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St Andrew's Colonial Homes

The Reverend John Anderson Graham opened St Andrew's Colonial Homes at Kalimpong on 24 September 1900. Drawing on a decade of local experience at the Church of Scotland's Kalimpong mission, Graham brought British theories of child rescue to the historic Anglo-Indian 'problem' and to the specific circumstances of British tea planters with interracial families in the northeast. His emigration scheme was unapologetically built upon severing the ties between mixed-race plantation children and their parents. After all, this was a time when British children were routinely sent to boarding schools, and for the children of 'empire families', as many tea planters themselves had been, this meant growing up on a different continent from their parents. But for the planters' children, prolonged residence at 'the Homes' was never interrupted by trips home or visits from a relative. And, crucially, many were destined to be settled at an even greater distance from their Indian and British families. On the children's behalf, Graham and the tea planters exchanged their genealogical existences for a colonial opportunity that they believed would offer a 'fair start in life'.

Graham attempted to soften the separation from birth families by integrating a familial structure into the Homes complex. The children would reside in cottages, cared for by British housemothers and 'aunties', with Graham the distant but kindly father figure. Built on a sprawling site located above the hill station of Kalimpong, this was to be another protected British space in India – indeed, the Homes became known locally as 'little Scotland'. The children's containment within this site, along with the practice of sourcing staff exclusively from Britain and the colonies, was intended to separate them not only from the racially precarious site of the tea plantation, but from any contact with the diverse communities residing in Kalimpong too. Along with being trained in manual labour and given a British schooling, the children were thus educated in the 'proper distribution of sentiment' towards their British ancestry.¹ This self-actualizing stigma about their Indian heritage was another means of combating any proclivity for the emigrants to look 'back' after being sent to New Zealand.

For descendants, this muted but powerful strategy helps us to understand why our Kalimpong forbears never spoke of their mothers, but were so comfortable putting their British tea heritage on display.

Graham's ideas sprang from the same imperial discourse that saw the state removing 'half-caste' children from Indigenous families in settler colonies, and the use of migration as a means of turning marginalized British children into productive imperial citizens.² Such ideologies were actioned in the United States too, with 'orphan' children sent to labour on the new frontiers.³ In the first section of this chapter I locate the Homes in Kalimpong within this rhetoric, aligning it closely to British child migration schemes that, like Graham, claimed to act for the greater imperial good. Graham's scheme was complex because it involves race *and* emigration, and thus functioned differently to, for example, the Australian government's removal of mixed-race children from their Indigenous mothers. Unlike these nation-centred race policies that worked to contain and assimilate the offspring of racial transgressions, Graham's transnational scheme could only operate within an imperial (or global) framework – here was a Scottish missionary, in India, sending children to New Zealand. Settler colonial policies did intersect with the Kalimpong scheme later, when Graham attempted to send his graduates abroad and discovered that relationships between the state and Indigenous peoples had begun to coalesce into distinct national identities and racial politics, which in turn affected the enactment of restrictions on non-British immigration.

It is to the problem of emigration that I turn after briefly situating Graham's scheme in the rhetorical context. Here I am mindful of building upon – and addressing the gaps in – the works already written about the Homes. Two short histories have been written by former staff members at Kalimpong: Simon Mainwaring's *A Century of Children* and James Minto's *Graham of Kalimpong*.⁴ Writing from an insider perspective means these works are steeped in local experience and have access to sources others do not; however, both are largely uncritical accounts of Graham's realization of a 'grand vision', and while they do contain some useful statistics about the emigration scheme in parts, there is little concrete information on what occurred outside of the Indian context. Historian Satoshi Mizutani's recent chapter on the Homes gives an excellent grounding in its theoretical constructs.⁵ I aim to build on his work here by (a) consulting sources other than those generated by the Homes, (b) focusing on the children's experience and (c) analysing the development of the emigration scheme. Although Mizutani describes Graham's colonial vision as a landmark in the prolonged Anglo-Indian debate, 'recognized by the colonizing British as

almost the only means to put an end to the Eurasian Question', he does not discuss emigration beyond its ideological premise.

This chapter continues to build a nuanced collective narrative in several ways. First, it aims to counter the progressive accounts of the Homes scheme promulgated by Graham's promotion of the scheme and the invariably optimistic accounts in the *Homes Magazine*, by drawing upon interviews with more recent Homes graduates. Second, and using these same sources, I seek to provide a clearer picture of everyday life at the Homes. What was life in the cottages really like? Did Graham avoid the kinds of institutional abuses that have surfaced elsewhere in recent years? Third, correspondence in the personal files from the tea planters to Graham reveals their persistent interest in their children. Their concern unsettles the assumption that the Homes enabled planters to simply abandon their children. Though this surely occurred in some instances, descendants of the 'six families' have been surprised to discover letters that testified to the planters' concern for the well-being of their children – paying their fees, requesting photographs, enquiring as to their health, making provisions for their future and in some cases quite open expressions of affection and conflict about the separations they had brought about.

A scheme among schemes

When Graham opened the Homes in 1900, he had just turned thirty-nine years old and had spent a decade working in the Church of Scotland's Kalimpong mission along with his wife Katherine. The dynamics of local and global labour migrations at the turn of the century shaped the way in which Graham imagined and constructed the institution. In Assam, the area under tea cultivation had increased from 26,853 acres in 1872 to 204,285 acres in 1900, an expansion facilitated by the movement of 750,000 workers from Bihar, Orissa and Bengal.⁶ In white settler colonies, a wave of legislation that sought to restrict the entry of non-white migrants included the 1899 Immigration Restriction Act in New Zealand and the beginning of the White Australia policy in 1901.⁷ Meanwhile in Britain, migration as a means of 'rescuing' impoverished children was peaking. By 1900, Barnardo's homes had been in operation for thirty years and had established institutions in almost one hundred locations, sending thousands of British children to Canada.⁸ A decade of awareness and first-hand experience of these phenomena furnished Graham with a unique multisited imperial perspective on both child rescue in Britain and the Anglo-Indian problem in India.

