

**The Boulton Grandparents' Letters
from (or on the way to/from) Australia
1882-1894**

Eleven of the letters that Ransome's maternal grandparents sent home between 1882 and 1894 have survived and are reproduced here with the permission of Special Collections & Galleries, Leeds University Library (Archive File BC MS 20C RANSOME/5/1). These were transcribed by John Edwards in preparation for his book *Edward Baker Boulton: Australia's Forgotten Artist*. Many thanks for this hard work. The original idiosyncratic spelling, grammar, punctuation and abbreviations have been retained.

Edward's letters are provided first, followed by Rachel's. The chronological order is as follows:

EB1 to My dearest Edith <i>[Edith marries Cyril Ransome</i>	20 November 1882 <i>December 1882]</i>	from Walcha
EB2 to My dearest Edith	15 January 1883	from Walcha
EB3 to My dearest Edith <i>[Arthur Ransome born</i>	28 January 1883 <i>18 January 1884]</i>	from Walcha
EB4 to My dearest Edith	1 January 1887	from Walcha
EB5 to My dearest Edith	15 February 1890	from <i>SS Coromandel</i> (returning to Australia)
RB1 to My very dear children	28 May 1890	from Walcha (Mary's Wedding)
EB6 to My dearest Edith	30 May 1890	from Walcha (Mary's wedding)
RB2 to My very dear children	13 March 1891	from Walcha
RB2 to My own dear girls	20 March 1891	from Walcha
EB7 to My dearest Millie	27 November 1893	from <i>Australien</i> (returning to Australia)
EB8 to My Dear Edith	4 January 1894	from Walcha
<i>[Edward dies in Walcha</i>	11 October 1895	Walcha]
<i>[Rachel dies in Wiltshire</i>	<i>May 1911]</i>	

Totalling nearly 9000 words and beginning at the time of the engagement of Ransome's parents, through Arthur's birth in 1884 up until the last full year of Edward Baker Boulton's life (1895), these letters from two people who were so important to Ransome provide a rich backdrop to his formative years and the stories of Australia that eventually made their way into his most famous books.

Edward's Letters (mainly to Edith)

Letter EB1:

Bergen op Zoom
Walcha 20 Nov/82

My dearest Edith

It gives me very great pleasure to find that you are enjoying yourself so much and to learn that your future goodman has so many tastes congenial with your own.

How I should liked to have visited the Lake District with you and have enjoyed with you the lovely scenery of Westmoreland and Cumberland.

I wonder what I shall think of English scenery after my more extended experience of Australia. We have had splendid rains and the country is now in "verdant green." Our promise of fruit and vegetables after last year's drought is overwhelming & the "Saccharine demand" for the various jams will be enormous and the pot boiling unlimited. Our woolpackers

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have gone astray on their way from Sydney but fortunately we cannot shear during the rain of which we are now getting plenty. I only arrived here on the 16th 19 hours from Sydney and three hours! from the station 9 or 10 miles from this.

I found them all well, Niz drove me and all were excited when I reached our snug cottage after an absence of nine months. I left B op Z looking rather like a desert and a desert it became until within six weeks, now it is like Erin's green isle but it will take twelve months for some of the paddocks to recover.

22nd. We began shearing a few yesterday but this morning it poured and I think we are at the commencement of a wet season - as they say always a feast or a famine. We shall have a very light clip but everyone seems in that same boat for the late drought was pretty general. We have fewer sheep to shear than last

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year but the truth is this property is too small for the family so when I do come home I fancy I shall have to go out again either with the family or alone - for the property must be increased or an additional one bought as soon as an advantageous offer presents itself. You see I am already inducting you into the pros & cons which accompany the "blessed state."

By the way you will require to keep good time and it may be as well to inform me if you have a watch and of what kind.

I am busy painting as usual, touching on old pictures instead of getting on with new ones for which I have several orders - Georgie is now painting in oils and promises to get on very well.

I have finished a picture of Sydney from the same spot as that one was taken, which was presented to the Queen by the Government of NSW but it is a better composed

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picture and better painted and the distance I think more distant. I have written to Sir Alfred Stephen one of the Trustees of the Art Gallery to have it placed there. I have orders for four pictures - so I hope to pay my passage home and something to boot.

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I intend bringing with me a good many sketches particularly those of the Richmond & the Clarence I wish I could have added the Tweed, the most beautiful of all.

I expect I shall find you all much changed as you must expect to see me but the younger ones I shall hardly recognise. Enclosed you will find the duplicate of the draft for 100 pounds which I sent you in my last - & which I now forward in case of accident to the first. Remember me very kindly to Cyril & with my love & prayers for you & indeed for all of you. I am forever your affectionate

Father.

