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'A Little Bit of Love for Me and a Murder for My Old Man': The Queensland Bush Book Club

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Abstract
This paper addresses rural book distribution in an era before free public libraries came to Australia. Well-to-do, city women established clubs, which solicited donations of "proper reading matter" and raised funds for the purchase of books for their "deprived sisters" in the Outback. They took advantage of a well-developed rail system to deliver book parcels to rural families. In New South Wales and Queensland they were known as Bush Book Clubs.

Testimonials found in the Clubs' annual reports provide a snapshot of the hard scrabble frontier life and the gratitude with which these parcels were received. This paper looks at the relationships forged between town and country around the distribution of books and the mechanics involved in providing this service at a time before free public libraries and bookmobiles became commonplace in rural communities.

Keywords
Queensland, Queensland Bush Book Club, bush book club, Australia, library, libraries, history

Disciplines
Australian Studies | Cultural History | History | Library and Information Science | Social History | Women's History

Comments
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'A LITTLE BIT OF LOVE FOR ME AND A MURDER FOR MY OLD MAN': THE QUEENSLAND BUSH BOOK CLUB*

Robin Wagner

'Dear Mrs. Ford', the correspondence begins – letters spanning the decades of the early twentieth century and addressed to the Chambers in Victory Court or the T&G Building, Brisbane:

> During the floods our home was an inch out of the water and the river four miles wide. We lost heavily in cotton but the stock are alright, though they were standing in water 3 ft. deep for a day and ... 8 pigs lived on the verandah for two days.[1]

> The drought was so bad that water was scarce and baths unknown. We had to do what we could with a wet sponge. But I missed vegetables most of all. Fruit one learns to do without, but the memory of vegetables used to torture me.[2]

> We certainly had a terrible experience in the cyclone. [We] lost everything but our house. The sea rose 20 feet over high tide mark and swept through our little home, destroying everything and drowning my poultry. I took the children on to a high piece of ground and put them in the flanges of a large stump while I tried to rescue my poultry. My husband stayed at the house tying down the roof.[3]

> It's easy for a bloke to be pleasant at the factory ... but pretty hard when he is pulling old Strawberry out of a bog or chasing the pigs out of the sweet potato patch. And calves! Have you ever heard the raucous, nerve-splitting, bellowing of an army of desperate little demons, who begin to scream at daylight and keep it up all through the hot day?[4]

> I'm afraid I've been a bit depressed because you see we mortgaged the place to feed our dairy herd and the little drop of rain last month killed most of those left.[5]

One might ask what cyclones, flood, fire, drought, lost crops, and hungry calves have to do with library history. The connection becomes apparent by examining

* I am grateful to the librarians at the John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland for their assistance and to the Faculty Professional Development Fund at Gettysburg College for supporting my research in Australian libraries and archives in 2008-2009.

[1] John Oxley Library (JOL), State Library of Queensland, Brisbane, OM-78-47, Queensland Bush Book Club Records, *Annual Report* (*AR*) 1928.
[2] JOL, *AR* 1927.
[3] JOL, *AR* 1934.
[4] JOL, *AR* 1939.
[5] JOL, *AR* 1926.

the records of the Queensland Bush Book Club, a Brisbane-based philanthropic organization that operated a lending library, of sorts, for bush residents in the early and mid twentieth century. Mrs Ford served as the group's Corresponding Secretary for many years, and letters detailing the hardships of life in the remote countryside ended up on her desk.

Many letters concluded with a note of appreciation for the fine work of the Queensland Bush Book Club:

> My husband had to go to the township and before he could return the creek rushed into flood, cutting me off from anyone. As I was alone with my little children I knew I would have to keep vigil all night. Thanks to the Bush Book Club the horror of that night was lessened; had I not had splendid books to read I think I should have gone mad.[6]

I

The Queensland Bush Book Club was already twelve years old when Ralph Munn and Ernest Pitt conducted their famous survey of Australian libraries in 1934. The questionnaires they sent out in advance of their travels were often returned with a personal plea to the Carnegie Corporation for funding. Other letters tucked into the survey forms might describe the library's sorry condition, the town's interest in a free public library, or an invitation to Munn and Pitt to visit. One such letter sent to Pitt and dated 18 June 1934 came from Mrs F.L. McKinnon, Honorary General Secretary of the Queensland Bush Book Club.

She begins by chiding Pitt, explaining that the 'questionnaire hardly applies to the Bush Book Club and any attempt to answer the isolated questions which touch us, would I think be confusing.' McKinnon goes on to explain that the Bush Book Club is 'more or less a philanthropic effort. We – the women of the cities of Queensland, offer to the women of the country (and men and children also) the companionship of our books. We send to the Outback a circulating library, as an indication of our sympathy and understanding.'

In several paragraphs, McKinnon sets the stage, explaining that the Club circulates to the bush districts where no school of arts library exists. She explains that they send to every isolated district in Queensland, from the Southern Border to the islands in the Gulf, supplying 2,000 families. Five hundred books change hands weekly. Books last from six months to two years, constantly travelling from reader to reader and never returning. The Club spends under £40 a year on books, depending almost wholly on donations. With her letter she encloses a copy of the Club's 1933 *Annual Report*.[7]

This particular annual report, and the others like it held at the State Library of Queensland, offers a full accounting of Club activities and finances. Moreover, these records provide a snapshot of reading tastes (along with descriptions of bush

[6] JOL, *AR* 1934.

[7] State Library of Victoria, Melbourne , MS 9596, Box 1, Folder 17, Bush Book Club of Queensland.

life) in twentieth-century Queensland, before the advent of free public libraries. The reports are sprinkled with anecdotes about farm families, gold miners, drovers, lonely lighthouse keepers, flooding rains, pestilence, and punishing drought. One report even includes an account of a marooning on an island, complete with a crocodile attack.

Interspersed with reader requests and tales of country life are snippets of poetry and scattered quotations, on themes that reference the heroism of country dwellers. The 1933 *Annual Report* concludes with this:

> We are the link between book lovers in the cities with books to give, and book lovers in the country hungry for books. We are a Voice in which the city expresses its homage to the Nation Builders and we are one of the influences at work which is breaking down the wall of suspicion between town and country.[8]

II

The Queensland Bush Book Club founders were clearly women of means, with the leisure time for volunteer work and philanthropy. They were educated women, or at the very least readers themselves, drawn from Brisbane's upper class. The original members came from the Lyceum Club of Brisbane, an organization consisting of university-educated women and others who shared interests in art, literature, music, science, education, and current affairs.

