# The Life and Work of George Isaacs

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract The Life and Work of George Isaacs Anne Elizabeth Black

This is the first comprehensive examination of the life, work and significance of the colonial writer George Isaacs, the "thorough Bohemian" who was the author of the first novel published in South Australia, *The Queen of the South*. Under the apt pseudonym of "A. Pendragon", Isaacs captured the dynamic atmosphere of the colonial era in his writing, which ranged from plays to poetry and from journalism to prose. But he did not fit comfortably into colonial society. Set apart by an unconventional private life, his Jewish heritage, his fierce intelligence and his willingness to speak and write his mind, he led a surprisingly varied life across two hemispheres and two Australian colonies. Isaacs was largely forgotten after his death. This chronological biography redresses this neglect by establishing the details of his life and writing. An Appendix provides a bibliography of his published and unpublished works. Opening chapters examine Isaacs' youth in England, with an emphasis on his first precocious publication, his enthusiasm for antiques, his influential connections, his travels and his immigration to South Australia. Following chapters discuss Isaacs' productive years in Australia, where, despite poverty, imprisonment and chronic ill-health, he visited the Victorian goldfields, wrote plays that were performed around the world, and had great influence in Gawler. There, he was a founder of the Humbug Society, influential in the Gawler Institute and responsible for an Australian anthem. One of Isaacs' plays, based on *Frankenstein*, was possibly the first published science fiction in Australia. This opinionated man left a significant imprint on his society and its literature. He did not become famous or wealthy, but his activities and his writing provide a useful counterpoint to the conventional interpretation of a successful life. As an inaugural study, *The Life and Work of George Isaacs* contributes another strand to our knowledge of Australian colonial literature and provides a foundation for further research. On a more intimate level, it is a paradigm of a colonial scribe—a case study of one immigrant's struggles to live as a writer in the evolving society of colonial Australia.

# Thesis Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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# Acknowledgements

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kindly provided access to Gawler's early records, plus valuable ongoing advice and friendship over the course of my studies. Staff at the Monash University Library and at the State Library of Victoria courteously facilitated my research. My fruitful study in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales was assisted by the efforts of Sue Chapman. Thanks to Colin Harris, Louise Trevelyan and Patricia Buckingham, I was able to view Samuel Isaacs' business card and other items in Duke Humfrey's Library in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Also in England, staff at the British Library courteously and efficiently dealt with my requests, as did librarians at the National Maritime Museum Library at Greenwich. The Australian Jewish Historical Society in Sydney provided me with useful information.

Much of my research on Isaacs took place in archives and museums. I am especially grateful for the expertise of staff at the State Records of South Australia and the Public Record Office, Victoria, who located legal and other records relevant to Isaacs' court cases and hospital admissions. Staff at the National Archives in Kew, England organized access to various useful legal documents, including the transcript that bears Isaacs' birth date. Eve Watson, Head of Archive at the Royal Society of Arts, London, kindly responded to my query regarding Isaacs' involvement in a catalogue. I appreciated the valuable assistance that I received from Arthur MacGregor, Francesca Jones and David Berry at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in response to my questions about the fate of Isaacs' jewellery and books. Natasha Awais-Dean and Alex Garrett at the British Museum provided me with wonderful information and the opportunity to closely examine the medieval rings and enamels that once belonged to my subject. Back in Australia, Dr. Georgia Hale and other staff at the Art Gallery of South Australia kindly located, photographed and arranged the viewing of a painting. I extend my warm thanks to the volunteers at the Castlemaine Historical Society, Victoria, who shared their knowledge of the local goldfields. I am very grateful to the Historical Society of South Australia Inc., for its generous grant in support of my study.

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This thesis is dedicated, with love and gratitude, to Ian Black, my dear husband, for his unfailing support; to my children, David Black and Fiona Stary, of whom I am so proud; and to my grandsons, Owen and Marcel Stary—the great-great-great-great-great grandsons of George Isaacs.

# Introduction

On Valentine's Day 1876, an impoverished man died at a hotel in the centre of Adelaide. In keeping with his Jewish heritage he was quickly dispatched to the West Terrace Cemetery, where, with no family present, he was buried without pomp. His grave was unmarked by a stone; his memory damned for posterity by the obituary soon published in the *South Australian Register*. Such was the end of George Isaacs, the little-known author of the first novel published in South Australia. Whether writing under his own name or under his apt pseudonym, "A. Pendragon", Isaacs captured the dynamic atmosphere of his era in his written works, but he did not fit comfortably into colonial society. Set apart by an unconventional private life, his Jewish heritage, his fierce intelligence and his willingness to speak and write his mind, Isaacs was an intellectual larrikin who led a surprisingly varied life across two hemispheres and two Australian colonies. His activities were so diverse that, in the early stages of my thesis, I suspected that I had accidentally followed the trails of several gentlemen named "George Isaacs". From any perspective, Isaacs' story is intriguing. This thesis is the first comprehensive account of his life, work and significance.

My research addresses a lacuna in Australian literary scholarship, for apart from my recent investigations, Isaacs has been largely overlooked. His modest fame as a colonial writer had faded by his death, thereby ensuring his rapid disappearance from literary history. From a national perspective, his current significance can be gauged by his omission from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, although that is the case for many interesting writers. The *Oxford Literary Guide to Australia* and other texts recognise the significance of his novel, but he is not mentioned, for example, in standard reference works such as the

*Cambridge History of Australian Literature*.[1] Isaacs' entry in *AustLit* is the current benchmark for information on both his life and his writing, but, reflecting the limitations of current scholarship, it is seriously deficient in both biographical and bibliographical detail.[2] Isaacs' written works have attracted little literary criticism, save from Paul Depasquale in *A Critical History of South Australian Literature 1836–1930,* from Graham Stone who has commented on Isaacs' significance to the genre of Australian science fiction, and from Eric Irwin who has discussed one of Isaacs' plays.[3] The few published historical references to Isaacs' life concentrate on his social and cultural activities in the South Australian town of Gawler, where, among many other things, he was instrumental in the foundation of both the Humbug Society, and its satirical offshoot, the *Bunyip* newspaper. Clearly, Isaacs' impact as a man and as a writer has been neglected. My recent research into his life has revived interest in his achievements and provided new insights into colonial times.

The primary aim of this thesis is to redress a gap in the knowledge of Australian colonial literature and colonial society by producing a definitive account of Isaacs' life and his writing. My research answers some fundamental and interwoven questions. What are the biographical details of Isaacs' life? What did he write and what was its significance, and how does his life expand our understanding of the evolving colonial society? From his privileged youth in London to his adulthood in the more socially mobile, but harsh reality of the Australian colonies, Isaacs was a compulsive scribe. Plays, prose, poems, editorials, advertisements,

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[1] Peter Pierce, ed., *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia* (Melbourne; New York: Oxford University Press, Revised edition, 1993), 223; Peter Pierce, ed., *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature* (Melbourne, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[2] "George Isaacs," *AustLit*, accessed 2 June 2015, www.austlit.edu.au In common with all literary references to Isaacs, *AustLit* approximates Isaacs' date of birth and fails to acknowledge much of his writing.

[3] Paul Depasquale, *A Critical History of South Australian Literature 1836–1930 With Subjectively Annotated Bibliographies* (Warradale, South Australia: Pioneer Books, 1978). For Isaacs' place in Australian science fiction, see "Australian Science Fiction (Part II)," Graham Stone, *bookcollectorsnews*, 30 April 2012, https://bookcollectorsnews.wordpress.com/2012/04/30/australian-science-fiction-part-ii/ and Graham Stone, "Here We Really Begin," in *Notes on Australian Science Fiction* (Sydney: Graham Stone, 2001), 66–69. Eric Irvin has discussed Isaacs in *Australian Melodrama: Eighty Years of Popular Theatre* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1981) and in "Early Nineteenth-Century Australian Drama: A Preliminary Investigation," *Southerly* 35.4 (1975): 362–374.

reviews and lectures flowed from his pen, but much of this writing has been overlooked by bibliographers. My exhaustive research in this area establishes Isaacs' significance as a colonial writer.

In enriching our understanding of colonial life and literature, the content of this thesis aligns with current directions in Australian literary research, especially the resurgence of interest in biography.[4] A study of Isaacs' writing is also compatible with the movement towards a regional rather than a national approach to Australian literature, as discussed by Philip Mead in his article "Nation, Literature, Location."[5] Supporting this emphasis on regionalism is Philip Butterss' recent book *Adelaide: A Literary City* (2013), which includes a chapter on Isaacs by the author of this thesis.[6] My discussion of Isaacs' goldfields novel is relevant to a further area of current interest in Australian literary studies—the history of the book—which according to *AustLit* "has emerged as a significant field of study, growing out of the solid foundations of bibliography and textual criticism."[7]

Mirroring the form of a traditional nineteenth-century "life", this thesis is structured as a chronological biography of twelve chapters, preceded by an introduction. The content falls naturally into two parts. The opening chapters one to three, covering the years from 1825 until

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[4] British critic Catherine Belsey notes that "inside academic publishing, critical biography has gradually acquired increasing cachet." Catherine Belsey, *A Future for Criticism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 37. Recent award-winning Australian literary biographies that support this trend include Jill Roe's *Stella Miles Franklin: A Biography* (Sydney: Fourth Estate, 2008) and Philip Butterss' *An Unsentimental Bloke: The Life and Work of C.J. Dennis* (Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2014).

[5] Philip Mead, "Nation, Literature, Location," in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, ed. Peter Pierce (Melbourne: Cambridge UP, 2009), 549–567.

[6] Anne Black, "A Colonial Wordsmith: George Isaacs in Adelaide, 1860–1870," in *Adelaide: A Literary City*, ed. Philip Butterss (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2013), 39–55.

[7] "Australian Book History and Print Culture," *AustLit*, accessed 6 June 2015, www.austlit.edu.au/specialistDatasets/AustMag The University of Queensland's *History of the Book in Australia* series is further evidence of renewed interest in this field. Volume two (John Arnold and Martyn Lyons, eds., *A History of the Book in Australia, Volume II: 1890–1945* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2001) and volume three (Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright, eds., *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2006) have already appeared. The first volume, which will cover Isaacs' era, is forthcoming.

Isaacs' immigration in 1851, investigate his busy European youth. His adult years in the colonies from 1851 until 1876, which are the primary focus of my research, are discussed in the following eight chapters. Finally, the concluding chapter assesses Isaacs' significance and his legacy. The patterns evident in the writer's early life—of travel, education, sociability, ill-health and regrettably, financial mismanagement—were repeated in his adult life in the colonies. The strongest link between the two parts of his life, however, was his sustained interest in writing. Until now, bibliographers have assumed that Isaacs commenced his writing career in Australia. My research, however, has revealed the existence of a previously unnoticed publication in England. This youthful literary work confirms his lifelong literary drive. A full list of Isaacs' written works is included in an appendix, which forms the first comprehensive bibliography of his published and unpublished works. Underpinning this thesis is a methodology rooted in the identification and interpretation of relevant primary sources, held in context by reference to existing scholarship on the colonial era and its literature. The lack of previous research on Isaacs is not due to a dearth of primary material for, unlike the vast majority of his contemporaries, he bequeathed to posterity—sometimes deliberately and sometimes inadvertently—a rich archive.

The most potent traces of Isaacs are found in his published works, but it is necessary to be cautious about interpreting his writing as a reflection of his life because Isaacs was always writing for an audience. As Catherine Belsey cautions, "What could seem more self-evident than that the explanation of a text is to be found in the intentions, experience and attitudes of its author?"[8] When discussing Isaacs' obviously autobiographical pieces, I have heeded John McLaren's wise words:

> It is only too easy to fall into the circular argument that an episode in his life explains this poem, and that the poem explains the occurrence. This is close to a hermeneutic

[8] Belsey, *A Future for Criticism*, 37.

> circle; that we understand a text only through its context, and that the context is explained by the text ... But hermeneutics also offers a way of escaping these circles and bringing together the different elements of literary biography in a narrative that establishes some of the truths of the life and the values of the writing, even if the result can never be complete.[9]

Most of Isaacs' works are now easily accessible thanks to the increasing digitisation of books, journals and newspapers. His words display his wit, the breadth of his knowledge, his intelligence, his scorn of humbug, but most of all, his creative compulsion. They often reveal a clear correlation between his day-to-day experiences and the content of his writing, which was frequently autobiographical and frequently passionate. This literary work can stand alone, but it is best appreciated within the context and circumstances in which it was written. Whether he is describing his adventures during the 1848 French revolution or composing a love poem, Isaacs' writing can provide valuable insights into his character and his inner thoughts. References to and by Isaacs in contemporary newspapers, now wonderfully accessible via the National Library of Australia's *Trove* website, provide a useful account of the progression of his life and a vital foundation for this biography. His public voice is most authoritative in his rapidly-composed newspaper editorials, opinion pieces and letters to the press. The extent of his involvement in his society is apparent from items as diverse as reviews of his plays, political statements, minutes of meetings, court reports, lecture dates, petitions and advertisements in the press.

Isaacs' treasured collection of letters and ephemera, covering the period from 1843 when he was eighteen, until his death, is housed in a Victorian scrapbook. It is the pre-eminent source of information on important aspects of his life, as it provides details of his precocious youth

[9] John McLaren, "Vincent Buckley: Shaping the Book," *Vincent Buckley Special Issue, Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* (2010): 3.

and also, a sequential view of his activities.[10] The enclosed contents represent many of the things that were most important to him. These social connections to eminent authors, musicians and titled gentlemen, acknowledgements from older and wiser scholars, and evidence of his life in the theatre and as a writer, provide a key to Isaacs' private world. The letters, which were no doubt judiciously selected, provide insights into how others perceived him, or at least how he wished to be seen.

Isaacs' life is a puzzle of many pieces and my search for further sources of information has been both extensive and exhaustive. Aside from the primary sources already mentioned, I have discovered remnants of his life in major Australian and British libraries, including the Bodleian Library in Oxford, which has a letter in his hand, and the British Library, which holds the earliest version of his novel. Isaacs attracted litigation at many points in his life, and I have examined legal papers relevant to these cases in the National Archives of the United Kingdom at Kew, England, and in the state archives of South Australia and Victoria. These documents chart his many difficulties and his occasional triumphs. I have researched the details of the former convict vessel that carried Isaacs to Australia in the library of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Genealogical tools such as censuses, wills, databases and registers of births, deaths and marriages have provided further snippets of information, as have the early records of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation, and the catalogue of the Art Gallery of South Australia. I have traced some of Isaacs' descendants and the descendants of his friends, to determine whether any oral history of his life remains. Throughout this research, generous experts in fields as diverse as etymology and entomology, medieval jewellery and numismatics, archaeology and goldfields history, have enhanced my understanding of Isaacs' world.

[10] George Isaacs' Scrapbook is found in the State Library of South Australia, and is catalogued at D Piece (Archival), D 6668 (Misc). Henceforth, the volume will be referred to as the "Scrapbook". The State Library of South Australia's catalogue describes it as a "guardbook". Its interleaved paper "guards" allowed for future expansion as more material was added to the collection.

To place Isaacs' life in its geographical and historical context I have indulged in biographical tourism. I have held his precious medieval rings in a back room of the British Museum, and visited his ancestors' graves at the Balls Pond Burial Ground. The streets where he strolled in London and Paris, the homes he inhabited, the dock from which he departed England, and his beloved towns in southern France have helped me to assemble an impression of the man, despite the time that has passed. I have walked along the promenade at Nice, "by the blue and tideless sea" that inspired his poetry, and climbed the stairs of the small museum in Montpellier where, as a young man, he attended an archaeological meeting. Isaacs' presence is felt most strongly in South Australia. The old Institute building in Gawler, the Adelaide hotel where he died, a theatre where one of his plays was performed, even the Destitute Asylum, all evoked his diminutive, bespectacled ghost.

Isaacs deserves such attention. He did not become famous or wealthy, but his productive activities and his writing provide a useful counterpoint to the conventional interpretation of a successful life. In a riches to rags story, he strove and suffered for his writing. As an inaugural study, my thesis contributes another strand to our knowledge of Australian colonial literature. It also provides a foundation for further research on the writer. On a more intimate level, it is a paradigm of a colonial scribe—a case study of one immigrant's struggles to live as a writer in colonial Australia.

# Chapter 1: Youth and *The Hesperus*, 1825–1844

*It may not be too fanciful to presume, that every century has produced an average amount of genius, and that the superiority of one age over another has been less owing to any caprice of nature, than to extraordinary events which have developed great minds, that otherwise might have lived and died in obscurity.* George Isaacs, 1843[1]

George Samuel Isaacs was born a Jew in a country that had not always welcomed people of that faith. For more three hundred and fifty years from 1290, the practice of Judaism had been outlawed in England, until the ban was relaxed by Oliver Cromwell. Then, waves of Jewish refugees fleeing persecution in Europe sought the relative stability of English life. Isaacs' ancestors were part of that migration. By the time of his birth in London on 5 January 1825, his family had been firmly assimilated into Anglo-Jewish society for several generations.[2] The given name that he shared with the reigning monarch, George IV, granted him a modicum of religious anonymity in a sometimes anti-Semitic society. If he also received a traditional Jewish name, it has been long forgotten.

Isaacs' family had commercial rather than literary aspirations. Father Samuel was a merchant who sold paintings, furniture, jewellery and antiques to London's burgeoning middle-class. He lived with his wife Ann in the city's West End, where many of the wealthier and more educated Jewish citizens had recently established their homes and businesses. In contrast, the majority of London's Jews, many of them street traders of commodities such as old clothes and fruit, lived in the East End of the city in humble circumstances. By the time of Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838, Samuel Isaacs' business was thriving. The plate glass windows

[1] Anon. [George Isaacs], *The Hesperus: an Original Monthly Magazine of Humour, Literature, and Art* 1 (1843): 1.

[2] Confirmation of Isaacs' date of birth is found in the transcript of an 1849 legal case between Isaacs, his father and his maternal grandmother: "And your orator [George Isaacs] further sheweth that he attained the age of Twenty one years on the fifth day of January one thousand eight hundred and forty six." George Samuel Isaacs v Ann Isaacs & Samuel Isaacs, National Archives of the UK, C14/1101/I/ J21, 1.

of his shop at 131 Regent Street, on the corner of Leicester Street, reflected a prosperous vista—thronging shoppers, attractive buildings and graceful street lamps.[3] Isaacs took full advantage of the fashionable location, with an ever-changing stock and frequent sales. His elegant business card served to reassure his customers that only superior goods were available at his establishment.[4] Buyers certainly needed to be wary. London was then awash with fakes of every description and many "antiques" were newly manufactured in the so-called "forgery factories" of Wardour Street, located not far from Isaacs' business. Whether Samuel's stock was in fact entirely genuine is debatable. The London-based art connoisseur and politician William Coningham, when describing paintings at a Parisian gallery, sniffed "really Isaacs in Regent Street has nothing so bad", so perhaps some of Samuel Isaacs' "Old Masters" were not what they seemed.[5] Nevertheless, the profits from the enterprise contributed to the comfortable nature of his eldest son's youth.

The family lived above the shop, in what became an increasingly crowded space. Despite Samuel Isaacs' frequent absences on buying trips to the Continent, thirteen children were born to Ann Isaacs in rapid succession. After firstborn George, she gave birth at roughly two-year intervals to Frances Letitia, Emily, Alfred, Julia, Sidney, Anne, Lily, Agnes, Clara, Frederick, Herbert and finally Jessie. By 1841, five female servants tended the growing brood.[6] Amidst

[3] Regent Street was the vision of the architect John Nash, who replaced a maze of alleys with an elegant commercial thoroughfare. The project was completed in 1825. An engraving of the exterior of Samuel Isaacs' shop showing its facade shortly before the Isaacs family took up residence there, appears in the illustrated book by James Elmes and Thomas Hosmer Shepherd, *Metropolitan Improvements: or London in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Jones & Co., 1827), 295. The old building at 131 Regent Street is now long gone, and the site is currently occupied by a department store. Leicester Street has been renamed Heddon Street.

[4] Samuel Isaacs' ornately decorated business card (or "Trade-card") is preserved amongst the papers of the wealthy Victorian collector William Beckford (1772–1857), in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. MS. Beckford c. 33, fol. 1. The card reads, "S. Isaacs, Importer of Paintings, China, & Curiosities, 131, Regent Street, A New & Elegant Assortment of Jewellery. The extent of value given for Pearls, Diamonds & Foreign Coins." For a fascinating insight into the life and travels of a contemporary London antique dealer, see Martin Levy and Elaine Moss, "John Coleman Isaac, 'Importer of Curiosities': An Outline of His Life, and the 1846 Continental Diary," *Journal of the History of Collections* 14.1 (2002): 97–114.

[5] Francis Haskell, "William Coningham and His Collection of Old Masters," *Burlington Magazine* 133.1063 (1991): 677.

[6] 1841 Census of England, City of Westminster, Parish of St. James, Regent Street, Samuel Isaacs' household, PRO HO 107/735/4.

this apparently happy childhood, Isaacs thrived. Later, he fondly recalled "the family party without restraint, as I remember such, in the old, old days."[7]

Isaacs was familiar with the workings of his father's business, but it was not his intention to become a shopkeeper. Instead, thanks to a family legacy, he had "great expectations" from an early age. On the death of his maternal grandmother Ann's second husband, Samuel, he would inherit several city properties. The elderly man was clearly fond of his wife's grandson and in a period of ill-health in 1831, named him as a "nephew" (although technically, Isaacs was his step-grandson) and a major beneficiary in his will.[8] George Isaacs had reached the age of eighteen before his benefactor died at the Regent Street residence in 1843. The resulting bequest was life-changing for the young man, for the rental income from his four, newly-acquired properties on the Hampstead Road in Middlesex was sufficient to fund the independent lifestyle of a gentleman. Now, Isaacs had no need to work. As he had not yet reached the legal age of twenty-one, his father Samuel and his recently widowed grandmother Ann, eagerly took control of the management of the inheritance on his behalf.

Provision had also been made in the will for Isaacs' maintenance and education, but his formal schooling had ended by, or at the time of, his benefactor's death. The possibility of further study was limited in any case. The universities of both Oxford and Cambridge denied entry to Jews at that period. Only University College London permitted Jewish students to enrol in a degree. Isaacs' younger brothers Alfred and Sidney attended that institution's

[7] Anon. [George Isaacs], "Dinners," *Number One* 1 (1861): 33.
[8] Will of Samuel Isaacs, late Orange Merchant now Gentleman of Claremont Terrace Pentonville, Middlesex, National Archives of the UK, PROB 11/1981/96. Somewhat confusingly, George Isaacs' parents Ann and Samuel Isaacs, and his maternal grandmother Ann and her second husband Samuel Isaacs, shared the same names. Little is known of the elder Ann Isaacs' first husband (and therefore George Isaacs' maternal grandfather) who bore the surname Levy.

associated school in 1844 and 1845, but Isaacs was not a pupil there.[9] His later facility in Latin, history, literature and chemistry suggests that he received a traditional, well-rounded education. Some London schools also offered the additional subjects of accounting and bookkeeping to those who wished to follow a commercial career. When Isaacs' later activities are considered, it seems that he may have received this instruction.

Isaacs absorbed the commercial aspects of his father's business but it was his exposure to its cultured clientele and their tastes that was to have a greater influence on his life. Rich, literary, politically-active and titled customers frequented his father's shop. Driven by the raging Victorian passion for personal collections, they vied for the most desirable objects amongst Samuel Isaacs' range of paintings and "curiosities".[10] Many clients offered kindness and encouragement to the shop owner's clever eldest son. Surrounded by such discriminating men and *objets d'art*, young Isaacs developed two passions—a love of writing and a desire to build a fine personal antique collection. The first desire would rule his life. Thanks to his generous inheritance and with "Esquire" newly appended to his name, he was now free to further those interests.

Present bibliographies, including *AustLit*, date Isaacs' first published writing to 1858, failing to acknowledge a youthful publication that predates that work by fifteen years. When he was eighteen, with the impetus and funds from his inheritance, Isaacs founded a literary journal. Significantly, this precocious venture marked his debut as an editor and as a published writer of prose and poetry. The first issue of *The Hesperus: an Original Monthly Magazine of*

[9] Temple Orme, *University College School, London: Alphabetical and Topographical Register for 1831–1898, Supplementary to the First Issue 1831–1891* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1898), 159.
[10] For further information on the Victorian passion for collections, see Jacqueline Yallop, *Magpies, Squirrels & Thieves: How the Victorians Collected the World* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011).

*Humour, Literature, and Art* appeared on London's streets in September 1843.[11] Its paper covers enclosed twelve pages of diverse editorial comment, poetry and prose, but Isaacs' input was not transparent. In fact the editor of the *Hesperus* was unnamed. Most contributions, including those written by Isaacs, were coyly disguised behind initials. He employed "G.I." ("George Isaacs") for his prose pieces, and with one exception, "S.I." ("Samuel Isaacs") for his poetry, throughout the journal's run.[12] Possibly using both sets of initials was a ploy to give the impression that more writers were involved in the *Hesperus* than was actually the case. Anonymity was a common feature of Victorian writing, as it offered privacy and a buffer in the face of negative criticism. Isaacs' desire for anonymity in this case was not the result of a lack of confidence in his own ability.

The young editor did not look far for a publisher. George Purkess, the well-known publisher of so-called "penny dreadfuls", was located in nearby Dean Street, Soho. His popular little magazines, cheaply printed for the masses, were as the name suggests, priced at one penny. The *Hesperus* however, did not belong to that inferior category. Priced at threepence, it was intended to be much more refined and instructive. To announce its arrival, Purkess placed an advertisement in London's *Examiner* newspaper, under the heading "New publishing".[13] There were many magazines in London, but Isaacs had identified a unique and altruistic niche. As a press review would note, "The object of the *Hesperus* is a new one."[14] Part of the journal's opening editorial explains Isaacs' motivations and expectations:

> There remained but one thing wanting, and that was a periodical devoted solely to the productions of young aspirants, fostering growing genius, guiding misdirected talent, and extending a taste for literary pursuits *amongst youth*. This want we here endeavour to supply, and although we could have wished the execution of our plan had been

[11] Henceforth, Isaacs' publication will be referred to in the text as the "*Hesperus*".
[12] The article "William Wordsworth, the New Poet Laureate" in the first issue, bears the initials "S.I.".
[13] *Examiner* (London), 9 September 1843, 16.
[14] *The Era* (London), 10 December 1843, 6.

> directed by those better qualified to do it justice, although we regret our inability to render so important an object as successful as it would be under more experienced government, yet we trust, by attention and energy, united to example, to gain our point, feeling assured that so laudable a purpose will meet with all the encouragement we will strive to merit, and that the youth of the metropolis will prove, by exerting their talent in our favour, that we have not relied on them in vain.
>
> It is but necessary to add, that the pages of the HESPERUS will only admit the contributions of those under the age of twenty-one years, consequently anonymous communications will be unnoticed.[15]

Perhaps a more experienced editor may have pruned this wordy manifesto, but Isaacs was young and he had much to say.

The same editorial provides the earliest evidence of Isaacs' developing personality and beliefs. It captures his optimistic view of English society in 1843 from a comfortable middle-class perspective. Surrounded by myriad signs of the progress of civilization, including the rapidly expanding train network, he rejoices in the present and anticipates the good times to come:

> The ease with which every branch of education is now imparted, the improvements which are daily being made in art and science, the rapidity with which new ideas can be circulated, the facilities for travelling, and the gradual decay of prejudice, which, like a blight, blasted the efforts of former ages, together with the near total extinction of priestcraft and superstition, dispose us to look forward with confidence to the rising generation, as one which will product more illustrious names than any preceding age,

[15] Anon. [George Isaacs], *The Hesperus* 1 (1843): 1. Throughout this thesis, the idiosyncratic punctuation, spelling and grammar of Isaacs and his friends will be generally retained in its original published or handwritten form. Some quotations will be corrected for clarity.

> aided as it is by every circumstance that can enlighten, expand, and adorn the human mind.

Behind the very long and rather naive sentence was a thoughtful and critical mind. There are early hints of his inquisitive nature, his enthusiasm for life and his aversion to dogma. Such concerns would permeate Isaacs' writing and influence his actions throughout the remainder of his life. In extolling the prospects of the "rising generation", Isaacs was clearly confident of his own important place in that future. The young man's optimism was matched only by his ego.

Isaacs looked to the classical past for the journal's title, *The Hesperus*. In Greek mythology, Hesperus was the name of the planet Venus, the evening star. As Venus was also the name of the Roman goddess of love and beauty—poetic subjects that were popular amongst literary men of that era—it was an appropriate title. The name may also have traded upon the popularity of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, *The Wreck of the Hesperus,* which had been recently published in the United States.[16] If Isaacs' *Hesperus* was indeed an allusion to that poem, it seems unfortunate that the vessel *Hesperus* was doomed to sink. It was perhaps not a good omen for the new venture.

The pink cover of each issue of the *Hesperus* bore a quaint Latin quotation from Horace, *Hoc opus, hoc stadium, parvi properemus et ampli; Si patriae voluus, si nobis vivere cari*, which can be roughly translated as "Let us, both small and great, work on this task, advance this pursuit, if we are to live dear to our country and ourselves." Similarly, the title page carried the motto *Fructu, non foliis, arborem oestima*. Its English translation has a direct link to the youth of the journal's contributors, because it was a heartfelt plea for attention: "Judge a tree

[16] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Wreck of the Hesperus," in *Ballads and Other Poems* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: John Owen, 1842), 42–47.

by its fruit, not by its leaves", that is, judge by results (the quality of the writing), not by appearances (the youth of the contributors). The use of Latin phrases was presumably to reinforce the supposed erudition of the journal's writers.

Prior to and after publication, Isaacs sent drafts of the *Hesperus* to several prominent authors who were regular customers of his father's business. As the journal was directed towards a general audience and not just youth, he hoped for some advice. Kindly, the men replied with praise and constructive criticism. Several months before the first issue appeared, Isaacs sent drafts of the *Hesperus* to the Scottish poet, song writer and author, Charles Mackay, who replied, "The poetry signed S.I. is exceedingly graceful and elegant and shows on the part of the writer a very great power of versification and refinement and language."[17] Isaacs' delight at these words must have quickly turned to concern when Mackay continued, "The article upon Wordsworth with the same initials, is altogether erroneous both in fact and comment ... and is evidently written from hearsay only, without a true knowledge of the subject." Mackay concluded his advice with, "The little work might I think be made valuable—at present I do not think it is so", and he invited Isaacs to visit him so that they could discuss the project. No doubt, changes were made. Isaacs was also bold enough to send a subsequent edition of the *Hesperus* to the respected and hugely successful author Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who replied with a detailed letter in early January 1844:

> I thank you sincerely for the presents you have been good enough to send me of "The Hesperus"—which indeed I have seen before & admired for its early promise. I have read already with interest the papers marked S.I.—and I find them all characterized by elegance [indecipherable] and good taste—rare qualities nowadays ... you have

[17] Charles Mackay to George Isaacs, 8 May 1843, Scrapbook, 42. Isaacs' Scrapbook contains three letters from Charles Mackay (1814–1889) to Isaacs, all concerning the *Hesperus*. In this first letter, Mackay refers to Isaacs' new journal as the "Hive"—perhaps this was an interim title.

> explained the feeling of a poet with the refinement of a Johnson. I am glad to see you avoiding the Keats & Shelley School, which ruin the taste of so many young poets.[18]

The support continued with praise from William Harrison Ainsworth, the famous author of the popular novel *Rookwood,* who wrote, "I have received The Hesperus to which task [I] give my best attention. From a glance at the numbers their contents appear very pleasant and promising."[19] Such effusive praise to the aspiring youth from established literary figures must have been very gratifying. However, the encouragement was placed in context at the conclusion of each letter. Bulwer-Lytton added, "I regret to add a postscript on business, but will you be so kind as to tell your father ..." Similarly, Ainsworth wrote, "Will you do me the favour to tell your father that I will purchase ..." and Mackay sent greetings to "Mr. and Mrs. Isaacs & all your circle." The replies were polite gestures to the son of a favoured business owner, yet the fact that Isaacs sought advice demonstrates his resolve to improve his writing. He was learning valuable lessons in networking and humility—both useful skills for a young writer.

Isaacs' literary contributions to the *Hesperus* were diverse, and ranged from the serious to the comical. With editorial control, he grasped the opportunity to explore different genres and styles. He fancied himself as a fledgling poet and, under the guise of S.I., enthusiastically pursued the art. The result could be simple and unsophisticated:

> Remember that evening, so glowing and bright,

[18] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to George Isaacs, postmarked 12 January 1844, Scrapbook, 4. Edward George Bulwer-Lytton (1803–1873) was a famed Victorian author. He is now chiefly remembered for the wordy opening sentence of his most popular book, *Paul Clifford*, which begins, "It was a dark and stormy night." Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Paul Clifford* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), 1. The Scrapbook contains two letters from Bulwer-Lytton to Isaacs. The first note enclosed introductions to other eminent authors. The second, the black-bordered note quoted above, was written following the death of Bulwer-Lytton's mother.
[19] William Harrison Ainsworth to George Isaacs, undated, but annotated "1843", Scrapbook, 1. Ainsworth continued his friendship with Isaacs, and later added another note to Isaacs' collection of autographed memorabilia.

> Our hearts were so warm, and our spirits so light,
> How happy the old, and how brilliant the young,
> The wine that we quaffed, and the songs that we sung[20]

Alternatively, the poetry could be overtly flowery, such as "The Rose, the grace of all our bowers/The Rose shall reign the queen of flowers."[21] Classical imagery is prevalent, and it permeates many poems, including "Ode", "Lamia" and "The Wreath". Isaacs' poem "Leda, by Leonardo Da Vinci", in particular, illustrates his fondness for the classical world:

> Here Hector's corpse dragged round the wall,
> The city burnt, and Priam's fall;
> Such themes demand a prouder lyre,
> A bard that warms with Homer's fire,
> But he who Leda's tale hath sung,
> His lyre to love alone was strung.[22]

"Leda" appeared in the October 1843 issue of the *Hesperus* and praised the painting of that name. The inspiration for the poem's subject matter was close at hand. Several years earlier, in 1839, Samuel Isaacs had advertised his end-of-season sale in the *Times* newspaper with the unlikely inducement that his customers could view the Leonardo Da Vinci painting "Leda" in his Regent Street shop, for a fee of one shilling.[23]

Isaacs' prose in the *Hesperus* is also notable for its variety. There are essays (including one on a button holder, and another on the National Gallery), opinion pieces, a topical obituary of the Poet Laureate Robert Southey, short tales and snatches of wisdom. Each issue concludes with

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[20] S.I. [George Isaacs], "Remember That Evening," *The Hesperus* 4 (1843): 41.
[21] S.I. [George Isaacs], "The Rose," *The Hesperus* 3 (1843): 30.
[22] S.I. [George Isaacs], "Ode," *The Hesperus* 5 (1844): 51–53; S.I., "Lamia," *The Hesperus* 4 (1843): 43; S.I., "The Wreath," *The Hesperus* 5 (1844): 55–56; S.I., "Leda, by Leonardo Da Vinci," *The Hesperus* 2 (1843): 16.
[23] *The Times,* 3 July 1839, 7. Da Vinci's original painting of "Leda" is considered lost, but it is known from several copies. Samuel Isaacs owned many such "notable" items, including the wooden Stratford Jubilee cup that was presented to the actor David Garrick. Supposedly, it was made from wood from a mulberry tree in Shakespeare's garden.

an instalment of G.I.'s farcical serial "Memoirs of the Twiggle Club". Its oddly-named characters, including "Mrs. Trippy", are the first examples of Isaacs' ongoing fondness for silly names.[24] There is a hint of Isaacs' approach to religious practice too, in the brief story "Who Can He Be?"[25] The narrator exclaims, "he cuts—a slice off a delicious ham." Surely an observant Jew would not have employed that adjective.[26] Whatever he was writing, Isaacs was enjoying the luxury of experimentation, while learning to write and edit within time and length constraints. Despite the unpolished results he was practising his craft. The diversity of his output in the *Hesperus* foreshadows his later engagement with many literary genres.

Isaacs' life was punctuated by the debilitating illness asthma, which at regular intervals, sapped his vitality and stalled his creativity. The unusually cold winters of his youth, especially the severe winters of 1840 and 1841, coupled with the smoke pollution from urban coal fires, exacerbated his condition. The third issue of the *Hesperus* includes G.I.'s "A Tale for the Month", which vividly describes a character's asthma attack:

> He, he, he, aw, aw, oh, oh, coughed I, as I hastened forward, nearly stifled by the confounded atmosphere; oh, oh, aw, aw, oh, and the cold perspiration stood in heavy drops on my brow, as my old enemy, the asthma, aided by the choking air, threw me into convulsions of coughing ... the fiendish fog, forcing its way down my throat, as I opened my mouth for respiration, sent my breath grasping, wheezing, and jabbering like the horrid chuckles of a death rattle. Good lord, I shall die![27]

It is likely that Isaacs was writing from experience.

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[24] Charles Mackay was not impressed by his preview of the serial and wrote, "at the risk of offence to the author ... do not publish the Twiggle Club at all ... without a very great deal of pruning and revision." Charles Mackay to George Isaacs, 20 August 1843, Scrapbook, 43.
[25] G.I. [George Isaacs], "Who Can He Be?" *The Hesperus* 2 (1843): 20.
[26] Todd M. Endelman states that "Most English Jews at the time [in the 1840s] were not Orthodox in the usual sense of the term ... despite belonging to congregations whose ritual and religious leadership were Orthodox." Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 114.
[27] G.I. [George Isaacs], "A Tale for the Month," *The Hesperus* 3 (1843): 29.

Although most of the content of the *Hesperus* was written by Isaacs, he was not its only contributor. Amongst the young hopefuls who submitted work were several who would later pursue literary careers. Apart from Isaacs, the most frequent contributor was "R.", his great friend William Harry Rogers who was known to all as "Harry".[28] Isaacs was drawn to his companion's artistic, cultured household in Carlisle Street, Soho, which was presided over by Rogers' father, the notable Victorian woodcarver William Gibbs Rogers. Isaacs and Harry shared a mutual passion for the past, and they enthusiastically researched artistic, historical and architectural matters in the nearby British Museum. Rogers' pieces in the *Hesperus* include the articles, "The Style of the Sixteenth Century", "Long Hair", "Royalty of Purple and Vermillion" and "The Daisy". In common with some of Isaacs' pieces they resemble school essays, which may have been their derivation.

Some contributors to the *Hesperus* already had easy access to the literary world. Alaric Alfred Watts ("Alaric Watts, Junr."), whose parents were writers, had a family writing pedigree that Isaacs must have envied.[29] Richard Bedingfield ("Richd. W.T. Bedingfield") was related to the author William Makepeace Thackeray. Bedingfield contributed the poem "Hesper" to the October 1843 issue and, like Isaacs, hoped for a literary career.[30] Thackeray advised him that writing was not an easy or financially rewarding occupation, and proposed in a letter written during the production of Isaacs' journal, that Bedingfield should consider a different career:

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[28] William Harry Rogers (1825–1873) became a noted Victorian illustrator and book cover designer. His literary and artistic work culminated in his esoteric book, *Spiritual Conceits* (London: Griffith and Farran, 1862). Unfortunately, the plain covers of the *Hesperus* did not benefit from his considerable decorative skills. Rogers' contributions to the *Hesperus* are his first known published works. That he was not a joint editor of the journal is implied in the phrase, "all communications are requested to be addressed for the editor" (that is, one editor) on the front cover of each issue. The Royal Collection holds a wooden cradle, exhibited at London's 1851 Great Exhibition, which was designed by Harry Rogers and carved by his father for Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise. For more information on Harry Rogers and his family, see: "The Woodcarver's Children: William Gibbs Rogers," Joyce Stephenson, accessed 10 July 2015, http://woodcarverschildren.weebly.com/

[29] Alaric Alfred Watts (1825–1901) married the writer Anna Mary Howitt, a sister of the Australian explorer Alfred Howitt. Watts worked in the Inland Revenue department from 1844 but continued to write, including poetry, and a biography of his father.

[30] Richard William Thomas Bedingfield (1823–1876) published a novel, *The Miser's Son: A Tale* (London: R. Thompson, J. Street, Strange, Berger, 1844) not long after his contribution to the *Hesperus*. In a poignant coincidence, Bedingfield died on the same day as George Isaacs, yet continents apart.

> Unless your publisher actually offers you money for a future work, I beg you to have nothing to do with him. Write short tales. Make a dash at all the magazines; and at one or two of them I can promise you, as I have said, not an acceptance of your articles, but a favourable hearing. It is, however, a bad trade at the best. The prizes in it are fewer and worse than in any other professional lottery; but I know it's useless damping a man who will be an author whether or no—men are doomed, as it were, to the calling.[31]

No doubt this gloomy advice was shared, but Bedingfield, Rogers and Isaacs ignored Thackeray's admonition and continued their writing careers. Additional submissions to the *Hesperus* arrived from the currently unidentified individuals, "D.P.", "H.G.", "(Miss) J.J." "E.D." and "Miss E.M.D."[32]

The novelty of a journal written by the young did not fail to attract the notice of the London press. Isaacs' literary networking may also have paid dividends, for enthusiastic reviews and excerpts appeared in publications as diverse as the *Court Gazette*, the *Belle Assemblée* and the misleadingly-named *New Zealand Journal* that was published in London. The *Court Gazette*'s review stated that, "The undertaking is of no common order, and the proprietor deserves encouragement for his praiseworthy attempt to draw forth, and patronize, the genius of youth."[33] Isaacs slipped laudatory snippets from these reviews into later issues of his journal. The *Spectator*'s summation of the *Hesperus* as "A periodical designed to foster and direct youthful genius" must have delighted the fledgling editor and affirmed his efforts.[34] However not all critics were impressed by the venture. One anonymous reviewer at the

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[31] Quoted in Peter L. Shillingsburg's *Pegasus in Harness: Victorian Publishing and W.M. Thackeray* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 54.
[32] "E.D." and "Miss E.M.D." may have been the same person.
[33] *Court Gazette*, quoted in *The Hesperus* 3 (1843), unnumbered page, "Opinions of the Press".
[34] *Spectator*, quoted in *The Hesperus* 3 (1843), unnumbered page, "Opinions of the Press".

*Morning Chronicle* did not approve of the "veritable production of a junta of juveniles."[35] With the wisdom of age and a great deal of smugness, he chided the young people for adopting the fruity motto, *Fructu, non foliis, arborem oestima*:

> Upon this very motto, however, we would remind our young editors that leaves and blossoms come in the spring-time of life, fruit in the maturer midsummer or autumn, and would seriously put it to them, whether, in their case, they would have us take these little sproutings as the fruit by which to judge of their tree of knowledge, and whether, by encouraging this premature shooting, they may not be impairing the stamina of a plant which, if properly trained, would most probably produce good fruit in its time?

Charles Mackay, who had encouraged the birth of the *Hesperus* and who was then working as a sub-editor at the offending *Morning Chronicle*, wrote again to Isaacs to say that he had not penned the review: "If I had written it myself, I should have spoken more warmly of some of the articles in "The Hesperus" and have kept the advice to myself."[36] The *Era* on the other hand praised the journal's progress:

> This little publication, the cradle in which our youthful literati are to be nursed—the nest in which they are to be nurtured til they are full-fledged—has taken a permanent stand among the periodicals of the day. The present number, 5, is decidedly an improvement upon the preceding ones.[37]

These reviews are the first published examples of Isaacs' contact with literary critics. Later, he in turn would judge his fellows in this form.[38] The gentle nature of these initial criticisms of his own writing and editorial style possibly reflects the journal's quality, but more likely

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[35] *Morning Chronicle*, 11 January 1844, 3.
[36] Charles Mackay to George Isaacs, 27 January 1844, Scrapbook, 44.
[37] *The Era* (London), 28 January 1844, 2.
[38] Already, as part of his editorial duties, he was evaluating and commenting upon the worth of correspondents' submissions to the *Hesperus*, under the heading "Notices to Correspondents".

derives from the reviewers' recognition of the youth and relative inexperience of the contributors.

The *Hesperus* concluded abruptly with the January 1844 issue. Just five monthly instalments had been published since its launch. Its sudden end was apparently unanticipated by Isaacs who concluded January's "Memoirs of the Twiggle Club" instalment with the usual optimistic refrain, "To be Continued." Evidence that the *Hesperus* may have succumbed to a lack of literary contributions is found in the final issue. Either from necessity or desperation, all prose and poetry in that journal, aside from one brief verse by "E.D.", was written by either Isaacs or Harry Rogers.

The demise of the *Hesperus* went unrecorded in the press but the enterprise had not been a failure. With unusual, early initiative and the support of his inheritance, Isaacs had taken his first independent step towards a literary career. He had conceived the novel idea of founding a magazine written by, rather than for young people, and had arranged for its publication. He had successfully undertaken the role of editor, and seen his own work in print. In addition, the sixty pages of the *Hesperus* had encouraged and facilitated the publication of the literary works of other young authors and poets. Isaacs had found mentors amongst the stars of London's literary world and established his own small foothold in that milieu. He could take pride in these achievements. It was a fine foundation for a young, ambitious writer.

# Chapter 2: A Young Gentleman, 1844–1849

*I had no profession; but shared with him an enthusiasm for art, a great passion for antique remains, and some taste for literature ... We had, neither of us, reached the age of twenty.* George Isaacs, 1861[1]

With money and leisure, Isaacs spent the next few years establishing his independence and his place in London society. When, early in 1844, his father decided to quit Regent Street, and to separate his business interests from his domestic life, the family moved to 7 Upper Gower Street, Bedford Square. The biographers of Charles Darwin describe the area's pleasant ambiance: "The estate was ideally quiet, with no pubs or shops, and almost no mews. University College was down the road, but here the street turned into a private track and was closed off by a gate."[2] Undoubtedly, the prime attraction for Isaacs was his new home's close proximity to the British Museum, where he spent many hours researching his interests.

Prior to the move, Samuel Isaacs advertised that he was "entirely relinquishing the business", and advertisements for the resulting dispersal of his Regent Street stock reveal the opulence of his wares.[3] Over four days from 7 February 1844, Messrs. Oxenham & Sons auctioned a remarkable array of furnishings and decorative objects, including mosaic and tortoise shell cabinets, tables, carvings, clocks, busts of "celebrated characters", stained glass, porcelain, manuscripts and "six matchless vases and pedestals 10 feet high of the time of Frances 1."[4] The following week on 14 February, Messrs. Foster and Son sold Isaacs' paintings, which they claimed had been sourced "at a liberal expense from distinguished Cabinets in England and the Continent."[5] One hundred and twenty art works, including some purported to have

[1] Anon. [George Isaacs], "How We Fared When Hard Up in Paris," *Number One* 1 (1861): 37.
[2] Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin* (London: Penguin, 1991), 276.
[3] *The Times*, 30 January 1844, 12.
[4] *The Times*, 30 January 1844, 12.
[5] *A Catalogue of the Capital Collection of Pictures, of the Dutch, Flemish and French Schools, the Entire Property of Mr. Samuel Isaacs, of Regent Street, Collected at a Liberal Expense From Distinguished Cabinets in England and on the Continent, and to be Sold in Consequence of the Proprietor Retiring From Business* (London: Foster and Son, 1844).

been painted by Vandyke, Brueghel, Rembrandt, Titian and Rubens went under the hammer. In reality Isaacs senior had no intention of retiring and he immediately moved his business around the corner to 22 Newman Street. A youth spent in the combined home, shop, museum and art gallery at 131 Regent Street, had left an indelible impression on his eldest son's psyche.

Travel would be a recurring theme in Isaacs' life. His earliest trips were probably purchasing expeditions to the Continent with his father, but in 1844 he travelled independently for the first time. The experience was captured in his later autobiographical tale "How We Fared When Hard Up in Paris".[6] He and Harry Rogers spent six months in Paris enjoying their new-found freedom—and discovering its limitations. Released from the confines and expectations of family life and undaunted by the chilly weather, including "the bitterest day, of the severest winter, that had been known in Paris, for many years", the young flâneurs explored the city.[7] They toured Versailles and Montmartre, and wandered the cobbled Parisian streets in search of "masquerades, dances at the Barrieres, billiards, punch, and pastry lunches."[8] Isaacs scoured the city's markets and second-hand shops daily to satisfy his "ungovernable passion" for old china, silver, enamels, ivory and illuminated manuscripts.[9] Surrounded by such temptation, he joyfully succumbed. His collection grew rapidly but his funds suffered from his extravagance.

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[6] Anon. [George Isaacs], "How We Fared," *Number One* 1 (1861): 37–42. My account of Isaacs' experiences in Paris during this period is taken from this source. According to the tale, the young men lived on the fifth floor at 15 Rue de Bussi, now the Rue de Buci.

[7] Anon. [George Isaacs], "How We Fared," *Number One* 1 (1861): 41.

[8] Anon. [George Isaacs], "How We Fared," *Number One* 1 (1861): 37. Henri Murger would shortly capture this bohemian lifestyle in *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*. The first tale in the series was published in 1845, and the complete collection of stories appeared in 1851. For a recent edition of Murger's work, translated from the French by Ellen Marriage and John Selwyn, see Henri Murger, *The Bohemians of the Latin Quarter* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Puccini's opera *La Bohème* is based on Murger's work.

[9] Anon. [George Isaacs], "How We Fared," *Number One* 1 (1861): 37.

With an annual income of one hundred and twenty-five pounds from his London properties plus one hundred pounds that he had already saved from their rents, Isaacs had more than sufficient finances to support an extended sojourn in France. He took sixty pounds to Paris to cover his expenses and left the remainder of his funds with his father, who was to continue to collect his rents.[10] Within six weeks however, the sixty pounds had been spent. An attempt to pawn "a choice gold ring, set with an antique gem" was unsuccessful and starvation loomed.[11] Only the arrival of Samuel Isaacs from England saved the day. The obvious moral—that financial profligacy in the pursuit of passions was unwise—was unstated and unheeded.

Isaacs appears to have written little in the immediate wake of the *Hesperus*, though he continued to search for opportunities to promote his verse. In August 1845 he approached the musicologist George Macfarren, the conductor at Covent Garden and the composer of a diverse range of operas, orchestral and choral works. Isaacs hoped that Macfarren would set one of his poems to music. The warm reply from the maestro was encouraging: "I certainly like the song, and think it very characteristic—I am doubtful whether it is of a nature that I can make available but I will shew it to my publisher and if it please him so much as it pleased me I shall have much pleasure in trying to give it musical expression."[12] There is no evidence that a collaboration resulted from Isaacs' overture.

[10] By contrast, Harry Rogers was struggling to establish himself as a book designer and illustrator, and his income was "a precarious one. He received from time to time a five-pound note from England, and made some few francs a week, out of commissions, from the book-sellers." Anon. [George Isaacs], "How We Fared," *Number One* 1 (1861): 37.

[11] Anon. [George Isaacs], "How We Fared," *Number One* 1 (1861): 41. This is the first evidence of Isaacs' great fascination with medieval rings.

[12] George Macfarren to George Isaacs, 20 August 1845, Scrapbook, 45. Isaacs' poem is unidentified. During his lifetime, George Alexander Macfarren (1813–1887) published one hundred and sixty-two songs, but no sign of Isaacs' name or his initials has been discovered amongst these works. Macfarren's biographer, Henry Charles Banister states that Macfarren "was always ready to help on young aspirants." Henry Charles Banister, *George Alexander Macfarren: His Life, Works and Influence* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891), 62.

With growing maturity and confidence, the young man travelled to the Continent several times each year. France was not his only destination, as he later explains in a poem:

> I've been up the Rhine,
> Down the Rhone,
> To Ehrenbreitstein,
> To Coblenz, to Cologne,
> To Aix, and to Arles,
> To Geneva, to Basle,
> And to famed Avignon,—
> But none
> Of these cities so fair,
> With Milan can compare.[13]

This wanderlust was supported by his doctors, who advised that the warm dry air of southern Europe would be beneficial to his asthma. The towns of Nice and Montpellier were ideal for recuperation. Meanwhile, Isaacs' ill-health, and his annual habit of fleeing the English winter drew frequent comments from his friends. The artist Marshall Claxton was typically sympathetic, and in a letter of farewell offered "a sincere wish that you may recover and return home well."[14] Isaacs travelled around England too, on quests unknown even to his friends. In March 1847 a puzzled Rogers enquired in a letter, "And pray why don't you let us know how you are managing to muddle through existence in such a place as Manchester. Does the North boast of any curious rings?"[15]

A wedding throws light on the religious affiliation of Isaacs' family at this period and probably the young man's own religious allegiance. In the 1840s, the Isaacs were part of a group that rejected current religious practice in favour of reform. In September 1846, Isaacs'

[13] Anon. [George Isaacs], "The Tooth of the Good St. Ambrose," *Number One* 1 (1861): 4.
[14] Marshall Claxton to George Isaacs, 18 September 1847, Scrapbook, 24.
[15] Harry Rogers to George Isaacs, 22 March 1847. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. Misc. C.22 fol. 22r. 2.

sister Emily made an advantageous match when she married the wealthy David Falcke at the recently founded West London Synagogue of British Jews.[16] The venue was a controversial choice, for the West London Synagogue was a breakaway religious group founded in 1840 to cater for the growing and wealthy Jewish community in West London. The new congregation rejected what it perceived as outdated religious traditions and the "high-handed, unbending nature of congregational governance", and introduced changes to the service.[17] These reforms angered the orthodox Jewish hierarchy, who responded by excommunicating all members of the fledgling community. The schism had far-reaching consequences for Isaacs' family. Because members of the new congregation were not permitted to bury their dead in an orthodox cemetery, they were forced to establish their own graveyard at Balls Pond Burial Ground. Eventually, Isaacs' mother, his father, his sister Emily and her husband David Falcke, and his grandmother Ann were all interred there.[18] Isaacs' remains however, lie elsewhere.

The young man was actively involved in another "church", yet that organization, the "Freemasons of the Church", had no religious connotations, nor was it aligned with traditional freemasonry. Founded in 1842, "For the Recovery, Maintenance and Furtherance of the true Principles and Practice of Architecture", its chief concern was the preservation and study of old buildings, especially churches.[19] Meetings were held in the ballroom of Harry Rogers' family home in Soho, and they attracted influential members of society, including Earl

[16] The synagogue had been founded in 1840. It must have been an exhausting time for Isaacs' mother, for a week after the nuptials she gave birth at home to her youngest daughter, Jessie.
[17] Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 114. Reforms included fewer and shorter prayers, sermons in English, the provision of a choir and more convenient hours of worship. The congregation's first synagogue opened in 1842.
[18] The little graveyard, also known as the Kingsbury Road Cemetery, is now anonymous, overgrown and surrounded by a high fence. Impressive gravestones can still be glimpsed through its locked gate. Its owner, the West London Synagogue of British Jews, now the West London Synagogue, celebrated its 175th anniversary in 2015.
[19] The Freemasons of the Church produced an influential architectural journal, *The Builder*, which was under the editorial command of architect and journalist, George Godwin.

Cadogan and Benjamin Disraeli.[20] Isaacs exhibited many choice items from his collection at these gatherings.[21] With growing confidence he delivered the paper "Ancient Glass, As Applied to Domestic Purposes" at the group's monthly meeting in May 1846. It was widely reported in the press.[22] The rarefied subject matter marked Isaacs' public speaking debut. The *Hesperus* had established his willingness to offer his opinions in print. The lecture shows that he was not afraid to express his views in public. Both are early intimations of the path that he would follow throughout his life. Isaacs enjoyed the fraternity of the Freemasons of the Church, but soon joined a more influential society that would become the focus of his social activities over the following years.

