

CHAPTER II

THE AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL MISSION

THE Mission assembled for the first time at the boat train—six officers and two sergeants. Needless to say, being Australians, we travelled together, lodged together, and ate together throughout our journey; and from first to last we had no batmen. I myself (then thirty-nine years of age, lean, active, and with an accurate memory) represented “war records”—fortunately we did not have to carry many books as my memory covered most of the history that we would need to know. Lieutenant John Balfour, compact in body and mind, and Staff-Sergeant Arthur Bazley (formerly my clerk), then both on Treloar’s staff, had served throughout the occupation of Anzac, and were to be my main assistants in the compilation of the Official History; on the present Mission they would help me with the records. Lieutenant H. S. Buchanan, a young construction-engineer of the Victorian Railways, who had had charge of the mapping section of the Australian Corps in France, and one of his most capable sergeants, G. Hunter Rogers, would make or check our maps.

To help us in tracing what had happened at the Landing I had applied for the help of the officer who, in all the force—with the possible exception of Major-General E. G. Sinclair-MacLagan—could best, I thought, have helped us to work out the events of the first few hours, especially of the attempt to reach the intended positions on the main range to the left (or north-east) of

the landing point. This was Brigadier-General E. A. Drake-Brockman, since well known as judge of the Federal Arbitration Court. As a major of the 11th (Western Australian) Battalion, he had been among the first to reach the top of the first height, and, taking charge there, after narrowly escaping a rush by three Turks, had, more than any other survivor of that day, directed and controlled the first advances towards the main range. Needless to say Drake-Brockman was eager to come—indeed it was probably he who suggested it; but General Birdwood, to whom Brudenell White referred my request, anticipated that this might necessitate the appointment of another brigade-commander, a step he wished to avoid. It happened that I had lately met a young scallywag of an intelligence officer, Lieutenant Hedley Vicars Howe, who as a private in Drake-Brockman's company, had been among the first to land, and had since done well in the Army. He was a fair-haired, blue-eyed lad with plenty of brains and a gift for description. Since leaving school he had lived an adventurous life on the north-west coast of Australia where, when war broke out, he owned and was working a couple of pearling luggers. If he could only have written, as he told them to us, his experiences between Australia and the islands with that variegated, polyglot crowd, his name would be famous as an author long since. He had a lively memory of the first day's fighting at Anzac, and would be able to identify his landing place and the direction of the first thrusts. I was fortunate to obtain his help without difficulty.

Most of these members of our small party had their careers still ahead of them. But the two others, our photographer, Captain George Hubert Wilkins, an athletic figure, rather over middle height, at that time clean-shaven, with eyes and brow that reminded me a little of Lord Kitchener's, and a pugnacious chin, and our artist, George Washington Lambert, with the golden beard, the

hat, the cloak, the spurs, the gait, the laugh and the conviviality of a cavalier, were already notable men. As Lambert waved good-bye to his big eighteen-year-old son, Maurice (afterwards well known as a sculptor—the younger, Constant, to become famous as a composer and conductor, was still in short pants); as he settled himself into his niche in our well-packed carriage, pulled out his pipe, and with a cheery dig at me (whom he insisted on calling “skipper”) began to pull the legs of us all; as he rolled out one after another of his store of good yarns from a mental cellar stocked by experiences of dukes and Diggers and broached with rich appreciation of their humour; as his teeth gleamed, and his nostrils expanded, and his cavalier’s beard was thrust out in each quivering prelude to his “robustious” laughter—one could not help wondering whether he did not consciously mould himself on the contemporaries of Van Dyck and Velasquez whose art so evidently influenced his own.

But one soon realised that he was simply himself—transparently honest, devoted, as a religion, to truth as he saw it. Curiously enough, while Lambert was often ready to make clever fun of anyone or anything, his seriousness (which also could be most interesting) was sometimes reserved, with devastating effect, for ceremonial occasions which everyone was hoping he would brighten by the flicker of his usual wit. Wilkins, on the other hand, could at any time be led into deeply serious discussion of almost any subject—with rare hints of a whimsical background showing through. Both men were well worth listening to.

Being two fairly senior men, both full of ideas and experienced in the big world, they established a firm friendship during our journeys. They had come by their experience in typically Australian ways. Wilkins, one of a large family, born on a remote South Australian farm, was educated as much by watching the habits of animals and plants and the fickle weather as at the bush school,