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Letter EB2:

Bergen op Zoom
Walcha 15th Jan/83

My dearest Edith,

I received your Mamma's letter of 28 Nov. in which she tells me that you intended changing your name on the 28th of the following month & very sorry that I am not to be present to do what is customary & comely in such a case however I have the satisfaction of believing that you will pass into the hands of one whose chief delight will be to make life agreeable, to enter into all your tastes & to sympathise with you & assist you in all the duties & trials of this mortal state and I trust you will have few of the latter but in this we must recollect we cannot be the choosers & as to the former I am sure that you are not one to shirk them and I feel this that doing our duty lessens our trials

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or at all events enables us to meet them in a better spirit.

Your brothers & sisters here are all very much pleased to think that the wedding has not been delayed & regret that they will be absent but no doubt they will all be in a writing mood & tell all their good wishes much better than I can express them.

You know how much I always loved you but you can hardly tell how much I have missed your sympathy in our beloved art or how much this seven years (I may say nine with the exception of three months) has cost me. It is a sad reflection to think that so many of your brothers & sisters will hardly know me or I them, at least at first sight & that I have lost the pleasure of watching them during their earliest years. My great consolation has been that they

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could not have been more tenderly or carefully brought up than they have been.

I hope my little present arrived in time. I only wish it had been five times as much but your Mamma will have told you what a sad dry year was last one & in consequence how the clip fell short of the previous one. However you will be glad to learn that the present season so far has been one of the pleasantest & the most promising we have experienced for the last 12 years. I believe there was more grass in one paddock this time than there was on the whole property last year.

We are constantly having thunder showers which keep everything fresh & the supply of grass & fruit is something wonderful. I believe we shall have more than a hundred tons of hay - indeed it is so plentiful

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that in some places it is selling at 20/- a ton - however it is satisfactory to have plenty whatever we may be able to do with it.

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I am painting & for money too but I trust that won't cause me to fall off tho' it has been the bane of many who have left nature & taken to "making pictures" - than which nothing is more pernicious, aesthetically or morally.

I don't think I shall sail before the 8th March or perhaps the 22nd those being the days on which the P&O vessels sail - on the 8th the Nizam T2700 sails & on 22nd the Parramatta T4500 [now].

I hope, at least I look forward to spending some happy time with you & Cyril - he will be able to give us his aesthetic ideas on art & tho' they may not be so severe as "Fors Clavigera" they may be more pleasing & suitable to our small doings. With my kindest love & prayers for your happiness I am ever your affectionate

Father
E B Boulton

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Letter EB3:

Bergen op Zoom
Walcha 28 Jany 83

My dearest Edith

I have your letter of 14 Decr & I hope by next mail to learn all the particulars of your wedding.

How I should like to have been present but sad necessity has kept me here for nine years excepting the short trip home & back in 1875. However you have a good substitute for me in your Uncle Tayleur who will do & say every thing that is required very nicely on such an occasion.

I anticipate much pleasure in your coming to see me & walk over the old fields & talk over the old events never to return & depend on it I shall not be very long at home before I come & pay you & Cyril a visit & perhaps surprise

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you in your studio.

You ask for a picture of mine & you shall have one as soon as I do one sufficiently good for your critical eyes which I fancy will have been sharpened by the aesthetic tastes of your partner. I have a book with some small pictures about half full which I have done at sundry times & which you may remember I promised to give you long ago. I see you intend to make partly the same tour which your Mamma & I made. I wonder if you will sketch Warwick Castle from the same point that I did.

I am glad to see that you intend following up your taste be getting lessons. I hope you will avoid Manner & keep a good style - the great thing to learn is the management of the brush & the

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palette - little by little is I believe the only way of painting well - to feel sure of what you are going to do that is exactly done as you intended & does not require alteration in form or colour.

The Wrights have been very kind & no doubt they are proud of you & so they ought for you have done their judgment good credit.

The Whittall & Co's deputation must have been very amusing & [Marie?/Nicole?] would have made a good painting tho' he must have omitted what she no doubt considered the best part of it & no doubt was if we could only always remember it.

I have finished several pictures lately & have them on hand now. Just before I came here from Sydney I painted a picture at Rangers nearly

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the same as that the NSW Govt bought & sent as a present to Her Majesty.

I left it at the Club & it has been so much admired that I thought of having it Chromolithographed in London & wrote to a Sydney firm to know if they would get subscribers, advertise etc & what their commission would be. They wrote back that they would do it for 40% on [on] the publishing price - now suppose it brought out at 30/- each their share would be 12/- per copy. If 1000 were sold their little Comm wd amount to 600 pounds! Of course that put an end to the idea as far as they were concerned.

