

the question, that he was alive and safe, a haunting fear would at times creep across their hearts. They received every now and then vague reports as to his well or ill being from people who had heard of the English prisoner, and thought it their duty to forward to the Isle of Man every breath of news that was whispered from across the Channel.

One morning when Rosemary went up to Urleigh Court, she found Mrs. Constantine in great tribulation.

"I have been longing for you, Rosemary, child," she said steadily, through the tears that were streaming down her pale cheeks. "There is news of him: but such news, so uncertain, that I will tell no one save you; for why should the others endure this cruel anxiety which is torturing us nearly to death?"

She took from her pocket a letter, which she gave the girl. It was from a friend of theirs who lived on the Kentish coast, and who had had the letter conveyed by special messenger.

"I must write you the last news so far as I know of our poor Alec," it ran. "It was brought me by an old fisherman, who was a friend of the man with whom the poor boy was hiding. He says that Alec succumbed to the terrible fever and ague from which he was suffering, the very day after his friend escaped to Heligoland. I know not if this be the truth, but the man seemed very certain of his facts. God help you in your sorrow!"

"I was never worthy to be his wife," sobbed Rosemary. "But oh, mother, it is hard to bear this fearful suspense!"

She looked up at Mrs. Constantine as she spoke. Her hand was solemnly raised to heaven, and the look on her face checked the girl's grief.

"We are all prisoners of Hope," she said. "And I will not believe that my son is indeed dead until I have had some tangible proof."

END OF CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

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## MY PACKING-CASES, AND WHAT I DID WITH THEM.

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**P**ACKING-CASES! My eyes light and my heart throbs with gratitude at the very words. I have disparaged their use. I have even written in these pages and advised against it; and, in spite of all they have been to me, I still say that in these days of cheap and artistic furniture it is a waste of force to spend time in manufacturing articles out of packing-cases if—here mark the words—we can afford to do better.

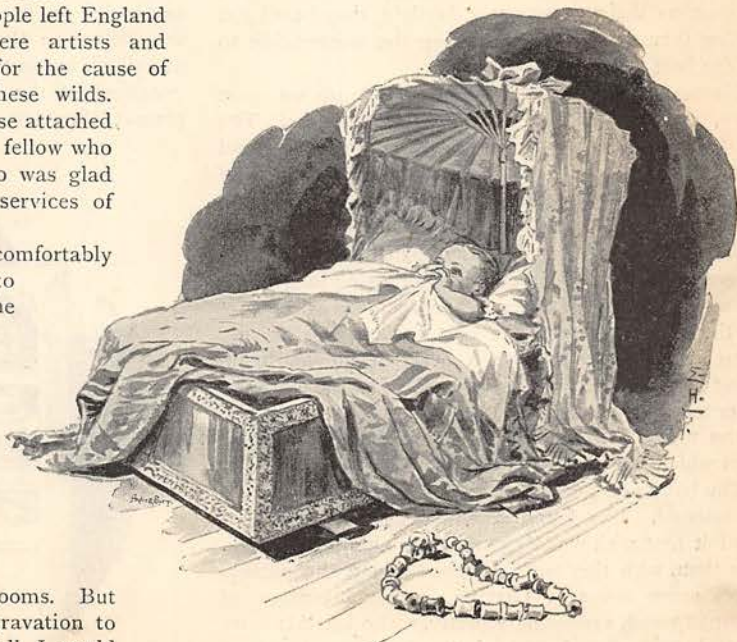
A little while ago a party of six people left England for the Australian bush. They were artists and writers by profession, and wished for the cause of work to get some experience of these wilds. Before they started they took the house attached to a sheep-run, belonging to a young fellow who had come home for a year, and who was glad enough to let it, and to throw in the services of his handy man.

He told us it was plainly but comfortably furnished. He advised us, however, to take our bedding and linen; and as the scholars wanted so many books and the painters such an amount of canvas, and as we all had to take enough garments for nine months, our luggage was considerable.

I was the raven of the party. I did not believe in that fine-spoken youth, who was so glad to let his house and loll about in English drawing-rooms. But as my croaks only served as an aggravation to the rest, I had to be silent, and all I could do was to pack, in an aggressive mood,

a case of odds and ends of useful carpentering materials.

The house was eighty miles from a railway-station, and, with the exception of the people who were taking charge of our landlord's sheep, the nearest neighbours lived at a distance of forty miles. The scenery was most beautiful, the quiet for literary work excessive;



AN EXTEMPORISED COT.



BOOK-CASE AND LAMP-STAND.

as to the furniture, we found two beds, and a third for a servant. There was no book-case of any sort—no cupboard, either for hanging dresses nor for tea-cups—no cradle for the unfortunate baby, who had lost his own on the journey.

The first few days were dark indeed. The men of the party were not so natty with their hands as some artists, nor did they seem so willing to help; in fact, as soon as their canvas saw daylight they heard Art calling them, and were off, leaving the women-folk to do the best they could.

Necessity made us desperate: bedsteads we must have, or sleep on the floor for nine months. The lumber-room was empty, but in an outhouse we found a quantity of packing-cases, in which the furniture of the house must have once arrived. We brought the three largest into the house, and set them in their places in the bedrooms. In my box of treasures were several dozen yards of webbing, and, using long nails, we fastened strips of it across the open top of the case for the bed to lie on. The cover, which was already detached, we used to form a head to the bedstead, using very strong and long nails for the purpose. After rubbing all the wood smooth, we varnished it; to the top of the bed's head we attached little hooks, from which hung frilled curtains of butter muslin.