Miss Margaret Ogg, Chairwoman of the Lyceum, was a founding member of the Queensland Bush Book Club. She was joined by half a dozen other public-spirited women and Lyceum members, who were first inspired by a series of articles in the Brisbane newspapers in 1921 about conditions in the Outback. One particular article in the *Courier*, entitled 'The Women of the West', paid tribute to the pioneer women and called for a group to take up the cause of providing them with reading matter.[9]

At the same time that the articles appeared in the press, Mrs Aubrey Withers, founder of the New South Wales Bush Book Club, visited Brisbane. In an interview, she drew attention to the fact that Queensland had no bush book service and remarked that even the Northern Territory was supplied with books by the Australian Inland Mission.[10] In response, the *Courier* and the Brisbane School of Arts promised 100 books each to start a 'library'. Mrs Ormond Smith, who later became the Club's President, sent £5 to the *Courier* as seed money.

The Brisbane women held their first meeting on 15 November 1921 at the old Town Hall, elected officers, and by January 1922 parcels of books were dispatched to thirteen subscribers. Within a few months Townsville women joined in, creating a Northern branch. At the end of the first year they had enrolled 330 members and sent out 1,100 books.

[8] JOL, *AR* 1933.
[9] JOL, *AR* 1930.
[10] JOL, *AR* 1930.

The object of the Club was not to compete with any of the small libraries in the country districts, but rather to be an adjunct to them, reaching out where the libraries did not circulate. The Club was non-sectarian and non-political. Its mission was to maintain a supply of good literature among the settlers in the country districts, who lacked access to a school of arts.[11]

It is important to note, however, that the founders believed themselves much more than overseers of a lending library. Their core purpose was to brighten the lives of their country sisters and to alleviate the loneliness and dreary monotony of the bush. According to a statement in the 1932 *Annual Report*, 'We can do nothing to improve conditions in the Bush but we can prevent the wistfulness and loneliness of a colour hungry woman, by providing her with the colour and romance and companionship of books.'[12]

Bush Book Club publicists mention descending from the men and women who cleared the wilderness and therefore are near enough to the pioneering days to know something of the loneliness of the bush. While this declaration seems a bit exaggerated, it served to accentuate a special connection with, and sympathy for, their country sisters that the city women seemed determined to draw. The women of the Bush Book Club believed they were promoting the worth, courage, and endurance of the country. In their view, city residents needed reminders of the country's important contributions to Australia's well-being.

The Bush Book Club leadership maintained that one worker in the country provided the livelihood for three in the city. The distribution of books was central in expressing the respect and friendship of the cities for the country. Members of the Bush Book Club saw it as their duty to educate city dwellers. They often referred to the Bush Book Club as breaking down the 'wall of suspicion between city and country'. The message was mixed however. On the one hand, the people of the bush were portrayed as heroic, hard working, noble, and under-appreciated. At the same time they required uplifting. This sentiment comes across clearly in the 1933 *Report*, where it is written:

> Our work is to keep supplied with books those men and women who are holding the front line trenches of Australian civilization – to take to them the great world of books, to people their loneliness with friends who will cheer them in depression, comfort them in trouble, rejoice with them in happiness and urge them on to greater effort in self development.[13]

[11] Schools of arts, like mechanics' institutes, literary institutes, and athenaeums, played an important part in the life of Australian communities. Among their roles was the provision of libraries and reading rooms. They also provided lectures and adult education. The libraries were open to members who paid an annual subscription, which allowed them to borrow books. The collections in most schools of arts were primarily fiction. The 'librarian' in charge often doubled as custodian, secretary and billiard marker. Many schools of arts had an adjoining games room which generated income to keep the library afloat.

[12] JOL, *AR* 1932.

[13] JOL, *AR* 1933.

Finally, the Club women believed they were doing something of national significance in bringing to light the hardships of the men and women of the country and providing them with the comfort of books. 'Our work is of national importance – are we not bringing town and country into closer harmony ... Is not a drought felt by the last person in the last little township as well as in the large cities?'[14] Sympathy and gratitude were equally important motivators, along with self-improvement. The 1936 *Report* states:

> It is not a pleasant thought in a young country where the man on the land is an Atlas bearing the burden of the prosperity of the towns. Thus it is that the Bush Book Club has a twofold object – to distribute books as the symbol of our friendship and to educate the people of the towns to knowledge of the country's burdens and heroism.[15]

To meet their goal the women crafted a well-oiled distribution system which allowed for the circulation of 500 or more books each week to 2,000 bush residents. Railways made it all possible. At the time Queensland had nearly 6,500 miles of railways, and every mile of it carried a Bush Book Club book at one time or another.

For a nominal fee of 2s. 6d. per year, country dwellers were guaranteed four parcels – each with ten books and about six magazines and illustrated papers. This was considered adequate reading for three months. Parcels went from reader to reader instead of coming back to headquarters each time. If books became worn out or lost, a subscriber would correspond with headquarters and a supplementary parcel would be sent. That way all parcels were kept to a high standard. A typical cloth-bound book would last two years, while paper-bound books had a shorter life-span.

Parcels were issued from the Brisbane or Townsville centres. A centre was later established in Ipswich. Readers passed on the books to each other through carefully mapped out travel routes. For faster readers, the Club would send additional reading matter off-cycle. The Northern and Southern District Secretaries kept lists of their subscribers along each rail route and maintained a card file in the office which listed each subscriber and their reading tastes and recorded the books they received in order to prevent duplication.

Books in disrepair or deemed too flimsy for distribution were sent to lighthouses or to various railway, road construction, forestry, and mining camps as gifts and were not part of the Club's distribution program. The sixteen lighthouses each received two parcels a year. Worn-out books were also sent to seaside huts run by the Country Women's Association, various missions – primarily on the northern islands – and isolated bush schools or children's homes.

The office women exchanged letters regularly with Sister Hawkes, a bush nurse in McKinlay, who ran what could be best described as a one-woman distribution

[14] JOL, *AR* 1935.
[15] JOL, *AR* 1936.

centre in the far west of the state. She provided reading matter for workmen heading 'farther out' – including shearers, stock hands, well sinkers, telegraph repairmen, and itinerant agricultural workers. She wrote: 'I have just had a crowd of shearers going a long way out for two months. They were very grateful for a bundle of reading matter as nights and weekends are long, especially since the introduction of the 40 hour week.'[16] The Queensland Bush Book Club kept Sister Hawkes supplied with large numbers of books and maintained a long correspondence with her.

