ROLF BOLDREWOOD

THE CROOKED STICK; OR, POLLIE'S PROBATION

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

The time, the close of a lurid sultry February day, towards the end of a long, dry summer succeeding a rainless winter, in the arid region of West Logan. A blood-red sun sinking all too slowly, yet angrily, into a crimson ocean; suddenly disappearing, as if in despotic defiance of all future rainfall. A fiery portent receding into the inferno of a vast conflagration, was the image chiefly presented to the dwellers in that pastoral desert, long heartsick with hope deferred.

The scene, a limitless stretch of plain—its wearisome monotony feebly broken by belts of timber or an infrequent pine-ridge. The earth adust. A hopeless, steel-blue sky. The atmosphere stagnated, breezeless. The forest tribes all dumb. The Wannonbah mail-coach toiling over the furrows of a sandhill, walled in by a pine thicket.

'Thank God! the sun is down at last; we must sight Hyland's within the hour,' exclaimed the passenger on the box-seat, a tall, handsome man, with 'formerly in the army' legibly impressed on form and feature. 'How glad I shall be to see the river; and what a luxury a swim will be!'

'Been as hot a day as ever I know'd, Captain,' affirmed the sun-bronzed driver, with slow decision; 'but'—and here he double-thonged the off-wheeler, as if in accentuation of his statement—'heat, and flies, and muskeeters, dust and sand and bad water, ain't the wust of this road—not by a long chalk!'

'What the deuce *can* be worse?' demanded the ex-militaire, with pardonable acerbity. 'Surely no ruffians have taken to the bush lately in this part of the world?'

'Well, I did hear accidental-like as "The Doctor" and two other cross chaps, whose names I won't say, had laid it out to stick us up to-day. They'd heard that Mr. Tracknell was going up to Orange, and they have it in for him along o' the last Bandamah cattle racket.'

'Stop the coach, the infernal scoundrels! What do they expect to do next? The country won't be fit for decent people to live in if this sort of thing is not put a stop to.'

'Well, Captain Devereux,' replied the driver, a tall, sinewy, slow-speaking son of the soil, 'if I was you I wouldn't trouble my head about them no more than I could help. It ain't your business, as one might say, if they've a down on Tracknell. He nearly got the Doctor shopped over them Bandamah cattle, an' he wasn't in it at all, only them Clarkson boys. My notion is that Tracknell got wind of it yesterday, and forgot to come a purpose.'

'So, if a gang of rascally cattle-stealers choose to stop the coach that I travel in, I am to sit still because I'm not the man they want, who did his duty in hunting them down.'

'Now hear reason, Captain! There ain't a chap in the district, square or cross, that would touch you, or any one from Corindah—no, not from here to Baringun. The place has got such a name for being liberal-like to gentle and simple. If we meet those chaps—and we've got the Wild Horse plain to cross yet—you take my tip and say nothing to them if they don't interfere with you.'

The man to whom he spoke raised his head and gazed full in the speaker's face. The expression of his features had changed, and there was a hard set look, altogether different from his usually frank and familiar air, as he said, 'Are you aware that I've held Her Majesty's commission?'

The driver took his horses in hand, and sent them along at a pace to which for many miles they had been strangers, as they left the heavy sand of the pine-hill and entered upon the baked red soil of the plain.

'I'm dashed sorry to hear it now,' he said slowly. 'Some people's mighty fond of having their own way. Yes, by God! I was afeared they'd block us there. They're a-waiting ahead near that sheep break—three of 'em. That's the Doctor on the grey. Blast him!'

With this conclusively fervent adjuration, Mr. Joe Bates pulled his horses into a steady yet fast trot, and approached the three men, who sat quietly on their horses near a rough timber fence which, originally constructed for counting a passing flock of sheep, partly obstructed the road.

Captain Devereux looked keenly at the strangers, then at the driver, as he drew forth a revolver of the latest pattern.

'Listen to me, Bates! I can make fair shooting with this at fifty yards. When they call on you to stop, draw up the team quietly but keep them in hand. Directly I fire, send your horses along. It is a chance if they offer to follow.'

'For God's sake, Captain, don't be rash,' said the young fellow earnestly. 'I'm no coward, but remember there's others on the coach. Once them chaps sees Tracknell ain't a passenger, they'll clear—take my word. You can't do no good by fighting three armed men.'

