



WONGAN WAY

By

Lilian Wooster Greaves

Author of

"Roses in Rain," "The Two
Doves," etc.

Perth, Western Australia
1927

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To Maylie

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Wongan Way

I.

Bright House of Dreams, your galleries extend;
Give larger place to Memory's echoing halls.
Let golden cords from silver rods depend,
That I may hang more pictures on your walls.
What treasures have I gathered in the years
Of pilgrimage among the quiet hills.
No nobler work on Linton's walls appears;
No fairer fancy Rossi's studio fills.
All painted by the oldest masters too—
Sir Sol, his rainbow palette in his hand;
Luna, her silver pencil dipped in dew;
August, most handsome of Dame Flora's band.
Dawn, with his taper fingers rosy red;
Evening, her royal shading unsurpassed.
The vagrant seasons, painting as they sped,
Vowing each master-piece to be their last.
These, and that super-craftsman, Cloud by name,
Did in times past their genius record.
Nature, the cunning dealer, knew their fame,
And cleverly their costly works restored.
Room then, for these; and for more precious things,
Bright House of Dreams, upon your mist-grey
walls—
Portraits more fair than all imaginings;
Faces that smiled on me in Friendship's halls.
So build a larger place for Memory.
And though your shining door stands wide at night,
Yet would I use by day Love's jewelled key,
And enter in, renewing my delight.

Wongan Way

II.

The Tree of Time his leafy boughs outspread;
The migrant months, like birds had built their nests,
And reared their broods of singing days that fled
Too soon on flashing wings with gleaming breasts.
But some, their mournful wailings uttering,
Were dull of feather and of languid flight;
And, gloom to gloom, at last on weary wing
They vanished o'er the hueless sea of night.
But best and brightest were the "mystery" days
Of closely folded wing and sombre plume;
Till, challenged by a wind from forest ways,
Full laden with the scent of wattle-bloom,
The wakened birds an answering challenge cried—
"Away! away!" they sang; and soared and wheeled;

While on expanded wing and flashing side
Splendours of hidden colours shone revealed,
Such was the day that brought me once again
To Wongan.—Birds and days are wondrous things.
We know not what brown bird, what dawn of pain
Hides red and gold beneath its folded wings.

Wongan Hills in Drought

Sweet Wongan Hills! Oh could I but restore
In smallest measure your great gifts to me—
Could I but smooth your dear brown faces free
From lines of care, and see you smile once more.
I'd bring a giant's brimming bowl of rain
To bathe your burning brows, your dusty hands.
I'd crown and girdle you with flowery bands,
And wrap you round in cloth of gold again.
As when with breaking heart I crept to you
And at your feet poured out my tale forlorn;
While from your quiet strength to me was given
The healing peace that maketh all things new.
You smiled a heartening benison at morn,
You wrapped me in your crimson robe at even.

The Wongan Wayside

PART I.—August, 1915

The Wongan Way, like the way to a certain place in Ireland, is a "long, long way" in many respects. It is a long way from the city to begin with; and when we arrive at the railway station, which is called Wongan Hills, it is still a long way to the siding that should be called Wongan Gap, but is not. Here we are met and driven out through the Gap, and between the hills to our friends at Wongan Hills West—the real Wongan Hills.

Here and now the Wongan wayside is beautiful throughout the changeful days and restful nights. The Angel of the Rain has wept in pity over the land that last year languished in drought and dust. The "early and the latter rains" have brought healing and hope to the marred, scarred faces of the bare brown hills.

Last year My Lady of Spring passed by the land, sighing. She could not trust her precious things with us. She would not place her tender children in homes where the Angel of the Rain had not attended, to see that their cradles were curtained and cushioned with green; their sweet faces washed clean, and their tiny feet kept white and soft. So we had no flowers.

But now the hillsides are white and gold with scrub blossom; and all along the roadsides we see quaint orchids, patches of blue, tufts of lilac, clusters of pink, and trailings of scarlet. The wild fuschias are in

bud; so are the sarsaparillas and the fairy fringe creepers.