Book distribution by rail was harder in Queensland than in neighbouring New South Wales, where the railway ran fan-wise out from Sydney. In Queensland there were several railway systems, and they were not linked. The Club created hubs at Brisbane, Ipswich, and Townsville. Families would make their way to the nearest railway station to collect their parcel, or it would be transported by carters, private vehicles, or the postal service for the next leg of the journey.

The Queensland Government supported the Bush Book Club for the duration of its existence. During the Great Depression the annual subsidy of £800 was scaled back to £500, but the Club managed to weather this reduction by changing routes and sending less individualized parcels.

In addition to free rail transport, local carters in each of the centres carried the books from the headquarters to the railway stations without charge. For years John Burke and Company carried free on their boat, the 'Wandana', all parcels for the Gulf ports, lighthouses, and islands. The Club women formed a special relationship with the 'Wandana' crew and supplied them with their own 'library' so that they would have books to read on their journeys.

On the wall of the Club's workroom hung a large map showing the territory covered by the Queensland Bush Book Club, from Birdsville in the south to Coen in the north; from the western border to lighthouses dotting the east cost. The Northern branch, with Townsville at its centre, served the territory north of St. Lawrence and west to the Northern Territory border, including the Gulf Country and adjacent islands. Their parcels went to isolated sheep and cattle properties and construction camps, and to settlers on the islands and along the coast.

The Southern region extended from the New South Wales border to St. Lawrence along the Central line to Longreach, Winton and Yaraka, west to Quilpie and Cunnamulla, southwest to Dirranbandi and Texas. A journey of over a thousand miles was not uncommon. A parcel to Burketown actually travelled 1,392 miles by rail by way of Dobbyn. Many would go six to eight hundred miles by rail and then another hundred miles or more by car. One member got her books from the closest rail depot, which was Mt. Isa, still three hundred miles from her home.

Books travelled long distances, but it wasn't always a straight shot. A parcel going out to Gilliat travelled 414 miles by train from Townsville. Then the mailman would take it another 20 miles, where it would be carried by cart or car another 60 miles 'to the fence', which was then just three miles from the reader's house.

[16] JOL, *AR* 1948.

Deliveries to the Cape York Peninsula were especially challenging. The Club considered an exchange between readers within a reasonable distance to be fifty to one hundred miles. On the peninsula the nearest neighbour could be two hundred miles from the next. In some cases mail would come by boat to a port fifty miles away and then by pack-horse. The reports from the 1950s mention deliveries by aeroplane and transport assistance from the Flying Doctor Service; but even as late as 1955 the combination of rail, motor truck and pack-horse prevailed in the Far North.

Each day in the office was a lesson in Queensland topography and geography for the city women: 'We learn geography from our readers and the immensity of our State.'[17] One letter accompanied by a sketch map showed the homestead A with radiating lines to three 'nearby' towns – 65 miles to B, 48 miles to C and another 22 miles on to D. One reader, asked to share books with the closest neighbour some fifty miles away, replied that while it might look like fifty miles on the map, the actual rail journey was 600 miles because of the absence of roads and the range of mountains that lay between them.

At its peak the Club had 2,200 subscribers. This figure represented many more actual readers, since many families were quite large. The Club needed at least 7,000 books and several thousand magazines and illustrated papers per year to supply all its readers. To keep a service like this going required capital, but not as much as one might expect. Labour was done with volunteers. For the most part, reading matter was donated. The Club seldom had to purchase books, and, when it did, costs were usually under £10 per year.

In fact the total cost of running the Queensland Bush Book Club rarely exceeded £300-£400 per year. The greatest expenses were in 1965, with £509 in earnings and £565 in expenses. While this was a net loss, the Club had a savings account balance of £1662 to handle the deficit.

The main costs were the rent of club rooms in Brisbane, Ipswich, and Townsville. There were expenses for utilities, cleaning, postage, wrapping supplies, and some cartage. The secretaries in each district received an honorarium. In the post-war period the Club paid for several affiliations, including one with the Flying Doctor Service.

Earnings came from donations, fund-raising events, and membership subscriptions. The price of a 2s. 6d. annual membership remained the same for thirty-one years. It wasn't until 1952 that the Club raised its rate by one shilling. City subscribers could pay the same rate to help keep the service afloat, but they had no borrowing privileges.

For the most part the Club maintained a balanced budget, although there were instances of shortfalls during the Depression. The Club recorded a deficit of £12 in 1928. The 1933 *Report* spoke of a 'serious financial deficit of £42'. But, all in

[17] JOL, *AR* 1939.

all, the organization succeeded financially with ample donations, voluntary labour, subsidies from the railways, and cautious spending.

The Club women required a space large enough to collect and store books and organize them before shipment. They found their first home at Number 6, Victory Chambers, Adelaide Street, in Brisbane. In 1924 they changed location to the T&G Building, on the corner of Albert and Queen Streets. This is where they came to sort donations, mend worn books, wrap the outgoing parcels, pack, and socialize with each other. They divided into committees and subcommittees to accomplish their work. The annual reports listed committees devoted to covering, mending, packing, and censorship. The reports further noted that the women were 'assisted by a number of girls'. This was a female-run organization.

Preparing the packages for shipment was a social activity. One can imagine the women gathered at a large table cutting out little pictures, in something akin to a scrap-booking party. Parcels were meant to be as attractive as possible. One annual report mentions scissoring out small illustrations and pasting them on the brown paper parcels:

> We are very strongly of the opinion that the neatness and trace of personal care are valuable evidence to the Outback that the city is sincere in its admiration and that the understanding between town and country, [that] we are doing our best to foster, contains no ignoble trace of condescension. The Bush Book Club is a friendly gesture from one book lover to another.[18]

Bush Club officers were successful in soliciting donations of supplies. The reports consistently thank various local merchants and banks for twine, wrapping paper, envelopes, writing pads, and the like. One gets the sense that there was a free flow of women in and out of the offices, attending to their assignments, perusing the book donations, and socializing among themselves. It was here that they most likely planned their teas, fêtes, card parties, and other fund-raising activities and interacted with community members who brought in donations.