'Do as you're told, my good fellow,' returned his passenger, who seemed transformed into quite another personage from the good-natured, easy-going gentleman with whom he had been chatting all day, 'unless you wish me to believe that you are in league with robbers and murderers.'

Joe Bates made no further remonstrance, but drew the reins carefully through his hands in the method affected by American stage-coach drivers, as he steadily approached the spot where the men sat, statue-like, on their horses. As the coach came abreast of them the man on the grey turned towards it, and, with a raised revolver in his hand, shouted, 'Bail up!'

The leaders stopped obedient to the rein. As they did so Captain Devereux fired three shots in rapid succession. The first apparently took effect on the rider of the grey horse, whose right arm fell to his side the instant after he had discharged his pistol. The second man staggered in his seat, and the horse of the third robber reared and fell over on his rider, who narrowly escaped being crushed. At the same moment, at a shout from the driver, the team started at a gallop, and taking the road across the plain, hardly relaxed their speed until the hotel at the angle of the Mackenzie River was in sight.

Looking back, they caught one glimpse of their quondam foes. Two were evidently wounded, while the third man was reduced to the grade of a foot-soldier. There was, therefore, no great probability of pursuit by this highly irregular cavalry force.

'By George! Captain,' said the driver, touching up the leaders with renewed confidence as he saw the outline of the roadside inn define itself more clearly in the late twilight, 'you can shoot straight and no mistake. Dashed if I could hit a haystack without a rest. The Doctor and one of the other chaps fired the very minute you did. One ball must have gone very close to you or me. I felt pretty ticklish, you bet! for I've seen the beggar hit a half-crown at twenty yards before now.'

'I believe he *did* hit me,' said Devereux, coolly putting his hand to his side. 'It's only a graze; but we'll see when we get down. I scarcely felt it at the time.'

'Good God!' said the kind-hearted young fellow. 'You don't say so, Captain? There's blood on your coat too. We'll have a look as soon as we get to Hyland's.'

'It's a strange thing though,' continued Devereux, 'that unless you're hard hit you never know whether a gunshot wound is serious or not. It's not my first knock, and I certainly shouldn't like it to be the last, after an engagement of this nature. However, we shall soon see.'

Something was in the air. As they drew up before the inn door, the customary group awaiting one of the great events of bush life was noticeably swelled. A confused murmur of voices arose, in tones more earnest than ordinary events called forth. The driver threw his reins to a helper, and took the landlord aside.

'We've been stuck up, and there's been a bit of a brush with the Doctor's mob. They've got it hot, but the Captain's hit too. You send a boy to Dr. Chalmers at Hastings township, and that darkie of yours to the police station. The

Captain had better get to bed. The mails are right and the passengers.'

The hotelkeeper, beyond a brief and comprehensive dedication of the false physician to the infernal powers, forebore remark, and so addressed himself to the practical alternative, that within five minutes two eager youngsters, one black and one white, were riding for their lives towards the points indicated, brimful of excitement not altogether of an unpleasant nature, as being the bearers of tragical tidings, and thus to be held free from blame—indeed, to be commended—if they did the distance in less than the best recorded time.

Inside the hotel the bustle was considerable. The bar was crowded, groups of men surrounded the inside passengers, who had each his tale of wonder and miraculous escape to relate. 'The Captain had behaved like a hero. Knocked over one man, broke the Doctor's shoulder, and dropped the third chap's horse nearly atop of him. If there'd only been another revolver in the coach they'd have took the lot easy. All the same, they'd just as well have let them have what they'd a mind too. They only wanted to serve out Tracknell, and when they found he wasn't there they'd have gone off as like as not. If the Captain was hurt—as looked likely—his life was worth all the bushrangers between here and Bourke, and a d——d bad swop at that.'

'Well, but some one must fight,' said a pot-valorous bar loafer, 'else they'd take the country from us.'

'That's a dashed sight more than *you*'d do, in my opinion,' retorted the speaker, who was a back-block storekeeper. 'We can do our share, I suppose, when there's

no other show. But we should have been all safe here now if we'd taken 'em easy—a few notes poorer, but what's that? The police are paid for shooting these chaps, not us. And if the Captain never goes back to Corindah, but has to see it out in a bush pub like this, I say it's hard lines. However, Chalmers will be here in an hour—if he's sober—and then we'll know.'

The sound of galloping hoofs in less than the specified time caused every one to adjourn to the verandah, when the question of identity, as two figures emerged from a cloud of dust, was quickly settled by a local expert. 'That's the doc's chestnut by the way he holds his head, and he's as sober as a judge.'