The British Archaeological Association had formed in 1843, and by 1846, Isaacs was a subscribing member .[23] In January 1847, he was named an Associate and within six months he was granted the status of full Member of the Association. Already a passionate collector, his interests were further encouraged by like-minded gentlemen. He attended the Association's monthly meetings and was soon exhibiting, sourcing and donating antiques to other members. This zeal impressed the more learned gentlemen of the Association who no doubt appreciated the young man's gifts, both material and intellectual. In return, Isaacs was welcomed into a privileged masculine world where favours were returned. Lord Hastings, for example, offered some game for his larder.[24] Another member, Henry Broadwood, arranged an introduction to

[20] As Honorary Secretary, Harry Rogers was particularly enthusiastic about the fate of old churches and he sketched their architectural features with delight and dedication. He shared this passion with his father, William Gibbs Rogers. Wonderful examples of the father's artistry and skill can be seen in his wooden carvings in the Church of Saint Michael, Cornhill, in London.

[21] For example, Isaacs exhibited "a circular reliquary of silver, gold, enamel, and precious stones, bearing the date 1247; also an enamelled jewel of the early part of the sixteenth century, enriched with rubies, pearls, and diamonds, and bearing in the centre a conventional 'pelican in her piety'", on 10 June 1845. *The Builder* 123 (1845): 281.

[22] For example, a review of the paper appeared in the *The Chemist: A Monthly Journal of Chemical & Physical Science* 7 (1846): 382. *The Medical Times, The Artizan* and the *Patent Journal and Inventors' Magazine* also carried summaries of the lecture.

[23] Isaacs' Scrapbook contains many letters written to him by British Archaeological Association members. As a German bomb destroyed the Association's records during the Blitz, these letters provide a useful insight into the lost early machinations within the group.

[24] Lord Hastings to George Isaacs, undated letter, Scrapbook, 37.

the Swiss naturalist, Count Louis François Pourtalès.[25] Soon, Isaacs had a wide circle of influential friends, who were wined and dined at his parents' Upper Gower Street home. One correspondent relayed the great delight another guest had experienced at Isaacs' "elegant and interesting soirée" in February 1847.[26] Despite Isaacs' youth he was treated as an equal, and as an authority, on diverse archaeological matters. A surprising example of this esteem is found in a note from Thomas Crofton Croker: "You are only too kind to think of adding to my poor collection, yet I cannot but feel that any addition received from your hands bears the stamp upon it of superior knowledge judgement and taste."[27] Croker, then aged fifty, was the venerable Secretary of the British Archaeological Association. Isaacs, when he received this compliment, was twenty-three years old.

Isaacs eagerly displayed his treasures at the Association's monthly meetings. Silver gilt fibulas (ancient brooches), a decorated casket, fabulous medieval rings, jet "pilgrim's signs", valuable enamels, a crystal goblet and a musical horn are but a few of the many objects that excited his friends' envy. The young collector owned several notable reliquaries (containers of religious relics). One, probably an item previously exhibited at the Freemasons of the Church, was the subject of a paper by fellow Association member J.G. Waller. It was later illustrated on the frontispiece of the Association's 1848 *Journal*.[28] A more spectacular antique, a "silver-gilt *chef*, or head, of the twelfth century, which once held the relics of St. Eustace in the church of Basle", bore a gem-studded diadem.[29] But not everything was authentic and Isaacs could occasionally be misled. In September 1847 he exhibited an antique

[25] Henry Broadwood to George Isaacs, 24 December 1846, Scrapbook, 7.
[26] Charles Roach Smith to George Isaacs, 23 February 1847, Scrapbook, 65.
[27] Thomas Crofton Croker to George Isaacs, 15 December 1848, Scrapbook, 17.
[28] J.G. Waller, "Remarks on an Ancient Reliquary," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 3 (1848): 16–18.
[29] Isaacs' St. Eustace reliquary was exhibited at the Association's meeting on 25 October 1848. *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 4 (1849): 395. For an illustration of the reliquary, see Martina Bagnoli et al., eds. *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (London: The British Museum Press, 2010), 191.

bronze sword, but by 1855 the same weapon was denounced as a modern forgery.[30] Isaacs' contributions to the meetings were not confined to the display of objects. He also presented lectures, and his first published archaeological paper "On an Enamelled Plate of the Twelfth Century" appeared in the Association's 1848 *Journal*.[31]

Eager to become more involved in the workings of the British Archaeological Association, Isaacs joined the committee organizing its Fourth Annual Congress, which was planned for Warwick in July 1847. The *Illustrated London News* devoted several pages to the event. There, amidst a brief list of the gentry in attendance—including an eminent Lord, several Sirs, an Admiral, a Professor and the author Thomas Harrison Ainsworth—is "Mr. Isaacs". Thanks to his enthusiasm George Isaacs was now a man of note. His paper, "On Enamel, as Applied to Goldsmiths' Work and Objects of Personal Decoration, in Continuation of the Foregoing Paper by Mr. Rogers", which was liberally illustrated with examples from his own collection, was presented on 20 July. According to the *Literary Gazette*:

> The most interesting portion, however, of the treatise was that in which the ring of Ethelwulf, until now regarded as enamel, was satisfactorily proved to be nigellum; and this gave occasion for Mr. Isaacs, in a supplementary paper, to enter into the consideration of the hitherto unaccounted for origin of this art, summoning to his aid a passage of Pliny, previously a difficulty to all antiquarian commentators ... The excitement caused by Mr. Isaacs' important discovery was very considerable.[32]

The intensity of the week had a severe effect upon Isaacs' health, causing Rogers to write to the convenor that his friend was temporarily unable to answer archaeological enquiries, and

[30] Isaacs was spared the humiliation of acknowledging his error, as by the time the forgery was proven, he was long gone from England.
[31] George Isaacs, "On an Enamelled Plate of the Twelfth Century: In the Possession of the Rev. Henry Crowe," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 3 (1848): 102–105. Now separated into two pieces, the enamelled plaques discussed in the paper are displayed in the British Museum's Medieval Room. Collection number, 1852, 0327.1.
[32] *Literary Gazette*, 31 July 1847. From a cutting in the Scrapbook, 6. Isaacs' paper was not published.

that "in his present indisposed state may feel disinclined to entertain."[33] Stress was a primary trigger for Isaacs' asthma.

Having established some independence, but desiring more, Isaacs left the security of his family home in Upper Gower Street. In 1847 he moved to nearby 30 George Street, just off Hampstead Road, Euston Square.[34] He was now romantically involved, but only the first name of the woman—"Grace"— is known. Later he wrote the poem "To Grace", which provides tantalizing hints of the relationship. Apparently, it did not end well:

> For five short years one life was ours;
> Apart—the world was desolate;
> How happy were those few brief hours,
> When on thy love I pinned my fate!
> How hast thou passed the many years,
> Since on an evil day we parted?—
> Thou in an agony of tears,
> I stern of mien, yet tender hearted.
>
> Dost thou, as I, recall those times,
> When wandering by the calm blue sea
> Of Nice, fairest of Southern climes,
> I had no other thought but thee?
>
> While in your eyes so often sought,
> I learned that I alone was lord
> Of all thy love, thy every thought,
> Thy every gentle whispered word:

[33] Harry Rogers to F.J. Pettigrew, 20 July 1847, Scrapbook, 5.
[34] George Street, an extension of Upper Gower Street where the Isaacs family resided, has been renamed North Gower Street.

Dost thou recall those times, mine own?
Now as at first, my dearest, best;
Shall e'er again thy soft low tone
Subdue the hours of my unrest?

I fear me not; unbound those ties,
Renewed may never be again;—
The wounded dove for ever flies
From that harsh hand that caused her pain.[35]

It would be easy to dismiss this sentimental concoction as an imaginary exercise, but Grace was not a product of Isaacs' imagination. She was present at his home in March 1847 when Harry Rogers visited there. Isaacs was absent, so Rogers borrowed a book from his friend's library then helped himself to "some of Grace's apple pie."[36] Afterwards, he commented to Isaacs that "you will hear with satisfaction that Grace is likely to make a first rate hand at pastry."[37] Her presence in the house, perhaps as a servant, housekeeper or mistress, is suggestive of an unconventional union. The couple was still together the following summer when Rogers added a postscript in a letter to his friend: "I hope that Grace is well. Remember me to her."[38] Thereafter Grace disappeared from Isaacs' life, but not from his poetry. The following sentimental excerpt from his poem "Life in Death" probably recalls her memory:

The maid of my young love I see once more,

[35] George Isaacs, "To Grace," in *Not For Sale: A Selection of Imaginative Pieces* (Adelaide: Sims & Elliott, 1869), 18. Isaacs' friend, Ralph Bernal (1784–1854) offered him some poetic advice on the subject of his romantic entanglement(s) at this period:

When you would woo a sprightly lass
Avoid the neighbourhood of glass
And cautiously surmount her
For though devotions sure to please
It is not fair to wound your knees
By flirting at a counter.

Ralph Bernal to George Isaacs, undated note, Scrapbook, 9.

[36] Harry Rogers to George Isaacs, 22 March 1847. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. Misc. C.22 fol. 22r. 2. Rogers was accompanied to Isaacs' house by their mutual friend, lawyer John de Bos.

[37] Harry Rogers to George Isaacs, 22 March 1847. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. Misc. C.22 fol. 22r. 2.

[38] Harry Rogers to George Isaacs, 25 July 1848, Scrapbook, 60.

Once more behold each perfect, peerless, charm,
The radiant look of happiness she wore,
When love-confessing all with blushes warm,
The snowy breast, the swan-like neck; round arm,
The eyes of hope, of hope Ah! How confiding,
I see them all but yet my heart is calm.[39]

Grace was not Isaacs' only romantic muse. "Florence" was admired in the *Hesperus* and "Dora", "Laura" and "Agnes" all rate accolades in later poems. Just before Isaacs' marriage, many years later, he composed a poem entitled "To ____". It was clearly addressed to his new bride but it recalled his youthful loves:

As, in the days of old, the devotee
Adored one goddess under various guise,
So pictured thou herein thyself may see,
Under each naming evermore the same—
"Dora" and "Grace" are but the portrait's frame.[40]

The one person never mentioned by name in Isaacs' writing was the woman he would live with for at least fifteen years, and who would bear his surviving children.

Like the English swallows, Isaacs continued to head south each winter. He was "prowling about the *Bric-a-brac* shops of Paris" at the close of 1847, and appears to have spent most of 1848 abroad, thereby missing the 1848 British Archaeological Association Congress in Worcester.[41] By early 1848 he was amusing himself in Montpellier. Lodging on the second floor of a house in the main boulevard, he spent several months being spoilt by a doting landlady. "Reading, fishing, shooting, archaeological pursuits, and training a learned cat by

[39] Anon. [George Isaacs], "Life in Death," *Number One* 1 (1861): 20.
[40] Isaacs, "To ____," in *Not For Sale*, 4.
[41] Isaacs, "Without a Passport," in *Not For Sale*, 31.

turns amused and did not weary me," he noted.[42] He took part in local cultural events and attended a meeting of the Société Archéologique de Montpellier in March 1848.[43] Asthma sufferers in the nineteenth century were encouraged to smoke by their physicians, who believed it improved the condition, so Isaacs relaxed by smoking cigars, cigarettes and his beloved Meerschaum pipe.[44] The resulting detrimental effect on his health can be imagined.

Isaacs' sojourn in the south of France coincided with the 1848 uprising, the so-called "February Revolution" ("Révolution de Février"). Much of Europe was in turmoil as workers, peasants and the unemployed fought for improved conditions. In February 1848, amidst fierce street fighting in Paris, King Louis-Philippe abdicated and fled to England. By June, the still-unhappy populace staged an unsuccessful rebellion against the city's conservative forces. Writing to Isaacs at this time, Rogers expressed his concern for his friend's predicament: "As to yourself, I can say nothing beyond good wishes, not knowing whether you are ill or well, contented or miserable, idle or active, have lost a leg in the Revolution or gained one."[45] While Isaacs' sister-in-law Belinda Falcke was caught up in the Parisian fighting, Isaacs became embroiled in the civil unrest in Montpellier.[46] Isaacs was unnerved by the citizens' declarations of patriotism and their seditious songs, but the danger escalated when they became suspicious of the political allegiances of strangers such as himself. He believed, he later wrote, that his life was then in danger: "George," said I to myself, "you are an unimpulsive individual, with a British conviction that honour and glory might not be advanced by your suspension to a lamppost. Nothing could compensate to you for that

[42] Isaacs, "Without a Passport," in *Not For Sale*, 35. Isaacs rarely mentioned animals, domestic or otherwise in his prose, so it is a surprise to read of his interaction with a pet feline. When he occasionally mentions dogs in his later writing it is always in a negative context.
[43] Isaacs received a formal invitation to the event. Scrapbook, 56. The society is still functioning and it is tempting to imagine that some of the exhibits in its small museum in Montpellier, now named Le Musée Languedocien, may have their origins in Isaacs' collections.
[44] Isaacs would later address a poem to "My Meerschaum Pipe". *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 12.
[45] Harry Rogers to George Isaacs, 25 July 1848, Scrapbook, 60. When elections were held in December, Louis Napoleon, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte was elected President of the Second Republic.
[46] Belinda Falcke's experience in Paris is mentioned in the above letter from Rogers to Isaacs.

elevation; therefore make tracks."[47] A rapid return to England was prevented by his lack of a passport, the consequence of a legal dispute that had occurred during a previous visit to France.[48] Eventually, via a circuitous route and with the intervention of an English official—who naturally recognized a fellow British gentleman in distress—Isaacs returned home. For a while, France was not a safe haven.

Amidst this excitement, George Isaacs' family's circumstances changed yet again. In 1848, Samuel Isaacs quit Upper Gower Street in favour of a rented house away from the centre of London. At the same time, his widowed mother-in-law, Ann Isaacs, moved from her home and joined the family at their new residence. Both departures were marked by that Isaacs' specialty—a very large auction. The extent of both sales can be attributed partly to the fact that the two households were merging and moving to a furnished house. The resulting duplication of household effects explains the presence of the many domestic items in the auction including beds, bed linen and crockery. However the sale of other items, including the almost new carriage ("a very handsome brougham"), the "gems variously mounted", the Collard horizontal grand piano, "a double action harp by Erat" and the "200 dozen of very choice Wines", suggests financial desperation. The "6 noble marble vases 10 feet high" could not have sold at the 1844 Regent Street relocation sale, for they reappeared here. The auction took place over five days, and was soon followed by the sale of Ann Isaacs' possessions at her home at 20 Claremont Terrace, Pentonville.[49] The extended Isaacs clan then moved to their new home, "Gothic Villa", at Turnham Green. The village was about ten kilometres to the west of London near Chiswick, on a bend of the River Thames. Presumably, it was a cheaper option than Upper Gower Street. The house's address, "a villa opposite the church, Turnham

[47] Isaacs, "Without a Passport," in *Not For Sale*, 36.
[48] The details of the dispute are found in Isaacs' story "Without a Passport" in *Not for Sale*.
[49] *The Times*, 13 May 1848, 11. The Gower Street auction was held over five days, commencing 15 May. *The Times*, 8 May 1848, 16. Ann Isaacs' auction occurred on 25 May 1848, and included "a pair of brilliant earrings" and other items suggestive of financial difficulty.

Green", reflected its semi-rural setting.[50] With his family now living out of town, George Isaacs no longer had a stable residential base in the city.

Consequently, he moved frequently over the next few years. "Gothic Villa" in Turnham Green remained his official address, but at times he also lived at, or at least received mail at various addresses, including 3 Woodstock Street, Oxford Street, 23 Broad Street, Golden Square, Starch Green, 9 Greek Street, Soho, Morland's Hotel in Dean Street, Soho Square and at the Rogers' family home in Carlisle Street. Frequent travel abroad may have made the establishment of a permanent home difficult, and surely his life was further complicated by the storage of his collection. Years of illness, leisure, and scant attention to his income was possibly having an impact on his financial affairs. But Isaacs did not curtail his spending. A sensational series of auctions took place in Paris in the early months of 1849 to disperse the collection of the deceased collector, Louis Fidel Debruge-Duménil. Afterwards, Isaacs owned several objects with Debruge provenance, including a "remarkable" Venetian lace-work glass flagon.[51]

A serious rift occurred between Isaacs and his family following his return to London. In April 1849 he instigated a lawsuit in the London Court of Chancery against his father Samuel and his grandmother Ann.[52] The case concerned the bequest left to him by the elder Samuel Isaacs in 1843, and in particular the four properties that he had inherited. His trustees had managed the properties on his behalf since that time, but they were apparently reluctant to relinquish control of the estate, even though Isaacs had reached adulthood three years previously. He

[50] This address appears on the envelope accompanying an undated letter addressed to Isaacs. Thomas Wright to George Isaacs, Scrapbook, 83.
[51] When Isaacs later sold his collection, some items in the auction catalogue were described as having Debruge collection provenance. See *Catalogue of the Well-known and Carefully Chosen Cabinet of Medieval Art of Mr. George Isaacs* (London: Puttick and Simpson, 1850), 14.
[52] George Samuel Isaacs v Ann Isaacs & Samuel Isaacs, National Archives of the UK, C14/1101/I /J21.

now sought to wrest control and possession of the houses from his father and grandmother by legal means, and to recover money that he believed was due to him. Samuel Isaacs and his mother-in-law Ann fought back in court, stating that the young man had received everything to which he was entitled. The final outcome is unclear. The trial may have had a severe and perhaps permanent impact on the family's relationships. Isaacs' mother Ann, "in a low state of mind", moved to Paris that summer with three of her daughters.[53]

Whatever the financial outcome for Isaacs, archaeology remained his primary pastime in 1849. He again volunteered for the organizing committee for the British Archaeological Association Annual Congress, which, this time, was to be held in Chester. In May he delivered a lecture to the Association on a subject close to his heart—"toad-stones".[54] Several of his antique rings were set with so-called toad-stones and Isaacs had delved into their mythology with great dedication. Their source was thought to be the head of a toad and they were believed to impart healing properties to the wearer.[55] Considering his indifferent health, there is a certain poignancy in Isaacs' great interest, but not belief, in these superstitious objects.

Whether or not Isaacs' frequent illnesses affected his physical stature is unknown for there are few references to his physical appearance. In common with most of his male contemporaries, he sported facial hair, for he once wrote, "All my British whiskers stood erect."[56] He also

[53] Isaacs v Garcia, National Archives of the UK, C14/1147/I /J33. This case, and another, Isaacs v Isaacs, National Archives of the UK, C14/1148/I /J46, also in 1850, throw light on the complex financial situation of the Isaacs' clan, as they fought over inheritance issues. Samuel Isaacs made regular visits to his wife in Paris.
[54] Isaacs' lecture on toad stones was published in the following year's *Journal of the British Association* 5 (1850): 340–343.
[55] The truth is less mysterious, and they are now known to be fossilized fish remains. Isaacs' own toadstone rings are now in the collection of the British Museum. Collection numbers AF 1025; AF. 1030.
[56] Isaacs, "Without a Passport," in *Not For Sale*, 40.

wore spectacles, at least when he was older.[57] Physically, he was not tall, even in an age when the general population was shorter than it is at present. George E. Loyau later describes him in the *Gawler Handbook*, on hearsay, as a "little fellow."[58] Isaacs' poem, "A Blythe Soliloquy", which is a loose parody on the opening lines of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, suggests that he was rather sensitive on the subject of his height:

> I, that am tiny stamped, and want war's majesty;
> To strut before a rank of grenadiers;
> I, that am curtail'd of this great proportion,
> Cheated of measure by begrudging nature,
> Neatly, compactly, sent at my full time,
> Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
> And that, so feminine and band-box like
> That lapdogs greet me, as I pass by them.[59]

Outwardly, Isaacs was a dandy who liked to make an impact. A rare description of his dress can be found in the following facetious poem, addressed to him by Ralph Bernal, a fellow British Archaeological Association member and inveterate antique collector:

> To Geo. Isaacs
> Oh good lack! I'm a rough country booby,
> [With fat turkies assorted,
> Just from Norfolk imported.]
> Pray don't be in a passion,
> If I ask for the fashion
> And solicit the pattern

[57] *The Bunyip*, 25 January 1868, 3. The editor commented, "as we labor [sic] under the misfortune of not being able to see Mr. Isaacs through his own spectacles."
[58] George E. Loyau, *The Gawler Handbook* (Adelaide: Goodfellow & Hele, 1880), 146.
[59] Anon. [George Isaacs], "A Blythe Soliloquy," *The Critic*, 28 February 1863, 11. The poem is anonymous, but its content strongly suggests that it was composed by Isaacs. Shakespeare's line, "Now is the winter of our discontent" is replaced with the words, "Now is the summer of my long content."

Of the Waistcoat in Satin
Which you lately design'd
With a taste so refin'd,
And then fasten'd at top with a ruby.
That bright Vest of unequall'd pretention,
Which clasps tight round the throat,
When unbutton'd your coat,
And protecting the chest,
Sits so close o'er your breast,
Like extremes in a riddle,
Falling loose in the middle,
At first, snugly concealing
Then next, open, revealing
Linen secrets, oh glorious invention!

Of men's dress, you're a thorough reformer,
For I hear, that th'impressions
Made by Jarman's old hessians,
On your cousin Belinda,
When she stood at her window,
Cannot reach the delights
Which your Waistcoat excites
In the ladies who dance
The Cellarins of France,
And who sing the duetts [sic] out of Norma.

Oh George Isaacs! What countless petitions
Will be sent by the Tailors,
Dandy Soldiers and Sailors,
For your portrait to sit,
In that elegant fit,

To young Rogers, forsooth,
In cravat starched and smooth,
(Who imprisons in fetters,
All the alphabet letters,)
That the likeness produc'd
May in future be us'd
In "Strutt's Dresses", with modern additions.[60]

Considering his love of fine gems, that ruby fastener on Isaacs' waistcoat was surely of exquisite taste and workmanship. Bernal describes the exterior Isaacs in this poem, but in doing so he also reveals something of his subject's character. Clearly, Isaacs enjoyed being the centre of attention. In fashion, he was a rebel who preferred to be a leader rather than a follower. The lines further hint that he had a certain familiarity with women of the stage, reinforcing his "gentleman of the world" persona.

Isaacs' character was now substantially formed. He followed his passions and took every opportunity to advance himself. His background as the son of a Jewish merchant does not appear to have impeded his progress through polite society. With his genial personality, he was an effective communicator, an inveterate correspondent and an affectionate friend. Memberships in learned organizations had enhanced his standing within the intellectual community and his eclectic antique collection was proof not only of his discrimination, but representative of the intellectual curiosity that characterised the Victorian age. Travels on the Continent, including his brush with the 1848 French revolution, had broadened his

[60] Ralph Bernal to George Isaacs, undated poem, Scrapbook, 10. The lines, "Who imprisons in fetters/All the alphabet letters" refers to Harry Rogers' embellishing skills, which he used to decorate the initial capital letters of book chapters. The words "Strutt's Dresses" in the poem are a reference to Joseph Strutt's *A Complete View of the Dress and Habits of the People of England from the Establishment of the Saxons in Britain to the Present Time* (London: Henry G. Bohn, New ed. 1842). Originally published at the end of the eighteenth century, its etchings reflected the changing taste in English fashions. A new edition, compiled by Isaacs' friend J.R. Planché, was issued in 1842. Presumably the book was familiar to the literate Isaacs and the artistic Rogers. Bernal wittily suggests that Isaacs' smart wardrobe is worthy of inclusion in the next edition of the volume. The phrase, "your cousin Belinda" refers to Belinda Falcke, the sister of Isaacs' sister Emily's husband, David Falcke.

understanding of political power and of human nature. Isaacs' precocious establishment of the *Hesperus*, his willingness to share his knowledge in public, and even his dapper dress, are all examples of his enthusiasm for life. With these attributes, everything pointed to a bright future.

# Chapter 3: The Last of England, 1850–1851

*Not with a vindictive feeling to any party, but with a merciful one to those who may follow us to the shores of Australia, do we the undersigned passengers on board the Mount Stewart Elphinston, unite in requesting you to lay before the public a brief exposition of the disgraceful manner in which we have been deceived by Messrs Woolley and Gull.* George Isaacs, 1851[1]

The year 1850 was a watershed in George Isaacs' life, but its early months offered no hints of the upheaval to come. As usual he had overwintered in France then returned to England in the New Year to resume his busy archaeological activities.[2] Preparations had begun in London for the 1851 "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations", more commonly known as the "Great Exhibition", which would showcase recent international achievements in technology and design in the "Crystal Palace" in Hyde Park. But the past claimed Isaacs' attention. As a prelude to the "Great Exhibition", the Society of Arts organized an "Exhibition of Ancient and Medieval Art".[3] It was held in the Society's London rooms in March 1850 and it aimed to educate the general public and current artisans in the workmanship and culture of earlier eras.

Isaacs' input into this event illustrates the esteem in which the twenty-five year old was held in archaeological circles. A committee headed by the Society of Art's President, Prince Albert, selected Isaacs, "a Gentleman well-qualified for the task—to prepare descriptions of the articles, which from time to time have been laid before the Committee for revision and approval and a Catalogue has thus been prepared of nearly 300 of the works of Art which

[1] *South Australian*, 18 March 1851, 3.
[2] Isaacs continued to attend British Archaeological Association and Freemasons of the Church meetings that year, but membership in one organization eluded him. According to a letter in the Scrapbook, he hoped to join the Society of Antiquaries in 1849, but membership does not appear to have been forthcoming. Sir John Boileau to Lord Hastings, 7 July 1849, Scrapbook, 8.
[3] The full name of the Society of Arts was the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. It is now known as the Royal Society of Arts (RSA).

have been received for Exhibition."[4] According to the *Art Journal*: "The plan suggested by him [Isaacs], with regard to the catalogue, and adopted by the Society, was to divide the entire selection of works exhibited into classes, chiefly according to material and character of manufacture, and these again into sections, according to the country, origin, &c."[5] In addition to his work with the catalogue, Isaacs was also involved in securing exhibits for display, and at least eleven items from his own extensive collection featured in the exhibition.[6] He canvassed his friends, including Earl Cadogan and the Rogers family, for further choice pieces. Queen Victoria graciously loaned items from her personal collection for display. With such a glittering array of treasures, the *Times* reassured prospective visitors that they could attend the event, "with the agreeable feeling that no irksome burden of criticism is thrown upon their shoulders and that all the varied objects spread out before them are rare specimens of excellence."[7] The exhibition was a huge success. More than twenty thousand people flocked to the Society's rooms to view more than eight hundred exhibits of metalwork, glass, sculpture, enamels, woodcarving, armour, jewellery and other examples of fine craftsmanship from the past.

The year's archaeological fest continued when, on 8 May, a spectacular *conversazione* was held at Lord Londesborough's new mansion in Piccadilly.[8] It aimed "to bring together, for the

[4] Quote from the minutes of the organizing committee of the "Exhibition of Ancient and Medieval Art", Eve Watson, Head of Archive, Royal Society of Arts, *email correspondence*, 10 February 2016. Other gentlemen on the committee included Augustus Wollaston Franks, later Director of the British Museum and Henry Cole, who played a major role in the organization of the "Great Exhibition". For background on the Society of Art's 1850 exhibition, see Susan Bennet's article, "Prince Albert, the Society of Arts and the Great Exhibition of 1851," in *Die Weltausstellung von 1851 und ihre Folgen: The Great Exhibition and its Legacy*, eds. Franz Bosbach and John R. Davis (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2002), 101– 106. Despite his input, Isaacs' name is not listed on the frontispieces of the three versions of the catalogue associated with the exhibition.

[5] *The Art Journal*, 1 April 1850, 103. Isaacs' catalogue descriptions of the items on display include a detailed explanation of the art of enamelling. See *Journal of Design and Manufactures* 3 (1850): 102–103.

[6] Eleven items in the later Puttick and Simpson *Catalogue of the Well Known and Carefully Chosen Cabinet of Mediaeval Art of Mr. George Isaacs* are assigned "Exhibition of Ancient and Medieval Art" provenance. These include, "a Gothic pilgrim's bottle, of earlier date than any before met with, elegantly ornamented with foliage, fleur-de-lys, and busts of saints, and bearing an inscription recording its fabrication at Aix-la-Chappelle." *The Art Journal*, 1 April 1850, 103.

[7] *The Times*, 20 March 1850, 8.

[8] Lord Londesborough (1805–1860), born the Honourable Albert Denison Conyngham, was the first president of the British Archaeological Association, a diplomat and a politician.

purpose of friendly union, all the leading members of the literary and scientific world at present in London."[9] Isaacs was one of the nearly two hundred invited guests who gazed at the antiquities assembled for the delectation of his lordship's friends. During 1850, he remained active in both the Freemasons of the Church and the British Archaeological Association.[10]

Throughout the excitement of these events, Isaacs' personal life was in flux. He had formed a relationship with a young woman named Marion Lane (or Layne). Little is known of her background save that she was born in London, the daughter of a commercial traveller, William Lane and his wife Elizabeth Gillham (or Gilliam). Possibly Marion accompanied Isaacs to France that winter, for by the beginning of 1850 she was pregnant. Isaacs' parents may have been seriously displeased by their eldest son's choice of a non-Jewish partner, for any children born of such a union would not be considered Jews. Whatever the circumstances and ramifications of Isaacs' relationship with Marion, it seems that he had made a critical decision about his future by the middle of 1850. He would leave England for South Australia.

Isaacs' exact motivations are unknown, but Marion's pregnancy and the prospect of supporting a family were obvious catalysts for his departure. There may have been other motivations. Ostracism following the 1849 court case or from his choice of partner or her pregnancy, may have caused him to distance himself from his family. Considering his indulgent activities in the past few years, he may have been burdened by debt. Later in life, Isaacs would invent "Augustus Fastman", a character whose parents sent him to Australia, in the hope that "a sea-trip would recruit his strength (somewhat impaired by his London

[9] *Morning Post*, 10 May 1850, 5.
[10] Isaacs is listed as a member in the annual *Journals* of the British Archaeological Association until 1859.

pursuits), and get his rather wild habits subdued by the sober and steady persons who have colonized South Australia."[11] Fastman's story may have resembled Isaacs' own.

The distant colony held attractive prospects for the young man. From a medical perspective, South Australia's warm dry climate promised relief from the chronic asthma that disrupted and threatened his life. The move also offered a chance for rejuvenation. The British press promoted egalitarian South Australia as a land of opportunity, and books such as George Blakiston Wilkinson's *South Australia: Its Advantages and its Resources* (published in London in 1848) and its companion volume *The Working Man's Handbook to South Australia* (1849) may have come to Isaacs' attention.[12] Adelaide, free from the convict associations of other colonial ports and presumably in desperate need of literary and cultured men, seemed an ideal destination.

Although the emigration was planned for the end of 1850 following the birth of Marion's baby, Isaacs' preparations for departure commenced months earlier. By May, he had decided to sell his prized collection of seventy-five antique rings to raise funds for the trip. Of varying styles and dates, the rings shone with gems, silver and gold. Isaacs had acquired them over the previous ten years, in England and on the Continent and he had quickly become an acknowledged expert in the field of antique jewellery. His rings represented much more to him than archaeological curiosities. As his friend Thomas Crofton Croker wrote, probably echoing Isaacs' own thoughts, they were objects imbued with history:

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[11] A. Pendragon, ed., *Twenty–four Hours' Adventures of a New Arrival in South Australia* (Adelaide: Alfred Waddy, 1866), 3.

[12] G.B. Wilkinson, *South Australia: Its Advantages and its Resources: Being a Description of That Colony, and a Manual of Information For Emigrants* (London: J. Murray, 1848); G.B. Wilkinson, *The Working Man's Handbook to South Australia: With Advice to the Farmer, and Detailed Information For the Several Classes of Labourers and Artizans* (London: J. Murray, 1849).

> Nor should the claims that the ring has on our regard, through the vast cycle of ages over which its history extends, be forgotten;—its power and its poetry: its alliance with religion and with love; with chivalry and commerce; with magic and the superstitious speculations of our forefathers;—its influence upon art and alchemy or chemistry, and their combined power upon the science of manufactures and medicine.[13]

Having taken such pride in its acquisition and quality, Isaacs did not wish to see his ring collection dispersed.[14] Estimating its total value at five hundred pounds, he first approached the British Museum, but it declined to purchase at that figure. Thomas Crofton Croker then kindly offered to act as an intermediary on his behalf. It was known that Lord Londesborough was interested in purchasing some of the rings for his wife, and Croker believed that he might be persuaded to take the whole collection at a reduced price. Isaacs was not at home when his friend called to inform him of the result of the negotiations, so Croker left his card with the scribbled inscription, "Lord L says 'done'".[15] Croker had brokered a deal for two hundred pounds; a figure considerably less than the initial purchase cost of the jewels.[16] The sale at the reduced price demonstrates Isaacs' determination to sell, or his desperation to raise money. He wrote meekly to Croker on 22 June 1850: "while congratulating Lord Londesborough on the acquisition of my pet collection [I] must express my gratification at their being so well placed."[17] From all the rings, he retained only one spectacular example, the sixteenth century ecclesiastical jewel that he had shown at the British Archaeological Association meeting on

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[13] Thomas Crofton Croker, *Catalogue of a Collection of Ancient & Mediaeval Rings and Personal Ornaments Formed For Lady Londesborough* (London: Privately published, 1853), vii.
[14] The collection included not only rings, but also Isaacs' eighteen ancient brooches or "fibulae".
[15] Visiting card of Thomas Crofton Croker, Scrapbook, 16.
[16] The sum took no account of rings received as gifts, or of the expenses involved in their discovery.
[17] George Isaacs to Thomas Crofton Croker. This letter written by Isaacs is now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. MS Eng. Misc. C22 fol. 10r. Following the sale, Croker would spend three years cataloguing Lady Londesborough's new jewellery collection, resulting in the privately-printed book, a *Catalogue of a Collection of Ancient and Medieval Rings and Personal Ornaments Formed For Lady Londesborough* (1853). It contains a detailed description of each of the seventy-four rings sold by Isaacs, via Croker, to Lord Londesborough.

12 May 1847. It was described in the Association's *Journal* as "a beautifully enamelled gold ring, set with a large emerald, on which is engraved the full length figure of a bishop under a canopy, round which is inscribed, *FIAT DEI VOLVNTAS*."[18] The motto "May God's Will be Done" was a fitting phrase for a bishop's ring and an appropriate slogan for a man contemplating the next uncertain stage of his life.

Amidst the preparations for departure, Marion gave birth to Emily Georgina Isaacs at 22 Goldhawk Terrace, Shepherd's Bush on 18 September 1850. Marion, not Isaacs, officially registered the child. She described Isaacs as a "Gentleman" and identified herself as "Marion Isaacs", though there is no evidence of a marriage between the pair, either in England or in France.[19] There is no mention of a wife or child in any of the extant letters written to Isaacs that year, so the existence of his new family was either unknown to, or discretely ignored by his acquaintances.[20] The fact that the couple was apparently not living together provides further evidence that the relationship was clandestine. Isaacs' official addresses remained the Turnham Green villa, conveniently less than two kilometres from Marion's residence at Goldhawk Terrace, and 23 Broad Street, Golden Square in the city. Despite having taken his father and his grandmother to court the previous year, and fathering a non-Jewish child, Isaacs was apparently still welcome at the family home, or at the very least, he still collected his mail there.[21]

Through procrastination or indecision, Isaacs left his most complex pre-emigration task, the complete dispersal of his antiquities, until shortly before his departure. He engaged London's

[18] *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 3 (1848): 125.
[19] For the purposes of this biography, Marion Isaacs will henceforth be referred to as Isaacs' wife, regardless of the validity of the term. She was later described as Isaacs' "wife" in a shipping record, in a newspaper article and on her death certificate.
[20] Alternatively, Isaacs may have chosen to exclude letters with references to the relationship in his Scrapbook.
[21] As seen in the postmarked or dated letters in the Scrapbook, Isaacs received personal correspondence at both addresses just prior to his emigration from England.

premier art auctioneers, Puttick and Simpson, to sell his "well-known and carefully chosen Cabinet of Medieval Art" by auction on 12 November 1850. The irrevocable nature of his departure was made clear in the advertisements for the sale, which described him as "about to leave England for a permanent residence abroad."[22] The trip was not to be an exploratory visit to the colonies, but a lifetime commitment.

The extent and quality of Isaacs' antique collection can be gauged from Puttick and Simpson's auction catalogue, which also serves as an inventory of his acquisitions over the previous decade.[23] One hundred and seventy-one carefully annotated lots were listed for sale. Purchases from the De Bruge Collection auctions, treasures exhibited at British Archaeological Association and Freemasons of the Church meetings, plus "not unimportant items" that were recently on display at the Society of Arts exhibition, tempted the connoisseur.[24] Paintings, coral, ivory, manuscripts, books, glass, jewellery, caskets and reliquaries were included in the sale. Wonders such as "The Casket of Giulio de Medici", the "Ivory Sceptre of Louis XII of France", a "Life Size Silver Head of the 12th Century" (the reliquary of Saint Eustace), a "Unique Venetian Glass Flagon" and a "Boxwood Chef-D'Oeuvre, in the Purest Taste" were amongst the offerings. That Isaacs had managed to acquire a hoard of such complexity by the age of twenty-five is surprising. Obviously he had not been thrifty with his inheritance.

All lots, with the exception of one oil painting were sold on the day of the auction. The top price of thirty-nine pounds was achieved by the Saint Eustace reliquary, which was purchased

[22] Puttick and Simpson advertisement, in *Notes and Queries* 2 54 (1850): 399. The advertisement also appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper.
[23] The financial results of the individual lots are recorded in an annotated Puttick and Simpson catalogue of the auction dated 12 November 1850, included in *Literature, Music and Art: The Annotated Sale Catalogues of Puttick and Simpson, 1846–1870* (Reading UK: Research Publications, 1989–1990).
[24] Puttick and Simpson advertisement in *Notes and Queries* 2.54 (1850): 399.

for the British Museum collection. Augustus Wollaston Franks, on behalf of the trustees of the British Museum, purchased several other lots including an enamelled "pax" featuring Saint James and Saint Jude.[25] A member of the Falcke family (probably Isaacs' brother-in-law, the collector David Falcke) bid successfully for several of the more desirable objects. Isaacs' friends, including Earl Cadogan and James Orchard Halliwell from the British Archaeological Association, were amongst the many buyers. The *Athenaeum* recorded that Halliwell purchased the prized *Treatise on Magic and Astrology* by Dr. Dee, and noted that "The present volume is in the original binding, with Ashmole's arms on the clasps. It should certainly find its way to its old companions in the Ashmolean, at Oxford."[26] Curiously, Samuel Isaacs bought several of the cheaper items, perhaps as nostalgic souvenirs of his son's once famed collection. In total, the auction yielded a sum of four hundred and eighty pounds for the vendor. Even with Puttick and Simpson's auction fee taken into account, that total was more than sufficient to provide a solid basis for a new life in Australia.

Isaacs' final days in England passed in a flurry of farewells. He invited a range of distinguished friends to his final soirée, held just prior to his departure. Older British Archaeological Association members had long taken a paternal interest in the young man, and as mentors they had provided him with a framework of support. Aware that the break with their friend would be permanent, they now wrote to Isaacs to express their sentiments. Theodosius Purland penned a heartfelt note that read, "My dear Child! Tho' in sorrow, yet I will take a parental leave on Friday evening next."[27] One of the founders of the Association, Thomas Wright, expressed his regret that members would no longer benefit from Isaacs'

[25] A pax is a sacred object kissed by participants during a mass.
[26] Isaacs' Dr. Dee volume is not in the present Ashmolean Museum collection and its current location is unknown. Arthur MacGregor, *email correspondence*, 15 October 2009.
[27] Thomas Theodosius Purland to George Isaacs, 19 November 1850, Scrapbook, 51. Purland (1805–1881) was a respected dentist, a British Archaeological Association member and a lifelong antiquarian who, among many other pursuits, fell in love at first sight, proposed and was accepted by his wife—all within half an hour of meeting her. He was also a balloonist, a hypnotist and instrumental in saving Shakespeare's house for the nation in 1847.

knowledge: "I am very sorry that we are going to lose you—you leave archaeology rather at sixes and sevens."[28] The antiquary Frederick William Fairholt added, "I am sorry you are going so far for so long—but—it is a world of change; and you know what is best for yourself at all events."[29] Harry Rogers' father, William Gibbs Rogers, sent Isaacs a kind note that included the names of contacts in Australia who might be of assistance to him. Perhaps unaware of the distances that separated the colonies in the far off land, Rogers Senior included the names of his Hobart cousins.[30]

Almost from the time of Isaacs' birth, a sturdy ship had been traversing the world's oceans. Her name was the *Mountstuart Elphinstone* and she had been built in Bombay (Mumbai) in 1826.[31] In her early days the teak barque of 611 tons had been the pride of the East India Company. In 1845, 1847, 1848 and 1849 she was hired to ferry British prisoners to Australian ports, including to Hobart and to Moreton Bay. Following the completion of her 1849 voyage she underwent a transformation. With British interest in transportation waning and Australian opposition to the practice growing, the *Mountstuart Elphinstone* was refitted for the immigrant trade. She would carry the Isaacs' family across the seas to Australia.

For an adult ticket price of twenty-one pounds, Isaacs was promised a comfortable trip in intermediate class, with a fast sailing time, a well-ventilated enclosed cabin, all bedding,

[28] Thomas Wright to George Isaacs, undated, but postmarked 20 November 1850, Scrapbook, 84.
[29] Frederick William Fairholt to George Isaacs, 20 November 1850, Scrapbook, 31.
[30] William Gibbs Rogers to George Isaacs, dated "Nov 28 or 29 1850", Scrapbook, 59.
[31] The ship's unusual name derived from the Scottish Governor of Bombay, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and it invited confusion. The same vessel was also recorded as the *Mount Stuart Elphinstone*, the *Mount-stuart Elphinstone*, the *Mountstewart Elphinstone*, the *Mount Stewart Elphinston* and the *Mount Stewart Elphinstone*. To add to the confusion, there were at least two ships of that name, or its derivations, sailing from England during the 1850s, and both were constructed in 1826. During Isaacs' ship's 1847 voyage south, she earned a place in medical history when she carried the news of the use of ether for anaesthesia to Australia for the first time. A painting of her, *The Ship "Mountstuart Elphinstone" Offshore* (1840) by William Adolphus Knell, is preserved in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

excellent food and all mess utensils.[32] An added inducement for the comfort of the one hundred and thirteen passengers, and especially for Isaacs, was the experienced surgeon on board, Dr. Solomon Iffla.[33] Like Isaacs, the Jamaican-born Jewish doctor was intending to settle in South Australia with his wife and child. The master for the voyage was Henry Courtney Loney, a cautious, experienced captain who, according to John Martin, an involuntary passenger on the ship's previous voyage to Australia, was "remarkably good tempered and agreeable in his manner."[34]

After final farewells, Isaacs, Marion and ten week old baby Emily boarded the *Mountstuart Elphinstone* at London's bustling Saint Katherine's Dock. She sailed on 29 November 1850, and experienced a short delay at Gravesend, where an officer from the Emigration Commissioners inspected her food supply. Isaacs watched as the man tasted some butter on deck, and was "inspired for the government of his country, which so paternally looked after its children."[35] The ship reached Plymouth, her last port of call in England, on 3 December. Additional immigrants joined her there, mail was exchanged, and the ship's agent, Mr. Gull, "invested in the sacred guise of a white choaker [sic]", distributed Bibles and prayer books to the women on board. Finally on 6 December 1850, with all cargo loaded, and with favourable winds in the Channel, the *Mountstuart Elphinstone* commenced her long voyage to South Australia.

Isaacs' life of gentlemanly indulgence ended abruptly on this voyage, and the reality of extended shipboard life was no doubt a shock to a man of his sensibilities. The passengers

[32] *The Times*, 5 November 1850, 1.
[33] Solomon Iffla (1820–1887) would, after a brief stay in Adelaide, build a successful medical, scientific and municipal career in Melbourne.
[34] John Martin, "The Partial Diary of 'Honest' John Martin, Young Irelander, 1812–1875, Co. Ireland," Part II, "Journal of Voyage From Ireland, in the Convict Ship Mountstuart Elphinstone to Australia", entry for 19 July 1849, www.theballards net/Harshaw/Martin/Diary/Part2 html
[35] *South Australian*, 18 March 1851, 3. The following account of the privations of the voyage is based on the contents of this letter.

were not only at the mercy of the wind and waves, but subject to the cost-cutting practices of the agents, the aforementioned Mr. Gull, and his colleague, Mr. Woolley. Shortcomings in provisions became apparent within days of the departure. When the passengers complained to agent Gull at Plymouth about the scarcity of some items of food and drink, they were reassured that things would improve. To Isaacs' consternation, the situation remained unacceptable:

> The Beef was in the language of the initiated "Old Horse," the Pork frequently vile, the Rum not Rum, the Biscuits bad, and the Tea not good. The Coffee Roaster was not large enough, the Pepper, when supplied to us, was whole, and obliged to remain so for want of a grinder. The two diminutive Water Filters became invalided in about a fortnight. The Gally [sic] was not sufficiently commodious for the quantity of food obliged to be daily cooked. The Cook appointed became a Cook disappointed, in consequence of incapability, shortly after we left Plymouth, and we had to select one from among ourselves to officiate in his place.

A further grievance for Isaacs was that, contrary to its advertised claim of carrying only one intermediate class of passenger, plus a handful of first class immigrants, the *Mountstuart Elphinstone*'s agents added a cheaper class. For the price of fifteen pounds, those immigrants received similar benefits to intermediate travellers. Isaacs complained that he and his family were "indiscriminately packed together" with the lower class. Whether he liked it or not, the egalitarian ideals that he prized were already in force, courtesy of the avaricious agents. Such were the perils of colonial immigrant travel.

According to Robin Haines in *Life and Death in the Age of Sail*, vessels bound for South Australia in the 1850s sailed via the traditional Cape route.[36] From Plymouth, the *Mountstuart*

[36] Robin Haines, *Life and Death in the Age of Sail: The Passage to Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003).

*Elphinstone* headed south in the Atlantic Ocean before crossing the Equator. After negotiating the doldrums, she then veered south-west, curving around the small island of Tristan da Cunha, before sailing east towards the Cape of Good Hope. A few vessels took on supplies at that port, but most did not, for at this period it was common for ships to make no landfall between England and Australia. *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* noted the ship's progress in that vicinity: "The Mountstewart Elphinstone, from London for Adelaide, was spoken Jan. 20, six days' sail from the Cape of Good Hope."[37] Once around the Cape, the barque picked up the Roaring Forties, the westerly winds that would speed Isaacs to his destination.

It must have been a long, uncomfortable trip for Isaacs and his family, and their relief when they first scented, then sighted land, can be imagined. After a journey of nearly 20,000 kilometres, the *Mountstuart Elphinstone* arrived at Port Adelaide on Saturday, 15 March 1851.[38] Apart from the insufficient provisions, she had experienced a trouble-free run. Travelling during the South Hemisphere summer and blessed with favourable weather, she had taken fourteen weeks to reach her destination at a time when a typical passage from England to Australia ranged from three to five months. Meanwhile in Adelaide, anxious friends and family members searched the newspapers each day for news of the arrival of expected vessels, and the names of their passengers. "George and Mary Ann Isaacs and child" were listed in the *Adelaide Times* on 17 March 1851, but it is unlikely that their arrival was anticipated by others.[39]

[37] *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 23 March 1851, 435.
[38] The only casualty on the voyage was a sailor, Richard King Junior, who had fallen overboard while climbing the ship's main-top-gallant-yard, the square sail set high on the tallest mast of the vessel. *Adelaide Times*, 17 March 1851, 2. According to Robin Haines, mortality on emigrant ships at this period was no worse than on land. Few emigrant ships sank on their voyage to Australia and few were devastated by disease. Haines, *Life and Death*, 39.
[39] *Adelaide Times*, 17 March 1851, 2. The arrival of "Geo. Isaacs wife and child" was also noted in the *Register*. *South Australian Register*, 17 March 1851, 2.

Remarkably, Isaacs' Australian writing career commenced on the day of his arrival in Adelaide. For three months he had suffered from the misrepresentations of the ship's agents, and now he vented his anger in a long letter dated 15 March that presumably had been drafted during the voyage. Twenty-one fellow passengers added their names to Isaacs' letter. Tinged with humour and sarcasm, filled with emotion and cleverly written, it detailed the many privations suffered by those on the *Mountstuart Elphinstone*. The letter appeared in the *South Australian* newspaper on 18 March, the first of many letters, on my topics, which Isaacs would send to the colonial press.[40] He hoped that his complaints would be copied to the English papers and thereby serve as a warning to those considering travel on ships chartered by Woolley and Gull. He urged intending passengers, "To believe neither in the printed circulars, written guarantees, nor assurances, however solemn—for we have found in these no security." By contrast, the passengers had no argument with their master, Captain Loney, for on arrival in Adelaide they placed testimonials to his skills in the *South Australian Register*.[41]

Having made the transition from English gentleman to Australian colonist and from bachelordom to fatherhood, Isaacs' new life lay before him. His first twenty-five years had demonstrated his versatility and his initiative. In the colony he would no longer have regular income from rents, the support of his extended family or friends, or access to the cultural institutions and societies that had affirmed his worth as an able young man. He would be responsible not only for himself, but also for his family. There was sadness at leaving everything that he had known, a sense captured in his later poem, "Lament":

> I, on my pillow
> Vigil sad keeping, may languish and moan;

[40] Isaacs' letter spurred another recent immigrant, "A.B.C.", a further victim of agents Gull and Woolley, to relate a similar tale of woe experienced on the voyage of the *Simlah* to Adelaide. *South Australian*, 21 March 1851, 4.
[41] *South Australian Register*, 22 March 1851, 2. One of the two testimonials to Loney bears Isaacs' signature. Henceforth, in the text, the newspaper will be referred to as the "*Register*".

Drooping and weeping,

Vigil sad keeping

For the truant who never returns to his own.[42]

But there was also joy in the promise of independence, opportunity and good health in Australia. Like most colonial immigrants, Isaacs would never return to his homeland, and he would live under the brilliant stars of the Southern Cross for the remainder of his life.

[42] Isaacs, "Lament," in *Not For Sale*, 29.

# Chapter 4: Gawler and Gold, 1851–1857

*Twainbridge ... has always been considered an important town—at least, I have ever heard its inhabitants say so.* George Isaacs, 1862[1]

In March 1851 George Isaacs entered a city that was barely fifteen years old, but Adelaide already boasted the basic trappings of civic gentility. Churches, a street grid, a hospital, a cemetery and parkland had been quickly imprinted on the land of the local Kaurna people. Residents could deposit their money in the State Savings Bank of South Australia, or spend it at the business of G.P. Harris & J.C. Lanyon, the forerunner of Harris Scarfe. The new synagogue of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation had opened the previous August. Shops, hotels and offices lined the main streets, and the remainder of the city was sparsely dotted with small, shingled dwellings. A census, taken not long before Isaacs reached South Australia recorded 14,577 residents in the vicinity of Adelaide, but despite its population it was not thriving.[2] Isaacs' arrival coincided with an economic depression that caused significant difficulties for the city's inhabitants. High food prices and unemployment fostered poverty and discontent.[3] The new immigrant was also challenged by the unfamiliar physical environment, as captured in the diary of the recent immigrant Edward Snell: "Adelaide is a wretched place to live in—hot as an oven, generally smothered in dust, and infested with countless myriads of flies, fleas, ants, and musquitoes [sic]. No water except that wretched little—Torrens."[4]

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[1] *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 7.
[2] *South Australian*, 7 February 1851, 2.
[3] Douglas Pike notes that 1851 was "not a happy one for the majority of South Australians, whom a mixture of class distinction and economic depression condemned still to distress and frustration." Douglas Pike, *Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829–1857* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, Second edition, 1967), 421.
[4] Edward Snell, *The Life and Adventures of Edward Snell*: *The Illustrated Diary of an Artist, Engineer and Adventurer in the Australian Colonies 1849 to 1859, Edited and Introduced by Tom Griffiths With Assistance From Alan Platt* (North Ryde N.S.W: Angus & Robertson and The Library Council of Victoria, 1988), 79.

Isaacs' easy European life as an unemployed gentleman was over and he was now faced with an urgent need to generate an income to support himself and his family in an uncertain economic climate. Seeking a profession that would engage his intelligence and his talents, he hoped for a literary career. He did not arrive unprepared for this task and carried letters of introduction from prominent Englishmen to ease his entry into Adelaide society.[5] Isaacs wrote to John Taylor of the *South Australian Register*, enclosing examples of his writing for possible publication. Taylor's polite but belated reply offered mild encouragement, but no suggestion of remuneration or employment:

> I return you your Manuscript with many thanks and much regret that I have detained it so long. Generally the compositions evince talent and a highly educated mind. I have selected one for insertion and it is only because we do rarely admit poetry that I do not avail myself more of your productions.[6]

No doubt the newspaperman had already been approached by many amateur gentleman writers who fancied careers as poets or journalists. He failed to keep his promise to publish Isaacs' proffered work in the *Register*.

Nevertheless, Isaacs' name was soon before Adelaide's citizens, but not as an author, journalist or poet. Within eight weeks of his arrival he had opened a business, Allday & Isaacs, in partnership with a fellow immigrant on the *Mountstuart Elphinstone*, Samuel Copland Allday. The shop was well situated in the heart of Adelaide in Hindley Street, next to the Royal Exchange Hotel. The young men advertised "All kinds of Law and Ornamental Writing executed with care and dispatch" and offered their services as general agents and

[5] George E. Loyau states that "On his arrival in South Australia Isaacs brought with him excellent letters of introduction, and he had evidently been on terms of correspondence with the late Douglas Jerrold, Bulwer Lytton, and other eminent literary men." George E. Loyau, *The Representative Men of South Australia* (Adelaide: George Howell, 1883), 143.
[6] John Taylor to George Isaacs, 15 August 1851, Scrapbook, 78.

accountants.[7] The fledgling business required little outlay, other than the rent of a room and the toil of its proprietors. Isaacs' upbringing in the commercial environment of his father's business in London must have been of benefit in his new occupation. Soon the firm expanded its services, advertising rent and accounts collection to landlords and businessmen. It sold a wide range of utilitarian and stationery items designed to meet the daily needs of newly-arrived immigrants.[8] Books, "a variety new and uncut, at less than London publishing prices" were available for purchase, and the firm also bought or exchanged the settlers' unwanted volumes.[9] There was nothing rare or valuable on sale at Allday & Isaacs for there was little market for antiquities in the economically depressed town. The collaboration between the two men proved ephemeral and on 24 July 1851 the partnership was dissolved by mutual consent.[10] The dissolution document was witnessed by fellow *Mountstuart Elphinstone* passenger, Jackson Keddell. Isaacs then continued to run the business as sole proprietor, but within weeks of the split with Allday, all advertisements for the shop ceased. Perhaps he could no longer afford to promote himself in the newspaper. More likely, the venture had quietly failed.