The office was also the location of the annual Book Day, where the community was invited for refreshments and asked to bring book donations. It is worth noting that the women of the Bush Book Club set a high standard when it came to the condition of donated books. They praised Book Day donors for their generosity, on the one hand, and scolded others, calling them 'unpleasant people who clear their book shelves of rubbish and brightly remark "That will do for the Bush Book Club."' A book's appearance was important for the message it conveyed: 'Books are our ambassadors for the creation of a better feeling and deeper understanding between town and country and we would not have them tattered in appearance or mean in spirit.'[19]

[18] JOL, *AR* 1929.
[19] JOL, *AR* 1936.

The Club continued to operate out of the T&G Building until 1942. It was ejected from this location without much warning, possibly because the space had been requisitioned for war-related work. One writer in the 1943 *Annual Report* refers to a 'frenzied search' for new headquarters. It ended up back at Victory Chambers, where it remained until 1964.

While the Club rooms offered a gathering-place for the city women to come together and sort books and wrap parcels, another important part of their mission was to be out and about in the community, seeking donations and raising funds to keep operations going. First there was an array of private garden parties, normally at the home of a Club member or a well-connected citizen of the community. Bridge and mah-jong parties were frequently mentioned.

The parties and card games were probably private affairs, invitation only, hosted by a member for close friends and associates, rather than a community-wide event. Other activities, such as exhibitions and fêtes, were most likely open to the community at large. The fêtes often brought in £50 or more. A bridge party might garner £10.

Social occasions were also hosted by their patroness, the wife of whatever governor was in office at the time. For example, Lady Blair held a musical at Government House which netted the Club £11. Other regular contributors included the Walter and Eliza Hall Trust (a Sydney-based charity), the Rotary Club, and the *Courier*. The Victoria Leagues of Edinburgh and Glasgow sent books.

The Club hosted Book Day each June. It was partly a fundraiser and partly a thank-you reception for supporters. Club rooms were open all day, and donors were encouraged to drop by for a cup of tea and a biscuit. A typical Book Day appeal brought in 1,500-2,000 books and 500 magazines and provided the organization with good publicity.

Other groups ran book drives on behalf of the Club, including the Lyceum Club, the Victoria League of Brisbane, the Brisbane Club, and the Rotary Club. Sometimes private citizens had book parties at their homes which might net 150 books. Other charitable groups arranged athletic tournaments to benefit the Club. Members of the various committees, and particularly Club officers, were expected to raise at least £2 personally. This might add up to another £50 for the coffers.

Fundraising had its ups and downs over the life-span of the Club. It fell off during the Depression and again during World War II. In 1941, for instance, the Bush Book Club made no public appeal, because they did not want to compete with other war-related charities. Citizens who ordinarily donated to the Club instead sent their used books to organizations collecting reading matter for soldiers. Wartime shortages meant an increase in book prices. Many people stopped buying books for themselves and therefore did not have volumes to donate.

By the mid-1940s book donations began coming from sources other than individuals. Schools of arts offered their discards. Reports from the 1950s mention donations from public libraries. The Club also became the beneficiary of estate gifts, which might net 400-500 books or small amounts of cash.

III

With cash and books in hand, the women of the Queensland Bush Book Club set about distributing the precious volumes to eager rural readers. The annual reports provide a vivid account of conditions in the Queensland bush and offer details of the pioneers' daily toil. Excerpts from readers' letters generally filled one or more pages of each slim report and were often a litany of trials and tribulations.

Weather was a constant theme. During the wet season recipients in the North were often cut off for three months or more at a time. As late as 1951 the Club got this letter: 'This is our first complete mail for ten weeks. All through the wet our only mail has been brought by a pack-horse which, of course could only carry letters and small parcels. How we are looking forward to a good read.'[20]

When parcels did make it through, they were often casualties of the weather. 'I am so sorry the books were damaged. Our house was blown over in the cyclone and all the books were soaked with rain', wrote a correspondent in 1946.[21] Another wrote of coming home to find water five feet deep had been in the house 'and everything smelt and looked just awful, including your books, which we will try and clean.'[22]

In some parts of Queensland flooding was a way of life: 'We have been deluged and flood-bound having missed eight mails. The dam broke its banks; I was awakened at 2:30 a.m. and told to get out quickly as water was 2 foot high in the house.'[23] Another testified: 'All our dams were washed away and half our old home with its contents floated away like corks. But we are well and ... will get the books in as soon as possible.'[24] Another said: 'Your parcel arrived just prior to our having 101½ inches of rain – some luck, eh?'[25]

If it wasn't water it was drought: 'Our selection has not had enough rain to fill a water tank for seven years.'[26] Lack of rain forced many a homesteader off the land. The 1924 *Report* states: 'In November and December we lost a number of readers whose grit and determination had been defeated by drought.'[27] In 1928, 'Drought has driven many men off the land and the large group in the Boulia district, once fifty members strong, has been almost entirely dispersed.'[28]

For those who remained it was a physically demanding existence. Some women lamented that bush fires kept them too exhausted to read. Another wrote: 'We have no heart for reading with stock dying all around us.'[29] Yet another observed: 'We

[20] JOL, *AR* 1951.
[21] JOL, *AR* 1946.
[22] JOL, *AR* 1956.
[23] JOL, *AR* 1954.
[24] JOL, *AR* 1956.
[25] JOL, *AR* 1936.
[26] JOL, *AR* 1928.
[27] JOL, *AR* 1924.
[28] JOL, *AR* 1928.
[29] JOL, *AR* 1952.

are too tired after a day of scrub-cutting to do anything but fall into bed.'[30] Others detailed the hardships of caring for a large family:

> I must give up my membership as I have a new baby to care for, making five children under six years of age. We are living in caravans, camping on the job, dam sinking and I have nowhere to keep books and no time to read. I have to teach correspondence lessons to the eldest and cook for several men as well.[31]

A woman wrote from a mining camp:

> The club is a genuine comfort to me. I get so little time to myself that I have kept the parcel nearly a year. I am sorry to have to tell you that I have to work so hard that it is very difficult to do much towards learning the children their spelling. I have so much sewing to do, making shirts and trousers for the miners and mending the bags, the smallest hole in the bags and the tin would run out in no time, much the same as rice would do.[32]