The baby's cot, made by his fond mother, was more ornamental. She found a small packing-case, and lined it first with wadding and then with pink sateen. She then, with tiny nails, fastened along the outside edges some strips of Carvina—a new invention, of stamped wood, exceedingly pretty. She left this in its natural colour, and stained the inside mahogany; while, for want of something better, she used a small

Japanese umbrella to hang the curtain from, fastening it over the head of the cot with two long nails passed through a hole bored in the handle.

Our next necessity was a book-shelf, and we tried to combine with it a movable lamp-stand. For this purpose we again brought out a packing-case, and fitted the interior with shelves; we made them fast by screwing a little wedge of wood exactly under where each shelf was to come upon each side of the interior of the case. We used short screws, and bored the holes first with a gimlet. We had to be very exact in our measurements, or our shelves would have been crooked. We sawed some deal exactly of the length required, and fitted it in; then we rubbed all the wood well with sand-paper, and stained the whole, outside and in. It wanted three coats before it was dark enough, and between each coat a rub with sand-paper. When perfectly dry, we French-polished. I had a ninepenny bottle of polish with me, and I poured a very tiny drop on the surface, and rubbed with a soft rag until it began to feel sticky. I then added more polish and began again; and so on, little by little, till the lovely transparent surface was gained that lasts for ever.

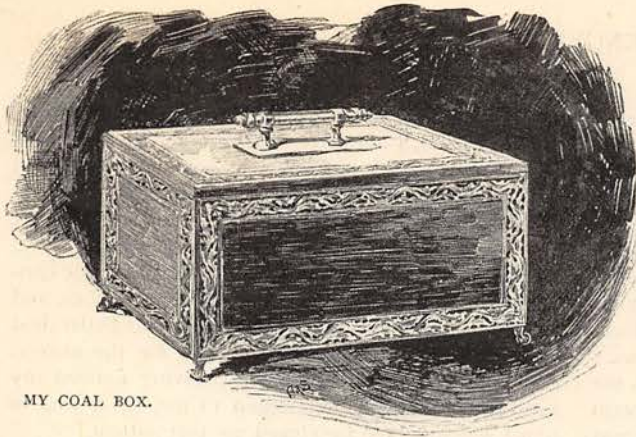
For the top of the case upon which the lamp was to stand we used some lengths of bamboo, cut them into required measurement, and arranged them to form an outside edge by boring holes and fastening them on to the wood with little screws. When all was done, we screwed castors to the bottom; it is better to do this the last thing, as otherwise your case will wriggle about when you particularly want it to be motionless.

We made a hanging dress-cupboard out of another case, decorating it in the same manner.

Another way of using a packing-case is to make it into a china cupboard. For this purpose the cover can be left on, but it is prettier without it. Arrange the shelves in the interior with wedges of wood as described, but in this case let them be irregular. For instance, let the top one go all the way along for plates; then put one below reaching three-quarters



CHINA CUPBOARD.



MY COAL BOX.

across, and another, about four inches below, only a quarter, and so on, taking for your copy a Chinese china cupboard. You may line the inside with velvet or with gold Japanese paper, or, if you want to do it cheaply, paint the inside dull red or blue and the outside with enamel, using a very fine brush and giving two coats. Remember before painting to rub down the wood, or it will never look well. If you use the door, fasten a Lincustra panel in the centre with indiarubber solution, and paint it with two coats.

While in the bush I made a beautiful coal (or rather wood) box, for our logs, out of a small wine-case. I used a bordering of stamped Carvina, and painted all a good black, giving three coats to make it look rich. I put on castors, and for a handle screwed into the cover a brass front-door handle, costing about three shillings and sixpence. A most handsome box was the result. Of course, the inside was also black. I have since carved such a case and then stained it with oak-staining, and the result has been most satisfactory. A movable tin lining is an improvement.

The last article I helped to make was a cosy corner. We draped two large cases with a wide frill of cretonne, and covered them with cushions covered with the same material, making the seats of webbing in the same way that we managed for the bedsteads. This webbing is much less hard to sit upon than the wood would be. We then draped the cretonne from the top of the wall, where it was fastened with a double frill, meeting, of course, in the corner, and we leant one or two cushions against this background.

By this being the last piece of handiwork I can boast of, you must not suppose that the house was complete—we were very far from that desirable ultimatum. But I used occasionally to slip my hand into my pocket and feel something hard that weighed it

down; and which was in fact my exact passage money home. And when, after a time, in the middle of making furniture, doing housework, cutting up the sheep after it had been killed, and cooking it as best I could, I realised that, though I had come into unutterable quiet as far as society went, I had not had one moment to write a line or read a book, I resolved that as I was in no way obeying the call of duty but had come on a pleasure trip, I would break away from my friends and return once more to civilised life.

They write kindly from that far distant land, and say that the artists help more than they did at first, and that the baby does not cry quite always. I am glad to hear it, and am thankful indeed to feel that the ship is not yet made which will carry me again to that wild life, to find my only comfort in a packing-case.



MY COSY CORNER.

