

## THE EASTER VOW

*Introduction: this extract from Caroline Chisholm's book, Female Immigration, relates her serious concerns and an accompanying indecision about how best to assist young female emigrants to the Colony of New South Wales. Many of these young women had little or no money and no-one to guide them into permanent, fruitful employment and accommodation, and away from older predatory men. The initial references are to late 1840 and the early months of 1841, leading up to the period of Lent and then Mrs Chisholm's Easter vow of 1841. The young innocent here is Flora, who is elsewhere called the Highland beauty.*

On my two following visits [to the emigrants' tents in Sydney's Domain], I still saw the same gentleman; I observed, too, a little extra finery on \*\*\*\*\* [Flora]. I could not make out the name of the gentleman; but I cautioned the poor girl's mother, and bade her beware. The poor woman said, there was no fear of \*\*\*\*\* for her head had never rested but on her mother's hearth. She was all innocence – the mother all hope.

The following day I was making a few purchases in Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s shop, in George-street, when the same gentleman I had seen with \*\*\*\*\* entered: an elegant woman hung on his arm. I enquired his name – “the lady was his wife.” I still doubted: I went to the next shop; I enquired, whose conveyance is that? – still the same name: I no longer doubted his intentions.

The following evening, seeing him in a tent with \*\*\*\*\* I made enquiries if *any* ladies felt an interest in these young creatures, or afforded them protection? I was told there was a committee, but the ladies never visited the institute, or in any way interfered; and after many enquiries, I was obliged to leave Flora to her *fate*.

From this period I devoted all my *leisure* time in endeavouring to serve these poor girls, and felt determined, with God's blessing, never to rest until *decent protection* was afforded them. In January, 1841, I wrote to Lady Gipps, and from that time I never ceased in my exertions. I knew that every ship's arrival would increase the necessity for such an institution. I felt convinced the evil which struck me so forcibly would soon be made apparent to the good people of Sydney; and I felt assured that the God of all mercy would not allow so many poor creatures to be lost, without disposing the hearts of the people to unite and save them.

I now considered the difficulties, and prepared my plan: for three weeks I hesitated, and suffered much. I was prepared to encounter the opposition of some, the luke-warmness, or the actual hostility of others, to the plan I might suggest. I saw I must have the aid of the Press; for I could only anticipate success by soliciting public sympathy for the cause I had undertaken, notwithstanding which, as a female and almost a stranger in the colony, I naturally felt diffident. I was impressed with the idea that God had, in a peculiar manner, fitted me for this work; and yet I hesitated. About this time, several young women, whom I had served, advised others to write to me: I did all I could to aid them in their prospects by advice, or recommending them to situations; but the number increased, and I saw that my plan, if carried into effect, would *serve all*.

My delay pressed on my mind as a *sin*; and when I heard of a poor girl suffering distress, and losing her reputation in consequence, I felt I was not *clear of her sin*, for I did not do all I *could* to prevent it. During the season of Lent of that year, I suffered much; but on the Easter Sunday, I was enabled, at the altar of our Lord, to make an offering of my talents to the God who gave them. I promised to know *neither country or creed*, but to try and serve all *justly* and impartially. I asked only to be enabled to keep these poor girls from being tempted, by their need, to mortal sin; and resolved that, to accomplish this, I would in every way sacrifice my feelings – surrender all comfort – nor, in fact, consider my own wishes or feelings, but wholly devote myself to the work I had in hand. I felt my offering was accepted, and that God's blessing was on my work: but it was his will to permit many *serious difficulties* to be thrown in my way, and to conduct me through a rugged path of deep humiliation.