The monotony and isolation were real, and books were often a woman's only company. One woman reported that she had not seen another woman in eleven months. Another wrote to say that she was eighty miles from the railway, had to travel ten miles to meet the mailman, and was weeks at a time alone with children. She expressed her appreciation for every aspect of the parcel, right down to the wrapping paper, which she ironed out and read. This letter came from the North:

> The mailman lost his horse and we didn't get the parcel for three weeks after it had been sent. The men and the children don't seem to mind these delays but I was sick with disappointment [...] I love human companionship and sometimes feel the complete isolation terribly.[33]

Another reader described the Bush Book Club as one of the 'kindest and best thoughts' that have ever happened: 'It is very lonely when one has nothing to read and nothing to think of but starving sheep. You see a book takes you out of yourself and leaves you something to think of afterwards.'[34] The arrival of a parcel was a break in the drudgery of women's lives. One reader wrote:

> I am terribly tired tonight but I must tell you about the arrival of my parcel. I had to take three small children and the washing a mile and a half to the dams, as all the house tanks are dry. I washed and watched the children and when I returned, the untidy house met my gaze. The three children were tired and oh so dirty ... The unwashed breakfast things looked so hopeless, and I was pretty tired of it all. Then your parcel came and I just sat down in the middle of the mess and read *Punch* and

[30] JOL, *AR* 1952.
[31] JOL, *AR* 1954.
[32] JOL, *AR* 1924.
[33] JOL, *AR* 1924.
[34] JOL, *AR* 1935.

> *New York Life* – thank you, thank you for including them – until the world looked bright pink.[35]

The country dwellers may have been isolated, but that did not mean they were uneducated. Australia in the early twentieth century had an impressively high literacy rate.[36] Many of the 'pioneers' had come from towns with bookshops and a school of arts. They carried their habit of reading into the bush.

The subscribers were both men and women. Their children might have been enrolled in correspondence school or taught by their mothers. Reading had both recreational and educational value. Judging from their requests, many bush residents were well read and had wide-ranging tastes, from popular novels and adventure tales to more serious books.[37] They wanted both Deadwood Dick and the classics. A notice board in the Bush Club office posted a 'wanted' list for unusual titles, and a waiting list for those in high demand. H.G. Wells's *Outline of History* was always top of the waiting list.

A reader requested Dante's *Divine Comedy* in English, French or German, adding that, if the Bush Book Club had books in ancient languages, he found Greek much easier to read than Latin. Another asked for translations of the French and Russian classics. Poetry was popular, and there were regular calls for Keats, Shelley, Burns, Tennyson, T.S. Eliot, and Shakespeare.

As a counterpoint to their daily lives, subscribers asked for romance, adventure, and mystery. 'I enjoy a murder; I like a blood-stained corpse in the butler's pantry'[38] they would write. Not surprisingly Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie and Edgar Wallace were much in demand.

Ethel Dell's popular romances and Elinor Glyn's more saucy women's fiction topped the list for subscribers who requested 'Love stories please – because you get all the other things in real life – but not love stories.'[39] There were also readers who

[35] JOL, *AR* 1926.

[36] The Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Yearbook Australia*, 23 (1930) p.319 quotes data from the Census of 1921: 'From 1871 to 1921, the proportion per 10,000 of the population of Australia able to 'read and write' advanced from a little over 6,000 to nearly 8,500, while that of those able to "read only" fell from about 1,100 to under 30.' *Yearbook Australia*, 37 (1946-7) pp.226-27 explains that 'The Census and Statistics Act 1905-1938 specified Education as a subject for inquiry at a Census, but does not indicate the nature or range of the information to be furnished. The Census and Statistics Act of 1946 ... provided for the omission of read and write, but under the system of compulsory education the number of persons in Australia who reach maturity without being able to read and write is very small, and this question was omitted at the 1933 Census.' *Australians, Historical Statistics* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1987), p.339 has a bar graph comparing census data from 1861 and 1921 on children aged 5-14. In 1921 about 1 in 10,000 Australian children were unable to read. These figures do not include indigenous people, who were not counted until 1971.

[37] Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was among the most frequently requested titles.

[38] JOL, *AR* 1947.

[39] JOL, *AR* 1930.

requested a combination: 'Please send a little bit of love for me and a murder for my old man.'[40]

The Club supplied literary classics by authors such as Dickens, Tolstoy, and Cervantes. Alexander Dumas, John Galsworthy, Robert Louis Stevenson, George Bernard Shaw, and Sir Walter Scott were much in demand. Popular British novelists dominated, more so than American writers. On the request list were A.E.W. Mason, Ian Hay, W.W. Jacobs, Arnold Bennett, May Sinclair, Mrs Henry Wood, P.G. Wodehouse and H.G. Wells. Louisa May Alcott, Ernest Hemingway, and Zane Grey topped the list of American authors.

The Club also dispatched plenty of non-fiction – mainly history, travel, elementary science and nature books. Captain Cook's Voyages were popular, as were all books on exploration. Bush residents asked for books on Greek, Roman, and Egyptian gods.

John Arnold, in his essay on non-fiction publishing in the first half of the twentieth century, describes the popularity of certain genres of non-fiction, particularly natural history and locally published writings on the Outback. Authors included Donald Macdonald, Thistle Harris, and Charles Barrett. Even more popular were the historical and travel books of Ion Idriess, Frank Clune and Ernestine Hill.[41]

Book Club records show that Idriess's works were much in demand. Requests for *Flynn of the Inland* and *The Cattle King* appear frequently on the waiting list. One reader wrote to the Club: 'Please give me any Australian novels dealing with the outback. I want to learn all I can about the country I am beginning to love. I have just read *Flynn of the Inland.* It is such men as he who make Australia a great nation.'[42]

In their study of rural reading in post-war Queensland, Denis Cryle and Betty Cosgrove discuss the popularity of Australian literature and maintain that rural readers – at least the ones they interviewed – were drawn to local authors. The rural readers in their study recalled series like the Billabong books and Digit Dick adventures as important childhood reading. Many identified strongly with Australian works, more so than with British and American, and cited Rolf Boldrewood, Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson as authors who were read aloud in their country homes.[43]

This identification was borne out by Club correspondence, where a subscriber wrote: 'We are hundreds of miles from a library. Our choice of books is non-fiction and travel chiefly, but actually we read anything and devour Australian books.'[44]

[40] JOL, *AR* 1953.

[41] John Arnold, 'Reference and Non-fiction Publishing', in *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market,* ed. by Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St. Lucia, Queensland: Queensland University Press, 2001), pp.282-97.