My Lady of Spring is designing for herself many beautiful costumes and draperies. The wild hops and other spicy shrubs distil for her a variety of perfumes. Everlastings are as star-dust beneath her feet, as she wanders on her "long, long way" from hill to lake. Loitering awhile along the creekside, she hears the music of falling waters over rocky slopes and between fern-clad banks. Then down she strolls from the rich red-soiled hills to the white sand-plain; past great clay-pans of milky-looking water; along the Saltwater river, where wattle shrubs covered in cloth of gold are united to their perfect reflections, and seem to be holding mystic communication with their other selves; past shallows where the smooth clay beneath the clear water is latticed with the footprints of wading birds; past flats where companies of trees appear to be standing knee-deep in water—to the lake-side.

And, oh! the joy of seeing the dear sweet lake, whose sole refreshment through dry years has been her own salt tears; the desolate one, who had been deserted by former friends and lovers—to see her pleasure now, as she welcomes to her home flights of happy birds; as her waters lap around the "swan's nest in the rushes." She reflects at morn the image of the hills that were once afar off, and receives to her gleaming palace at even, the sun in his armour of gold, with his attendant courtiers of cloud.

Of course, as we pass along the Wongan wayside in the company of My Lady of Spring, we see growing crops; we realise that Wongan is a land of promise. We pass a few of the homes, we meet some of the people on their way for the mail, or home from the townsite; and children going home from school.

Some day, when these beautiful hills are better known, when photographer and artist have done their duty to the country by picturing the natural beauties of the district in press and gallery; when weary town-dwellers sigh for country air, and coast-dwellers long for a change inland, they will hie them to the hills for rest and healing, and will find them.

Some day—and yet some other day! A half-mocking voice seems to foretell a more distant future. It says: Some day, when the rainfall of the good years is conserved for use in the dry years; when a great condenser distils fresh water from beneath the salt-beds; when the latent mineral resources can be developed; the travellers to the hills will not be only tourists, artistic parties, health seekers; but armies of industry. We do not know.

But if ever those days come, when our rocks shall be melted in the furnace, and our hills dissolved in the crucible; no burnished metal can be so precious to us as the wide clear vision of our early years here. No king of industry can love the land as we love it in its innocence and infancy. No noisy town can claim our affection as the "long, long ways," the slopes and gullies, the smiling wheatfields of Wongan Hills West.

Rain on Wongan Hills

Rain! For the Lord in His mercy hath spoken.
Rain! And our drought-ridden bondage is broken.
Rain! For a door has been opened in heaven.
Rain! Like the manna abundantly given.
Rain on the hills and the sand-plains beneath them.
Rain on the trees and the creepers that wreath them.
Rain on the gullies and green slopes that bound them.
Rain on the homes and the fair gardens round them.
Rain on the fields where the new grass is showing;
Rain, till the clay-pans are all overflowing.
Rain, till the creeks begin leaping and rushing;
Rain, till the rock-beds with fountains are gushing.
Rain, till the shrubs are with jewels a-quiver;
Rain, till the boys can go bathe in the river.
Rain! and the children come romping and dashing.
Rain! and the girls with their white feet come splashing.
Rain! till they shout it and breathe it and think it.
Rain! How they race it and chase it and drink it!
Rain! How they laugh at it, love it and sing it!
Rain, and the heaven-sent breezes that bring it.
Rain! and the wattle's gold censer is swinging.
Rain! and the birds their "Te deum" are singing.
Rain o'er the country-side, rain in our faces;
Rain with its message for dry desert places.
Rain, till our hearts, to their deepest recesses
Are cleansed and refreshed as the grey wildernesses.
Rain, till the dust of our doubting and grieving
Is all washed away in the joy of believing.
Rain, till the buds of our hope in their beauty
Wreath with their promise the dry tree of duty.
Rain, till we feel we are learning and growing.
Rain, till our love, like the creek, is o'erflowing.
Rain, till we lift up our hearts in thanksgiving—
Till clear is our vision, and purer our living.
Rain, till we know that the night of our sorrow
Shall break in a brighter and clearer to-morrow.
Rain! for the Lord in His mercy hath spoken.
Rain! and our drought-ridden bondage is broken!

