa and then I am going to have a spell and then I think I will go up into the Bush for a while . . .

14–3–13
S.S. Kooringa
Port Kembla

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that we arrived here today from the West and we are leaving again on Monday for the West again and then to Melbourne where I think I will leave for I am not keeping too good I want to see a docter in the West and he told me that I was properly run down and that I needed a rest to put me right so that I will have to do this trip round West and then to Melbourne where I think that I will have a couple of months holiday that is of course if the exchecker will hold out that long and then I will look for another job or else I will go to the bush for a while for I am getting sick of going to sea so that I think a spell ashore will do me good for I feel properly rotten and I look more like a

corpse than anything else of course that is the engine room that does that and I cant eat my grub like I use to but for all that I am pretty heavy yet for I am twelve stone three pounds for I am all bone . . . Now Mother I am sending you a P.O. for three quid and I have not had a letter from you for above three months I hope you are getting mine all right for every one I send you there is a money order in it for 3 quid.

A Spell Ashore

11–6–13
616 Bourke Street
W. Melbourne

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that I have left the Kooringa and that I am having a spell ashore in Melbourne. I left the Kooringa last week I have been laid up with influenza between the West and Melb. so that I finished up when we got in but I am beginning to feel all right again but I am going to have a spell ashore until I feel all right again. Now Mother I hope that you and Annie are keeping all right and that things are still going all right at home. Now Mother I am sending you a P.O. for ten pound so that you will be all right for the next three months and then I expect I will have started by then and then I will be able to send you some more. I have not had a letter from you for over one month but I expect that there will be some letters lying for me at Stockton so just keep on writing there and I can have them forwarded on to me . . . I was weighing myself this morning and I went 12 stone 7 pounds so that is not too bad for I have not any sloppy fat on me for I am pretty solid. I will be 21 on the 6th of July . . .

Sick and "Dead Broke" in Melbourne

11–8–13
330 Raglan Street
Port Melbourne

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that I am still alive and kicking. I had a letter from you about 3 weeks ago and it was five weeks before since I had the one before you were saying in your last

letter that you had never had a letter from me for two months well I think that there must be a mistake somewhere for I have not missed a month in writing to you and sending you a P.O. since I joined the Kooringa. I left her over two months ago but I told you in my last letter that I had left her and in my last letter to you I sent you a P.O. for ten pounds I expect you have got that all right by now. Well Mother I had six weeks holiday after leaving the Kooringa and I was going to go to sea the next week when I got a very bad dose of cold I have been in bed about a month and I am just beginning to get about again it has given me a shaking I can tell you for I am as weak as a rat. I was about 12 stone six before I was sick and I have lost about 8 pound in weight I look properly consumptive. I got my photo taken before I laid up I am sending you an enlargement and three small ones. Well Mother I hope that you and Annie are keeping all right and that things are going on all right at home for I cant send you any more money until I start again about next week if I feel strong enough for a man dont want to be feeling very weak to be firing on this coast now that the summer is coming on again. So with ove to you and Annie

I remain
Your loving Son
Jack

In the next letter, 31st December, 1913, written from Port Pirie Jack was himself again and working on the S.S. *Tarcoola.**

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that I am still alive and kicking. Well Mother you will be wondering why I have been so long in writing well things have been bad with me this last few months so it was no good writing as I had nothing to send. I am firing in this ship she is a pretty fair job but I am in pretty good trim just now I feel as fit as a fiddle. I was weighed last night and I went 12 stone 5 lbs so that I am in pretty good nick for to be working in the stokehole for I have no soft fat on me. Now Mother I think I have had all your letters up to now and I got your Xmas Card and one from Annie and one from Sarah it was good of you to remember me . . .

* 2,647 tons. Built Tyne 1902. Adelaide Steamship Company.

"*Four Years Since I Left Home*"

1–3–14
S.S. Yankalilla
Sydney

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that I am still alive and kicking I wrote you a letter a couple of months and sent you three pound. I expect that you have got it by now. Well Mother I had a row with the chief on the Tarcoola and I finished up and was out of work for three weeks before I joined this one . . . Now Mother I am sending you a P.O. for three quid. It is four years since I left home how the time does fly but if I can hang this ship down for a twelve month I will have a run home. I am beginning to get tired of this country I think that I would be just as well sailing out of home for the money is getting bigger at home and the money goes sharp out here. Well I think that this is all I have to say except that I am keeping well . . .