As the girls are writing I will only say my passage is not yet taken & that I trust I may be able within 3 months once more to salute you in the meantime with my hearty prayers for the welfare & happiness of yourself & your partner I am ever your affectionate

Father

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Letter EB4:

B op Z New Years Day 1887

My dearest Edith,

Your last letter has given me much pleasure as it was very interesting & your account of your belongings very satisfactory. I am in an undecided state of mind with regard to my future. Your mother has proposed for the four girls to come out with her & join me here. I have written (several months ago) that I was intending to go home - between my letter & the reception of your Mamma's comes the death of my old friend & as I am an executor (one of four) I know under his will I am divided about the best policy. I cannot remain absent from her & I see a difficulty about bringing out all the four girls for I do not suppose that your mother would like to adopt this as her permanent residence - the consequences of all coming out would be a heavy drain on

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my finances here -

£400 for passages & outfit

400 for building a dining room 4 bedrooms etc

400 for passage home in two or three years

There is an alternative viz for your mother & two girls to come out & two to live with someone in England who would take them on terms for two years. By this the passages might be reduced to £250 & very little building would be required here. We are about making a few necessary alterations & a decent servants room is required & the whole if the smaller members only were coming could be done at once, but I am waiting for a copy of the will to decide whether I go or remain here.

It is not pleasant to be in this state sitting between two stools, but I hope a few days will decide. I cannot say it is a happy N.Y. day on that account, nevertheless it shall not prevent my wishing you & yours a Happy New Year & many of them.

We are all very well but busy for the girls not having any help but the boy who cuts wood, milks the cows, blacks the shoes, etc - are cooks & housemaids & I told them they should have the wages which wd be paid to servants if here. So I paid them to the end of last year £4 which would do as a NY's gift & hoped to reconcile them to their servitude.

This last year has been a prosperous one for us & the debt diminishes but what shall we say about this ominous 87 with the Czar off his head (not his head off) & France ready to fight her own shadow and Germany increasing her army.

Last year I sent all the wool by sailing ships - to delay arrival which was fortunate as it realised the advanced prices - this year I am reversing my policy & sending it by steamers so as to arrive before the Baltic is open & which generally opens with war if it is intended.

We have news of Lord Churchill's secession & as usual our Ministry had a little secession too - the Minister for Works. Every time an alteration or a change has taken place at home, so one takes place here. I shall be anxious to have Cyril's next book - I like the one he sent out very much & heartily I wish him success in his new work. I have read the greater part of Ticknor's life journal & correspondence & vote it about the best of the kind that ever was written - a good man & a good book. I wonder that you have not mentioned it. I have been painting lately & if I don't bring I must send you a half hour's work - a little sketch from our creek looking towards the house.

I have done two of old Biganzolo, L. Maggiore - am now finishing a picture of the Fitzroy Falls I took when at Bowral two months ago.

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I am afraid Ruskin would not look at my sketches - he would require a deeper study of nature. I paint too much indoors but I must go out more if only for the sake of my eyes & health - besides an outdoor sketch is worth a dozen over done drawings indoors. I shall be glad to learn more about Flamboro' Head - do you ever try painting in W colour on a monotoned paper - it is a great improvement for sunsets on a small scale. I have not tried it in extenso. Are there any artists who promise to become great? I know we have many who excel in technical work but are there any who touch the imagination like some of the old ones.

What a splendid gift is that by the Duke d'[Aumain] to the Institute of France. It was wise too - he might never see it again & it might be confiscated.

I have not made many (any) excursions lately nor paid my visit to the Hook family & the Tia Falls, about six miles from them for they have lost the youngest of their two sons (about 17) by Typhoid at school. Cecil Blossome with his new wife came to spend Xmas at her father's - Europambela. It is a pretty place on the Apsley which flows in full view of the house - having many pretty beaches with grand weeping willows - further down the river are "my Falls" cataracts, fearful ravines, gorges, etc. - of unknown depth - but all the country between us & the Pacific is of a tremendous character & were I younger & had a fellow spirit to join with me I doubt not I had long ago done it or broken my neck.

(No signature)

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Letter EB5: (From SS Coromandel)

15 Feby 90

My dearest Edith

Approaching Brindisi where we expect to arrive tomorrow at 10am/Sunday/& remain till 2pm Monday when the overland mail arrives & we are off.

We left a lot of passengers at the Gib & took on board another lot - then at Malta yesterday we did the same, at Brindisi we lose 28 & gain 30 & many of these go to Alexandria & we take up again at Ismailia - so just as we are beginning to know some nice people we lose them compensated perhaps by a few we don't know.

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Mother was delighted with Valetta - we saw The Palace & Church of St John Lateran & admired extremely the architecture of the Opera house & were fortunate enough to witness a rehearsal but it made an awful difference in the whole of them being in "mufti" & very plain mufti too, some of them awfully sloppy. Since I looked into the House six years ago it has been renewed in painting & scenery.

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It is very prettily painted & decorated & there are 5 tiers of boxes. We lunched at a table d'hote on Lobster, on Irish stew chicken & ham. Mr Ross catered, paid for everything & then divided & all we had to pay was 4/- each which included boat hire & a drive in two carriages to a monastery a short distance out, where we saw each in his own cell viz 20 or 30 baked friars - a most revolting sight thier {sic} flesh was all preserved but shrivelled & they appeared to be composed of baked mud in all attitudes & all standing - it was an awful Hobgoblin exhibition.