[42] JOL, *AR* 1951.

[43] Denis Cryle and Betty Cosgrove, 'Rural Reading or Reading Rural: Everyday Print Culture in Post-War Queensland', *Queensland Review,* 8 (2001), 55-64 (p.60).

[44] JOL, *AR* 1953.

Besides Ion Idriess, the Club's other commonly requested Australian writers were Walter Murdoch, Ethel Turner, Kylie Tennant, and the poet George Essex Evans.

Surprisingly absent from the record were appeals for practical books. One might have expected requests for books on agriculture, machine repair, livestock management, mechanics, or other useful arts. Only one such request stands out. A boy interested in motors and engines was sent a steady supply of *Popular Mechanics* magazines over the years. He later wrote that he had secured a position in a country-town garage and sent the Club his first pay cheque in appreciation.

Sometimes the advice readers were seeking went beyond the literary recommendation. In fact, Mrs Ford may have been one of the first reference librarians, judging from the range of questions that came her way. She always tried to help her readers. One wanted to know how to adopt a child. Another requested directions on how to weave a basket from ornamental reeds. A young man asked for a recipe for strawberry jam. She found him one. He responded gratefully and then asked if she might put him in touch with 'a suitable young lady about 21'.

Club women often referred to themselves as 'guides, philosophers and friends' to those in the country. In terms of guidance, they saw it as their responsibility to carefully screen all the books they sent out. A censoring committee was designated to remove books considered unsuitable. Their guidelines were to weed out anything 'objectionable or too sophisticated. For our books must pass the test of mother and father, and growing boys and girls.'[45] They must be healthy and wholesome.

This moral overtone was in keeping with the prevailing attitude of the day. In her work on literary censorship, Deana Heath discusses in detail the pervasiveness of Australian censorship from 1904 onward. Various forms of censorship were sanctioned by the government and led by the Department of Customs. Any work that unduly emphasized matters of sex or crime or that might encourage depravity was banned. This could include medical books displaying body parts, books on preventing conception, information on abortion or miscarriage, or novels with sexual scenes or references.[46]

Originally directed at imported, mostly British, literature, censorship soon expanded to include new Australian literature with sexual themes. As Heath explains, 'for many years the system kept out knowledge of what was going on elsewhere in the world, particularly in relation to changing notions of sexual morality and alternative political models.'[47] The women of the Bush Book Club were simply following the conventions of the day.

Morality was not the only grounds on which to censor a book. The Club women took pride in their elevated literary tastes and were determined to send out 'only the best literature'. Reports mention that when putting together a parcel one should

[45] JOL, *AR* 1924.

[46] Deana Heath, 'Literary Censorship, Imperialism and the White Australia Policy', in *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891-1945*, pp.69-82.

[47] Ibid., p.82.

choose 'better reading' first, followed by romances, thrillers, and westerns. At a time when trade unionism, labour unrest and Communist-party activities were increasing in Queensland cities and towns, the Club made sure that writings on such themes were removed.

Book Club officers disparaged certain unnamed Australian authors, calling their works 'neurotic emotionalism', their plots 'desperate Russianized situations', and their pages filled with 'festering human hates'.[48] They commented that the socialist plots of new Australian fiction writers bore no similarities to the real lives of noble country readers.

IV

With Club officers actively censoring reading matter one wonders whether country readers were satisfied. Did the Queensland Bush Book Club give country dwellers what they wanted? Or was there a disconnect between what the readers desired and what the Book Club provided?

Judging from the membership renewals year after year, these were satisfied subscribers. Their numbers stayed strong at 2,000 or more until World War II. When a family dropped out, it was less a matter of displeasure and usually the result of economic hardship. One subscriber wrote: 'Strange as it may seem I am not able to pay the subscription and cannot ask for more books. We have lost our crops through hail three years running and I simply cannot ask my husband for money.'[49]

Others could not make a living in the country and returned to towns. In some years it would be reported that 300 subscribers left the country, but another 300 had not only taken their place on the land but also joined the Book Club. A letter excerpted for the 1950 *Annual Report* reads: 'I have just taken over this farm and written on the wall of the house I found your address. Would you tell me please how to become a member?'[50]

Robust membership was just one sign of satisfaction. Another was the longevity of the readers. The Queensland Bush Book Club served multiple generations of families over many years. For example, in 1947, upon the death of an elderly subscriber, the record showed that she had received 96 parcels in her lifetime – more than a thousand books and hundreds of magazines and papers. Her son was a member, and his son had just received his first children's Christmas parcel from the Queensland Bush Book Club. They represented three generations and twenty-six years of membership.

Another woman, writing to cancel her membership in 1964, indicated that the family was moving to England. The family had received their first parcel in 1928. In another testament to longevity a subscriber observed:

[48] JOL, *AR* 1939.
[49] JOL, *AR* 1939.
[50] JOL, *AR* 1950.

> The children are now grown up and earning their living. Many thanks for the books, which for years lightened our labors and helped us over many a dreary wet day and which taught the children the King's English much better than any local association could do. One of them has done a lot of broadcasting and another has written poetry – and been paid for it too! I do not think their literary tastes could have been fostered in the bush, had it not been for the parcels of books to which they turned on return from the cow yard or cotton field.[51]

The correspondence also suggests that the Club also met its goal of bringing cheer to the bush and helping to alleviate loneliness: 'I have been eight years in the Bush without seeing a town and for two years have not been beyond the paddock fence, but I can go round the world with Curle, enjoy palaces and courts with Lord Frederick Hamilton and live the love story in Ethel M. Dell's novel.'[52]

Another question that bears asking is how did gender, class, and race figure in the Queensland Bush Book Club story? While bush subscribers were both men and women, the bonds that formed were primarily among women. The majority of the correspondence was between women. Support of one's sisters in the bush was a stated goal. Much emphasis was on women's loneliness, toil, and helping to lift that burden through books and friendly letters.

The Corresponding Secretary, Mrs Ford, bore a large measure of this responsibility. She was the chief correspondent with the women in the bush and served in this role for thirty-three years. The original aim of her position was to communicate about the parcels, but these communiqués invariably turned into a body of sociable correspondence that went on for decades. Women remarked that they felt she was their friend, and, by extension, so were all the women who volunteered in the Club.