Graham's upbringing as a 'country lad' with his three brothers 'running barefoot over the moors' and assisting with menial tasks on the farm materialized in many aspects of the Homes in Kalimpong: the Homes children all went barefoot, Kalimpong was chosen for its healthy environment, and Graham possessed an unwavering belief in the remedial and productive value of disciplined labour.⁹ He had initially worked in the Scottish civil service but was heavily involved in church activities that assisted impoverished city children. At the age of twenty-one he began his religious studies. Graduating in 1885 with an MA from Edinburgh University, Graham entered Divinity Hall, where he encountered Professor Archibald Charteris. Renowned for his belief in 'applied Christianity', Charteris founded the Young Men's Guild – the vehicle by which Graham achieved his aim of placement in an overseas mission. He and his new wife Katherine made the journey to Kalimpong in 1889, and for six years they built up the infrastructure of the growing, and ethnically diverse, hill station; establishing churches, schools and the Kalimpong Mela, an agricultural exhibition for local farmers.¹⁰

In his subordinate role to the head missionary at Kalimpong, one of Graham's duties was to visit planters in the surrounding tea districts. It was on these visits that he became aware of an aspect of the Anglo-Indian 'problem' largely concealed from public knowledge: the production of mixed-race children in an era that emphasized distance between British ruler and Indian subject.¹¹ The children lived existences considered racially perilous to European eyes – growing up on remote estates among their extended kin, local villagers and migrant labourers, lacking exposure to British norms and bereft of education.¹² Graham's notes on the domestic situations he encountered offer a further glimpse into the nature of the plantation families. While there was an element of shame in his discovery that it was common practice for planters to cohabit with local women, Graham recalled that these relationships were often 'real and tender', and he was affected by the planters who spoke openly about the 'absence of a hopeful future for their children'.¹³ His descriptions, openly sympathetic to the planters and alluding to scenes of contented bungalow life, were never to be repeated publicly.

Regardless of the domestic routines the families had settled into, the question was what would become of them when the planters inevitably retired to Britain or elsewhere. Graham disapproved of the established convention whereby the planter simply made financial provision for the women and children upon his departure. Graham's primary concern was for the children, and he took it upon himself to find a solution. In 1895, he took three years' leave in Britain, travelling around Scotland to speak publicly about his work in Kalimpong and

publishing his book, *On the Threshold of Three Closed Lands*.¹⁴ Addressing the General Assembly of the Young Men's Guild, he used familiar mission rhetoric to refer to the plight of plantation children, claiming that 'we have a fearful price to pay for our imperial honours and vast conquests in the wreck and refuse of human life which is left in the line of our march'.¹⁵ Visiting Quarrier Homes in west Scotland, Graham was impressed by the housing of children in cottages dispersed on large estates, where ill-equipped parents were replaced by carefully chosen house-parents.¹⁶ These idealized rural 'homes', regarded as an innovative alternative to the austere Victorian institution, provided a template for the physical layout at Kalimpong and Graham's emphasis on an in-lieu family to staff the cottages there.

Sending impoverished children to rural parts of Britain was not a guaranteed solution to a cyclic familial problem, however, and hence the appeal of colonial migration schemes such as those initiated by Emily Ward and Thomas Barnardo. These schemes were understood to offer a permanent solution to child poverty, and a timely injection of mouldable labour into the 'opening' of vast tracts of land in the settler colonies. Farm labouring youth could potentially become farmers in their own right, the schemes claimed, and at a safe distance from their birth families. In this neat imperial solution, Graham found a strategy that would form the crux of his emigration scheme for the thirty years that he sent graduates to New Zealand. Like Barnardo, Graham would face colonial resistance to orphan migrations as part of a larger refusal to being viewed as a 'dumping ground' for impoverished Britons. But as we will see, the Kalimpong scheme faced an additional problem to British child-rescuers, namely race, and the tightening of settler colonial borders against non-British migrants.

The belief in many quarters that Graham's plan to house and educate planters' children at Kalimpong was necessary, and sound, was evidenced by the financial support and patronage that was immediately forthcoming upon his return to India in early 1900. After meeting with Bengal government officials, Graham leased one hundred acres of land and received a government grant of five rupees per child per month.¹⁷ The first edition of the *Homes Magazine*, published in February 1901, listed Sir John Woodburn, lieutenant governor of Bengal, as honorary president, and his predecessor, Sir Charles Elliot, as one of seven honorary vice presidents that included notable figures in Edinburgh, Assam and Calcutta.¹⁸ The remaining members of the board were tea planters in the surrounding Duars and Darjeeling districts. Noticeably absent was the Church of Scotland, which to Graham's great disappointment bluntly refused to lend its name or assistance to a scheme that could be framed as providing a

convenient solution for tea planters' immoral behaviour. Instead Graham was reliant on government grants, charitable donations and the integrated support of the tea industry. The planters' regular fee payments for their own children were understood to subsidize unsupported children, and the tea agencies made donations to the Homes.¹⁹

Despite the heavy involvement of tea planters in the establishment, financing and operation of the institution, their role was effectively silenced by Graham's persistent deployment of the rhetoric of rescue. Like Barnardo, Graham publicly referred solely to destitute children in need of saving, when this label was actually only applicable to a minority of children under the care of either institution.²⁰ His private writings, meanwhile, left no room for doubt that the Homes was established to make social and educational provision for the planters' children.²¹ Furthermore, Graham's description of the emigration scheme directly addressed the planters' desire to find a solution outside India for their children. However, apart from the declared involvement of planters on the Homes Board, and inclusion of their written opinions in the *Homes Magazine*, Graham never publicly admitted the nature or extent of their stake in the Homes – that over half of the children resident there grew up in the cosseted world of plantation bungalows, and that for them, being sent to the Homes represented a material *drop* in circumstances, though a projected rise in future prospects through colonial emigration.

The solution/problem of emigration

John Graham was not the first to suggest emigration as a potential solution to the Anglo-Indian problem.²² His scheme was unique, however, in its realization of the systematic and sustained transfer of Anglo-Indian juveniles.²³ Graham was clear about the aims of the 'Colonial' Homes from the outset. The original brochure listed the 'Object' as 'to attempt a solution of the problem by giving such a course of training as will fit the children for emigration to the Colonies'. The 'Need' was that 'the only real hope of amelioration lies in Emigration'. Since it was not possible to send the children directly to the colonies, they would first be made 'fit'. The 'Advantages' of the location at Kalimpong were 'its healthy site' to gain physical strength for the colonies, 'its isolated position' to keep the children away from 'injurious native influence' and its extensive grounds to provide training in 'the culture of the field, the garden, and the orchard'. 'Children who are manifestly unfitted for Colonial life', the statement continued, 'will be trained

for openings in India.²⁴ There was no question then of the fundamental place of organized emigration in the establishment of the Homes.