We got back to the ship in ample time but it was rough & Mother nearly call {sic} up her accounts - she looks very poorly this morning - but it is very cold & the Calabrian range is covered with snow. We are nearly 20 miles from the nearest portion of the shore but can see houses & large buildings. The snow was far

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down the sides of Etna which was quiescent.

It had a grand appearance at day light the Captn said but I was not aware we were so near & did not get up to look which I regretted very much as one look & a few lines would have impressed the effect on my pictorial senses. It is blowing very hard as I write but the vessel is very steady. I am glad she was substituted for the Rome. We have some very nice passengers - Mr Marriott is most gentlemanly but an invalid & Mrs Marriott is very nice but we lose them at Brindisi also Mr Oswald who is to meet his wife & child at B & then goes on the Cathay to Alexandria. It is about 4 days from Bi to the Canal where we pick up the Bishop Selwyn wife & child. Mr Tovey is curate at St Johns Wolloomoolloo, is a good chess player also the Bishop & we have a good many indifferent but there is a Glasgow body who is so far best.

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We dine without the fiddles, i.e. frames for keeping plates & dishes on the table, so steady is the vessel. The Australians muster strong - but some from each Colony & two from New Zealand.

The Captain is pleasant & a great talker & we now sit at his table. Mr & Miss [Mathers] then Mamma & self then Mr Harvey - who has a delicate boy - but the children have separate meals - Captn at top Dr at bottom - no one near on the other side but Brindisians will fill up on Monday. I have done only two small pencil sketches of African mountains. The Gib was fine by moonlight but we did not wake up at one o'clock to see it. That did I see [sic] Apis Hill of which Katie & Mab have a little drawing. I feel very little inclined to read or draw but hope soon to have milder weather.

Sunday morning. At breakfast we had a pleasant surprise by the letters

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placed before us at Breakfast & yours among the number & glad we were to find all well. I shall be very glad to learn that Cyril has been successful at all events, if elected he will be found the right man in the right place.

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We are all in a hurry & bustle being alongside the wharf - the Cathay taking away half our passengers & about 30 coming aboard by the mail train from London. When we get to Ismailia tell Arthur that we have seen no whale because they do not grow in the Mediterranean but we have seen a good many sea pigs otherwise called porpoises.

It is rather sad for us leaving so many kind friends - but such is the fate of those who travel by these sailing Hotels.

We have a/c of Mary & anticipate with anxiety an a/c of the operation she was about to undergo but we must bottle up our fear

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& hope, till we arrive at Albany, King Georges Sound. Our shearing was getting on well by Millie's letter but it was dreadfully late - 28th Decr she wrote & still ten days at least would be required to finish.

It may be all for the best as to price so I cease to nurse expectations one way or another. You must send this to Apsley Road as Katie has written me a very long letter which I intend answering from Egypt or Aden - indeed we hope to find opportunities of letting you know our adventures from every port. Mother is as lively as a grig today tho' she "parted company" yesterday for it was very cold & wet off Sorrento Bay & blew very strongly - this morning is lovely, a fine blue sky - & she as proud as a hen with a score of chickens is showing off her photos to various people - Tho' Sunday it at present is only used for dating letters.

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12pm Sunday

We have only just returned from prayers aboard ship Cathay, which is not equal in size or accommodation to ours. We shall not see our new passengers as they will not arrive before midnight so we shall only see them at breakfast tomorrow. We have learned nothing yet about Mrs Perkins but should we meet her on our way, you depend on your Mamma paying her every attention.

We have met with some very nice people whom in all probability we shall never see again. I must close this now for it is getting on for luncheon time. I hope to get a sketch or two soon - people avoided the place as uninteresting but I see a fort & I must disagree.

Your a/c of the tots is most amusing & I must write them a letter from Egypt - where the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry land.

With our best wishes & prayers for the welfare of all of you. Ever your loving

Father

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I hope that Cyril will head the poll by a considerable majority.

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My dear Edith

You will sympathise with your sister when you learn that Mary was married to her dear Donnie, Stewart Donald Ryrrie of Hugundra, Monaro District on the 27th inst by the Revd W.G. Moberley of Walcha Vicr in the drawing room of Bergen op Zoom.

It was a rather pretty ceremony in rather a small room with a party of fourteen. After the lunch we formed a group in front of the house and were photographed in the rain umbrellas being dispensed with for the instant. I need not say anything of the Bride's dress as it stands out very clearly & you will easily imagine its cream colour. The party was ourselves 8 - Parson wife & daughter 3 - Bessie, Donnie & best man Granville Delaune Ryrrie 3 - The parson's daughter saved the dreaded number 13 - It all passed off very

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cheerily & Niz drove them off amid a shower of rice to Walcha Road Station for Sydney where they have arrived having taken up their quarters at the Hotel Metropole & where they stay for a week & then proceed to Coolringdon the residence of her old friends the Ryrries. They want us to pay them a visit before we go home but it is a long journey.