Ford wrote several hundred letters annually to subscribers in the early years. By 1939 the hundreds of letters had become more than 1,900 annually and remained at that level until she retired in 1957. She communicated on a personal basis on topics that mattered to women. A paragraph in the 1927 *Annual Report* amplifies the gender connection:

> An over wrought woman can write to the Secretary and feel better for unburdening her mind; a proud mother will recount little Willie's villainies with gusto, or send a snapshot of jolly boys and girls. There is a sense of belonging to one another between the women of the Committee and the women of the Outback, and should a reader demand advice on knitting jumpers, or the best medical book for a young mother, or

[51] JOL, *AR* 1939.

[52] JOL, *AR* 1930. 'Curle' probably refers to British writer Richard Curle (1883-1968). Primarily known for his scholarly writing on Joseph Conrad, Thomas Hardy, Robert Browning and other authors, Curle also wrote a number of adventure tales, including *Wanderings: A Book of Travel and Reminiscence*, 1920; *Into the East: Notes on Burma and Malaya*, 1923; *Unchanging Fez*, 1925; *Caravansary and Conversation: Memories of Places and Persons*, 1937; and *The Atmosphere of Place: Little Pictures from Five Continents*, 1945.

> what creepers to grow on a veranda, someone will be able to give expert advice ... And there is always a member of the Committee handy and willing.[53]

While arranging the delivery of a parcel, Mrs Ford might at the same time drop a note enquiring about a child's health. Subscribers complimented Ford on her personal touch: 'You write so wonderfully that I had got into the habit of thinking I was the one and only recipient of your beautiful kindly communications', wrote one woman from the Outback.[54] Ford and the other office correspondents sought to create a personal connection. A country woman writing about a long-anticipated visit from her sister ended with: 'I believe I've told you everything we did, and said, and I don't even know that you'll be interested, but somehow I feel you will, because you remembered the name I gave my baby.'[55]

While the bonds between women were obvious, there was also an unmistakable class division. Well-to-do city women in Brisbane and Townsville had the leisure time to attend garden parties, orchestrate fundraisers and select the best literature to uplift the downtrodden bush dwellers. These women occupied a higher status than their country sisters, which, in turn, entitled them to attach a kind of heroism to the lives of country folk. Readers of the Bush Book Club's *Annual Reports* were constantly called upon to demonstrate their admiration and appreciation for the women pioneers.

Occasionally comparisons were made that suggested that the women in the city were a mere generation removed from the hardships experienced by country dwellers – in short, they were all really the same. In actuality, however, their country sisters probably would not have been welcome at a Bush Book Club card party or musical at Government House. Despite the rhetoric of appreciation, the lines were clearly drawn: one group of women (city) was helping the other, less fortunate (country). One group had means and the other did not.

In terms of race, the Queensland Bush Book Club was a group of white city women helping predominantly white settlers. This was not a book-lending service for the Aboriginal population. A call for book donations emphasized that 'We want the best you have for these magnificent Australians – men and women carrying on often in the face of fearful odds ... and remaining cheery, brave, determined and so grateful for friendships'.[56]

It is important to note, however, that these were friendships with magnificent *white* Australians. The Queensland Bush Book Club was principally interested in serving the white pioneers and white residents of the bush. In fact, at times it appeared that book-lending was aimed at rescuing white settlers from the loneliness of being surrounded by Aborigines. In one report the secretary writes: 'To be

[53] JOL, *AR* 1927.
[54] JOL, *AR* 1928.
[55] JOL, *AR* 1938.
[56] JOL, *AR* 1941.

the only white man amongst hundreds of a coloured race, is to appreciate the Bush Book Club to the full.'[57]

Aborigines got the discards. The tattered books were sent to the missions. One report explained that cases of cast-off books were packed every month for the islands north of Thursday Island including Darnley, Yorke, Moa, Murray and Badu: 'In most cases there is only a handful of whites with a coloured population of several hundred.'[58]

When books went to Aboriginal settlements they were gift parcels, not loans. Recipients of 'gifts' paid no subscription fee and were expected to be grateful for the donated packages filled with discards. The 1954 *Annual Report* mentions a large number of parcels going to deserving organizations: 'Among these are the Church of England Missions on Cape York Peninsula at Lockhart River, near Portland Roads, also the Mitchell and Edward Rivers in the Gulf'.[59] Deliveries to Aboriginal missions at Coen, Croker Island, Weipa, Mapoon, and the Palm Islands are also referenced.

When it came to serving Aborigines, the annual reports conveyed a patronizing tone. One account described the delivery of book parcels to the Croker Island Mission and receiving a hand-made shell brooch from the appreciative native children.[60] Mrs Ormand Smith reported that gift parcels sent to isolated bush schools were met with a 'special gratitude'.

For most of the Club's history the Aboriginal population was ignored, if not excluded. When they were recipients of the Bush Book Club's largesse it was in the form of discarded materials or books carefully selected as appropriate for their presumed interest and intelligence.

V

From World War II onward the Queensland Bush Book Club's membership was in decline. The Committee vowed to carry on despite the war; still, membership was in free fall. In 1941, 1,100 families were on the roster; by 1944 it was 1,000. Country men left for war, and their women and children moved in with relatives in town. The Club curtailed its requests for donations so as not to compete with war charities.

The 1942 *Annual Report* noted that evacuation, illness and war work were taking a toll on the Committee. The women who usually came to the Club offices were now assisting the war effort in activities ranging from Red Cross service to civil defence work. The offices were open less frequently. When the Townsville Corresponding Secretary left, there was no volunteer to take her place. Mrs Ford assumed all secretarial work for the North and South Districts.

[57] JOL, *AR* 1930.
[58] JOL, *AR* 1930.
[59] JOL, *AR* 1954.
[60] JOL, *AR* 1952.

Petrol rationing affected deliveries. John Burke and Company, which had been carrying parcels for free since the beginning, had to withdraw its concession. The difficulty of getting tyres and petrol put other carters out of business. Readers living a long distance from a train depot had no way to get their books from the station. In addition book donations dried up.

Membership inched above the 1,000 mark in the 1950s but never regained its pre-war strength. When the Queensland Railways closed a number of branch lines in 1960 the Club lost more subscribers. Membership was in a slow decline that would last until the Club folded in 1967.

In the post-war decades telephones and televisions helped put a dent in isolation. New regional libraries were established in country districts, and the Queensland Bush Book Club surrendered those readers, recognizing that they had helped foster a love of reading and in all probability had facilitated the formation of those libraries.