9–4–14
S.S. Yankalilla
Melbourne

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that we arrived here today. Now Mother I have been in this ship about 2½ months so dont write any more letters to the Tarcoola write to the mission at Stockton. Tell Annie that I got her letter all right and the 5 Woodbines* but I did not get those that she sent to the Mission at Stockton but I hope to get them later on . . . I have still got Jack Jackson along with me he is trimming to me he is getting on all right he knew about his uncle being dead before I got your letter I was showing him round Melbourne last night he was surprised to see such a fine city for Newcastle on Tyne is not a patch on Melb. Thats the worst of you people in the old country you all seem to think that Astrailia is all bushland but there are finer and more up to date cities out her than a lot of the cities at home . . . P.S. I am sending you a money order for three quid.

* Annie had a habit of tucking a few cigarettes in her letters. There were some in the letters returned to her from Gallipoli after his death on 19th May, 1915.

"*Every Bird Likes Its Own Nest Best*"

5–5–14
S.S. Yankalilla
Port Pirie

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that we arrived here today from Adilade. I have been in this ship now over three months now. I wrote a letter to you last month and one the month before and I sent three pound in each letter. I expect that you have got them by now. Well Mother I got a letter from Annie with your letters and she was telling me that you had been poorly but I hope that you are all right again by now. I wish you were keeping in the same sort of health as I am at present I never felt better in my life before. I got weighed last night and I went 12 stone 4 pound so that is not a bad weight for a man working in the stokehole and doing plenty of hard solid work. I am going to try and hang this ship down for another eight or nine months and then I am coming home so see and start looking your best for next year for I am getting about sick and tired of knocking about out here and you know the old saying that "Every bird likes its own nest best" so you can look out for me next year even if I land home broke . . . P.S. I am enclosing a P.O. for 3 quid.

"*Annie . . . is very like me*"

30–5–14
S.S. Yankelilla
Melbourne

Well Mother I am glad to hear that you are keeping better now for I am keeping in the pink of condition. Tell Annie that I got her letter and Photo all right and I am sure that she looks real well. I have shown it to a lot of my friends and they say that she is very like me . . . P.S. I am enclosing a P.O. for 3 quid.

S.S. Yankalilla
Newcastle
(undated approximately July 1914)

Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that we arrived here today from Fremantle. Now Mother you will have to excuse the pencil as I

had no ink. I sent you a letter from Melb last trip it will be on its way to by now. It was my birthday the other day I was 22 how the time sharp flies. I am sending you a P.O. for three pound in this letter that will make fifteen quid since I joined this ship . . . I will be home next year so see and be looking your best for next year . . .

P.S. Give Annie my love and tell her that I got her box of fags all right also the fags in her letters and thank her for me for being so kind also give her this P.O. for a quid . . .

Little did he suspect that instead of seeing the realization of his dream to take a trip home to see his adored Mother he would be in a hero's grave at Hell Spit.

His generosity and constant caring for his Mother shines through all these simple letters.

The wages of a stoker on a coastal ship were £8 a month.

CHAPTER NINE

POSTSCRIPT

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DONKEY?

THE DONKEY IS, perhaps, the most misunderstood and underrated of all animals. He is represented as the symbol of all that is stupid, stubborn and ridiculous. And yet there is considerable intelligence in his big, heavy head. Those who know donkeys say that there is a fundamental passion for freedom in them.

A donkey's ability to secure footing in rocky, slippery places is remarkable. There is nothing in the formation of his hoof to suggest that he is more sure-footed than the horse, yet he certainly is. He can scramble with considerable speed among rocks and treacherous ways impossible to a horse. The domestic donkey reveals the ancient skill of his family by the way in which he creeps with heavy burdens along dangerous paths where only he or his relative, the mule, could go.

If the ass is delightfully ludicrous it must be remembered that he is also tireless. That is a point to remember in this story.

Laurence Sterne, the genial author of *Tristram Shandy*, thought the ass the most sociable, the most companionable, the most talkative of all beasts. The most talkative! "Meet him where I will, whether in town or country, in cart or under panniers, in liberty or in bondage, I have ever something civil to say to him; and, as one word begets another, I generally fall into conversation with him; and surely never is my imagination so busy as in framing his responses from the etchings of his countenance. In truth, the ass is the only

creature of all the classes of beings below me with whom I can do this." Sterne goes on to discuss the possibility of conversation with parrots, jackdaws, apes, dogs, and cats; but he gives them all up in despair. They lack, he says, the talent for conversation.

Simpson would have agreed with Sterne, for those who met him in the Gully constantly heard him talking to his donkey, but only he heard or knew what the donkey said to him.

The donkey had his high days in the greatest story ever told. It was a donkey that carried Christ, yet unborn, to Bethlehem and as a dear and aching armful into Egypt.* He had an important part to play in the parable that has moved the world to caring compassion and generous charity – the Good Samaritan and his donkey on the Jericho road.

Christ made His triumphal entry into old Jerusalem seated on an ass when the crowd went wild with delight and spread their robes and tore down palm branches for it to walk over.