Mary had a great number of presents from people I never heard of as well as her own friends & is a great favourite all round. She has every prospect of a happy life if she can only throw off what has troubled her for so long & of which I fancy the Doctors speak more hopefully.

Yesterday Millie gave a skating party on the rink at Walcha which is a very good & roomy one & were it not for the noise on the wooden floor

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it would be very pleasant fun. They all seemed to enjoy it & the visitors must have numbered about sixty. We all got home about sundown & today Bessie & R D Ryrrie left us for Sydney. So we are present only our family number but in a few days Georgie leaves us for home & Annie is to accompany him to Sydney. He has made up his mind to go by the Coptic sailing from NZ about 24 June & should reach England early in August. The vessel to join the Coptic leaves Sydney 11th June so he should have a few days at Auckland. 31st This must be posted about 12 today & it must go to Walcha. I have not much time for more.

We have just heard from B. Columbia that Herbert has got work & Tom has a prospect of employment & I trust of the future use of his knee but I know that even with care, it will take years to make it sound

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if ever it becomes so.

Your letters of 17th April were duly appreciated & were on the whole very cheering. I hope you may escape the bad effects of the East Winds which may always be looked for sooner or later in "Merrie" England - here we have a very mild winter & I am writing near an open window with a brilliant sunshine.

What a comfort to have the children's craniums all right - if you wash the hair in salt & water & leave it to dry & afterwards use a little vaseline you will get rid of all dandruff & thicken it.

I should like to have gone thro' the Tudor with you & Cyril "to do the biography." I hope you will send me an account of your seeings & doings in Cadogan Square.

I have painted three pictures of the Fort at Brindisi & am going to do a fourth after[glow]. I have done a B op Z for Mary bright & cheerful & have now begun a savage view for my friend Merewether of Blue Mountains Scenery near his place at Mt Wilson which combines fertility with barrenness.

Crosswritten¹:

Bad news of wool sales. Can't be helped. Kiss the children for me & with love from all to Cyril, yourself & them.

Ever your loving

Father. I have read Bruce's Napier & am reading Frith's memoirs now & soon Cyril's Shakespeare will be to the fore I hope.

Letter EB7 to Millie (his oldest child):

AUSTRALIEN,
27th Nov 1893

My dearest Millie

As you will have entered on your hospital duties, I send you a few lines to say that we got through the Tropics without being used up. I went ashore at Mahe with Mr Jacob but tho' a young man of lithe figure I soon exhausted his walking powers. We visited the Government Commissioner's garden and saw an Avenue of beautiful "dragon" trees - alone and a school of native boys who were receiving lessons out of class - we saw the Vanilla Creeper growing up the dragontrees but it was not in bloom and we gathered the most charming flowers in one orange vermilion perpetual and a lovely purple blossom on a long spike etc. etc. but they all withered very soon. We saw a Turtle feeding on a dung heap and we have since had turtle soup!

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On returning from our walk we sat down on a stump by the Avenue and began drawing it with the boys carrying their books on their heads - more came out and I was soon surrounded and had to use the ferrule of my umbrella - the masters then came out and we had a pleasant chat with them. One came from Reunion - by the way our Second Captn/ Chief Officer told me he came fro that island & he is a specimen Voila!! (sketch) very pleasant & so good natured you can't help loving him. Our Captn "Didier" talks like a steam machine from the pit of his stomach - the only man I ever heard like him but more bass was an old ship Captn [Mambo] of Sydney & he talked from the bottom of his stomach. Captn Didier calls me his garcon & I told him to treat age with proper respect. Cptn Lassiter always addresses me as Sir in respect of my antiquity.

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We have some pretty women on board Mrs Lassetter, Mrs Campbell & Mrs Byrne, with a plain but very humorous husband, a dentist, knows everybody in Sydney. She is very jolly & I flirt with her before his face. Mrs Colquhoun (Cahoon pr) is also very nice & Mrs Campbell very pretty and now the French lady has left, sits on the Capt'n's left. Then Mr C and Adml D and then your humble Servt and Herbert, Mr & Mrs Byrne and an officer - on the Capt'n's right Mrs Gadson, Mrs C's mother - such a charming old lady so pretty with her white curls, we talk over Sydney 50 years ago - then

¹ To reduce unnecessary wastage, writers in these times would write diagonally across the page over the first pages.

comes a French Gent'n then Mr Waite Jr about 30 - Mrs Waite & Mr W's father & mother - very good fun both, Mr & Mrs Lewis, London folk always at sea on a/c of her lungs - he demonstrates you can't beat that moustache (sketched) a musician and a chess player. We are about even but his wife [???] - plays better - but Lassetter

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beat her 2 to 1 and I beat him last night. My peg men are useful now the ship rolls so much - Lewis himself is rather a bully in his playing - Mr & Mrs Strange of Adelaide - she is a nice kind quiet body and has a baby with which I keep my hand in practice - it is a dear fat thing & would rather come to me than its own dad - Capt'n Lassetter has a boy teething & he's always squealing. I think he will be very nice when he gets over the teeth. Yesterday we had a thick drizzle but today is fine tho' cloudy - tomorrow off Cape Lewin & Wednesday at Albany - so this is ready for ship's post box if we don't land.