The Little Storm Mother

Oh! who is afraid of the voice of thy thunder?
Who trembles and hides from the fire of thine eyes?
Who hails not thy coming, thou little grey wonder,
As far to the westward we see thee arise?

'Tis not for thy children, thine anger and grumbling,
Fierce little Storm-mother, with love in thy breast.
We laugh as we list to thy chariot-wheels rumbling.
We know what has brought thee from out the cool
west.

We know that the rover, the East Wind, has told thee
That blistered the hills are, and thirsty the plain.
Thy famishing children are fain to behold thee—
Their fevered lips long for thy coolness again.

In thine eyes blaze the lightnings of fierce indignation.
The little hills quake at the touch of thy feet.
But the children who know thee, in pure adoration
Cry "Little Storm-mother, your kisses are sweet!"

Come, veil us awhile from the harshness of summer.
Cast o'er us the folds of thy gossamer grey.
Oh! who is afraid of the little Storm-mother
Who shadows the hills from the heat of the day?

Birds at Wongan Hills

'Tweet, tweet, you're sweet; you're sweetest of the
sweet!'—

Thus Brown-wing would his song of love repeat;
And from the wattle branches' green retreat
He listened for the shy response—"Tweet, tweet!"

"A nest, a nest, a little, little nest—
The best, the best, the very, very best"—
Their blended song their love of home expressed—
The smallest, greyest home in all the West.

"You sweet, you sweet, you sweetest little things!"
Now Father Brown-wing, now the mother sings,
As each fond parent on untiring wings
To baby-bird some dainty morsel brings.

"Come fly! come fly! 'Tis time you learned to fly.
Come, Baby Brown-wings, spread your wings, and try.
You'll want to go a-hunting by-and-bye,
And wheeling round the salmon-gum so high."

Each wondrous birdling tries the wondrous feat.
Full soon their education is complete.
Brown-wing once more his love-song doth repeat—
"Tweet, tweet, my sweet; you're sweetest of the
sweet!"

Evening on Wongan Hills

Was there ever such an evening
Since God said "Let there be light"?
Ever such sublime communion—
Heaven with earth, and day with night—
Mingling in one perfect rapture
Heaven's love and earth's delight.

Shone there ever such a rainbow,
 Reaching down the hills to greet,
 Since the first bright arch of promise
 When earth's cleansing was complete,
 Spanned the smiling skies, but rested
 On the earth his glorious feet?
 Glowed there ever such a sunset
 Since earth's first glad day was done?
 When did heaven such dazzling raiment
 Wrap round earth, its cherished one—
 Like the wondrous coat of colours
 Jacob made for Rachel's son?
 Storms before and darkness after
 O'er our souls have lost their power—
 Safe and splendid heaven's high temple,
 Safe and splendid earth's strong tower.
 Part of both, and blest in either
 Rest our souls this evening hour.
 Rain-wet rocks, like jasper shining—
 Earthly things wear heavenly grace.
 Day looks back in evening's mirror—
 Sees his own all-glorious face.
 Blazing West to bright East calleth,
 "Surely God is in this place!"

Old

Old? Nonsense! the earth is as young as a kitten!
 'Tis only her garments look old—
 The wrappings of grey she put on that sad day
 When the last fires of autumn grew cold.
 Just give them a rinse in the wash-tub of winter,
 A dip in the dye-bath of spring.
 Then deck her and dress her; caress her and bless
 her—
 The earth is a merry young thing.

The Wongan Wayside

PART II.—August, 1915

We closed our former article with a hint of possible industrial changes in the yet invisible future of the Wongan Hills.

To us, dwelling in the present, to whom pioneering has been made easy in a hundred ways, the industry of the past appears more fascinating, inasmuch as it is already written. We are not going back to ages gone by, when in the beginning of things, some great giant seems to have gathered out some of the precious things that were hid in the earth—sorted out some gleams of copper, and specks of gold; snatched at some of the living radium stones, and then lost them among the rocks, amid the general disturbance he had brought about.

