Pieter Koster

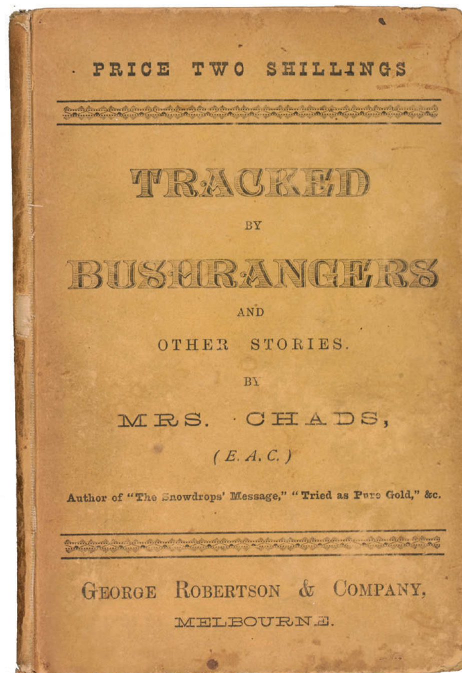
A Forgotten Art Critic: Ellen Augusta Chads and the Melbourne Art Scene 1884–86

ELLEN AUGUSTA CHADS (1837–1923) was a Melbourne author, journalist and art critic. Her name is barely known today, for although she wrote when the First Wave Feminists were beginning to have an impact on society, she could never be considered one of them. Her four books of didactic romances, published between 1882 and 1891 quickly became unfashionable and have long been forgotten.[1] Her journalism for the *Herald and Weekly Times* is lost in unsigned articles. In later life she played a prominent role in the establishment of the Lost Dogs' Home in North Melbourne, but this too is almost entirely unacknowledged now.[2]

Her life in Melbourne was one of considerable hardship. She had been born Ellen Augusta Morrison in Jersey in 1837, the youngest child of Vice Admiral Isaac Hawkins Morrison and Louisa Adams Smith, the daughter of a successful London pattern-maker. She married the widower Captain John Henry Chads in unusual circumstances on the island of Mauritius in 1865 and came to Melbourne with him in that same year. Chads's father was Colonel John Cornell Chads, governor of the British Virgin Islands and his uncle was Admiral Sir Henry Ducie Chads K.C.M.G. His sister married Felix Bedingfeld, the youngest son of a baronet.

Captain Chads's first wife had died shortly after giving birth to her third child. At the time of his marriage to Ellen, he was a regimental paymaster serving in Mauritius, where Bedingfeld was Colonial Secretary and Ellen's brother William Lawtie Morrison was Surveyor-General. Three weeks after the wedding Chads was cashiered from the army for embezzlement and declared 'unworthy to serve Her Majesty in any capacity whatever'. It is likely that he deceived Ellen Morrison into marrying him because she had an income from the estate of her recently deceased father. Shunned by fellow officers, ex-Captain Chads and his wife departed for Melbourne to start a new life. Here he became a book-keeper and eventually a mail clerk in the Education Department. A son was born but died on the day of his birth, and a daughter was still-born. John Henry Chads was constantly in and out of courts facing charges of debt and fraud. Their life in Melbourne was itinerant, moving from one house to another almost annually and in 1876 he was declared insolvent.

Ellen Chads began to write fiction and her first rewards came in 1880 with stories in the *Melbourne Christmas Annual* followed by irregular columns in the *Australian Woman's Magazine and Domestic Journal*. In June 1884 a new journal entitled *Once a Month* appeared. Under the initials 'E. A. C.', Chads wrote extensive Art Notes for each month of the journal's two-year run, and also contributed occasional columns on music and current events.



Front cover of *Tracked by Bushrangers and Other Stories* (1891) by Ellen Chads. State Library of Victoria.