At 6 am sharp a round of bread & butter "si vous plait" - at 9 regular breakfast - at 1 tiffin - at 4 tea - at 6 dinner - at 9 [lime]-water brandy & [biscuits].

I also indulge in Sailors Biscuits soaked in water - & butter - capital wholesome & digestible.

Ever dearest Millie

Your loving P.F.

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Letter EB8:

B op Z

4.1.94

My Dear Edith

I don't think I have written a letter to you since I arrived here & am just beginning one which will be very quiet in its tone tho' just now the thunder is growling like a bear with a sore head. You will have seen or heard the contents of most of my letters which are by no means hopeful. The truth is that we are getting more deeply indebted & the sheep not much better. It would have horrified you to see the number of carcasses in the paddocks after shearing & footparing.

They simply could not support themselves & laid down & died - how many I cannot say - but where we have lost hundreds

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our neighbours have lost thousands - one of them has lost all but a few & he had at one time more than we.

It will require good generalship & great economy to weather this continuance of bad seasons & that we must pare most closely there is little doubt.

I hope we shall not be compelled to take Uncle Tom back but I fear that we must have Oswald as to pay for his support is so much heavier than if here & he certainly is getting better as his letters testify. Poor fellow I think if the Girls can make up their minds to receive him it will be a great pleasure to him to live with them again. I fear Mother & I will not be able to pay you our little gift for a year or two but every expense must be lopped off or we shall gradually be engulfed - by means of Interest to the Bank Loan Instalments (1/- acre on 7700 acres) -

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rabbits - kangaroos - Land Assessments - rent & town rates - all over & above the working expenses - besides the colony is threatened with a general land tax - & now you are as tired of reading as I am of writing this sad answer so turn over the leafs.

I hope Cyril's book is going along famously and will soon be published. Have you read Lord Sherbrook's life - also Lady Burton's Memoir's of her husband - I am anxious to read it in extenso - I got Lord Dundonald's Memoirs by his grandson - but both are so egregiously egotistical that I was disgusted and gave it up. I am at the last part of "Old Mortality" & wonder how I had forgotten some of the details - how clearly the characteristics of each individual is kept. His was a master mind - I think I have enjoyed its reperusal more now than I did on the first reading - How apt the headings of the chapters & I suspect Anon was often Walter himself.

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It is wonderful too his description of the Preachers of the Covenant, how he imitates their styles & exposes their hypocrisy & their vile morals & their demoniacal cruelty and subtlety.

The showers are on our Northern side today & yesterday on our south - we have hot weather here & then cold, the therm falling in a few hours 30° - but at several places inland 110° in the shade was registered - thunderstorms afterwards 52°!

Mary writes that some of their neighbours lost 3000 each - it might have been the cold that killed so many in our paddocks.

I hope soon to have a good a/c of your Xmas & New Year's doings. Here we have not only at home but in the district been very quiet - our poor town Walcha with its broad streets looks like another [Auburn] only the houses are new and roofed with iron - the inhabitants are too modest to appear - We expect Annie back from her visit to Mary in about a fortnight.

M. B. G. & H. join with me in all love & kind wishes.
Your loving & ancient P.F.

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Rachel's Letters

Letter RB1:

Bergen op Zoom
May 28 '90

My very dear Children

Since writing last we have rec'd nice long letters from Helen, Ethel & Edith for all of which many thanks and all were very interesting as I do like to hear everything that goes on at home tho' I think each letter that comes makes me long more for the time when I shall be back among you again! George's passage is not yet taken so his visit is still uncertain - but Mary's wedding took place yesterday! Donnie and his best man, Granville Ryrie, came about 11 on Monday & we all agree in liking much what little we saw of Donnie & I think if poor Mary only had her health, there would be a very good prospect of happiness before her - Bessie is still here & she, Mr, Mrs & Louise Moberly [were]

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were the only other additions to our family party - making 14 altogether. The marriage took place in the drawing room - a Sutherland table with both flaps down, & covered with a plush cloth & on which stood a prayer book & 2 vases of white flowers, was so placed that Mr Moberly could stand behind it, & in front two cushions were placed for Donald & Mary - we all stood round - as soon as Donald & Granville came in - Father brought Mary, dressed in a pretty, plain dress of cream silk, with hat & feather to match, a pretty bunch of white flowers at her throat, & a lovely bouquet. She was very pale and looked thin & ill, otherwise she would have looked very nice. Her sisters were none of them dressed as bridesmaids tho' Bertha officiated in that capacity - holding bouquet & gloves

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& wearing a light stone coloured tweed trimmed with dark olive green corduroy velvet & hat to match. Annie wore light blue dress with hat of black velvet & forget-me-nots. Millie a grey dress trimmed with steel & Black velvet with hat to correspond & Bessie a dark electric blue dress & hat. I wore my new Bk silk and bonnet with a large bunch of golden brown chrysanthemums (no leaves) down one side of my bodice [sic] to match my bonnet & tan suede gloves - my "get-up" was much approved of! Which was satisfactory. As soon as the service was over, & registers signed, we went in to breakfast or more correctly speaking luncheon which was very prettily set out in the dining-room, a three-tier cake occupying the most prominent position. The speeches very few, short & to the point - as soon as lunch was over the whole party was photographed

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outside the house - then Mary changed her dress, & they started for a 10 miles drive to the nearest railway station for Sydney, which place they wd not reach till 5 next morning! (Here luncheon stopped my writing. Now Thursday 29th I resume) - We had a telegram from Donnie last night announcing their arrival.