Early developments challenged Graham's idealized vision of colonial emigration. In the first instance, the roll grew so quickly that emigration was never going to be possible for all of the pupils. Graham initially imagined a total roll of about forty children.²⁵ The institution opened with six pupils, four of whom were domiciled European children. By 1902 there were seventy-two children in residence, and by 1910, 305. In 1922 the roll was capped at 625; even this Graham enacted with great reluctance given his original 'open-door' policy.²⁶ In addition to the strain of providing infrastructure for a larger student body, Graham and his supporters had to accept that increasingly restrictive border controls in the settler colonies would apply to educated Anglo-Indians. By 1907 Graham had changed his outlook considerably, telling the Calcutta Committee of the Homes that perhaps 'India should get the benefit of the children she herself had trained'.²⁷ In other words, placement in India became an option for not just those deemed 'unfit' for the colonies. According to Mainwaring, of the 500 pupils to have left the Homes by 1925, 115 had emigrated, the majority to New Zealand.²⁸

Acknowledgement that colonial emigration would not be possible for the majority of Homes graduates had important ramifications for the development of the institution, not least because the rural labour that boys were trained for was organized very differently in India than it was in the settler colonies. In New Zealand it was anticipated that graduates would enter a 'free' labour market, earning wages that could be accrued as capital and put towards an independent existence as a landowning farmer; while in India the rural sector was economically precarious, organized around caste, and not seen as a pathway to Anglo-Indian respectability.²⁹ Hence the Homes training would potentially be defunct if immigration restrictions meant that its graduates would have to be placed in India. Graham attempted to ease any concern about this by stating that preparation for the settler colonies would produce graduates equally well suited to Indian placement.³⁰

A series of articles in the early editions of the *Homes Magazine* reveals Graham's considerable efforts to ensure that training was matched with settler colonial labour shortages. He also sought reassurance from his colonial contacts that emigrants would be socially accepted there. In the second edition of the *Homes Magazine*, John Murray, a local tea planter, contributed an article on the social integration of Anglo-Indians entitled 'The Philosophy of Colonisation'. The article was a rebuttal to the suggestion – mooted by a Scottish planter – that

a 'Eurasian Settlement' might be founded in Australia. Murray opposed the idea, arguing that it was contrary to the Homes vision, which imagined its graduates 'entering Colonial life, not to found a colony of Eurasia':

A Eurasian Colony could never succeed. The idea has within it the very germ of decay. The success of social organization depends not on its exclusiveness, but on the diversity, and complexity of its members. ...

Is it not the exclusiveness forced by the condition of circumstances on the Eurasian community that has necessitated the very existence of the Homes? And to foster a policy tending to the formation of a Eurasian Colony, would be to defeat the object for which the Homes were founded. 'Forced exclusiveness' may well characterise the bar under which the Eurasian community in India is now suffering.³¹

The suggestion that a segregated Anglo-Indian community abroad would be destined for 'decay' highlights the belief that social integration was not only *possible* for Anglo-Indians in the settler colonies, but essential for their survival. Murray espoused clear ideas about where young Anglo-Indians would sit in colonial hierarchies should this integration be possible. Taking 'a lower place in the scale of being than the corresponding type of British Colonial', they would join the 'struggle for existence' in Australia on the following terms:

One of two things must happen. He will either cease to exist, or he will be absorbed in the dominant race. If in the struggle an endeavour be made to retain his distinction of type, he will be doomed to failure. ... At the very outset of his colonial career the Eurasian is by nature forced to take a subordinate position. His relation to the Colonial will be that of servant to master. Here, then, is the training ground, this is the starting-point, and yonder the goal, far off in the distant light.³²

Thus Murray theorized a model by which Anglo-Indians might be absorbed into the white settler populations. The next step was to collect information about how this might work in practice.³³ In the same edition of the *Homes Magazine* an article entitled 'Fields of Emigration' proposed sending graduates to New Zealand. While the Homes was 'not yet in a position to send any of our children to the Colonies', the author (presumably Graham) advised that information was being collected wherever possible 'on this essential part of our scheme'.³⁴ The article cited correspondence from a farmer named James Fraser, a 'sturdy Scot' who was in Government Service in India for thirty-five years before settling in New Zealand. Graham welcomed Fraser's enthusiasm, which was in contrast to the 'fierce' suggestions by 'leading men in other Colonies' that

Anglo-Indians would not be welcome there.³⁵ Fraser described New Zealand as an ideal starting point for hard-working, self-reliant emigrants, and gave details of how to acquire and manage plots of land. Fraser added that 'in a generation or two Eurasian stigma of colour and helplessness would be lost'. Their offspring would be 'born Britons' which he described as the 'raison d'être of the whole scheme and an immense thing to look forward to'.³⁶ Fraser articulated an aim that underwrote the scheme but was seldom mentioned – that once settled at a distance from their origin families, the emigrants would be free to marry into the white settler majority and achieve racial dissolution in the generations that followed.

Fraser's belief in the merit of a strong work ethic, which could be used by otherwise 'helpless' populations to overcome the stigma of racial mixing and achieve self-sufficiency, was backed up by an Australian farmer in 1903. The correspondent, a former member of the Homes Board, described farming life in the colonies as 'very different to either at home or in India. Every man, it does not matter how large a scale he is, works'.³⁷ The particular value attached to farming in the settler colonies was again seen as requiring elaboration in order to make a case for the colonies as a destination. Graham's supporters were trying to convey that rural labour in the colonies was not equivalent to a coolie labouring on a plantation, but neither was it a means of achieving the status of their tea-planting fathers. It was somewhere in between, and thus ideal for Anglo-Indians. The 'orphan boys', the correspondent continued, would 'depend upon themselves. ... A boy who was not afraid to work could, easily, by the time he was 28 to 30 years of age, save enough to start a farm of his own'.³⁸ Murray, Fraser and the Australian correspondent all argued that Anglo-Indian men could progress from the subordinate position in a 'servant to master' relationship to being independent farmers. While women graduates were not mentioned in the early discussions of emigration, their placement in the colonies from 1909 generated a parallel discussion about the pathway towards 'independent' careers. Achieving financial self-sufficiency was another step in the permanent break away from their British and Indian heritage, and from reliance upon the Homes.