Though her columns seem to have been well received, her fiction was not. Granted that four books of stories were published, what must be taken into account is that each of them was published at the author's risk. Publishers such as Cameron, Laing and Co. who published her first collection, and George Robertson of Melbourne who published the last two of her books, invariably published at the author's cost, almost entirely irrespective of the merits or otherwise of the literature.[3]

Some contemporary reviews were mildly appreciative, while others were savage in their criticism. One review said of her fiction writings: 'English fiction with an accidental Australian setting . . . produced on but little indebted to Australian soil.'[4] Worse still was the review that suggested it was 'ostentatious', the reading of the book 'more a task than a pleasure', and the characters 'nothing but dummies' and 'quite uninteresting'.[5]

Ellen's current events column reported, among other things, on public meetings. Ellen's conservative religious beliefs came to the fore in these reports, as well as in her romance stories. Most striking, perhaps, is her report of one of the very early meetings of the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society where she smugly predicted its failure to her readers:

> Happily for the common sense of our community, the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society is very far from a success. At the recent [meeting] held early last month, only about fifty persons were present and the proceedings were of a very tame nature. The members however, in spite of all adverse appearances, declared themselves quite confident of future success![6]

This opinion was repeated in a homiletic addendum to her last book, *Tracked by Bushrangers and Other Stories*, published in 1891.

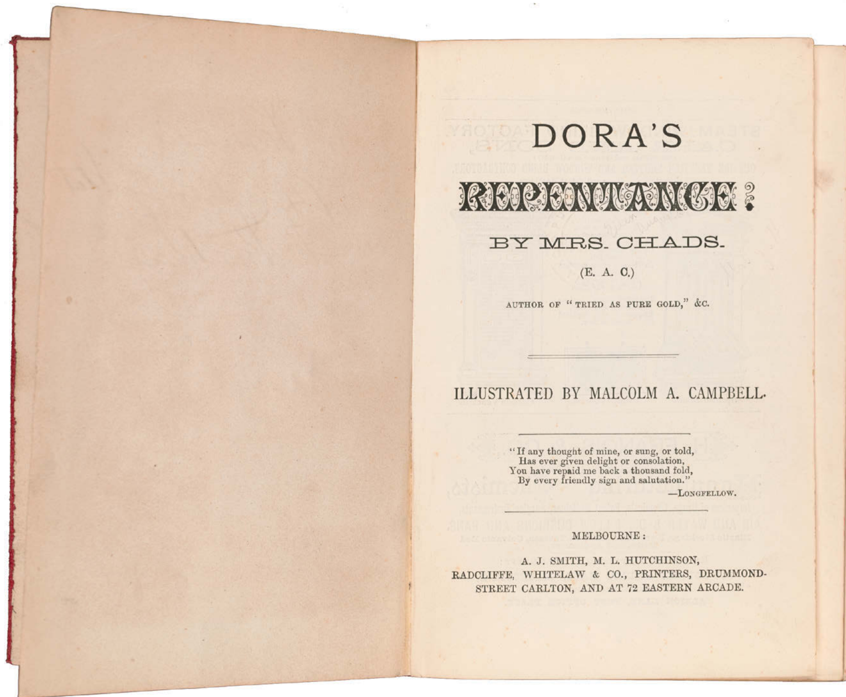
Her novel *Tracked by Bushrangers* was dedicated to the memory of her husband, who had died of 'general debilitation' in 1890. At some time after this, Ellen obtained work as a journalist with the *Herald and Weekly Times*.

Chads and the Wider Art Scene

The Melbourne art scene of the mid 1880s was very much a reflection of the Victorian art world and this, according to Alison Inglis, 'was one of the most vibrant and successful in Britain's history'. As evidence for this claim she adduces the increasing numbers of artists and their increasing status, as well as the demand for exhibitions and the expansion of the commercial market. She makes it clear that this vibrancy was not restricted to London or even to England, but also extended to colonial cities like Melbourne, by examining art exhibitions in London, Manchester and Melbourne.[7] The peak of the art boom in Melbourne occurred in the 1880s when art dealerships and galleries abounded in Collins Street East.[8]

Melbourne itself was a booming city, populated by those who had come seeking a fortune in the gold rushes and were now determined to find it in commerce. Graeme Davison suggests that in the early 1880s 'Melbourne was leaving its trading and primitive industrial stages behind and gradually acquiring the broader functions of a fully-fledged metropolis'. During this decade the population increased from 268,000 to 473,000. It had what Davison terms 'a characteristically metropolitan ethos'.[9] It was precisely at this time that Ellen Chads wrote her art columns for *Once a Month*.