Mary went off in a pretty grey hat & veil & nicely fitting long ulster & cape with a broad flat boa of light [bear] nearly to her feet. Granville Ryrie stays till to-morrow when he & Bessie leave together.

Father and I were having our quiet games of Reversi in the drawing-room last evg when we heard shrieks of laughter from the dining room, whither the young ones had retired for refreshments. Granville was amusing them with various tricks & performances & then they tried holding their breath & lifting with such success that they came back & said I must be

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elevated, which they did with such effect that I saw myself well in the glass over the mantle piece! They then lifted Father who much enjoyed the fun. Today is a lovely day again after pouring rain all yesterday morning. We are to lunch at 12.30 & then all go into Walcha, 4 in one buggy, 3 in another & 2 on Horseback! to a rinking party Millie is giving in the Temperance Hall & which I expect will be very amusing - Millie, of course, provides refreshments & was busy all yesterday morn making cakes etc - I hope to give you an account of this in my next. When it is over we shall drop down into our usual quiet routine. I have a list of Mary's presents, many of which were very nice. I wonder if Agnes wedding will the next in

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the family! This will probably not be for two years to come. Bessie is only 22 - her father talks of taking a trip to England with his wife Bessie & Ida - I suppose dear Katie is at home again & I trust she & all are quite well. Remember me to Janet & Lydia who I hope are going on all right. My love to uncle Tom who I also hope is well in every way. Mary Smith (Philip Boulton) has a little daughter - "both doing well". I have written to Aunt Dora by this mail & enclosed a letter to Sophie Wright - I have not given Aunt D any details of the wedding. I am afraid you will be puzzled how to read this as I found I had turned the paper the wrong way but I will number the leaves - Father made

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a very pretty sketch of this place for Mary to take with her. He has made a pretty little picture of the Old Fort at Brindisi - sketched from the "Coromandel" which he has sent to Melbourne to Mrs Finlayson - a fellow passenger. I have finished the 1st Vol of Frith's reminiscences & am waiting for an opportunity of getting the 2nd from Walcha. It is a very amusing work. I hope Cyril's book on Shakespeare will be a success. I should like to have a copy to be sent here at my expense as soon as it is out. I was glad to hear of Jessie's appointment. Is Lance still alive?

Give my love to Mrs a Court also Miss Tibbits & [Ann] when you see them - Have any of you been to

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see Miss Edwards? Give my love to her if you do, poor little thing! You don't seem to see much of the Armytages - Do you see a great deal of Agnes? or is she too much taken up with her [Beard]? Is there any likelihood of their getting married, say, in the course of next year? It is time I closed this lengthy epistle. I am hoping for a letter from British Columbia soon as I see the Francisco mail has reached Auckland. It only goes once a month so my letters to the poor lads are necessarily few and far between, but they will have home letters as well. I hope you will be enjoying delicious summer weather when you get this & will have some good tennis. May God bless you all my dear ones at Home - Leeds or wherever you are - Very much love to each from

your aff. mother REB

Letter RB2:

B.op.Z March 13, 91

My very dear Children

We had such a delightful budget of letters last mail - from Edie, Helen, Mab, Ethel, Arthur, Herbert, George & Aunt Isabel! I was rejoiced to find you were all well but hoped George would have sailed earlier than March. Today's letters may bring more decided intelligence as his last said he was "thinking of sailing March 2".

Things here are as they were. So I can only just give a sketch of what we have done since I last wrote. On Sunday Peter drove me to church in the little buggy & Father walked & we all drove back together "three in a gig" & Father & I had a nice long walk

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before tea. On Monday afternoon I drove with Millie to a small selector's living four miles the other side of Walcha to enquire about a servant but unfortunately without success. However I enjoyed the drive (altogether 14 miles) as all the latter part was new to me & some peeps of distant scenery very lovely, tho' as far as the eye could reach there was no sign of human habitation but much of the way was thro' the bush where green trees were on both sides & shut out all distance. On Tuesday, I sewed most industriously till at 5, when I sallied forth alone (Father busy painting) for a walk. After going about a mile I sat on a dead tree to rest & any thing more

