

A SURE JUDGE OF CHARACTER

Introduction: in 1841 and 1842, Caroline Chisholm successfully matched a great many employers wanting servants, shepherds, farm labourers and other workers with those living at the female emigrants' home in Sydney and with single and married men and families living outside the home. She had done this informally in the preceding years. Mrs Chisholm's invariable success in these job placements was due to her capacity to understand the prospective employer's needs, strengths and weaknesses, on the one hand, and an equal capacity, on the other, to understand what the person wanting employment had to offer and the position to which they would be most suited. This extract from Mrs Chisholm's Female Immigration shows something of her keen interest in people and her sure judgment of character.

I may here state, that I had one very beautiful girl; she could read and write well, was of an amiable temper, and willing to take advice: I provided her with a situation; she was returned to me solely on account of her good looks. I was at a loss what to do with her; I was afraid to allow her to go out for exercise, and was obliged to limit her to Church on a Sunday. She was the daughter of a Lieutenant, who had spent twenty-four years in the service of his country: having a large family and limited means, he sent one of his treasures here; Providence, however, provided for her in an unexpected manner.

A very respectable woman, a settler's wife, waited on me for advice; she was one of those sensible, shrewd women that help to keep a home together. She told me she had five boys and a girl, none of whom could read or write, and that she wanted a teacher. "My eldest boy, Jack, Ma'am, is as fine a young man as you would wish to see, only he is too wild: he is past learning; but the others are willing enough."

At this time, I had three of these helpless creatures I wished to provide for; but I told the worthy women that _____ was so good tempered, that she would suit her best, if she did not mind her being handsome. "Has she any bounce about her?" "None." I went into the room with her; as she eye rested on _____ there was a look of satisfaction, followed directly by one of deep thought and reflection. There was something so intelligent in her countenance, I became curious; she left the room; returned to the office, when she said, "I'll see you again at five o'clock, ma'am; but don't let the girl engage, any how: a thought has come into my head; I must *think over*."

At five she came. "Now, Mrs. _____, I would like to tell you my plan – 'Do you see,' says I, 'if any gal would keep a man at home, it would be the creature I saw this morning: now,' says I, 'tho' Jack's not taken to drink, yet he's uncommonly fond of company, and is for going to every horse-race he hears of; and I expect, some time, he'll make a very foolish match, wi' some one more ignorant than he is:' yet, ma'am, tho' he can neither read or write, he's uncommonly cute. Now, I think, if I take _____ home, she'll tempt him to stay at home; and then, when I see he's taken, and his heart is touched, I shall call him to one side – bounce a bit, and say, 'I'll have no fine ladies living wi' me.' This opposition will make him more determined; then, in a day or two, I'll cry a bit about it – he's kind-hearted, and can't stand that: then he'll come coaxing me, and I'll consent, and talk over the old man; and the clergyman shall settle everything, and it will be a good thing for us all, ma'am."

I consented to arrange with _____, who should be ready the next day: she was engaged as teacher for one year, salary £16.

I may here remark [regarding] pretty girls [that], no matter what their qualifications or characters were, it was difficult to dispose of them; they are not, it appears, liked as servants, though they are preferred as wives.