**BOB SNAPE: Reflections on the COOK FAMILY HISTORY, Camberwell, circa 1955.**

It has been suggested on several occasions that someone should write the story of the Cook Family. I have no intention of attempting the task. The longer I live the more I realise what a fine lot of people they are – (Myself included of course).

The work would need to be undertaken by an outsider – some disinterested person prepared to ruthlessly analyse and record their weaknesses and funny little ways as well as their virtues.

I must regretfully admit that the offspring of Charles and Eliza Cook , from Julia Maria to Lily Malenda Glover were, one and all, frightful snobs. They tried to trace their ancestry back to the celebrated Captain Cook. Fortunately for themselves, they were unsuccessful in this as I believe that history records that the only children left behind by the famous captain were all illegitimate.

They changed their names from Mary Ann to Marian , and Emily to Emilie. They couldn’t do much about the others but I believe that some of them even added an ‘e’ to the word Cook. On or about their arrival in Melbourne from the country, they decided that that “pa” and “ma” should be abolished and “father” and “mother” substituted therefor. There was an old saying that Julia used to say to her mother in the early days, “Dance like Potson, ma”. I do not know who on earth Potson was but I can’t imagine Grandma Cook dancing like Potson, or anyone else. This prohibition was handed down to the next generation and the little Snapes wouldn’t dare call their mother “mummy”, “mum” or “ma”. I was profoundly shocked one day to hear Ethel Lightfoot refer to her father as “daddy”, and concluded that she must have got some special dispensation to be game enough to take a liberty.

Getting back to the aunts, it is worth recording that they all succeeded in capturing a pretty decent lot of husbands, with the exception of Emily Eliza who absolutely refused to get married at all. Bob and Jack {Cook} were, of course, scared right off matrimony: they had learned too much about women from their big bevy of sisters. Nevertheless, the Cook daughters were really a splendid lot of women: intelligent, tremendously alive, full of energy and activity, very interested in music and literature and very religious.

I remember our Grandfather, Charles Cook, as a grand old man with a snow-white beard, fresh complexion, jovial smiling face and twinkling eyes – always making little jokes and quaint little rhymes. He used to spend a lot of his time, after retirement, in his workshop at the bottom of the yard at No. 7 Taylor Street, sawing and planning pieces of timber and making all sorts of useful articles and toys for his grandchildren. He had a fine tenor voice and sang while he worked those stirring old Wesleyan Methodist hymns, full of thythy, including, “ My heart and voice I raise”, “All hail the power of Jesu’s Name”, etc. I think his favourite was, “I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath”. On Sundays, he dressed up in a frock coat, stiff white shirt and bell-topper hat, to go to the Gladstone Street Moonee Ponds church, with Grandma in a long black dress and black bonnet. He used to but little peppermint walking sticks for us. As we lived at No. 23, only a few doors up the street, we saw him nearly every day. Once when I was there, he produced a bottle of some stuff he bought to put into the fowls’ food to increase their egg-laying capacity. He drank some of the stuff and offered me a spoonful. I hesitated and said, “ Are you sure it’s got no alcohol in it as I signed the pledge last Sunday?” Fortunately, at that moment, Grandma came along and took the bottle away.

Grandma Cook was a wonderful woman. It is said that in the wilds of Walhalla and the early days at Maffra and Sale, when anyone was in trouble the cry was “Send for Mrs Cook”, or, “Go to Mrs Cook”, and she was always ready and willing to help. With her large family and frequent change of residence she must have been the proverbial “busy woman”.

I turned up at 7 Taylor St. Regularly every Saturday morning, in the hope of earning an honest halfpenny, by running errands for her. There I would find her in the big kitchen making large quantities of bachelor’s buttons, ginger cakes, scones, etc. She always had a terrific fire going in the old fashioned stove. More than once, the chimney caught fire and someone had to scramble up onto the roof and throw a wet bag over the chimney top.

I never heard Grandma speak an unkind word of anybody. I recollect one day that I had a lot of texts on little cards. She picked one out with only two words on it, “Be Kind”. As plainly as though she was in this room at the moment, I can remember her saying the words out loud to herself, “Be Kind”.