Isaacs formed connections with members of the local Jewish community in his first months in the colony.[11] With his non-Jewish wife and daughter he would not have been welcome in the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation's synagogue in Rundle Street, but this did not prevent him from associating with fellow Jews, or from advocating on behalf of a Jewish cause. George Isaacs' name can be found on a petition sponsored by the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation that

[7] One example of this advertisement can be found on the front page of the *South Australian Register*, 9 May 1851.
[8] The shop's eclectic stock included razors, rulers, ink, pipes, dressing cases, music, musical instruments, surveyors' tapes and tailors' measures. *South Australian Register*, 7 June 1851, 1.
[9] *South Australian Register*, 8 July 1851, 4.
[10] *South Australian Register*, 26 July 1851, 2.
[11] Isaacs' name only appears in the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation's records at the time of his death, in contrast to his fellow passenger on the *Mountstuart Elphinstone*, Doctor Solomon Iffla, who was listed as a member of the synagogue by June 1851.

was presented to the newly elected Legislative Council on 29 August 1851.[12] It opposed a controversial bill calling for Government financial aid for the support of Christian worship. Isaacs' signature on this document is the first slight example of his political activism in Australia. He would sign many petitions throughout his life. These small acts, from praising Members of Parliament to commending a postman, are clear indications of his willingness to support causes, defend justice and to play an active role in his community.[13] His support for the Jewish view in this case cemented a positive relationship with the local religious community. In future, members of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation would offer him much-needed aid at some difficult moments in his life.[14]

Following the demise of his first Australian business, Isaacs was forced to look elsewhere for work. His connections proved advantageous and by 1852 he was working for the Jewish businessman and importer Burnett Nathan, the treasurer of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation. He employed Isaacs to manage a stationery shop, not in Adelaide, but in the small town of Gawler, forty kilometres to the north. Gawler's prospects were favourable, as it was a stopover on the route between Adelaide and the bustling copper mines of Burra and Kapunda. When Isaacs arrived, the town already boasted 220 houses, several hotels including the popular Old Spot Hotel, the Victoria Mill that handled the district's grain, and a public school-house.[15] St. George's Anglican Church had been consecrated in 1848, and was

[12] The Adelaide Hebrew Congregation's petition was one of three on that issue presented to the Legislative Council. According to Douglas Pike, a group of influential Anglicans urged the bill's adoption, while the Lutheran Church in Tanunda asked that it be passed in a more moderate form. "An Ordinance to Promote the Building of Churches and Chapels for Christian Worship, and to Provide for the Maintenance of Ministers of the Christian Religion" was defeated thirteen votes to ten. Pike, *Paradise of Dissent*, 436.
[13] Isaacs' signature on a petition commending a postman's dedication can be found in the *South Australian Register*, 3 March 1856, 1. In another example, his name appears on a petition supporting local politician Philip Butler for the seat of Barossa in the House of Assembly. *South Australian Register*, 21 May 1857, 1.
[14] Isaacs supported Adelaide's Jewish businessmen with his pen. The following example comes from his newspaper, the *Critic*: "Emboldened by the success of Mr. Emanuel Solomon, Mr. Goodman Hart and Mr. Samuel Raphael are candidates for civic honours. That these gentlemen have not long before this been elevated is surely not their fault. We hope ere long to see them in their proper place." *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 5.
[15] For a description of Gawler at the time of Isaacs' arrival, see Old Colonist and E.M. Yelland, ed., *Colonists, Copper and Corn* (Adelaide: E.M. Yelland, Revised edition, 1983), 90.

purportedly the first church to be built north of Adelaide.[16] Despite these and other amenities however, Isaacs' initial enthusiasm for the area was muted. In a later article he made it clear that he did not retain happy memories of his early days in the town that he dubbed "Twainbridge":

> I had the conduct of one of the principal stores in the main street (the town was all main street then), and was treated with a certain (though cold) courtesy by the notables I have spoken of, I fancied—and even now fancy—that I was regarded as not sufficiently interested in the town to be permitted to identify myself with it. Indeed, I was not anxious to do so.[17]

Isaacs, the ambitious man who had once explored the great cities of Europe and hobnobbed with gentry, now found himself serving behind a shop counter in a rural backwater. Certainly this was not the future that he had envisaged for himself when he left England. He was filled with despondency: "a certain dejection had seized my soul, as if Fate were whispering, 'Here you shall pass your life till you become mildewed and all ambition rots.'"[18]

However, there was cause for optimism in his family life. On 16 August 1852, Marion gave birth to a son, George Alfred Isaacs. The baby was the couple's second child and he was their first progeny to be born in Australia. As was the case when Emily was born in London, it was Marion, not Isaacs, who registered the baby, unlike some later children born to the couple who were not registered at all. A third child, named Marion after her mother, was born sometime before 1856.[19] The years surrounding these births offer little information on Isaacs'

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[16] Loyau, *Gawler Handbook*, 12.
[17] A. Pendragon, "The Old Spot Inn: A Reminiscence of Ten Years Ago," *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 7. Gawler's small triangle of houses and businesses lay between two creeks, the North Para and the South Para. Two bridges spanned the waterways, hence the name "Twainbridge". As I can find no other instances of this name in relation to the town, it appears that the term was coined by Isaacs.
[18] A. Pendragon, "The Old Spot Inn: A Reminiscence of Ten Years Ago," *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 7.
[19] According to the given age on her Marriage Certificate which suggests a birth date of 1855, daughter Marion Isaacs believed that she had been born in Adelaide, but no official registration of her birth has been discovered in South Australia or Victoria. Marriage Certificate of Marion Isaacs and David Jones Higginbotham, 13 October

activities, but it seems that, for at least part of the time, he was dutifully tending a shop and building a family life in Gawler.[20] For the remainder of that period, he embarked on what must have been one of the great adventures of his life. Like the majority of the male population of Gawler, and indeed South Australia, he succumbed to the lure of the Victorian goldfields.

The discovery of gold in New South Wales in February 1851 did not have a great impact on Isaacs or, indeed, on the colony of South Australia. Later that year however, reports reached Adelaide that gold had been discovered in neighbouring Victoria, prompting thousands of men, including Isaacs, to set off to make their fortunes. This exodus of manpower threatened dire consequences for the young South Australian colony. Commerce stalled as businesses closed due to a lack of staff and supplies. Farms were deserted as farmers and their agricultural workers sought their fortunes, leaving fresh food in short supply. Bakers, butchers and bankers followed their compatriots, and money and skills drained from the colony. Few adult males remained in Gawler.[21] Bereft of their breadwinners, women like Marion Isaacs struggled through a bleak period of uncertainty, compounded by poverty.

The birth of George Alfred to Marion Isaacs in August 1852 suggests that his father was not among the first wave of gold seekers who left South Australia for Victoria in late 1851. Isaacs certainly visited the goldfields, perhaps more than once, but like most he left no trace of his

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1875, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Victoria, reg. no. 4928. Her father may have been at the Victorian goldfields at the time of her birth.

[20] It is not known if Isaacs remained in contact with his parents in England or if they were aware of his growing family in Australia.

[21] According to James Martin, "the only men left in Gawler were Canon Coombs, Mr. Duffield, his miller (Mr. Churchman), Mr. Purcell, and Dr. Mahony." E.H. Coombe, *History of Gawler*, 1837–1908 (Gawler, South Australia: Gawler Institute, 1910), 23. For a useful overview of the impact of the Victorian gold rush on the South Australia colony, see Douglas Pike, "The Effects of Gold," in *Paradise of Dissent*, 442–460.

presence there.[22] With his frequent ill-health he was unsuited to the physical toil of mining. There were other ways to profit from the experience, as Lazarus Morris Goldman notes:

> Few of the Jews dug for gold. They sought their fortune by other means equally as hazardous and speculative, as tradesmen, shopkeepers, pedlars, general merchants and as gold buyers. They underwent all the hardships that the miners experienced in those exciting days and whenever a lead ran out or rumour were heard of richer fields, they too, followed the mob and pitched their tent anew. [23]

As later court records reveal that Isaacs borrowed the large sum of twenty-seven pounds from his employer Nathan, just prior to leaving for Victoria, it is possible that he used the money to secure retail stock for later re-selling on the goldfields.[24]

Unlike many, Isaacs did not make his fortune in Victoria, for when he returned to Adelaide on the schooner *James* on 11 January 1856, he carried a mere two pounds.[25] Reunited with his family in Gawler, he discovered that Marion had incurred a debt of over thirteen pounds to the local merchants during his absence. He was faced with the immediate tasks of feeding and clothing his family, servicing his now substantial debt and paying the rent of six shillings per week for their two-roomed cottage. In practical terms the Victorian gamble had been a financial disappointment. In the wider context of his writing career however, the trip provided inspiration. The things that he had seen, heard and experienced on the goldfields would soon provide an authentic basis for his first published literary work in Australia.

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[22] A man named "George Isaacs" did leave his mark in the Forest Creek/Castlemaine goldfields, signing his name on a petition for a school in 1855 and running a wine shop. That gentleman, of Christian heritage and no relation to the subject of this biography, became a Castlemaine magistrate.
[23] Lazarus Morris Goldman, *The Jews in Victoria in the Nineteenth Century* (Melbourne: The Author, 1954), 82.
[24] Sequestration Files and Schedule of Estates, Court of Insolvency, State Records of South Australia, GRG66/5/37/534 and GRG66/6/11/534. Information on Isaacs' financial and legal difficulties in 1856, discussed in the following pages, can be found in the above records. A slightly different account of the legal proceedings appears in the *Adelaide Times*, 18 October 1856, 3.
[25] *Adelaide Times*, 12 January 1856, 2. Isaacs' experiences on the Victorian goldfields are explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

It did not take long for Isaacs to re-establish himself in Gawler. In February 1856, he commenced work as a clerk in James Martin's burgeoning foundry on a salary of two pounds, ten shillings per week, but he had grander ambitions. He devised a clever scheme that would simultaneously retain his current employment in the foundry, satisfy his literary and social yearnings and be of benefit to the local community. In the same month that he became an employee of Martin, Isaacs also launched the town's first public reading room.[26] There was one major problem however; he had no funds to establish such a business. He borrowed money for the rent of the house in Murray Street, the necessary furniture and for the reading matter. Shaded by damask curtains, the facility boasted four large tables, five settees, five lamps, a clock, maps, drawers and a counter. Stationery supplies were also available for sale. In this comfortable enclave, the reading room subscribers could choose from six hundred books: "being quite new, and selected to suit all tastes with the greatest care."[27] To augment the reading matter, Isaacs wrote to the Chief Secretary's Office requesting free copies of the *Government Gazette*, but he was refused.[28] Marion, presumably with children in tow, oversaw the running of the enterprise during the day. When the weary Isaacs returned from his toil in Martin's office in the evening, he took over the library's supervision until closing time. Master of the scheme and surrounded by fellow townsmen, he must have delighted in the bookish atmosphere. As demonstrated in the past, he had a genuine desire to educate and entertain his fellows. In founding the reading room, Isaacs hoped to recreate a modest antipodean version of the libraries, clubs and societies that he had so enjoyed in London.

[26] In a letter dated "Gawler Feby 29 1856", Isaacs writes, "I have opened a public Reading-room in this town." Letter to the Colonial Secretary from George Isaacs, State Records of South Australia, GRG 24/6, Unit 129, 662/1856.
[27] For descriptions of Isaacs' reading room, see the *Adelaide Times*, 27 February 1856, 3, and the *South Australian Register*, 4 June 1856, 4. Gawler readers who required a more comprehensive selection of literature could travel to the city, where the amalgamation of the Adelaide Mechanics' Institute Library with the South Australian Subscription Library in 1848 had resulted in a depository of several thousand books.
[28] Letter to the Colonial Secretary from George Isaacs, State Records of South Australia, GRG 24/6, Unit 129, 662/1856; Letter to George Isaacs from the Colonial Secretary, State Records of South Australia, GRG 24/4, Volume 10 (1856), 114.

Inevitably, expenses and pressure from his creditors increased. To counter this, the Isaacs family lived very simply. Aside from housekeeping expenses of forty-two shillings per week, the only other expenditure was a small sum to cover the cost of clothing and medical bills. Welcome income of almost eighty pounds was received from the seventy-six gentlemen who subscribed a guinea each to the new reading room. The surnames of these men, including Angas, Duffield and Martin, represented the cream of Gawler and wider South Australian society. Initial responses to Isaacs' scheme were encouraging, and over the following six months his reading room provided a welcome literary haven.

The public-spirited enterprise soon came to an abrupt and unfortunate end. Isaacs' creditors had been patient, but when outstanding loans were not repaid after several months, two Gawler men, James Harris (new owner of Burnett Nathan's former store and a subscriber to Isaacs' reading room) and George Charles Wyld (who had provided the reading room's furniture) threatened litigation. Together, they were owed thirty-nine pounds, fourteen shillings and seven pence. In a desperate move to placate these creditors, Isaacs was forced to close his reading room and to sell its contents. He struggled to find an auctioneer who was willing to act at short notice, and the urgency of his predicament meant that he was unable to negotiate a better price for his goods. He estimated that his original financial outlay was one hundred and twenty-four pounds, but when the contents were auctioned by Edward Clement on the evening of 5 June, "under distress", the result was a disappointing fifty-five pounds. After auction expenses were taken into account, the profit was further reduced to thirty-one pounds. Isaacs then offered to pay his creditors Harris and Wyld a meagre three shillings and sixpence in the pound, but they refused to accept his offer.

Actually, Isaacs was in debt to twenty-one creditors, most of them inhabitants of Gawler. In total, he owed one hundred and eighty pounds. The largest individual debt was to Burnett Nathan, whose generous pre-gold rush cash advance remained unpaid. Other creditors had provided cash, meat, flour, newspapers, printing, stationery and medical advice to the family over the preceding months and years, but apparently most were prepared to wait for their money. It was a vain hope. Isaacs' assets were few and he owned no property. Despite his day job at Martin's foundry, he was now in a grave financial position. He estimated that the sum total of his assets at this point was fifteen pounds, which included ten pounds worth of clothing belonging to himself, his wife and their three children. Cooking utensils, furniture and bedding accounted for the remaining five pounds. Any vestige of his past wealth was gone.

Isaacs' "detaining creditors" Wyld and Harris, supported by the charmingly-named bailiff Ayliffe, now pursued him to Gawler's Local Court. As he was unable to pay his debt, he was declared insolvent on 11 June 1856. Isaacs had speculated on the reading room's profitability and lost. To protect his remaining cash from immediate seizure, he handed the thirty-one pounds from the sale of his reading room chattels to his employer Martin for safekeeping. The legal proceedings rolled on. On 14 August, the Local Court again upheld the complaints of Harris and Wyld against Isaacs, and it issued two warrants for his arrest for insolvency. He was immediately taken into custody in Gawler, and on the following day he was conveyed to Adelaide Gaol. The urbane young man who had stepped ashore five years earlier with such hope and talent was now designated an "imprisoned debtor".[29] On 16 August attorney Luke

[29] Insolvency was a common affliction at this period. Fellow Gawler inhabitant, Dr. George Nott, was imprisoned for insolvency at the same time as Isaacs. He had provided medical care to the Isaacs' family and was one of Isaacs' creditors. *Adelaide Observer*, 2 August 1856, 5. The future editor of the South Australian journal *Pasquin: Pastoral, Mineral, and Agricultural Advocate*, Eustace Reveley Mitford, was also imprisoned for insolvency in Adelaide Gaol, shortly after Isaacs' incarceration. *South Australian Register*, 3 October 1856, 3.

Cullen lodged Isaacs' petition for release from prison, and for the subsequent discharge of his debts. By 25 August the petition was filed before the insolvency court .

In prison, Isaacs could neither earn money nor hasten his fate. Meanwhile his distressed family subsisted in Gawler. An affidavit was issued to Harris and Wyld to attend court on 1 September to show cause why Isaacs should not be released on bail. Unfortunately his creditors did not bother to appear, so Isaacs remained a prisoner. At this point, two supporters stepped forward and generously offered to provide financial sureties for his release on bail. One was Morris Marks, an Adelaide draper and prominent member of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation. The other Good Samaritan was Isaacs' employer James Martin. Together Martin and Marks lodged the considerable sum of eighty pounds ten shillings bail with the official assignee of insolvents, Leonard Thrupp to secure Isaacs' release from prison. It was 8 September and he had been incarcerated for twenty-five days.

Released on bail, Isaacs returned to Gawler where he reclaimed his thirty-one pounds from Martin. It was quickly swallowed up by the legal and travel expenses associated with the case. On 23 September, Isaacs appeared in Adelaide's Local Court House where he answered questions relating to the causes of his sorry financial predicament. His replies to Commissioner Charles Mann's questions reveal the precarious nature of his business from its inception. To the question, "What capital had you?" Isaacs replied that initially he had none, but that he had borrowed eighty pounds from Messrs. Pile, Turner and Harrison Brothers to set up and furnish his library. It was noted by the court that these Gawler gentlemen had been partially repaid. No decision on Isaacs' fate could be reached that day however, as he had failed to tender necessary financial documents to the court. The case was then adjourned until 16 October and the anxiety of the outcome was prolonged.

The tone of the second hearing's questions was more probing and critical, as the Commissioner attempted to dissect Isaacs' casual bookkeeping arrangements. In answer to why he had not lodged his financial records with the court, Isaacs replied, "I have none to lodge." When asked, "Where did you put down the amounts coming due?" Isaacs stated, "I kept those in my memory." His responses reveal a naïve and careless attitude towards standard business practices, and the Commissioner must have shaken his head in disbelief at the insolvent's financial incompetence. What is clear from the recorded exchanges is that Isaacs was certain that his money worries were temporary and that the action taken against him had been premature: "I consider that I had the means of paying all my debts if I had been allowed to go on in the usual way. I consider from the income I was receiving that I was justified." The hearing was adjourned until 24 October, when Commissioner Mann delivered his verdict, finally discharging the debtor from insolvency. Isaacs was now free, at least from his debts. Whether he was exultant, ashamed, contrite or smug is unknown, but the verdict must have brought him great relief. During the whole period of his arrest, imprisonment, bail and hearings, Marion had been pregnant. She gave birth to their fourth child, Sidney on 12 November 1856, not long after the case concluded.

In the second half of 1857, Isaacs became a driving force in the organization of the Gawler Institute, which had for its aim the "moral and intellectual improvement of the neighbourhood."[30] Its activities would transform the small town. Following a series of minor disagreements between local gentlemen, the Gawler Institute was officially founded in October 1857, the same month that the railway connected Gawler to Adelaide. Isaacs, who managed to contribute one guinea towards the Institute's establishment, was elected to the provisional committee, confirming that there was neither lasting stigma attached to his

[30] *South Australian Register*, 3 November 1857, 1. There was already a precedent. The Adelaide Mechanics' Institute had formed in 1838. Coombe, *History of Gawler*, 73.

insolvency, nor excessive bad-feeling directed towards him from his former creditors.[31] He took the minutes at the Institute's inaugural meeting on 21 October 1857, held at James Martin's cottage in Murray Street.[32] Thereafter progress was swift and the Gawler Institute's first entertainment, a vocal and instrumental concert, took place the following month. One of the Institute's first actions was to establish a library. Isaacs had failed to establish a viable reading room in Gawler, but he now vigorously championed the same cause as part of a team. The Institute library was a great success from its inception and it grew rapidly. By April 1858 it boasted 926 volumes, of which 471 had been donated by public-spirited members.[33] The facility was a recreational boon for Isaacs, but its presence must also have been a bittersweet reminder of his own recent failure.

Many aspects of Isaacs' character that had been evident in England reappeared in his early years in Australia. His continued literary drive, his confident social outlook, his willingness to share his knowledge and his eager pursuit of opportunity were admirable character traits. The insolvency episode however, suggests that Isaacs retained a reckless attitude towards his finances. When he indulged in antiques in England and France, he was the only victim of his extravagance. In Australia however, his speculation had seriously endangered the financial well-being of his family, his friends and members of his community. What is clear from both the positive and negative experiences of his life to this point is that Isaacs was driven by supreme optimism. Free from debt thanks to his release from insolvency, and with a regular income and predictable hours of employment courtesy of James Martin's foundry, Isaacs now settled into a period of stability. He resumed his place among the gentlemen of Gawler. For the first time since his arrival in Australia, he had both the leisure and the opportunity to

[31] Coombe, *History of Gawler*, 92.
[32] *Minutes of Proceedings of the Gawler Institute from October 21 1857 to April 20 1863*, 21 October 1857.
[33] Isaacs donated twenty-eight books to the Gawler Institute, in the period from the library's inception until April 1858. *Minutes of Proceedings*, 19 April 1858. An annual subscription of one guinea permitted access to the library until ten o'clock each evening. The Institute and its library had a strictly masculine membership, though ladies were welcome at selected social functions.

return to his writing. Seven years in the colonies of South Australia and Victoria had greatly expanded his knowledge of the world and its inhabitants. He took up his pen.

# Chapter 5: *The Queen of the South*, 1858–1859

*[B]e it mine to spread the colours carefully, to draw the outlines accurately, to mingle truthfully the light and shade, so the various figures of my picture may, however faulty the design, however feeble the execution, however unskilful the grouping, at least be true to nature.* A. Pendragon, 1858[1]

George Isaacs' first known literary publication in Australia, *The Queen of the South*, subtitled *A Colonial Romance: Being Pictures of Life in Victoria in the Early Days of the Diggings*, had a long gestation. Although fictional in form, its contents clearly drew on his experiences on the Victorian goldfields prior to 1856. Isaacs had returned to South Australia with little money, but his travels had given him a unique insight into his adopted country. From his memories of that arena of hope and disappointment he now wrote a novel that would secure him a small place in Australian literary history. The book captures the energy and diversity of a New World gripped by gold fever, and contrasts it with the conservative Old World of Isaacs' youth. It reveals an author coming to terms with his new life in an unfamiliar country. This major undertaking, from a young man whose previous literary output had consisted only of brief poems and prose, marks Isaacs' rising self-confidence in his ability as a writer.

Advertising for the book and a call for subscribers appeared in the *South Australian Register* on 16 March 1858:

> In the Press, and will be shortly Published, in Two Shilling Monthly Parts of 48 Pages, to be completed in Six Parts—A COLONIAL ROMANCE—THE QUEEN OF THE SOUTH; Being Pictures of Life in Victoria in the early days of the Diggings, BY A. PENDRAGON[2]

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[1] A. Pendragon, *The Queen of the South: A Colonial Romance: Being Pictures of Life in Victoria in the Early Days of the Diggings* (Gawler, South Australia: W. Barnet, 1858), 7. Henceforth, the title of the novel will be shortened to the "*Queen of the South*", or the "*Queen*".

[2] *South Australian Register*, 16 March 1858, 1. Three weeks later, the same review was reprinted in a Melbourne newspaper. *The Age*, 8 April 1858, 6.

The *Queen* was not published in Adelaide, but in Isaacs' home town of Gawler, by William Barnet, a printer and bookseller who had opened a business in Murray Street the previous year. Bookseller, Charles Platts, was the agent for the book in Adelaide.

Isaacs' novel is significant for several reasons. It is his first known published literary work in Australia. It also marks the debut of his pseudonym "A. Pendragon", a name suggestive of myth and wit. In the *Hesperus,* Isaacs had sheltered behind the family initials of "G.I." and "S.I." Now as a mature "pen dragon" he claimed an adult identity.[3] He would employ the pseudonym "A. Pendragon" or its variation "Pendragon" frequently, but not exclusively, for the remainder of his life. As A. Pendragon, Isaacs would be the author as well as the narrator of the *Queen of the South.* Part memoir, part commentary and part fiction, the novel is a bold announcement of his intention to follow a literary path in Australia.

The publication of the *Queen of the South* is very significant for Isaacs' writing career and it also has wider colonial importance. Literary references, including the *Oxford Literary Guide to Australia* acknowledge that Isaacs' *Queen* was the first novel to be published in South Australia.[4] However it was not the first novel to be written in that colony.[5] Catherine Helen Spence's two volume work *Clara Morison: a Tale of South Australia During the Gold Fever*

[3] The name "Pendragon" derives from the Welsh word for leader. Celebrating this choice of pen-name, Isaacs pasted an undated, pen and ink sketch of a rather ferocious dragon wielding a quill pen on the frontispiece of his Scrapbook—perhaps a pictorial representation of his desire to boldly uphold his beliefs through his writing. The unknown artist of the sketch signed it "Wm. W. Jnr." If "Wm. W. Jnr." are not the initials of the actual artist, the signature may reference William Wordsworth, and therefore the drawing may be a spoof on Isaacs' aspirations as a poet.

[4] Peter Pierce, ed., *Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, 154. Depasquale describes Isaacs' book as "the first novel actually printed in South Australia." Depasquale, *A Critical History*, 73.

[5] Phillip V. Thomas in *Colonial to Modern Gawler*, Volume Two of *Gawler: An Annotated Bibliography of Historical, Technical and Scientific Sources in Seven Volumes* (Adelaide: Corporation of the Town of Gawler, 1997), 14–15, writes that the *Queen* is "reputed to be the first book [not only the first novel] published in South Australia". To counter this, he then cites the contents of some letters in the Gawler Historical Archives that were written by the Public Library of South Australia archivist J. McLellan to T.V. Johnson in 1857. They assert that three earlier books—*Das Alleinige Panier* (1849), *Worte Dr. Martin Luthers* (1850) and *Billige Erwiederung* (1850)—were printed in Tanunda, South Australia. These German language publications were, however, religious commentaries, not novels.

first appeared in 1854.[6] Her next novel, *Tender and True: a Colonial Tale*, also in two volumes, was printed in 1856.[7] Both of these works, however, were not initially published in South Australia, but were sent "home" to their primary market, England, for publication and distribution.[8] Isaacs' *Queen* also barely achieves chronological precedence over the 1859 novel *Marian, or, The Light of Someone's Home: a Tale of Australian Bush Life* by Maud Jeanne Franc, the pseudonym of Matilda Jane Evans.[9] In *Our Own Matilda*, Evans' biographer Barbara Wall acknowledges that the *Queen of the South* was the first novel to be published in South Australia, but she is mistaken in stating that Evan's *Marian* was the first novel to be issued in parts in the colony.[10] Isaacs' work has an earlier claim, as the first issue of the *Queen of the South*, enclosed in its pale blue wrapper, appeared in Adelaide in late March 1858, despite the date of "April 1858" on its front cover. The final instalments of the *Queen*, parts five and six, were published in June 1859, just as the first part of *Marian* appeared in Adelaide bookshops.[11]

Isaacs' novel was an innovative undertaking. In offering an Australian perspective on the gold rush to Australian readers, it was also a risky venture considering the South Australian public's apparent preference for European fiction. As contemporary Adelaide newspaper advertisements demonstrate, Isaacs' local work was competing for readers in a book market dominated by established international authors of the calibre of Alexandre Dumas, Herman Melville, George Sand, Washington Irving, Victor Hugo and Isaacs' supporters, Edward

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[6] Catherine Helen Spence, *Clara Morison: a Tale of South Australia During the Gold Fever* (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1854).
[7] Catherine Helen Spence, *Tender and True: a Colonial Tale* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1856).
[8] Another, earlier goldfields novel, *The Gold-Finder of Australia: How He Went, How He Fared, and How He Made His Fortune* (London, Clarke, Beeton & Co., 1853) had been published in London. Its editor and presumed author, John Sherer, had not visited Australia.
[9] Maud Jeanne Franc, *Marian, or, the Light of Someone's Home: a Tale of Australian Bush Life* (Adelaide: Alfred Waddy, 1859).
[10] Barbara Wall, *Our Own Matilda: Matilda Jane Evans 1827–1886: Pioneer Woman and Novelist* (Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 1994), 1–2.
[11] This is confirmed in adjoining advertisements for Isaacs' and Evan's works in the *South Australian Register*, 24 June 1859, 1.

Bulwer-Lytton and William Harrison Ainsworth.[12] In a piece of self-parody in the *Queen*, Isaacs relates the public prejudice that Australian writers are less accomplished than their European counterparts, through his character Mr. Boyler. While repeating criticism of Isaacs' second instalment ("the language is not refined; nothing like Bulwer or Disraeli") Boyler adds dismissively, "We must consider ourselves lucky to get a writer a little above a fool in a new country."[13]

The proposed six "Monthly Parts" of the *Queen of the South* did not follow their creator's planned timetable. Part two did appear in May 1858, as did part three in June, but from then the instalments lagged.[14] The fourth issue is undated (that is, there is no month printed on its cover) and it was not advertised. Parts five and six, as previously noted, were not available until June 1859.[15] The completed novel quietly reappeared in book form that year. Except for the addition of a "June 1859" dedication to his friend George Nott, and a contents section, there is no evidence that Isaacs edited the original six parts to form a more cohesive whole.[16] The newly assembled *Queen* was not advertised and its single volume appearance was ignored by the press. It is not known how many copies were available for sale but the print run was probably small.[17] The novel was not reprinted in its author's lifetime and it cannot have been a profitable exercise, either for Isaacs or his publisher William Barnet. Following

[12] For a contemporary advertisement of books by international authors, juxtaposed against an advertisement for the newly-released *Queen*, see the *South Australian Register*, 14 April 1858, 1.
[13] Pendragon, *Queen*, 109.
[14] The printing delay, if not caused by the tardiness or poverty of the writer, may reflect the printer William Barnet's reluctance to proceed with a financially unrewarding project marked by poor sales. Part two and subsequent issues of the *Queen* carried advertisements for Gawler businesses in their final pages, to defray printing costs.
[15] A printing constraint of forty-eight pages per issue ensured that Isaacs' narrative was cut off awkwardly in mid-chapter and in mid-sentence at the conclusions of parts one to five.
[16] The pagination of the parts, exactly matches the pagination of the completed novel. For both the author and printer, this was the simplest method of producing the finished work.
[17] Slim evidence that several hundred copies of part three were printed can be found in a quote by narrator A. Pendragon, "here breaks in my 450 impatient readers." Pendragon, *Queen*, 123.

Isaacs' death, a critic identified as "H.W." dismissively recalled that "the whole thing was so absurd, that probably not a dozen copies were sold."[18]

The *Register* was quick to review the first part of the *Queen.* Although its critic recognized that he was appraising only the opening instalment of a "genuine colonial novel", he was not impressed by what he saw as the author's unbalanced selection of characters. Isaacs was warned that if he continued to represent Victorian society as "a congregation of all the worst elements of human nature, he will not only vulgarize his work and caricature an entire community, but he will offer a covert insult to all the Australian colonies."[19] Presumably the reviewer's underlying, but unmentioned complaint was that English readers of the *Queen* might subsequently view the Australian colonies as uncouth, lawless places. With no interest in delivering a sanitized view of colonial life to his readers, Isaacs resisted saccharine platitudes and continued his story as before. But he was vexed by such criticism, stating in his novel that "an author, after all, is but a man, and has flesh-and-blood feelings for his own progeny."[20]

The review of the *Queen*'s first instalment marks the beginning of a life-long unease between Isaacs and the *Register*. Bruised by its comments, Isaacs took every opportunity in later chapters of the novel to deride, in a less than subtle fashion, the prominent Adelaide paper.[21] A more virulent attack on the novel appeared several months later, when the same paper published a report of a lecture presented by the Reverend John Gardner at the Hindmarsh

[18] "Fiction in South Australia," *Australian Family Herald*, 15 August 1877, 41.
[19] *South Australian Register,* 29 March 1858, 2.
[20] Pendragon, *Queen*, 110.
[21] For example, when a character offers copies of the 1852 *Register* to narrator A. Pendragon in the novel, he hastily replies, "Not for me, thank you." Pendragon, *Queen*, 109.

District Library and Mechanics' Institute. During the speech, the cleric dismissed Isaacs' story as "low and vile."[22] An incensed Isaacs responded in print:

> If Mr. Gardner can produce from any page of "The Queen of the South" any line having an immoral tendency, any sentiment conveying a licentious or profligate meaning, any idea which does not picture forth the hideousness of villainy in whatever shape it may appear there, then is the work low and vile. But if not, and I boldly assert he cannot, then is Mr. Gardner convicted of having committed himself to a low and vile libel.[23]

The novel's loose structure, no doubt influenced by the serial nature of its composition and publication, relates the adventures of a diverse group of fortune hunters at Forest Creek, near Castlemaine in Victoria (with brief excursions in the text to Melbourne).[24] The plot jumps from one scenario to another, suggesting that Isaacs was writing spontaneously and with no overall plan. As it contains a murder, a stolen will, deceptions and theft aplenty, Michael Tolley includes the *Queen of the South*, with its "strong elements of crime", in his survey of South Australian crime fiction.[25]

In an attempt to explain the direction of his writing, Isaacs inserted three supplementary unnumbered chapters, titled "Chorus", "Interruption" and "Intruders", at irregular intervals throughout the forty-four chapter text.[26] Like a solo version of a Greek chorus, the author employs the extra chapters to comment on the action, to justify his writing and to vent his

[22] *South Australian Register*, 26 October 1858, 3. Gardner's lecture was delivered on 19 October 1858. The *South Australian Advertiser* printed its own review of the lecture but, unlike the *Register*, it chose to omit any reference to Reverend Gardner's attack on the novel. *South Australian Advertiser*, 27 October 1858, 3.
[23] *South Australian Register*, 28 October 1858, 3.
[24] In his quest for authenticity, Isaacs even includes a facsimile of a crude handwritten goldfields sign, advertising, amongst other delights, "BORD AND LOJIN LEMUNAID". Pendragon, *Queen*, 31.
[25] Michael Tolley, "Crime Fiction in South Australia," in *Southwords: Essays in South Australian Writing*, ed. Philip Butterss (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1995), 196.
[26] "Chorus" follows Chapter XIII, "Interruption" follows Chapter XVI and "Intruders" follows Chapter XXXVII.

irritation at critics of his work. He was unable to resist a dig at the *Register*: "This page shall be my Chorus; not from any misapprehension that the more intellectual of the spectators should misconceive the purpose of these pictures, but in order that the recognized picture-hanger of the colony should not *register* [italicised in original] them wrongly."[27]

Overall, the *Queen*'s highly self-indulgent, undisciplined and impulsive structure mirrors the character of the narrator, who declares, "I am very impatient of system, and disposed to be flighty."[28] The plot is not the expected careful production of a tentative first-time author, but a complex offering from a confident, opinionated one. Commentators recognize its power. Graham Stone describes the novel as:

> a lively tale of the goldfield, with its crudity and villainy displayed in a rather more earthy and wart-and-all style than might be expected [in] its day ... Isaacs clearly did not suffer fools gladly and found colonial society thick with follies and pretensions inviting attack—And attack he did.[29]

Similarly, Paul Depasquale sums up the *Queen* as "colonial fiction thrown together in devil-may-care fashion, an Isaacs *pot-pourri* of satire, personal spleen, melodrama, broad humour and racy narrative: a book which, for its 'bias Australian', may fairly be seen as a precursor to Furphy's *Such is Life*."[30] These are accurate assessments.

Isaacs rejoiced in the manipulation of language. His careful capture and preservation of contemporary speech in the novel is a useful record of the language of his time. He was always receptive to new material and, as he wrote in the *Queen*, "ready, at any moment, to

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[27] Pendragon, *Queen*, 84.
[28] Pendragon, *Queen*, 62.
[29] Graham Stone, "George Isaacs," *Past, Present & Future* 13 (1990): 85.
[30] Depasquale, *A Critical History*, 73.

relinquish the society of my dearest friend for that of any vulgar rogue, whose manner, vocation, or vocabulary, is distinguished by any peculiarity worth noting."[31] He took care to reproduce regional accents, lisps, unfamiliar words and idioms. This attention to detail is appreciated by lexicographers of Australian colonial speech, including Joan Hughes in *Australian Words and Their Origins* and Amanda Laugesen in *Convict Words: Language in Early Colonial Australia*, who both note Isaacs' use of Australian vocabulary.[32] "Glasses round" for a free drink, "lag" for convict, "posts and rails" to denote coarse, inferior tea and "blowing" for boasting are some quoted examples from the *Queen*. It is likely that Isaacs' careful explanations of such familiar Australian words as "swag" and "billy" were intended for prospective overseas readers. Here is the character Jack's charming and insightful explanation of the word "gas":

> "Gas," explained Jack, not without some signs of disgust at the ignorance of his companion, "has to do with everything here, it's the only stock-in-trade of some people. Look at the papers, see how they blow about this, and about t'other; about the *people's rights* and *Angler Saxons*, and *free-born Britons*, and our *glorious adopted country*, and so forth;—that's gas. Look at the motter of Advance Australier; that's gas. Shop-keepers advertisements, and the prospecterses of companies, them's gas. Slop-sellers is very gassy, so is land-agents, so is lawyers..." Considerably enlightened as to the colonial meaning of the term gas, Frank now turned his attention to dinner.[33]

Isaacs even draws attention to his invention of a new word in his novel—"loveful"—an appropriate adjective for the author who would later modestly compose the line, "that I have loved as few can love!"[34]

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[31] Pendragon, *Queen*, 62.
[32] Joan Hughes, *Australian Words and their Origins* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989); Amanda Laugesen, *Convict Words: Language in Early Colonial Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[33] Pendragon, *Queen*, 18.
[34] Pendragon, *Queen*, 122: Anon. [George Isaacs], "Life in Death," *Number One* 1 (1861): 19.

Isaacs observes, records and comments on colonial society, revealing a natural flair for journalism that would be developed long after the *Queen*. The plot is plainly fiction, but Isaacs superimposes that story over accurate depictions of many aspects of goldfields life—details large and small that reveal much about his view of the world. They add veracity and authenticity to the text. The narrator represents himself as an artist, and employs a painting analogy throughout the novel, commencing with the book's subtitle "Pictures of Life in Victoria". An observation that miners carry their provisions in socks or hats is charmingly transferred to the story. The questionable habit of a gold buyer who, when weighing a customer's gold, surreptitiously flicks small nuggets to the floor for later retrieval, is wryly noted. These records of the more mundane aspects of goldfields life give the novel its greatest charm.[35]

Frequent links can be discerned between the background details on Isaacs' literary canvas and his personal life, for he could not resist the urge to drop elements of his wide general knowledge, or his life experiences, into his writing. His treatment of Australian wildlife in the novel is an example of this connection. Like many of his age and class Isaacs took a keen interest in his natural surroundings, so there is much local fauna in the *Queen*. The iconic kangaroo, the dingo, magpies, crows, cockatoos, emus, kookaburras, bellbirds, snakes and even bull ants are faithfully dotted throughout the text. Freshwater turtles bask in the early morning sun beside the Coliban River.[36] The aural cacophony of an Australian dawn chorus is given greater significance, reminding A. Pendragon "of hope, and joy, and renovated nature."[37] These small details reinforce Isaacs' aim of producing a complete "picture" for his readers. Smaller creatures also contribute to the atmosphere, with the author wittily capturing

[35] For fascinating insights into everyday life on the Victorian goldfields, see Robyn Annear's book *Nothing But Gold* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999).
[36] Pendragon, *Queen*, 202.
[37] Pendragon, *Queen*, 88.

the essence of that bush blight, "the affectionate caresses of tame flies."[38] The author's entomological curiosity causes A. Pendragon to boast, "So I myself once secured a magnificent beetle (*Buprestis*) and a solitary wasp (*Sphex*), which had just seized it", in the midst of a paragraph about a police gold licence raid.[39]

Not only wildlife was subject to Isaacs' eyewitness assessments, for he also surveyed his compatriots with a naturalist's eye and a journalist's enthusiasm, storing these impressions in his memory for later reincarnation in his writing. The predominantly European characters in his book are unashamedly, almost embarrassingly stereotypical.[40] Isaacs again has fun with silly surnames (a practice commenced in the *Hesperus*) and looks to his past acquaintances for naming inspirations. Thomas Crofton Croker, for example, becomes "Croker" and Theodosius Purland transforms into "Theodosius Speckletight". Other surnames are purely descriptive. A man who came to Australia under government auspices is, of course, dubbed "Manacles". The hero of the *Queen of the South*, young innocent Frank, is introduced to readers on page twenty-four of the novel. Initially he is described as "Frank Cary, the new chum", however by page fifty-five, Frank's surname has inexplicably changed to Maynard. Such a lapse in continuity, uncorrected in the final version of the novel, again suggests hasty composition on Isaacs' part. Evil, unreformed ex-convict "Bob-the-butcher", wily but kind Ikey Lazarus, sneaky Sol Lazarus, the devious lawyer Quills, Dribble the old clerk, and pompous characters galore populate the narrative. They have little subtlety, but their motivations are clear, as are Isaacs' intentions. Through them, he praises honesty, lampoons pretentiousness, laughs at the trappings of class, criticises petty officialdom, supports the wronged and demonstrates that people are capable of redemption. Isaacs especially values the

[38] Pendragon, *Queen*, 218.
[39] Pendragon, *Queen*, 126. Isaacs, in keeping with his interest in collections, maintained a personal invertebrate collection.
[40] There are few references in the *Queen* to the presence of Aboriginal people or to Chinese miners on the goldfields, suggesting that Isaacs had little personal experience with either group in Victoria.

strength of, and necessity for mateship on the diggings, as illustrated in the bond between Frank and his supportive partner, the former convict Jack Jones. The *Queen* reminds readers that the full range of human nature can be found in any setting, even in one as pristine as the Australian bush.

Isaacs also captures the wider perspective of the community in his novel. He encapsulates the collective immigrant fear of becoming "lost in the bush" when he places his protagonist Frank in just that situation. Generally undaunted by the novelty of his adopted physical environment, Isaacs, the immigrant and former city dweller is perhaps ambivalent towards the unfamiliar bush. A further insight into colonial society is Isaacs' depiction of the growing rebellion against government authority, especially in relation to the possession of gold licences, and to the presence of alcohol on the goldfields. The egalitarian and democratic nature of the diggings is compromised by petty officialdom. Though written later, the action in the *Queen* precedes the Eureka Rebellion of 1854, but its themes mirror the grievances of the Ballarat miners.

Isaacs has little patience with ineptitude, hypocrisy or corruption of any kind, and throughout the novel he satirises and denounces such behaviour. It is with relish that he describes the machinations of Brother Beriah Buster and the Reverend Father McGrath—a pair of rapacious and self-serving religious charlatans who prey on unsuspecting miners. Their actions and insincere faith are ridiculed, and Isaacs makes it clear that the new religion, for Buster and McGrath and many others, is the worship of gold, not God. On the subject of his own religious heritage, Isaacs is transparent. When discussing a Jewish character in the *Queen*, he states:

> Being of this race myself, I would fain have said nothing of it; for, if I dwell on Lazarus's merits, severe critics may say I glorify my own people; if, in a like spirit, I speak of his defects, the whole of my tribe will cry out, "See this man, how he defiles his own nest."[41]

This reference is a rare, personal declaration of Isaacs' Jewish heritage. There is pride in his description of the Jewish Diaspora in the novel, for it mirrors his own dispersal and adaptability:

> Wherever there is a spot on earth there is a Jew; wherever there is any gold, or much commerce, there are many Jews ... To whatever place this remarkable people go, they carry with them the characteristics of their race, preserving a marked individuality, even in the pliability with which they adapt themselves to climate, or custom, men, or manners.[42]

The *Queen* records a masculine view of life on the goldfields and has little to say about the role of women, reflecting both their place in colonial society and their rarity at the diggings. A. Pendragon is well aware that his story lacks a traditional heroine, and he states, "I have dispensed with a heroine, which is, to fiction, what the queen is to chess—the most important piece on the board."[43] In literature as in life, Isaacs demonstrates a growing inclination to defy convention. If the novel has a true heroine, she is the *Queen* of the title—ostensibly the colony of Victoria. An impartial monarch, she offers her subjects motivation, land, nurture and the possibility of transformation. Most powerfully, she controls the dispensation of the ultimate reward, gold. There is some irony behind the words of the character who addresses the difficult circumstances of women left behind when their partners leave for the goldfields:

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[41] Pendragon, *Queen*, 33.
[42] Pendragon, *Queen*, 32.
[43] Pendragon, *Queen*, 62.

"And what ... will be the refuge of deserted women? The pavement and the brothel."[44] Perhaps Isaacs had forgotten that he left Marion and his children to fend for themselves in Gawler during his absence.

"Energetic" is the adjective that best summarises the contents of the *Queen of the South*. The vitality of the goldfields had a deep effect on the author and it transferred to his writing. From the following paragraph in the opening pages, until the novel's close, it is clear that Isaacs was aware that he was participating in, and was recording, a vast social movement:

> So they went forth, a motley throng. Never was seen such an incongruous assemblage of wayfarers, nor such variety of vehicles. Drays, carts, gigs—drawn by bullocks, by horses, by men; trucks and wheelbarrows—by men, by boys, by dogs. Even the one ancient donkey, who owned the distinction of being the sole representative of his patient race in the colony, was pressed into service. Some parties of foot passengers, boasting the joint possession of a horse, made him carry their pack; others, and their name was legion, less fortunate, toiled patiently along, sustaining burthens that a horse might stagger under; exposed to the inclemency of the season, traversing swamps, and wading creeks, the pale and effeminate martyrs of a sedentary life competing in the race with the athletic son of labour, and the *old hand*, inured to the colonial climate, and hardened to the roughest work. Thus, side by side, of divers [sic] races, of every degree, in one lengthened chain of many miles, their aim one goal, there went forth the worshippers of mammon.[45]

[44] Pendragon, *Queen*, 10.
[45] Pendragon, *Queen*, 14. William Howitt (1792–1879) in *Tallangetta, The Squatter's Home* records a similarly energetic, though noisier description of the exodus to the goldfields: "Men on foot, with pack, and gun, and huge following dogs; men on horseback, galloping as for life; men and women and children with loaded carts, rolling, plunging, tearing along, amid loud shouts and curses; high drays, hugely piled with goods, rolling and swaying along, drawn by long double teams of bullocks, and attended by huge fellows in jack-boots, huge hats, and smoking faces, and whips that cracked and thundered like volleys of unceasing musketry, and an eternal din of oaths, and shouts, and curses. Men and women in garbs of all shapes, and sorts, and colours; and on they came

The restless language of this excerpt conveys Isaacs' recognition of the drive and united quest of the gold seekers. The author had indeed been one of those "pale and effeminate martyrs of a sedentary life" swept up in the disparate flow of humanity. Amidst all the incongruities of the participants, he can discern the primary force—greed. But, as the novel shows, greed's by-products are resourcefulness, innovation and the casting off of anachronistic British conventions—all results that Isaacs applauded.

The writer delights in these signs of New World progress. From the perspective of a different hemisphere, and with a growing sense of independence from the English society that he had once enjoyed, he mocks the conformity of his previous life:

> That comfortable Englishmen ... in air-tight rooms, heated by large coal fires—that these men should live here in tents, hovels, huts, holes—hastily snatching at the meagre dainties of boiled tea, damper, and half-done mutton, is certainly startling. And more remarkable still, that these English, in the old country so wedded to custom, so doggedly adverse to innovation—so destitute of fancy—so persistent in wearing chimney-pot hats—so obstinately intent on building, day after day, houses so like each other, that, were they not numbered, men would inevitably go mad in despair of ever finding their own homes—that these English, so constant in their habits, so national in their steady imitation of themselves in out-of-the-way places, and at inconvenient times—should here burst into a perfectly oriental display of extravagant and bewildering variety of architecture. Not two abodes were alike in form, material, or size[46]

Australia was not a paradise but it offered potential. Isaacs, the optimist who fled England, established colonial businesses, tried his luck on the goldfields and was jailed for his efforts,

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and came." William Howitt, *Tallangetta, The Squatter's Home: a Story of Australian Life* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1857), 58.

[46] Pendragon, *Queen*, 29.

was apparently not easily discouraged by adversity. The publication of the *Queen* was a turning point in his life for it was a concrete symbol of his debut as an Australian writer. Irrespective of his daily occupation behind a clerk's desk, the criticism of his novel, and financial constraints, he had made his mark. The *Queen of the South* however, was to be an alpha and an omega. Driven to write for the remainder of his life, Isaacs would not produce another novel.

The *Queen* opens and closes optimistically and everything is neatly, if rather laboriously resolved. Those who are honest are rewarded; those who are devious die or receive their just desserts. Despite his praise of Australia's egalitarian opportunities throughout the novel, Isaacs returns his hero Frank, to England, courtesy of an inheritance rather than a gold nugget. "Home" is his ultimate reward for good character. Perhaps after eight difficult years in Australia, Isaacs too sometimes wished to return to his birthplace, despite the colony's vigour and its potential for social freedom. If Frank Maynard's fate is a guide, Isaacs' cultural and geographical allegiances were unresolved at this stage of his life. As A. Pendragon, he offers the following advice, perhaps to himself:

> All you who are blasé with the old world—who have exhausted its dissipations—who are tired of its stiff conventionalities—who are satiated with its theatres, its crystal palaces, its museums, its galleries of art, its prima donnas, its men of science, and its quacks ... come out here to the Australias; and if your blood be not altogether chilled by age, or curdled by excess, the stagnant stream, swept by the bracing roughness of colonial life, will again flow briskly and redly through your languid veins. *But if you come*, do not hanker after the things you have left; but take your existence here as if it were a new birth, to which none of your old-world habits are in anywise applicable.[47]

[47] Pendragon, *Queen*, 168.

In writing the first novel published in South Australia—even though it was not recognized as such by his contemporaries—Isaacs had indeed captured the “bracing roughness of colonial life”. With the goldfields experience, insolvency and novel behind him, he could now explore further opportunities for social and literary advancement.

# Chapter 6: The Gawler Institute, 1858–1863

*I am a dreamer. I am also a poor man: most dreamers are. They do not travel over that solid ground whereout nuggets may be picked and pocketed; but float in a visionary atmosphere and build air castles.* A. Pendragon, 1859[1]

The *Queen of the South* was just one of many projects that Isaacs undertook in the busy years of 1858 and 1859. His days were filled with his clerical job at Martin's, and his evenings were taken up with domestic responsibilities, writing, and participation in a range of community activities. A fifth child, Henry, joined the family on 20 May 1858. Isaacs' social life at this period revolved around the Gawler Institute. With its library, lectures and comfortable surroundings, the organization was fulfilling its intended role as a social and educational hub. Isaacs rarely missed an Institute committee meeting, where he was appreciated for his creativity, his enthusiasm and his letter writing skills. With this high level of involvement in the community, it is not surprising that the progress of his novel was erratic.

The Institute's reading room was a magnet to the man who had lost his own library. As an early member of the Institute's library sub-committee, Isaacs played a major role in sourcing donations of books from members.[2] He also purchased suitably instructive material on the library's behalf. In the six months to April 1858, he personally donated twenty-eight volumes to the Institute, indicating that his financial situation was satisfactory—or that his book buying zeal took precedence over his domestic bills. Isaacs' close association with the library allowed him to make full use of its delights, and he was not averse to bending its borrowing rules to his own advantage. In November 1858 he applied for permission "to use 6 books for

[1] A. Pendragon, "Patents in South Australia: [Mr. Model Communicates to Mr. A. Pendragon the history of his last invention.]," *Adelaide Observer*, 21 May 1859, 5.
[2] E.H. Coombe quotes James Martin as saying of the Committee, "they were splendid beggars in those days." *History of Gawler*, 73.

references, in regard to writing for the press, the same to be returned within 24 hours."[3] When Isaacs proposed that, "a part of the room be partitioned off for the purpose of accommodating there members who choose to smoke" and, "that additional leaves be added to the smoking room screen", the modifications were to his own advantage.[4] Isaacs worked hard for the Institute, but he also enjoyed the perks of minor officialdom. He must have derived great satisfaction too, from observing that his intelligence and drive were appreciated by his lively peers.

Isaacs quickly established himself as the creative force behind many of the Gawler Institute's schemes. As the Institute's first anniversary approached, its committee pondered a suitable celebration to mark the event. Isaacs took the initiative and moved "that an exhibition and entertainment be given ... to consist of specimens of Natural History and the Fine Arts."[5] Elected secretary of the exhibition committee, he was soon making arrangements, placing advertisements in the press calling for the loan of specimens, arranging their display and distributing advertising circulars.[6] In a show of solidarity with its rural sister, the Adelaide Institute forwarded some of its own items for exhibition. The *South Australian Advertiser* commended the Gawler Institute's vision:

> In a colony like this, where material influences engross so large a share of public and private attention, it is encouraging to observe that our literary institutes both in town and country are becoming something more than a name, and by their refined ennobling influences tending slowly but surely to elevate the tone of society.[7]

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[3] *Minutes of Proceedings*, 2 November 1858. If this loan resulted in a published article, it remains unidentified.
[4] *Minutes of Proceedings*, 22 July 1858; *Minutes of Proceedings*, 1 February 1859.
[5] *Minutes of Proceedings*, 19 September 1858.
[6] A sub-committee of Gawler women was appointed to oversee the catering for the exhibition. Their surnames, including Martin, Turner, Clements and Coombs, reveal that they were all wives of prominent members of the Institute. Marion Isaacs' name is absent.
[7] *South Australian Advertiser*, 9 October 1858, 2. Henceforth, in the text, the newspaper will be referred to as the "*Advertiser*".

The dust clouds swirling along Murray Street on Friday 15 October 1858 did not deter four hundred people from attending the opening of the two day exhibition in the Institute's rooms.[8] Remarkably, the event had been organized in fewer than four weeks. Visitors were delighted with the quality of the eclectic display, which included Queen Charlotte's purse, pieces of Queen Caroline's dress, watercolours of British Guiana, statuettes, carvings and beadwork. Fossilized, stuffed, and pinned creatures also featured strongly on the tables, as did mineral specimens.[9] If Isaacs contributed any exhibits, he is not mentioned as a donor in press articles. He must have observed the assembled artefacts with bittersweet regret, for the treasures that he had once owned in London would have easily outshone the stars of this rural colonial exhibition.

The festivities continued into the evening, when four hundred people attended a celebratory concert in James Martin's decorated store in Murray Street. In a speech interspersed between performances, Walter Duffield M.P. proposed a vote of thanks to the committee and office-bearers for their organization of the anniversary. Isaacs responded on the committee's behalf, remarking that it was his "first attempt at a speech in public", a statement at odds with his past delivery of archaeological papers.[10] All aspects of the first anniversary celebrations were judged a success. Isaacs' crucial role in the endeavour was recognized by the Institute's committee, who presented him, appropriately, with an inkstand, "as a Testimonial of appreciation of services rendered by him during the past entertainments."[11] Not surprisingly, he was re-elected to the Institute's committee at the next Annual General Meeting.[12]

[8] At Isaacs' suggestion, school children were admitted for threepence, between 2 and 4pm. on the exhibition's second day. *Minutes of Proceedings*, 9 October 1858.
[9] *South Australian Advertiser*, 18 October 1858, 3.
[10] *South Australian Register*, 18 October 1858, 3.
[11] *Minutes of Proceedings*, 2 November 1858.
[12] *Minutes of Proceedings*, 28 October 1858.