Encouraged by these positive reports about farming opportunities, Graham established a working farm at Kalimpong to train the boys for emigration. Between 1903 and 1905 a farm steading, farmhouse and demonstration farm of twenty-five acres were added. The farm was increased by fifty acres in 1906 and a 'demonstration farm building' was added in 1908.³⁹ At this time emigration was still a theoretical construct, about to be tested with the first emigrants leaving the Homes. In the interim, Graham had continued to accept tea planters' children

on the documented agreement that they would be sent to the colonies upon reaching working age. These included several children from the 'six families'; Lorna and George Peters, Richard Hawkins, and the Moller children were all resident at the Homes by 1908.

Life at the Homes

The emigrants' reluctance in later life to talk to their children about the experience of living at the Homes is a part of the untold story that is often thought to indicate trauma. Those who did speak about their upbringing usually reminisced about the dramatic view of Mt Kanchenjunga rather than sharing details of their daily life. During their parents' lifetimes, descendants have respected this silence, treading carefully around what was a sensitive subject. Recent public reports of neglect and abuse of children in institutions of this era have no doubt affected the way their silence has been interpreted.⁴⁰ For descendants, there are two opposing narratives within which they might place their parent's story: on the one hand, an idealized upbringing in the spectacular landscapes of the Himalayan region, cared for by a kindly missionary; on the other, a decade or more isolated from their family in the strict confines of a Victorian institution. The aim of this section is to provide a meaningful sketch of daily life at the Homes, in order to enable a better understanding of why many emigrants so intently put the experience behind them, and to address the question of the extent to which the Homes felt like a home. Did staff and other pupils become a substitute for the children's own family? How were sibling relationships managed in a scheme based on familial separation?

Because little testimony exists from the New Zealand emigrants about their experiences at the Homes, here I utilize the memories of more recent graduates in tandem with written sources of the earlier period. These temporally distinct sources are linked by the notion that, unsurprisingly, the Homes experience gradually improved over time. Ruth Glashan, archivist at the Homes, attributed my grandmother's silence to her residing there in the early 1900s, when hardships such as cold, hunger, harsh discipline and bullying were most prevalent. In 2000, Anne Beckett interviewed her parents, Gavin and Isabella Gammie, about their memories of Kalimpong. Gavin emigrated with the last group to New Zealand in 1938 and Isabella arrived independently in the early 1940s. Throughout the interview they attributed differences in their experiences to Isabella's attendance in a slightly later period.⁴¹ Simon Mainwaring's history of the Homes also refers

to a gradual lightening of discipline and greater attention to the extracurricular needs of the children from the 1960s.⁴² Even so, graduates of the 1970s have likened their time at the Homes to military school and described being 'at the mercy' of the house-parents.⁴³ Recent testimony is thus integrated here to relay some first-hand reflections on growing up at the Homes, keeping in mind that the difficulties would have been more pronounced in the earlier period when the New Zealand emigrants were in residence.

Reflecting upon my own visit to the Homes in 2007, my initial impressions suggest that Graham's desire to accommodate the children in something other than a typical Victorian institution was achieved, at least in geographical setting and use of space. By 1930 the Homes grounds covered 600 acres on a steep hillside above the township of Kalimpong. The classrooms were clustered near the entrance, but the cottages and other buildings were widely dispersed, separated by the undulating terrain and vegetation. This is illustrated in a photograph taken by a 1911 emigrant, George Langmore, on his return visit to Kalimpong in 1924 (Figure 3.1). Very little has changed since then, with no new buildings added. The lush vegetation that has grown in the intervening years conjures imaginings of an idyllic childhood in a tropical setting. On my second (and longer) visit, however, I gained a keen sense of the children's regulated lives. Their existence revolves to a marked extent around cottage life. They are either at school, at their cottage or en route to one or the other. While the forbidding

Figure 3.1 The Homes school buildings (centre front) and cottages with Kalimpong township at rear. Photograph taken by George Langmore in 1924. Courtesy Langmore private collection.

feel of large concrete structures is absent, a peculiar sense of isolation creeps in with the contrasting worlds of prayer meetings in dimly lit wooden cottages, the untamed foliage outside and the busy town of Kalimpong – just a few minutes' drive down the hill but somehow entirely separate.

The children's sudden departure from the plantation to the Homes, from family to strangers, is one that many descendants reflect upon when considering the hardships of their parents' lives. When Isabella Gammie's daughter asked her about the moment of separation from her mother, Isabella's immediate response was that they had *ayahs* whom they 'spent more time with'.⁴⁴ Her comment confirms that it was usual for the children to have *ayahs* on the plantation, and that separation from them was an additional – perhaps the primary – trauma they experienced when sent to the Homes. Other descendants of Kalimpong emigrants have relayed their parents' memories of the first days and weeks at the institution spent in quarantine. For many, this was the first time they had ever slept alone. It was, in one descendant's words, a stark contrast to the 'cosseted existence' of plantation life.⁴⁵ Ruth Nicholls, whom we met in Chapter 2, was sent to the Homes when she was four years old. She recalled being sent 'straight to the isolation area. And [I] cried and cried for two or three weeks.' She remembered 'sleeping in a ward, and not a soul around' and 'all these nurses in white garments and being poked and prodded and inspected'.⁴⁶

For those who arrived as infants, there were no early memories of arrival or separation. Children under the age of five years were housed in Lucia King, the 'babies' cottage', until they were old enough enter one of the boys' or girls' cottages. As Gavin Gammie noted of his early years at the Homes, it was difficult to remember what it was like or to know what the impact might have been. He was four years old when he arrived at the Homes; others in the study families were as young as two. Even for children old enough to remember, there was simply no time to adjust or even to realize what had happened. As one later graduate recalled, 'I didn't know what hit me to be honest. I looked for my mother and she wasn't there. ... I'm falling out of the bed and she's not there to get me. ... You were pushed into the swimming pool, dragged off here, dragged off there, and you just didn't know where you were.'⁴⁷