From mid 1884 until mid 1886 *Once a Month* lived up to its namesake and appeared without fail.[10] It contained biographies of prominent citizens, short fiction and longer fiction as serials, and regular features on current events, gardening, chess, music and, of course, art. It attempted to appeal to a readership in Sydney as well as in its native Melbourne. Chads's pathway to her association with *Once a Month* is easy to trace. The stories in the *Melbourne Christmas Annual* of 1880 published by Cameron Laing and Co. led to her association with the *Australian Woman's Magazine and Domestic Journal*, which was also published by Cameron Laing. Here Chads contributed columns on current topics, written in the stilted dialogue common at the time, as well as a few stories, and notes on music, books and art. Cameron Laing then agreed to publish her first book of short stories, *Tried as Pure Gold and Other Tales*, in 1882. Then in 1884 she began to write the art columns for *Once a Month*, focusing on art in Melbourne. She was as regular as the magazine. The writer of the Sydney notes was far less regular, with the



DORA'S

REPENTANCE?

BY MRS. CHADS.

(E. A. C.)

AUTHOR OF "TRIED AS PURE GOLD," &C.

ILLUSTRATED BY MALCOLM A. CAMPBELL.

"If any thought of mine, or sung, or told,
Has ever given delight or consolation,
You have repaid me back a thousand fold,
By every friendly sign and salutation."
—LONGFELLOW.

MELBOURNE:

A. J. SMITH, M. L. HUTCHINSON,
RADCLIFFE, WHITELAW & CO., PRINTERS, DRUMMOND-STREET CARLTON, AND AT 72 EASTERN ARCADE.

Title page of *Dora's Repentance* (1883) by Ellen Chads. State Library of Victoria.

notes often being of the briefest nature or even frequently absent, but the Melbourne notes were always there and always comprehensive.

In her twenty-four columns she mentions no less than 268 different artists, from Miss A'Beckett to L. J. Wood, and many of them receive multiple notices. Her favourite seems to have been Robert Dowling, who received thirty-three mentions, followed by John Mather with twenty-one. She was particularly fond of Dowling's *From Calvary to the Tomb* and his *Daniel in the Den of Lions*, defending them against their critics and pleading for their purchase by the National Gallery of Victoria.[11]

Her admiration for these works reveals a preference for religious subjects and the allied genre of history painting. She frequently describes the scenes depicted in these paintings in lengthy detail, just as James Smith, the *Argus* art critic who constantly promoted cultural activities in the fledgling colony did. Placing Chads's notes on *From Calvary to the Tomb* next to those of James Smith reveals such striking similarities that after making allowances for the fact they are both writing about the same work of art and describing the same scene one is yet led to suspect a benign kind of plagiarism.[12]

The similarity of their views is evident in Smith's criticism of Eugene von Guérard who, he complained, failed to convey the spirit of nature or the lessons that nature teaches, though 'his interpretation is faithful to a fault'.[13] Chads does not repeat Smith's criticism, but her comments on von Guérard's works are distinctly lukewarm. His *Barter* 'contrasts well with a charming work by H. F. Johnstone, *Forest of Fontainbleau, Spring*, in which the freshness of budding green leaves and perfume of early grass are almost to be felt'. Of some scenes representing Capri and Naples she wrote that the 'drawing is, as usual, wonderfully accurate' but adds the patronising note that 'a steady improvement in colouring is discernible'.[14]