The year 1858 marks not only Isaacs' debut as a novelist, but also his first appearance as a published poet in Australia. His inaugural work, a single poem, was inspired by current events in Gawler and it concerned a staple commodity—beer. Gawler's publicans had resolved that "the Gawler Town brewers be not allowed to sell any of their colonial-brewed ale to any other person or persons than innkeepers."[13] If the local brewers failed to adhere to this directive, the innkeepers threatened to purchase their beer supplies from Adelaide. With the imminent approach of a hot, thirsty summer, Gawler residents feared that this would raise the price of beer, deprive the town's economy of money and curtail their right to purchase beer directly from the town's breweries. A protest committee was formed on 12 November 1858 and a letter of complaint was sent to the innkeepers.[14] When no reply was forthcoming, Isaacs joined the five hundred locals who attended a "monster" public meeting at Martin's store on 20 November. The gathering resolved to censure the publicans for their directive.[15] Isaacs then addressed the crowd, and stated that such a reprimand did not go far enough. The *Register* reported his alternative, more drastic proposal:

> For himself, he should abstain from frequenting any of the houses of the publicans to whom it referred; and he would recommend the same course to others, as the only way of teaching some men civility and a due regard for the feelings of their neighbours. The resolution was carried, and accompanied by three groans for the obnoxious parties.[16]

Towards the end of the meeting, the offending publicans created a diversion outside the store, in an attempt to disrupt the proceedings within. They rang bells, and announced that free beer

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[13] *South Australian Register*, 22 November 1858, 3.
[14] *South Australian Advertiser*, 22 November 1858, 3.
[15] George Nott's comments at the meeting that, "it had long been felt as a grievance in Gawler Town that a private family could not draw its beer at home, but must send out perhaps through the rain, for its daily supply" and that "a great proportion of the large amount of wages earned in Gawler unavoidably went in summer-time to the publican", illustrate the popularity of beer at this period. *South Australian Register*, 22 November 1858, 3. Before the innkeepers' resolution, brewers were legally entitled to sell five gallon kegs of beer directly to individuals for home consumption.
[16] *South Australian Register*, 22 November 1858, 3.

was available from the barrel that they had just rolled into the street. But the citizens were resolute. There were no takers.[17]

A few days later, the following advertisement appeared in the *Advertiser*: "JUST PUBLISHED, price 2d. COLONIAL LYRICS. No. 1.—"The Song of the Bar," by A. Pendragon. Gawler: W. BARNET. To be had of PLATTS Adelaide."[18] The final stanza of Isaacs' poem leaves no doubt about his stance on the matter, at least at this stage of his life:

> Haunt not the public-house,
> But drink your beer at home;
> Cease to indulge in the mad carouse
> That covers your lips with foam!
> One or two glasses of wine,
> A moderate draught of ale,
> Are a grateful boon from the Giver Divine,
> If temperance prevail.
> But the public bar is a curse,
> Where the tempter chuckles and thrives,
> *Swelling the gain of his bloated purse*,
> BY THE RUIN OF HUMAN LIVES!
> Sip, sip, sip!
> Brandy, and beer, and gin;
> The foam upon the drunkard's lip,
> On the publican's a grin.[19]

[17] At the end of 1859, another beverage made news in Gawler. The first public drinking fountain in the colony was installed in the town, thanks to the generosity of James Mold, a member of the Total Abstinence Society. *South Australian Advertiser*, 16 December 1859, 2.
[18] *South Australian Advertiser*, 25 November 1858, 1.
[19] An original copy of "The Song of the Bar" does not survive, but the poem reappears anonymously in A. Pendragon's newspaper, the *Critic*. Anon. [George Isaacs], "Song of the Bar," *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 10.

This type of rapidly composed poem with a social message, written in response to a topical situation, would become an Isaacs' hallmark.

Over the next twelve months, Isaacs was extraordinarily active. Buoyed by the success of the first anniversary entertainments and still at the helm of the entertainment committee, he and his fellow members planned the Institute's next triumph, the first outdoor fete to be held in South Australia. Inspired, he composed the poem "Manly Sports: Lines Suggested by the Forthcoming Gawler Fête Champêtre", which was published under the pseudonym "A.P." in the *Register*, just prior to the event.[20] The "Rural Fete and Picnic" was held at Cockatoo Valley, a few kilometres from Gawler, on Tuesday 8 March 1859. More than eight hundred people attended, with some arriving by train from Adelaide. For two shillings for a return trip, many were transported to the field in a parade of wagons supplied by Gawler businesses, which had all closed for the day. The Brunswick Brass Band serenaded the revellers from its own vehicle, and the leading wagon bore the Institute's banner, emblazoned with its motto "It is good to be merry and wise."[21] At the grounds, colonists enjoyed traditional pastimes, such as merry-go-round rides, football and cricket matches, dancing, quoits, archery, a footrace, a shot put and a hammer throw competition.[22] The fun was punctuated by a huge picnic at one o'clock. With somewhat biblical enthusiasm, the *Advertiser* reported that, "Joy was beaming in every countenance, and the sun shone in full splendour upon all."[23] That evening, three hundred people attended a "Grand Evening Entertainment" in town. Despite the committee's

[20] *South Australian Register*, 24 February 1859, 2. "Fête Champêtre" is an eighteenth-century French term for a garden party or a pastoral festival. This poem, also published in the *Adelaide Observer* two days later, is the only known example of Isaacs' use of the pseudonym "A.P."
[21] *South Australian Advertiser*, 10 March 1859, 3.
[22] According to M.R. Talbot, Isaacs wrote to the Secretary of the South Australian Institute, Nathaniel Hailes, requesting some books from the Institute's library: "on sports, to assist in planning a festival the institute was organizing in 1859. Hailes hoped that 'even in the field', the dignity of literary, scientific and artistic societies would be upheld: the books he was sending would provide enough ideas for them to be able to dispense with such crude activities as 'jumping, in sacks & climbing greased poles'. As well as sports he suggested using flowers to decorate a 'March-pole', 'with Queen of the *March* & all complete'." M.R. Talbot, *A Chance to Read: A History of the Institutes Movement in South Australia: Written for the Institutes Association of South Australia* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1992), 53. See also, Letter from Nathaniel Hailes to George Isaacs, 25 January 1859, State Records of South Australia, GRG19/14/1, vol. 1, 95–96.
[23] *South Australian Advertiser*, 10 March 1859, 3.

ban on intoxicating drinks, the celebration was voted "one of the most successful entertainments ever attempted in the colony."[24] The *Advertiser*'s journalist was most impressed by the arrangements:

> although we do not wish to particularise individuals where all have done so well, we cannot refrain from adding one word of special commendation in behalf of Mr. Isaacs, whose efforts have been beyond all praise, and whose successes have been as well deserved as they are, doubtless, encouraging to himself.[25]

Isaacs was indeed encouraged by such successes and plaudits, and was already considering his next scheme. During the interval of the concert, George Nott announced that an "Industrial Exhibition" was planned for Gawler, the brainchild, once again, of Isaacs. Having missed London's Great Exhibition of 1851, it seems that Isaacs was now determined to conduct a colonial version. Nott continued:

> although this scheme, which had been proposed by Mr. Isaacs, had been only roughly sketched, it was at once adopted by the people of Gawler, and through the energetic and indomitable perseverance of its originator, by a personal canvas of his friends a sum of upwards of 140 pounds was collected by that gentleman in two days.[26]

Isaacs was either a very popular fellow or a very persuasive one. His new project, tentatively planned for the following October, would showcase local arts and manufactures. It was a complex undertaking that would involve the co-operation and goodwill of many parties. There would be competitions, judges, gold, silver and bronze medals and numerous categories of endeavour, including "inventions and improvements in machinery", "works of factories or

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[24] *South Australian Advertiser*, 10 March 1859, 3. However, it would take until 14 September 1859 for Isaacs to produce the balance sheet for the event. It showed a profit of just over nineteen pounds. *Minutes of Proceedings*, 14 September 1859.
[25] *South Australian Advertiser*, 10 March 1859, 2.
[26] *South Australian Advertiser*, 10 March 1859, 3.

associations of workmen", "works of female industry", "novel processes in fabrics" and of course, "works of imagination by colonial authors". There was even "a special prize of a gold medal for a workable design for the medals, and second and third prizes [for] the silver and bronze medals."[27] Prizes for the prizes—it was all too complicated. Although initially supported by the committee, and doggedly pursued for a time by Isaacs, the scheme did not come to fruition.[28] A colonial government would have been daunted by the scale of such an undertaking in its capital city, let alone a small team of enthusiastic gentlemen in Gawler. Isaacs, creative as ever, was motivated by ideas, not practicality.

Amidst these exertions and the completion of the *Queen of the South*, Isaacs took tentative steps towards the career in journalism that had so far eluded him. His article "Patents in South Australia" by "a Correspondent" appeared in the *Adelaide Observer* on 21 May 1859, and later in the *Register*.[29] Subtitled "Mr. Model Communicates to Mr. A. Pendragon the History of his Last Invention", it tells the story of poor Mr. Model, who, foiled by the twin banes of bureaucracy and cost, fails in his attempt to patent an invention. Narrator A. Pendragon employs humour to draw attention to the complexity and unfairness of South Australia's patent law process.[30] Just over a month later "Mr. Model" reappeared in the pages of the *Register* in the article "Discourses About Many Things".[31] In this piece, "Mr. Model discourses with A. Pendragon Esq., on the insolvent court, low wages, immigration, and other

[27] *South Australian Register*, 11 April 1859, 3. News of the proposed exhibition travelled quickly. This article, mentioning Isaacs as one of three honorary secretaries for the event, was copied to London. *Australian & New Zealand Gazette* (London), 25 June 1859, 554. Australian news was still conveyed to England by ship at this period. Although the Adelaide to Melbourne telegraph line opened in 1858, Australia was not connected to the rest of the world by telegraph until 1872.

[28] In its half-yearly report at the end of April, the committee stated that, "the exhibition which will be as far beyond all our previous efforts in the energy & thought it will take, as it will ... surpass all previous undertakings in the benefit it will confer on the colony at large." *Minutes of Proceedings*, 30 April 1859. Thereafter, support for the scheme waned.

[29] *Adelaide Observer*, 21 May 1859, 5; *Register*, 30 May 1859, 2. In this story, Mrs. Pendragon, "my wife, good woman", makes a rare appearance in Isaacs' prose.

[30] Isaacs may have drawn his inspiration for this piece from his father. In London in 1855, Samuel Isaacs obtained patent number 145, his first and only patent, for improvements in the manufacture of artificial coral. It was no doubt linked to his interest in the manufacture and sale of jewellery.

[31] *South Australian Register*, 5 July 1859, 3. The piece is dated "June 13, 1859". The *Observer* also printed the article. *Adelaide Observer*, 23 July 1859, 2.

matters of policy."[32] This is a further example of Isaacs venting his frustrations in fictional form.

*Colonial Lyrics No. 2* by A. Pendragon appeared in Adelaide shops in August 1859. This time Isaacs drew his poetic inspiration not from a local issue but from an international perspective. His seven stanza poem "Viva L'Italia" was written as Italy struggled towards unification.[33] The *Advertiser,* in a review that suggests that the "advertorial" is not a recent phenomenon, greeted *Colonial Lyrics No. 2* warmly:

> As these poems are made to sell, we must not print them at full length,—but if the following really spirited conclusion of "No. 2" is appreciated as it deserves to be, our readers will not forget when they visit their booksellers, to ask for the Colonial Lyrics. The verses now quoted are the concluding stanzas of an Australian appeal to Italy,—reciting Italia's ancient glories, present degradation, and future prospects:—
>
> The Tiber no longer shall have a lone Queen,
> The lorn Adriatic no more weep its Lord;
> Stately Rome shall again be the Rome she has been,
> And the Teuton recoil from the edge of her sword.
>
> Awaken, Italia! The land of the glorious,
> The Cradle of Art, and the Fountain of Song!
> As your aim is impassioned, so be it victorious,

[32] Immigration was certainly a controversial subject in South Australia. In June, a group of Gawler residents who were concerned about unemployment in the colony, held a meeting to discuss the situation. They proposed that a letter be forwarded to the *Times*: "for the purpose of dissuading intending emigrants from leaving Britain at the risk of wandering about this colony in quest of work and exposed to the poverty and privations at present experienced by so many of the operative classes." *South Australian Advertiser*, 21 June 1859, 1.

[33] As with *Colonial Lyrics No. 1*, all original copies of "Viva L'Italia" have disappeared, but versions of it appear in later Isaacs' publications. A. Pendragon, "Viva L'Italia: A Voice From Australia," *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 8; George Isaacs, "Viva L'Italia: A Voice From Australia," in *Rhyme and Prose; and, A Burlesque, and its History* (Melbourne: Clarson, Shallard, & Co., 1865), 56–57. Isaacs adds a footnote stating that the poem was written "on the eve of the struggle for Italian Independence in 1860."

To Italians may Italy ever belong![34]

The paper gave colonial readers an indication of the style and language of "Viva L'Italia", but the poem's stirring subject matter was less relevant to their lives than Isaacs' earlier poem about beer. Sales of both *Colonial Lyrics* were probably low and no further issues appeared. In future, Isaacs would find alternative ways to disseminate his poetry.

As amply illustrated by his activities in the small world of Gawler, Isaacs had many admirable qualities, but patience and a willingness to abide by decisions he did not agree with, were not amongst his attributes. He did not attend the regular Institute committee meeting on 2 August 1859, but instead sent a letter announcing his resignation.[35] The reason for this surprising move is not explained in the Institute's minutes. Perhaps he was exhausted, petulant or annoyed by the lack of support for his industrial exhibition idea. This was not the first or the last time that he tendered his resignation to the Institute committee.[36] In this example of pique, the irritant, whatever it was, was quickly overcome. Committee members resolved not to accept his resignation and he quickly resumed his attendance at meetings.

Isaacs' next inspiration created a lasting legacy, but his importance in the scheme is not generally acknowledged in South Australian histories. He was instrumental in the composition of an iconic song. The minutes of an undated Special Meeting of the Gawler Institute committee held in September 1859, record that:

> The meeting called by Mr. Isaacs was stated to be for the purpose of getting up an entertainment for the [second] Anniversary. Mr. Isaacs brought forward a scheme comprising an amateur performance of a short drama or Burlesque, amateur

[34] *South Australian Advertiser*, 17 August 1859, 2.
[35] *Minutes of Proceedings*, 2 August 1859.
[36] Previously he had resigned, for unknown reasons, from an Institute sub-committee on 12 August 1858.

> performance consisting of Instrumentalists & Vocalists, & a prize of Ten pounds each to the best song to be entitled the Song of Australia, and to the best composer of music suitable for it.[37]

From these words, it is clear that Isaacs was the initiator of the competition that resulted in the anthem now known as "The Song of Australia". As with earlier Gawler Institute schemes promoted by the writer, there was little time wasted between the conception of the idea and its implementation, but as always, he worked well under pressure. He placed advertisements in the *Advertiser* and the *Register* from the start of October 1859, announcing that there would be separate competitions for the words of a proposed patriotic song, then for its musical accompaniment.[38] Entrants were given barely a fortnight to write the lyrics, and were required to address their poems to "George Isaacs, Gawler". Prizes for the words, and then the music, were now set at ten guineas each. Entrants were informed that the copyright for both works would remain with the Institute.

More than ninety submissions of patriotic fervour were quickly forwarded to the judges who wasted no time on the adjudication.[39] On 21 October 1859, it was announced in the press that the winning lyrics were written by Mrs. Caroline J. Carleton of Adelaide. This is the opening verse of her five stanza poem, as it first appeared in the *Advertiser*:

> There is a land, where summer skies
> Are gleaming with a thousand dyes,
> Blending in witching harmonies;
> And grassy knoll and forest height

[37] *Minutes of Proceedings*. The undated minutes of this Special Meeting occur immediately after the minutes for the 6 September 1859 meeting, but before the minutes of the next meeting on 14 September 1859.
[38] *South Australian Advertiser*, 1 October 1859, 1; *South Australian Register*, 3 October 1859, 1.
[39] To ensure anonymity, entries were marked with a motto only—the true name of the entrant was sealed in an accompanying envelope. Poetry judges were John H. Barrow, John Brown, John Howard Clark, A. Forster, W.C. Wearing and E.J. Peake. The music entries were judged by G.W. Chinner, F.S. Dutton, A. Ewing and W. Holden. Isaacs advertised that "to encourage native talent", a "careful selection" of the entries would later be separately published, though there is no evidence that this ever occurred. *South Australian Register*, 21 October 1859, 1.

Are flushing in the rosy light,
And all above is azure bright—Australia![40]

Next, composers were allotted ten days to submit an appropriate musical accompaniment to the winning poem.[41] Again the response was swift, and the winner of the music competition was announced on 5 November. From the twenty-three entries received, the judges awarded the prize to German-born Herr Carl Linger, who, according to the *Oxford Companion to Australian Music*, would go on to have "a decisive impact on the early musical development of SA."[42] The competition had been conducted with such haste that afterwards, Isaacs found himself dealing with many queries from unsuccessful entrants.

Behind the scenes, and despite the success of the competition, Isaacs was again unhappy. The cause of his disquiet may have been the delayed second anniversary concert, at which the new song was to be officially launched. At a Special Committee meeting on 25 November, Isaacs once more tendered his resignation. Again the committee, concerned that his absence would "seriously affect the wellbeing of the forthcoming entertainment", refused to accept it.[43] Instead, they reaffirmed their support for his actions. Mollified, Isaacs proposed that Herr Linger be the manager and conductor of the second anniversary concert and the committee

[40] The winner's name was announced on the front page of the *South Australian Advertiser* on 21 October 1859 and the lyrics were printed on page three. Almost immediately, parodies appeared, including the following anonymous example:

There is a land where summer skies
Are scorching out a million eyes,
Blinding with itching agonies;
And burnt up field and treeless height
Are glaring in the fiery light,
And all of us must dress in white! Australia!

*South Australian Advertiser*, 24 October 1859, 3.

[41] The music had to conform to the following conditions: "That the air be written in the G clef, and in any key the composer may select; but not to range below lower C or above upper G. The Chorus (if any) to be written for three or four voices." *South Australian Register*, 21 October 1859, 1. As with the earlier lyrics competition, each musical entry was anonymous, bearing only a motto linked to the composer's name in a separate envelope.

[42] Wayne Hancock and M. Elphinstone, "Linger, Carl Ferdinand August," in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Music*, ed. Warren Bebbington (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), 344–345.

[43] *Minutes of Proceedings*, 25 November 1859.

acquiesced. Finally, he successfully moved that Mrs. Carleton and Herr Linger be forwarded their prizes of ten guineas.

The premiere of "The Song of Australia" took place in the assembly room of the Oddfellows Hall on 12 December 1859. Nearly three hundred guests, most in evening dress, and many having travelled from Adelaide, attended. The *Advertiser*'s correspondent was somewhat surprised by the quality of the arrangements: "indeed, visitors from Adelaide, judging from the appearance of the room, would scarcely have imagined that they were present at a concert in a provincial town."[44] Everything, apart from the out-of-tune piano, was praised: "It was a very successful affair as an entertainment, and must have proved highly gratifying to those gentlemen connected with the Gawler Institute who have been the means of awakening local talent, and giving to Australia the first national melody."[45] It is significant that the Gawler Institute and Isaacs promoted the idea of a patriotic song more than forty years before Federation, and more than a century before Australia proclaimed "Advance Australia Fair" its official National Anthem.[46] The *Register* appreciated the incongruity associated with the task: "It is certainly not an easy undertaking to write a national song for a country which as yet may be said to be without a nationality."[47]

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[44] *South Australian Advertiser*, 14 December 1859, 3.

[45] *South Australian Advertiser*, 14 December 1859, 3. It was imperative that the Institute launch the song without delay, for a breach of copyright had already occurred. The Italian composer Cesare Cutolo had organized a concert in Adelaide on 8 November, which featured, despite the intervention of the Gawler Institute, a performance of "The Song of Australia" to music chosen by Cutolo. *South Australian Advertiser*, 14 December 1859, 3.

[46] At the national poll taken in 1977 to select a National Anthem, "Advance Australia Fair" with 43.2% of the vote triumphed over "Waltzing Matilda" (28.3%), "God Save the Queen" (18.7%), and "[The] Song of Australia" (9.6%). Although still surprisingly popular in southern Australia, Gawler's "The Song of Australia" was little known elsewhere. "Advance Australia Fair" was officially named the National Anthem in 1984. "The Australian National Anthem," *Australian Government*, last modified 2 March 2007, http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-national-anthem

[47] *South Australian Register*, 24 October 1859, 2.

Isaacs was only one member of the Institute committee of intelligent, public-spirited men but his prominent role in the organization was frequently acknowledged. In October 1859, the *Advertiser* praised the Gawler Institute's amenities in the Oddfellows Hall: "The society is mainly indebted to Mr. Isaacs, the honorary Secretary, for the excellence of the arrangements and the provision made for the comfort of visitors."[48] This description of his role drew an immediate response from Isaacs: "In a paragraph in to-day's paper headed 'Gawler Institute,' an undue amount of honor is given to me. I am not the Honorary Secretary —Mr. John Mitchell holding that office,—neither do I claim to have done more for the Society than other gentlemen of the Committee."[49] Despite this humility, Isaacs' actions on the Institute's behalf during 1858 and 1859 clearly reveal that he was the creative mind behind its major schemes. It was in large part thanks to Isaacs that the *Register* could note in 1859 that, "It has been said to be the prerogative of genius to give birth to great and original ideas. Gawler Town appears to have distinguished itself in this respect on various occasions."[50]

Despite his urban upbringing Isaacs was a member of Gawler's Agricultural Society. Its annual Ploughing Match and Show of Livestock was held just outside the town on 5 October 1859. As was customary, the event was followed by an evening dinner at which Isaacs delivered "an eloquent and well-deserved eulogium" to Mr. Edward Lindley Grundy.[51] Afterwards, the meal prompted Isaacs to compose the short story "Dinners". He still hankered after the indulgent aspects of his European past, and such refined longings, especially culinary ones, could not be satisfied by Gawler society. "Dinners" was seasoned with more than a whiff of scorn:

[48] *South Australian Advertiser*, 11 October 1859, 3.
[49] *South Australian Advertiser*, 13 October 1859, 3.
[50] *South Australian Register*, 6 October 1859, 3.
[51] *South Australian Advertiser*, 7 October 1859, 3. In newspaper articles of the time, Edward Lindley Grundy's name was usually abbreviated to "E.L. Grundy".

> Remotely connected with an agricultural trade, I am kidnapped into becoming a member of a society, under the auspices of Ceres Pomona and Flora. The jolly farmers, who compose the bulk of this society, hold "Shows," and, afterwards, dine.—I sit down to table; but can *I* dine?
>
> Is there no horror in underdone sucking pig?[52] Are turkeys never tough? Are there not mahogany hams, and cold potatoes, and seas of gravy, with icebergs of fat in them? and dry jams, set in fossil crusts? And are there not compounds of fire and vinegar, called Sherry; and mixtures of blacking and verjuice, called Port; and acidulated water, called Champagne; and extract of scrubbing brushes, labelled Hock? Bless those honest farmers with unsuspicious appetite, made keen by country air; they feed! —I shudder!—they drink—alas, I, also, drink: how can I escape drinking?[53]

Although the epicurean tastes that he had acquired in London and Paris were yet again disappointed, the evening had its high points. Perhaps the "acidulated water" imbibed during the dinner had its effect on Isaacs, for it was reported in the press that he "contributed much to the hilarity of the evening."[54] During the meal, Isaacs' friend Jefferson Stow rose, and in a "highly relished" performance, recited the rules of a new society that had recently formed in the town. Isaacs must have listened with satisfaction, for he and Stow were responsible for its birth.

[52] Apparently the length of cooking time of the pig, and the quality of the hams, rather than his Jewish heritage, prevented Isaacs from enjoying the meat.
[53] Anon. [George Isaacs], "Dinners," *Number One* 1 (1861): 33.
[54] *South Australian Advertiser*, 7 October 1859, 3.

# Chapter 7: The Humbug Society and *Number One*, 1859–1863

*But if circumstances have placed us in a sphere uncongenial to us, we are not to be restrained from our endeavo[u]r to emancipate ourselves. Why should I, for instance, always be as I am? May I not, like others, have my small ambition and desire to write myself M.P. or Editor?* George Isaacs, 1860[1]

George Isaacs' name will always be linked with the Gawler Humbug Society, which began as a gentle movement of mockery and fun in which the pretensions of some of the town's citizens were lampooned. Nurtured by silliness and satire, it evolved over good-natured male bonding in George Causby's Globe Inn (now the Kingsford Hotel). Its title was a witty misnomer, for in practice the organization was an anti-humbug society that aimed to identify and denounce humbug in all its manifestations. Isaacs pursued the same agenda throughout his life. Now in his confident mid-thirties and in apparent good health, he happily indulged in the affairs of the new institution. Eventually, the Society would have a lasting effect on the Gawler district, and gain fame beyond the town's modest borders.

The circumstances leading to the creation of the Gawler Humbug Society and the exact date of its foundation are unknown, for its first members embraced spontaneity, decried formality, and bequeathed no written records of its history. It was left to George E. Loyau, writing more than twenty years later in the *Gawler Handbook*, to document the Society's early days.[2] He makes it clear that Isaacs played an integral role:

> The Society was founded on the spur of the moment, through a sudden inspiration with which Mr. Jefferson Stow and the late Mr. George Isaacs, both at that time

[1] George Isaacs, "On a Flute, a Dog, and the 'Thursday Review'," *South Australian Advertiser*, 31 July 1860, 3.
[2] Loyau, *Gawler Handbook*, 136–146. Later books on Gawler's history, E.H. Coombe's *History of Gawler 1837–1908* and Derek Whitelock's *Gawler, Colonel Light's Country Town: A History of Gawler and its Region—The Hills, the Plains and the Barossa Valley* (Adelaide: Corporation of the Town of Gawler, 1989) appear to derive their accounts of the Humbug Society from Loyau's book. George Nott's brief *Rise and Progress of Gawler* which was printed anonymously in *A General and Commercial Directory for Gawler and Surrounding Districts ... to Which is Added a Short Sketch of the Rise and Progress of Gawler and a Mass of Useful Local Information, with an Almanac for 1861* (Gawler, South Australia: W. Barnet, 1861), 55–72, makes no mention of the fledgling group.

> residents in Modern Athens, were favoured. This occurred in the year 1859, when business was not very brisk, and too many persons had a considerable amount of spare time on their hands.[3]

Historian Brian Samuels observes that, although Loyau initially names Isaacs and Stow as Humbug Society founders in his *Gawler Handbook*, in his later work, the *Representative Men of South Australia*, he also acknowledges the input of Dr. George Nott and Edward Lindley Grundy.[4] Samuels concludes that "Loyau's words suggest that the idea was Isaacs and Stow's but that the other two gentlemen helped to actually establish the Society."[5] When Jefferson Stow entertained the patrons at the already-mentioned Agricultural Society dinner with a recitation of the Humbug Society's rules, the words were, according to a contemporary newspaper report, already "well known by all present."[6] Therefore, the Gawler Humbug Society's birth predates 5 October 1859.

The impetus for the foundation of the society was the pompous behaviour adopted by some members of the Freemasons, Foresters and Oddfellows while dressed in the full regalia of their orders. Isaacs observed this phenomenon with amusement. Loyau describes the result: "by one of those intuitions which sometimes mark and influence the career of men of genius, and produce momentous and lasting effects upon society, Isaacs and Stow resolved to form a rival association, and at the same time selected the title and dashed off the rules that became so famous."[7] Isaacs' wit is evident in the Society's twelve rules and twelve "by-the-bye laws", which were the antithesis of regulations found in conventional societies. Ostensibly they followed standard practice and outlined the organization's aims, officers and meeting place. In reality, each rule or by-law was a subversive parody. One object of the Society, for

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[3] Loyau, *Gawler Handbook*, 136.
[4] Loyau, *Representative Men*, 232.
[5] Brian Samuels, "Flam! Bam!! Sham!!!: The Gawler Humbug Society," *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia* 18 (1990): 142.
[6] *South Australian Advertiser*, 7 October 1859, 3.
[7] Loyau, *Gawler Handbook*, 137.

example, was "the open advocacy of Humbug, in contradistinction to its secret practice in most other Societies."[8] Individuals blackballed by other societies were encouraged to join, but those with M.P. or J.P. after their names were ineligible. The inaugural officers of the Gawler Humbug Society were the "Arch Flam" (E.L. Grundy), the "Bouncible Bam" (Jefferson Stow) and Isaacs, who, as the "Surprising Sham", was required to don the "night-cap of dignity" to denote his exalted status. "Flam! Bam!! Sham!!!" became the sacred oath, uttered following a new member's admission, or when a current member behaved in a way considered worthy of derision. As both the Surprising Sham and the "keeper of the gingerbeer bottle", Isaacs was responsible for formally initiating new members at Humbug Society meetings. Under his guidance, they were required to kiss a gingerbeer bottle: "the most appropriate symbol of Humbug, reminding all of froth and fourpence."[9] Next, either the Bam or Isaacs would deliver an address to the new brother. Inevitably it dwelt at length on that gentleman's flaws. Apparently this trial by embarrassment did not prove a deterrent to membership, for the *Gawler Handbook* states that the locals "joined the Society in multitudes, and the gingerbeer bottle was at work day and night."[10]

Membership rules were fluid and members were not confined to the human species. When Arch Flam Grundy was absent from meetings, he was, according to Loyau, replaced by a clever spaniel named Toby.[11] Perhaps Loyau's informants' memories were hazy, for in a newspaper report of an early Humbug Society meeting, Isaacs refers to the dog as "Bupp".[12] Never a dog-fancier, the Surprising Sham still defended the canine's valid position within the Society:

[8] Loyau, *Gawler Handbook*, 137.
[9] *The Bunyip*, 5 September 1863, 2. Copies of the Humbug Society's rules were first advertised for sale on the front page of the *South Australian Advertiser* on 27 February 1860.
[10] Loyau, *Gawler Handbook*, 139.
[11] Loyau, *Gawler Handbook*, 141.
[12] *South Australian Register*, 16 July 1860, 3.

> The SHAM must remind Brother Rayson that a distinguished visitor from the Isle of Skye, who had taken great interest in the Society, had some [time] since been unanimously elected a member; and had hitherto, he must confess to the honour of the dogs, conducted himself quite as orderly as a man, indeed, more so than many men. He thought, generally, his bark was quite as intelligent and intelligible as other humbugs—(cheers)—and like those might, by intonation, be made to convey approval, ridicule, or any intermediate sentiment.[13]

Isaacs was a keen observer of bureaucracy, and politics and the law were easy targets for his satire. The Humbug Society's tenth rule, "That any member guilty of puppyism, haw-hawing, murdering the Queen's English, or any conduct unbecoming a gentleman, be summarily expelled from the Society, and as a mark of contempt be elected a Member of Parliament on the first vacancy occurring", had an interesting corollary.[14] The following year, the Gawler Humbug Society put forward their Arch Flam E.L. Grundy as a candidate for the seat of Barossa. With local support Grundy was duly elected, along with William Duffield, to the House of Assembly. From frivolous beginnings, the Gawler Humbug Society had risen to real power. As Brian Samuels quips, "A little humbug can go a long way."[15]

Isaacs became the Honorary Secretary of a finance committee formed to raise money for Grundy's support during his term in office, and much debate about the payment of parliamentarians ensued. Such discussions were fuelled by the hotel bar. Keen to clarify the distinction between payment and reimbursement during a meeting, Isaacs resorted to a substance near-to-hand:

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[13] *South Australian Register,* 16 July 1860, 3.
[14] *The Bunyip*, 5 September 1863, 2.
[15] Brian Samuels, "Gawler, 'The Colonial Athens', and South Australia's First Local History and First Public Museum," *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia* 40 (2012): 42.

> As an illustration he [Isaacs] called upon Brother Koepke for a glass of ale. Brother Koepke in handing the glass of ale required fourpence. The Surprising Sham looked Brother Koepke steadily in the face while drinking the ale. He then gave a sigh of satisfaction, and said, "If I had given Brother Koepke fourpence before drinking the ale that would have been payment; I now give him fourpence, and that is reimbursement."[16]

In contrast to his earnest exertions on behalf of the Gawler Institute, the early years of the "Honorable Fraternity of Humbugs" offered Isaacs a recreational outlet for his irreverence.

Meanwhile, Isaacs' long-term interest in natural history and collections contributed to the creation of another Gawler Institute innovation—a museum. The town had been home to a Naturalists' Club since August 1854, with core members Isaacs and Messrs. Nott, Bathurst, Livesay and Burton. Observing the success of the Institute's natural history exhibition and the wealth of interesting specimens in private hands in the surrounding community, the men, all Institute members, considered a more permanent display. In 1859, they philanthropically offered their personal collections of natural history specimens and related books to the Institute, in the hope that they would form the nucleus of a local museum.[17] Isaacs' personal butterfly collection migrated to a new, if ultimately impermanent home. Other collectors were then inspired to donate items for permanent exhibition. Soon the assembled Aboriginal artefacts, minerals, preserved zoological specimens, corals, calabashes and skins were on display in the new Gawler Institute museum, located in one of the Institute's rented, ground floor rooms in the Oddfellows' Hall. Mr. Livesay was appointed the inaugural Honorary Curator.

[16] *South Australian Advertiser*, 28 March 1860, 3.
[17] *South Australian Advertiser*, 20 July 1859, 3.

Gawler's new attraction became South Australia's first public museum, predating the opening of the South Australian Institute Museum (now the South Australian Museum) by almost two years. According to Brian Samuels, "What is significant about Gawler's museum is that it was the first of what was destined to become the predominant form of museum across the state, that run by public bodies such as governments and voluntary associations."[18] Isaacs delivered a brief speech at the museum's official opening on 4 February 1860. Guests then examined the exhibits, including an emu net ("which articles ... are now getting scarce, owing to the natives making them from English twine"), taxidermy (including "an English fox devouring a barnyard fowl"—an unfortunate portent of what was in store for Australian wildlife) and a case of stuffed birds. Several gentlemen, including Isaacs, had contributed towards its purchase.[19] Later, the second curator, Dr. Richard Schomburgk would acknowledge Isaacs' major input into the museum: "I would beg to take this opportunity of mentioning how much its formation was owing to the zeal and energy of Mr. Isaacs."[20]

With the museum in operation and with seemingly indefatigable energy, Isaacs considered a suitable celebration for the approaching third anniversary of the Gawler Institute. Salvaging an idea from his aborted Industrial Exhibition, he proposed an "Exhibition of Female Arts and Industry" to the Institute meeting on 8 June 1860. The scheme received favourable comment in the *Advertiser*:

> The Gawler Town people are again in the foreground of enterprise. We are informed that the Gawler Institute has determined to hold an exhibition, early in October next,

[18] Samuels, "Gawler, 'The Colonial Athens'", 45.
[19] Isaacs continued to search for new specimens for the museum. At the Institute committee meeting on 6 June 1860 he announced his donation of a water rat, presumably a specimen of the native *Hydromys chrysogaster*. *Minutes of Proceedings*, 6 June 1860.
[20] *The Bunyip*, 30 December 1865, 2.

> of works of female industry, open to the colony. Prizes to the amount of 50 guineas will be awarded. This looks like going a-head![21]

Preliminary planning commenced, but due to "a doubt having been entertained as to the certainty of having the Government Aid continued", the project faltered.[22] Though the Institute reaffirmed its support for the exhibition at its Annual General Meeting on 15 October, nothing further occurred.

At home in Lyndoch Valley Road South in Gawler, Isaacs struggled to support his large family, which now included a sixth child, Frederick.[23] The writer was again sliding into debt. With an apparent insouciance towards the welfare of local tradespeople and small businesses, perhaps influenced by his middle-class upbringing, Isaacs lived on credit. Butchers Elston & Clark pursued him to Gawler's Local Court on 9 August 1860 over a debt of five pounds, six shillings and seven pence.[24] Isaacs asked the magistrate for additional time to repay the money, but to his dismay he was ordered to repay one pound per week. Only the previous week he had rallied his neighbours to financially support E.L. Grundy during his time in parliament, and had very likely contributed to that fund himself. His social activities and bonhomie were again proving a financial threat to his family's wellbeing.

Isaacs rarely mentioned his domestic life in his writing, however, in July 1860, he contributed "On a Flute, a Dog, and the 'Thursday Review'" to the *Advertiser*. The article was a rant against a conservative local paper, edited by Abraham Davis, but it included a glimpse of the

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[21] *South Australian Advertiser*, 23 June 1860, 2.
[22] *Minutes of Proceedings*, 15 October 1860. The delay in promised Government grants to Institutes was of great concern to the South Australian Institute, which had just constructed its new headquarters on North Terrace. *Adelaide Observer*, 25 August 1860, 6.
[23] Isaacs' home address, which was almost certainly a rented property, is found in *A General and Commercial Directory for Gawler*, 8.
[24] The butchers, Elston & Clark, pursued a second debtor in court on the same day. Life as a small business owner in Gawler was clearly fraught with litigation. *South Australian Register*, 11 August 1860, 3.

philosophy that Isaacs hoped to instil in his children. It also confirmed his own liberal outlook on life:

> I do not wish my children to have the low estimate of human nature that the editor of the *Thursday Review* appears to have. I do not wish them to look upon their schoolmaster with contempt—as a man who holds his office in virtue of unfitness for other duties, and who, had he not been a schoolmaster, must of necessity have been either a coal merchant or general agent. I do not wish my children to have a scorn of poor people, or see in poverty the inevitable road to roguery. I wish them to avoid the baseness of imputing bad motives to the actions of their neighbours. I desire them to grow up as reasonable and intelligent beings; to form their own convictions and maintain them, disputing opposite opinions, however, without anger.[25]

Articles and poetry by A. Pendragon continued to appear sporadically in South Australia's press. "Glances—Backward", a nostalgic invocation of the past, appeared in the *Advertiser* in July 1860. Using the metaphor of reflection, the speaker sought solace in his memories of the great cities of Europe:

> Come memory, come show me thy mirror bright
> From out the darkness of the present night;
> Carry me back in dreams to by-gone days,
> When all the world looked fair in eyes of youth,
> When all men honest seemed—all women truth.[26]

Perhaps, for Isaacs, that European past was fading:

> The scene has vanished—cloistral Liege appears.
> In quaint old inn I sit with raptured ears;

[25] *South Australian Advertiser*, 31 July 1860, 3.
[26] *South Australian Advertiser*, 3 July 1860, 3.

> From countless belfries peal the silver chimes;
> A medley music—yet so sweetly blending,
> As saintly voices might, to heaven ascending.
> How nights like these the grosser earthly sense sublimes,
> How pious sounds like these make melody in after times.[27]

Still on a European theme, but on a more topical subject, Isaacs' poem, "Garibaldi: A Rhapsody" appeared two months later. It was a paean to the Italian leader who had recently celebrated a major victory in Palermo, Sicily. Despite living on the other side of the world, Isaacs was moved by Garibaldi's success:

> And ever here in Austral-land remote
> Thy name rings like a trumpet-note,
> And wakes the sturdy English heart to cheer thee on,
> Til freedom for thy fatherland—thine only aim—is won,
> Garibaldi![28]

The elocutionist Mr. T.P. Hill recited the poem, retitled "Garibaldi, the Hero of Europe", at an entertainment at the Gawler Institute in March 1861. The rendition was praised by the *Advertiser*, but the *Register*'s review was more circumspect—pointing either to Isaacs' invisibility in the literary world or to the critic's ignorance:

> The first piece in the programme, "Garibaldi," was written by a gentleman in Gawler, who I suppose does not wish his name to be made public, as he wrote it under the signature of "A. Pendragon." I can't say how it would read without the powerful aid of Mr. Hill, but it certainly appeared to be written by no novice.[29]

[27] *South Australian Advertiser*, 3 July 1860, 3.
[28] *South Australian Register*, 1 September 1860, 3.
[29] *South Australian Register*, 26 March 1861, 2.

True, Isaacs was no novice, with verses in the *Hesperus* and scattered South Australian poems to his name. But neither was he, despite his efforts, an acknowledged poet, and this rankled.

The writing of "Garibaldi" must have caused Isaacs to consider South Australia's defence, for his next published poem addressed the colony's military deficiency.[30] "The Seer's Warning" appeared in the *Advertiser* on 22 September 1860. It was satirically dedicated to "those enlightened Statesmen who deem two thousand imperfectly disciplined Volunteers and a hasty levy of a raw Militia, a force sufficient for the defence of a country upon which may be suddenly launched the trained legions of a martial people."[31] Isaacs' invasion paranoia drew a humorous response from T. Cotton of the "River Murray, near Wellington", whose poetic reply, "Pro Aris et Focis" ("for god and country"—literally "for our altars and our hearths"), soon appeared in the *Advertiser*. Playing on Isaacs' pseudonym, Cotton's poem commenced, "I heard A Dragon grumbling" and continued in a similar vein, gently mocking Isaacs' language and dire predictions.[32] Such facetious literary homage from Cotton was at least an acknowledgement of A. Pendragon's efforts in verse.

To commemorate its fourth anniversary, the Gawler Institute announced its plan to award a two hundred guinea prize for a history of South Australia, from its foundation until the close of 1861. Committee members, plus Walter Duffield and the Reverend Coombs, were involved in the organization of the scheme. Isaacs, with his proven record in the management of a competition was elected to the relevant sub-committee and he must have eagerly anticipated a result. Unlike "The Song of Australia" campaign however, things did not proceed as planned.

[30] The call-to-arms is a little surprising, coming from a man who failed to join the Gawler Volunteer Rifles.
[31] *South Australian Advertiser*, 22 September 1860, 2.
[32] *South Australian Advertiser*, 18 October 1860, 3.

The prize was eventually awarded to Henry Hussey in September 1862, for an unfinished manuscript. He was the only entrant.[33]

Isaacs continued to write. On 13 October 1860, an advertisement in Kapunda's *Northern Star* announced his new venture: "'You and I' by A. Pendragon. We have made arrangements for the publication of the above original story, in monthly parts of one shilling each. The work will be brought out uniform with the London serials, and the introduction may be expected to appear shortly."[34] Despite further promotion, *You and I* was not published. In March 1861, an advertisement in the *Northern Star* stated that the proposed serial would be "withdrawn for the present".[35]

With few opportunities for publication in South Australia, an ever-growing stockpile of his own compositions and his usual self-confidence, Isaacs took the next logical step. In April 1861 he issued the first title of a new literary periodical appropriately named *Number One*.[36] He was its editor and main contributor. As Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver note in *The Colonial Journals and the Emergence of Australian Literary Culture*, "The author-as-editor was a role that could work both ways, keeping a colonial writer visible (and remunerated, at least to a degree) by providing a regular outlet for his or her work, while supplying the journal with material that was in keeping with its local aspirations."[37] *Number One*, a forty-seven page anthology of poetry and prose, was one of the first publications of the Adelaide firm of

[33] As Hussey's history was unfinished, the prize money was withheld and the work was returned to him for completion. George Fife Angus, who had offered his personal papers to Hussey for research purposes, then offered to purchase the manuscript if the Institute would release its claim to the document. This was agreed, and the volume, edited by Edwin Hodder, was finally published in 1893 as *The History of South Australia From its Foundation to the Year of its Jubilee: With a Chronological Summary of All the Principal Events of Interest Up to Date* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1893).
[34] *Northern Star*, 13 October 1860, 4.
[35] *Northern Star*, 9 March 1861, 1.
[36] A. Pendragon, ed., *Number One* 1 (1861).
[37] Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver, *The Colonial Journals and the Emergence of Australian Literary Culture* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2014), 11.

W.C. Rigby.[38] Isaacs outlined his literary intentions in the Introduction to the journal: "I believe there is a vacant place in our colonial literature. It is my aim to fill it, and in the form of a Monthly Magazine, to provide a vehicle for imaginative writing."[39] He stated that he would ignore politics and news, but would deal, somewhat expansively, in "Wit, Humour, Agreeable narrative, History, Travel, Poesy, the Arts and Sciences, the movements of the Philosophical, and other literary associations."[40] The slim volume, enclosed in yellow paper wrappers, had a tripartite geographical birth. It was written and edited by Isaacs in Gawler, printed at G.M. Allen's *Northern Star* newspaper office in Kapunda, and published in Adelaide.[41]

Reviews, some of which included excerpts from the journal, were encouraging. The *Register* dubbed *Number One* "racy of the soil", and all called for public support for Isaacs' creation.[42] "The number before us is really a good colonial shilling's-worth," praised the *Advertiser*, which noted the distinct Australian flavour of the writing. However it also expressed concern for its readers' delicate sensibilities, by adding the sanctimonious proviso, "We suggest, however, that certain expletives which Police Court reporters usually indicate by an initial letter and a long dash, might with advantage be omitted from a magazine which we presume is intended for all circles."[43] *Bell's Life in Adelaide* added that *Number One* contained "lively, vigorous writing—prose and verse, both of which evince a prolific fund of humour and good powers of graphic delineation. The more sober pieces are not devoid of pathos and happy imagery."[44]

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[38] Valmai Hankel, "Rare Book and Special Collections in the State Library of South Australia," *Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand* 2, 7 (1974): 38.
[39] Pendragon, "Introduction," *Number One* 1 (1861).
[40] Pendragon, "Introduction," *Number One* 1 (1861).
[41] The *Northern Star* was an early South Australian country newspaper, first published in Kapunda in 1860 by George Massey Allen. Isaacs and Allen, with their similar forthright and satirical approaches to journalism, had much in common. Isaacs described him as "our genial and jovial friend". *The Critic*, 18 October 1862, 6.
[42] *South Australian Register*, 16 May 1861, 2.
[43] *South Australian Advertiser*, 18 May 1861, 2.
[44] *Bell's Life in Adelaide*, 18 May 1861, 26.

In the *Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, Vivian Smith states that "Early Australian literary poetry bears the indelible stamp of the highly cultivated amateur" and this statement certainly applies to Isaacs' writing.[45] His four anonymous poems in *Number One*—"The Tooth of the Good St. Ambrose", "Life in Death", "The Owl and the Lark" and "The Myrtle"—are diverse in form and subject, but all reveal his breadth of knowledge and experience. Gawler's Dr. George Nott, another cultivated amateur, contributed two poems to the volume, "Wine and Beauty" and "Bestir Yourselves Australians", both under the pseudonym "Ignotus" (Latin for "unknown").[46] A further poem in *Number One*, titled "Unpublished Lines, On a Collection of Portraits of the English Poets", was neither Australian, contemporary, nor unpublished. It had been composed by the Englishman, the Reverend William Clarke as "An Impromptu on Some of the English Poets" and had been originally published in *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* in 1812.[47] Isaacs perhaps included it as a nod to the European bias of his readers.

The prose in *Number One*, like the poetry, is similarly diverse in subject and style. Nott, this time under the pseudonym "G.N.", is represented by the short mystery "Who was the Sixth?" Its opening paragraph certainly conveys the essence of Australia, but the length and complexity of the single sentence is worthy of Isaacs' former mentor, Edward Bulwer-Lytton:

> The Thermometer at 130,—A North wind blowing,—a ride, first through a sand scrub, and then for miles across a dusty plain, with the monotonous posts and rails, stretching, in straight lines, in every direction, mapping it out into the likeness of a

[45] Vivian Smith, "Australian Colonial Poetry, 1788–1888: Claiming the Future, Restoring the Past," in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, ed. Peter Pierce (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 73.

[46] The latter poem is the clue to Nott's ownership of the pseudonym "Ignotus". A later newspaper article identifies the poem, "Bestir Yourselves Australians", as Nott's entry in "The Song of Australia" competition. *The Bunyip*, 30 June 1899, 3. Another poem by Nott on the same theme, "A Song for Australia", was set to music by the German composer Carl Wilhelm Draeger and published in 1861. *South Australian Register*, 3 May 1861, 4.

[47] John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1812–1815), 376. Isaacs altered the title of the poem and made minor changes to its six stanzas. He also removed, probably accidentally, the "e" from the poet Clarke's surname.

> gigantic chessboard, the fallow and stubble representing the black and white squares, with the homesteads like chessmen, scattered here and there, as if the end of the game were approaching, and the board nearly cleared;—Light, Heat, and Sameness everywhere, till the eye ached, the brow burnt, and the mind grew weary.[48]

Isaacs is the author of the remaining prose in *Number One*, "Passages From an Inedited Romance" (including "Peter Plosman" and "The Parricide Collar"), "After Proof" and the autobiographical and previously-discussed "Dinners" and "How We Fared When Hard Up in Paris". Despite the critics' praise of *Number One*'s Australian flavour, thanks, mainly to Nott's tale, most of Isaacs' writing in the journal is firmly European-based.

Gratified by the critical response to *Number One,* Isaacs modified his plans for its continuation. The *Register* reported that:

> Gawler is again about to prove itself foremost of South Australia in the cause of literature, by starting a quarterly magazine; the capital required is being raised by a Company, and already most of the shares have been taken up. It is to be edited by the talented editor of "Number One," and, from all appearances, will prove a success, if the people of South Australia will lend a helping hand both by pen and purse.[49]

But the public did not rally to support Isaacs' vision of an ongoing literary magazine. Despite extensive advertisements for *Number One* in the *Advertiser* and its weekly, the *Chronicle,* running from May 1861 until July 1862, it remained a singleton. Its anticipated successor, the quarterly magazine, never appeared. Elizabeth Webby notes that more than half of the eight hundred or so journals produced in Australia during the nineteenth century failed in their first year, due to "limited circulation, poor distribution, failure to attract advertising, high

[48] G.N. [George Nott], "Who Was the Sixth?" *Number One* 1 (1861): 12.
[49] *South Australian Register*, 26 July 1861, 3.

production costs."[50] It would appear that each of these factors contributed to *Number One*'s demise.

Foiled in his plan to showcase his writing in his own magazine, Isaacs resumed his practice of submitting occasional works to local newspapers. His awkwardly rhymed and typographically challenged poem about a man's attempt to ride a donkey, "Jack Jifkins: A Romance of Hampstead Heath" appeared in *Bell's Life in Adelaide* in June 1861.[51] According to its opening line, "Oh, Ingoldsby's muse put a soul in my pen!" it was inspired by the metrical tales of the *Ingoldsby Legends* by Richard Barham.[52]

During this period, two situations hint at Isaacs' rather volatile character, demonstrating that he was quite prepared to defend himself against literary or physical attack. In late 1861, he was involved in a campaign to remove a Town of Gawler Corporation councillor, John McEwen from office. Following a Council meeting, a "memorial" exposing McEwen's failings appeared in the press. In it, Isaacs proposed that McEwen should retire.[53] As simmering small-town tensions escalated, Isaacs inflamed the situation. He composed several anonymous, satirical pamphlets that highlighted McEwen's incompetence and illiteracy, including "Council of Four on a Grave Subject" and "Johnny M'Toole's Primer". ("Johnny M'Toole" was McEwen's nickname.) McEwen's supporters then published a defence that

[50] Elizabeth Webby, "Journals in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Book in Australia: Essays Towards a Cultural & Social History*, eds. D.H. Borchardt and W. Kirsop (Melbourne: Australian Reference Publications in Association with the Centre for Bibliographical and Textual Studies, Monash University, 1988), 42–43. Similarly, Lurline Stuart states that, "Over the next hundred or so years [that is, from 1821], almost six hundred periodicals with varying literary content were published. Most of them were begun in the confident assumption of success ... but only about half those produced survived their first year." Lurline Stuart, *Australian Periodicals With Literary Content, 1821–1925: An Annotated Bibliography* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2003), ix.

[51] *Bell's Life in Adelaide*, 8 June 1861, 40.

[52] Richard Barham (1788–1845) was a Church of England cleric, novelist and poet, who wrote under the pseudonym "Thomas Ingoldsby". His *Ingoldsby Legends* were tales in prose and verse that first appeared in *Bentley's Miscellany*. Later, they were published in three volumes. Thomas Ingoldsby [Richard Harris Barham], *The Ingoldsby Legends* (London: R. Bentley & Son, 1840–1847).

[53] *South Australian Advertiser*, 27 August 1861, 1.

criticised Isaacs' squibs.[54] Local M.P. Walter Duffield unwisely interfered in what was a Council matter, and came to McEwen's defence. Isaacs was enraged at this political interference and retaliated with an inflammatory seven page booklet entitled *A Letter on a Letter: Addressed to Walter Duffield, Esq. M.P.* It began:

> Sir, Allow me to render you thanks for the great service you have conferred on Literature, by the last production of your eloquent pen—a letter, in which you have done me the distinguished honor of agreeing with a Memorial in which my name and works are freely criticised. It is so very pleasant to see great minds unbend from the severe tasks imposed upon them by senatorial duties—so highly gratifying to see the members of our Colonial Parliament following, at however humble a distance, in the footsteps of the Macauley's [sic], D'Israeli's [sic], Bulwer's, [sic] Brougham's [sic] and Campbell's [sic] of the British senate—so refreshing to have the monotony of our Duffield's speeches in the house, (and which the reporters make appear so dull in print) relieved by the patriarchal simplicity of homely letters![55]

It is a typical example of Isaacs' satirical style—in language that must have made him a bitter enemy. He continued, slyly:

> Let me in future, when I see Bigotry rampant, calmly smile, but forbear to speak—when I see Arrogance ride roughshod over people, let me in quiet rebel, but enter no protest—when I see Ignorance usurp the place of Learning, let me regret in private, but in public bow my head submissive to the powers that be—when Incompetence comes before the people for their suffrages, pleading in boastful empty nothings, its claims to highest honors—let me shout "Duffield and Mediocrity for ever!"[56]

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[54] *Bell's Life in Adelaide*, 12 October 1861, 110.
[55] George Isaacs, *A Letter on a Letter: Addressed to Walter Duffield, Esq. M.P. Member of the Philosophical Society, &c. &c.* (South Australia: George Isaacs, Printed for the Benefit of the Public, 1861), 3.
[56] Isaacs, *Letter on a Letter*, 5–6.

The booklet concludes with the news that two hundred copies of "Council of Four on a Grave Subject" and three hundred copies of "Johnny M'Toole's Primer" had been printed and dispersed. Isaacs planned to issue five hundred copies of *A Letter on a Letter*.[57] He appended a copy of Duffield's defence of McEwen to his booklet and mischievously italicised the politician's many spelling mistakes. Subjected to such ridicule, the M.P. kept silent.

Isaacs' satirical work, "Council of Four on a Grave Subject", derived from McEwen's unfounded allegation that, during the Council's planting of trees in the cemetery, McEwen's daughter's unmarked grave and the graves of others had been disturbed. McEwen, a Roman Catholic, alleged that only Roman Catholic graves had been targeted.[58] Meanwhile someone, presumably in jest, scattered Aboriginal remains in the cemetery. When discovered, the bones fuelled McEwen's belief that settlers' graves had indeed been desecrated. McEwen now considered Isaacs his chief antagonist. He approached Isaacs' employer James Martin and threatened that unless Isaacs was sacked from his employment, the town's Roman Catholics would boycott Martin's business. That McEwen was clearly unhinged was obvious to most Gawler citizens, and Martin, and even the town's Roman Catholic priest, Reverend John Roe, sided with Isaacs.

During this altercation, Isaacs managed to anger both the Council (the majority of whom were in favour of removing McEwen) and the Gawler Institute. Imprudently, he arranged for copies of his satirical pamphlets and the *Letter* to be delivered to the Council during its meeting. This was considered very inappropriate. Without the prior permission of the Institute, he then placed a copy of *A Letter on a Letter* on the Gawler Institute table for everyone to peruse. The

[57] A single copy of *A Letter on a Letter* survives, preserved in the *Scrapbooks of Edward Clement*, in the State Library of South Australia. D 7500/1 (Misc), vol. 1, item 11, 80. No copies of "Council of Four on a Grave Subject" or "Johnny M'Toole's Primer" have been discovered.
[58] *South Australian Register*, 9 July 1861, 3.

Institute discouraged political comment and politician Duffield was widely respected. Isaacs was castigated for his audacity, and then officially reprimanded in the Institute's minutes and its Annual Report. Still up to mischief, he offered the Institute library two issues of *Bell's Life in Adelaide* that contained references to the McEwen affair. His donation was pointedly refused by the Committee.[59] Loathed by McEwen and chastised by both the Council and the Institute, Isaacs was not chastened. By early 1862, he was once again on jovial terms with both organizations—and John McEwen was no longer a councillor.

A second awkward incident suggests that Isaacs had a combative nature, as well as an impulsive one. While celebrating yet another successful agricultural show on 19 February 1862, at the Grapes Inn in Gawler, Isaacs and his friends retired to a hotel room to smoke. The door to the room was left open. Someone decided that the door should be closed. A scuffle ensued, the door was forcibly opened and closed several times, and Isaacs' coat was torn by a waiter, Mr. Frankel, during the melee. Frankel offered to pay for repairs but was instead charged with assault. When the case reached the Local Court, the defendant was found guilty and fined five shillings. Isaacs, the complainant, received costs, leaving his honour, but not his coat, intact.[60]

Elizabeth Webby notes that, during this period, "Few authors were able to make a living from writing and these few depended heavily on journalism, supplemented in some cases by the writing of serialised fiction or plays and pantomimes."[61] Isaacs followed this course. He remained in employment, but was keen to explore his versatility as a writer. His first play, the two act farce *That's Smith* by A. Pendragon, premiered in stormy weather on 22 July 1862.