'How can you tell that?' queried a wondering passenger.

'Why, easy enough. Doc.'s not man enough for the chestnut except when he's right off it. When he's betwixt and between like he takes the old bay mare. She stops for him if he tumbles off, and would carry him home unsensible, I b'leeve, a'most, if she could only histe him into the saddle.'

The medical practitioner referred to rode proudly into the inn yard unconscious of the critical ordeal he had undergone, and throwing down the reins of his clever hackney, walked into the house, followed by the respectful crowd.

'Bad affair, Hyland,' he said to the landlord. 'Which room? No. 3? All right! I'll call for you as soon as I look the Captain over. It may be nothing after all.'

Entering the bedroom to which the wounded man had retired, he found him sitting at a small table, smoking a cigar with his coat off and busily engaged in writing a letter.

This occupation he relinquished, leaving the unfinished sheet and greeting the medico cordially. 'Glad to see you, doctor. Wish it was a pleasanter occasion. We shall soon know how to class the interview—Devereux slightly, seriously, or dangerously wounded has been in more than one butcher's bill. One may hold these things too cheap, however.'

'Take off your shirt, Captain; we're losing time,' said the doctor; 'talk as much as you like afterwards. Hum! ha! gunshot wound—small orifice—upper ribs—may have lodged in muscles of the shoulders. Excuse me.' Here he introduced a flexible shining piece of steel, with which he cautiously followed the track of the bullet. His brow became contracted and his face betrayed disappointment as he drew back the probe and wiped it meditatively in restoring it to its case. 'Can't find the bullet—gone another direction. Take a respiration, Captain. Good. Now cough, if you please.'

'Do you feel any internal sensation; slight pain here, for instance?' The Captain nodded affirmatively. 'Inclination to expectorate?'

'Yes.'

'Ha! much as I feared. Now put on your shirt again; and if I were you, I'd get into bed.'

'Not just yet, if you'll allow me; we had better settle this question first. Is the matter serious—you know what I mean—or only so so?'

'You're a strong man, Captain, and have seen all this before. I shall tell you exactly how the matter stands. This confounded lead pill, small as it is, has not taken the line I hoped it had towards the shoulder or lumbar muscles. It has

turned inwards. You have been shot through the lungs, Captain, and, of course, you know the chances are against you.'

The wounded man nodded his head, and lit another cigar, offering the doctor one, which he took.

'Well! a man must go when his time comes. All soldiers know that. For my wife's sake and the darling of our hearts' I could have wished it otherwise. Poor Mary! It might have been avoided, as the driver said; but then I should have had to have changed natures with some one else. It is Kismet, as the Moslem says—written in the book of fate from the beginning of the world. And now, doctor, when will the inflammation come on?'

'Perhaps to-night late; certainly to-morrow.'

'I may smoke, I suppose; and I want to write a letter before my head gets affected.'

'Do anything you like, my dear sir. You can't catch cold this weather. Take a glass of brandy if you feel faint. No, thanks! none for me at present. See you early to-morrow. I'll tell Mrs. Hyland what to do if hæmorrhage sets in. Good-night!'

The doomed man smoked his cigar out as he gazed across the broad reach of the river, on a high bluff of which the house had been built. 'Done out of my swim, too,' he muttered, with a half smile. 'I can hardly believe it all to be true. How often a man reads of this sort of thing, little expecting it will come home to himself. Forty-eight hours, at the utmost, to prepare! How the stars glitter in the still water! To think that I shall know so much more about them before Saturday, most probably at any rate. What a strange

idea! Poor Mary! what will she do when she hears? Poor darling! expecting me home on Saturday evening, and now never to meet on earth. Never, nevermore! To think that I kissed her and the bright, loving little darling Pollie—how she clung round my neck!—for the last time! The last time! It is hard, very hard! I feel a choking sort of feeling in my chest—that wasn't there before. I had better begin my letter. The letter—the last on earth.'

He flung away the fragment of the cigar, and sat down wearily to the letter which was to be the farewell message of Brian Devereux to his wife and child. How dear they were to him—reckless in some respects as his life had been—until then, he never knew before. He sat there writing and making memoranda until long after midnight. Then he lit one last cigar, which he smoked slowly and calmly to the end. 'They are very good. I may never get another. Who knows what the morrow may bring forth? Good-night, my darlings!' he said, waving his hand in the direction of Corindah. 'Good-night, sweet fond wife and child of my love! God keep and preserve you when I am gone! Good-night, my pleasant home, its easy duties and measureless content! Good-night, O earth and sea, wherein I have roamed so far and sailed so many a league! Once more, darlings of my heart, farewell! A long good-night!'