It was this scene which inspired G. K. Chesterton to write his poem on The Donkey:

When fishes flew and forests walk'd
  And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
  Then surely I was born;

With monstrous head and sickening cry
  And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
  On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
  Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb
  I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
  One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
  And palms before my feet.

* St. Matthew 2: 13.

As we have seen, Simpson and his donkey met on the second day of the Landing (26th April). There was no formal introduction, said Leigh Woods,* but from the first the attachment was mutual. Perhaps the poor, neglected beast was nervous among all the explosions and turmoil and welcomed the comfort of a friendly man who understood donkeys. Maybe Simpson was fed up with things in general and found in the donkey a link with his childhood and South Shields where his heart was. Anyway they cottoned on to each other and for a month were inseparable mates.

Every day they went together up Shrapnel Gully – the donkey by his side or following him like a big, well-trained dog to bring some mother's son from the trenches or the scrub. Did the donkey know that he was carrying a stricken soldier down that valley of death and that he must tread gently to avoid the jerks? Of course not, but there are still Anzacs whom it is better not to contradict when they say he did.

A queer animal, that donkey, a bantam in size, save for his ears which were inordinately long and generally at half-lop. When his ears went full cock, the boys knew that it was well to take cover for it was a sure sign that the gun "Beachy Bill" had barked and that a shell was on its way.

"The donkey," wrote E. C. Buley, "was a little mouse-coloured animal, no taller than a Newfoundland dog. His master called him Abdul. The man seemed to know by intuition every twist and slope of the tortuous valleys of Sari Bair. The donkey was a patient, sure-footed ally, with a capacity for bearing loads out of all proportion to his size."†

There are a variety of accounts as to how he came by the donkey. Brigadier-General C. H. Brand told me that a number of Greek water-carriers with donkeys were landed on 25th April, but they were soon sent away and some of the donkeys strayed into the gullies. Another version is that they were captured with some mules from the Turks.

* In *The Scotsman.*

† *Glorious Deeds of Australia in the Great War*

In the Australian War Museum Library – to which I have been constantly indebted – there is a letter from J. G. Jackson in which he says that the New Zealanders certainly had donkeys. There were two on board the S.S. *Goslar*, the transport from which he landed. The purpose of these animals, so the troops were told by their officers, was to test drinking water "as it was a well-known fact that donkeys will not drink impure or poisoned water".

It is certain for various reasons that there were donkeys on Gallipoli. Captain Longmore (of the 16th Battalion Machine Gun Section) reports what he heard from Captain H. J. Sykes of the same Battalion:

> "Abdul was one of two donkeys purchased by members of the 16th Battalion Machine Gun Section at Lemnos. Those optimists thought they would need assistance in carrying their guns to Constantinople and they paid £2/15/– for their long-eared transports. At Anzac they dropped them overboard and saw them swim ashore forgetting all about them until they saw one of them in partnership with Kirkpatrick. . . ."

This account was supported by a report of an interview with Mr. T. Gorman, formerly Lieutenant Gorman, the quartermaster of 16th Battalion, the man responsible for purchasing the donkeys. The report stated that while in Lemnos before the landing Lieutenant Gorman was impressed with the possibility of using donkeys to transport stores after arrival on Gallipoli. Colonel Pope, Commander of the Battalion, approved the purchase of a couple of donkeys from Battalion funds. Gorman made the purchase at Lemnos. When the troops disembarked at the scene of hostilities the donkeys were hoisted in a sling into boats bound for the shore. These were the only two donkeys landed by the Australian troops.

This report was amplified by Private H. Thorne:

> My first acquaintance with them [the donkeys] was on board the troopship *Haidar Pasha*, on which the 16th Battalion or part of it proceeded towards Gallipoli. They were handed over to the

Machine Gun Section to carry their gear and ammunition after we landed. I well remember the disparaging remarks passed at the time about the donks and Lieutenant Carse suggested it would be to our interest if we clipped them, as they had very long hair and were alive with lice.

I was assisting in this operation when we received orders to fall in ready to disembark on to the destroyer. I know we had to leave one donkey clipped on one side and not the other. However the destroyer, H.M.S. *Ribble*, was alongside and over we had to go leaving our job unfinished.

We proceeded to within, I should guess, a quarter of a mile of the shore, with the guns on the destroyer going full blast, when we had to tranship again into small rowing boats in charge of one sailor and pull ourselves ashore.

We were all aboard the row boats and just on the point of leaving the destroyer when one of the naval officers in charge woke up to the fact that we were going without our donkeys, and he sang out "Who do these donkeys belong to?" Not a soul answered. We did not want them in the first place, and secondly there was no room in the boats for donkeys, we were packed as it was. We pulled away without them and looking back I saw them pushed overboard into the water and they must have swum ashore. Anyhow that is the conclusion that most of us that survived came to when we recognized them later on. One of them must have been a mare donkey in foal, for a young donkey was born there about May.