Daily life at the Homes demanded more than schooling and extracurricular activities; the children were immediately absorbed into rigorous work routines. Graham was reliant on the labour of the children from the outset, which he justified as necessary to avoid employing Indian workers and to inculcate the 'true dignity of manual labour'.⁴⁸ This policy was also an overt rejection of the caste system, with every child expected to take their turn to perform a range

of domestic tasks – a 1920 article in the *Homes Magazine* written by a female pupil described in detail the duties of the kitchen girl, the dining room girl, the lavatory girl, the lamp girl and so on.⁴⁹ Jane Webster, wife of the tea planter Peter Webster whom I interviewed for this study, volunteered at the Homes in the 1950s. An abiding memory of her time there was children kept constantly busy with unnecessary tasks such as ‘picking up leaves’ at 5.00 am, in what she understood as a battle against ‘Indian sloth’.⁵⁰ While the children’s labour was justified as a productive method of preparing them for colonial life, it was also a means of countering any lingering ‘native’ tendencies.

As to whether the children formed familial bonds at the Homes, much depended on their relationship with the housemothers and aunties in charge of each cottage (Figure 3.2). Discipline was meted out in a manner to be expected of an institution of this period. Mainwaring reported use of the ‘stick’ and infamous housemothers who beat bed-wetting boys with iron bars.⁵¹ Ruth Nicholls talked about getting ‘cuts ... boys on the bum and girls on the hand’. But importantly, John Graham, the father figure whom the children all called ‘Daddy’, was not involved in carrying out such discipline. Eddie Lamb, a Homes graduate who ended up in England, recalled an incident where a boy was caught stealing and noted that this was the only time he ever saw Graham beat a student.⁵² Although Graham looms large in any account of the Homes, he was for the most part a figure who was admired from afar. It was James Purdie, secretary from 1908 to 1946, who knew the boys and girls by name, and who offered regular counsel,

Figure 3.2 ‘Ready for school’, outside a cottage at Kalimpong. Courtesy Gammie private collection.

while Graham was known to refer to them all as 'my dear boy' or 'my dear girl'.⁵³ Graham lived offsite in Kalimpong, and when he was at the Homes, children would follow him around excitedly trying to elicit some contact – a pat on the head, grabbing his hand – or comment from him. The only time they were guaranteed an individual audience with Graham was upon leaving, when he would offer them advice about the dangers of the outside world and present them with a Bible. Graham's aloofness inspired a sense of awe and a legacy of affection for him, which functioned as a powerful counterpoint to more difficult memories of the Homes upbringing.

Maintaining ties to one's birth family through relationships with siblings at the Homes was limited by the strict enforcement of gender segregation. The boys' cottages were all located in the area to the north of the school buildings and the girls' to the south. Boys and girls did not visit each other. They were schooled separately and took their manual training in different areas. Ruth Nicholls was placed in the same cottage as her older sisters, but only saw her brother Sydney on 'rare occasions like the school fete, the school sports day'.⁵⁴ Likewise, Gavin Gammie recalled only seeing his sisters on special occasions. One of Gavin's most difficult recollections was of not being informed that his younger sister, Sheila, died at the Homes.⁵⁵ Others had younger siblings arrive and were not told of their relationship, which seems to have been the case with my grandmother's younger sister, Alice. When I spoke with Ruth about these separations, she understood them as the staff's way of 'keeping an eye on us'. Safety was also Ruth's way of making sense of the high level of restriction and management of the children, contrary to the freedom that the sprawling grounds and untamed landscapes suggest:

JM: My impression was that there is this nice big area, but really your life is quite restricted.

Ruth: Yes, kept as safe as possible. And the only funny thing that went on was the beggars, and they'd come and do their chanting, from down at Kalimpong, down at the village. Only on rare occasions did we have a walk down to the village, what was it for, I don't know. ...

JM: But that was quite rare, wasn't it?

Ruth: Very rare. Oh our lives were so full and preoccupied with school and games and housework and cooking.⁵⁶

Graham worked hard to inculcate a sense of family and a boarding school experience in the set-up of the cottages. Each housed thirty to forty children and was staffed by one housemother and an aunty. Sports days and other events were structured around

Figure 3.3 'Homes birthday 1916', Kalimpong. Courtesy Gammie private collection.

cottage loyalties (Figure 3.3). But the broad 'Anglo-Indian' categorization disguises the particular cultural dynamism of cottage life, where children from diverse origins were lumped together whether they grew up on plantations, with Anglo-Indian families in Calcutta, or in other circumstances. In this regard Graham was active in 'creating' Anglo-Indians, since the tea planter's children were exposed to certain traits of that community – such as the dreaded 'chee-chee' accent – that they would not have otherwise been.⁵⁷ For their part, the plantation children brought their maternal language and culture to the cottages. The resultant hybridity is exemplified by the 'Homes slang', which combined English boarding school colloquialisms and frequently used Hindi terms.⁵⁸ Despite Graham's best efforts, non-European cultural and linguistic habits from cottage life and the plantations persisted, all the way to New Zealand, as Chapter 8 will show.

This hybridity was apparent to some extent in the children's meals in the cottages. On the plantations, the children's diet consisted of a combination of British and Indian food. The same seems to have held true at the Homes. Ruth Nicholls remembered the diet as mostly 'English' food: 'Porridge in the morning, maybe a fruit or two like banana and things you can add to it. And was it toast or plain bread? I've forgotten. And a cup of tea.' The main meal was 'soup and a middle course, and pudding. I was a fussy eater of course. Didn't like the brussel sprouts.' Although Ruth recalled the food being 'English', and based around meat and potatoes, they did occasionally have curry, which was 'very mild, compared to when we went home, and had the real McCoy'.⁵⁹ The legacy of eating highly

spiced curries that will be discussed in Chapter 8 is perhaps indicative of a greater reliance on local food in the earlier period when self-sufficiency was not possible, or of abiding memories of the plantation.