And so, having an instinctive feeling that the hour was at hand when the injured mechanism of the fleshly frame, grandly perfect as it had hitherto proved itself, would no longer provide expression for the free spirit, Brian Devereux, outworn and faint, sought the couch from which he was never to arise. At daylight he was delirious, while the

frequent passage of blood and froth from his unconscious lips confirmed the correctness of the medical diagnosis. Before the evening of the following day the proud, loyal, gallant spirit of Brian Devereux was at rest. He lies beneath the waving desert acacia, in the graveyard by the river allotted to the little town of Hastings. He was followed to the grave by every man of note and position in a large pastoral district; and on the marble tombstone which was in the after-time erected at the public cost above his mortal remains are included the words:—

'Sacred to the Memory of Brian Devereux, late Captain of H.M. 88th Regiment, who was mortally wounded by bushrangers while making a gallant and successful defence. Honour to the Brave!'

So fell a gallant man-at-arms, obscurely slain—ingloriously in a sense, yet dying in strict accordance with the principles which had actuated him through life. There was deep, if not ostentatious, sorrow in his old regiment, and more than one comrade emptied his glass at the mess table more frequently the night the news came of the death of Brian Devereux, whom all men admired, and many women had loved.

Brave to recklessness, talented, grandly handsome, the darling of the mess, the idol of the regiment, the descendant of a Norman family long domiciled in the west of Ireland, he had always exhibited, commingled with brilliant

and estimable qualities, a certain wayward impatience of restraint which at critical periods of his career had hindered his chance of promotion. A good-natured superior, on more than one occasion, had reported favourably on differences of opinion scarcely in accordance with the canons of the Horse Guards. At length a breach of discipline occurred too serious to be overlooked. In truth, a provoking, unreasonable martinet narrowly escaped personal discomfiture. Captain Devereux was compelled to send in his papers, to the despair of the subalterns and the deep though suppressed discontent of the regiment.

Sorely hurt and aggrieved, though far too proud for outward sign, he resolved to quit the mother-land for the more free, untrammelled life of a new world. The occasion was fortunate. The sale of his commission, with a younger son's portion, sufficed at that time to purchase Corindah at a low price, on favourable terms. Adopting, with all the enthusiasm of his nature, the free, adventurous career of an Australian squatter, he married the fair and trusting daughter of a high Government official—herself a descendant of one of the old colonial families of distinction,—and bade fair, in the enjoyment of unclouded domestic happiness and the management of a confessedly improving property, to become one of the leading pastoral magnates of the land.

But who shall appease Fate? The bolt fell, leaving the fair, fond wife a widow, and the baby daughter fatherless, whose infantine charms had aroused the deepest feelings of his nature.

After the first transports of her grief, Mrs. Devereux, with the calm decision of purpose which marked her character, adopted the course which was to guide her future life. At Corindah she had tasted the early joys of her bridal period. There her babe had been born. There had her beloved, her idolised husband—the worshipped hero of the outwardly calm but intensely impassioned Mary Cavendish—pleased himself in a congenial occupation, with visions of prosperity and distinction yet to come. She would never leave Corindah. It should be her home and that of his child after her. Her resolution formed, she proceeded to put in practice her ideas. She retained the overseer—a steady, experienced man, in whom her husband had had confidence. She went over the books and accounts, thus satisfying herself of the solvency and exact position of the estate. This done, she explained to him that she intended to retain the establishment in her own hands, and trusted, with his assistance, to make it progressive and remunerative.

'Captain Devereux, my poor husband,' she said, 'had the greatest confidence in you. It is my intention to live here—in this place which he loved and improved so much—as long as there is sufficient for me and my baby to live on. I shall trust to you, Mr. Gateward, to do for me exactly as you would have done for him.' Here the steady voice trembled, and the tears that would not be suppressed flowed fast.

'I will do that and more, Mrs. Devereux,' said the plain, blunt bushman. 'Corindah is the best station on the river, and if the seasons hold middling fair, it will keep double the stock it has on now in a few years. You leave it to me,

ma'am; I'll be bound the run will find a home and a snug bank account for you and missie for many a year to come.'

