

sights. They glimpsed Queen Victoria, whom Mrs Bennett called 'a dreadful bundle'. The older ones went to the opera, to hear the great mezzo-soprano, Zelia Trebelli, in *Carmen*. 'A fine opera', wrote Mrs Bennett, 'but the characters lower-class, the heroine a factory girl. We should not choose the same opera again'.

Towards the end of the family's stay, Mr Bennett grew despondent, wondering if the boys' undistinguished progress justified all the trouble and loneliness. He urged his wife to push them even harder. 'I am so afraid', he wrote, 'of their not being any brighter than the ordinary colonial boys they will have to compete with in the struggle of life here & indeed it is a greater struggle than in England'.

Mrs Bennett did not believe the children would have done better in Australia. 'The girls certainly would not and Walter is certainly on the way to be far ahead of what Frank was. Our boys are not particularly bright but I think have done as much as abilities and health permit'.

The girls did better than their brothers. Fan gained a prize at school which earned her in addition a white camellia, Al was awarded a certificate and a red one. Mrs Bennett thought more highly of girls' schools in England than of boys'; she considered correctly that too much Latin was taught at boys' schools and that the mathematics teaching was inadequate.

Mr Bennett continued to worry about his three older sons, then aged eleven to sixteen. Occasionally, he wrote as though irrevocable steps had been taken, writing, 'Poor fellows it would have been better for them if they had been able to follow the paths I have traced out for them'. And of Alf, aged about thirteen, he wrote sadly, 'I sometimes think I should have selected some other line for him', as though no change was possible.

The parents began to discuss the date of return. Mr Bennett was torn between wanting them back and wanting them to get the utmost benefit from their stay. He suggested later and later dates; December 1881, March 1882. Mrs Bennett felt bound to stay till December 1881, when Wal would have heard the result of the naval examination. She proposed to leave immediately afterwards, bringing Wal back if he failed, leaving him in the navy's care if he passed. She wanted to bring Frank back, too, so that he could take the medical courses that would soon be offered by the University of Sydney. (They began in 1883.)

Mrs Bennett's death from smallpox in June 1881 changed everything. A smallpox epidemic led her to have the children vaccinated but not herself, since she did not want a sore arm at a time when she might have to nurse the children. She intended to be vaccinated a week later but by then Harry had developed scarlet fever. She hardly left his side for ten days and was not vaccinated until after she had developed smallpox. Ironically, the children had little trouble with their vaccination.