Chads and the Imperial Function of Art

The similarities between her reviews and those of Smith run much deeper than mere content and style. There is also a strong unity of purpose. In early 1886 she criticises the National Gallery of Victoria for not purchasing a landscape by Benjamin Williams Leader and *The Love Birds* by John Millais.[15] Dowling himself offered to set up a subscription to purchase these two paintings.[16] According to Mrs Chads, all art lovers in Melbourne 'have a right to expect better knowledge to be displayed by those who profess to guide and instruct the public taste by the pictures they purchase for our National Gallery'.[17]

The expression she uses here reveals that she holds the same opinion about the purpose of art as does James Smith who, when urging the establishment of the gallery in 1857, wrote:

> The value of the Fine Arts, as instruments of civilisation, moral teachers, means of intellectual culture, sources of enjoyment, and adjuncts of industrial enterprise is now fully realised by the most enlightened nations of Europe.[18]

Art commentators like Ellen Chads played a vital role in validating and transmitting an interpretation of art that performed these functions. Her two dozen art columns for *Once a Month* reveal exactly how she carried out her role as a conduit. Her preferences reflect Ruskin's taste as mediated by Smith: dignified portraits, mimetic landscapes, and accurate history painting. She admires technical skill, respects conservative art teachers such as Mather and Dowling, and encourages students who show promise. Ellen Chads's notes frequently resemble those made by Smith in the *Argus* but add religious remarks, suggesting that she saw her role very much as the conduit of his, and therefore Ruskin's values.[19] Critics such as Smith and Chads identified themselves as more than mere interpretative commentators on art. Although there is no evidence to suggest that they ever met, it is very possible that they did. Both pursued cultural improvement and must have often been at the same events. Both worked as journalists, Smith for the *Argus*, and in later years, Chads for the *Herald*. Together they were purveyors of the civilisation embodied in the Empire.

Their 'pitch', based on the unquestioned certainty that the colonial world they experienced, and the place they had in it, was that the British Empire was the best that it

could be, and that it was the means of spreading civilisation throughout the globe. On this Chads and Smith were agreed, although Chads would never have tolerated Smith's Spiritualist views. Her romance stories indicate that she was an ardent Evangelical. Their common ground on art and civilisation transcended their religious differences. The argument was authoritative and persuasive yet behind this certainty there lay an uncertainty, not that they may be wrong, but that they may not prevail.

Despite the expressed confidence of British superiority, colonialism was not the secure project it frequently claimed to be. There was a great deal of what Ann Laura Stoler labels 'pervasive anxiety about white degeneration in the colonies'.[20] Melbourne may have seemed 'Marvellous' but it was a long way in space and time from the metropole. Class structures had transported themselves to the colony, but their makeup was altered and there was considerable anxiety and dispute about membership qualifications for each of the groups.[21] Not only were the colonies at great distances from the metropole, and the civilising influence of 'home' diluted, they also faced a hostile environment consisting of very un-English landscapes and perceived barbaric native races. These external threats could only increase the anxieties of those who had an interest in creating an ordered, civilised society at the far reaches of the Empire.

Crucial to the success of this endeavour was the part played by the middle class. Towards the end of the nineteenth century this was the dominant class of the Empire and its members and aspiring members, in large part, saw it as their mission to represent the values of civilisation throughout the Empire and the world. Victorian art was a product of the English middle class, which had what Dianne Sachko Macleod has called a genuine love of mimesis and of highly finished art works. 'Finish . . . signalled tangible evidence of painstaking labour, pride in the work ethic and corroboration of money well spent', qualities which were 'deeply embedded in the identity the middle class had constructed for itself'.[22] These are qualities which Chads admired, which may be seen in phrases such as 'admirable', 'worthy of inspection', 'delicate and finished in the highest degree', 'every detail is worked out with fine execution' and 'displays a good deal of conscientious work'. Macleod explains the attraction of mimesis in patriotic terms:

> Visual representation played a key role in elucidating what it now meant to be English . . . it was imperative that mimesis remain at the heart of artistic practice: it served to remind art's public of the wholesome attractions of the nation's countryside and native character . . . Images from the past were recycled to project a reassuring picture of a tranquil, rural, enduring England that was too stable to be buffeted by the winds of change.[23]

If it was necessary for art to reinforce Englishness[24] in the face of rapid transformation of society in England, it was even more so in the colonies, where comfortable 'Britishness' was threatened externally as well as internally.