Between Mr. Gateward and Corindah Plains, 'the best run on this side of Mingadee,' as the men said, the promise had been kept. The years had been favourable on the average. When the dire distress of drought came there had been a reserve of pasture which had sufficed to tide over the season of adversity. Besides this, Corindah was decidedly a 'lucky run,' a favoured 'bit of country.' When all the land was sore stricken with grass and water famines, it had springs which never ran dry; 'storms' too fell above Corindah; also strayed waterspouts, while all around was dry as Gideon's fleece. In the two decades which were coming to an end when Pollie Devereux had reached womanhood, the rigid economy and unwavering prudence with which the property had been managed had borne fruit. The credit balance at the bank had swelled noticeably during the later and more fortunate years. And Mrs. Devereux was known to be one of the wealthiest pastoral proprietors in a district where the extensive run-holders were gradually accumulating immense freeholds and colossal fortunes. A temporary check had taken place during the last most unfortunate season. No rain had fallen for nearly a year. The loss of stock on all sides had been terrific, well-nigh unprecedented. Mrs. Devereux, rather over-prudent and averse to expenditure (as are women mostly, from Queen Elizabeth downwards, when they have the uncontrolled management of affairs), had felt keenly the drawbacks and disasters of the period.

'I wonder if we shall get our letters to-morrow, mother,' said Pollie Devereux to that lady, as they sat at breakfast at Corindah on one clear, bright autumnal morning. 'Things do really happen if you wait long enough.'

'What is going to happen?' asked the elder lady dreamily, as if hardly aroused from a previous train of disturbing thoughts. 'We are all going to be ruined, or nearly so, if the winter proves dry. Mr. Gateward says the cattle never looked so wretched for years, and the poor sheep are beginning to die already.'

'Mr. Gateward is a raven for croaking; not that I ever saw one, but it sounds well,' replied the girl. 'He has no imagination. Why didn't he send the sheep away to the mountains before they got so weak, as Mr. Charteris and Mr. Atherstone did? It will be all his fault if they die, besides the shocking cruelty of slow starvation.'

'He is a conscientious, hard-working, worthy man,' said Mrs. Devereux. 'We should find it difficult to replace him. Besides, travelling sheep is most expensive. You are too impatient, my dear. We may have rain yet, you know.'

'I wish I had been a boy, mother,' replied the unconvinced damsel, drumming her fingers on the table as she looked wistfully through the open casement, festooned by a great trailing climber, to where the dim blue of a distant mountain range broke the monotony of the plain. 'It seems to me that none of the men we know have energy or enterprise enough to go beyond the dull round of routine in which they have been reared. Sheep and cattle, cattle and sheep, with a little turf talk for variation. They smoke all day, because they can't talk, and never think. Surely new

countries were not discovered or the world's battles fought by people like those I see. I think I should have been different, mother, don't you?'

'I am sure of that, my darling,' answered the mother with a sigh, patting the girl's bright abundant hair as she rose in her eagerness and stood before her. 'You put me in mind of your father when you look like that. But you must never forget that the world's exciting work is rarely allotted to women. The laws of society are harsh, but those of our sex that resist them are chiefly unhappy, always worsted in the end. My girl cannot help her eager, impatient heart, but she will never despise her mother's teaching, will she?'

'Never while life lasts,' said the girl impetuously, throwing her arm round the elder woman's neck, and burying her face in her bosom with childlike abandon—'not when she has an angel for a mother, like me; but I *am* so tired and wearied out with the terrible sameness of the life we lead. Though I have been here all my life, I seem to get less and less able to bear it. I am afraid I am very wicked, mother, but surely God never intended us to live and die at Corindah?'

'But you will be patient, darling?' said the mother tenderly, as with every fond endearment she soothed the restless, unfamiliar spirit newly arisen from the hitherto unruffled depths of the maiden's nature. 'You know I had intended to take you to Sydney for the summer months, if this terrible season had not set in. But when——'

'When the rain comes, when the grass grows—when the millennium of the pastoral world arrives—we may hope to have a glimpse of Paradise, as represented by Sydney, the

Botanical Gardens, and the Queen's-birthday ball. That's what you were going to say, mother darling, wasn't it? Poor old mother! while you're fretting about those troublesome sheep, poor things, that always seem to be wanting water, or grass, or rock-salt, which doesn't happen to be procurable—here's your ungrateful, rebellious child crying for the moon, to make matters worse. I'm ashamed of myself; I deserve to be whipped and sent to bed—not that I ever was, you soft-hearted old mammy. Besides, isn't this delightful unknown cousin, Captain Devereux, coming some fine day? He's a whole chapter of romance in himself. I declare I had forgotten all about him.'