which was all that his parents could afford for him. However, by getting a job in Adelaide—to which his parents moved—he was able to attend the School of Mines by afternoon and night; and the knowledge of engineering which he there picked up was eventually to give him an opening to the career which—next to that of a singer—he most longed for. It was characteristic of him that, though always moved by some reasonable utilitarian purpose, he invariably sought his goal through adventure—the more dangerous the more acceptable; indeed I sometimes doubted whether any course of action was for long agreeable to him unless it led eventually to danger. He had begun, while still a boy at Adelaide, by bolting to Sydney by steamer—I believe as a stowaway—and obtained work there as electrician in a theatre; and this introduced him to the cinema, then hardly out of its teething troubles. The next step found him in Europe as a cameraman, making films for Gaumont Frères and photographs for the London *Daily Chronicle*. By simply poking his nose into Hendon aerodrome he managed to get some experience in flying; and by meeting Sir Ernest Shackleton he obtained a promise that he should be taken on the next polar expedition of that explorer. But at that juncture there broke out the war between Turkey and Bulgaria and the chance of obtaining for his firm, for the first time, some genuine moving pictures of battle came straight into his lap. He hurried thither and for many weary weeks experienced, along with Philip Gibbs, Percival Phillips, Ashmead Bartlett, Henry Nevinson and other well known war correspondents, the heartbreaking frustration resulting from the fear of staffs, commanders and governments on both sides that the press might see and tell the truth. His idea of filming the war from a motor-cycle, which probably would have involved the first use of the internal combustion engine in warfare (at all events by a war correspondent), was overruled by the Turkish staff. When he wheeled his machine, after vast

trouble, up to the Pera Palace Hotel at Constantinople, with a movie camera bolted below the handle-bars and a still life camera on top of them, and a side-car full of spare parts, negative, food and camping gear, he had, as he himself says,¹ "a complete one-man unit, self contained. But it was also the laughing stock of the drago-men, interpreters, and the Turkish staff officers", from whom he had to secure his permit to go to the front; they insisted on each correspondent's having two servants, four horses, and two months' food supply.

Nevertheless when, eventually, the trainload of war correspondents did push off into the appalling confusion of a Turkish army which was being driven back on itself, Wilkins succeeded, one day, in getting some interesting and gruesome pictures at close range; and as the only other movie camera in the theatre of war happened to be broken down and out of action during this precious opportunity, Wilkins sent off his film in the proud knowledge that he had secured a historic "scoop" by making the "first motion pictures ever taken of an actual war and in the front line".

To his amazement what he received in return was a furious message from his firm and newspaper saying that he had been disgracefully beaten—"the opposition had a picture of the battle running in the halls two days before . . ." And—as Wilkins immediately grasped when he hurried home to see it—what a picture! Just what the public wanted! Precisely what it thought war was like! Only, when once Wilkins got to work he easily proved it to have been acted and filmed just outside Paris. Wilkins' film, showing precisely what he saw, was much less exciting to audiences. However, when both were exhibited the faking was so plain that audiences and producers at once recognised it.

I have described this episode because it was typical

¹ In his book, *Under the North Pole*, describing his later project of submarine exploration in the Arctic.

of Wilkins' work when I was associated with him from 1917-19. By then he had greatly added to his experience by exploration in the Arctic. While filming the cocoa industry in the West Indies he learnt of a filibustering expedition in Brazil, and was on his way to film that also when he received from London a cable containing what he had long hoped for—an invitation to join an expedition to the Arctic. At the time he thought it came from Shackleton, but actually it was from the Canadian-born Vilhjalmur Stefansson, commander of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, which was to leave British Columbia in June 1913 for four years' exploration. From that master, and from the Eskimos, he learnt the method that he always afterwards employed in exploration on the ground, not only in the polar regions but in the wilds of North Australia—to live off the country in the same way as its natives did. Using this method in the Arctic, Stefansson and two companions made an immense journey on foot across the Beaufort Sea. During his long absence the local trappers, whalers and Eskimos gave up all hope of his return; but Wilkins was under orders to meet the party with a small ship, and whether they were dead or alive he was determined to go on until he did so. He managed to work the ship to within walking distance of the intended meeting point, and then pushed ahead on foot until on Banks Island he noted on a certain hill a beacon which had not been there the day before. It had been put there by Stefansson for his two comrades. All three arrived, in the pink of condition, as also were their dog-teams.

It was while in the Arctic in 1916 that the party first heard of the Great War that had been raging since 1914. Wilkins hurried to Australia and obtained a commission as pilot in the Australian Flying Corps; but on reaching England he was debarred, through a supposed defect in his eyesight, from flying at the front. Instead, as we were just then setting up a team of official photographers and

cinematographers separate from the British, it was suggested that he should be one of its two officers—the other was Frank Hurley. Both were utterly daring fellows, but in other respects they were almost opposite. Hurley, a rare mixture of the genuine, highly sensitive artist and keen commercial man, became responsible rather for the publicity side, to which he was devoted; while Wilkins sought to provide our future historians with a record of places and events so accurate that they could be, and often were, relied on as historical evidence. In the Third Battle of Ypres on a number of occasions both of them nearly got themselves killed through their desire to photograph the effects of bursting shells; and, in accompanying the attacks in 1917-18 in order to photograph the infantry fighting, Wilkins at least once had to assume direction of infantry (they happened to be Americans) who through lack of officers were leaderless in a very tight corner, and he emerged from the campaign with a Military Cross and Bar. It was part of the arrangement for our records that, though the official photographers and the official artists were responsible to Major Treloar and the High Commissioner respectively, both worked under my general direction in the field; and so it was that towards the end of that war in France Wilkins came to me one day with a serious face and informed me he was conscious of a gap in his photographic records; he had not yet taken any satisfactory picture of German infantry actually fighting. He hoped to remedy this by getting some pilot to fly him so low down over the German line that he could get a useful set of pictures of the German army in action.