Religious diversity was suppressed by the daily Christian rituals that dominated life at the Homes. In a group discussion in the documentary *We Homes Chaps*, every participant expressed a different response to this. Some stated that religion was forced on them; others felt that their cultural origins were never compromised; yet another remembered Christianity as a benign influence – singing nice hymns in church and learning English phrases. Ruth Nicholls remembers occasionally having multiple church services in one day and always having a service on Sunday. They said grace before meals in the cottage. She vividly recalls ministers visiting the Homes and giving sermons: ‘Launch out into the deep! That was one of the sermons. And hellfire and brimstone. That was do as you’re told or else you’ll go to hell you see.’ Ruth found the religious training a ‘bit overwhelming’ and life at the Homes in general to be ‘strict, very strict’. When I suggested that she must have looked forward to the holidays, she replied, ‘Oh yes. Freedom.’ I asked Ruth if it was hard to leave the plantation and return to the Homes after the holidays:

Of course! We used to cry and my Dad had tears rolling down his face, and the dog would get into a depression, and all the servants would come. Plus, the workers on the tea plantation, quite a few of them, would have heard that *babaluc*, that is children, were going back to school. And so there’d be a gathering. They’d do the *salaams*.⁶⁰

Ruth’s case is enlightening because she moved between plantation life and the Homes, and thus her reflections bring immediacy to the racial and cultural dynamics of the parallel childhoods the two sites engendered. Her nostalgic memories of the plantation, which she would happily talk about at length, contrasted noticeably with her difficulty remembering aspects of life at the Homes. The Nicholls family exemplifies the situation where plantation children were undoubtedly ‘rescued’ from their future, rather than the present as Graham’s appeals suggested. Planters were convinced by the Homes emigration scheme, sacrificing domestic arrangements that in at least some cases functioned without issue, in order to achieve an idealized future in the settler colonies. It is important to note, however, that Ruth’s regular visits ‘home’ were exceptional. For most plantation children, holidays were remembered as a difficult time, when other children would go home and they would be left behind.⁶¹ This was compounded

by uncertainty about their familial circumstances. While their bodies were kept busy from moment to moment, their minds were free to wonder about who their parents were, whether they were alive, and if perhaps their father might arrive one day as other fathers did.

Evidence of the planters' continued – albeit indirect – involvement during the period of their children's residence at the Homes challenges any simple thesis of abandonment. Although few children enjoyed a level of contact akin to that of the Nicholls family, the fathers from the case study families did express an interest in their children's progress and eventual placement. Examining their correspondence turns our attention back to the plantations and the continuance of life there after the children were sent to Kalimpong. The planters' definitive action in sending the children away from their mothers does not mean that the issue was resolved. It is likely to have been a source of ongoing tension in the bungalow, especially with the production of further offspring. The women's archival silence and the planters' functional attendance to their children's new circumstance should not disguise the fact that domestic life at the plantation was no doubt substantially affected by the sudden absence of the children.

Egerton Peters's communication with Graham evidently stopped for six years once the first two children were safely deposited at the Homes. That silence was sharply broken when Peters received a letter from ten-year-old Lorna in 1912. His response, addressed to her housemother, questioned the wisdom of putting his daughter in direct communication with him and asked 'whether it was quite fair without consulting me'.⁶² Clearly rattled by the unannounced and unexpected breach of the distance between them, Peters declared that he 'should be delighted to hear from and write to the child if it did not appear to me to be against her best interests'.⁶³ He considered that 'the atmosphere of a tea garden and close contact with natives would be decidedly objectionable for her' and worried that she would 'expect later to be sent to me for holidays'. His letters betray the peculiarly malleable quality that people of mixed race were believed to embody. In her six years at the Homes, Lorna had apparently been transformed from a wild child who spoke no English to one whom Egerton Peters imagined could not bear to be in contact with her maternal family. Peters's letters during his children's time at the Homes suggest a man who struggled to come to terms with his decision to send them away, particularly after the death of their mother in 1911.

Peters's anxiety about the decision to deposit his children at the Homes was less apparent in planters' letters in the other family files. Francis Hawkins's letters for the duration of Richard's residence at the Homes dealt only with fees, apart from a moment in 1918 (some seven years after his son was sent to Kalimpong)

when he wrote that 'it suddenly occurred to me the other day that Richard gets no pocket money' and henceforth allowed an extra 2 rupees per month for this purpose.⁶⁴ In 1919 Hawkins retired to England to care for his mother. There is no evidence that he ever visited the Homes prior to leaving India. Similarly Paul Moller's letters dealt only with the payment of fees and sending another child to Kalimpong. James Dewar continued to check on the progress of the Spalding boys during their few years at the Homes. John Gammie wrote regularly to Graham, enquiring as to his children's health and requesting photographs of them.⁶⁵ Gavin Gammie later recalled that his father did make several visits to the school, but he only met with the older children. Like the children of other families, Gavin would have been unaware of his father's continued interest in his well-being. Life at the Homes can therefore be characterized as one of monotony and routine for the children, who moved towards an unknown future with little or no familial contact.

Leaving India

Leaving Kalimpong and then India made complete the physical wrenching of the children from their birth families, and, as this section will demonstrate, this second removal was equally attributable to the wishes of their fathers as the initial despatch to Kalimpong. Despite the difficulties in achieving emigration, placement in the settler colonies was consistently portrayed as the most desirable outcome for Homes graduates and one that was offered as a reward for the 'best and brightest' students. In practice, however, the most influential factors seem to have been a tea planting father who pressed for emigration and was willing to finance the trip, and timing – reaching working age when groups of Homes graduates were being allowed to enter New Zealand. Fairer skin was also considered an important attribute for emigration. The wishes of the young people themselves were afforded minimal consideration. Their futures were another uncertainty that the children lived with until emigration was, often hastily, arranged.