The foregoing conversation was held in the morning room of the very comfortable cottage—or one might say *one* of the cottages—which, with a score of other buildings of various sorts and sizes, heights and breadths, ages and orders of architecture, went to make up Corindah head station. Perhaps the building referred to had the highest pretension to be called 'the house'—inasmuch as it was larger, more ornate, and more closely environed with flower-beds, shrubs, and trailing, many-coloured climbers, all of which bore tokens of careful tendance—than any of the others. As for the outward appearance of the edifice, it was composed of solid sawn timber, disposed outwardly in the form of horizontal slabs, lined more carefully as to the inner side; the whole finished with gay, fresh wall-papers and appropriate mouldings. A broad, low verandah ran around the house. A wide hall, of which both back and front doors seemed to be permanently open, completely bisected the building. Wire stands, upon which stood delicate pot-plants

of every shade of leaf and flower, gave a greenhouse air to this division. At a short distance, and situated within the enclosed garden, was a smaller, older building of much the same form and proportion. This was known as 'the barrack,' and was delivered over to Mr. Gateward and such bachelor guests as might from time to time visit the station. This arrangement, which often obtains in bush residences, is found to be highly convenient and satisfactory. In the sitting-room smoking and desultory, even jovial conversation can be carried on, together with the moderate consumption of refreshments, around the fire, after the ladies of the household have retired, without disturbing any one. In summer the verandah, littered with cane lounges and hammocks, can be similarly used. In the event of an early departure being necessary, the man-cook of the junior establishment can be relied on to provide breakfast at any reasonable, or indeed unreasonable, hour.

On several accounts Corindah was looked upon as a representative station, one of the show places of the district. It was a stage which was seldom missed by any of the younger squatters who could find a convenient excuse for calling there, upon the journey either to or from the metropolis. It was a large, prosperous, naturally favoured tract of country, a considerable and increasingly valuable property. It was managed after a liberal, hospitable, and kindly fashion. Mrs. Devereux, though most unobtrusive in all her ways, permitted it to be known that she did not approve of her friends passing the door without calling; and they were, certainly, treated so well that there was no great inducement to neglect that form of respect. There was yet

another reason why few of the travellers along the north-western road, friends, acquaintances, or even strangers, passed by the hospitable gate of Corindah. During these eventful years Mary Augusta, generally spoken of as 'Pollie Devereux' by all who could claim anything bordering upon the necessary grade of intimacy, had grown to be the handsomest girl within a hundred miles of the secluded spot in which she had been born and brought up.

And she was certainly a maiden fair, of mien and face that would have entranced that sculptor of old whose half-divine impress upon the marble will outlast how many a changing fashion, how many a fleeting age! Tall, lithe, and vigorous, yet completed as to hand and foot with an exquisite delicacy that contrasted finely with the full moulding of her tapering arms, her stately poise, her rounded form, blue-eyed, tawny-haired, with classic features and a regal air, she looked like some virgin goddess of the olden mythology, a wood-nymph strayed from Arcadian forests ere earlier faiths grew dim and ancient monarchs were discrowned.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

The heiress of Corindah had been carefully educated in a manner befitting her birth, as also the position she was likely to occupy in after-life. Governesses had been secured for her of the highest qualifications, at the most liberal salaries. Her talents for music and drawing had been highly cultivated. For the last three years of her educational term she had resided in Sydney with a relative, so that she might have the benefit of masters and professors. She had profited largely by instruction. She had read more widely and methodically than most young women. Well grounded in French and Italian, she had a handy smattering of German, such as would enable her, in days to come, either to perfect herself in the language by conversation or to dive more deeply into the literature than in the carelessness of youth she thought necessary.

These things being matters of general knowledge and common report in the district, it was held as a proved fact by the wives and daughters of her neighbours that Pollie Devereux had got everything in the world that she could possibly wish for. Agreed also that, if anything, she was a great deal too well off, having been petted and indulged in every way since her babyhood. That she ought to be only too thankful for these rare advantages, whereas at times she was discontented with her lot in life, and professed her desire for change—which was a clear indication that she was spoiled by overindulgence, and did not know what was for her real good. That her mother, poor Mrs. Devereux,