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dismal you can scarcely imagine. Nothing to be seen but dead, dying or scrubby trees, the grass long & brown, a mountain mist passing over, the wind howling among the trees & to add to the dreary effect, the carcasses of the poor sheep who had "lain them down & died" lying close by! However the rain soon cleared & tho' there was no sun, it became brighter & the walk home was pleasant & tell the children Grannie saw a dear little brown-grey bear climbing a dead tree till it easily reached the top where it seated itself between the branches & looked just like a piece of the tree itself. I also saw scores of lovely parrots. Wed^y I spent in work, walks, chess. Nip Johnson & a friend rode over in the afternoon & as Bertie & Annie had driven over to

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Ohio & Millie lying on the bed in her dressing gown - resting after the fatigues of cooking, I had to act Hostess & quite enjoyed the feeling again! Yesterday Peter again drove me to Walcha to see after my new dress, which is not yet finished & to do a little family shopping.

To-day is a glorious day, bright & sunny & not too hot. The Summer heat is over & the sharp frost at nights, if they continue, will soon destroy the beauty of the garden, but the weather is very enjoyable.

Niz is still absent. Millie has at last heard of a Cook from Sydney who she hopes will be here on Tuesday. Mary gives a better acc^t of herself. Bertie

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does not go to Sydney till after Easter & pays a visit there before going to Mary who expected Nurse Smith to stay with her. She has been there before & Mary is fond of her. Bertie & Annie are still very busy dress making. I am now amusing myself by darning & otherwise repairing the house linen but of course have a piece of knitting on hand & am reading "Across the Pampas & the Andes" by R. Crawford.

Mr Smith considers the sheep improving greatly tho' there are still many sick & lame. Father intends going into Walcha this morn^s & will I trust bring letters with good account of you all my dear ones. I am anxious to hear

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how poor Uncle Tom is. Such an accident is very bad for an old man & he is so very un-complaining - give my love to him. I was very sorry to hear of Mrs. A'Court's illness. I do hope she is better. Be sure you give her my love & sympathy. I hope dear Katie had a pleasant visit with Mrs. [Lynd] & I fancy you are all at home now & would not I like to be with you! May God bless you all & watch over you for good. It is my daily prayer for you all. No end of love to each from your affectionate

love to the Boutflowers & Aunt
old mother
R.E.B.

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Bertie is busy arranging the flowers for the table & has just brought in two vases of small dahlias of various shades of gold with white marguerites quite three inches across. They have four little white swans which hold smaller bunches. The Dahlias here have been, & are very beautiful & a very great variety. The Chrysanthemums are not yet out.

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Letter RB3:

Bergen op Zoom March 20 '91

My own dear girls,

We have just recd letters from Helen & Mab of February 12th & from which I am rejoiced to find George really intended sailing early in March. If he does actually do so then we may hope to leave in May. I trust he will have a prosperous voyage & should reach home about 20-24 April. But of course we cannot yet speak with any certainty. But it is bet to wait and see him before leaving. Niz has been away a month and we have very good accounts of him. We are not yet sure which day he returns. Bertie will probably

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leave for Sydney soon after Easter & after staying awhile there, go on to Mary, whose nurse is now with her, & thinks her looking better than when she saw her last. We are enjoying lovely weather now, fresh and sometimes frosty mornings with warm sunny days. The flowers have been beautiful, & a great show of Dahlias. I have not been away from the station since I last wrote & have really nothing to tell - one day being so like another.

The cook Millie expected on Tuesday, "changed her mind," and declined to leave Sydney! So Millie is still cook, & B & A do much of

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the house work in the mornings - of course we dine early now.

I was indeed thankful to hear that Tom had got work. I hoped to have had a letter this incoming mail from Francisco but he probably feels uncertain as to where we are. I am very sorry

for dear Herbert, but hope he will meet us at home this summer as Father sent him money. He will then be able to understand exactly the true position of family affairs. Oh dear what a worry it has been! & how thankful I shall be (D.V.) to enjoy the peace & comfort of home again. Tell dear Mab I don't fret - but I do feel. I am glad she had

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such a pleasant visit at Leeds, & also that dear K so enjoyed Harrogate.

I am now reading a work of Darwin's - "A Naturalist's Voyage round the World." It was undertaken in 1832. Of course there have been immense changes amongst the human inhabitants of the countries he visited, but his account of the birds beasts & insects is most interesting. Father has just invite me out for a walk in the sun, so adieu till Mar 21st. We had a short pleasant stroll but saw no living creature excep^t a few birds flitting about. I must write now to dear Arthur. It is a sad disappointment to think I shall not see

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the dear fellow on our way home, but Father says the year will be too advanced to run the risk of being so long in the Tropics & talks of either going by the Messageries Maritimes which only stop at the Seychelles, or round by the Cape - but all is yet uncertain - but I am very sorry to miss seeing dear Arthur - tho' I believe we have done wisely in waiting till George was back again. I must not scribble on. May God bless you all, my very dear children. No end of love, & hoping really to see you this summer.

I am ever your affects [sic] old

Mother - R.E.B.