For nearly half a century there has stood still for Daisy Bates.
She gave up her home to live with the Aboriginals in their desert camps—and now, at the age of 85, feels misunderstood.

By MARIE CATTON

ONE hot summer afternoon in 1935, passengers on the Transcontinental Express saw a strange procession making its way up the sandhills and saltbush to the little white settlement of Oodnadatta, on the edge of the Nullarbor Plain just inside the South Australian border.
Wasting slowly in single file came thirteen aborigines, carrying cases and boxes, and the slim, straight figure of a tall white woman dressed in old world clothes.

On the slope of nearby hills other natives were gathered, creating such a noise that nobody could have watched the little woman they called "Kabbarli" (grandmother) leaving them to return to her own people.
In front of her stood two of the young natives, their bare feet kicking aside stones and twigs so that her progress would not be cut.

The train stood on the siding while the little party stood waiting. For her farewell gifts she didn't give each of the aborigines a smoking.

Then the train came—and, with it, the impatient Mrs. Bates had avoided all her life.

FROM the time she left Oodnadatta, Mrs. Bates became a centre of controversy, of sensational criticisms and praise. Shortly after, with the manners, conventional outlook, and self-satisfied efficiency which characterised her throughout anything she had stepped away from the train and into the twentieth century. She has never accustomed herself to that change.
And perhaps the rest of the world hasn't quite accustomed itself to this cultivated little Irishwoman, who has been lost to civilisation for nearly a lifetime—a woman who has driven a herd of 700 cattle on a 3000 mile trek to the West Kimberleys—a woman who spent a lifetime among the aborigines, from the Pindanawonga of Western Australia to the digger-anglicised tongue of Yambiliba—a woman who, in years of wandering in the desolate tribes of half a continent, learned to "think black"—a woman who once quizzed the celebrated journalist single-handedly about the only woman in the world who can claim the title of "author" of the Okura-Woodroffe race of a C.E.D. and blood brotherhood of an aboriginal tribe.

Writers all over the world have hailed Daisy M. Bates for her work among the aborigines, and have called her "the spectator of a vanishing race...a desert recluse...a figure that will pass into legend."
"I may be historic," laughed Mrs. Bates. "I'm certainly prudish. The dresses I wear are made for me in Perth in 1890. Everything I own seems to belong to the last century."

But the woman who has talked to the aborigines, and listened to them, and written about them, has certainly been "a woman who belongs to Queen Victoria's reign."
There is a touch of pride in her soft, blarney-floured voice.

She likes to tell you that her umbrellas has been in the family for many times. One goes back to King George V, then Duke of York, who picked it up for her when she dropped it on the lawn of Government House in Perth at a garden party in 1911.

In 1900 she went to a Parisian tailor in Perth, and told him she wanted a complete wardrobe for the bush—a wardrobe that would keep her six navy blue serge coats and skirts, two grey tweed Norfolk frock, a black broadcloth, and a white taffeta ballroom gown.
Mrs. Bates says she "wears clothes today, and with what she describes as "correct folding", and "keeps them in perfect condition."

"Only clothes that have been hung," she says. "Only the washable garments are pressed."

Guiding influences in her life have been the Bible and the Royal Family. In almost every conversation she mentions the Royal Family. Her own royal, formal manner is modelled on the manners of Royalty, as she remembers them in the days when she left England for Australia, when Victoria was Queen.

"The stimulating memory of my meetings with the Princess Royal, who has always been with me, spurred me on to do my little bit for the aborigines," says Mrs. Bates.

Her first acquaintance with Royalty was when she met Queen Victoria in the 1870's, staying with the Outram family at St. Andrews, Scotland, near Bannatyne Castle. She wandered into the castle grounds and unexpectedly encountered the Queen coming down the Broad Walk. "I immediately recognised my majesty, and was so nervous that I leant on its three devout curtsies," Mrs. Bates says. "All I can really remember of that visit was that her Majesty was big, black, saucer-shaped face with its white ribbons."

At Yampi Sound, during her childhood, she had an unexpected meeting with the Prince of Wales, later King Edward, when she busily opened one of Mrs. Nightingale, who had been the Prince's governess.

Thirty years later, in Perth, she was presented to the Duke and Duchess of York, who later became George VI and Queen Elizabeth, when they arrived in Australia to open the new Aboriginal Parliament.

Another 20 years later, on the visit of His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, who had the present Governor-General, the Duke of Gloucester.

Mrs. Bates stood at the end of this last memory of Royalty. "When I met the present Governor-General, I felt the 'queen's curtsy' that I had made to his great-grandfather, and was thrilled to it again."

Her imperial soul has always been faithful to the best traditions of Kiipere.

Every Empire Day, while she was living with the blacks, they gathered about her for a celebration of the Centenary. In 1888 she signed the job, "because the state attendants were not given enough tea, and to illustrate royal generosity."

The little patriotic display always ended in the same way. "Roggarsa, stand up! Kabbarli would be the same as Kabbarli. God save the King."

"Godsaveher's" Day would repeat after her solace.

Daisy O'Dwyer, later to become Daisy Bates, was born on October 14, 1860, at Ballychrine, in the North Riding of Tipperary, and spent her early childhood in a rambling old stone farm house in the ruins and rains of Ireland.

The farm had been the property of her mother's family, the Hunte, for generations.

Later, when her parents died, the family—a bannah that must have sailed all before ordinary agitations, and who had left three children and a young woman, with only their own survivals, were dying.

In 1899, Mrs. Bates decided to return to Australia. Just before she left London, she met Daisy M. O'Dwyer, an Irishwoman, and through her, and her friends that Daisy Bates has given so much money to.

In February, 1894, she returned to the land of her childhood. She was a balloon, and like the balloon, she flew.

"Where's my daughter?" Mrs. Bates said. "Where's my daughter?"

Tasmania, Governor Arthur organised a meeting to capture Oyster Bay and Big River tribes. The bodies of three men were found, but when the net was closed there was none to it. The gas too much had slipped past the world—be captors.

The white man took his chagrined Daisy Bates, and buried the aborigines who had been slaughtered.

The remnants were packed into the desert camp again and she decided to settle at Oodnadatta, S.A., where she spent 20 years studying and helping the aborigines.

Her records of aboriginal customs, legends and language were sent in two big cases to the Government archives in Canberra in 1917.