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[59] *Minutes of Proceedings*, 3 December 1861.
[60] *South Australian Advertiser*, 25 February 1862, 3.
[61] Elizabeth Webby, "The Beginnings of Literature in Colonial Australia," in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, ed. Peter Pierce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2009), 46.

Isaacs wrote it specifically for its venue, the Victoria Theatre (now the Queen's Theatre) in Gilles Arcade, Adelaide. On that evening's bill his play was sandwiched between two English productions—Michael Balfe's three act opera, *The Rose of Castile* and William Suter's farce, *John Wopps the Policeman*. Many of Isaacs' friends, including Gawler's mayor, his employer James Martin, attended, and supporters filled the theatre's dress circle. Next day a laudatory review in the *Register* recorded the fledgling playwright's surprisingly modest reaction when the curtain closed on *That's Smith*:

> It was very successful with the audience, who imperatively demanded the appearance of the author. He was, after some delay, led to the front by Mr. Greville, the living picture of sweet bashfulness and unsophisticated confusion. He bowed his acknowledgements, and retired amid a storm of applause.[62]

Isaacs' play had a cast of seven including the Victoria Theatre's lessee Mr. J.R. Greville, who portrayed the character "Bob Smith". Other actors included Miss Rose Edouin as "Lucy" and Mrs. Macgowan as "Miss Bombyx", the "most beautiful specimen of natural history in her father's collection."[63] The second and final performance of the play took place on Friday 25 July. No script of the ephemeral *That's Smith* survives, but the *Register* provided its readers with a detailed outline of the farcical plot:

> The son of a Victorian settler, Arthur Brooks by name, and an artist (strange to say) by profession, arrives in Adelaide, and receives immediately on his arrival a letter from his Pa in Melbourne, informing him that he has by a lucky turn of fate succeeded to a property in England of £3000 a year. He is also enjoined in the same epistle to wait on Dr. Bombyx, an old friend of his father, but from whom his Pa had been estranged by

[62] *South Australian Register*, 23 July 1862, 2.
[63] *South Australian Register*, 22 July 1862, 1.

> pride and poverty, and endeavour to realize a dream of their early days by marrying the rich old South Australian's daughter.[64]

Although the play was set in Adelaide and was announced as "the new produce of our fertile soil", the *Register* was pleased to downplay its local roots: "This piece, if it retains a place upon the stage, will do so upon its intrinsic merits, as with one exception, we did not notice an allusion to anything personal or *en passant* in South Australia."[65] Isaacs' first brief foray into the theatrical world of the colony had proved a pleasing, if brief, success. On the strength of it, and his past efforts, the *Register* crowned him "the literary lion of Gawler."[66]

Still restless, Isaacs commenced a new endeavour that perfectly suited his personality, his background and his pocket. Less than a month after the performances of *That's Smith* he became a travelling lecturer. One hint that he had been considering this option for some time can be found in the Gawler Institute minutes of 16 July 1859. Rather than paying guest speakers to deliver the fortnightly lecture at the Institute, Isaacs proposed an alternative scheme, that "a paper read by some gentleman, who in his early days had leisure to inform himself on various subjects might be read and discussed."[67] He imagined himself as the gentleman behind the lectern. In theory, all that was required for success as a travelling lecturer was the provision of a local hall, some judicious advertising and a throng of culture-starved locals. Of course, an interesting topic derived from one of Isaacs' many areas of expertise was also required. Thanks to his youthful antiquarian interests he had ample material on which to base his talk. In August and September 1862 he toured towns north of Adelaide with the dense monologue, "Ancient Superstitions".

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[64] *South Australian Register*, 23 July 1862, 2.
[65] *South Australian Register*, 23 July 1862, 2.
[66] *South Australian Register*, 23 July 1862, 2.
[67] *South Australian Advertiser*, 20 July 1859, 3.

"Ancient Superstitions" debuted on home territory in Gawler on 6 August. Despite two other public meetings in the town that evening, eighty people gathered at Ernst Koepke's Assembly Room to assess Isaacs' competency as an orator. His speech, encompassing astrology, alchemy and witchcraft, lasted more than an hour and was well-received, with the press noting that his latest accomplishment "proved the aptitude of the talented lecturer in a new field of literature."[68] With that encouragement, Isaacs headed north to Kapunda. There, on 8 August, events did not go as planned, as the *Chronicle* notes:

> A. Pendragon (Mr. G. Isaacs) attended here last Friday evening to deliver a lecture on "Ancient Superstitions," but owing to the posters which he sent from Gawler, on the previous day, not being delivered by the Railway authorities until late on Friday, but very few knew that anything of the kind was to take place, and unfortunately but few attended, which induced the lecturer to pos[t]pone it for a more convenient season.[69]

The press followed Isaacs' progress over the next five weeks. "Ancient Superstitions" was enjoyed at Redruth and Lyndoch and was saluted by the Angaston Volunteer Band at Angaston. It was presented in Tanunda following an advertisement in the German language press, and appeared for a second time in Gawler, at the Gawler Arms Hotel.[70] According to the *Advertiser*'s critic, Isaacs' next lecture, held on a chilly winter night at the Burra Hotel, was unsuccessful:

> I regret to say the audience was very small, which could not be wondered at, as the weather is so unsettled and the roads so very muddy. Had there been a larger assembly no doubt the lecture would have been more interesting than it was, for the echo of the room proved very disagreeable. I hope if the lecturer favors us with another visit it

[68] *South Australian Register*, 8 August 1862, 3.
[69] *South Australian Weekly Chronicle*, 16 August 1862, 3.
[70] *Süd Australische Zeitung*, 13 August 1862, 3.

> will be under more favorable circumstances, for he must have been greatly discouraged.[71]

The planned lecture in the schoolhouse at Auburn was cancelled due to the mired roads. Ever resilient, Isaacs continued his tour. He reached Salisbury on 2 September, but there too, the inclement weather deterred a larger audience. On 12 September, in Penfield, it was the same story. On that occasion, the *Observer*'s correspondent noted that "very unpropitious weather, thunder, lightning, and rain are by no means conducive to large gatherings."[72] Hindsight suggests that winter and early spring were not sensible seasons for peregrinations around rural South Australia.

Given the detailed and esoteric subject matter covered in the lecture, it is surprising that audiences were not completely mystified, rather than appreciative of Isaacs' efforts. As one contemporary review in the *Advertiser* explained, the lecture commenced:

> by referring to the Jewish caballists as the earliest teachers of magic science,—the science and mysteries of numbers, judicial astrology, invocation of Saints, and the labours of the alchymists, in their endeavours to transmute base metals into gold and the search after the philosopher's stone, were severally touched upon. The lecturer then proceeded to give an account of love philtres, amulets, and charms, and of the universal belief in, and horrors of, witchcraft in England up to the last century. The celebrated Dr. Dee, and the pranks he played on Queen Elizabeth were referred to and the lecture concluded with a brief notice of theomania of fairies, gnomes, and sprites.[73]

No listeners in the small country towns of the colony were likely to dispute Isaacs' assertions after that discourse. It is a testament to his apparent authoritative and animated public

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[71] *South Australian Advertiser*, 16 August 1862, 2.
[72] *Adelaide Observer*, 20 September 1862, 4.
[73] *South Australian Advertiser*, 25 August 1862, 3.

speaking skills that "Ancient Superstitions" was so well received.[74] The financial outcome of the speaking tour is unknown. The cost of the adult admission price to the lecture was one shilling and sixpence, but when travel costs, accommodation, advertising, hall rental and the problems of delayed advertisements and poor weather are considered, there cannot have been much profit from the exercise. The clearest indication that it was not a financial success is that Isaacs never repeated the lecture tour experience. He certainly needed an income, for the tour had prompted his resignation from his secure employment at James Martin's foundry.

In the preceding years, Isaacs had made an enormous contribution to Gawler's social and cultural life. Thanks to his efforts on behalf of the Gawler Institute, which resulted in the fete, "The Song of Australia", the library and the museum, and the Humbug Society, the town was now dubbed the "Colonial Athens" (or "Modern Athens") of South Australia—a title imbued with more than a hint of its own humbug. Overcome by classical hyperbole, a reviewer of Isaacs' *Number One* assessed the town's position in 1861: "Gawler is the Parnassus of South Australia. There the poets sing, and there the Muse of History sits, weaving wreaths of laurel for the young Macaulays of the South."[75] Whilst supporting his growing family in that Arcadia and dealing with insolvency, Isaacs had also composed a novel, edited a journal of prose and poetry, written and staged a play and had articles and poems published in the South Australian press. With insight gained from these experiences, and with typical optimism, he was eager for his next challenge. He had outgrown Gawler, or perhaps he had overstayed his welcome there. After a decade's absence, George Isaacs returned to Adelaide. The metropolis promised a far wider audience for his many talents.

[74] The full text of "Ancient Superstitions" would soon appear in two parts in Isaacs' newspaper. *The Critic*, 8 November 1862, 9–11; *The Critic*, 15 November 1862, 10–12.
[75] *South Australian Register*, 16 May 1861, 2.

# Chapter 8: *The Critic*, 1862–1863

*Happiness, however, in this life is not of long duration*. A. Pendragon, 1862[1]

Unable to resist the freedom but also the discipline of the editorial role for long, Isaacs returned to Adelaide in 1862 to pursue a dream; he had decided to found and edit a weekly Saturday newspaper. The new publication's title, *The Critic*, summed up his view of the world. As an inveterate observer he was now free to hold colonial society to account, promote his opinions, review and publish the poetry and prose of his choice and generally indulge himself in print. The first issue of the sixpenny paper appeared in shops in Adelaide and surrounding towns on 4 October 1862.[2] Edited in an upstairs office in Waterhouse's Buildings in King William Street, and printed at nearby Dehane's Stationer's shop, the newspaper was an ambitious project for one individual. Nevertheless, Isaacs was confident that he had the qualifications to satisfy the reading requirements of the South Australian public. It would be his first full-time attempt to support himself as a writer and editor.

Following the lack of success of his novel, and of *Number One*, he was far from naive about the risks associated with colonial publications. With some prescience he had already outlined the fate of a similar, though fictional editor and paper in the *Queen of the South*:

> There is also Dasher Rigging Kite, Esq., who has been successively hawker, commission-broker, merchant, auctioneer, member of council, dancing-master, bullock-puncher, and editor of the 'Spirit of Progress'—a journal which developed its go-a-head principles so admirably as in three short months to spirit away the capital of

[1] *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 3.
[2] Initially, the *Critic* could be obtained from agents in Adelaide, Gawler, Kapunda, Greenock, Lyndoch Valley, Kooringa, Angaston, Tanunda and Clare. *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 2. As an alternative to the sixpenny price, a subscription to *The Critic* cost five shillings per quarter, paid in advance. From the following comment in the paper it appears that Isaacs expected to receive twenty five pounds in sales from each issue: "perhaps the best thing he can do in such circumstances will be to buy up the whole of our next week's issue, which would be twenty-five pounds well spent." *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 12.

> the proprietary, and to progress with its projector and editor, D.R.K., Esq., into the Insolvent Court, where it finally disappeared.[3]

The opening edition of the *Critic* announced that the short-lived *South Australian Journal* had just expired but the portent went unheeded.[4] Isaacs, as always, was an optimist. He was confident he could support his large family, which now included a seventh child, Morris, on the proceeds of the paper.

Brave or perhaps foolhardy, Isaacs preferred an independent path that entailed no alliances with Adelaide's literary establishment. He envisaged that his paper would offer an alternative view of colonial society, and that it would tackle issues that the *Register* and the *Advertiser* chose to ignore. The *Critic*'s stated aim was "not to advance the opinions of any political party, but to comment, in a candid and impartial spirit, on the Events of the Week, and on the various sentiments initiated by the Daily Journals."[5] Its editor, A. Pendragon, would employ satire, "generally recognized as one of the most effective correctives of folly and abuses" against perceived humbug or injustice.[6] This weapon, Isaacs assured his readers, would be tempered by:

> Fun without coarseness,
> Humour, free from vulgarity,
> Wit devoid of bitterness, and
> Ridicule, clear of personalities.[7]

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[3] Pendragon, *Queen*, 4.
[4] Not much is known of the *South Australian Journal*. Its printer and publisher, J.H. Lewis placed an advertisement on the front page of the *Register* on 7 October 1862, stating that the *Journal* would be discontinued for a time, to reappear in an enlarged form in the future. It was not heard from again. Isaacs considered that "it was a respectable, if not a very lively paper." *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 11. In November 1862, the *Critic* announced the launch of another local publication, the *Adelaide Musical Herald*. *The Critic*, 22 November 1862, 6.
[5] *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 1.
[6] *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 1.
[7] *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 1.

Ultimately, political incompetence and folly would severely test Isaacs' resolve to separate "ridicule" from "personalities". Impartiality was difficult for this opinionated man. Gentler pieces on the volunteer militia, sport, new publications and reviews of Adelaide's cultural attractions would fill the remainder of the paper. Isaacs, who had offered assistance to local writers in his introduction to *Number One*, now repeated that pledge in his newspaper: "[*The Critic*] will afford a vehicle for the introduction to the public of such "Imaginative Works of Colonial Creation," as might possibly be excluded from Journals more strictly devoted to news and politics."[8] The person whose works stood to benefit most from this new publishing opportunity was, of course, George Isaacs.

An immediate income from sales and advertisements was crucial to the *Critic*'s success for, as sole proprietor, Isaacs was responsible for both the printing costs and the wages of his small staff.[9] He had a written agreement with the printer George Dehane, stating that the rent on the printing equipment would be paid one month in advance, but it is unlikely that he had much in the way of funds to support the *Critic*'s ongoing production. To raise money, Isaacs included more than seven pages of advertisements in the first sixteen page issue of the paper, spruiking items and services ranging from agricultural implements to accommodation. The high number of advertisements suggests that he had been very busy canvassing for business in the weeks prior to publication.[10]

In a practical outlet for his love of rhyme, Isaacs also composed anonymous personalized ditties for his advertising clients. The subject matter may have been mundane but he

[8] *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 1.
[9] Isaacs employed a foreman, two printers, a clerk and an office boy at Dehane's printing business. John Henry Sabine, Terence McSweeney, William Jeffrey and David Leader were listed as his employees. *The Telegraph*, 6 March 1863, 2.
[10] In the first month of the *Critic*'s operation, Isaacs contacted the Roads Board with a request to reprint their public notices in his paper. The Board refused, on the grounds that it had already declined similar requests from other newly established periodicals. *South Australian Weekly Chronicle*, 25 October 1862, 3.

approached the task with gusto, for writing was now his full-time occupation as well as his art. The following extract from a poem in praise of the Victoria Hotel, also known as "The Acre", appeared on the *Critic*'s opening page:

> Know ye "The Acre," where the drinks are all prime,
> The ale balmy as honey, and the liquors sublime,
> Where the jest ever flows, and the repartee glitters;
> The essence of Punch with the mildest of bitters—
> Where the fine arts are cherished, and Bob the supreme,
> Like an oracle, solves the most difficult theme,
> And settles the question, by toss up or shake,
> 'Twixt "What will you have, friends?" or "What will you take?"[11]

A further seven stanza poem in the first issue promoted Brandon's Shoes: "They never hurt the tenderest feet—/To wear them 'tis a pleasure."[12] The jingles were hardly literary poetry yet their novelty must have flattered the advertisers and attracted the attention of readers. Isaacs ensured that the remainder of the paper lived up to its name, filling it with sharp political commentary, made more vivid by the imminent South Australian parliamentary elections. Letters, horseracing results, humour, poems and a theatrical review rounded out the content. A perceptive reader might have gained the impression that the colony's new periodical was, like its editor, rather radical in its political persuasion, intelligent and literate. It was a promising start.

As the weekly *Critic* posed no apparent threat to the established daily papers, its initial critical reception was kind.[13] Magnanimously, the *Register* stated that, "There is ample room in the

[11] *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 1.
[12] *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 14.
[13] Apart from the reviews in the major dailies, the appearance of the *Critic* was also noted by a German-language paper. *Adelaider Deutsche Zeitung*, 10 October 1862, 6. It was not long before readers in New Zealand were aware of the new publication, thanks to the practice of newspapers copying news from one paper to another. *Otago Daily Times*, 13 October 1862, 5.

colony for such a publication."[14] It continued, "Its editor, long known under the *nom de plume* of "A. Pendragon," is a man of undoubted ability, and the first number of the new journal fully sustains his reputation." From its high moral ground, though, it could not resist a warning. Any satirical comments from the *Critic*'s editor would, "unless carefully managed, be very liable in his animadversions to transgress the bounds of propriety." Apparently, Isaacs already had a reputation in the colony for the strength of his criticism. The *Advertiser* also published an encouraging review of the *Critic,* noting that it was "neatly printed on good paper", however it relished the opportunity to place Isaacs, "for once, into his own crucible."[15] It chided him for reporting old news ("the Editor of the *Critic* must have been taking a siesta in Sleepy Hollow"), defended itself against charges of impropriety and, in retaliation against Isaacs' assertions of sloppy editing, it found fault with his journalism. Like the biblical David, Isaacs exposed the weaknesses of the Goliaths of the Adelaide press, gleefully pointing out their grammatical imperfections and careless prose. He expected the daily papers to match his own high standards. The *Critic*'s literary pages however escaped censure: "they certainly contrast favorably with those pretenders to literature which have from time to time suddenly appeared before the Adelaide public, and as suddenly vanished." The *Advertiser*'s review concluded that Isaacs' paper was "a good sixpennyworth for sixpence."

Subsequent issues of the *Critic* enlarged upon the original format. The paper was filled with local political gossip, commentaries, world affairs and spoofs, and its content was enlivened with occasional illustrations, including cartoons and a woodcut.[16] The mining industry's importance to the colony's economy was reflected in the *Critic*'s many mining references, including fake prospectuses for businesses such as the "Brawler Gobbling Green Goose

[14] *South Australian Register*, 7 October 1862, 2. The review also noted that the *Critic* was the same dimensions as the "*Farm* and *Garden* and the late *Church Chronicle*."
[15] *South Australian Advertiser*, 6 October 1862, 2. The following quotations in this paragraph derive from the same source.
[16] Two political cartoons relating to the coming election appeared in Isaacs' paper. *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 8. A further illustration, in the form of a double page paper cut, was titled "The Party on the Northern Coast Attacked by a Bunyip" by "Michael Angelo Bloggs". *The Critic*, 7 February 1863, 8–9.

Mining Company (Limited)".[17] The occasional fictional adventures of the "Chinkbiddle" family recalled Isaacs' serial "Memoirs of the Twiggle Club" in the *Hesperus*.[18] Bogus "Letters to the Editor", affixed with odd signatures such as "Archibald McSqueeze", drew attention to, and reinforced Isaacs' pet concerns.[19] The editor's diligent efforts on behalf of the *Critic* did not cease in the evening, for it was then that he dutifully attended Adelaide's social, political, musical and theatrical events.[20] These experiences provided material for articles and reviews—and, more importantly, brought Isaacs into contact with the latest gossip. The frequent emphasis on news from the turf suggests that Isaacs might have been a keen punter, but the business of editing and writing the *Critic* must have left him with little spare time for recreation or family life.

Isaacs' love of language and puzzles was on display in columns such as "Playing with Words", which celebrated anagrams, charades, acrostics, puns, enigmas and other amusements. One poem, "New Year's Morn" by "A X STICK" [acrostic], was undoubtedly an Isaacs' original:

> T he bells have ceased tolling—"the year's passed,"—and they
> H ave rang in the new one, quite merry and gay:
> E ach one to enjoy it the best way he may.
>
> C ome all of you, then, who have consciences clear,
> R esolved to be happy, and joyous this year—
> I ndulging in nought that's mephitic.
> T he way to avoid this, some one recommends,
> I s that you should not only—but each of your friends,

[17] *The Critic*, 20 December 1862, 4.
[18] "Mrs. Chinkbiddle Declines to Accept Mr. Cooper Bowls as a Son-in-law" was the first instalment. *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 9.
[19] *The Critic*, 10 January 1863, 11.
[20] In "Musical Chit Chat", Isaacs announced that the soprano Madame Stuttaford, a woman with whom he would later have a musical connection, had arrived in the colony. *The Critic*, 18 October 1862, 6.

> C ommence the new year with THE CRITIC.[21]

Most charming of all the word plays is the cartoon of Isaacs' own rebus—a pictorial representation of his surname—in which two eyes are suspended over an axe. [Eyes/axe = Isaacs][22]

Isaacs retained a strong interest in Gawler's affairs, and news of the town appeared regularly in the *Critic*. No longer officially associated with the Gawler museum, he could publically lament its lack of a catalogue and of labelled specimens: "the museum will be like a beautifully illuminated book written in a language not understood— very pretty, but of no practical advantage, and conveying no instruction."[23] For Isaacs, education of the public, whether via taxonomic labels in a museum, a library or in a free-spirited paper, was vital. His anonymous, comprehensive article "A Few Words on Gawler" was worthy of an almanac, while his recollections of his early days there "The Old Spot Inn, Twainbridge: A Reminiscence of Ten Years Ago" was sentimental.[24] The tardy progress of Gawler's Prize History of South Australia competition drew his criticism.[25] Anonymous parodies "A Chapter for the Gawler Prize History of South Australia" and "Another Chapter for the Gawler Prize History of South Australia" followed.[26]

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[21] *The Critic*, 3 January 1863, 7.
[22] *The Critic*, 20 December 1862, 12.
[23] *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 7. The following month, it was reported that Isaacs carried a specimen of a "gigantic prawn" from Holdfast Bay to the Gawler Museum, on behalf of "Professor" Robert Hall. *South Australian Register*, 28 November 1862, 3. Isaacs is also recorded as a donor to the South Australian Museum in 1862/1863. *South Australian Register*, 13 October 1863, 3.
[24] *The Critic*, 1 November 1862, 6; *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 7.
[25] *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 10.
[26] *The Critic*, 24 January 1863, 6–7; *The Critic*, 14 February 1863, 10. Both this and the preceding spoof on South Australia's prize history were later reprinted in the *Border Watch* newspaper. The *Bunyip* published further instalments in the series, including "Gawler, the Wise.—(Continued)", "Grey, the Sanctified", "Robe, the Sublime" and "Young the Magnificent". Isaacs attributed the articles to "Our Own Historian". *The Critic*, 28 February 1863, 5.

The *Critic* kept it readers up-to-date with the latest advances in science. Whether publishing a review of John Gould's seminal book on natural history, *The Birds of Australia*, mocking astrology, or taking a position on the greatest scientific controversy of his era, Isaacs endeavoured to promote modern scientific thought.[27] In the three years since the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, bitter debates had raged between evolutionists and creationists. To Isaacs' great dismay, the *Register*, in an article entitled "Man Among the Monkeys", dismissed Darwin's theory in favour of the Biblical account of creation.[28] Isaacs' response was rapid and savage. The *Register*'s editor, he stormed, "deprecates the attempts of men of science to plumb nature, or investigate her secrets. To him it would appear a mistake that Galileo, Bacon, Newton, Hervey, and others of our own time hardly less eminent, should ever have lived."[29]

Most of the *Critic*'s content came from Isaacs' pen and the inexorable demand for copy continued even when he was indisposed. In November 1862 he informed his readers that he had been "seriously ill" and confined to bed.[30] His ailment prevented him from attending an event close to his heart, the Annual Gawler Fete, but it failed to delay the *Critic*'s appearance on the following Saturday. Unwell, but with the printing deadline for the next issue looming, Isaacs resorted to publishing the text of the first half of his lecture "Ancient Superstitions".[31] This not only filled three pages of the *Critic*, but also unwittingly saved his lecture for posterity. The second half of "Ancient Superstitions" appeared in the following issue on 15 November.[32] Isaacs included the article "The Taverns, Coffee-Houses, and Clubs of London:

[27] *The Critic*, 10 January 1863, 10. The author of the review, James Rennie, later reviewed John W. Colenso's "The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined" for the *Critic*. 17 January 1863, 4. The review copy was courtesy of Platts. Isaacs appears to have had a mutually beneficial relationship with the Adelaide bookseller, and also with the firm of W.C. Rigby; *The Critic*, 31 January 1863, 9; 7 February 1863, 12.
[28] *South Australian Register*, 31 December 1862, 2.
[29] *The Critic*, 3 January 1863, 2.
[30] *The Critic*, 8 November 1862, 5.
[31] *The Critic*, 8 November 1862, 9–11.
[32] *The Critic*, 15 November 1862, 10–12. Inevitably, Isaacs also augmented the *Critic* with previously published works. Aphorisms and quotations, poems and short prose pieces filled spare corners. The anonymous article

With Anecdotes of the Wits Who Made Them Memorable" in the 29 November issue of his paper. Some of its information was probably derived from a book that he had borrowed earlier that year from the Adelaide Institute Library, *The Clubs of London, with Anecdotes of their Members, etc*. [33]

To help fill out the columns of the *Critic*, Isaacs solicited literary contributions from the public. Welcome and sometimes unwelcome offerings of letters, prose and poetry dropped into the "Editor's Box" in Dehane's shop window. Isaacs' poem "An Editor in a Fix and how he got out of it" captures the stress involved in the editorial role. Its moral offered an obvious solution for all harried editors. Less discrimination was required:

> And when you next write *contributions declined,*
> The waste paper basket pray keep in your mind;
> But this you all know, as a matter of course,
> In emergency cases it's your only recourse.[34]

According to the poem, discarded donations to the *Critic* included, "sonnets to eyebrows, lovers' vows/The sale of a sheep run, disease amongst cows." A. Pendragon expected more pithy contributions.

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"Characteristics of Childhood" had first appeared in a journal in 1832. *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 8; *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* 34 (1832): 265. A poem by "Unknown", "What Will You Do, Love" published in the first issue, was revealed in the second issue to be the work of the Anglo-Irish poet Samuel Lover. *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 12; *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 13. Isaacs was generally careful to identify the original sources of works published in his newspaper.

[33] *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 6. Isaacs borrowed five books from the Adelaide Institute's library in February 1862, including James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (London: Henry Baldwin for Charles Dilly, 1791). Borrowing Registers, State Records of South Australia, GRG19/115, items 1–3.

[34] *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 11. The opening line, "One morning an Editor came in a pet" refers to the wine-loving Isaacs' agitation following his attendance at a temperance lecture. Earlier in the same issue, he gave his view of those involved in that cause: "Individually we have no objection to teetotallers or the principles they advocate, but we certainly do not admire the intemperance with which they pursue the idea of temperance." 4.

Isaacs' friends supported the *Critic* in various ways. They submitted letters, prose pieces and poems, served as informants and were, occasionally, the subjects of articles. George French Angas contributed six poems to the *Critic*, including "To the River Murray".[35] Jefferson Stow, who in later years became the editor of the *South Australian Advertiser*, contributed anonymous articles, which, according to Loyau, "created great stir in Adelaide."[36] Gawler's Dr. George Nott ("G.N.") offered letters, a review and French translations and E.L. Grundy obliged with a note. Eustace Reveley Mitford, writing several years before the foundation of his own satirical newspaper, *Pasquin*: *Pastoral, Mineral, and Agricultural Advocate*, contributed a letter and an impassioned piece on his fight for justice over the disputed Tipara mineral claim.[37] Eccentric Adelaide photographer "Professor" Robert Hall, along with his companion Isaacs, featured in A. Pendragon's tale "The Way In and the Way Out" that exposed bureaucratic silliness at the Gawler Show.[38] John McKinlay's travels were celebrated in an article that catered to the public's fascination with exploration.[39] Always keen to publicize his connections with prominent men, Isaacs emphasized his friendship with the explorer: "all those who have known him for a number of years (and the writer is proud to have been one) testified to the esteem in which they have ever regarded him as a frank, kindly, unassuming, and honorable man."[40] Closer to home, Isaacs paid much attention to the parliamentary career of fellow Humbug Society member E.L. Grundy.[41] This social web of talented individuals provided not only content, but also validation for Isaacs' paper.

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[35] *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 12. The poem had previously been published in Sydney. *Illustrated Sydney News*, 7 January 1854, 5. Other verses by Angas in the *Critic* include "The Last Farewell" (18 October 1862, 10), "The Two Ships" (25 October 1862, 12), "Lines" (1 November 1862, 12), "The Shunamite's Son" (8 November 1862, 8) and "Pomara's Return" (20 December 1862, 13).
[36] Loyau, *Representative Men*, 233.
[37] *The Critic*, 28 February 1863, 8–9; *The Critic*, 7 March 1863, 9.
[38] *The Critic*, 14 February 1863, 4–5. Under the heading of "Ecclesiastical", Isaacs notes in another issue that "'The Rev. Robert Hall,' we learn from a late number of the *Photographic Journal*, has 'honourable mention' from the Commissioners of the Great Exhibition for 'ethnological studies of the aborigines.' We are pleased to find our friend the professor's artistic labor so well appreciated in the old country; but did not know that he had entered orders—unless for photographs." *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 8.
[39] *The Critic*, 18 October 1862, 10.
[40] *The Critic*, 22 November 1862, 6.
[41] *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 11. This is just one of many references to E.L. Grundy in Isaacs' newspaper.

The *Critic* permitted Isaacs the luxury of showcasing his own poetry. It is diverse in form and theme, ranging from serious literary works to humorous satirical parodies. Whether from unlikely modesty or to mask the truth that he was the author of much of the paper, most of his poems, including "My Meerschaum Pipe" and "The Sword of Benevenuto Cellini" are unattributed.[42] "A Song for the New Year" and "Viva L'Italia" are exceptions, carrying A. Pendragon's name.[43] As many of the anonymous poems in the *Critic* later appeared in publications authored by Isaacs, their origin can be confirmed. Conversely the "Song of the Bar", attributed to A. Pendragon in *Colonial Lyrics* in 1858, reappears anonymously in the *Critic*.[44] Isaacs did not restrict himself to one pseudonym, and indeed he was probably behind several in the paper. His poem "Prison Reveries"—"Evil the deeds that wall my life about—/ That doom me to this cage"—for example, is attributed to "Humanitas".[45] Isaacs usually opted for anonymity in his topical and often caustic political rhymes. It was probably a wise choice considering their pungency. The following extract is at the milder end of his satirical spectrum:

> Mr. R.I. Stow, he's a smartish young man;
> He don't care for principle, only for place;
> If elected, he'll get all he possibly can,
> And use any means to be first in the race.[46]

Other poems in the *Critic,* such as the lengthy "Pluto's Visit to Rome" by "Mephistophiles", exhibit hallmarks of Isaacs' style and interests but without further evidence they cannot be attributed to him.[47] "Sigma", "Crotchet", "H.M.P.", "S.A.C.", "Parvenu", "Dingo" and

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[42] *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 12; *The Critic*, 18 October 1862, 10.
[43] *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 10; *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 8.
[44] *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 10.
[45] *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 12.
[46] Anon. [George Isaacs], "What Mr. J.P. Boucaut Thinks" [After the Manner of the Biglow Papers.]" *The Critic*, 1 November 1862, 11.
[47] *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 10–13.

various other writers in the paper are currently unidentified. The teasing contributions from "Maid Marian", however, may derive from a source close to home, his partner Marion.[48]

The *Critic* promoted new Australian writing, with Isaacs' journalistic curiosity keeping him abreast of recent developments. True to its title, the paper assessed the recent works of Australian authors and poets, despite Tim Dolin's assertion that "There were no significant local periodicals publishing literary reviews in this period."[49] Isaacs' weekly may have been modest, but its response to new Australian writing was significant. Isaacs' review of Clara Aspinall's London-published novel *Three Years in Melbourne*, for example, was condescending but supportive:

> Written with no greater excellence than might be attained by any moderately educated lady—unambitious in style and sentiment, it is yet distinguished by qualities that will doubtless obtain for it many readers. Its chief merit, indeed, lies perhaps in the very absence of literary effort, and a compensating truthfulness and unaffected simplicity shines in every page; beyond which it is characterised by a cheerfulness and good-nature not often present in works descriptive of the colonies.[50]

Under the heading, "An Australian Poet" Isaacs praised the work of young Sydney writer Henry Kendall. He reprinted an English review of Kendall's work taken from the *Athenaeum*, and reproduced his poem "Fainting by the Way". Kendall was discouraged by a lack of notice in Australia, so Isaacs offered the following advice:

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[48] *The Critic*, 17 January 1863, 9.
[49] Tim Dolin, "First Steps Toward a History of the Mid-Victorian Novel in Colonial Australia," *Australian Literary Studies* 22.3 (2006): 283.
[50] *The Critic*, 24 January 1863, 7. Melbourne's *Argus* was similarly unimpressed, saying of Aspinall's work, "It is as mild and harmless as it is possible for a book to be." *The Argus*, 17 January 1863, 5. Clara Aspinall, *Three Years in Melbourne* (London: L. Booth, 1862).

> Mr. Kendall should however remember that similar complaints have been made in every part of the world by young writers who have afterwards become famous. True genius may for a time pass unrecognized, but cannot fail sooner or later, if true to itself, to assume its rightful position. There are very few instances of any aspirant to literary honours becoming famous on their first appearance.[51]

If literary fame was eluding Isaacs, he could generously champion the younger Kendall's work instead. In a later article in the *Critic* he wrote:

> We wonder what the New South Wales papers who rejected Mr. Kendall's verses feel when they see the high praise which his manuscripts here met with from the first literary journals in England. We were the only journal in Adelaide which could find room to copy the very admirable verses with their recommendation.[52]

Other than reviews, Isaacs also published works by a range of Australian writers, known and unknown, in his paper. Nathaniel Hailes' poem "Youth and Age", on the subject of the passing of time, matched Isaacs' own concern for that subject.[53] The *Critic* also published two poems by the Burnside writer Ellen Elizabeth Debney, who wrote under the pseudonym "Ellie"; "Stuart to his Old Bush Hat" and a poignant verse on the death of the poet's daughter, "The Little Arms Outstretched".[54]

In *South Australian Newspapers*, Len Marquis comments that publications such as the *Critic* were directed at the more educated section of the population.[55] Isaacs was certainly writing for literate colonists and many, if not most, expected a comprehensive coverage of literature

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[51] *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 12.
[52] *The Critic*, 31 January 1863, 5.
[53] *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 10.
[54] *The Critic*, 31 January 1863, 11; *The Critic*, 7 March 1863, 13. Ellen Elizabeth Debney (1833–1870) composed "Stuart to his Old Bush Hat" not long before its publication in Isaacs' paper, as it bears the date "January 28th 1863".
[55] *South Australian Newspapers*: *A Selection of Material From the Extensive Research Notes Gathered for a Proposed History of the Press in South Australia by Leonard Stanley Marquis Prepared for Publication by Ronald Parsons* (Murray Bridge, South Australia: Ronald Parsons, 1998), 63.

from overseas. A. Pendragon's first book review in the *Critic* did not examine an Australian work, but was an appreciative appraisal of Thackeray's *The English Humorists of the 18th Century*.[56] Political verses presumably written by Isaacs under the pseudonym "Hosea Biglow" imitated the style and content of the American author James Russell Lowell's *Biglow Papers*.[57] Likewise Isaacs' spoofs on "Mrs. Caudle", modified to deal with local topics, were inspired by English writer Douglas Jerrold's character of that name.[58] "Gawler Pypps, His Diary" needed no explanation as to its derivation, and references to "circumlocution offices" were understood by all those who had read Dickens' *Little Dorrit*.[59] The original author of each of these articles is unnamed, for Isaacs assumed that his readers were sufficiently literate to notice and to appreciate European and American literary references. After all, the *Critic* was aimed, smugly, at "Those who read *Punch*—and who is there that does not."[60]

The editor of the *Critic* did not neglect French literature. From the paper's outset, he planned to serve his readers an impressive Gallic treat. A notice in the second issue declared that a review, plus excerpts from Victor Hugo's publishing phenomenon, *Les Misérables*, would shortly feature in the paper. The novel's strong egalitarian themes, including its call for freedom of the press, must have resonated with Isaacs.[61] Two long excerpts from *Les Misérables* appeared in the *Critic* on 27 December 1862 and 3 January 1863. If not the first, they were certainly among the earliest extracts of Hugo's novel to be reprinted in an Australian newspaper.[62] Giving credit and copyright where it was due, Isaacs was careful to

[56] *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 5. Oddly, Thackeray's name is misspelt "Thackray" throughout the review.
[57] *The Critic*, 8 November 1862, 6. James Russell Lowell, *The Biglow Papers* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: George Nichols, 1848).
[58] *The Critic*, 1 November 1862, 11; *The Critic*, 8 November 1862, 7.
[59] *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 11; *The Critic*, 7 February 1863. Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1857).
[60] *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 4.
[61] Isaacs considered that, "A marvellous book it is—full of original ideas, sparkling with epigram, sad, tender, brilliant, and natural—that is, natural as far as French nature goes, which is not ours." *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 6.
[62] The novel did not require much promotion. By early April 1862, within two months of its publication in Paris, it had been translated into nine languages. Three months from its launch, one hundred thousand authorised copies and countless pirated versions had been sold. The first English edition arrived in Australia by late August

acknowledge that his version of Hugo's work derived from Lascelles Wraxall's first authorised English translation, which could be purchased from the Adelaide bookseller Mr. Rigby.[63] As the imported novel was expensive, the *Critic*'s selections of *Les Misérables* must have been appreciated by those who were unable to afford the original.

While the *Critic* provides an insightful commentary on the workings of South Australian colonial society, its highly subjective nature appears to reveal much about Isaacs' state of mind, his interests and his prejudices. His passion for honesty and fairness, his concern for the underdog, and his attachment to the past are all very evident in his writing. The *Critic*'s Christmas editorial is suffused with an almost palpable longing for England. Isaacs' Jewish heritage is markedly absent from this Yuletide reverie:

> The Editor fell back in his chair. He had been dreaming of roast goose, boiled turkey, plum pudding, and their attendant graces, to be indulged in by himself and family on the day following, undisturbed by considerations of the evils that afflict humanity, and of those that more particularly disturb that small portion of it settled in South Australia. … The editor replaced his slippers, opened his office window, and gazed upon the scene below and beyond him. Below were the crowded streets, people hurrying hither and thither; cabs, omnibusses [sic], and horsemen dashing along. Beyond he caught a glimpse of the ocean, upon the bosom of which the sun was then descending. There were no signs of the approaching Christmas in the streets or on the ocean; none of that pageantry with which all are familiar who left England, dear old

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1862. Information sourced from the *Victor Hugo: Les Misérables—From Page to* Stage exhibition, held at the State Library of Victoria from 18 July–9 November 2014. Isaacs' extracts of *Les Misérables* omitted the acute accent in the novel's title.

[63] Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Lascelles Wraxall (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862).

> England, late in life; but yet this Christmas eve seemed to pervade everything; old scenes seemed to rise from the past and overlay the present.[64]

Nearing middle-age and acutely aware of the passing of time, Isaacs assessed the impact of his life and explored the theme in the *Critic*. Mortality was on his mind. That he was uncomfortable with the results of his introspection was poignantly expressed in his autobiographical poem "We All Would Do Better When We Grow Grey":

> Grey! grey! am I getting grey?
> Yes, it is so, grey I am getting;
> Passions, like ravenous birds of prey,
> Have swooped on my heart, in its blood their beaks whetting;
> And have left on my temples the print of their feet,
> And have left the rush of their wings in my brain,
> And have left my soul sickened amidst my defeat—
> In the past no memorial, the future no gain.
> I used my youth as a thing to endure;
> I used my manhood as not to fade out;
> I played with my love as a thing secure,
> And I looked on all men as a rabble and rout,
> The whom I would bend and mould to my will,
> In the pride of my knowledge and force of my skill.
> But now I am grey; wearied and grey—
> And little I care for the things that were.
> I have squandered my morning, have wasted my day,
> Gave no thought to the night when the world was gay.
> We all would do better when we grow grey.[65]

[64] *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 3.
[65] *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 12. Unattributed in the *Critic*, the poem later appeared under Isaacs' name. See, Isaacs, "We All Would Do Better When We Grow Grey," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 60.

By late November 1862, despite a weekly circulation of approximately seven hundred papers, the *Critic*'s financial situation was dire and its future was in peril. Isaacs apologized to his readers for the shortened nature of the 22 November issue, and then announced that a new proprietary was in the process of being formed.[66] The *Critic* was not published on the expected dates of 6 December and 13 December, but it reappeared, reprieved and newly funded, on 20 December 1862. As the editor remarked in that issue, "Capital is the only effectual remedy for the disease of impecuniosity."[67] The *Critic*, formerly owned outright by Isaacs, now had twenty-three unnamed proprietors. He managed to retain half the ownership of the paper and his position as editor, but he was careful to inform his subscribers that "the transfer of the property involves no change in the conduct or character of the paper. The independent tone for which it has hitherto been distinguished will be preserved."[68]

The *Critic*'s financial situation had not improved by the New Year. Isaacs, who drew only five pounds per week as editor, made it clear to his readers that the cause of the difficulty was the non-payment of advertising fees: "The sums due to us may be separately small in amount, but the total is considerable; and our supporters will add to the favors they bestow on us in the shape of taking our paper and advertising in it by prompt payments."[69] Despite its problems, the *Critic* had achieved a minor milestone—it had reached the end of its first quarter. A. Pendragon was overcome by Victorian sentimentality:

> If there is something like a feeling of sorrow and sadness in having travelled another stage-length of the journey of life, there is also a feeling of hope and gladness in commencing a fresh one. To the young and happy it inspires joyous thoughts of anticipated pleasures, and to those who know the realities of life's anxieties, it brings a

[66] *The Critic*, 22 November 1862, 3.
[67] *The Critic*, 20 December, 1862, 3.
[68] *The Critic*, 20 December 1862, 3.
[69] *The Critic*, 24 January 1863, 8.

> trustful hope that the past may have borne away with it all the dark clouds and shadows, and that the future may bring more cheerful blessings.[70]

As the *Critic*'s financial woes escalated, Isaacs was drawn into a serious altercation with George Dehane, the owner of the printing press that was used to publish the paper. Trouble had been brewing for several months as Isaacs struggled to pay the rent on the equipment. Dehane halted the publication of the 21 February 1863 issue of the *Critic* due to non-payment of rent. Incensed by this obstruction, Isaacs sued the printer for one hundred pounds damages for the loss sustained by his business. On Friday 6 March 1863, the Isaacs versus Dehane case, before the Stipendiary Magistrate Mr. J.W. Macdonald and Mr. E.M. Bagot, occupied the Adelaide Local Court of Full Jurisdiction for an entire day. At five o'clock in the afternoon, after half an hour's deliberation, the jury of four found in Isaacs' favour. Within hours, a comprehensive report of the case appeared in that evening's *Telegraph* newspaper, demonstrating the efficiency of Adelaide journalism at that period.[71] For Isaacs, it was a Pyrrhic victory. The finding "without costs" and the trifling sum of one shilling damages must have been a bitter disappointment. He had instructed the Attorney General Randolph Stow, his friend Jefferson Stow's brother, and the barrister James Penn Boucaut (later Premier and Supreme Court judge) to plead his case, so their fees may have been considerable.[72]

The finding did not save the *Critic*, which was now on the point of collapse. The final issue appeared on Saturday 14 March 1863. Reduced to a single page, it bore the following ominous message:

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[70] *The Critic*, 24 January 1863, 10.
[71] *The Telegraph*, 6 March 1863, 2.
[72] Isaacs had previously written anonymous, unflattering appraisals of both men in the *Critic*. One example is the already quoted poem, "What Mr. J.P. Boucaut Thinks." *The Critic*, 1 November 1862, 11.

> Owing to promises of aid remaining unfulfilled, calls being tardily responded to, and the difficulty of readily collecting the accounts dispersed in numerous small sums over the colony, the proprietors are compelled to suspend for a while the publication of 'The Critic'.[73]

Extra proprietors were sought to take out seven hundred and fifty shares in the paper at two pounds each, to no avail. The *Critic*'s closing words evoke memories of its editor's lost ring collection: "An eastern sage, when asked for a motto for a ring which might support its wearer alike in prosperity and adversity, wrote—"And this, too, shall pass away."[74] Despite the support of five hundred and thirty-one subscribers, and another seventy readers, the newspaper collapsed after twenty-one issues. As Len Marquis notes, it had a "hectic but brief life."[75] In retrospect, Isaacs had over-extended himself financially and misjudged the market. He was now jobless and his employees were unpaid. One month later he appeared in court charged under the Master and Servants Act, and was ordered to pay six pounds and eleven shillings plus costs to his former employee David Leader.[76]

Isaacs' resilience in the face of failure continued, as he immediately revived his enthusiasm for the theatre. With one successful play already staged in Adelaide, he was eager to repeat the experience. Three months after the demise of the *Critic*, the *Register* noted that Isaacs' new production was almost ready for an audience:

> We have been favoured with a sight of the rough draft of "Major Blaze," a broad comedy, from the fertile and humorous pen of Mr. G. Isaacs, author of "That's Smith," and numerous equally well-known productions. The plot is skilfully woven, the dialogue humorously characteristic, the incidents not outrageously improbable;

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[73] *The Critic*, 14 March 1863, 1.
[74] *The Critic*, 14 March 1863, 1.
[75] Marquis, *South Australian Newspapers*, 63.
[76] *South Australian Advertiser*, 18 April 1863, 3.

> and altogether it is likely, if played properly, to be a success. Mr. Isaacs has been careful to avoid anything that might be susceptible of local application, either in his selection of characters or the dialogues.[77]

The notice was accurate but premature, because it soon became apparent that Isaacs was unable to find support for the play's production. The *Advertiser* clarified its fate:

> We understand that Mr. George Isaacs not having succeeded in arranging for the production of his new comedy, "Major Blaze," in Adelaide, and there being no local copyright law in South Australia to protect his work, he has decided to enter it at Stationers' Hall, according to the provisions of the Imperial Act. Before doing so, however, he intends to give a private reading of the comedy to a few literary friends.[78]

A search of the records of Stationers' Hall, the London-based registry of literary works that constituted an early form of copyright, has found no evidence that *Major Blaze* was ever lodged there, under either Isaacs' name or his pseudonym.[79] Procrastination, misadventure, ill-health, or his chronic poverty may have prevented the play's deposition. *Major Blaze* disappeared without a trace.

Isaacs' reported concern regarding the lack of copyright in the colony highlights a huge problem faced by aspiring colonial writers and especially playwrights. Australian theatre managers preferred to cheaply buy or pilfer successful English productions, rather than risk their livelihoods on untried local plays. As Paul Depasquale notes in *Writing of Plays in South Australia to 1950,* "'Theatre' in Adelaide has always implied, from the beginning, overseas

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[77] *South Australian Register,* 16 June 1863, 2. The phrase "equally well-known productions" is intriguing, considering that there is only evidence for one earlier play by Isaacs. The words, however, may refer to Isaacs' non-theatrical works.
[78] *South Australian Advertiser*, 20 June 1863, 2.
[79] Stationers' Hall, now the Worshipful Company of Stationers and Newspaper Makers, is a London organization that was founded in 1403, originally as a Guild of Stationers. In Isaacs' time, writers could enter their name and the title of their work in a register.

plays and, for theatrical highlights, overseas companies."[80] The lack of effective copyright in the Australian colonies would continue to have a negative impact on Isaacs' fortunes throughout his life. He expressed his concerns in the later poem "Victoria in Excelsis: A Satire":

> How many years of studious toil are spent,
> Before the author builds his monument,
> At length achieved in fairly printed pages
> (A monument that may endure for ages),
> He has his triumph—is that triumph less,
> When printers trade upon a life's success?[81]

The fate of the *Critic* did not dampen Isaacs' passion for newspapers and he was soon associated with another. Always an editor and journalist at heart, he was too independent to work for an established conservative paper—or even a conventional employer. He was drawn back to Gawler where his irreverent friends William Barnet and George Nott were planning the irrepressible Humbug Society's new venture, a satirical monthly newspaper to be named *The Bunyip; or Gawler Humbug Society's Chronicle*. Isaacs became involved in its planning. With Nott as the inaugural editor and Barnet as publisher, the *Bunyip* was launched on 5 September 1863 to immediate acclaim—and a libel suit.[82] Isaacs, under the alias of "The Surprising Sham" joined in the fun.

It is reasonable to surmise that the impetus for the *Bunyip*'s publication came initially from the *Critic*, which had collapsed six months earlier. Judging from his contributions, Nott had

[80] Paul Depasquale, *The Writing of Plays in South Australia to 1950* (Warradale, South Australia: Pioneer Books, 1977), 2.
[81] Isaacs, "Victoria in Excelsis: A Satire," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 71.
[82] Gawler doctor William Home Popham believed that he had been libelled in the first issue of the *Bunyip*. He sued, then won the case, but the newspaper was fined only one shilling.

enjoyed writing for Isaacs' paper. He had also observed its development and demise closely. He appreciated the *Critic*'s satirical stance and he could envisage a receptive market, however he had also observed his friend's difficulties in single-handedly producing and financing a weekly paper. A monthly publication that concentrated on satire, written by a group of friends, seemed a more manageable proposition.

Isaacs was in fine form in the first issue of the *Bunyip* when, once again, he found politicians an easy target. The following proposal is typical of his wit: "That contingent on the foregoing motion becoming law, and the substitution of MONEY, in lieu of mind, in the construction of Parliament, it is desirable that the Parliamentary Library be forthwith disposed of, and the proceeds appropriated to the purchase of Moonta mine shares for distribution among members."[83] Without the "Surprising Sham" tag though, it is impossible to determine exactly which articles and verses he contributed to the paper. The *Bunyip*'s early spoofs, satirical comments, silly names, fake letters to the editor and questionable advertisements are all so reminiscent of his style. Certainly Isaacs was crucial in the paper's formation, but in reality, his association with Gawler's *Bunyip* must have been brief. At most, it can only have lasted for a few months.

By late 1863, he was heavily in debt to at least twenty-four creditors and a second insolvency seemed inevitable. Most of Isaacs' expenses had been incurred in Gawler and Adelaide, for items as diverse as tobacco, rent and lodging (in both towns), stores, meat, a hat (for one guinea), stationery and printing.[84] Medical attention and drugs had been sought and unpaid for, in the little town of Wallaroo on the Yorke Peninsula, one hundred and sixty kilometres north-west of Adelaide. Several other debts related to loans and IOUs. In total, Isaacs owed

[83] *The Bunyip*, 5 September 1863, 5.
[84] Court of Insolvency, State Records of South Australia, GRG66/6/0/29/1772.

his creditors one hundred and seventy-three pounds. His writing projects over the previous year—the failed *Critic*, the rejected *Major Blaze* and his brief stint at the *Bunyip*—had drained, rather than enhanced his financial position. He and his family were very poor, and there was no immediate prospect of improvement. Having experienced imprisonment for insolvency in the past and with no wish to repeat the experience, he could think of only one solution to his predicament. He fled the colony. By late 1863, Isaacs and his family were residing in Melbourne.

# Chapter 9: Melbourne and *Rhyme and Prose*, 1863–1865

*It is somewhat singular that while nearly every class is clamouring for protection, the dramatic author, who suffers most from unfair competition, is never considered.* George Isaacs, 1865[1]

Eight years had passed since Isaacs was last in Melbourne and he returned to the metropolis determined to live as a writer. He settled his family into a house in Napier Street Fitzroy, within walking distance of the city's centre, and considered his options. True, he was conveniently far from the attentions of his South Australian creditors, but he had no reputation or supporters in Victoria. He needed to establish his literary credentials anew.[2] Melbourne's active theatrical scene, with its Theatre Royal and Royal Haymarket Theatre, excited his interest. Isaacs subdued his editorial ambitions and decided to further his career as a playwright in the most populous city in Australia.

The writer commenced work on a burlesque of *Frankenstein,* an ambitious dramatic parody loosely based on Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. He titled the new incarnation *The Burlesque of Frankenstein; or, The Man-Gorilla*. With more than fifteen characters and nine changes of scenery (including a forest, a cave, a coast, a Swiss chalet and "Frozen Regions and Crystal Caverns") his adaptation was far from modest in scope. His decision to base his work on Shelley's novel, however, was not an original concept. Graham Stone, in his afterword to the facsimile of Isaacs' play, observes that "between 1823 and 1849 at least five serious melodramatic versions of Frankenstein and six

[1] George Isaacs, "A Burlesque, and its History," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 97.
[2] One indication of Melbourne's support for literature can be seen in the early foundation of the Melbourne Public Library. Opened in 1856, it was the first public library to be established in an Australian colony, and one of the first free public libraries in the world.

burlesques had been staged many times in London."[3] Reasonably, he surmises that Isaacs may have seen one or more of these interpretations and been inspired to write another.

In keeping with the burlesque tradition, Isaacs peppered his work with wordplays and local references. His heavy reliance on puns points to the sharp ears and brains of colonial audiences. "No, no! my *flower*, although in fancy bre(a)d,/You shall not *loaf* on me. So *roll* ahead!" is a typical, if rather extreme example of his style.[4] Melbourne patrons would have appreciated the local and topical allusions of the play, including a reference to the city's asylum beside the Yarra River: "Go *lamb* to *bed—Bedlam* you might have said./But, no, I am not mad as yet, my friend;/You'll dwell before me at the Yarra Bend."[5] Isaacs also insinuated his personal circumstances into his script, transferring his own fragile financial state to his protagonist. He burdened Frankenstein with debts, pressing creditors and legal problems:

> Frankenstein: I ask a *suit*—my tailor makes me *two*. One which I wear—the *suit* I never sought.
>
> Clerval: You have at home?
>
> Frankenstein: No, in the County Court.[6]

The burlesque was also enlivened with frequent songs, set to popular tunes such as *Pop Goes the Weasel* and *Auld Lang Syne*.[7]

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[3] George Isaacs, *The Burlesque of Frankenstein; or, The Man-Gorilla*, Facsimile by Graham Stone (Sydney: Graham Stone, 1989), 29. Isaacs may have seen, for example, the Brough brothers' burlesque *Frankenstein; or the Model Man* at the Adelphi Theatre in London in 1849. *The Times*, 27 December 1849, 5.
[4] George Isaacs, *The Burlesque of Frankenstein; or, The Man-Gorilla*, in *Rhyme and Prose*, 114.
[5] Isaacs, *Burlesque of Frankenstein*, in *Rhyme and Prose*, 127.
[6] Isaacs, *Burlesque of Frankenstein*, in *Rhyme and Prose*, 103.
[7] According to Lucy Sussex, Isaacs' burlesque, if it had been performed, would have "featured scantily clad women for the day: girls in tights, playing male roles." Lucy Sussex, *Blockbuster! Fergus Hume & the Mystery of a Hansom Cab: the Story of the Crime Novel That Became a Global Publishing Phenomenon* (Melbourne: Text Publishing Company, 2015), 27.