Part of middle class strategy was to enlist the support of the working class by inculcating it with middle class values. A very effective tool for this task was patriotism. Hugh Cunningham has pointed out that from the 1870s patriotism, always

a contested site, had been appropriated by the Right. It became a 'key component in the ideological apparatus of the imperialist state'.[25] He enumerates the various ways in which patriotism was inculcated in the English working classes during the latter part of the nineteenth century, listing such activities as leisure reading, the music hall, chapel and games. In the Australian colonial setting the addition of art appreciation to this catalogue would not be inappropriate. It too was a contested site, with various European schools vying for popularity, but Ellen Chads's notes come down heavily on the side of Englishness. English art is still the yardstick. She laments, for instance, that the art teacher and portrait painter G. F. Folingsby is 'so devoted to the German School of Art'. She justifies her opinion by arguing that 'Victoria is an English colony and her students should be taught to love and admire the school belonging to their mother country . . . than which there is none more beautiful'.[26] For Chads, art has a patriotic, imperial, and religious purpose, with very little in the way of boundaries between them. They are more like three ways of talking about the one civilising purpose. A respectable female colonist could do no better than to promote art in those terms. Patriotism and respectability went hand in hand.

The Empire as an idea grew increasingly popular as it was sold to the great British public in the art and literature of mass circulation newspapers and magazines.[27] At the same time a parallel process of propaganda occurred among the more educated and cultured middle classes of society, largely through the fine arts, and especially painting. Popular culture romanticised exploration, military exploits and missionary zeal, while the fine arts glorified historical connections, the grandeur of nature and the respectability of society's leaders. It valued the middle class ideals of hard work, skill and application. Chads's art and music notes in *Once a Month* represent an overt outworking of this propaganda with its undercurrent of vulnerability.

Chads's art notes reflect both the assurance of bourgeois colonists in promoting their ideals, and the vulnerability they felt in their isolation from the metropole. While she admires art works that reflect the values of the bourgeois, she constantly bemoans the public's ignorance of and lack of interest in art, and distances herself from those who lack her education and refined tastes. Chads represents herself in the notes in *Once a Month* as a well educated lady of the world, an authoritative arbiter of taste and above all a champion of respectability and of Empire. We see a woman who appreciates art, and especially its finer points, but who did not subscribe to Whistler's credo of *Art for Art's sake*. She appreciated art for what she believed was its moral and civilising influence. Art appreciation was a duty to the Empire, and vital for its continuing advance, and good art was that which accurately reflected reality. Portraits and scenes were judged on superficial likeness to the subjects, historical painting by its composition and imagined reality, and religious subjects by their reflection of a literal reading of the Bible. When writing about J. R. Herbert's painting *Moses bringing down the tables of the law*, Chads defends it against its critics by an appeal to its faithfulness to Biblical detail.

> The bright hued and fresh looking garments, though one of the features sometimes condemned by visitors, are in themselves another proof that the artist has made himself completely master of his grand subject, for we have Scripture authority for knowing that the people were divinely ordered to 'wash their clothes, and keep the day as an holy-day'.[28]

This is a striking example of how a particular work of art is judged by the critic's overtly stated religious beliefs, allowing the creative artist no licence at all.

This is not the only time that Chads allows her religious beliefs to colour her judgment. When reviewing Edna Lyall's novel *Donovan*, she declared it a 'singularly fascinating book' but added this rider:

> The work as a whole loses some of its charm for me in the fact that the writer upholds the doctrine of evolution as well as the misleading one of what is vaguely called the larger hope. Both doctrines appear to me to be so sadly dishonouring to the wisdom and perfection of God, and so opposed to his revealed word, that their presence . . . is a drawback for which its many excellencies can in no way compensate.[29]

Creative effort is judged on whether it honours the literal interpretation of certain Bible passages that speak about creation being completed in six days. In this instance, however, Chads takes the next step and rejects creative effort because it is not in accord with a particular dogma of the church.