I was thankful that the war ended before he induced any pilot to let him make the attempt. Although his later flights across the North Pole and elsewhere in the Arctic and Antarctic—in which he was one of the world's pioneers—succeeded through his extreme care and determination not to take unworthy chances, no amount of care could

have avoided German machine-gun bullets. And so here he was, at thirty, completely fit, having tasted life in most countries and capitals—and preferring, at any rate for the present, the simplicity of the Eskimo—and eager to round off his work on the photographic records by this visit to Gallipoli with, probably, the most unadventurous expedition of his life.

Our artist was the even more picturesque George Washington Lambert. Born in St Petersburg in 1873, son of an American engineer who died before his son's birth, and a young English girl (herself daughter of an English engineer, engaged, like Lambert's father, in building the Russian railways), he was brought at two years old to England, whither his devoted and adored mother returned with her rigid, "self-made" father. Despite the stern grandfather's determination to pitch him young into commerce, Lambert's mother encouraged his evident genius for music and art. When the boy was twelve the family migrated to Sydney, and a holiday on the sheep-station of a grand-uncle at Nevertire gave him the chance of revelling in the bush, the riding, and all the life of the back-country people. He soaked in the sunlight, the sights, the sounds, and the characters; and, though he was forced into various clerkships, his whole heart was in a country life. He wanted to be a sheep-breeder, and at seventeen he plunged back into that life as a "station hand", "fencing, butchering, branding, sheep-dipping, shearing, horse-breaking and droving".² That year, 1890, happened to be a hard one, with the shearers' strike on and wool prices low. His energy throughout it left him half exhausted in body and mind. Returning to Sydney with a pile of drawings of the bush, and its people and animals, he had one painting most unexpectedly bought by the Art Gallery; he haunted the Sydney water-front, and the then largely virgin coast, but also the Flemington sale-yards, making

² See *Thirty Years of an Artist's Life*, by Amy Lambert, p. 17

studies of men, animals and dust there—not for sale but rather to show how much he knew of the detail of country life. His drawings were occasionally accepted by the *Sydney Bulletin*; and it was a *Bulletin* artist, B. E. Minns, who finally urged him to “make drawing his profession. You’ll never succeed as a sheep-man,” said Minns. “You’ll always want to paint. Go and see Julian Ashton.”

To Ashton Lambert went, and that foremost teacher of Australian painters settled the matter. Lambert joined his school, desperately earnest, supporting himself part of the time by working as a grocer’s assistant. His almost religious concentration during hours of study, and his joy in his leisure, fishing, boating, and loafing, were phenomenal. In 1900 a portrait of his mother won him a travelling scholarship, on which he married and went with his wife to Paris, and, in a top floor of the Quartier Latin, put in, among Swedes, Russians, Rumanians, English, Americans, and other Australians, two more years of intense study. From there with his wife and small son—Maurice, afterwards the sculptor—he moved to Chelsea, where, among many congenial fellow artists, he was still living at the outbreak of the First World War. Intensely though he enjoyed society, including high society, Lambert obeyed no master except his artistic conscience, and throughout his twenty years in London as a portrait painter he and his wife often came almost as near to the bread line as in their Paris days. His friends had high hopes of his becoming very prosperous “if only you play your cards well”. “I don’t play cards,” was his simple reply—and he didn’t.³

The outbreak of the First World War had found him over forty, but partly through his experience of the bush, and partly through the influence of an aristocratic client, he was placed in charge of the felling of timber in some of the Welsh forests. Then came offers from both the

³ *Thirty Years of an Artist's Life*, p 45.

Canadian and the Australian authorities in London of work as an official war artist. The Canadian terms were better but Lambert chose the Australian, which would take him to Palestine to paint his beloved bushmen of the Light Horse—and their horses. He spent there the first half of 1918, working through Sinai and Palestine; and it was partly the brilliance of his work, partly his almost romantic scrupulousness in carrying it out and handing in, as his contract required, all his sketches and drawings made in the field—117 in number, exclusive of pocket books and notes—that caused Captain H. C. Smart of the High Commissioner's Office to recommend him to me for our Mission to Gallipoli. I had crossed from France to London mainly to see him, and at dinner at the Royal Society's Club he impressed on me that what he wanted was a clear military "operation order" setting out the work to be done. I received then, as on this Mission I always did, the impression that he looked on himself as a soldier fulfilling a directive, and that he would carry it out in every detail. In this respect his attitude was very similar to that of Wilkins.