Entranced by the idea of evolution, and dismayed by the ignorance of those who denied its truth, Isaacs incorporated aspects of the theory into his writing. Even his Monster is conversant with the controversy, stating: "On natural *selection* I've read Darwin."[8] Warwick Anderson in *The Cultivation of Whiteness* notes that two characters in Isaacs' play are based on University of Melbourne professors, George Britton Halford and William Thomson. Halford (dubbed "Alferd" in the burlesque) vehemently opposed Darwin's evolutionary theory in lectures and print, while Thomson ("Waldman") just as vigorously supported it.[9] In the opening scene set in a university college hall, the Professor of Natural History, Mr. Alferd, pours scorn on the Professor of Chemistry, Mr. Waldman:

> Alf. Firm like a column,
> Amidst inferior animals Man stands,
> And walks upon his feet and not his hands.
> There are some scoffers say that the Gorilla, (*Glares defiantly* at Waldman.)
> Between the man and smaller monkeys fill a
> Long missing link—but this is humbug—rot!
> I, Alferd, say it.
> Wal. And I say it's not.[10]

Isaacs did not linger over the writing of the *Burlesque of Frankenstein*, which was completed soon after his arrival in Melbourne. Initially he hoped that it would appear at George Coppin's Theatre Royal during the 1863 Christmas season, but that plan was thwarted when he declined the financial offer of the theatre's lessee, Barry Sullivan. It was a decision that he swiftly regretted:

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[8] Isaacs, *Burlesque of Frankenstein*, in *Rhyme and Prose*, 114.
[9] Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health, and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 278. For further insight into Halford's views on evolution, see Jeanette Hoorn, ed., *Reframing Darwin: Evolution and Art in Australia* (Carlton, Victoria: Miegunyah Press, 2009).
[10] Isaacs, *Burlesque of Frankenstein*, in *Rhyme and Prose*, 101–102. The professors were not the only Melbourne citizens mentioned in the play. Doctor Louis Lawrence Smith was a Melbourne physician notorious for offering medical opinions by post. Isaacs has the Monster say, "Have I advised with L.L. Smith by letter?" Isaacs, *Burlesque of Frankenstein*, in *Rhyme and Prose*, 119.

> In refusing that gentleman's offer for my piece of twenty pounds (which sum I subsequently but too late consented to take), I was actuated by the consideration that for an original composition employing considerable time and brain-work the amount was inadequate, while Mr. Sullivan, from an opposite point of view, was doubtless justified in conceiving his offer sufficiently liberal, seeing that ... he could secure a piece for nine-pence, as good as, perhaps better than mine, and possessing the prestige of a London success and the name of a popular author.[11]

Eric Irvin in *Australian Melodrama: Eighty Years of Popular Theatre* has little sympathy for Isaacs' predicament: "the non-performance of the burlesque was due to the writer's stupidity (or cupidity) rather than, as he claims, the cheapness of overseas plays."[12] Disheartened, but still confident of the burlesque's worth, Isaacs temporarily suspended his search for a suitable venue.

Following this setback, his first production in Melbourne was not the major theatrical work that he had envisaged, but was instead a simple poem, "Send Them to Gaol! Subtitled "Lines suggested by Newspaper Police Reports", it was printed on a single leaf of paper dated "January 1st, 1864". Poverty and social injustice remained on Isaacs' mind, an empathy born of experience:

> 'Tis only a woman—forsaken—distressed,
> With three little children—a babe at her breast;
> She is faint!—she is hungry!—where shall she rest?
> Send her to Gaol!

[11] Isaacs, "A Burlesque, and its History," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 97–98. Isaacs' proposed production of *Frankenstein* was replaced by the imported substitute *Lalla Rookh; or, The Princess, the Peri, and the Troubadour* by William Brough. It opened at Melbourne's Theatre Royal on 26 December 1863.
[12] Eric Irvin, *Australian Melodrama: Eighty Years of Popular Theatre* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1981), 56.

What creature is this?—haggard, wasted, and wan,
With the manners of childhood, and form of a man,
An Idiot!—Bring hither Her Majesty's van—
Send him to Gaol!

'Tis a Child of the Streets—ragged! houseless! forlorn!
His feet are unshod and his hair is unshorn,
Allowed to go wild from the day he was born—
Send him to Gaol!

O! send them to gaol, 'tis the speediest plan,
The woman forsaken—poor child—blighted man,
And when they come out they may do—*what they can*;
SEND THEM TO GAOL![13]

The poem went unnoticed by Melbourne's major newspapers but was published unattributed in *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle* on 16 January 1864.[14] The following month it appeared in the South Australian dailies, the *Register* and the *Advertiser*, where only the latter identified Isaacs as its author.[15] "Send Them to Gaol!" next featured in Gawler's *Bunyip* in March 1865. Nott, who remained the editor of the paper, added an affectionate introduction: "We have broken through our established rule of not publishing anything but original matter, for the purpose of re-producing the following beautiful lines, by our old friend, and fellow-townsmen, Geo. Isaacs."[16] It was welcome recognition for the writer but it did not pay his bills.

One year after the completion of the *Burlesque of Frankenstein* and with the 1864 Christmas season fast approaching, Isaacs renewed his efforts to stage his play in Melbourne. He

[13] The State Library of Victoria holds an original copy of "Send Them to Gaol!"
[14] *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 16 January 1864, 2.
[15] *South Australian Register*, 18 February 1864, 3; *South Australian Advertiser*, 19 February 1864, 3.
[16] *The Bunyip*, 5 March 1864, 4.

approached the Haymarket Theatre's lessee William Hoskins, and his stage manager Henry Edwards, and was delighted when they offered him encouragement. However, Isaacs somehow undermined the opportunity: "I had the misfortune to unconsciously offend Lady Don (owing to a disagreement with her agent), and her ladyship's refusal to play in it—she *then* being a star in the ascendant—sealed its fate for that year."[17] He was bitterly disappointed and blamed his predicament not on his own actions, but on the "difficulties attendant on literary enterprise in the Australian colonies."[18] His determination to uphold a principle—he refused to work for a pittance and insisted on rights for colonial dramatists—thwarted his ambition. In reality, his small protest against the established colonial practice of staging cheap, but proven English plays in preference to untried colonial works, was inconsequential.

After praising Isaacs' burlesque in *Bell's Life*, a Melbourne theatre critic, "Oliver Surface" outlined a further difficulty facing colonial dramatists:

> The *esprit de corps* is very weak among them. Instead of making common cause for the welfare and elevation of their class, they—and the same may be said, with some honourable exceptions, of members of the press generally—are the first to detract from the merits of a brother writer, to depreciate his abilities, and even to assail his private character.[19]

Isaacs, by contrast, was supportive of the work of fellow writers and eager to advance their prospects.

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[17] Isaacs, "A Burlesque, and its History," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 98. "Lady Don", born Emily Eliza Saunders in London, was a successful actress renowned for her burlesque performances. She toured Australia twice during the 1860s.
[18] Isaacs, "A Burlesque, and its History," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 97.
[19] *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle*, 24 June 1865, 2. "Oliver Surface" is a character in Sheridan's play "A School for Scandal".

Despite the *Burlesque of Frankenstein*'s non-appearance, Isaacs did achieve theatrical success in Melbourne, thanks to his collaboration with a pair of talented English entertainers. George Tinkler Case and his wife Grace Egerton arrived in the city in August 1864, at the beginning of an extensive and prolonged world tour.[20] They commenced a season at the newly-decorated and rebuilt Polytechnic Hall in Bourke Street, and shortly afterwards, commissioned Isaacs to produce fresh sketches and character outlines for their variety act. One resulting play became Isaacs' first work on the Melbourne stage. The *Argus* advertised its appearance:

> Mr. and Mrs. George Case have great pleasure in announcing, that they have an entirely NEW ENTERTAINMENT, Written expressly for them by GEORGE ISAACS, Esq., Entitled, "OUR TRIP TO THE RHINE." Illustrating the varied and eccentric characters one finds in that oft-travelled romantic route. Together with New and Costly Dresses. New Songs, New Sketches and Rapid Changes, and New Scenery, (Embracing the exterior of an hotel at Bonn, on the Rhine, with a view of the Drachenfels, painted by Mr. England.)[21]

*Our Trip to the Rhine* premiered at the Polytechnic Hall on 21 November 1864.[22]

Isaacs' writing took full advantage of Grace Egerton's remarkable talents and animation. She was undoubtedly the drawcard of the duo, having previously enjoyed a solo career as an actress at Sadler's Wells Theatre and the Bijou Theatre in London. Since forming a

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[20] Egerton was born Elizabeth Grace Cruft in London in 1835. George Case scandalously divorced his first wife in 1859, then married Egerton in 1860. Her popularity in Australia was such that her name was bestowed upon, among other things, a gold reef, a mining company and a racehorse. Edmund Yates, a protégé of Dickens and another writer of sketches for the Cases, described her as a "pretty, and uncommonly sprightly and clever little actress, who ought to have done better things." Edmund Yates, *Edmund Yates: His Recollections and Experience* (London: R. Bentley & Son, 1884), vol. 1, 52. For a concise and interesting article on the Cases, see Robin Gill's "The Case of Grace and Her Favourite", *New Malden's Village Voice*, 11 June 2011, 9–12. Australian ABC radio broadcaster Melanie Sim presented an overview of the entertainer, "The Many Different Characters of Grace Egerton", on 29 April 2011. www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2011/04/28/3202507.htm

[21] *The Argus*, 18 November 1864, 8.

[22] Rival entertainments in Melbourne that evening illustrate the bias towards English dramatic works. They included Taylor's *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* and Morton's *A Regular Fix* at the Theatre Royal, and Lady Don in Jerrold's *Black-eyed Susan*, followed by Sheridan's *The Critic*, at the Royal Haymarket Theatre.

professional and a personal partnership with George Case, her fame had grown. She cheerfully caricatured the inhabitants of English society on stage, and her three-hour performances were filled with patriotic and popular songs, illusions (the "Protean cabinet" and the "Wizard of the East" being the most popular), quick changes and multiple (including male) impersonations. Her husband, an accomplished musician in his own right, played second fiddle to his wife, performing not only in sketches as required but also on the violin, piano and English concertina during interludes in the dramatic action.[23]

Although Melbourne's *Age* review of the play was encouraging, the critic from the *Argus* was not impressed by the premiere of *Our Trip to the Rhine*. He praised the actors' performances, but gave no accolades to the dramatist: "The outline, for it is little more, which Mr. Isaacs had sketched for Mr. and Mrs. Case, and which they fill up with the help of vocal and instrumental music, is of the slightest and most ordinary character, and affords little scope for effective display of any kind."[24] At just over an hour in length, *Our Trip* was considered rather brief, but it was never performed in isolation, being always accompanied by selections from the Case's wide range of entertainments. Its cast of more than a dozen eccentric characters, all played by Egerton or her husband, bore Isaacs' signature fanciful names. These included Araminta Jacintha Chowdler ("How pleasant it is to have plenty of lovers, and not care a button for any of them"), "Miss Weeps", the Scottish "Miss M'Durk" (who "danced a Highland fling to perfection"), the Frenchman "Count de Flambooze" and "Giulio Augustus Mugg".[25] Despite the newspaper's reservations, Melbourne's theatre-goers happily paid from one to three shillings to view *Our Trip to the Rhine* and its accompaniments.

[23] Prior to the tour, Case, a former student of the English concertina's inventor Charles Wheatstone, promoted, and for a time manufactured concertinas. He exhibited his instruments at London's Great Exhibition in 1851.
[24] *The Age*, 22 November 1864, 5; *The Argus*, 22 November 1864, 4.
[25] *The Argus*, 21 November 1864, 8; *The Age*, 22 November 1864, 5.

Isaacs received a welcome financial windfall during the run from a well-attended "complimentary benefit" performance held in his honour on 15 December 1864. The large audience was probably drawn more by Egerton's vivacity rather than Isaacs' skill with words.[26] *Our Trip to the Rhine* was not the only work by the writer to appear on the benefit night, for he had written a new sketch, *Matrimonial Episode in the Lives of Sir Everard and Lady Mary Flutterly* for the occasion. According to the *Argus*, its theme was "the old comedy one of jealousy, dramatically framed, and affording Mrs. Case more scope for her talent in [im]personation."[27] Both plays were repeated regularly over the following four weeks, until the actors' commitments elsewhere in the colony concluded the Melbourne season.

Satisfied with the popularity of Isaacs' writing, Egerton and Case added *Our Trip to the Rhine* and *Matrimonial Episode in the Lives of Sir Everard and Lady Mary Flutterly* to their repertoire.[28] Then, undeterred by the vagaries of travel, accommodation, halls and weather, they embarked on a remarkable four year marathon of Australia's cities and towns. Isaacs' plays featured frequently on their playbills, as they criss-crossed the country and briefly visited New Zealand.[29] From Perth to Sydney, and from Hobart to Rockhampton, and in numerous small towns in between, Isaacs' works were introduced to enthusiastic audiences. Such was the popularity of the entertainers that they revisited many locations twice or even three times. When, in March 1865, they reached White's Assembly Rooms at the Clarence Hotel in Adelaide, an advertisement promised that *Our Trip to the Rhine* was "Pronounced to be the most complete and successful of their Entertainments, remarkable for the elegance of the costumes and the extraordinary and rapid changes."[30] Isaacs received credit for the play

[26] The social prejudice then sometimes attached to actresses does not seem to have applied to Egerton, who, during her Melbourne season, performed before the Governor and his family several times.
[27] *The Argus*, 16 December 1864, 5.
[28] Neither play was ever published.
[29] *Evening Post* (Auckland), 29 November 1865, 3.
[30] *South Australian Advertiser*, 11 March 1865, 1. After its 1865 debut at White's Rooms, *Our Trip to the Rhine* would return to Adelaide in May 1866 and April 1867.

during its initial Melbourne run, but thereafter, in advertisements and reviews throughout Australia and overseas, his authorship of *Our Trip to the Rhine* was unacknowledged.[31]

With little income from his theatrical pieces, Isaacs turned to employment in a related field and became the theatrical agent and secretary to an American "tragedian" J.H. Allen, who had arrived in Melbourne in early 1865. Allen's appearances at the Theatre Royal did not impress an *Argus* critic: "At first it was thought that, despite a few imperfections, the actor had some notably good stuff in him, but experience proved Mr. Allen to be a good stock actor, and no more."[32] Soon after that lukewarm assessment, Allen left for a tour of the Victorian provinces, but his agent was unable to accompany him.

With scant income, debts and significant family-related expenses, Isaacs was again in serious financial difficulty. In a replay of the events that led to his first insolvency, he was assailed by his Melbourne creditors. They had supplied him with cash or essentials such as bread, milk, meat, coal and furniture, but now wished to be reimbursed. With no property and with his only assets—his clothes and furniture—valued at just five pounds, Isaacs was unable to escape the consequences of his poverty.[33] On 13 April 1865 he was arrested, then swiftly imprisoned behind the sombre bluestone walls of Her Majesty's Gaol, Melbourne. A newspaper notice publicised his plight: "George Isaacs, theatrical agent, of Fitzroy—causes of insolvency—family sickness, imprisonment for debt, pressure of creditors and want of employment. Liabilities 71 pounds, 1s. 7d, assets 5 pounds; Deficiency 66 pounds, 1s 7d."[34] What the "family sickness" entailed, other than Marion's latest pregnancy or Isaacs' propensity for asthma is unclear, but the misery surrounding the family's circumstances can

[31] *Our Trip to the Rhine*, with new scenery, reappeared at the Polytechnic Hall in Melbourne for a second time in March 1866. *The Argus*, 14 March 1866, 8.
[32] *The Argus*, 25 April 1865, Supplement, 1.
[33] Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 759/P000/73/8832, Insolvent's Schedule, List B; List D.
[34] *The Argus*, 20 April 1865, 6.

be imagined. The next act in this domestic tragedy occurred on 17 May 1865, when a newspaper advertisement advised that the first and only meeting regarding Isaacs' insolvency would be held "this day" at eleven o'clock, before the Chief Commissioner of Insolvent Estates.[35] Isaacs did not appear, nor did his creditors and the meeting closed. At noon however, he arrived at the court and stated that he had been unaware of the hearing. The Commissioner ordered that a note be taken of the fact, but as the date had also been advertised three weeks earlier, Isaacs had no valid excuse for his absence.[36] There, the insolvency trial ended and the prisoner was released. Marion, who had been in the latter stages of pregnancy throughout these grim proceedings, gave birth to Isaacs' eighth child, Christina Adelaide, at home at 52 Napier Street Fitzroy on 27 May 1865. Dr. Serrell's attendance at the confinement must have brought another unwelcome bill to the destitute family. Stoically, Marion listed Isaacs' occupation as "theatrical author" when she registered her newborn's arrival.

Unable to sustain himself in the thespian environment Isaacs turned to another possible source of revenue and released an anthology of his previous South Australian writing. He introduced the book by saying that his work was being republished, "in the not unpardonable expectation of extending the circle of my readers beyond that afforded by a small and widely scattered community."[37] The true impetus for the book's appearance was his dire need for cash. Prepared in haste, the "short book of his writings with a long title" was named *Rhyme and Prose; and, A Burlesque, and its History*.[38] It was published by Clarson, Shallard & Co. and was priced at five shillings.[39] With no patron and no favours to repay, Isaacs kept its dedication simple. It was "respectfully dedicated to those who buy and read it." The book's promotion was efficient, thanks to the publisher having offices in both Melbourne and

[35] *The Age*, 26 April 1865, 7.
[36] *The Argus*, 19 May 1865, Supplement 1; *The Age*, 26 April 1865, 7.
[37] Isaacs, *Rhyme and Prose*, v.
[38] Irvin, *Australian Melodrama*, 56.
[39] The publishing and printing firm of Clarson, Shallard & Co. was located at 72 Little Collins Street East, Melbourne.

Sydney. First advertised in the Melbourne press on 16 June 1865, it was promoted several days later in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.[40]

The author's name on the cover of *Rhyme and Prose* was not the expected "A. Pendragon" but was instead "George Isaacs". In choosing to publish under his own name, Isaacs created a separate literary identity for himself in Victoria. His pseudonym was not familiar to local readers in any case, as his South Australian works had not been distributed in the adjacent colony. Local reviewers were thus unfamiliar with his prose and poetry, and Isaacs anticipated their jibes. He addressed a humble plea to the "Critics of Victoria" in the book's preface:

> Appreciating fully the power you wield over the destinies of an obscure author, but believing the great majority of you are not disposed to abuse it, I submit this book cheerfully to your judgment, neither inviting undue favour, nor challenging hostility. I have, however, to prefer one request, that is, that you will please to pronounce your verdict on it solely according to its own merits, for while it would be an affectation in me to pretend to have *no* confidence in my own powers—nay, more, it would be to confess myself guilty of an impertinence in coming before the public—the admission of such confidence does not commit me to the extent of claiming literary prominence. Comparison, therefore, between me and any writer of acknowledged rank—necessarily tending to my prejudice—would consequently be as unjust as unprovoked.[41]

[40] *The Argus*, 16 June 1865, 3; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1865, 16.
[41] Isaacs, *Rhyme and Prose*, v–vi. The book's preface is dated "June, 1865", so no time was lost between the completion of the writing and the book's publication in mid-June. An indication of its hasty preparation, by either Isaacs or the publisher, is the incorrect pagination of some poems, whose actual page numbers do not correspond with those given in the "Contents" page.

The *Age* ignored his request for mercy: "We cannot say we admire the production. The prose is better than the poetry, but of the poetry the less said the better."[42] The *Geelong Advertiser* was kinder:

> Colonial authors deserving of the name are not too numerous, and when we meet with one it is well to give him a friendly recognition and offer him such encouragement as we may. A very creditable and indeed attractive little volume has just been published by Clarson and Shallard, entitled, "Rhyme and Prose, and a Burlesque and its History." The author is Mr George Isaacs, who is, I believe, well known in theatrical circles; indeed, we may almost gather as much from his preface to the Burlesque. Some of the more serious compositions give evidence of the genuine afflatus, and, although the pieces are unequal in merit, the whole volume will well repay a reading.[43]

The content of *Rhyme and Prose; and, A Burlesque, and its History* was neatly captured in its utilitarian title. Its embossed red covers enclosed a collection of twenty-five poems, most previously published in South Australia , plus the short stories "Dinners", "How We Fared When Hard-up in Paris", "Passages from an Inedited Romance" and "After Proof", which had all appeared in *Number One*.[44] "Send Them to Gaol!" was included in the collection. Having reached the realization that his burlesque was unlikely to be staged in Melbourne, Isaacs added its script to the book, preceded by a diatribe explaining its absence from the stage, and a description of the difficulties faced by colonial playwrights.[45] He remained optimistic about the play's future however, and, in a reversal of the usual sequence of events, cheekily

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[42] *The Age*, 19 June 1865, 5.
[43] *Geelong Advertiser*, 20 June 1865, 3.
[44] Poems in *Rhyme and Prose* that had previously been published in South Australia included "Glances—Backward", "Garibaldi", "My Meerschaum Pipe", "Viva L'Italia", "The Tooth of the Good St. Ambrose", "Life in Death", "Prison Reveries", "A Song for the New Year", "The Sword of Benevenuto Cellini", "The Owl and the Lark", "Manly Sports", "The Seer's Warning", "We All Would Do Better When We Grow Grey" and "The Myrtle". Some verses show slight modifications in wording and punctuation from their earlier forms.
[45] Eric Irvin comments on the unusual nature of Isaacs' protest: "But if comments on an Australian drama by critics or newspapermen were generally scant, comments by the playwrights themselves were even scarcer." Eric Irvin, "Early Nineteenth-Century Australian Drama: A Preliminary Investigation," *Southerly* 35.4 (1975): 369.

suggested that its future appearance in London would precipitate its eventual performance in Australia. Typically, Isaacs included a hint of his past refined personal associations:

> Perhaps one of the most distinguished burlesque writers, whom I will not permit myself to name here, but to whom this book will find its way, may, at my desire, and out of recognition of an old acquaintance, not disdain to correct its crudities by some touches of his elegant and facile pen, and so present it to a London audience, in order that it may hereafter attain in due course acceptance at a colonial theatre.[46]

No English support for Isaacs' *Burlesque of Frankenstein* was forthcoming and the work remained unperformed. However, as Stone notes, this failure resulted in a benefit for posterity. Had the play been produced, its text may not have been preserved in *Rhyme and Prose*.[47] Isaacs' burlesque remains of interest for its representative capture of the era's language and attitudes, and for its place in the *Frankenstein* genre. More importantly, the *Burlesque of Frankenstein* has special significance in a minor stream of Australia's literary development. *AustLit* states that it is "possibl[y] the earliest science fiction work written by an Australian resident."[48]

The renewed exposure given to Isaacs' poetry in *Rhyme and Prose* resulted in the poem "The Myrtle" undergoing a transformation. First published in *Number One*, then again in *Rhyme and Prose*, it now became the basis of a musical composition.[49] The *Argus* approved its new state: "Madame Stuttaford has just set a pleasing song, entitled "The Myrtle" by Mr. G. Isaacs

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[46] Isaacs, "A Burlesque, and its History," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 98. The unnamed burlesque writer referred to by Isaacs was almost certainly James Robinson Planché (1796–1880), Isaacs' friend, a fellow member of the British Archaeological Association and the author of three letters in the Scrapbook.
[47] Isaacs, *Frankenstein*, 30.
[48] "The Burlesque of Frankenstein; Or, The Man-Gorilla," *AustLit*, last modified 26 July 2012, www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/C246164
[49] Anon. [George Isaacs], "The Myrtle," *Number One* 1 (1861): 31; Isaacs, "The Myrtle," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 37.

to music, which will not do discredit to our rising school of Australian composers."[50] Stuttaford was a popular soprano and teacher who performed regularly in Melbourne and Adelaide. Whether she and Isaacs formed a financial partnership to produce the musical version of "The Myrtle" is unknown. Perhaps Madame merely appropriated the words. There was certainly no mention of Isaacs' contribution in the following press announcement:

> A pretty musical *brochure*, "The Myrtle" the manuscript of which was favourably noticed in the Argus a few weeks ago for the charming sweetness and simplicity of its composition, is now placed within easy reach of the music loving portion of the public at a very moderate price, having been lithographed in excellent style by Messrs. Fergus[s]on and Mitchell, and being procurable at all music sellers. The piece was dedicated by the composer Madame Stuttaford, to her pupils.[51]

Regrettably, no copies of Stuttaford's song adaptation of "The Myrtle" have survived.

*Rhyme and Prose* was the product of adversity, so it is not surprising that its previously unpublished poems were filled with regret and sadness. In "For the Passionate Dream of an Hour", Isaacs yearned for lost love. "We Shall Have a Damp Bed To-night, My Child" and its sequel "Magdalena" were, in subject matter, companion pieces to "Send Them to Gaol!" His gloomy "Death's Clearance" was a response to his imprisonment:

> How Death—the King glorious,
> With footstep victorious
> Carries repose to the mortal o'erwrought,
> Releases all debtors
> From poverty's fetters;

[50] *The Argus*, 13 July 1865, 4.
[51] *The Argus*, 10 August 1865, 5.

Clears the insolvent right out of the Court.[52]

Isaacs was unable to mask his bitterness. His long poem, "Victoria in Excelsis: A Satire", continued the theme of injustice and directly referenced his own plight: "The heinous crime of being very poor,/Which three months in a gaol is safe to cure."[53] Isaacs faced another jail term in Melbourne. At the Fitzroy Police Court in late July 1865, he was ordered to be incarcerated for a further twenty-four days because he had failed to comply with a court order.[54]

Isaacs' own life now became a drama. A profound change occurred in his personal circumstances, for he separated permanently from Marion and his children. Perhaps, unhappy with his whims, failures, translocations and serial insolvencies, Marion banished him from her life, although caring for her large brood alone in Melbourne must have been a sobering prospect. Perhaps Isaacs had grown tired of family commitments or he was fleeing from his Melbourne creditors. He may have decided to follow his client, J.H. Allen. Possibly he intended to reunite with his family when his financial pressures eased.[55] Whatever the cause of the couple's separation, the years of poverty and strife had taken their toll. Isaacs' despairing poem "A Love Dream", written during this tumultuous period, was pointedly placed on the opening page of *Rhyme and Prose*. If autobiographical, it suggests that Marion ended the union, to Isaacs' regret:

The wave still caresses the shore
Still whispers "For ever;"
But the maiden's voice repeats it no more,
May repeat it again—ah! never.

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[52] Isaacs, "Death's Clearance," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 53.
[53] Isaacs, "Victoria in Excelsis: A Satire," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 67.
[54] *The Age*, 25 July 1865, 4. At the end of July, Paser's, the "makers of superior billiard tables", sought Isaacs' whereabouts: "MR. GEORGE ISAACS, lately residing near Victoria-parade,—please call at Paser's, 196 Little Bourke-street." *The Argus*, 29 July 1865, 1.
[55] The following year, he would state in an Adelaide court that, "My family is in Melbourne. I have not contributed to their support since I have been here." Court of Insolvency, State Records of South Australia, GRG66/6/0/29/1772.

Oh! why are we not what we seem?
Is faith in the loved one a dream?
Were the words in response to my prayer,
From her I deemed spotless and fair,
But a fantasy written in air—
To linger a moment, and then to depart
For ever?
Was the hope of my life—the one hope of my heart—
To be realized never?
But to fade like a dream—
For ever?[56]

Almost every aspect of Isaacs' residence in Melbourne had been unsuccessful. His literary endeavours had brought little financial or social reward, he had suffered imprisonment and his family life had ended. Life must have seemed depressingly unfair. Considering his situation, his next move was unsurprising. He left Victoria and returned to Adelaide.

Isaacs' departure coincided with J.H. Allen's decision to leave Victoria and to perform before South Australian audiences. The two men left Melbourne on 23 August 1865 aboard the steamer *South Australian* and arrived in Port Adelaide two days later.[57] They disembarked in a colony gripped by a widespread drought. Continuing his employment as Allen's agent, Isaacs wasted no time in arranging a solo season of "Dramatic Interpretations" for Allen at White's Assembly Rooms, commencing on 30 August. He placed advertisements in the Adelaide papers and sold tickets to the show each morning from the Clarence Hotel.[58] According to the *Advertiser,* the hastily-arranged performance was unsuccessful:

[56] Isaacs, "A Love Dream," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 10.
[57] *South Australian Weekly Chronicle*, 26 August 1865, Supplement, 1. Isaacs' sailing date coincides with the end of the twenty-four day term of imprisonment given to "George Isaacs" of Fitzroy.
[58] *South Australian Advertiser*, 29 August 1865, 1.

> Mr. Allen undertook a most difficult task, and he exerted himself strenuously to accomplish it to the satisfaction of the audience, which we regret to say was extremely limited ... as a whole, the entertainment was exceedingly heavy, and lacked spirit terribly ... We are at a loss to understand why Mr. Allen concluded his interpretations with the scene between Dick Dashall and Mrs. Corbett. Surely he could have found something to interpret in the extensive range of English comedy more amusing and less repulsive than a drunken scene.[59]

Isaacs persevered with the actor. He brokered a performance for Allen at the Gawler Institute's Oddfellows Hall and then organized a return appearance for the actor in Adelaide. With a patron, the blessing of the Freemasons, musicians and an expanded program, Allen returned to White's Assembly Rooms on 18 September. On this occasion, thanks to Isaacs' efforts, he played before a large and "highly respectable" audience. The earlier offending drunken scene finale was replaced by a comic piece, the "History of Paddy's Wedding" and extended applause greeted the actor at the conclusion of the program. To Isaacs' relief and to Allen's gratification, the press reviews were excellent.[60]

Despite the success, financial concerns rapidly undermined the personal and business relationship between the pair. Isaacs appeared before Adelaide's Local Court on 25 October 1865, to answer a charge of failing to pay three pounds, eleven shillings, the cost of advertisements placed in the *Advertiser* and the *Chronicle* on Allen's behalf. He asserted that he was merely acting as an agent for Allen, and that therefore, he was not responsible for the debt. The judge disagreed and Isaacs lost the case.[61] Thereafter, the partnership between the men collapsed and the actor returned to Melbourne.

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[59] *South Australian Advertiser*, 31 August 1865, 2.
[60] *South Australian Advertiser*, 19 September 1865, 2.
[61] *South Australian Advertiser*, 26 October 1865, 3.

There was one bright moment for Isaacs amidst this stress. A flurry of excellent reviews of *Rhyme and Prose; and, A Burlesque, and its History* appeared in South Australian newspapers in September. The *Register* hailed the book as "an old friend in a new face" and praised Isaacs' initiative:

> For an author to provoke criticism a second time on the same material is rather courageous, but such is undoubtedly Mr. Isaacs' nature. He takes the world as it comes, and if, like Mahomet's mountain, it will sometimes not come to him, then he goes to it.[62]

The *Adelaide Express* commended Isaacs' poems as "really very pathetic, and well versified."[63] The *Chronicle* singled out "For the Passionate Dream of an Hour" for special praise.[64] But it is doubtful whether these reviews, and the anthology's availability in Adelaide's bookshops, brought much money to the impoverished writer.

Isaacs must have foreseen the legal consequences of his return to South Australia but he appears to have made no effort to conceal his reappearance. Local creditors were soon on his trail. On 14 September 1865, Isaacs' former clerk at the *Critic*, John Henry Sabine, issued an "information" against him at the Police Court in Port Adelaide, demanding fifteen pounds, three shillings in unpaid wages.[65] Isaacs, perhaps anticipating trouble, had already fled to Gawler, where he was seen at the Monster Fair on 7 November:

> it is well-known that the extraordinary success of the [Gawler] Institute is owing, in no small measure, to the abilities and untiring restless activity of a few lovers of the artistic and the intellectual. Among the foremost of these is the well-known

[62] *South Australian Register*, 6 September 1865, 2.
[63] *Adelaide Express*, 5 September 1865, 2.
[64] *South Australian Weekly Chronicle*, 9 September 1865, 2.
[65] *South Australian Advertiser*, 15 September 1865, 3.

> Pendragon, who left "The Athens of Australia" some time ago, but is now on a visit to the scene of his former labo[u]rs.[66]

The town remained a haven for Isaacs, but it could not protect him indefinitely. His creditors, thanks to the newspaper notice, were now aware of his whereabouts. Once again, he returned to Adelaide.

[66] *South Australian Advertiser*, 8 November 1865, 2.

# Chapter 10: *Not For Sale*, 1865–1869

*I am no partisan—I have no party—I desire no adherents but those who, emancipated from narrow local prejudices, see that the welfare of the State can only be soundly based on the prosperity of all its members.* George Isaacs, 1868[1]

Back in the city and free from family responsibilities, forty-year-old Isaacs struggled to re-establish himself. He lived modestly on about three pounds per week, lodged in city hotels and found intellectual and social stimulation at the South Australian Institute.[2] His creditors were quiet during the first months of 1866, perhaps hoping that as far as the repayment of debts was concerned, Isaacs in any type of employment was preferable to Isaacs in prison. His tenuous literary foothold in the city did not sustain his new bachelor existence and he looked for additional employment. But writing remained his passion, and over the next few years he explored every opportunity to keep his name before the South Australian public.

Isaacs was delighted to renew his connection with Grace Egerton and her husband when they returned to Adelaide in May 1866, for their second season at White's Assembly Rooms. More than a year had passed since the performers and Isaacs had parted in Melbourne, and now, in need of new dramatic material, they sought him out. He obliged, with sketches of the "Little German Girl" and with more material on "Lord Dundreary", an already popular character in their repertoire.[3] One of Egerton's many impersonations that season was of Isaacs' overenthusiastic barber "Jeremiah Brush", who had appeared in Melbourne as part of the ever-evolving *Odd People* sketch. Adelaide also saw repeats of *Matrimonial Episode in the Lives of Sir Everard and Lady May Flutterly* and *Our Trip to the Rhine*. The local press was again thrilled by Egerton's talents: "To those who wish to listen to exquisite music and a

[1] *Pasquin*, 15 February 1868, 47.
[2] Application Book for Subscribers to the South Australian Institute, State Records of South Australia, GRG 19/97/00000/1/1866.
[3] These characters are listed under the heading "Memo of characters ordered by G. Case, June 1866", in an unindexed note in Isaacs' handwriting in the Scrapbook.

heavenly voice, and to see perfect acting illumined with an arch humo[u]r, and tempered by delicacy and good taste, we would say go to White's Rooms and decide the Case for yourselves."[4] The entertainers were fond of Isaacs and thus were concerned when he became ill. George Case sent the following note:

> I heard with great regret that you were laid up. I enclose a small trifle for immediate use, as soon as you are well enough let me know, and I shall be very glad to profit by some more of your writings, in the meantime should you still remain invalided, let me know, and I will repeat the enclosed.[5]

Unfortunately the thoughtful gift, likely of an alcoholic nature, was of little benefit to Isaacs, who had contracted the life-threatening bacterial disease, typhoid. He was admitted to the Adelaide Hospital on 17 May 1866 with typical symptoms of fever, weakness and abdominal pain. The hospital's detailed admissions register records his occupation as a "newspaper editor", although there is no evidence that he was working in that capacity at that period.[6] Typhoid, spread primarily through infected food or water, claimed the lives of 216 South Australian colonists that year but Isaacs was spared.[7] Following sixteen days in hospital he was discharged, out of danger but quite debilitated. Reading, as always, provided a solace during his convalescence. Years earlier he had described its soothing effect: "In the inmost recesses of my heart I felt a reverential love for Scott, Burns, Dickens and others too of smaller note, whose Bosh and Bunkum had beguiled many a weary hour in sickness and solitude—had often brought sweet oblivion of past and present sorrows."[8] He was still

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[4] *South Australian Advertiser*, 3 May 1866, 2.
[5] George Case to George Isaacs, undated (but marked "Monday") unindexed letter in the Scrapbook.
[6] Royal Adelaide Hospital Register, State Records of South Australia, GRG78/49, entry 458/1866. Oddly, Isaacs' religion was marked as "P" (Protestant) on the register.
[7] *South Australian Register*, 2 April 1867, 2. In 1866, the peak months for typhoid deaths were from March to June, so the disease was prevalent when Isaacs contracted it.
[8] Anon. [George Isaacs], "After Proof," *Number One* 1 (1861): 47.

recuperating a month later when the Adelaide Town Hall opened with great fanfare. Unlike his Gawler friend Dr. George Nott, Isaacs did not receive an invitation to the celebration.

With a new career in mind, Isaacs moved to one of five recently built offices at Albert Chambers in the city. The two-storey stone and brick building at 5 King William Street was just around the corner from North Terrace.[9] Conveniently, it was adjacent to "The Corner"—the Gresham Hotel—which was now run by his genial friend "Professor" Robert Hall. Isaacs lodged there, at least until Hall's premature death in August 1866.[10] With the new office came an audacious new identity. Twice imprisoned for insolvency, deeply in debt (from past and recent activities) and with a demonstrated careless attitude towards personal bookkeeping, Isaacs now offered the citizens of Adelaide his services as an accountant.[11] He certainly had previous clerical and bookkeeping experience, courtesy of his stints working as a storekeeper and as a clerk. The work would bring him some income but not much satisfaction.

To encourage business, Isaacs placed advertisements in Adelaide's newspapers throughout July and August 1866: "TRADESMEN'S BOOKS MADE UP. Letters for the press revised, lectures written, advertisements and circulars drawn up, petitions prepared, &c., by George Isaacs, King William-street, within one door of Gresham Hotel."[12] He was both an accountant and a freelance writer for hire. The *Adelaide Express* drew further attention to his plea and wryly noted, "Amongst his other offers, Mr. Isaacs undertakes to revise letters intended for

[9] *South Australian Advertiser*, 2 June 1865, 1.
[10] Court records reveal that, at the time of Hall's death, Isaacs owed him four pounds four shillings for board and residence. Court of Insolvency, State Records of South Australia, GRG66/6/0/29/1772.
[11] Sequential Boothby's *Adelaide Almanac*s list "Isaacs. G. accountant" at the Albert Chambers address from 1868 until 1872, but advertisements such as "Tradesmen's Books Made Up" and court documents confirm that Isaacs operated as an accountant from 1866.
[12] *Adelaide Express*, 30 July 1866, 1.

publication in the press; an office for which there is, as we know by experience, abundant occasion."[13]

Concurrently, Isaacs initiated a scheme to raise funds from advertising. He prepared and released a twelve page story, titled *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures of a New Arrival in South Australia*. The booklet, edited by A. Pendragon and printed by Alfred Waddy in Leigh Street, promoted Adelaide's commercial enterprises in a novel manner. Isaacs wove their names and services through an amusing fictional narrative. Profit from the brochure's production derived solely from the one pound fee paid by each business owner to the author, for *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures* was not intended for sale; its cover clearly states that it was to be "Given away".

The lasting value of the work lies in its capture of contemporary Adelaide, for it is a comprehensive snapshot of the identities, shops and services available to the city's inhabitants in 1866. In Isaacs' plot, the newly-arrived protagonist "Augustus Fastman" spends a frenetic and rather surprising twenty-four hours accumulating the necessities of life, while experiencing all that the city has to offer. These activities occur under the tutelage of narrator A. Pendragon. Between stargazing, boot buying and hairdressing, the young man acquires items as diverse as household goods, a whip and a piano (that instrument bought on the advice of "Mr. Emslie Fraser, *Pianoforte Tuner* to HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR").[14] The men witness a performance of Lyster's Opera Company, play billiards, enjoy an excursion to "the Bay" and spend much time sampling the culinary and liquid delights of Adelaide's

[13] *Adelaide Express*, 30 July 1866, 2. Whether the final phrase refers to the large volume of letters received, or to their poor state of grammatical construction is unclear. Either way, it appears that there was a need for Isaacs' skills.

[14] A. Pendragon, ed., *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures of a New Arrival in South Australia* (Adelaide: Alfred Waddy, 1866), 8. Considering Isaacs' friendship with its publican, it is not surprising that the Gresham Hotel received top billing in the opening paragraph of *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures*.

hotels. While Fastman purchases cigars at Ernest Benda's shop, pipe fancier A. Pendragon supplies himself with some fine cut "Golden Isabella" tobacco.[15] When Fastman declares that his jewellery has been damaged during the voyage to Adelaide, jewellery connoisseur A. Pendragon advises him to visit Sawtell's, where his "*ring, too, which was a very elaborate piece of workmanship, could be repaired*." [Original in italics][16] The text abounds with gentle humour and playfulness, such as the following: "After enjoying a hearty repast, Smith suggested that we should introduce our friend to colonial wine, and whispering me, said he would stand treat if I would lend him a note. To say no more of that, as Smith himself seems inclined to do."[17] The author clearly enjoyed the booklet's creation but he was seeking more permanent work. He added a copy of his newspaper advertisement seeking employment to the final page of *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures*.

Isaacs practised his true craft as suitable opportunities arose. When Adelaide's Mayor William Townsend announced plans for an Asylum for the Blind, the South Australian Histrionic Society organized a charity concert in support of the cause. The event was held at the Victoria Theatre on 31 July 1866 and Mayor Townsend recited the evening's prologue. Soon afterwards, the *Bunyip* published the following poem which, it noted, was "written to precede the late amateur performances in Adelaide for the benefit of an asylum for the blind, they having been written by a former well-known inhabitant of Gawler, namely, Mr. George Isaacs":

> Not for ourselves we sought your presence here,
> Not from a self-conceit your voices claim;
> Sweet Charity has bidden us appear,
> To give our service in her holy name.

[15] Pendragon, *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures*, 10.
[16] Pendragon, *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures*, 7.
[17] Pendragon, *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures*, 5.

The Blind, alas! From such fair scene forbidden
  Appear to us through her, and not in vain;
From them the pageantry of earth is hidden,
  But not the sympathy that lightens pain.

We are no adepts in the noble art
  That adds fresh lustre to the poet's page,
And to the lifeless written words impart
  The life and likeness of a bygone age.

But humble aspirants we do our best,
  For that alone your plaudits may be given;
And so conclude—At worst be it confest
  That you and we have both in good cause striven.[18]

On 6 October 1866, an advertisement in the *Register* announced the publication of George Isaacs' *Travels Round the World, Commencing from Government House*. At a cost of only threepence, the publication may have been a satirical pamphlet, but the words suggest that Isaacs was up to mischief, for they read:

CONTENTS:—Stage First—Of Pretty Cockey—Of Senators. Stage Second—Of Newspaper Men—Of Dramatic and Other Artists. Stage Third—Of the Athens of

[18] *The Bunyip*, 11 August 1866, 3. Intriguingly, other press notices suggest that this was not the poem recited by Townsend at the concert. Instead, verses that begin, "A Blind Asylum! Is there one who feels/No kindly sorrow at the mute appeals" are identified in the *Register* as the actual prologue. They did not come from Isaacs' pen. *South Australian Register*, 1 August 1866, 2. The *Southern Argus* identifies John Howard Clark as the author of the *Register*'s version. Clark's poem, it dryly notes, is "a really admirable conglomeration of Shakspeare [sic], Jane Taylor, Byron, Pope, Tom Hood, Mrs. Hemans, Dryden, and a few other English bards and rhymesters. Not that you recognized absolute quotations, but something approaching to them." *Southern Argus*, 4 August 1866, 3. Perhaps Isaacs' poem was rejected by the Mayor or was recited at another event in aid of the same cause, considering the *Bunyip*'s reference to "amateur performances".

South Australia—Of the Open Humbug Society—Of the Alligator and the Bunyip. Stage Fourth—Of Policemen—Of Detectives—Of Highwaymen.[19]

There is no further evidence for the existence of *Travels Round the World*.[20]

Isaacs enjoyed the local music scene, despite the fact that, according to the *Adelaide Observer*, the quality of music in the city left much to be desired.[21] The standard of musicianship improved with the return to Adelaide of the internationally-recognized musician and conductor, George Loder. In late 1866, Isaacs and Loder arranged a complex musical lecture, and Isaacs prepared its printed program.[22] Loder presented the "Origin, Rise and Progress of British Song" on 18 December at the South Australian Institute's quarterly soirée at the new Adelaide Town Hall. The evening was interspersed with multiple musical illustrations performed by the cream of Adelaide's musicians, including Loder's wife Emma. From all accounts, the audience delighted in the patriotic fare, which ranged from Anglo-Saxon songs to the music for Morris dances.[23]

Isaacs was unavoidably absent from George Loder's lecture, for in the preceding week he had been arrested for insolvency for a third time. Again, he was imprisoned in the Adelaide Gaol, the inevitable result of his failure to repay three hundred and twelve pounds, two shillings and

[19] *South Australian Register*, 6 October 1866, 1.
[20] An even more puzzling advertisement appeared the following year: "I AM TOO STUPID to be identified with any Adelaide newspaper. George Isaacs." *South Australian Advertiser*, 10 August 1867, 1. Further identical advertisements followed in the *Express and Telegraph* and the *South Australian Register*. Whether this was an insult submitted by a rival or another pithy Isaacs' riposte to a controversy is unclear. As in the first example, there are no further references to the matter in Adelaide newspapers. Always comfortable in print, Isaacs had no qualms when it came to employing advertising space to disseminate his views.
[21] *Adelaide Observer*, 8 December 1866, Supplement 1.
[22] Loder was a very busy man. In one of several notes that he addressed to Isaacs, he complained, "Monday I am teaching all day long God help me!" George Loder to George Isaacs, undated and unindexed letter in the Scrapbook.
[23] A detailed, handwritten synopsis of the first part of George Loder's lecture is found in an unindexed entry in Isaacs' Scrapbook. Traditional songs presented that evening included "Summer is a Coming in", "The Valiant Roland", "There Were Three Ravens", "Desdemona's Song", "Greensleeves" and "Barbara Allen".

sixpence.[24] Court papers show that in the preceding years he had purchased, but not paid for tobacco, medical attendance, drugs, boots, clothing and lodging. He had rented furniture and bought stationery, used printing services and purchased wood for the fire in his office—all on credit. Some debts had been incurred prior to his flight to Melbourne. A recent creditor was poor Dan, an errand boy listed in court papers without surname or address, who was owed one pound six shillings in wages.

On the opposite side of the ledger Isaacs claimed that nine men owed him money for commissions, letter writing and the drawing up of an indenture. Three businessmen had not settled their accounts in relation to *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures of a New Arrival in South Australia*. Mr. C.S. Poole had misplaced Isaacs' copy of the *London Satirist* and been billed one pound in consequence. As these debts amounted to only fourteen pounds they had little impact on his predicament. The writer had received some income since returning to Adelaide, earning forty-five pounds in commissions between October 1865 and July 1866, and then sixty-nine pounds (from advertising pamphlets) and forty-six pounds (from commissions) from that time until his arrest. But no money remained. "George Isaacs Accountant" was immediately declared *in forma pauperis* by the court, meaning that any resulting legal fees were waived.

The impoverished prisoner was ordered to appear at the Insolvent Court House in Adelaide on Christmas Eve 1866 to disclose his estates and to meet with his creditors, but he was unable to attend due to illness. Subsequent adjournments of his case stretched over several weeks. On 21 January, his appearance was further postponed, "owing to the insolvent being unable, in

[24] The details of Isaacs' 1866 insolvency case can be found in the records of the Court of Insolvency, State Records of South Australia, GRG66/6/0/29/1772.

consequence of bad eyes, from attending."[25] On 28 January 1867, the matter was adjourned for a further three weeks because Isaacs had not submitted his financial documents to the court and he remained "too ill to attend."[26] The insolvency proceedings came to a close on 18 February when he was granted a second-class certificate, without suspension.[27] His only meagre possessions at the time of the insolvency were listed thus: "Water bottle, Jug, Toilet Dish, Blacking Brushes, Chair, Table, Trunk, Coffee Pot, 2 Cups and saucers, Pce of Damask, Broom, 2 glasses, Knife & fork."[28] Officially, the cause of Isaacs' insolvency was attributed to "the income from his business being insufficient to meet his necessary expenses."[29] The pattern of his life did not change markedly following his release from prison, and he persisted with both accountancy and literary pursuits. Realistically, there were few other options available to him.

At the beginning of 1867, Eustace Reveley Mitford founded a new South Australian weekly paper, *Pasquin*. He was a kindred spirit to Isaacs and had earlier supported his friend with contributions to the *Critic*. Depasquale notes that Isaacs composed articles for *Pasquin* and certainly some anonymous articles and poems appear to be written in his style, though Isaacs' name appears only occasionally in the journal's pages.[30] One signed example of his writing in *Pasquin* is the article "On the Drama of 'Punch'", which examines the relevance of the traditional Punch and Judy show.[31] A revealing "Letter to the Editor" from Isaacs suggests that his recent insolvency was causing him ongoing strife:

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[25] *South Australian Advertiser*, 22 January 1867, 3.
[26] *South Australian Advertiser*, 29 January 1867, 2. Whatever Isaacs' ailments, the documents associated with the trial show that Isaacs was suffering from a poor memory. He stated that "I think I went to Melbourne in 1862", but it was in late 1863 that he travelled there. Similarly, he said, "I returned from Melbourne in Oct 1865" when in fact he returned to Adelaide in late August 1865. Court of Insolvency, State Records of South Australia, GRG66/6/0/29/1772.
[27] *South Australian Advertiser*, 19 February 1867, 2.
[28] Court of Insolvency, State Records of South Australia, GRG66/6/0/29/1772.
[29] *South Australian Register*, 19 February 1867, 3.
[30] Depasquale, 31. For example, an anonymous article "The Religion of Gawler Town" bears all the hallmarks of Isaacs' writing, especially with its references to art works in Bruges. *Pasquin*, 8 February 1868, 34.
[31] *Pasquin*, 9 January 1869, 13–14.

> There appears to be a "vicious circle," which has its origin in the Court of Insolvency, and extends its orbit so as to include certain legal offices in King William Street, and money-lenders elsewhere. The pernicious effect of this rotatory arrangement upon those whose misfortunes bring them within the mischievous sphere, I propose to make known to the public if you have no objection.[32]

Not surprisingly, Isaacs had strong opinions on South Australian insolvency laws. Although he was encouraged by Mitford to submit further articles on the subject, no trace of these has been found in *Pasquin* under Isaacs' name, or under that of his pseudonym.[33] *Pasquin* does, however, contain an advertisement for a new Isaacs' publication. To raise funds, he revived the adventures of the hyperactive Mr. Fastman. Five thousand free copies of the sequel, *Mr. Fastman on his Legs Again* were offered to agents for distribution.[34]

In the aftermath of the insolvency, Grace Egerton and George Case's third visit to Adelaide, in April 1867, proved a welcome distraction for the writer whose dream of achieving success as a playwright had not diminished. The Cases had presented a new entertainment, *The Lost Party, or The House-Warming—Too Warm to be Pleasant* in Sydney in September 1866.[35] No author was mentioned in the advertisements for that production, but when the play reached Adelaide, its creator, Isaacs, was revealed by the *Advertiser*.[36] As with *Our Trip to the Rhine,* which also featured that season, the loose plot of *The Lost Party* suited Egerton's

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[32] *Pasquin*, 27 April 1867, 6.
[33] *Pasquin* does contain a series of articles on insolvency after this date by a contributor writing under the initials "J.H.". When Isaacs died, one obituary mentioned that "he wrote some clever papers about debt and debtors ... for the *Observer*." *South Australian Register*, 15 February 1876, 5. Several sober, anonymous articles on the history of "Insolvency Codes" appeared in that paper during August and September 1868 and these may have been Isaacs' work. *Adelaide Observer*, 15 August 1868, 13; *Adelaide Observer,* 29 August 1868, 4; *Adelaide Observer*, 12 September 1868, 13.
[34] *Pasquin*, 16 March 1867, 8. The advertisement states that Isaacs' booklet will be available "in a day or two." No copies of this sequel have been located.
[35] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September 1866, 8.
[36] *South Australian Advertiser*, 25 April 1867, 2. Apparently, in public, Isaacs did not seek prominence as a dramatist. Eustace Reveley Mitford remarks that, "It is only to a few private friends that he has avowed the authorship [of the plays]." *Pasquin*, 27 April 1867, 7.

facility with impersonations. A theatre reviewer in Hobart provided an overview of the new play:

> this is supposed to form a romantic episode in the life of Mr. George Case. Having gained his wife ... he duly "settles down," and Mrs. Case suggests the propriety of their beginning life with a housewarming, and coaxes her husband into giving a party, which he consents to do on the understanding that he is not to be troubled. She undertakes all preliminary arrangements, and while Mr. Case is enjoying a quiet morning at home, he becomes the subject of attack by a series of queer characters (represented by Mrs. Case) who are connected with, or seeking appointments in connection with the aforesaid party.[37]

The characters "Mrs. Major Buster", "Sprouts" the greengrocer, "Mrs. Siddons Graves", "John Mangles", "Trubbles" and "Miss Polyphemia Scroggins" combine to effectively scuttle Egerton's plans. The Cases were pleased with the sketch and, as they had with Isaacs' previous commissions, added it to their range of entertainments.[38]

The success of his collaboration with the Cases encouraged Isaacs to risk another production independent of their involvement. He wrote a new farce, *Our Uncle*, which had its first and only performance at the Victoria Theatre in Adelaide on 7 June 1867. Sandwiched between the longer plays *The Poor Gentleman* and *Cool as a Cucumber*, the new sketch was enjoyed by a "large and brilliant assembly" that included the Mayor of Adelaide, Henry R. Fuller, the Chief Secretary, Henry Ayres and the Colonel Commandant.[39] The cast of four featured Mr. Hoskins (in his benefit performance for the season), Mr. Charles Young, Miss Arnot and Mr. Musgrave. Further performances of *Our Uncle* were ruled out because Hoskins, who played

[37] *The Mercury* (Hobart), 28 October 1867, 2.
[38] When Isaacs' play was revised by Edmund Yates in 1874, the title was curtailed to *The Housewarming: (Too Warm to be Pleasant)*.
[39] *Express and Telegraph*, 8 June 1867, 2.

the principal character of "Fluke"— "a lawyer more troubled with creditors than with clients"— was due to leave Adelaide.[40] The reviews were favourable, with the *Register* noting that the play's chief merit "lay in the dialogue, which was racy, and abounded in local allusions."[41] Amidst the applause, Isaacs was called to the stage, but shyness or modesty intervened and he did not appear.

The *Advertiser* summed up the farce's typically implausible plot for its readers:

> Fluke, an extortionate agent, with a clerk who appears to belong, or to fancy he belongs, to the legal profession, were represented respectively by Mr. Hoskins and Mr. Chas. Young. Bloater, a money-lender who bolted from Liverpool 20 years ago, turns out to be the uncle of Miss Honeydew, whom he had been pursuing with the terrors of the law. Having robbed her mother, he is obliged to return the money to the daughter, who marries Fluke ... the final scene, where all embraced and adhered to each other in caterpillar fashion was decidedly effective.[42]

Not everyone in the audience was impressed by such shenanigans. Several months later when news of the performance reached England, the Adelaide correspondent of the London paper *The Era* informed his readers that the performance of *Our Uncle* in Adelaide had been "a miserable failure."[43] How galling for Isaacs, if he indeed became aware of the newspaper's comments, to think that his family and friends in England may have read that damning criticism, and been unaware of the play's generally positive reception in Adelaide.

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[40] *South Australian Register*, 8 June 1867, 2. Isaacs was already acquainted with Hoskins. He had approached the actor in Melbourne regarding the production of the *Burlesque of Frankenstein*.
[41] *South Australian Register*, 8 June 1867, 2. The *Register*'s review includes a particularly detailed account of the plot of *Our Uncle*.
[42] *South Australian Advertiser*, 8 June 1867, 2.
[43] *The Era*, 25 August 1867, 10.

There was great excitement later in the year when, on 31 October 1867, the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Alfred, arrived in the colony for a three week tour. Gawler was honoured by a brief royal visit. The *Register* half expected an untoward reaction from the town's more radical inhabitants and its reporter expressed relief that "Happily, nothing was heard of the celebrated "Humbug Society," with its "Archflam," "Bouncible Bam," or "Surprising Sham".[44] Society members, and also Isaacs may have been critical of colonial government, but like most of South Australia's citizens they were loyal to the British royal family.