Bernard Smith's 1945 generalisations that 'appreciation of art has always been ephemeral in Australia' and that 'No class since the settlement has consistently supported the arts even as a form of social display'[30] echo Chads's frequent complaint that activity in the field of art did not form a major component of Australian consciousness, even at the height of the 1880s art boom. Melbourne, she believed, was very much in need of education in matters pertaining to art. Again and again she lambasts the ignorant Melbourne public for its lack of interest in artistic endeavours. Particular works are said to 'deserve far warmer and more appreciative allusion to its merits than was awarded to them'.[31] On another occasion she complains that art gallery visitors are 'too apt, in their ignorance of the subject, to assert that the artist is wrong and his colouring defective'.[32] Melbourne, it seems, concerned itself with football and cricket 'to the exclusion of higher and more profitable sources of amusement and instruction'.[33] Chads's hopes for a brighter future for art in Melbourne end in despair. Neither the government nor the wealthier members of society showed any encouragement for artists,[34] and the 'artistic portion (a small one, we regret to say) of our great city'[35] occasionally appreciated an exhibition, 'that is to say, as much so as Art ever is in Melbourne'.[36]

Melburnians' ignorance is illustrated by this story, told with apparent relish by Ellen Chads:

> Though art is certainly becoming more appreciated in Melbourne, it is yet treated in many cases with a species of ignorant contempt unknown in Europe. The following incident, a perfectly true one, will show that such is *occasionally* the case: – An artist was one day called upon by a visitor who, after due inspection

> of the studio and the works exhibited there, announced her intention of having her portrait taken and inquired 'what do you charge a day?' The astonishment and disgust of the gentleman so addressed can easily be imagined. Our readers will scarcely credit the fact but after every sitting the lady (?) laid down a certain amount – the day's wages, as she probably expressed it in her own mind. The artist in question wisely looked upon the affair in its ludicrous light but the incident shows how little art is truly understood by many of the *nouveaux riches* to be found in the colony.[37]

To a modern audience, this story shows Chads in the poorest possible light. It is full of the snobbish elitism of the English class system, but it is nevertheless instructive. Art appreciation was not just a matter of admiring pictures. Real appreciation of art required education, training and taste, as well as an understanding of its mores. The anecdote exposes an inherent contradiction in Chads's commentary. On the one hand, art should be more appreciated by the general population than it is, but on the other, it can only be appreciated by the elite (to which she belongs), who have been endowed with the necessary qualities, presumably by breeding and education. Attempts to access this elite status by such low-born people as the *nouveau riche* lady who paid daily for her portrait sittings could only lead to embarrassing *faux pas* and ludicrous displays of ignorance, reinforcing the class distinctions inherent in Chads's patronising notes and, not coincidentally, her own status as a well-born, educated and respectable lady. One can argue that her mission to educate the ignorant was both essential to and incompatible with her respectable self-representation: essential because that was the proper role for respectable people, and incompatible because the more successful she was, the more she undermined her own elite status by diluting the pool of respectable people. Another commentator writing in the *West Australian* in 1887 similarly castigates Melburnians, though from a different angle, when she describes Herbert Schmaltz's *Too Late* as 'a picture that tells a story so plainly as to leave very little to the imagination, and this, I fancy, is partly the reason for its popularity'.[38]

Chads's patronising attitude to Melbourne's capacity for culture is also on display in her music notes. Here she noted that the German city of Bonn had instituted a system of licences for music teachers, and expressed a wish that Melbourne would follow its lead. This, she believed, would 'put a stop to the very inferior teaching now often given by young ladies who, because they can play a few popular airs and a little dance music, think themselves perfectly fitted to instruct in one of the noblest of the arts'.[39] Melbourne, despite oft-expressed hopes for improvement, is far from attaining the ideal European civilised condition of which Ellen Chads represents herself an ambassador.