Other readers naturally fell away either because of old age or new mobility. A member of thirty years wrote in 1954: 'Thank you for many happy hours of reading I have enjoyed as a member of the Bush Book Club, especially in the early years when I was forty miles from a neighbour. We have sold out and are going to live in town so I will not want the books again.'[61]

A man of 89, who also had been a subscriber for over thirty years, wrote to say he was getting too old to read. A reader of twenty years wrote to say he was going into a home because he could no longer live alone.

Membership was declining, and so was the number of volunteers at the three Centres. The women who had begun the Queensland Bush Book Club were an increasingly elderly population. They retired. They passed away. The annual reports of the 1950s and 1960s read like obituary columns. There was no group of young women with leisure time to replace the original volunteers. The sense of a close-knit social club was all but gone. When Mrs McKinnon and her successor, Mrs Goldsmith, stopped writing the annual reports (in 1948 and 1960 respectively) the reports took on a new, business-like tone. The stories of country life and reading tastes, the snippets of poetry, and inspirational quotations disappeared from the printed record.

In the post-war years, the method of book distribution also underwent change. While the original circulation model of passing parcels among bush families was still employed, there was an upsurge in groups making appeals for the Queensland Bush Book Club to send them books that they could keep. These included the Red Cross, the Irrigation Commission, industrial farming settlements, hostels, prison farms, children's homes, and other groups hoping to establish their own on-site libraries.

The Club's lending practices in the final years signalled a step towards encouraging community libraries. In 1951 it was recorded that

[61] JOL, *AR* 1954.

> We have recently made a new contact which we feel is important and hope next year to enlarge in scope. For the past year we have been sending books to a tutor on a large Company owned station in South Western Queensland. First it was only children's books which were asked for ... to encourage a love of reading in the young ones. Gradually we have added magazines for both the men and their wives and these are so much appreciated that the owners are establishing a staff library. Our packages are still going out for we feel there is need for all. We are gratified to think that we have been pioneers of something which may grow to much greater proportions.[62]

The last *Annual Report* in 1966 stated:

> We are conscious of the fact that the number of our subscribers is not increasing and that possibly the years of our usefulness to the country people will come to an end. Better roads, the establishment of many regional libraries in the country, as well as cars, radio and telephone all help remove the isolation of earlier years, and though loneliness will still exist, communication in most areas is becoming easier and more frequent.[63]

In early 1967 the Club disbanded.

VI

The lasting effect of the Queensland Bush Book Club was fourfold.

First, it reached an otherwise ignored constituency at a time when there was no other book-lending service to remote communities. There were no government-supported libraries in these remote rural areas until well into the 1950s. The Queensland Bush Book Club filled this void. It set about to identify isolated families and distributed thousands of books – growing from seventeen subscribers and 100 books to supplying 25,000 books a year.

Second, it forged a bond between women of the country and women of the city. Perhaps it wasn't the two-way street that many of the women imagined, but the women in Brisbane and Townsville – those on the receiving end of the correspondence – did learn much about conditions in the bush. It is equally apparent that the women in the Outback formed a strong bond with the city, judging from the voluminous correspondence attended to by Mrs Ford and the other corresponding secretaries. Friendships were created and nurtured, even if primarily by mail. 'I would like to thank you for your letters and your books', began one reader. 'My husband's mother must have been one of your first readers and she often spoke of the Club. It added such an interest to her life. I think she was the finest type of pioneer.' The writer goes on to say that her mother-in-law, who was born near Cunnamulla, probably did not know a dozen women intimately in all her life. She went to Brisbane only

[62] JOL, *AR* 1951.
[63] JOL, *AR* 1966.

twice. She adds: 'But please don't pity her, because she was the happiest woman I know.'[64] She continues:

> One parcel you sent almost at the beginning had three books which still contained the name of the giver with a little message from her. It was the name of a well known Brisbane woman, and my mother-in-law always felt as though she was a personal friend. When the Brisbane papers came she would search the social columns for news of her friend, and was happy for the day if she found her dress described at the races or at a party. I often begged her to write to the lady, but she was too shy. In some of the books I notice that the names of the original owners have been cut out. Do leave them in in the future because some lonely woman may make a friend in the same way.[65]

Third, the Queensland Bush Book Club helped lay the groundwork for the establishment of public-library service in rural areas. In a very real way the Club cultivated a reading habit over the course of forty-six years, touching thousands of individuals. It hooked people on reading and continued to serve them until the formation of regional libraries in country centres.

Over time, the Club women came to regard themselves as pioneers, whose work would eventually be taken over by local libraries. In its final years the Queensland Bush Book Club worked closely with the Public Library Country Extension Service, especially when it had enquiries for books it could not supply. When the Club closed shop in 1967, it left behind a more literate rural constituency ripe for the introduction of state-supported libraries.

Finally, judging from the excerpted correspondence, the Queensland Bush Book Club had an impact in upgrading people's cultural experience. Life in the bush was dreary, monotonous, and extremely hard work. There were no recreational opportunities for most of these families other than reading. The Club filled this emptiness. Country people did not travel. Most of them had never been to Brisbane. Their travel was in the books provided by the Club.

'I have to thank you for the wonderful holiday', began one reader. 'I haven't been away for many years but I travelled far and wide with the last parcel. The perfect holiday they say combines escape inwards with escape outwards, but when the latter is not forthcoming, it is still possible to obtain the escape inwards – for a member of the Bush Book Club anyway.' She goes on: 'I have had the most entrancing holiday, visiting Java with Winifred Ponder. I have been admitted to Farthing Hall and watched the development of a romantic love story and enjoyed the domestic difference of two very likeable people. I have joined Lord Peter Wimsey in his pursuit of a murderer ... and positively swaggered up and down the Spanish Main in the wake of Captain Blood.' She ends:

[64] JOL, *AR* 1926.
[65] JOL, *AR* 1926.

> Now I am going back to my mending and banking and cleaning with heaps of new friends and much to think about and many incidents to laugh over. It's a wonderful thing to laugh. Such a pity that one so soon forgets the trick of it surrounded by miles of parched brownness and dazzled by heat haze, with the dreary knowledge in the background of dying cattle and overworked men-folk – But I feel ever so refreshed with new things to think and talk about.[66]

[66] JOL, *AR* 1936.