In the New Year of 1868, Isaacs decided that his principles deserved wider exposure. Following a long apprenticeship in vigorous political commentary, he made a bid for public office and stood for the seat of Barossa in the South Australian parliamentary elections. Poor health and little money had probably discouraged an earlier attempt. From the outset of Isaacs' campaign, most of South Australia's press was unsupportive of his candidacy. Even the once friendly *Bunyip* attacked its joint founder, though it recognized his enthusiasm:

> We cannot trace throughout the address any comprehensive scheme of reform; "Isaacs and principle" is the burden of the lay, and as we labor under the misfortune of not being able to see Mr. Isaacs through his own spectacles, we are scarcely so convinced as he appears to be, that his advent on the Parliamentary stage would be the precursor of such great and signal blessings to the colony at large. However, let the principles be what they will, Mr. Isaacs is very much in love with them himself, so much so he tells us, that having once adopted one, he will "Never accept any compromise of it."[45]

[44] *South Australian Register,* 7 November 1867, 3. The same article notes that the only discordant note of the visit occurred when Sunday school children sang two verses of "The Song of Australia"—"in a manner which might have been improved."
[45] *The Bunyip,* 25 January 1868, 3.

The article's negative tone was a blunt attack on Isaacs' apparently vague political ambitions. It concluded that his "lofty views" were the "baseless fabric of a dream."[46]

Mitford's *Pasquin* printed a good-natured assessment of Isaacs' ambition, though the article hints at the idiosyncratic nature of the candidate's proposed reforms. According to the journal, Isaacs' policy aimed to:

> root out land-jobbing, to cease the accumulation of revenue by the wholesale sacrifice of public property. It proposes to let us live upon the interest instead of the principal of our fortune—(not altogether a bad idea!) Mr. Isaacs thinks the farmers could better tide over a few bad seasons if they gave less money for the land that produces diseased wheat; and he thinks people who have no security to offer, and are bound to practice [sic] economy, ought not to borrow money, or incur debt in any shape. Where Mr. Isaacs acquired his principles of political economy is a mystery. Certainly not in the academic porticos of classical Australia. If Pendragon is fairly supported, North-terrace will come to unutterable grief, and the country have reason to rejoice in the shindy.[47]

Isaacs was an idealist who envisaged a fairer society devoid of corruption, but the pragmatists about him had no confidence in his schemes. His fierce independence, while it accorded with his principles, did not permit the formation of political or financial alliances that may have eased his election.

By mid-February 1868 he remained unopposed, as many likely gentlemen had declined to run. Indeed, public apathy gripped the Barossa, especially in Lyndoch where Isaacs had not

[46] *The Bunyip*, 25 January 1868, 3.
[47] *Pasquin*, 25 January 1868, 21.

been seen since his "Ancient Superstitions" lecture in 1862. He was not keen on addressing electors directly, causing the town's *Register* correspondent to dismiss his candidacy as "Hobson's choice".[48] Wounded by newspaper attacks, Isaacs now kept a low profile: "the press ignoring him, probably on account of his ignoring the press."[49] The *Register* crowed, "Has Barossa, for instance, declined to accept Isaacs' sacrifice on the altar of his country?"[50] After various machinations, Philip Santo (the Commissioner of Public Works), Richard Chaffey Baker (whose father was a prominent member of the Legislative Council) and Joseph Skelton (a businessman) joined the race.[51] For unknown reasons, Isaacs suddenly withdrew his candidature shortly before the election. Lack of electoral and financial support likely influenced his decision. Baker and Santo won the seats. In future, Isaacs would confine his attempts to influence public policy to the written word.[52]

Ever creative, the writer returned to prose in mid-1868 with the tale, "How Tom Pallet Laid the Ghosts". The mild ghost story, with its predictable storyline, simple plot and distinctly English setting, appeared in the *Adelaide Observer*. "Tom Pallet", an organ repairer with a knack for voicing pipes, proves that the ghostly sounds emanating from a room in a supposedly haunted manor house, do not come from an unhappy spirit, but in fact derive from concealed, long-forgotten organ pipes. Isaacs, through his protagonist, refutes spiritualism in favour of reason: "And so you believe in ghosts in this part of the country," said the traveller [Tom Pallet]; "in this enlightened age you believe in ghosts. Bah!"[53]

[48] *South Australian Register*, 29 February 1868, 3.
[49] *Southern Argus*, 7 March 1868, 2.
[50] *South Australian Register*, 23 March 1868, 2.
[51] *South Australian Advertiser*, 1 April 1868, 2.
[52] Political tensions remained high after the election. When a disgruntled gentleman, Henry Alford, and a politician, Daniel Fisher (Member for East Torrens) clashed in a brawl at the Globe Hotel, Isaacs, who was known to both men, attempted (with George Massey Allen, now editor of the *Satirist*) to broker a truce. He was unsuccessful and the case ended in court. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 12 May 1868, 3.
[53] *Adelaide Observer*, 13 June 1868, 10.

Isaacs' situation became more stable over the following year. There were no personal or legal dramas, no political campaigns and no hints in the press that he was embroiled in any difficulties.[54] He retained an interest in Gawler and did not forget its Institute, donating a rare Mantis Crab specimen to the museum's collection late in the year.[55] A sign that life was more congenial for him was the appearance of a slim, red-covered book in July 1869. Its title was *Not For Sale; A Selection of Imaginative Pieces* and its author was George Isaacs.[56] Published by Sims & Elliott of the City Steam Press in Gawler Place, Adelaide, and not advertised in the press, *Not For Sale* was available only through a "Subscriber's Edition".[57] Ostensibly, the title referred to the method of the book's availability. The little publication, "so greatly assisted by your interest in its favour", was humbly dedicated to fellow scribe and artist, George Hamilton, the Commissioner of Police.[58]

In contrast to the often impassioned themes in *Rhyme and Prose,* a book that was written under difficult circumstances, *Not For Sale* is a far gentler anthology. Isaacs was its sole author and most of its contents had not been previously published.[59] Graham Stone describes it as "a typical 19th century miscellany, or mishmash if you prefer", but contemporary reviews were complimentary and the *Advertiser* thought it "exceedingly well written."[60] *Not For Sale* contains three short stories, each set in the past in Europe and each narrated in the first person. Isaacs was again in a nostalgic mood. "A Tale of Mystery and Mesmerism" is a light-hearted romance with a twist, "The House of the Four Robbers" explains the secret of an old

[54] Isaacs was mentioned in relation to a court case in October 1869, while he was lodging at the Terminus Hotel, Adelaide. The landlord was charged with keeping his public house open during unlawful hours, and Isaacs was a witness in his defence. *South Australian Register*, 23 October 1869, 3.
[55] *South Australian Advertiser*, 6 November 1869, 2.
[56] George Isaacs, *Not For Sale; A Selection of Imaginative Pieces* (Adelaide: Sims & Elliott, 1869).
[57] This prompted the *Kapunda Herald and Northern Intelligencer* to suggest that its well-written contents merited a change of title from "Not For Sale" to "For Sale". *Kapunda Herald and Northern Intelligencer*, 23 July 1869, 3.
[58] George Isaacs, *Not For Sale*, 3. Hamilton's long poem, "Pscycos and Phrenia", had been anonymously published in Adelaide the previous year.
[59] "The House of the Four Robbers" had been previously published. *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 29 August 1868, 3.
[60] Stone, "George Isaacs," 86; *South Australian Advertiser*, 5 July 1869, 2.

Sardinian house, and the previously-mentioned "Without a Passport" recounts Isaacs' difficulties in southern France during the 1848 revolution. *Not For Sale* also includes nine new poems, six of which have a love theme; "To ____", "Laura", "To Grace", "Someone's Nigh", "The Orange Flower" and "Dora". "From the Parlour Operatta [sic] of 'The Enraged Musician'", subtitled "Music by Mr. Samuel Needham", was also included in the collection.[61]

*Pasquin*'s long review of *Not For Sale* comprehensively sums up not only the book but also its author:

> To whom nature has denied imagination, it is not given to criticize the efforts of fancy or the ingenious refinements of a mind devoted to poetry ... Our author's book clearly shows by the tone of the sketches and lyrics that his soul is one mass of poetry and poetical expression. There is a vein of melancholy and irony combined running through the leaves, which leads to the conviction that, born under more fortunate auspices, the writer might have shone ... More favoured by circumstances, however, we rejoice that he has escaped the sad fate of that useful, but suffering race. He deals in woman worship, and sacrifices freely to bright eyes, coral lips, and "the nectar I alone may sip."[62]

The reason for the surfeit of romantic verse in *Not For Sale* was revealed on 18 November 1869, when George Samuel Isaacs, journalist, forty-five, wed Eliza Rice aged twenty-five, at Adelaide's Anglican Saint Luke's Church."[63] There are two surprises on the wedding

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[61] Samuel Needham, formerly a pupil of George Loder, was a young musician then making his mark in Adelaide as a pianist and conductor. It is unclear whether Isaacs actually wrote a "Parlour Operatta". More likely, the poem and title are another example of the writer's comments on a topical situation.

[62] *Pasquin*, 17 July 1869, 230. This was one of the last reviews written by Eustace Reveley Mitford, who died from the complications of a cold on 24 October 1869, aged 58 years.

[63] Adelaide Hospital records suggest that the Devon-born Eliza (father John Rice) had been in the colony for about ten years at the time of her marriage and that she had arrived on the ship *Coonatto*. Royal Adelaide Hospital Register, State Records of South Australia, GRG78/49, entry 455/1871. Although Isaacs gave his age as

certificate. First, the groom gave his status as a bachelor, suggesting that either he was never formally married to Marion, or that, in a period of rare divorce, bigamy was of no concern to him. Propriety was never high on Isaacs' priorities. Second, he declared that he was an Anglican, perhaps to please his bride or to permit their union in the Church of England. The couple's new status was announced in the *Register*.[64]

The Prelude to *Not For Sale*, the coyly-captioned poem "To ____", celebrates Isaacs' new love:

> As, in the days of old, the devotee
> Adored one goddess under various guise,
> So, pictured thou herein thyself may see,
> Under each naming evermore the same—
> "Dora" and "Grace" are but the portrait's frame.
> Still from the canvas speak thine azure eyes,
> Still o'er thy stately neck and shoulders fair
> Flows the rich wealth of hyacinthine hair.
> Each perfect charm in one harmonious whole,
> Clasped by such sweetness as is thine alone;
> The halo of a pure and guileless soul,
> Circling thee like a stainless vestal zone.[65]

He was smitten and Eliza was his muse.

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forty-five at his wedding, he would not reach that age for several weeks. Marriage Certificate of George Samuel Isaacs and Eliza Rice, 18 November 1869, Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Office, Adelaide, reg. no. 317.

[64] *South Australian Register*, 20 November 1869, 2.

[65] Isaacs, "To ____," in *Not For Sale*, 4.

# Chapter 11: Final Years in Adelaide, 1870–1876

*I have no confidence in anybody. Nobody has any confidence in me, and I have no confidence in myself.* George Isaacs, 1870[1]

Isaacs' new-found happiness with Eliza coincided with an invigoration of his writing life. His ambition to return to a newspaper editorial role had lain dormant, subdued by his poverty, since the days of the *Critic*. He sought a new outlet for his opinions and found it in the colony's six hundred publicans, or "licensed victuallers". Isaacs was confident that he could address their concerns with a weekly newspaper. He planned to unite the geographically scattered publicans and to rally them to fight the more unpopular clauses in a Licensed Victuallers' Bill, then before Parliament.[2] When his threepenny weekly, the *Licensed Victualler* first appeared on 27 November 1869, the editor's name on the masthead was the resurrected and now abbreviated "Pendragon". Isaacs was soon aware of an added incentive for the project to succeed. Eliza became pregnant in the first weeks of their marriage.

From its outset, in tone and subject matter, the *Licensed Victualler* resembled the satirical *Critic* rather than a staid trade journal. It opened, appropriately, given what the paper would contain, with a two page article on defamation law, then continued with more predictable articles on liquor regulations, the slow progress of the proposed Bill, the unjust treatment of the inebriated, the running of a public house and the derivation of the word "grog". But its editor had a wider agenda. In a familiar Pendragon tone but rather violent language, he announced that the paper aimed:

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[1] *Licensed Victualler*, 29 January 1870, 5.

[2] Isaacs stated that, if the Act passed, "Each publican will have to devote one-third of his life to reading the Act, one-third to watching policemen, and one-third in controversy with a magistrate. If any life is left in the publican after that, his Trustees and the Insolvent Court may make the most of it." *Licensed Victualler*, 27 November 1869, 4.

> to ridicule, pretension—to hold up to scorn, cant and humbug—to denounce abuse and jobbery, and to seize with an unflinching hand the public thief and oppressor, however he may deem himself protected by the bristles of the law, and to gibbet him as an example to evil doers in all times to come.[3]

Such objectives were reinforced by the paper's grandiose motto, a familiar Isaacs' device that quoted Francis Bacon: "Magnanimity consisteth in contempt of peril, in contempt of profit, and in meriting of the times wherein one liveth."[4] It is an appropriate motto for Isaacs, but its relevance to those readers who sold food and drink to the colonists is rather vague.

Each eight page edition of the *Licensed Victualler*, which was printed at Sims and Elliott's City Steam Press in Gawler Place, once more addressed Isaacs' main concerns. He railed against corrupt politicians and unfair laws. He criticised the *Register* and the *Advertiser* for their superficial articles, dominated by reports of "tea meeting[s], bazaars, good young men's associations, lectures, and the various other sources of bewilderment and beguilement presented by sanctimonious scavengers to their silly supporters."[5] Readers were treated to humorous articles, for example, on the failings of the rival colony of Victoria, concert reviews, and tirades against itinerant preachers, an Isaacs' bugbear since the days of the *Queen of the South*. The editor encouraged the submission of works by colonial authors: "We are inclined to welcome all aspirants for literary honours, because even supposing their achievements are not equal to their aims the very effort to distinguish themselves is praiseworthy."[6] The paper's references to Adelaide were uniformly uncomplimentary and dwelt on the city's lack of lighting, drainage and other amenities. Isaacs was no doubt the

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[3] *Licensed Victualler*, 27 November 1869, 4.
[4] Francis Bacon wrote, "Magnanimity no doubt consisteth in contempt of peril, in contempt of profit, and in the meriting of the times wherein one liveth." Francis Bacon, "Mr. Bacon's Discourse: In the Praise of His Sovereign," in *The Works of Francis Bacon* (London: J. Crowder and E. Hemsted, 1803), Vol. 3, 22.
[5] *Licensed Victualler*, 8 January 1870, 3.
[6] *Licensed Victualler*, 27 November 1869, 6. This remark was sparked by the arrival of *Midnight Musings*, a locally-written anthology of poems. James Anderson, *Midnight Musings: Poems* (Adelaide: Platts, 1869).

author of most of the "Letters to the Editor", including several from the aptly-named correspondent "John Bung", whose surname derived from the stopper used to close the hole in a keg. In the article "South Australia's Neglect of Intellectual Worth", the editor lamented that three recently-deceased colonists had not received appropriate recognition.[7] Two of the men had been his friends—the musician George Loder and *Pasquin*'s Eustace Reveley Mitford.

Continuing his campaign to raise the profile of the colony's publicans, Isaacs decided to reinforce his words with actions. He called for the establishment of a local Licensed Victuallers' Association and offered to act as its interim secretary. The idea for an association of hotel keepers was not new, as such groups were already present in some Australian colonies, and one had previously existed in South Australia. With support from some of Adelaide's influential publicans, Isaacs convened a meeting at the Commercial Hotel in Grenfell Street on 28 February 1870, for the purpose of founding a Licensed Victuallers' Association. The *Register* reported that an association had been formed that evening, but the news was premature, as further meetings were cancelled due to lack of interest.[8] Another year would pass before an ongoing Licensed Victuallers' Association was successfully established in South Australia, but by then, Isaacs was no longer involved in the industry.

There was little enthusiasm for Isaacs' ideas or for his newspaper. Optimistically, he sent copies of the *Licensed Victualler* to every South Australian publican, and requested a subscription fee of two shillings and sixpence per quarter in return. The recipients probably

[7] *Licensed Victualler*, 8 January 1870, 2–3.
[8] *South Australian Register*, 2 March 1870, 4. According to the *Licensed Victualler*, Isaacs was elected Honorary Secretary of the Licensed Victuallers' Association, by the "few but zealous members" present at the inaugural meeting. *Licensed Victualler*, 5 March 1870, 4.

appreciated his advocacy but very few responded with money. Even fewer wrote in support of his ideas, so Isaacs issued a peevish ultimatum:

> In dedicating our paper so specially as we have done to the publicans, we have shut ourselves, to a certain extent, out from the general public, to whom, nevertheless, under any title but that of "Licensed Victualler" our publication would, we believe, be welcome. We therefore have a right to expect from the Licensed Victuallers a more energetic assistance than has been hitherto accorded us, failing which either at the end of the quarter the paper will be abandoned, or the interests of the publican made the secondary feature of it, not the primary, as at present.[9]

Lack of interest from hotel keepers was not Isaacs' only challenge, for soon the stress of overseeing the *Licensed Victualler* triggered his chronic illness, resulting in the non-appearance of the expected issues of the paper on 15 and 22 January 1870. The *Register* noted the erratic production of its literary irritant and then hinted at the severity of Isaacs' medical condition: "We have been shown a certificate from Dr. Phillips, to the effect that Mr. Isaacs' illness prevented him making any mental effort."[10] Isaacs was soon forced to seek the aid of additional proprietors to underpin the paper's financial viability, but he reassured readers that its character would remain unchanged.

Pendragon's *Licensed Victualler* concluded with its thirteenth issue on 5 March 1870, at the end of its first quarter.[11] Readers were informed that it would return if sufficient support was received, but it was not revived. Isaacs had the last word in the final issue, with a pungent denunciation of politicians in the poem "The Act of Providence: A Hudibrastic":

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[9] *Licensed Victualler*, 29 January 1870, 4.
[10] *South Australian Register*, 22 January 1870, 5.
[11] The Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, is the only institution to retain all thirteen issues of Pendragon's *Licensed Victualler*.

Of all domestic animals
That people keep, the principal's
A cat—a most convenient beast,
Whose function to catch mice is least;
For should the cook the mutton share
With some admirer of the fair,
Or careless housemaid break the delf,
Each shifts the onus from her self,
And questioned on misdeeds says pat,
"It wasn't me, ma'am, 'twas the cat."
So politicians we have seen
Make Providence a ready screen:
"If things," say they, "have gone to smash"
And naught of victual left but hash,
'Twas not our fault, but common sense
Points to the act of Providence.
Bad laws and greedy grasp at pence
Are all the acts of Providence,
Corruption vile and false pretence
Are clearly acts of Providence."
Perhaps so—works of Providence
Are not alway[s] in evidence,
And possibly it may be thought
That rust and blight and rot and drought
Were only part of the full measure
Of Providence's high displeasure.
And that, to make the curse complete,
Each rogue and fool was given a seat
In Parliament, and also voice

To call himself the people's choice.[12]

Disillusioned with those in political power, exhausted by months of unrewarded literary effort, hampered by ill-health and beset by money worries, the editor surrendered. The *Licensed Victualler* followed the same unfortunate trajectory as its predecessor, the *Critic*. Ultimately both papers failed because they were unpopular with colonists, whether due to their content, or to wider social and economic factors. By founding a paper with a narrow readership base and a restricted focus, Isaacs was inherently vulnerable. The *Licensed Victualler* was another gamble and again he lost.

Throughout the paper's brief life and afterwards, Isaacs continued to pursue the small writing, brokering and accountancy commissions that kept him solvent. When the German Dramatic Club required a prologue to accompany its fund-raising concert, he composed the poem "Though Leagues of Treacherous Seas the Shores Divide". It was recited by Mr. Balk, before a "glowing array of Teuton faces" at the Theatre Royal on 30 November 1869.[13] The event supported three worthy causes—the families of miners killed at a colliery near Dresden, the Second German Expedition to the North Pole and a proposed monument to honour the explorer Baron von Humboldt. The following extract shows the strained amalgamation that resulted from Isaacs' attempt to combine all three themes into one prologue:

To help the widow and the fatherless,
Sure is a motive heaven itself might bless.
Think of the mothers suddenly bereft
Of their support, with helpless children left;
Three hundred men by unforeseen event
Into the dread hereafter sudden sent.

[12] *Licensed Victualler*, 5 March 1870, 5. Pendragon's hudibrastic poem, the form named after Samuel Butler's poem "Hudibras", was written in iambic tetrameter, and rhymed aa, bb, cc, dd, etc. Fittingly, hudibrastic verse was typically employed for satirical purposes.
[13] *South Australian Register*, 1 December 1869, 2.

Pity commands us, science too has claim
For those who seek no heritage but fame;
Her self-denying sons all perils dare—
Invade untrodden lands, explore the air,
Hazard the risks of Frigid, Torrid Zone,
And dare the deep, unaided and alone.
Unselfish labors, leaving us the weal
Of bounties they from nature's store reveal.
Such was our Humboldt, Germany's great son,
Who stands supreme above each lordly one.
Of Kings the mightiest King. To us pertains—
Of the same race—to honour his remains.
Nor unforgotten be each valiant soul,
Heir to his daring, who all dangers brave,
And seek the mystery of the Northern Pole,
To win immortal fame or ice-bound grave.[14]

Such sentimental versification did not lead to great poetry, but it more than fulfilled the expectations of the colonial audience and its press.

On 29 August 1870, nine months after her marriage, Eliza gave birth to a son, who was named George Samuel Isaacs after his father.[15] Although the baby was Isaacs' ninth child, he was probably his first legitimate offspring. Somewhat inconveniently, the writer already had a living son named George. George Alfred Isaacs, born to Marion in 1852, was then living in Melbourne—but that was far from Adelaide.

[14] George Isaacs, "Though Leagues of Treacherous Seas the Shores Divide," *South Australian Register*, 1 December 1869, 2.
[15] Birth Certificate of George Samuel Isaacs, 29 August 1870, Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Office, Adelaide, reg. no. 282.

At the close of 1870, Isaacs contributed a Christmas story to the *South Australian Chronicle*'s Christmas Supplement. "The Lawyer's Christmas; or, Bogie and Chillipank" was set in Adelaide.[16] Characters include a good honest workman ("Chillipank"), his miserly boss (solicitor "David Bogue" or "Bogie"), his brother ("Farquhar"), a cheerful daughter ("Fanny") and a servant for comic relief ("Mrs. Vupcher"). The plot involves coincidence, hardship, a prodigal son, a ghost story, a little romance, good works, lots of imbibing, divine retribution (a stroke for poor Bogie) and even a mention of the Licensed Victuallers' Act. It was perfect fare for Christmas reading, especially with an uplifting conclusion that neatly resolved everything. Isaacs' portrayal of a fictional Christmas in the colony was a hybrid English and Australian affair, featuring traditional roasts, mince pies and the old English game of snapdragon (whereby raisins were retrieved from a plate of burning brandy) contrasted with a trip to the beach. The whole story is formulaic but fun. It was the first in a series of Christmas tales by Isaacs.

Whatever literary pursuits he was following, Isaacs maintained his social activism and his community involvement. He continued to sign petitions. In November 1870 and again in November 1871, for example, he added his name to advertisements supporting Adelaide's Jewish Judah Moss Solomon for Mayor.[17] He also closely monitored current affairs. In March 1871, the *Advertiser* carried an advertisement from Isaacs regarding the colony's approaching census, which was to be taken on 3 April. It called for "PERSONS AGGRIEVED by the unjust distribution of the COLLECTORSHIPS for the Census", to contact him, "with a view to obtain satisfaction by a thorough investigation of the influences governing State patronage in the Chief Secretary's Office."[18] As ever, Isaacs was calling for transparency in government activities. Alternatively, he may have been overlooked for a collector's position and was now

[16] *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 24 December 1870, 1–2.
[17] *South Australian Advertiser*, 5 November 1870, 3; 29 November 1871, Supplement, 5.
[18] *South Australian Advertiser*, 25 March 1871, 1. Isaacs was living in Norman Street, Adelaide at this period.

airing his grievance in print. In late 1871 he inserted advertisements in the *Register* and the *Advertiser* calling for the election of politicians of the "utmost integrity and of ordinary business capacity."[19] That he no longer had aspirations in that area was made clear: "I am no pretender to your suffrages, for which my position does not qualify me."

Isaacs' contented domestic life with Eliza and their child was tragically short-lived. On 6 May 1871 she was admitted to the Adelaide Hospital with acute bronchitis. Two days later the couple's eight-month old baby, George, succumbed to meningitis.[20] Eliza remained in hospital for a further two months until she too died, from "phthisis"—tuberculosis—on 16 July 1871.[21] Eliza and her baby were buried in separate plots in Adelaide's West Terrace Cemetery. In the space of three months, Isaacs had suffered the heartbreaking loss of his little son, then of his young wife. He was unable to afford headstones for their graves.[22]

Whatever his private grief, Isaacs continued his restless search for new opportunities. While, acting as an agent and hotel broker, he had earlier arranged the leasing of Adelaide's Prado Hotel to Johannes Schirmer, then, successfully sued Schirmer in October 1870 when his commission was unpaid.[23] The Prado was the new name for the former Victoria Theatre in Gilles Arcade (the venue for *Our Uncle*) that had closed following the opening of the more popular Theatre Royal nearby. In its new incarnation as Schirmer's Prado Hotel and Ballroom, it quickly gained a notorious reputation for prostitution and licensing offences. By

[19] *South Australian Register*, 6 December 1871, 2; *South Australian Advertiser*, 6 December 1871, 1.
[20] Death Certificate of George Samuel Isaacs, 8 May 1871, Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Office, Adelaide, reg. no. 51.
[21] Death Certificate of Eliza Isaacs, 16 July 1871, Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Office, Adelaide, reg. no. 106.
[22] The exact site of Eliza Isaacs' grave in the West Terrace Cemetery is unknown. Baby George Samuel Isaacs was buried with several unrelated others, in Plot E 41, Path 11, Road 3.
[23] Isaacs sued Schirmer for nineteen pounds, nineteen shillings, but received a court judgement for only five pounds. *South Australian Advertiser*, 27 October 1870, 3.

mid-1871 the business had ceased.[24] It was then that Isaacs conceived a grand and philanthropic plan for the vacant building's renewal. In detailed press advertisements on 28 October 1871, he announced that he would convert the premises of the Victoria Theatre into a Mechanics' Institute and Home.[25]

As the future Manager and entrepreneur of the project, Isaacs envisaged a facility designed to cater for honest single workmen. They would receive "comfortable Lodging and Washing—with three bountiful Meat Meals per diem" for a fee of twelve shillings per week. The majority of the theatre complex's twenty-nine "large and lofty rooms" would become bedrooms. Six rooms would be reserved for community purposes, providing inmates with the luxury of a reading room and library, a gymnasium, a music room, a room for lectures, an education room and a coffee and smoking room where chess and draughts could be played. The old theatre, still in working order and well supplied with scenery, would be available for amateur performances. A Registry Office was also planned for the site and an outdoor yard was available for games. Non-resident subscribers would be able to pay a fee of one shilling per month to access these recreational facilities. With initial encouragement from several influential gentlemen, Isaacs expected that the conversion would soon commence, "so soon as a fair number of the class for whose advantage it is designed have intimated their desire to avail themselves of it."[26] Forty-seven nearby traders signed an endorsement of Isaacs' plan, believing that the new precinct would "not only be conducive to the interests of morality, but tend to relieve the neighbourhood from the stigma cast upon it by the use to which the premises you hold have previously been devoted."[27]

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[24] For a description of the dubious ambience of the area, see the article, "The Dancing Saloons and Night-houses." *South Australian Register*, 28 June 1870, 6.
[25] *South Australian Advertiser*, 28 October 1871, 1; *South Australian Register*, 28 October 1871, 2.
[26] *South Australian Advertiser*, 28 October 1871, 1.
[27] *South Australian Advertiser*, 28 October 1871, 1.

Two months on, however, the visionary but expensive scheme had not progressed. To demonstrate its potential, Isaacs offered rooms free of charge to dramatic, athletic, music and other groups during the project's development—probably in the expectation that they would pay rent once it opened.[28] Ultimately, his benevolent plan to provide accommodation and education for working men—and a comfortable living for himself—did not eventuate. By September 1872, the better-funded City Mission had taken over the premises as a base for its charitable and religious activities.

There was no Christmas story from A. Pendragon at the end of that sad and difficult year, but for South Australians, it was a time of celebration. Isaacs was among the more than five hundred guests invited by Mayor Emanuel Solomon to attend a grand banquet and entertainment at the Adelaide Town Hall on 28 December 1871, to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the colony's foundation.[29] "The Song of Australia", now a fixture at South Australian festivities, featured in the musical entertainment.

In what can only be described as the triumph of optimism over experience, Isaacs pressed on with his editorial ambitions. He launched a new Saturday weekly newspaper, the *Week's Doings*, on 6 April 1872.[30] Thomas Gill in the *Bibliography of South Australia* records that it was produced jointly by Isaacs and W. Burrows.[31] Mr. Burrows was no longer involved by 18 April, when the *Register* reported that the paper "will henceforth be Edited by A. Pendragon."[32] The *Week's Doings* was a typical Isaacs' satirical production with a motto of "shooting folly as it flies". The *Northern Argus* captured its independence: "Its opening

[28] *South Australian Advertiser*, 21 December 1871, 1.
[29] *Australian Advertiser*, 29 December 1871, 3.
[30] The *Week's Doings* was first advertised on 8 April 1872. *South Australian Advertiser*, 8 April 1872, 2.
[31] Thomas Gill, *Bibliography of South Australia: Compiled by Thomas Gill for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition* (Adelaide: Government Printer, 1886), 97.
[32] *South Australian Register*, 18 April 1872, 7.

number shows a great deal of pugilistic valor in hitting at what it considers 'cant' or 'humbug.' Its principles are to spare none, but make a bold strike for common sense, caring for nothing or nobody."[33]

Isaacs' earlier works had contained few illustrations, but each issue of the new weekly featured a prominent political cartoon, in the manner of its established local competitor, the *Portonian*.[34] The first example showed parliamentarian Mr. Patterson floating down the Roper River in a dray "while a crocodile hungrily regards him from the bank, and a half a dozen natives are going through some fantastic performances upon the opposite shore."[35] The second issue's satirical cartoon was promoted in advertisements: "SEE TODAY'S WEEK'S DOINGS, with Cartoon, 'WHICH IS THE DONKEY?'"[36] It depicted a covered donkey-cart being driven by a caricature of a well-known parliamentarian. The cartoon in the following issue featured the Adelaide Post Office. The politician Ebenezer Ward was the target on 4 May, when he was shown "on the floor of the House burning all the Acts of Parliament, with a view of consolidating their contents in one Act."[37] Some politicians were annoyed by these verbal and graphical barbs, and in return for his impudence, they made fun of Isaacs in the House. In May, it was reported from Parliament that "Mr. Boucaut had said that he would not go to the *Week's Doings* for truth."[38]

[33] *Northern Argus*, 12 April 1872, 2.
[34] The *Portonian* newspaper was founded in 1871 by Duncan Moodie and featured political cartoons by "Cerberus" (John Eden Savill).
[35] *South Australian Advertiser*, 8 April 1872, 2. Other papers borrowed articles from the *Week's Doings*, including the *Border Watch* which reprinted an Isaacs' article, "Drainage Works in Timbuctoo", a few months later. *Border Watch*, 10 August 1872, 3.
[36] *South Australian Advertiser*, 13 April 1872, 1.
[37] *Southern Argus*, 10 May 1872, 2.
[38] *South Australian Register*, 30 May 1872, 7.

The *Week's Doings* followed a predictable downhill path. An advertisement appeared in the *Evening Journal* and other papers in late June, apologizing for a delay in its publication.[39] A further advertisement a week later advised that the non-appearance of the paper had been caused by the editor's "continued illness", and that the *Week's Doings* would resume with a double issue on the following Saturday.[40] It was not heard from again.[41] The question of what drove Isaacs to persist with small papers, thereby repeatedly putting his finances and his health at risk, is a pertinent one. He was not stupid. His own experience, and that of the short-lived publications around him, suggests that he was quite aware of the likelihood of failure and financial difficulties. He did not expect to become rich, "which following literary pursuits," he once wrote, "is never likely to happen."[42] The reason for Isaacs' perseverance lay in his nature. Writing was not his job, but his calling. He had an inner compulsion to report, educate, entertain and spread his opinions, whatever his personal circumstances. Samuel Lover, years earlier, had succinctly described the condition: "When once the itch of literature comes over a man, nothing can cure it but the scratching of a pen."[43]

One day in October 1872, Isaacs wandered into the *Advertiser*'s busy office clutching an old book. The journalists present were sympathetic towards the aging writer and Isaacs' find was shared with the paper's readers: "Mr. George Isaacs has brought to our office for inspection an old volume of travels. It is in small folio, in the Latin tongue, and contains numerous maps

[39] *Evening Journal*, 22 June 1872, 2.
[40] *Express and Telegraph*, 8 July 1872, 2.
[41] Leonard Stanley Marquis notes a possible connection between Isaacs and the *Adelaide Miscellany and Journal of News, Literature, Music, etc.*, a paper that concluded on 23 September 1869: "There is a strange, and so far unexplained item concerning this 'Miscellany' in the second issue of *The Week's Doings*, April 13, 1872 that has an advertisement for H.W. Neale, practical bootmaker, 10 Robe Terrace, Waymouth Street, where, incidentally, the imprint of the paper says it was published. Then, a little lower down the column there is a notice for the office of the Adelaide Miscellany! While there is no evidence discovered to support the theory, it would appear that someone involved with the defunct publication was tidying up the loose ends,—or, was trying to keep the title alive in the hope of reviving it." Marquis, *South Australian Newspapers*, 65–66.
[42] *Licensed Victualler*, 27 November 1869, 4.
[43] Samuel Lover, *Handy Andy: A Tale of Irish Life* (London: Henry Lea, 1842), 291. The original quote renders "literature" as "litherature". Lover (1797–1868) was an Anglo-Irish artist, writer and composer. As already mentioned, Isaacs printed Lover's poem "What Will You Do, Love" in the *Critic*. *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 12.

and engravings, the whole being in excellent preservation."[44] News of Isaacs' antiquarian volume was widely copied to other newspapers, probably due to its mention of the possibility of gold deposits in northern Australia, or the need to fill columns with odd snippets. The episode is rather poignant, as it conjures up a picture of the unsuccessful writer using the book as a lure, to seek company and validation in the unforgiving publishing world.

Isaacs' next literary project foundered before it even began. A Board of Enquiry into the colony's Police Force had recently concluded in Adelaide. The minutes of the enquiry were so extensive and complex that Isaacs decided that an edited version was warranted. He advertised the imminent release of his summary in the *Register*:

> POLICE FORCE—MINUTES OF EVIDENCE taken by the Board of Enquiry contain 6,210 Questions, with Replies of 50 Witnesses, exclusive of Correspondence. Extracts from this voluminous State document, with comments thereon, will appear in a day or two. Price 1s. A. Pendragon.[45]

Two days later however, he was forced to issue a retraction:

> POLICE FORCE—I have been so misled in the amount of support I was led to expect on the Publication announced by me in the journals of Tuesday, and so much misapprehension exists as to its design, that I decline to proceed further with it. Those interested in the subject of the Police Enquiry Commission can obtain the Evidence at the Government Office for £1—not 2s. 6d., as industriously circulated by ill-informed or maliciously-disposed persons. A. Pendragon.[46]

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[44] *South Australian Advertiser*, 8 October 1872, 2. The snippet was picked up by, amongst others, Sydney's *Empire*, 15 October 1872, 2.
[45] *South Australian Register*, 26 November 1872, 8.
[46] *South Australian Register*, 28 November 1872, 2.

He had overestimated the public's interest in a topic that he found intensely intriguing or perhaps was unable to fund the project.

At the age of forty-eight, Isaacs was impoverished and frequently ill. His writings had not brought him financial or literary success, his business schemes had failed, Marion and the children of his first partnership were far away in Victoria and his second family was deceased. He could no longer afford to rent Albert Chambers and he lived in hotels.[47] Somehow he eked out a living in central Adelaide, but his health remained a constant concern. In early October 1873, Isaacs was involved in a dispute with the Adelaide Hospital. Suffering from asthma and armed with a subscriber's form for admission, he struggled to the hospital for aid. There he was informed by Dr. Logan that he had the wrong form, and that he would need to visit the nearby Destitute Asylum to obtain the correct version. Railing at the unfairness of the request, but with no other option, Isaacs did as he was directed: "The distance, it is true, was not great, but to me, at the time suffering under a paroxysm of asthma, the journey there and back was a painful pilgrimage."[48] The next morning, following an overnight stay in hospital, Isaacs felt a little better and he decided that he would apply for a pass out for the day as he had urgent business in town. He, along with others with a similar request approached Dr. Jay. Jay rebuffed them all and referred them instead to Dr. Logan. Logan, in turn, refused to issue the passes, and referred the patients back to Dr. Jay, who had by that time left the hospital for the Destitute Asylum. The incident contained all the ingredients that Isaacs most despised—officiousness, lack of commonsense and an absence of compassion from those in power. He was so incensed by "the red-tape system which governs an institution that of all others should be most free from it" that he retaliated with a series of aggrieved letters to the press.[49] His

[47] In October 1873, Isaacs was living at the Prince of Wales Hotel, Angus Street, Adelaide. *South Australian Advertiser*, 18 October 1873, 3.
[48] *South Australian Advertiser*, 18 October 1873, 3.
[49] *South Australian Advertiser*, 18 October 1873, 3.

complaints were referred to the Hospital Board, but it supported the doctors' stance and ruled that he had no grounds for complaint.

At the end of the year Isaacs wrote his second Christmas story, "A Christmas Tale" for the *Observer*.[50] It was a shorter and simpler affair than his previous Christmas effort, with a plot that revolved around the benevolent acts of two successful businessmen, "Jollichin" and "Plumper". With another nod to his personal life, he included a brief mention of Gawler in the plot. Once again he had no problem reconciling his Jewish heritage with his practice of celebrating, in print, the Christmas season.

Isaacs wrote little over the next year and his editorial work was confined to the supervision of a slim volume, *The Dieyerie Tribe of Australian Aborigines*. He had no prior expertise in the anthropological area and had rarely mentioned Aboriginal people in his writing.[51] The book's author was the police trooper Samuel Gason, whose intimate knowledge of Dieyerie culture derived from his nine years of experience in the far north of South Australia. The South Australian Government was so impressed by Gason's study that they offered to sponsor and print the book. Released in late March 1874, at a cost of two shillings, it contained an "Editor's Note" that was humble, and—for Isaacs—atypically brief:

> The part I have had in the production of this work is so very subordinate, that I would willingly have omitted my name to it, had not the author, with a too great diffidence in his own labours, and a too flattering sense of my services, pressed me for it; and I

[50] *Adelaide Observer*, 27 December 1873, 13.
[51] Samuel Gason, *The Dieyerie Tribe of Australian Aborigines*, ed. George Isaacs (Adelaide: W.C. Cox, Government Printers, 1874). The work, as *The Manners and Customs of the Dieyerie Tribe of Australian Aborigines*, was later included in J.D. Woods' *The Native Tribes of South Australia* (Adelaide: E.S. Wigg & Son, 1879), 253–307. The older term, "Dieyerie", has now been replaced by "Dieri".

> consented, only on being permitted to say that I did little more than arrange and classify the interesting papers confided to my charge.[52]

With Isaacs' assistance, Gason hoped to provide "a record of the characteristics and tongue of a race fast dying out", and to assist "those pious missionaries and others, who are extending so greatly inland this vast continent, civilisation, through its gracious handmaiden, Christianity."[53]

Thanks to his writing and his social activism, Isaacs was well-known in Adelaide. When, in 1874, the artist Alfred Clint was commissioned by publican W.R. Morton to produce two paintings of "Prominent South Australians", Isaacs was included in one of the group portraits.[54] The six foot long watercolour, with a backdrop of Morton's Southern Cross Hotel in King William Street, placed the writer in a predominantly male crowd of about one hundred and twenty people. All classes of society were represented, from the "the highest functionaries of the land" to those "noted either for their eccentricity or their genius."[55] The *Register*, no doubt, would have placed Isaacs in the "eccentric" category. Many who contributed to the writer's life story are depicted in the work, including John Taylor (the editor of the *Register* at the time of Isaacs' arrival in Australia), James Penn Boucaut (who represented Isaacs in a court case and later mentioned him in Parliament) and George Hamilton (the Commissioner of Police, to whom *Not For Sale* was dedicated). Isaacs would have been the acquaintance, friend, or foe of many more.

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[52] Gason, *The Dieyerie Tribe*, Preface.
[53] Gason, *The Dieyerie Tribe*, Preface.
[54] Isaacs' presence in the painting is confirmed in a review of the painting, *Prominent South Australians (No. 2)*, in the *Bunyip*: "Other capital likenesses are given of Messrs. J.R. Fuller, Salom, S. [indecipherable], E. Ward, M.P., Hon. A. Blyth, Hon. H.E. Bright, George Isaacs, and some eighty others." *The Bunyip*, 6 March 1874, 3.
[55] *South Australian Register*, 5 March 1874, 5.

Still touring the world, Grace Egerton and George Case made their final appearances in Adelaide in June 1874. Once more, they entertained patrons with *The Housewarming: Too Warm to be Pleasant* and *Our Trip to the Rhine*. The author of the plays was unable to attend as, again, he was seriously ill. On 1 June Isaacs returned to the Adelaide Hospital for treatment for "Acute Bronchitis", the same malady that had been responsible for his wife's final admission to hospital.[56] Seven weeks passed before he was well enough to be discharged. Afterwards, he continued to combine writing with his work as an accountant and agent, but his literary output as well as his physical health was in decline. His work as an agent was also diminishing, judging from the following advertisement placed in the *Register* by a disgruntled Gawler brewer: "The Public are hereby informed that Mr. GEORGE ISAACS has NO LONGER ANY AUTHORITY to COLLECT MONEYS or SOLICIT ORDERS on my behalf, notice having been given him to that effect since 18th September last. THOS. J. MONRO. October 28, 1874."[57]

A mundane event prompted Isaacs' next altercation with the law. Returning home on 5 June 1875 he hailed a cab, but at the end of the journey he found that he was unable to pay the fare of three shillings. He assumed that he could obtain credit, but driver James Driscoll pursued the debt to the Police Court.[58] On 24 June, Isaacs was fined one pound, thirteen shillings—much more than the original fare. Unable to pay, he was, "like a felon, conveyed in Her Majesty's van to the lock-up, and there incarcerated."[59] Trying to test either the legal system, or the patience of cabmen, he was soon before the court on a similar charge. In July, he took Charles Sowerby's cab to the Windsor Castle hotel. The fare this time was only sixpence, but,

[56] Royal Adelaide Hospital Register, State Records of South Australia, 78/49, entry 744/1874.
[57] *South Australian Register*, 29 October 1874, 2.
[58] In a letter to the *Advertiser*, Isaacs defended his actions: "In a day or so I shall be able to prove, by the testimony of several respectable cab-owners, that it is their practice to give credit, and that such has been frequently extended to me, and that their confidence has never been by me abused." *South Australian Advertiser*, 29 June 1875, 2. According to the same article, Isaacs stated that Driscoll later claimed that the fare was four shillings. Isaacs believed that the case should have been referred to the Civil Court, where he would have been permitted to defend the charge.
[59] *South Australian Advertiser*, 29 June 1875, 2.

according to the cabman, Isaacs claimed that he did not have that amount. In court, Isaacs disputed this and stated that he did not remember not paying Sowerby, and that "it was not likely that he would go on credit for such a small amount as sixpence."[60] When fined the original fare, plus costs of one pound five shillings and sixpence, Isaacs asked for time to pay, prompting magistrate Mr. Beddome to comment that "people who could afford to hire cabs could pay a small sum like that."[61] Nevertheless, Isaacs was granted a week's grace, thereby gaining the satisfaction of forcing the cabman to wait a few more days for his money. His sympathy for the working man did not extend to forgiveness of what he saw as an injustice.

The conclusions of 1874 and 1875 saw two further Christmas tales by the writer. "In Barracks: A Christmas Log" appeared in the *Chronicle* on 26 December 1874, alongside a new story by Melbourne's Marcus Clarke.[62] In eight brief chapters, Isaacs recounts the fictional Christmas reminiscences of five friends and a housekeeper. One interlude is set on the gold diggings at Forest Creek in Victoria in 1854, the location of the *Queen of the South*. Another chapter recalls the events of a New Year's Day in Paris in 1844. Isaacs' fiction remained strongly rooted in his past, in contrast to Clarke's exotic, imaginative tale, "The Gipsies of the Sea; or the Island of Gold". Isaacs' final Christmas story, his fourth, appeared on 25 December 1875. "Our Place: And How We Spent the Christmas There" was published across two pages in the *Chronicle*.[63] It was similar in many ways to his previous year's effort. In a now tried and true formula, Isaacs' characters sat around on Christmas Day and swapped reminiscences of their past lives. Once again the writer included a tale from the Victorian gold diggings, told this time from the perspective of a Blackwood shopkeeper. All ended happily with a "surprising denouement", the revelation that one individual was the long-lost love of

[60] *South Australian Register*, 9 July 1875, 3.
[61] *South Australian Register*, 9 July 1875, 3.
[62] George Isaacs, "In Barracks: A Christmas Log", *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 26 December 1874, 2–3. Marcus Clarke's tale is "The Gipsies of the Sea; or the Island of Gold", 1–2. As "Bajau; or The Gipsies of the Sea" it had already appeared in a newspaper. *The Queenslander*, 3 January 1874, 7–8.
[63] *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, *Christmas Supplement*, 25 December 1875, 1, 10.

another. Isaacs tidied up the story's details in his Postscript, and ended with the words, "A Happy New Year to you my readers—yes, and even to my critics."[64]

George Isaacs' own story now reached its conclusion. The writer died at six o'clock in the evening on Valentine's Day, 14 February 1876 at the Union Inn in Waymouth Street Adelaide.[65] A note in his Scrapbook records that he died "rather suddenly—having been ill only a few days."[66] According to his death certificate, he had succumbed to congestion of the lungs, and his lifelong affliction, asthma. The informant on that document, George Witcombe, was unaware of Isaacs' date of birth, and guessed his age at "about 50 years", which was close. Isaacs was fifty-one. His years of struggle and inspiration were condensed in the "Occupation" column of the certificate, to the inadequate words "Literary Correspondent". In the absence of any family members and out of charity, the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation arranged his funeral. Isaacs was buried in plot F 15 in the Jewish section of the West Terrace Cemetery in Adelaide. No headstone marked his grave.

In June that year, the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation sent the following letter to S. Joseph Esq. in London:

> A Mr. George Isaacs died here on the 14th February 1876 and understanding that you knew some of his relatives I am instructed by the President and Committee to write to ask you if you will kindly communicate the same to them. He died very poor so poor that the Synagogue had to bury G. Isaacs, he leaves 5 children who we are told are in Melbourne. Mr. Isaacs left a will which is in the possession of the Synagogue

[64] *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail, Christmas Supplement*, 25 December 1875, 10.
[65] The Union Inn, now the Union Hotel, still operates from its original location at 70 Waymouth Street Adelaide. That the time of Isaacs' death is known from press reports suggests that he was not alone when he died. *South Australian Register*, 15 February 1876, 5.
[66] These words appear on the final, unindexed page (excluding the appendix of correspondents) of Isaacs' Scrapbook.

> authorities, leaving a Mr. Klewer [Kleber?] his executor should there be any property accruing to him or should the friends wish to pay his funeral expenses we shall be glad to secure the same or give them any information in our power.[67]
>
> I have the honour to remain Dear Sir
> Your Most Obed[ient] Serv[ant]t
> Daniel S. Hart Secretary"[68]

The cost of Isaacs' funeral was six pounds and eleven shillings. No trace of his will has been discovered.[69]

The final entry in Isaacs' Scrapbook is written in an unknown hand. It reads in part, "Last lines written by GI about January 1876" and refers to an affixed, printed poem. Its subject—a topical commentary on the malfunctioning Post Office clock and the man responsible for it, the South Australian Post-Master General, Charles Todd—confirms that Isaacs was writing and commenting on public affairs until shortly before his death. With its humour, erudition and satire, it is so redolent of his style:

> Oh, master mind—Astrologers of past
> You far exceed—Nor Faust nor Doctor Dee,
> In all nativities they ever cast,
> Presaged so great a quack should ever be.
>
> You take within your scope the heavenly orbs,

[67] Isaacs' executor "Mr. Klewer" was possibly Herman Klaber, his brother-in-law and the husband of his sister Frances. As Herman Klaber remained in England, it suggests that Isaacs may have maintained contact with his English relatives during his long residence in Australia.
[68] Details of Isaacs' burial and subsequent correspondence are found in the microfilmed records of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation, held in the State Library of South Australia. Letter from Daniel Hart to Mr. Klewer, Adelaide Hebrew Congregation Letter Book, SRG 162, volume 1, letter number 223, 15 June 1876. For the cost of Isaacs' funeral, see the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation Committee of Vestry Minutes, 1862–1890, SRG 162/2, volume 1, entry 23, 6 March 1876.
[69] George Isaacs' will is no longer in the archives of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation. Dr. Klee Benveniste, Honorary Archivist of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation, *email correspondence*, 22 July 2011.

Pierce with your gimlet eye Earth's nether rock
Your soaring genius science so absorbs,
You hourly fail to tell us "What's o'clock."

The boldest sceptic that this earth reveals,
Denying that there reigns supreme a God;
Unless quite deaf unto Post Office peals,
Must fain admit existence of *one Todd*.[70]

[70] The published source of the untitled and undated poem has not been identified.

# Chapter 12: George Isaacs' Legacy and Significance

*Long years towards the past have rolled,*

*And not an hour unmarked by fame;*

*Bridal and burial peals have tolled,*

*Yet thou art still, oh still the same.*

George Isaacs, 1862[1]

In the period immediately following George Isaacs' death, Australian newspapers summed up his life in obituaries that ranged from the bland to the vicious, according to the sympathy or prejudice of the editor. In all accounts he was acknowledged as a writer. This first stage of Isaacs' legacy was brief, for soon his deeds and writing slipped from public and private memory. Yet this almost-forgotten, mercurial man left an imprint on his society, and he has relevance in ours. Isaacs' body of work has significance in Australian, and especially South Australian literary history. His struggle to establish himself as an author provides insight into the inherent difficulties faced by colonial writers, and his complex story enriches our understanding of the nineteenth-century immigrant experience. These interconnected themes justify this exploration and recognition of Isaacs' life.

Initial contemporary responses to Isaacs as a writer, and as a man, came from the newspaper trade that had so captivated him. One paper in particular had been the frequent target of his pen. Isaacs had attacked the *Register*'s stance on many issues, over many years, so on the morning following his death, retaliation was guaranteed. The paper published an obituary of refined venom, which deserves quoting in full:

> A man of ability, whose career, however, has been chequered and certainly not successful, has just passed away. Mr. George Isaacs, long known in the literary world

[1] Anon. [George Isaacs], "The Sword of Benevenuto Cellini," *The Critic*, 18 October 1862, 10.

> of South Australia as the writer of sketches poems, tales, and satirical pieces with the signature of "A. Pendragon," died at the Union Inn, Waymouth-street, at 6 o'clock on Monday evening, the 14th inst., after a short illness. The deceased in 1858 published in parts, pamphlet form, his earliest work of any note, a colonial romance, styled "The Queen of the South," intended to picture Victorian life in the early days of the diggings. This was issued at Gawler, and in that town the author was for some time a leading spirit, taking a part we believe in the doings of the still celebrated Humbug Society. He was connected with the *Critic*, a satirical publication which appeared in Adelaide, and fugitive contributions in prose and verse from his pen found their way occasionally into the columns of the city and country Press. He wrote some clever papers about debt and debtors seven or eight years ago for the *Observer*, and he published by subscription a small volume of fancy sketches and poetry entitled "Not For Sale." Later Mr. Isaacs started and conducted a weekly in the interests of the licensed victuallers. He was born in London, where his father was collector and salesman of antiquarian curiosities, and Mr. Isaacs was himself a member of the Archaeological Society. His fiction was pleasingly written, albeit at times somewhat overstrained; his verse was easy and flowing, while his ironical productions were often caustic and scathing. He was a thorough Bohemian with apparently no fixed object in life, and a want of application and lack of continuous energy that prevented the possibility of his prospering. To many, however, the announcement of his death will cause regret.[2]

Many of these points were valid, but Isaacs will be forever damned by the *Register*'s opening sentence, and its penultimate line. Graham Stone nicely sums up the obituary's flavour: "Well, that's the voice of 19th Century Adelaide, smug, moralising, arrogant, with its veneer

[2] *South Australian Register*, 15 February 1876, 5. In Isaacs' defence, his "want of application and lack of continuous energy" can be largely attributed to his poor health. Coincidentally, two items below Isaacs' obituary is a brief notice concerning the revived Licensed Victuallers' Association.

of imported second-rate culture smothering the rough vitality of a forty-year-old colony."[3] Unfortunately, as the most comprehensive account of Isaacs' life, the newspaper's slanted view became the template for later assessments of his worth.

Isaacs would have delighted in the *Register*'s "thorough Bohemian" denouncement, for throughout his adult life and whenever finances and circumstances permitted, he had enthusiastically pursued the ideals associated with that region. His world bore many similarities to Thackeray's definition of Bohemia in his final novel, *The Adventures of Philip on His Way Through the World*:

> A pleasant land, not fenced with drab stucco, like Tyburnia or Belgravia; not guarded by a huge standing army of footmen; not echoing with noble chariots; not replete with polite chintz drawing-rooms and neat tea-tables; a land over which hangs an endless fog, occasioned by much tobacco; a land of chambers, billiard-rooms, supper-rooms, oysters: a land of song; a land where soda-water flows freely in the morning; a land of tin dish-covers from taverns, and frothing porter; a land of lotus-eating (with lots of cayenne pepper), of pulls on the river, of delicious reading of novels, magazines, and sauntering in many studios; a land where men call each other by their Christian names; where most are poor, where almost all are young, and where if a few oldsters do enter, it is because they have preserved more tenderly and carefully than other folks their youthful spirits, and the delightful capacity to be idle.[4]

With such tendencies, Isaacs held himself somewhat apart from, and above, those whose ambitions lay in the commercial realm. South Australian society however favoured capitalism over creation, as the writer lamented:

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[3] Stone, "George Isaacs," 85.
[4] William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Adventures of Philip on His Way Through the World; Shewing Who Robbed Him, Who Helped Him and Who Passed Him By* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1866), 45. The novel first appeared as a serial in *Cornhill Magazine* from January 1861 until August 1862, before being published in book form in 1862.