The intermittent correspondence between tea planters and Graham over the course of their children's residence at the Homes was followed by a flurry of communication, equal in frequency and urgency to the initial enquiries, about where they would be placed upon reaching working age. This correspondence was the key forum for deciding upon destinations. The letters provide further evidence of Graham adapting his idealized vision in response to the practical difficulties of realizing emigration, by encouraging the fathers to play a more

active role in their children's futures than either side had anticipated. The planters' response to this was entirely negative. Egerton Peters, for example, was adamant that he had entered into a contract that included sending the children to the colonies. In 1912 Peters replied to a letter from Graham, the content of which left him 'much disturbed'.⁶⁶ He took offence at Graham's suggestion that he might take responsibility for the children when they had 'grown up', explaining his perspective in no uncertain terms:

When I sent these children to the homes, it was after long and anxious consideration. ... Since I sent them away I have regarded it as absolutely settled that they would be sent to the colonies by the St Andrew's Colonial Homes, and but for that understanding would never have parted with them.⁶⁷

Peters apparently received a reassuring response to his concerns, but raised the issue again on several occasions between 1914 and 1917. A crucial point in this correspondence was Peters's heightened concern for 'Eurasian girls' who were educated and then 'turned out' to earn a living in India, which he believed could 'only lead to misery of the worst description'.⁶⁸ Peters's desperate frustration at the thought that he had made a mistake by sending his children to the Homes led to the revelation that, at least for him, there had been other options. 'Had I for a moment thought that they would be brought up at the Homes to no better future than to find such work as they may in India,' he wrote, 'I would have brought them up on the native side by preference.'⁶⁹ This supports the discussion from Chapter 2 about the possibilities for children to be accepted by their maternal families. Peters's final plea took immediate effect – probably because it coincided with plans to emigrate a group. Less than a month later he wrote of his 'great relief' that Lorna and George would be sent to New Zealand 'where they will have a fair chance in life'.⁷⁰

Dora Moller, the second eldest of Paul Moller's children, was in the same group to New Zealand. In July 1920 Dora had written to Graham to thank him for allowing her to go to the plantation for a holiday. 'I have arrived home safely,' she wrote, 'Father was so pleased to see me. He gave me a hearty welcome.'⁷¹ Six months later, just prior to her departure for New Zealand, Paul Moller wrote that Dora was 'still here and is very [lovely]'.⁷² After she left Moller wrote again, to thank Graham 'for the way you have brought up Dora, it's a great credit to your big institution'.⁷³ In the same letter Moller informed Graham that he had been 'ordered home' (to Denmark) by his doctor and would not be returning to India. For his children still at the Homes, Moller wrote that 'as already indicated, I want them all to immigrate to N.Z., and arranged to make annual payments to cover

school fees until that time came. Meanwhile his son Charles wrote the first of a flurry of letters asking for help to join his sister in New Zealand. Evidently he had the opportunity to sail with her group in 1920, but for some unstated reason opted to work in India instead. This he seemed to regret soon afterwards, and he wrote regularly to the Homes asking for assistance to emigrate, which would eventuate five years later.

In 1924 John Gammie agreed to Graham's suggestion that his eldest children, Fergus and Betty, be sent to New Zealand ('if you think it would be a good idea') and promised to raise the required sum of 1,500 rupees by the end of the year.⁷⁴ Gammie expressed a desire to see his children before they left India, but struggled to organize a meeting in Calcutta because he was in the process of being transferred to another plantation. He asked that Fergus and Betty be instructed to write to him via the Homes, as otherwise 'letters might go astray and you will always know my address.'⁷⁵ Here we see the institution's role as a stabilizing presence in an interracial empire family; a function that would usually – in white families – be performed by relatives in England acting as anchors for their highly mobile and scattered families. As it turned out, Gammie did get to see the children, a meeting that left him satisfied with their upbringing at the Homes. His affective letter to James Purdie demonstrated his concern that the ties between siblings be maintained. 'They've kept that nice disposition they had as kiddies,' he wrote, 'and from what they told me I gathered that the family still had that love for each other which is so nice to see. ... It was so nice them recognizing me at once.'⁷⁶

In a letter concerning his son Richard's future prospects, Francis Hawkins wrote of his expectation that 'in the course of a year of two he will be starting in life,' asking whether Richard exhibited 'any liking for machinery as I would like him to be apprenticed to engineering if he has any inclination that way.'⁷⁷ The following year Francis replied to a letter from Purdie regarding Richard's future:

As regards Dickie's future I note all you say re sending him to Britain. I should certainly like him to be sent out of India but my investments have not turned out as they promised and I am afraid I couldn't afford to keep him over here but I am prepared to find £100 to start him and am quite willing to leave the manner of doing this in Dr Graham's hands.⁷⁸

Francis was apparently responding to a suggestion by Purdie that since he had returned to Britain, he might be able to assist his son emigrating there. Francis's desire to avoid direct involvement in his son's future could scarcely be described as subtle, and his reasons were thin; although he could not afford to 'keep' his

son he was able to find a substantial sum to see him settled elsewhere, the details of which he was happy to leave to Graham. Soon afterwards Francis wrote that he was pleased that his son would 'be started in something he has a liking for. ... I hope you will be successful in your efforts to place him in America.'⁷⁹ Richard was in fact sent to New Zealand in 1925 in the same group as Charles Spalding.

James Dewar had always been clear that the Spalding brothers should go to the colonies, and it was perhaps a more straightforward case given that their father had passed away and could take no further part in their lives. Dewar wrote to Graham in 1925, responding negatively to the suggestion that Charles visit his mother prior to leaving for New Zealand: 'Unless Charlie particularly wishes to see his mother before he goes away, I think it would serve no useful purpose if she went up to see him. She is not a good woman.'⁸⁰ The same issue arose when Charles's brother Tom was due to emigrate. In 1926 Charles wrote to Purdie from Te Awamutu in the North Island of New Zealand, and referred to an established correspondence with his mother. 'I got a letter from my mother,' he wrote, 'and she told me that Donald will be going to the Homes soon. She ask [*sic*] me if she could see me one day when I have some money and I answer [*sic*] the letter back, told her that I might see you some day. And she said she would like to see Tom before he goes to N.Z. I will be glad if Tom could see her before he comes here.'⁸¹ Charles's level of literacy was noticeably lower than that of other emigrants, attributable to his age upon admission (twelve years). His request that Tom see their mother before emigrating, whom they would both have remembered very well, was not granted.