We do not know how long it is since "the waters covered the face of the earth" in these parts. We only see great beds of cement and plaster; and find the tiny shells left as keepsakes from the former age. Those who know the signs may read them.

Tokens of a far more recent past seem sufficiently ancient to us. Wells put down half a century ago, in the picturesque Old Testament fashion, still remain; one with a large fig tree beside it.

One farmer friend shows us traces of old tracks which were used by sandalwood cutters in the early days; and cattle-pads, so long unused, that trees, whose size proclaims them to be fully thirty years of age, grow right in the middle of the road.

We become quite interested in old roads. "What is this?" we ask, as we pass a place where logs are laid across the track—"the remains of an old corduroy road?" "No, that is where Thomas got bogged last week, and laid saplings before the wheels, to pull out on." So we are brought back with a laugh to the present.

Every day, a few yards from our present abode, we tread the ashes where stood a miner's forge about twenty-five years ago. Children play about the places in the hill-side where the miners once levelled the earth floor of their tents. When we visit the gold-show and the copper-show, we wonder if ever the agricultural age will merge into the metal age here.

The gleams of light thrown occasionally on the awakening of the agricultural life of Wongan Hills West, are very interesting. "When I came here, eight years ago," says the first white woman, "I could not see twenty yards in any direction, for bush." "When I first came," said the second white woman, her arrival being about a year later, and her home eight miles distant, "the worst part to me was when my husband had to go for stores. Every two months he took the horse and cart and was away eight days. I used to be terrified for fear one of the children should be taken ill. And, oh! the howling of the dingoes round the place at night!"

"Our first camp-site, and the remains of our first garden," points out another woman; "we shall be quite sorry when the plough cuts it up and turns it in next week."

"Here's where I carried Mother across the river, the day of our first district picnic"—and Father shows us a point on the Mortlock River. The eldest son had carried his sister across, while the younger son carried the basket. "And a great day it was," remarks Mother. Yes, Mother; greater than you knew. They were great days that brought women just like you, and children just like yours to the making of the place.

Many of the men who came here were from the city. They had worked in offices, occupied important posi-

tions in the social, financial and intellectual world. Their wives had been gently born and unused to hardship. Yet when changing conditions induced their husbands to take up land, and develop it themselves, the women cheerfully left behind them the ease and nicety of city life, braved the wilderness with equal courage; perhaps greater; for only women know how much it costs a woman to be brave.

Here, four years ago, after the railway had been opened, we first visited the women in their homes at West Wongan. Our drive was only thirteen miles. Theirs had been forty-six miles, via Goomalling; or sixty-four miles, via Toodyay. To us there was no enshrouding, encroaching blockade of forest; for man and fire had made vast clearings, and established communication with the outside world.

Here we first realised the quiet heroism of the "Lady on the Land." We wish that she would write her own story; but she does not think it very wonderful. She sees nothing heroic in leaving a comfortable house ("all conveniences," as the advertisements say) and a large friendly and social circle, for a cycle of loneliness in a primitive camp; baking her own bread, sometimes in a camp-oven to begin with; dependent to a great extent on tinned foods for long periods of time; gladly taking up increased work as a cow can be purchased, or men hired for harvesting.

Her special pride is in her children—Ted's first kangaroo; Billy's first duck; how the boys provided Christmas fare—one duck, one pigeon, and two parrots! How Tom cut a path through the bush for his sister's daily walk to school. How little Jean set out on an array of jam-tins during a shower, to catch some water for Mother—Margaret's bread baking; Fanny's riding; the boys' carpentering and plumbing and plastering; the girl's gardening, white-washing and upholstering.

They are just what we would expect from the sons and daughters of these particular mothers.

Some day the first white woman and the second white woman, and their neighbours will reap their reward.

The Farmer's Daughter

Guess I'll stick to washing dishes,
Sweeping, cooking, darning socks;
Having literary wishes
Gives a girl too many shocks.

