

York College of Arms and Pedigree, 649 Broadway, which he had established. He and his wife let part of their house and did a little importing. One of Mrs Bennett's sisters worked in a mantilla showroom but, wrote her mother, 'The owner is a friend of Papa's. It is a very respectable position'. No doubt, but the family's situation does seem rather precarious. I find it easy to see how Mrs Bennett, too, would welcome steady careers for her children.

Mrs Bennett's brothers do not appear to have considered the United States as a land of opportunity. Three of the four left in their teens, one, who was drowned not many years later, for New Zealand and two for Australia. Only Henry, an opera singer, remained in America. William and Agnes Bennett met when, aged only nineteen, she travelled alone to the southern hemisphere to check on her brothers' welfare.<sup>3</sup> A few years after their marriage in 1862, he built a house in Neutral Bay and called it Honda after a place in South America, which he had visited. Honda was for him the fulfilment of a dream, but his wife hated being left with babies (and a servant or two) in an area where for years there were only five other houses. Letters from the early period of the marriage reveal her unhappiness when he was away and the tension between them.<sup>4</sup> She was strong and independent, not one to give in easily. Mr Bennett took everything the hard way. He admitted to being a 'real old croaker' and a worrier. Neither of them had much sense of humour.

Who decided on the move to England? Presumably they were in agreement. He could hardly compel her to go against her will, she could hardly compel him to spend almost all his salary on the venture and to endure great loneliness. Mrs Bennett sometimes wrote<sup>5</sup> as though she were carrying out his intentions: 'your wishes ever uppermost in my efforts & thoughts' (letter of 18 December 1878) and 'my charge', 'my mission', and 'If I can only keep my health and fulfil my duty and charge to your satisfaction'.

But he wrote (2 September 1878) 'the great reason that I consented to you going that you might not be a slave to the caprices of Australian domestics' and 'it was one of my great inducements to part with you to think that you yourself would have some rest and pleasure' and 'one of my reasons for letting you go was that you might have some pleasure'. These words make me think that she may have been the initiator. She was a forceful woman with a more clear-cut personality than her husband, as he recognised: 'you have so much more decision & force of character in the matter of decision'.

I am inclined to think that the idea of the move originated with her but that he laid down the rules for the children's education. A stay of about three or four years was planned. Neither guessed the problems this would bring: he found the loneliness more crushing than he had expected, she found the practical details burdensome and there were unexpected difficulties with the children's health.