Although it seems Graham sought Dewar's opinion about Charles seeing his mother before emigrating, it is clear that the Homes were very wary of the prospect, and careful to avoid complicating the long-term separations from their birth families already achieved. As explained in Chapter 2, the mother of the Moller children had managed to keep the children on the plantation for some years prior to them being sent to the Homes. Dora's extended holiday at the plantation before leaving for New Zealand could indicate that she was also successful in negotiating some time with her daughter before losing contact with her permanently. Yet Dora's letter did not mention her mother, which could be explained in multiple ways – that she was no longer alive, or that their relationship was difficult, or simply that Dora knew Graham would not be pleased to hear of her reconnecting with her mother – but it does also leave open the possibility that Dora was allowed to visit the plantation *because* her mother was not present. The references to the women also raise the issue of literacy. The Spalding file subsequently contained correspondence from the boys' mother,

Prosoni; a typed, translated letter marked with her thumbprint. Literacy was a major limiting factor in any future contact with their children, and the women's understanding of this must have lent urgency to the desire to see them prior to leaving India.

What of Jean and Rend Mortimore, whose father was not in the picture and did not therefore provide the impetus for them to be emigrated? Evidently their mother, Ka Ngelibou (Nelly), had become literate while her children were at the Homes; however, this skill was used to protest their fate rather than exert any control over it. The Mortimore file contained two identical forms that preceded the first letter from Nelly. The forms were declarations signed by Jean and Rend, acknowledging the cost of passage to New Zealand as a 'debt of honour' to be repaid to the Homes as soon as possible in order that 'the money spent on my behalf may be available for another pupil of the Homes'.⁸² The agreed sum was £40. Six days after these statements were signed, Nelly penned a letter from Shillong in Assam. 'Dear Sir', she began, 'I have learnt with much regret that my children Jean and Renrose have left Kalimpong for New Zealand on the 23rd of last month and this news comes to me like a shock and breaks my heart and I feel I cannot bear it until now I can write something to you.'⁸³

Nelly was apparently aware that Jean and Rend were due to leave the Homes, as she referred to a previous request for a photograph of the children before they were sent away; but, crucially, she expected that they would be placed in India as she had requested on the application form. Though her letter followed polite conventions, Nelly's frustration was palpable. Having done everything possible to maintain contact with her children she remained powerless to have her pleas taken seriously at this utterly crucial moment. Resigned to the fact of their departure, she now asked only that the promised photograph be sent to her along with a 'full address' that would enable her to write to Jean and Rend in New Zealand. After all that had gone before, in the flick of an eye, Nelly's children were gone.

Of course this was a crucial juncture for the emigrants too. The danger of following the archive, and the emigration narrative, is to miss the distinction between the initial separation and leaving India. Being sent to Kalimpong often meant residing in reasonably close proximity to their place of birth. Although mothers who attempted to visit their children at the Homes were refused entry at the gate, the shift to New Zealand made the possibility of maternal reunion as adults extremely remote. Those placed in India were also limited in their capacity to achieve such reunions – due to the women's absence from the Homes records, and the practice of telling children that their mothers were deceased

when they were not – but there was at least the possibility of returning to the plantation and tracing their birth family.

Leaving India also meant leaving the institution in Kalimpong where these young women and men had grown up. It meant leaving friends that they had lived in close quarters with for more than a decade; the spectacular views of the Himalayas that they would all speak of in later life; the food, the chores and the daily routines; all of the drama of Homes life and all of the boredom; housemothers who would be vividly remembered for better or worse; and precious interactions with Graham or Purdie that would not be forgotten. For some, emigration also brought the keen anticipation of being reunited with siblings – and friends – already placed in New Zealand. They would carry the identifier of belonging to a particular cottage with them, and more bonds would be formed within the groups that set sail from Kalimpong.

These patterns of separation and reunion characterize both the origins and the legacy of the Kalimpong narrative. When they left the Homes, the emigrants were still embedded in complex transnational family arrangements, but they had little knowledge of this. Graham imagined their transfer to a distant settler colony as the final stage of extracting them from those circumstances, where temporary placement with local families would facilitate a complete break from problematic ancestral ties to India and Britain. The first graduates to depart Kalimpong for New Zealand did so prior to Graham ever visiting the colony. He sent them abroad on the same terms that their fathers had sent them away from plantations, with an idealized view of their destination based on knowledge gained and circulated through imperial networks.

The emigrants were delivered into a place with its own developing racial politics, its own gendered working norms suited to the requirements of an agricultural settler colony, and the reputation of a distinctly egalitarian society. Graham's efforts to formulate and circulate discursive connections between the two colonies – as outlined in this chapter – was a forerunner to a more concrete exchange of people and the formation of solid ties with settler families that would bridge the space between India and New Zealand. All along, the archival project to future-proof the physical separations continued: distancing the children from their mothers; creating Anglo-Indians out of tea planters' children; and placing them in a documented story of rescue, improvement and the opportunity to be part of not only a colonial family, but also the wider imperial family and indeed the dispersed 'Homes family'. This was always going to be a complex arrangement but it was deemed better than the simple bonds of birth.

Figure 3.4 The 1925 emigrants on the SS *Janus*. Courtesy Milne private collection.

A photograph of the large 1925 group en route to New Zealand (Figure 3.4), which included Richard Hawkins and Charles Spalding, provides a contemplative counterpoint to the studio images the emigrants posed for in Calcutta and that Graham later circulated in the *Homes Magazine*. I have seen this photograph in several descendant collections. The image of these young people on the open sea is a powerful reminder of the reality of what Graham's scheme entailed, and their faces convey the anxious space they occupied – between their collective pasts and individual futures, between adolescence and adulthood, and between their ambiguous racial status as 'Anglo-Indian' and the hope of becoming 'colonials'. It also captures something of the spirit of those sea journeys. My grandmother, Lorna, wrote with a sense of liberation from the SS *Janus* (five years earlier) that was understandable given her fifteen years isolated at the Homes. Writing on behalf of 'your grown up cherubs from Kalimpong', Lorna's chatty letter related a steady stream of onboard intrigues and events.⁸⁴ Nostalgic memories of the 'dear old Homes, which we all long to see once again' had already become part of the way she understood her place in the world, and these memories were no doubt matched by her unrecorded imaginings of what lay ahead.