This last point has a bearing on a statement by my friend Padre A. P. Bladen that one of Simpson's donkeys was in an "interesting condition".

On that May morning when a machine-gun bullet found his great heart, the patient Simpson was bringing down was wounded again, but the donkey continued on its well-known way to the dressing-station.

What became of the little donkey with the long ears and the sturdy grey back that was so often stained red? Dale Collins* and Dr. Bean† support the oft-repeated statement that he became the pet of the 6th Mountain Battery Indians,

* *Anzac Adventure*, by Dale Collins.

† *Official History of Australia in the War, 1914–18*, by C. E. W. Bean.

who took him with them at the evacuation. So perhaps he lived out his years contentedly munching green grass on the peaceful plains of India with far-away recurring memories of that strange man who adopted him in his loneliness and with whom he walked the long rough trail up and down Shrapnel Gully.

One day Philadelphia Robertson contemplated the bronze statuette of Simpson and his Donkey beside the Shrine of Remembrance which dominates Melbourne's St. Kilda Road and looks out over Port Phillip Bay which Simpson knew well and she went home to write this poem:

Would it seem strange to you
If somewhere in Elysian fields
Cropping the herbage by a crystal stream,
Wandered the little ass, tall Simpson's friend?
Or strange at all,
If, down the hill, beneath the flowering trees,
By meadows starred with lilac and with rose,
Came Simpson, singing, his brown hands
With celestial carrots filled
For his old friend?
To me, not strange at all,
Amidst the beauty of some shining sphere
They surely move –
Those deathless hosts of Christlike chivalry.

THANKSGIVING

I HAVE EXPRESSED my gratitude in these pages to many kindly people who have helped in my search for John Simpson Kirkpatrick across Australia and in England. To these I add my indebtedness to the following:

To the Director and Staff of the National War Memorial, Canberra, Australia.

To the Staff of the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

To The Prime Minister and Government of Australia for permission to reproduce the painting of "The Man With The Donkey". This picture has been the subject of considerable controversy. It is not an actual portrait of Simpson, but I have accepted it as an artist's symbolic presentation of the man of the legend. The artist Sapper Moore Jones of New Zealand himself entitled it "Murphy and His Donkey". It was painted from sketches made on Gallipoli after he was invalided to England. The fact that the figure is not a portrait of Simpson does not in my view, detract from its symbolic appeal.

To Mr. John Masefield, O.M., Poet Laureate, to whom I first told this story of "The Man With The Donkey" after making the exciting discoveries at South Shields. He has honoured me with his friendship for nearly thirty years. I was sitting in his quiet home, Burcote Brook overlooking the Thames at Abingdon, when I asked him how he came to write his prose classic of Gallipoli. Then I inquired if he knew Simpson. He did not. I told him the facts in outline. "You must write that story!" he said with unwonted insistence. Until that moment I had not considered recording it. I have now heeded his charge.

To the Trustees of the Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne, for permission to include a photograph of the stat-

uette of "The Man With The Donkey" by the sculptor Wallace Anderson, which is associated with the Shrine.

To the Postal Department of the Commonwealth of Australia for graciously supplying an advance photograph of the design featuring Simpson and his Donkey for the postage stamps to mark the Jubilee of the Anzac landing on 25th April, 1915.

I am grateful to my friends, Mr. Cecil Edwards, former Editor of the Melbourne *Herald*, and Mr. John Hetherington, of *The Age*, Melbourne, for reading the manuscript and making welcome suggestions.

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The Man With The Donkey

BENSON, Sir Irving

The Man With The Donkey
BENSON, Sir Irving

About this book

There has been a halo of romance and mystery about "The Man with the Donkey".

Sir Irving Benson tells for the first time the full story of the man behind the legend. He has talked with everybody he could find who knew him on Gallipoli and traced his life from the boy at South Shields, in Durham, where he led donkeys along the sands.

A youth of 18, he went to Australia on a Cargo ship as a steward, then worked on sugar plantations in Queensland, carried his swag to a cattle station in New South Wales, became a coal miner in the Illawarra Range, joined a gold rush in Western Australia, worked as a fireman on coastal ships until he enlisted in 1914 in Perth and thence to Egypt, Lemnos and Gallipoli. Through all his wanderings he cherished a great devotion for his Scottish mother who shone for him like the evening star. Here are the letters he wrote to her. This fine, sensitive story of "The Man with the Donkey" may well become an Australian classic.

The design of three special postage stamps issued by the Australian Government to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Gallipoli landings