

SOME GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

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impassable because of the rains, the general heart of Australia was glad.

Rain was a blessing. The land was in a rapture of fecundity. The plains were carpeted with green. The sheep-feed was good, and the price of wool was bumping. There had never been such prospects. The lean, droughty, dying, bankrupt years were forgotten. I went to Australia in the year of much happiness—1909—because of the plentitude of rain.

So I took out big maps of Australia, and read the words "desert" and "terra incognita" over great slabs of the continent. Men told me of life in those regions. Some talked of the horrors, the loneliness, the God-forsaken regions of the backlands. Other men said "desert" was a lie—that there was land to sustain millions of people.

Both spoke the truth. Before the rains the interior is arid. If you have a stray patch of grass, its neighbour patch is hundreds of miles away. For five years the interior may pant, cursed with drought. Then the rains come. In a few days prairies of grass reach to the belly of your horse. That is one of the wonders of the land.

Australia, which is so vast that you could drop the British Isles upon it and not find them again for years ; which is as big, or bigger, than all Europe, has an insignificant population of a little over four million inhabitants. In the big towns, like Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, you will find a third of the population—strangely lop-sided compared with the number who live on the land. In no other country