> But laws were surely made by men of mark,
> For merchants, bankers, dogs that bite, not bark,
> Not for the idle, dreaming, useless crew,
> Who carved on marble, or on canvas drew,
> Or paper waste, creating with much thinking
> Something not fit for eating, or for drinking.[5]

At the time of Isaacs' death, the writer Marcus Clarke and his friends were busily and publically celebrating the Bohemian lifestyle in Melbourne. In more conservative Adelaide, the epithet "Bohemian" remained a term of reproach.[6]

Not all of Isaacs' obituaries were unfavourable. Most were concise and in the style of the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s declaration that announced "Mr. George Isaacs, a well-known litterateur, is dead."[7] The polite but not effusive obituary published by South Australia's *Advertiser* might indicate that the deceased's former supporters at that paper had moved on.[8] Although no Melbourne paper carried news of his death, various city and regional papers throughout Australia and beyond, spread the word. By 13 April, even readers of California's *Sacramento Daily Union* were informed of Isaacs' passing.[9] There was no mention of the writer's plays in his obituaries. The journalists were either unaware of that aspect of his life or felt that his contributions to the stage were insignificant. Mount Gambier's *Border Watch* initially informed its readers that "George Isaacs, the well known literary Bohemian, is

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[5] Isaacs, "Victoria in Excelsis: A Satire," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 71.
[6] Linguist and Emeritus Professor Roly Sussex comments on the *Register* obituary: "Calling Isaacs 'Bohemian' is a bit rough on the dead; it suggests vagrant of mind, taste and literary output." Roly Sussex, *email correspondence*, 25 February 2011.
[7] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 February 1876, 5.
[8] "The deceased was known for some years as a public writer, who, under the *nom de plume* of "Pendragon," composed a novel and numerous satirical, humorous, and imaginative pieces, in prose and verse, which found their way into print either in newspapers or in separate form. He was one of the founders of the Gawler Humbug Society. Afterwards he acted as editor of the *Critic*, and since then edited a *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette*." *South Australian Advertiser*, 16 February 1876, 5.
[9] *Sacramento Daily Union*, 13 April 1876, 1.

dead."[10] A few days later it published a sympathetic account of his life, with a concluding sentence that captured his final pitiable state: "For years past he has been in very low water pecuniarily, and has been a lounger at the hotels whose cause he has been advocating."[11] It was confirmation that alcohol had become Isaacs' solace. Another regional newspaper, the *Kapunda Herald and Northern Intelligencer*, highlighted Isaacs' decline:

> for years past his living has been very precarious. To the publicans, whose cause he had been advocating, he was indebted for board and lod[g]ings, and from business men who appealed to him for out-of-the-way advertisements, he obtained now and then a small gratuity. He was not blessed with the gift of frugality, and was therefore never able to reach George Herbert's happy state of competence without riches.[12]

After twenty-five years in Australia, Isaacs had become a figure of pity or of disdain on Adelaide's streets.[13] His fall from grace was a sorry end to his productive life. As the *Kapunda Herald and Northern Intelligencer*'s obituary makes clear, even Isaacs' reputation in the Gawler region had faded by his death: "The name may be remembered by many living north of Adelaide, though the man may have been forgotten. And yet in his time he has done a great deal that should have made him live in people's memories."[14]

Gawler's *Bunyip* failed to mark Isaacs' death with an original obituary. The paper had outgrown its controversial, satirical beginnings and had become respectably conservative. In a clear indication of its tamed editorial policy, it reprinted the *Register*'s obituary of Isaacs

[10] *Border Watch*, 16 February 1876, 2.
[11] *Border Watch*, 19 February 1876, 3. In a poignant juxtaposition considering Isaacs' final poem, this obituary was followed by the statement, "The new Post Office clock is silent, and when it will chime again not even Mr. Todd can tell."
[12] *Kapunda Herald and Northern Intelligencer*, 18 February 1876, 3.
[13] Few of Isaacs' friends and supporters were still living. Harry Rogers died in London in 1873. "Professor" Robert Hall had died at the age of forty-five in 1866, Eustace Reveley Mitford in 1869, George Nott in 1872 and Edward Lindley Grundy in 1875.
[14] *Kapunda Herald and Northern Intelligencer*, 18 February 1876, 3.

without commentary.[15] Editor, journalist and author George E. Loyau would soon become the *Bunyip*'s editor. Within a few years, he produced two books that included brief accounts of Isaacs' life. In the *Gawler Handbook: A Record of the Rise and Progress of that Important Town* (1880), he acknowledges Isaacs' ebullient contributions to civic affairs. Ephraim H. Coombe, in his *History of Gawler 1837–1908* (1910) later covers similar ground. In 1883, Loyau awarded Isaacs a permanent place in South Australian history when he selected him for inclusion in the *Representative Men of South Australia*. Presumably under the influence of the *Register*'s obituary, and in stark contrast to the favourable entries on other "representative" men featured in the book, Loyau adds a condemnation of Isaacs' morality:

> A want of application and an abnormal incapacity to appreciate the value of time and money, marred what might have been a brilliant and useful career, and he died in Adelaide at an earlier age than perhaps would have been the case had he attended more strictly to rules adopted by those who reach the proverbial three score and ten allotted to man.[16]

This stern verdict was based purely on hearsay, for Loyau did not arrive in the South Australian colony until the year following Isaacs' death.

Isaacs, the compulsive writer, did not leave an autobiography so we do not have his perception on the circumstances or overall direction of his life. Perhaps the lack of a memoir was merely the result of procrastination. Possibly, the hardships that he experienced towards the end of his life, including illness, poverty, lack of entrepreneurial and literary success, the tragic deaths of his wife Eliza and baby George, court cases and imprisonment, gradually

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[15] By 1907, the *South Australian Register* had revised its opinion of Isaacs, describing him as, "One of the most able literary men who ever came to South Australia and a friend and coadjutator [sic] of Lord Lytton." Clearly, the imprimatur of English aristocracy continued to define one's worth as a writer and a gentleman. *South Australian Register*, 11 October 1907, 4. In 1932, a correspondent to the paper who designated himself as "Austral Native (not blackfellow)" noted that, "Poor, much-travelled, Geo. Isaacs (of Jewish descent) was a well-known pressman in those early times." *South Australian Register*, 2 September 1932, 7.
[16] Loyau, *Representative Men*, 142.

sapped his enthusiasm for self-promotion. Isaacs' written works abound with personal anecdotes that can be traced to verifiable events, so he was not averse to writing about himself. He was not introverted and he was not afraid to state his opinions publicly. The letters in his Scrapbook could have supplied a wealth of material on which to base a memoir. This absence of an autobiography compounds his invisibility in the present.

Since his death, Isaacs has received sporadic and brief attention in literary references and bibliographies, commencing with the *Bibliography of South Australia: Compiled by Thomas Gill for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, London 1886*. In 1978, Paul Depasquale revived the writer's fortunes in a *Critical History of South Australian Literature 1836–1930*, when he described Isaacs as "an indefatigable advocate of colonial literature in South Australia and Victoria."[17] There is little acknowledgement in literary references of Isaacs' editorial roles in newspapers, apart from that contained in *South Australian Newspapers: A Selection of Material From the Extensive Research Notes Gathered For a Proposed History of the Press in South Australia by Leonard Stanley Marquis*.[18] Similarly, Isaacs' plays, as in his obituaries, are ignored.[19] *AustLit* remains the current benchmark for information on the writer, but, as stated in the Introduction to this thesis, Isaacs' entry there is brief and deficient in both bibliographical and biographical detail.[20] Not surprisingly, the writer is unknown to the general public.

[17] Depasquale, *A Critical History*, 17. Depasquale provides a useful overview of Isaacs' writing from a local perspective, but he has little to say regarding other aspects of Isaacs' life.
[18] Marquis, *South Australian Newspapers*, 63–64.
[19] To redress this neglect, I have discussed Isaacs' plays in a conference paper. Anne Black, "A Colonial Wordsmith: George Isaacs in Adelaide, 1860–1870" (paper presented at the Association for the Study of Australian Literature's "Literary Adelaide" conference, Adelaide, 10 February, 2012).
[20] *AustLit* appears to have derived its information on Isaacs from the two major nineteenth-century published sources on his life, the *Register*'s obituary and Loyau's entry on Isaacs in the *Representative Men of South Australia*.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is time to reassess the significance of Isaacs' life. He did not achieve the influence, or exhibit the talent, of near contemporaries such as Catherine Helen Spence, Marcus Clarke, or Adam Lindsay Gordon. On the national scene, he is a minor literary figure. However, as Elizabeth Perkins notes in her essay "Towards Seeing Minor Poets Steadily and Whole", such an assessment is no justification for scholarly neglect:

> The minor writer is always a problem. Critics, embarrassed at finding themselves busied with minor writers, try to assess them briskly and catalogue them neatly away. Other readers who have given time and thought to untangling the life and works of a minor writer, or who have unearthed some previously unknown document or literary remains, tend, for some time anyway, to over-value their protégé. And why not? There are students of literature enough and to spare, and a little posthumous care and attention are not too much to ask for the writer who has a lesser place in the development of our literature.[21]

The highlights of Isaacs' literary career can be briefly summarised. It began in London at the age of nineteen with the publication of the literary journal, the *Hesperus*. Later, at a time when few novels were published Australia-wide, Isaacs, writing as A. Pendragon, was the author of the *Queen of the South*, the first novel published in South Australia. It appeared as a single volume in 1859, but had been initially published in serial form, commencing in the previous year. As such, it was also the first local novel to be published in parts in South Australia.[22] Unusually, its six parts were printed and issued separately, rather than appearing as a serial in another publication.[23] As Elizabeth Webby notes, "Almost all Australian book

[21] Elizabeth Perkins, "Towards Seeing Minor Poets Steadily and Whole," in *Bards, Bohemians and Bookmen: Essays in Australian Literature*, ed. Leon Cantrell (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1976), 39.
[22] *AustLit* fails to note that the novel was published in serial parts before its appearance as a book.
[23] Katherine Bode, in *Reading by Numbers: Recalibrating the Literary Field* (London; New York: Anthem Press, 2012) provides a useful summary of early Australian novels and their modes of publication. She writes that, in relation to colonial Australian novels, "The fact that, of all the titles serialised locally in the 1850s, only those

publication before 1890 was at the author's expense, or by subscription."[24] If this was the case for the impoverished Isaacs, it might explain the tardy, staggered appearance of the parts of his novel. That the book was written and printed in the small town of Gawler, before it came to prominence as the "Athens of the South", rather than in the metropolis of Adelaide, is also worth noting. Isaacs' *Number One* was an early attempt at a literary journal in South Australia. As previously discussed, Isaacs' burlesque of *Frankenstein* has significance on a national level considering *AustLit*'s declaration that it is, "Possibl[y] the earliest science fiction work written by an Australian resident."[25] The importance of these achievements went unrecognized by Isaacs' contemporaries, an indication of the small attention paid to the works of local writers.

Such a brief résumé of Isaacs' more noteworthy achievements belies the extent and complexity of his literary output. Despite many constraints, he wrote consistently from his youth until his death in Adelaide. His writing was not confined to one genre, but spread across fiction, poetry, pamphlets, drama, lectures, advertising and journalism. Its breadth encompasses many aspects of colonial life. Isaacs eagerly, and perhaps rashly, jumped from one form to another, as circumstances arose, for he was both an opportunistic writer who quickly responded to events around him, and a more considered creator of substantial publications. His literary efforts were the product of his deep belief that his writing was of value to his community, either as a form of entertainment or as a source of education. This certainty fuelled his determination to succeed as a writer. Although contemporary reviews of his written works, especially his poetry, were appreciative, Isaacs received little practical

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published in the Month [*Month: A Literary and Critical Journal*] achieved book publication." 40. This statement, considering the six part serialisation of the *Queen of the South,* is incorrect.

[24] Webby, "The Beginnings of Literature in Colonial Australia," 45.

[25] "The Burlesque of Frankenstein; Or, The Man-Gorilla," *AustLit,* last modified 26 July 2012, www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/C246164

support from colonial readers. They flocked to his plays and lectures, but either through economy or apathy, did not purchase his books or his newspapers.

The significance of Isaacs' diverse oeuvre, however, lies not in the importance or otherwise of his individual pieces but in this witty and intelligent man's vivid and prolonged capturing of life in colonial Australia. He was a commentator and a true colonial wordsmith. His puns and poetry, plays and prose, written over a twenty-five year period in South Australia and Victoria, chronicle not only the minutiae, but also the wider themes present in his society. In identifying and examining Isaacs' previously neglected trove of writing, this thesis enriches our understanding of history, expands our appreciation of language and illuminates the social mores of the period. Isaacs' writing forms a mosaic—a larger picture that greatly enhances our understanding of the evolving colonial milieu.

Much of Isaacs' literary output demonstrates his commitment to independence. His newspapers advertised his freedom from the influence of politicians, the rich and the religious and he prided himself on presenting an alternative view of the world to that published by the conservative press. As Mitford notes in the first issue of *Pasquin*, such independence was difficult to achieve at that period: "The influence of Government, the worship of mammon, the respect paid to a sugar-bag aristocracy, and the power and tyranny of the white-choker institution, paralyse the courage and consistency of every colonial editor."[26] Isaacs appeared undaunted by such pressures.

A consistent theme throughout his life was his support for the rights and opportunities of his fellow writers. Nurtured by popular authors in his youth, he in turn encouraged others in their

[26] *Pasquin*, 26 January 1867, 2.

literary ambitions. By precociously founding the *Hesperus* in his teenage years, with the novel stipulation that only those under the age of twenty-one could contribute to its pages, Isaacs offered other youthful writers a rare literary outlet. Similarly, his Australian journal, *Number One* was promoted as an ongoing vehicle for the publication of original colonial poetry and prose. His newspapers likewise provided welcome publication opportunities for colonial scribes. The *Critic* in particular, noticed and promoted Australian publications.

Isaacs' intermittent campaign for the copyright protection of colonial works is a further example of his support for local writers, even though his actions, primarily driven by self-interest, had little impact on the issue. His own works never achieved the popularity that would have attracted piracy, yet, as a man of principle, he championed copyright for all authors as a fair and morally sound practice. It was not until 1878, two years after his death, that a Copyright Act for the protection of authors was enacted in South Australia. As Sarah Ailwood and Maree Sainsbury note in "Copyright Law, Readers and Authors in Colonial Australia", this country was tardy in adopting copyright laws in comparison to other imperial colonies, such as Lower Canada, Nova Scotia, New Zealand and India.[27]

The fate of original copies of Isaacs' books and newspapers is instructive, as it throws light on such factors as the size of their initial print runs, and their reception. In most cases, it seems that relatively few copies of each publication were issued. This, with the passing of time, and the lack of recognition of Isaacs' name, has combined to leave few survivors. Scarce copies of the *Hesperus* in its part form survive only in the British Library and the Bodleian Library,

[27] Sarah Ailwood and Maree Sainsbury, "Copyright Law, Readers and Authors in Colonial Australia," *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 14.3 (2014): 11, www nla.gov.au/ojs/index.php/jasal/article/view/3271/4094

Oxford.[28] Original copies of Isaacs' literary journal *Number One*, of his books *Rhyme and Prose* and *Not For Sale*, and of two of his three newspapers, the *Critic* and the *Licensed Victualler*, are present in some major national, state and university libraries in Australia, England and the United States. Unfortunately, the only remaining issue of Isaacs' newspaper, the *Week's Doings* has disappeared from the collection of the State Library of South Australia.[29] A single remnant of the ephemeral *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures of a New Arrival in South Australia* advertising brochure survives in the Mitchell Library in Sydney, as does an undated copy of Isaacs' play *The Housewarming: Too Warm to be Pleasant*. It was published by the Melbourne firm of Charles Troedel, but the author receives no credit in its pages.[30] In his lifetime, Isaacs collected rare books with enthusiasm; now, his own scarce editions are keenly sought after in the antiquarian book trade. A few original copies of the *Queen of the South*, dubbed by Depasquale, "The most desirable early S.A. imprint—the first novel printed in S.A.; written by one of S.A. literature's colonial heroes; in original condition, the cornerstone of a collection of S.A. printed books", are found in public collections, with an unknown number in private hands.[31] Even rarer are the individual parts of the *Queen*'s first incarnation as a six part serial. The only remaining copies are held by the British Library, and regrettably, it retains only the first four of the six parts. This is reflected in the Library's recent paperback reprint of the novel, which lacks parts five and six.

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[28] The only known, surviving original copies of the *Hesperus* are located in the British Library (which holds all five issues, September 1843 to January 1844 inclusive) and the Bodleian Library, Oxford (which has the September 1843 and October 1843 issues only).

[29] Lurline Stuart records that the State Library of South Australia holds one copy of the *Week's Doings*. Lurline Stuart, *Nineteenth Century Australian Periodicals: An Annotated Bibliography* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1979), 169. Anthony Laube, however, has confirmed that the newspaper can no longer be found in the collection. Anthony Laube, State Library of South Australia, *email correspondence*, 1 March 2012.

[30] *The Housewarming: Too Warm to be Pleasant* (Melbourne: Charles Troedel, n.d.). This version of *The Housewarming: Too Warm to be Pleasant*, with its abbreviated title (it has lost the introductory words "The Lost Party") may derive from Edmund Yates' later revision of the play. The characters and plot however closely match the original press descriptions.

[31] Depasquale, *Critical History*, 273. Depasquale prints this quote in italics. Original copies of Isaacs' scarce novel may be found in the State Library of South Australia, the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia Library, the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, the National Library of Australia, the Gawler Institute Archives, Stanford University Library and the Princeton University Library.

Some of Isaacs' other works have been resurrected and reissued in various forms, or are available online. The opening issues of the Humbug Society's *Bunyip* were reprinted in facsimile in 1982.[32] Beginning in 1989, Isaacs' burlesque in *Rhyme and Prose* was also reissued in facsimile by Graham Stone in Sydney, as *The Burlesque of Frankenstein, or; The Man-Gorilla*. The play remains a curiosity to those interested in the evolution of the *Frankenstein* genre and to science fiction enthusiasts. With the advent of print-to-order editions, Isaacs' *Rhyme and Prose; and, A Burlesque, and its History* and *The Dieyerie Tribe of Australian Aborigines* are both available as paperbacks. Various Isaacs' publications, including *Number One*, can also be read in digitised versions. The incomparable *Trove* reveals Isaacs' many contributions to Australian newspapers. How gratifying that Isaacs' words, composed with such enthusiasm and often under such trying conditions, are now easily accessible thanks to recent technology.

It is pertinent to note that no complete bibliography of Isaacs' written works is possible due to his practice of writing anonymously or under a pseudonym. Whether his ephemeral and unidentified advertising jingles can be classed as literature is debatable, but Isaacs' facility with poetry was regularly employed by advertisers keen to use his skills to promote their products. According to Isaacs' obituary in the *Border Watch*, "not a few of those poetical advertisements which are seen in the daily and weekly newspapers are traced to his pen."[33] His known pseudonyms of "S.I.", "G.I." (both found only in the *Hesperus*), "Humanitas", "A.P.", "Pendragon" and "A. Pendragon" are not an exhaustive list. The bulk of Isaacs' unidentified writing however, is likely to be of a minor nature, and is probably confined to advertisements, brief poems, and prose pieces in newspapers or pamphlets.

[32] First published by William Barnet in 1863, *The Bunyip* was owned by the Barnet family until April 2003. The weekly Gawler newspaper continues, and is currently part of the Taylor Group.
[33] *Border Watch*, 19 February 1876, 3.

In summary, Isaacs' literary work is characterised by his willingness to embrace many forms. In common with many of his educated friends in England and Australia, he began his career as an amateur writer, but his passion for writing led him further. In the colonies, his reduced means dictated that he required additional employment to survive, but whenever he was able he rejected such security and attempted to live exclusively as a writer. For Isaacs, these forays, despite his efforts, were financially unsuccessful. As a gentleman by upbringing and demeanour he wrote primarily for the educated classes, but he was also prepared, especially through the medium of his newspapers, to advocate on behalf of the working man. The predominant characteristics of his writing, and also of his personality, were his versatility, his independence and his dogged perseverance in the face of public apathy towards his work. His wit, his breadth of knowledge, his intelligence, his scorn of humbug and most of all, his creative compulsion, drove him to write. In terms of his output, when compared with other colonial writers mentioned in Depasquale's *A Critical History of South Australian Literature 1836–1930*, Isaacs' versatility with his pen was not matched by any other South Australian writer of his generation.

Isaacs' personal legacy, aside from his writing, is also rich and ongoing. Following his return to Adelaide in 1865, his Melbourne family somehow survived and prospered. Marion eventually remarried (or more likely was married for the first time) to James Charles Juliff, in Sydney in 1889.[34] The story of Marion's childhood, romance, immigration, child-rearing and survival after her separation from Isaacs, warrants examination, but like most women of her era she left behind only a bare minimum of official records. As Marion Williams, she died as an Anglican, in Sydney in 1901. According to her death certificate she was aged sixty-five,

[34] Marion gave her status as a "widow" when she married Juliff, who later changed his surname to Williams. Marriage Certificate of Marion Isaacs and James Charles Juliff, 10 December 1889, New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages, reg. no. 1889/003166.

suggesting a birth date around 1835, although this may not be correct.[35] The same document records that she was fifteen when she "married" Isaacs. As her offspring matured, they scattered throughout Victoria and New South Wales and possibly overseas. They did not share the fortunate upbringing of their father, and their adult occupations—for example, of boot maker, milliner and domestic servant—reflect the basic nature of their education and their working class status. When Isaacs' first Australian-born daughter Marion wed David Jones Higginbotham in Melbourne in 1875, Isaacs was described on the marriage certificate as a "gentleman" who was "absent from the colony" (of Victoria).[36] The couple named one of their sons, George. Other grandchildren of Isaacs also bore that name, suggesting that his children retained affection and respect for their father, despite his rift with their mother.[37] Isaacs' own fecundity was repeated in the next generation, creating the basis of a now, no doubt extensive genetic legacy. Despite a large number of descendants, he rapidly disappeared from the family's oral history.[38]

Isaacs' significance as a Jew in Australia is difficult to assess, as he rarely acknowledged his religious heritage in his writing. He was born and buried as a Jew, yet he appears to have had little connection with synagogues in Britain or in Australia. There is little to show how, or if, the Jewish religion shaped his life. If he encountered anti-Semitic prejudice, either in England or in Australia, he did not comment upon it. Certainly he was supported by Jewish friends in his early days in South Australia, but his relationship with the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation is unknown, save that the synagogue graciously buried him. In choosing two Gentile women

[35] Death Certificate of Marion Williams, 15 May 1901, New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages, reg. no. 1901/003969. Marion's birth date remains unclear, though some genealogical websites suggest that she was born in 1829. When she married the younger Juliff in 1889, she claimed to be aged fifty-four, giving a birth date of about 1835. Her stated age at death supports this. Marriage Certificate of Marion Isaacs and James Charles Juliff, 10 December 1889, New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages, reg. no. 1889/003166.
[36] Marriage Certificate of Marion Isaacs [George Isaacs' daughter] and David Jones Higginbotham, 13 October 1875, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Victoria, reg. no. 4928.
[37] For example, Isaacs' eldest child Emily named her first child Andrew (her husband's name) George Melville.
[38] No attempt has been made to identify all living descendants of George Isaacs as an extensive genealogy is outside the scope of this thesis. At the time of writing in 2016, Isaacs has at least six living great-great-great-great-great grandchildren, and probably many more.

as his partners, Isaacs ensured that he and his offspring would never be part of a traditional Jewish community. Nevertheless, he remains South Australia's first Jewish novelist, and probably its first Jewish writer.

Isaacs' Scrapbook, with its collection of letters and ephemera that spans thirty years of Isaacs' life in England and Australia, has its own history. Somehow throughout all his tribulations, Isaacs retained the volume that had its genesis in his carefree youth. Following his death, the volume entered the library of Sir Samuel Way, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of South Australia, and when Way died in 1916 the Scrapbook was transferred to the State Library of South Australia. It remains there, a testament to Isaacs' connections and triumphs. Most of the enclosed English letters are accompanied by their addressed and postmarked envelopes, which incidentally record Isaacs' progress through England and the Continent. His ephemera, such as newspapers cuttings, a postcard, annotations and a drawing, allow further insights into his world. By the time of his death, the autographed letters from eminent authors such as Ainsworth and Bulwer Lytton, had acquired a monetary, as well as a biographical and historical value. Loyau notes their significance to their original owner:

> only those who knew "Pendragon" intimately have any idea of the value he placed upon these associations. He cherished them as dearly as his life. After his death the letters were put up for sale by Mr. W. Townsend, but that gentleman refused to part with them for 10 guineas. He said they would fetch a better price in England.[39]

Export was not their fate and the Scrapbook remained in South Australia.

[39] Loyau, *Gawler Handbook*, 146. Townsend, a former Mayor of Adelaide, was a Member of Parliament at the time of Isaacs' death.

Valuable objects have a life independent of their owners, as they move through different hands across generations. Isaacs' former possessions—so representative of the Victorian enthusiasm for collections and such a testament to his attraction to beautiful objects—have been identified in major museums. These specimens are tangible testaments to his good taste, his early wealth, his social standing and his learning. At the same time, they can be viewed as examples of his inclination for profligacy or his inability to resist temptation. The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford has one of his medieval fibulae.[40] At least thirteen beautiful rings, the remnants of the collection that Isaacs sold to Lord Londesborough in 1850, have been traced to the British Museum, though the whereabouts of his prized engraved emerald ring is unknown.[41] The British Museum also has a number of other items that once graced Isaacs' collection, including enamels, a plaque, a bottle and various other artefacts. The most significant object is his medieval silver gilt reliquary of Saint Eustace, which, unbeknown to Isaacs, still housed its ancient relics.[42] Not all of his former possessions are as notable. His butterfly collection is now in the South Australian Museum, having been transferred from the defunct Gawler Institute Museum. Merged with the state invertebrate collection, the individual specimens can no longer be identified.[43] Like Isaacs himself, the material objects he left behind have had a peripatetic existence.

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[40] David Berry, Ashmolean Museum, *email correspondence*, 8 October 2009, Collection no. AM 1978.22.

[41] Following the deaths of Lord and Lady Londesborough, their rings were absorbed into the massive collection belonging to Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, the medieval specialist at the British Museum. On his death they were bequeathed to the Museum. Photographs of several of these rings appear on the British Museum's website.

[42] The head reliquary of Saint Eustace, which once graced Isaacs' collection, concealed a long held secret. When British Museum curators commenced conservation in 1956, they discovered a previously-unsuspected wooden core. Within was a trove of religious relics, including skull fragments of Saint Eustace, a Roman military saint. Labels identified other relics as coming from Saint Anastasius, Saint Jocunda, Saint Nicholas Bishop, Saint Eucharius, Saint Benedict Abbott, Saint Simeon Confessor, Saint Anthony Confessor, and the Ten Virgins. Some wood from Christ's cross and a piece of his robe, plus the Holy Reed, completed the collection. The relics have since been returned to their original home in Basel Cathedral. Their labelled wrappings (or *relic tituli*) and the Saint Eustace reliquary have been retained by the British Museum. As one of the Museum's treasures, the reliquary is usually displayed in the Medieval Europe room, when it is not touring the world on public exhibition. In 2015 and in early 2016 it was on loan to several Japanese museums as part of the "A History of the World in 100 Objects" exhibition. St. Eustace Head Reliquary, British Museum reg. no. 1850, 1127.1.

[43] Isaacs is described in the South Australian Museum's records as, "One of the earliest taxidermists said to have prepared specimens, from 1840 onwards, which found their way into the Museum." Herbert M. Hale, *Records of the South Australian Museum: Volume XII: The First Hundred Years 1856–1956* (Adelaide: South Australian Museum, 1956), 27. Isaacs is also recorded as contributing unidentified specimens directly to the South Australian Institute Museum, later the South Australian Museum. *South Australian Register*, 13 October 1863, 3.

Isaacs is still fondly remembered in the town of Gawler for the integral role he played in its early development. He initiated the competition that resulted in "The Song of Australia", co-founded the Humbug Society, was present at the birth of the *Bunyip*, and was instrumental in the development of the Gawler Institute, its library, its museum, the town's first fete and various exhibitions. These schemes, though hatched in the rural town, had colony-wide implications. Isaacs' frenetic public involvement in Gawler lasted little more than a decade, but during that time his efforts enhanced its reputation for innovation and irreverence. For this, he is acknowledged in the Town of Gawler's 2008 booklet, *Footprints: Gawler Significant Identities*.[44] Historian Brian Samuels has also assessed Isaacs' contributions to the town in two informative articles in the *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*.[45] Isaacs was the catalyst for many of the events, organizations and facilities that earned Gawler its reputation as the "Athens of the South".

A small but potent part of Isaacs' personal legacy is missing, for there is no verified pictorial or photographic representation of his physical appearance. Despite his prominence in Gawler and Adelaide, and regardless of his friendship with the Adelaide photographer "Professor" Robert Hall, no photographs of Isaacs have been found in institutional collections or in private hands. Tantalizingly, he is known to have been portrayed in Alfred Clint's large watercolour of prominent South Australians, but his name is absent from the incomplete key to the painting. That list was created about forty years after the painting's creation, when Isaacs' physical appearance had long been forgotten.[46] Written references and his own works suggest that he was short in stature, bearded and bespectacled, but, amongst the crowd of

[44] *Footprints: Gawler Significant Identities* (Gawler, South Australia: Town of Gawler, 2008).
[45] Samuels, "Flam! Bam!! Sham!!!: The Gawler Humbug Society," 135–142; Samuels, "Gawler, 'The Colonial Athens,'" 41–52.
[46] Alfred Clint's painting, *Prominent South Australians (No. 2)* is not on display and is currently in storage at the Art Gallery of South Australia (catalogue number 0.602) with its twin, *Prominent South Australians (No. 1)*.

gentleman gazing out from Clint's painting, Isaacs remains unidentified. Instead, his words must serve as his portrait.[47]

As Douglas Pike so elegantly states in *Paradise of Dissent*, "the five roads to respectability in Adelaide were early arrival, thrift, temperance and its illegitimate offspring abstinence, piety, and the ownership of land."[48] Isaacs, apart from in his youth, did not strive for respectability. His comfortable personal circumstances in England did not prompt him to early immigration, and from an early age, he dismissed thrift in favour of indulgence. Temperance and abstinence were contrary to his nature, and piety was never a major concern. Sadly, his penury ensured that he was unable to afford land in the colony. From the time of his arrival in Australia, self-expression, rather than respectability, was Isaacs' goal. He did not easily conform to conventional colonial ideals and he acknowledged his difference: "I am not ashamed to admit, though I may expose a weakness, that I have a disposition in favor of the eccentric and irregular", he once wrote.[49] He was discussing architecture at the time, but the sentiment would appear to apply to many of his actions during his years in Australia.

Described by Loyau as "genial, humourous [sic], vivacious, and versatile", George Isaacs left an enduring testament of his life and his thoughts in his writing.[50] His schemes were grand, his ambition and ego were apparently undimmed by setbacks, his scholarship was wide and his desire to make his name in literature in Australia was a driving, but ultimately unsuccessful force in his life. As he stated, "We do not all fill the place for which our gifts are

[47] Also, according to the supernatural website, the *Haunts of Adelaide*, we have Isaacs' ongoing presence. Apparently, his coughs have been heard in the cellar of the Union Hotel. "The Union Hotel," Allen Tiller, *The Haunts of Adelaide*, 28 May 2013, http://hauntedadelaide.blogspot.com.au/2013/05/the-union-hotel html
[48] Pike, *Paradise of Dissent*, 510.
[49] *The Critic*, 29 November 1862, 7.
[50] Loyau, *Representative Men*, 142.

suitable."[51] Isaacs' legacy embodies the spirit of an adaptable, enterprising and above all, optimistic nineteenth-century Australian immigrant. As recently as 1992, Graham Stone could state in his introduction to the facsimile edition of Isaacs' burlesque that, "Not much can be said with confidence of the life of George Isaacs."[52] Previous academic indifference and Isaacs' omission from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* have not aided his cause. Yet Isaacs' story, his "compelling narrative of struggle" as Jodie George describes it, is demonstrably rich, and its twists and turns add much to our understanding of colonial society.[53]

## Postscript

In 2016, one hundred and forty years after Isaacs' death, a small group will gather under a gnarled olive tree in the Jewish section of the West Terrace Cemetery in Adelaide. The rabbi and a quorum of members of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation, together with Isaacs' descendants and supporters, will dedicate a simple and long overdue gravestone to the memory of the writer.[54] Isaacs, of course, had written his epitaph years before:

> What phantoms we pursue, our end the same—
> For all the self-same end.
> The lordly owner of a time-known name
> Goes to the lowly earth from whence he came;
> I, also, thither wend.[55]

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[51] *South Australian Advertiser*, 31 July 1860, 3.
[52] Isaacs, *Burlesque of Frankenstein*, 29.
[53] Jodie George, "Adelaide: A Literary City, Edited by Philip Butterss," Review in the *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 14.5 (2014): 2. www.nla.gov.au/ojs/index.php/jasal/article/view/3454/4252
[54] Isaacs' headstone will be sponsored by the author of this thesis.
[55] Humanitas [George Isaacs], "Prison Reveries: Dedicated to Samuel Tomkinson, Esquire," *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 12. The poem, with slight alterations, later appeared under Isaacs' name. George Isaacs, "Prison Reveries," in *Rhyme and Prose*, 55. Isaacs may also have been the author of the poem "Epitaph", which appeared anonymously in the first issue of the *Critic*. It concludes, "Waste, then, no thought upon the Dead,/But cheer the struggling and oppressed,/The Living needs his Daily Bread—/The Corpse but its Eternal Rest." *The Critic*, 4 October 1862, 12.

Appendix

# A Chronological Bibliography of the Published and Unpublished Writing of George Isaacs

George Isaacs' writing is spread across several genres. He wrote under his own name, under pseudonyms, and anonymously, and he was responsible for most, if not all, of the unnamed prose and poetry in his anthologies and newspapers. Some of his work remains unidentified due to its anonymous nature, or to presently unidentified pseudonyms. The following bibliography of Isaacs' published and unpublished writing contains only items directly attributed to him by name, pseudonym or other evidence. Poems are marked with an asterisk. Further information on each publication may be found in the main text.

**1843:**

Anon. [George Isaacs]. *The Hesperus: An Original Monthly Magazine of Humour, Literature, and Art*. London: G. Purkess, 1843–1844. Isaacs was the unnamed editor of this threepenny monthly magazine of prose and poetry, which was published in London over five issues between September 1843 and January 1844. The journal aimed to promote the works of youthful writers and contributors were required to be under twenty-one years of age. Isaacs' articles and poems, listed below, are signed either "G.I." [George Isaacs] or "S.I." [Samuel Isaacs].

No. 1. September, 1843

S.I. "William Wordsworth, the New Poet Laureate", 2–3

S.I. "How Oft 'Tis Ours in Crowds to Meet", 5*

G.I. "Carl Kroz", 6–7

S.I. "Fill High the Bowl with Rosy Wine", 7*

G.I. "Eccentricities", 8

G.I. "Memoirs of the Twiggle Club", 9–12

No. 2. October, 1843

S.I. “Leda, by Leonardo Da Vinci”, 14–17*

G.I. “I am a Taciturn Man”, 17

G.I. “Who Can He Be?”, 20

S. I. “To E.C.”, 21*

G.I. “Memoirs of the Twiggle Club”, 22–24

No. 3. November, 1843

G.I. “A Tale For the Month”, 28–29

S.I. “The Rose”, 30–32*

G.I. “The Man That Argues the Point”, 32–34

G.I. “Memoirs of the Twiggle Club”, 34–36

No. 4. December, 1843

S.I. “Remember That Evening”, 41*

G.I. “Versatility”, 42

S.I. “The Vow”, 42–43*

S.I. “Lamia”, 43*

G.I. “Memoirs of the Twiggle Club”, 44–48

**1844:**

*The Hesperus*, continued:

No. 5. January, 1844

G.I. “The National Gallery”, 50–51

S.I. “Ode”, 51–53*

S.I. “The Wreath”, 55–56*

S.I. “A Smile”, 56*

G.I. “Memoirs of the Twiggle Club”, 57–60

**1846:**

Isaacs, George. “Ancient Glass, As Applied to Domestic Purposes.” Isaacs presented this paper, which was not published, at the May 1846 meeting of the Freemasons of the Church, in London.

**1847:**

Isaacs, George. “On Enamel, As Applied to Goldsmiths’ Work and Objects of Personal Decoration, in Continuation of the Foregoing Paper by Mr. Rogers.” Isaacs read this paper, which was not published, at the British Archaeological Association’s Annual Congress in Warwick, England, on 20 July 1847.

**1848:**

Isaacs, George. “On an Enamelled Plate of the Twelfth Century.” *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 3 (1848): 102–105. This was Isaacs’ first published archaeological paper.

**1849:**

Isaacs, George. “Toad-stones.” *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 5 (1850): 340–343. Isaacs read this paper at a meeting of the British Archaeological Association on 30 May 1849. It was published in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* in 1850.

**1850:**

Isaacs, George. *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Ancient and Medieval Art*. Isaacs was employed by the Organizing Committee to assist in the compilation of the catalogue accompanying the Royal Society of Arts’ “Exhibition of Ancient and Medieval Art”, held in London during March 1850. Although his considerable input into the catalogue

was mentioned in various contemporary publications, his contribution is not acknowledged in the frontispiece of the volume.

**1858:**

Pendragon, A. *The Queen of the South: A Colonial Romance: Being Pictures of Life in Victoria in the Early Days of the Diggings*. Gawler, South Australia: W. Barnet, 1858. *The Queen of the South* is the first novel published in South Australia, the first novel published in parts in South Australia and the first novel published by a Jewish writer in South Australia. It is also the first work to appear under Isaacs' pseudonym "A. Pendragon". The novel was initially released in serial form, and the first of its six issues was published in Gawler in April 1858. The completed work, also published by William Barnet, appeared in 1859. It has a publication date of 1858, but its "Dedication" is dated "June 1859".

Pendragon, A. *Colonial Lyrics No. 1*. "The Song of the Bar."* Gawler, South Australia: W. Barnet, 1858. The poem was first advertised in the *South Australian Advertiser* on 25 November 1858. No extant copy has been located, but it was later printed, without attribution, in an Isaacs' newspaper. *The Critic*, 27 December 1862, 10.

**1859:**

A.P. [A. Pendragon]. "Manly Sports: Lines Suggested by the Forthcoming Gawler Fête Champêtre."* *South Australian Register*, 24 February 1859, 2. This poem, also published in the *Adelaide Observer* two days later, is the only known example of Isaacs' use of the pseudonym "A.P." In 1865, the poem appeared in Isaacs' *Rhyme and Prose, and, A Burlesque, and its History* (58–59) under the shortened title "Manly Sports".

Pendragon, A. "Patents in South Australia." *Adelaide Observer*, 21 May 1859, 5. This fictional article is subtitled "Mr. Model Communicates to Mr. A. Pendragon the History of His Last Invention".

Pendragon, A. "Discourses About Many Things." *South Australian Register*, 5 July 1859, 3. This fictional article records a discussion between Mr. Model and A. Pendragon.

Pendragon, A. *Colonial Lyrics No. 2*. "Viva L'Italia."* Gawler, South Australia: W. Barnet, 1859. This poem was first advertised in the *South Australian Advertiser* on 17 August 1859, but no extant copies of the original publication have been located. "Viva L'Italia" later appeared in *The Critic* (29 November 1862, 8) then in *Rhyme and Prose* (56–57) in 1865.

**1860:**

Pendragon, A. "Glances—Backward."* *South Australian Advertiser*, 3 July 1860, 3. The poem later reappeared in *Rhyme and Prose* (12–13) in 1865.

Pendragon, A. "On a Flute, a Dog and the 'Thursday Review'." *South Australian Advertiser*, 31 July 1860, 2.

Pendragon, A. "Garibaldi: A Rhapsody."* *South Australian Register*, 1 September 1860, 3. "Garibaldi" was reprinted in *Rhyme and Prose* (14–15) in 1865.

Pendragon, A. "The Seer's Warning."* *South Australian Advertiser*, 22 September 1860, 2. The poem later appeared in *Rhyme and Prose* (61).

Pendragon, A. *You and I*. This story, which was to be published in monthly parts of one shilling each, was advertised in Kapunda's *Northern Star* newspaper from 13 October 1860. It did not appear, and the following March an advertisement stated that the serial would be "withdrawn for the present".

**1861:**

*Number One* 1 (1861). Under the pseudonym A. Pendragon, Isaacs was the editor and main contributor of *Number One,* an anthology of prose and poetry that was written in Gawler, printed at the *Northern Star* office in Kapunda and published in Adelaide by Rigby in April 1861. It was Isaacs' attempt to found an ongoing literary journal in the colony, but only one issue appeared. Dr. George Nott contributed prose and poetry under the pseudonyms "G.N." and "Ignotus". Another poem was by the English writer, Rev. W. Clarke. The remaining anonymous contents of the journal, listed below, are presumed to have been written by Isaacs.

"The Tooth of the Good St. Ambrose", 4–11.*

"Life in Death", 19–20.* (Marked as "18" on "Contents" page.)

"The Owl and the Lark", 22–23.*

"Passages from an Inedited Romance: 1. Peter Plosman. 2. The Parricide Collar", 24–30.

"The Myrtle", 31.*

"Dinners", 32–34.

"How We Fared When Hard Up in Paris", 37–42.

"After Proof", 45–47.

Pendragon, A. "Jack Jifkins: A Romance of Hampstead Heath."* *Bell's Life in Adelaide and Sporting Chronicle,* 8 June 1861, 40.

Isaacs, George. "A Letter on a Letter, Addressed to Walter Duffield, Esq. M.P." This pamphlet, written as a response to a controversy in Gawler, was printed "For the benefit of the public" in 1861.

Isaacs, George. “Council of Four on a Grave Subject”, “Johnny M’Toole’s Primer”, “The Brawling Corporation”, “The Devil, the Jew and the Corporation”. These four squibs were published in Gawler in November 1861. No copies have been found.

**1862:**

Pendragon, A. *That’s Smith*. Isaacs’ first play, a two-act farce set in Adelaide, premiered at the Victoria Theatre in Adelaide on 22 July 1862. Only two performances occurred and the script was not published.

Pendragon, A., *The Critic*. Isaacs was the editor of the weekly satirical newspaper *The Critic*, which was published in Adelaide from October 1862 to March 1863. Its content includes political commentary, poems, letters to the Editor, news from the theatre, racetrack and concert hall, book reviews and extracts (including some chapters from Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*), puzzles and advertisements. Undoubtedly Isaacs was the author of most of the paper’s content, including its many satirical rhymes. The few items in *The Critic* that bear his pseudonyms, or that can be directly attributed to him, are listed below:

Number 1. 4 October 1862

Pendragon, A. “A Leading Article”, 7–8.

Number 2. 11 October 1862

Humanitas. “Prison Reveries”, 12.* This is the only known example of Isaacs’ use of the pseudonym “Humanitas”. The poem later appeared under Isaacs’ name in *Rhyme and Prose* (54–55).

Anon. “My Meerschaum Pipe”, 12.* Published anonymously in *The Critic*, this poem reappeared in *Rhyme and Prose* (36) under Isaacs’ name. The “Contents” page of the book gives its page number incorrectly as “37”.

Anon. “We All Would Do Better When We Grow Grey”, 12.* First published anonymously, this poem reappeared, slightly modified, under Isaacs’ name in *Rhyme and Prose* (60).

Number 3. 18 October 1862

Anon. “The Sword of Benevenuto Cellini”, 10.* Published anonymously in *The Critic*, this poem later reappeared in *Rhyme and Prose* (85) under Isaacs’ name.

Number 6. 8 November 1862

Anon. “Ancient Superstitions”, Part 1, 9–11. This is the first part of the complex lecture delivered by Isaacs in towns north of Adelaide during August and September 1862.

Number 7. 15 November 1862

Pendragon, A. “Ancient Superstitions”, Part 2, 10–12. The second part of Isaacs’ lecture carried his pseudonym.

Number 9. 29 November 1862

Pendragon, A. “The English Humorists of the 18th Century: By W.M. Thackary [sic]”, 5.

Pendragon, A. “The Old Spot Inn, Twainbridge: A Reminiscence of Ten Years Ago”, 7.

Pendragon, A. “Viva L’Italia; A Voice from Australia”, 8.* This poem first appeared in *Colonial Lyrics No. 2*, in 1859. It was later published in *Rhyme and Prose* (56).

Anon. “Playing With Words”, 13. This is the first anonymous part of a two-part article on word games by Isaacs.

Number 10. 20 December 1862

Anon. “Playing With Words”, 11–12. Isaacs’ second article on word games concludes with a sketch of his rebus— a pair of eyes over an axe [eyes axe=Isaacs].

Number 11. 27 December 1862

Pendragon, A. “Wanted, A Leading Article”, 3. The writer identifies himself as the editor of the paper.

Anon. “Song of the Bar”, 10.* This poem had previously appeared in 1858 in *Colonial Lyrics No.1*. by A. Pendragon.

Pendragon, A. “A Song for the New Year”, 10.* The poem was later republished in *Rhyme and Prose* (64–65).

Anon. “An Editor in a Fix and How He Got Out Of It: Being an Embellished and Exaggerated Fact”, 11.* As Isaacs was the editor of the paper, this poem is attributed to him.

**1863:**

*The Critic* continued:

Number 15. 24 January 1863

Pendragon, A. “The Toast of the Press”, 12.

Number 17. 7 February 1863

Pendragon, A. “Blogg’s Mems. at the Exhibition on North Terrace”, 6–7.

Number 18. 14 February 1863

Pendragon, A. “The Way In and the Way Out”, 4–5.

Isaacs, George. *Major Blaze*. Isaacs' comedy *Major Blaze* was first discussed in the Adelaide press in June 1863. The *Register* then reported that Isaacs had failed to find a venue for its production, and that he would send the script to Stationer's Hall in England to establish his copyright. This did not occur and the play was not published or performed.

*The Bunyip*. Gawler, South Australia. The first issue of the Gawler Humbug Society's *Bunyip* newspaper appeared on 5 September 1863. Isaacs contributed to its early issues.

Isaacs, George. *The Burlesque of Frankenstein; or, The Man-Gorilla*. Isaacs completed this burlesque by late 1863, but was thwarted in his attempts to have it staged in Melbourne during the 1863 and 1864 Christmas seasons. It was never performed, but its script is preserved in *Rhyme and Prose, and, A Burlesque, and its History* (99–128).

**1864:**

Isaacs, George. "Send Them to Gaol."* This poem was published in Melbourne on a single leaf of paper in January 1864. It later appeared in *Rhyme and Prose* (16).

Isaacs, George. *Our Trip to the Rhine*. Isaacs' most successful play was first performed at the Polytechnic Hall in Melbourne in November 1864. English entertainers Grace Egerton ("Mrs. George Case") and George Case presented the play throughout Australia, and later in New Zealand, India, Japan, South Africa, the United States and Canada. Its last confirmed performance in Australia occurred in Brisbane in November 1875, shortly before Isaacs' death.

Isaacs, George. *Matrimonial Episode in the Lives of Sir Everard and Lady May Flutterly*. This sketch, a tale of a jealous husband, his wife and an innocent bystander, was first performed by Grace Egerton and George Case at George Isaacs' Benefit at the

Polytechnic Theatre in Melbourne on 15 December 1864. It was then added to the Case's repertoire.

**1865:**

Isaacs, George. *Rhyme and Prose; and, A Burlesque, and its History*. Melbourne: Clarson, Shallard & Co., 1865. Much of the material in this collection of prose and poetry had already appeared in Isaacs' *Number One* and elsewhere. Previous publication details are given for such works in the list below.

"A Love Dream", 9–10.*

"For the Passionate Dream of an Hour", 10–11.*

"Glances Backward", 12–13.* Previously published. *South Australian Advertiser*, 3 July 1860, 3.

"Garibaldi", 14–15.* Previously published. *South Australian Register*, 1 September 1860, 3.

"Send Them to Gaol", 16.* Previously published in Melbourne in January 1864.

"Dinners", 17–20.

"Peace", 21–22.*

"How We Fared When Hard Up in Paris", 23–33. This tale describes the youthful adventures of Isaacs and his friend Harry Rogers in Paris. It had previously appeared in *Number One*. 37–42.

"The Owl and the Lark", 34–35.* Previously published. *Number One*, 22–23.

"My Meerschaum Pipe", 36–37.* Previously published. *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 12.

"The Myrtle", 37.* Previously published. *Number One*, 31.

"Where Art Thou Now, Love?" 38.*

"The Tooth of the Good St. Ambrose: A Legend of the Basilica of St. Ambrose, at Milan", 39–48.* Previously published. *Number One*, 4–11.

“Life in Death”, 49–51.* Previously published. *Number One,* 19–20.

“War”, 52–53.*

“Death’s Clearance”, 53.*

“Prison Reveries”, 54–55.* Previously published under the pseudonym “Humanitas”. *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 12.

“Viva L’Italia: A Voice From Australia”, 56–57.* Previously published. *Colonial Lyrics, No. 2*; *The Critic,* 29 November 1862, 8.

“Manly Sports”, 58–59.* Previously published. *South Australian Register,* 24 February 1859, 2.

“We All Would Do Better When We Grow Grey”, 60.* Previously published. *The Critic*, 11 October 1862, 12.

“The Seer’s Warning”, 61.* Previously published. *South Australian Advertiser*, 22 September 1860, 2.

“Good Bye, Bad World”, 62–63.*

“A Song for the New Year”, 64–65.* Previously published. *The Critic,* 27 December 1862, 10.

“Victoria in Excelsis: A Satire”, 66–71* The poem is dated “October 1864”.

“Passages From an Inedited Romance”, 72–84. Previously published. *Number One*, 24–30.

“The Sword of Benevenuto Cellini”, 85.* Previously published. *The Critic*, 18 October 1862, 10.

“We Shall Have a Damp Bed To-night, My Child”, 86–87.*

“Magdalena”, 88.*

“After Proof”, 89. Previously published. *Number One*, 45–47.

“A Burlesque, and Its History”, 96–98. In this introduction, Isaacs explains the circumstances that led to the burlesque’s absence from the Melbourne stage.

*The Burlesque of Frankenstein; or, The Man-Gorilla*, 99–128. The script of Isaacs' unperformed play.

Isaacs, George. *The Myrtle*. Following the release of *Rhyme and Prose* in Melbourne, Madame Stuttaford set Isaacs' poem "The Myrtle" to music, then released it as a song. It was published by Fergusson and Mitchell in Melbourne in July 1865. No copies have been located.

**1866:**

Pendragon, A. *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures of a New Arrival in South Australia*. Adelaide: Waddy, 1866. This fictional story is an advertising brochure for Adelaide's businesses. A sequel appeared in 1867.

Isaacs, George. "Not For Ourselves We Sought Your Presence Here."* *The Bunyip*, 11 August 1866, 3. "Not For Ourselves" was written as a prologue to an amateur performance in support of a proposed "asylum for the blind" in Adelaide.

Isaacs, George. *Travels Round the World: Commencing from Government House*. The title was probably a satirical commentary on current events, disguised as an advertisement for a new publication. *South Australian Register*, 6 October 1866, 1.

Isaacs, George. *The Origin, Rise and Progress of British Song*. Written for the English musician George Loder, this lecture was delivered on 18 December 1866 at the Adelaide Town Hall.

Isaacs, George. *The Lost Party or The House Warming—Too Warm to be Pleasant*. Isaacs' farce became a popular piece in the repertoire of George Case and Grace Egerton.

**1867:**

*Mr. Fastman on His Legs Again*. Isaacs advertised this sequel to *Twenty-four Hours' Adventures* in Eustace Reveley Mitford's paper, *Pasquin*, on 16 March 1867. Five thousand free copies were available, but no examples have been located.

Isaacs, George. *Our Uncle*. The unpublished farce had only one performance, at the Victoria Theatre in Adelaide on 7 June 1867.

**1868:**

Isaacs, George. "How Tom Pallet Laid the Ghosts." *Adelaide Observer*, 13 June 1868, 10.

Anon. [George Isaacs?]. "Insolvency Codes." Following the writer's death in 1876, several Adelaide papers reported that Isaacs wrote "some clever papers about debt and debtors seven or eight years ago for the Observer". (The first example of the statement appears in the *Evening Journal*, 15 February 1876, 2.) As the *Adelaide Observer* published a series of anonymous, sober articles under the heading "Insolvency Codes" during 1868, Isaacs may have been their author:

"Insolvency Codes: I. Roman; II. Early English." *Adelaide Observer*, 15 August 1868, 13.

"Insolvency Codes: III. Modern English; IV. The Scotch; V. The Belgian; VI. American; VII. Summary of Principles." *Adelaide Observer*, 29 August 1868, 4.

"Insolvency Codes: VIII. Lord Cairns Bill." *Adelaide Observer*, 12 September 1868, 13.

Isaacs, George. "The House of the Four Robbers." *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, 29 August 1868, 3. This short story soon reappeared in Isaacs' anthology *Not for Sale*. 19–27.

**1869:**

Isaacs, George. “On the Drama of ‘Punch’”. *Pasquin*, 9 January 1869, 13–14. Isaacs’ article examines the relevance of the traditional Punch and Judy show.

Isaacs, George. *Not For Sale: A Selection of Imaginative Pieces*. Adelaide: Sims & Elliott, 1869. This slim anthology of prose and poetry was dedicated to the Commissioner of Police, George Hamilton, and its many love poems were perhaps inspired by Isaacs’ recent marriage. Unlike his earlier publications, *Not For Sale* contains no previously-published material, apart from the short story, “The House of the Four Robbers”:

“Prelude: To ——”, 4.*

“A Tale of Mystery and Mesmerism”, 5–15.

“Laura”, 16–17.*

“To Grace”, 18.*

“The House of the Four Robbers”, 19–27. Previously published. *South Australian Chronicle and Daily Mail*, 29 August 1868, 3.

“Night and Morn”, 27.*

“From the Parlour Operatta (*sic*) of ‘The Enraged Musician.’”, 28.*

“Lament”, 29.*

“Someone’s Nigh”, 29.*

“The Orange Flower”, 30.*

“Without a Passport”, 31–47.

“Dora”, 48.*

Isaacs, George. “Though Leagues of Treacherous Seas the Shores Divide.”* *South Australian Register*, 1 December 1869, 2. This poem was composed for an event organized by the German Dramatic Club, held at the Theatre Royal, Adelaide, on 30 November 1869.

Pendragon, ed. *The Licensed Victualler*. Adelaide: City Steam Press, 1869–1870. This threepenny weekly satirical paper promoted the interests of the colony's licensed victuallers. It commenced in November 1869 but failed after thirteen issues, concluding on 5 March 1870. Isaacs was probably responsible for most of its content.

**1870:**

*The Licensed Victualler* continued:

Pendragon. "The Act of Providence: A Hudibrastic."* *Licensed Victualler*, 5 March 1870, 5. This poem appeared in the paper's thirteenth and final issue.

Pendragon A. "The Lawyer's Christmas; or, Bodie and Chillipank." *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, Christmas Supplement, 24 December 1870, 1–2. This was Isaacs' first Christmas story.

**1872:**

Isaacs, George. *Week's Doings*. This illustrated, satirical weekly paper first appeared on 6 April 1872. "W. Burrows" was briefly associated with the paper at its inception, but Isaacs was soon sole editor. The paper collapsed in June 1872, partially due to Isaacs' ill-health. With a motto of "shooting folly as it flies", it contained political cartoons, articles and poems. No copies remain.

Pendragon, A. "Police Force—Minutes of Evidence." Isaacs announced the forthcoming appearance of this publication in the *South Australian Register*. The project did not proceed. *South Australian Register*, 26 November 1872, 8.

**1873:**

Isaacs, George. "A Christmas Tale." *Adelaide Observer*, 27 December 1873, 13. Isaacs' second Christmas story.

**1874:**

Gason, Samuel. *The Dieyerie Tribe of Australian Aborigines*. Edited by George Isaacs. Adelaide: W.C. Cox, Government Printer, 1874. Isaacs added a brief editorial introduction to the anthropological work. The book was later incorporated into J.D. Woods, *The Native Tribes of South Australia*. Adelaide: Wigg, 1879.

Isaacs, George. "In Barracks: A Christmas Log." *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*. Christmas Supplement, 26 December 1874, 2–3. Isaacs' third Christmas story.

**1875:**

Isaacs, George. "Our Place: And How We Spent the Christmas There." *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*, Christmas Supplement, 25 December 1875, 1, 10. Isaacs' fourth Christmas story.

**1876:**

Isaacs, George. "Oh, Master Mind."* According to an annotation in Isaacs' Scrapbook, this three stanza printed poem about the South Australian Postmaster-General Charles Todd's troubles with the Post Office clock, is Isaacs' final work. Judging from its subject matter it was composed in early 1876, shortly before the writer's death.

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