I think thoughts just like those bookmen;
Dream sweet dreams from morn to night.

I see folks just like their spook-men
In the evening's ghostly light.

I'd have loved a life of learning,
But whene'er I go about

With fires of genius burning,
 Then the kitchen fire goes out.
 "Look here, Sis, we're two great ninnies"—
 Thus my brother yesterday—
 "Working hard when golden guineas
 Here are fairly flung away.
 "Prize for lyric, prize for sonnet,
 Prize for humorous verses, too—
 Seize a paper, scribble on it—
 Suit for me and dress for you
 "Come, let's try it—I say, Mary,
 What's a lyric, anyhow?"—
 So I got the dictionary,
 And forgot to milk the cow.
 —"Sonnets must be made to order;
 Fourteen lines, and put just so,
 Like in your embroidery border,
 Or a picture-frame, you know.
 "Where's the 'Royal Road to Rhyming'?
 Lyrics must be musical—
 Ebbing, flowing, singing, chiming,
 With a gentle rise and fall."
 So we scribbled till the dark it
 Closed around, and day was gone;
 Mother home again from market!
 Dinner wasn't even on!
 Father swore a score of sonnets,
 Several miles of lyric, too—
 Guess I'll earn my frocks and bonnets
 Just as other daughters do.

Stoker's Rash

Morning

Was it grass-seeds you mentioned? Beg pardon, I'm
 sure.
 Proceed with your story, I pray.
 Didn't mean to be rude; but I misunderstood—
 I thought you were speaking of hay.
 A ton to the acre, your five-cornered lot—
 Is that where you're stooking to-day?
 We chaps from the city are objects of pity.
 We envy you, stooking your hay.
 Sore arms, tired back, and a splinter or two?
 What matter? 'Tis thanksgiving day.
 After famine's long battle you've feed for your cattle—
 You ought to be singing of hay.
 Try thanksgiving oil for the blisters and rash;
 Or your Mary will kiss them away.
 Or let me try the charm of life on a farm,
 I'll give you a hand with the hay.

Evening

I'm swarming and teeming with grass-seeds!
 I'm sure the dashed things have struck root!
 Here! let's have a go at the bathroom;
 And lend me an unseeded suit.
 I tingle and burn worse than ever!
 What's that? Oh! the order for Perth—
 I can't hold a pencil for splinters—
 Just order some best Fuller's earth.
 Some wadding and lint and carbolic,
 Some needles and tweezers and oil.
 Order Zam-Buk and eye-salve and Condy's—
 I'm all of a sizzle and boil.
 I've fly-fever, blood-poison and snake-bite,
 And sunstroke and measles.—Don't laugh.
 I'll "write up" the cost of production—
 You deserve a good price for your "chaff."
 Say, when can I get these dashed cure-alls?
 Next week! via Johnson and Brown?
 Good heavens, man! Order the sulky!
 I'm back by the next train to town.
 What's that you say? Cream? Ah! that's better—
 Why Mary, you're saving my life.
 Here, some on my arms—ah! that's heaven!
 I think I must order a wife.

The Breaking of the Drought

Morn, and the dust on red wings flying,
 Where flowers are dead, and green grass dying;
 The land-breeze like a spoilt child crying—
 The Wongan Hills are sighing.
 Noon, and the storm-wind fiercely dashing
 Through bending forest the tall trees lashing;
 The lightning's eyes 'twixt thunders crashing,
 Round the Wongan Hills are flashing.
 Afternoon—through the creek-beds creeping
 Soon rise the wakened waters leaping,
 Till everywhere are torrents sweeping—
 The Wongan Hills are weeping.
 Evening, and cleansed from all defiling,
 With playful drops the moments whiling;
 Wrapped in the sunset's robe beguiling,
 The Wongan Hills are smiling.



COMBINED BOOKLET

These verses can be obtained in a combined booklet, "Out of Doors in W.A.," comprising "Wongan Way" and "Wild Flowers," and including a portrait of the writer.



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