This failure of the Melbourne public to live up to the standards that Chads had set for them resulted in a kind of fortress mentality, which coloured her view of the art she was reviewing. The pictures that would, in her opinion, best satisfy the functional requirement of art in promulgating English civilisation and the values of the Empire received the greatest praise. These included portraits of prominent citizens, English and Australian landscapes, flowers (a particular favourite of hers) and history painting.

Chads and 'Australian Impressionism'

Chads's art notes in *Once a Month* written over 1884–86 provide a snapshot of the Melbourne Art scene on the verge of major change. What follows below is an attempt to see that world as Ellen Chads saw it. Though not a major critic, she nevertheless has an ideology of art that she expresses clearly in her notes. She has her preferences and is sufficiently articulate about the reasons for those preferences to enable us to delineate a consistent approach.

The years when Chad was writing for *Once a Month* are significant in Melbourne art history because it was then that Tom Roberts returned from England and began to paint near Box Hill in 1885. What became known as the Heidelberg School, called by some 'Australian Impressionism', had commenced. Roberts was soon joined by McCubbin, Streeton and Conder. The '9 x 5' exhibition of 1889 was their 'coming out', but Chads was then no longer writing art notes. We can imagine, however, that her reaction would have been as unfavourable as that of James Smith, who said that they 'had no adequate *raison d'être*' and were a 'pain to the eye'.[40]

Joining Roberts, McCubbin, Streeton and Conder in the '9 x 5' exhibition were C. D. Richardson, R. E. Falls and Herbert Daly. Jane Sutherland had also intended to exhibit but withdrew at the last moment.[41] Chads affords us a couple of glimpses of some of these artists prior to their involvement in the birth of 'Australian Impressionism'. It is clear from Chads's notes that these painters were not prominent in the art world of 1884–86. Of the three 'other' '9 x 5' exhibitors, Chads mentions only C. D. Richardson. In a brief note she calls his painting *Solitude*, 'an exquisite bit'.[42] In February 1885 Chads notices Sutherland's 'pretty bit of scenery . . . with a piece of water winding through a paddock, and groups of gums growing on the edge – the subject is a pleasing one and a cow drinking at the stream gives the requisite touch of animation'; but she does not include the title.[43] Streeton is not mentioned. Neither, of course, is Sydney-based Conder, who did not arrive in Melbourne until after Chads had stopped writing her notes due to the collapse of *Once a Month*.

Frederick McCubbin, sometimes spelled 'McGubbin' in Chads's notes, is mentioned in February 1885, before he began painting with Roberts, as a successful exhibitor from Mr Folingsby's school, along with several others, including E. Phillips Fox. In the same month his *Homecoming* is said to have undoubted merit, but it 'is not so attractive as its title would give reason to anticipate'. Chads does not elaborate on this somewhat curious comment but it is possibly a product of her own homesickness. She also praises his study of 'a bit of ground near the jail. The common place scene is rendered with strict fidelity, but the soft, warm grey haze refines it and makes the subject amongst the best shown'. In April 1886, when already painting with Roberts, McCubbin's *Old Dog Tray* and *Darebin Creek*, 'both possessing clever execution', are mentioned as being purchased by the Chairman of the Gallery Committee.[44]

The first mention of Roberts is in November 1885 with his exhibits in the Black and White Exhibition receiving fulsome praise. One of the pen and ink drawings, a view

of the Thames Embankment pleased her with its delicate treatment. She reserves for it one of her highest accolades: 'it repays a close examination'. Proving that she herself has given it close examination, she continues 'all the details are most artistically treated, especially the lamppost and the parapet upon which the child is seated'. In March 1886 she repeats the praise of his black and white pictures and categorises the paintings he is sending to London for the Indian and Colonial Exhibition as 'meritorious'. These included *Coming South*, *Mary*, *A Scene near Hawthorn Bridge* and *Darebin Creek*.