Grandma Cook took me on a train trip to Sandringham one day, to visit the Lightfoot family who had taken a house called ‘Marsden’ on Beach Road. It was a very hot day and we got lost and walked a way down past the old Red Bluff Hotel before finding the house.

We all liked to see Auntie Naomi as she always handed out oranges, apples and bananas in large quantities, and there was of course that additional attraction of the beach.

The Christmas gatherings at ‘Kalimna’ were momentous occasions. All the uncles , aunts and cousins turned up without fail (except of course those who happened to be in W.A.) The big dining room was packed with tables and seats of all kinds and the excitement was terrific. There was almost a riot among the kids one year when Uncle Jim Hannan was detected surreptitiously slipping a sixpence into Bert’s Christmas pudding.

What fun the kids had after the sumptuous dinner was over! We used to sneak around old Uncle Ned’s cabin at the back of the house; peeping around the door until he chased us away. We usually ended up with fingers full of thorns from the prickly hedge in the paddock next door.

It is remarkable what things stick in people’s memories: I remember Uncle Joseph Hulme coming round to Kalimna and cutting down the big pepper trees that almost filled the front garden. He chose an excellent way of keeping himself from worrying. On that day, Jim (Frank Charles Hulme) was born.

Aunt Marian scared the life out of me one day. I was staying at their house in Gatehouse Street, Parkville, and wheeling Bab up and down in the pram on the balcony verandah. She said, “If you tip my baby out I’ll kill you”. She was always so gentle and didn’t realise that her words would be taken seriously. ......................................................................................

We used to learn lots of psalms. One verse I remember was “Let all people praise Thee O God”. I knew who God was all right but could never make out who the O God was.

Grandma Cook’s favourite was the 23rd and she never tired of hearing us recite it to her. When Toll first went to Alexandra and the train was passing through Yea she called out, “Look, Yea though I walk”. I decided that I would have a kind heart so that I would never die. (The old hymn said, “Kind hearts never die”).

Ether had some original ideas on grammar when she was a small girl. A man named Potts made a bathing box for them at Sandringham and she insisted on saying, “Mr Pott made out bathing bock,” because there was only one Mr Potts and only one bathing box.

Our Aunt Emily was one oif the most unselfish and hardworking persons I ever knew. With her school and numerous music pupils she must have worked an 80 hour week. In addition to this she somehow found time to mother a number of orphans, teach Sunday schhol, get up concerts and what not. I was fond of music but would never practise. She used to crack me over the knuckles with a huge lead pencil. She should have had a cat o’ nine-tails. I was probably her only pupil who never passed a single examination. I was always too scared to ever sit one. On one break-up day in the old school hall in Taylor Street, I had the honour of playing a duet with a fat little girl named Lena Anderson. Half way through the piece there was a da capo and we were supposed to repeat from the beginning. I repeated but she went straight on. You can imagine how we ended up. The following year, we had a more ambitious concert in the Puckle Street Hall. On the day of the concert I had been sent a Message to buy some phenyl and spilled half the stuff on my clothes on the way home. When we were all seated on the platform on the night of the concert Emily kept saying “Where’s that dreadful smell of disinfectant coming from?” It was eventually traced to me and I would probably have been tossed out of the concert if it hadn’t been for the fact that my name was down on the programme for the piano solo, the Marche aux Flambeaux, which was executed by me with much fear and trembling at the knees.

In those days the radio and gramophone were unknown, but musical evenings where everybody had to do a turn were all the rage. Every now and then there would be a surprise party at somebody’s house. There would be a knock on the door and the crowd would rush in, music in one hand and supper in the other.

All the aunts were fond of music and most of them could sing and play the piano. Lily had a beautiful voice, could play any mortal thing from the Soldiers of the Queen to the Dead March in Saul and was in great demand as a soloist at weddings. Isabel, with her lovely deep voice used to enthral us with her recitations. She had a big elocution class which usually met in the dining room at Kalimna. One pupil of hers I remember used to be always reciting a piece of about forty verses called “Lasca”. Poor Lasca used to die in the last verse. The pity of it was that she didn’t snuff out in the first verse.

(This stuff was read by me at a relatives’ party arranged by Auntie Flo and Auntie Lil some years ago.

R.S.)