Chads praised some of Roberts's and McCubbin's early works as late as halfway through 1886. For the most part however their works prior to the '9 x 5' exhibition did not receive notice. Her treatment of Louis Buvelot whose use of a high tonal key is said to have influenced the painters of the Heidelberg school[45] is similar. An unnamed painting is considered 'a pleasure to examine' in January 1885, and a month later his *Waterpool at Coleraine* is similarly praised. There is nothing in any of Chads's remarks about the works of these artists that hints, even remotely, at the place they would later occupy in the annals of Australian art.

Chads and 'Native Industry'

Although Chads mentions the German and French schools of art she seems never to have contemplated the possibility of an Australian school of art, except perhaps as a kind of minor variation of the English School. This is entirely consistent with the way in which she viewed her own literary efforts, which she pronounced a product of 'Native Industry'.[46] In many of her stories Australia functions as a new beginning of hope for people who have been the subject of misfortune in England, but none of them display any notion of an independent Australian style, and for the most part they are set in England, Jersey, India or Mauritius. She may have meant little more than that the stories were published in Australia by an Australian publisher.

Her use of the term 'Native Industry' to define her work is unusual.[47] Deirdre David points out that 'Victorian writers' use of the term "native" [was] almost always pejorative and patronising',[48] but this does not hold true in this instance because Chads applies it to her own work without any reference to indigenous people or culture. She does not claim that her fiction is indigenous, or the work of a native-born Australian,[49] but neither is it a simple continuation of English culture. It stands in a new 'Native' tradition. Although she does, on other occasions, use the term native to characterise Aboriginal people it is then tellingly uncapitalised.[50] She appropriates the notion of 'Nativeness', dispossessing its rightful referents and 'elevating' it to a variant of Englishness.

She was also quite willing to take the unique qualities of the Australian landscape and light and subjugate them to the requirements of Englishness. Recording a visit to a Melbourne studio in April 1885 she remarks that:

> Mr. [James Waltham] Curtis exhibits some work which, though Australian in its subject, has yet much that carries the gazer back to England; the grey slightly cloudy sky, and the softened look of the whole scene remind one more of the old country

> than the blue sky and great brightness usually noticeable in an Australian scene; it is more from the admirably delineated gum-trees than anything else that one realized where it is laid. It is a charming subject, most picturesquely treated . . . [51]

It is worth noting, however, that this blending of Australian landscape with English light was not a difficult combination for Chads. She did not criticise it, nor did she express a longing for a purely Australian art, aggressively independent of the English School, for Curtis' painting still meets with unreserved approval. Her notion of 'Native Industry' or 'Independent Australian Britons' is not one that craves independence from England, but one that melds with it. She does not plead for an art that Australians can call their own and be proud of, but for greater loyalty to the English school. It might be suggested that the lack of a truly Australian art – one that celebrates Australian subject matter and the local landscape – may not have been unrelated to the apathy of the vast majority of Melburnians to the continuing parade of patriotic English Art that filled their galleries.

Once a Month was issued for the last time in June 1886, just one more of the plethora of Australian periodicals that flourished briefly and died through lack of subscribers. The market was simply too small, and publishers constantly underestimated the difficulties of producing magazines modelled on English counterparts. Chads published two more books, one in 1888 and the last in 1891. Her husband, meanwhile, had worked constantly at the Education Department as a mail clerk, despite continually appearing in the courts for debts before his death in 1890.

Mrs Chads obtained employment with the *Herald* as a journalist. Her work was unsigned, but according to her obituary,[52] she wrote for that newspaper for a number of years, perhaps as many as thirty. She also became involved in a number of charities but had a serious falling-out with some of her fellow workers, and eventually turned her attention to the establishment of a lost dogs home and lethal chamber which, as a result of her fund-raising efforts, was established in 1913.[53] Until then, unwanted dogs had simply been methodically drowned in the Yarra River.[54]

Her husband's two daughters from his previous marriage had migrated to Australia and were much involved in the Salvation Army. Neither of them ever married, and Mrs Chads does not appear to have much contact with them. She died in 1923 and is buried in her husband's grave at Boroondara General Cemetery (Kew), though her own name was never added to the inscription on the tombstone.[55]

There is no known likeness of Ellen Chads and her obscurity in the present age is complete.