
THE BULLETIN DEBATE POEMS

Edited by
WILDWOOD CURRICULUM

Chapter One

UP THE COUNTRY

I am back from up the country — very sorry that I
went —
Seeking for the Southern poets' land whereon to pitch
my tent;
I have lost a lot of idols, which were broken on the
track,
Burnt a lot of fancy verses, and I'm glad that I am
back.
Further out may be the pleasant scenes of which our
poets boast,
But I think the country's rather more inviting round
the coast.
Anyway, I'll stay at present at a boarding-house in
town,
Drinking beer and lemon-squashes, taking baths and
cooling down.

`Sunny plains'! Great Scott! — those burning
wastes of barren soil and sand

With their everlasting fences stretching out across the
land!

Desolation where the crow is! Desert where the eagle
flies,

Paddocks where the lunny bullock starts and stares
with reddened eyes;

Where, in clouds of dust enveloped, roasted bullock-
drivers creep

Slowly past the sun-dried shepherd dragged behind his
crawling sheep.

Stunted peak of granite gleaming, glaring like a
molten mass

Turned from some infernal furnace on a plain devoid
of grass.

Miles and miles of thirsty gutters — strings of muddy
water-holes

In the place of 'shining rivers' — 'walled by cliffs and
forest boles.'

Barren ridges, gullies, ridges! where the ever-
madd'ning flies —

Fiercer than the plagues of Egypt — swarm about your
blighted eyes!

Bush! where there is no horizon! where the buried
bushman sees

Nothing — Nothing! but the sameness of the ragged,
stunted trees!

Lonely hut where drought's eternal, suffocating
atmosphere

Where the God-forgotten hatter dreams of city life
and beer.

Treacherous tracks that trap the stranger,
endless roads that gleam and glare,

Dark and evil-looking gullies, hiding secrets here and there!

Dull dumb flats and stony rises, where the toiling bullocks bake,

And the sinister 'gohanna', and the lizard, and the snake.

Land of day and night — no morning freshness, and no afternoon,

When the great white sun in rising bringeth summer heat in June.

Dismal country for the exile, when the shades begin to fall

From the sad heart-breaking sunset, to the new-chum worst of all.

Dreary land in rainy weather, with the endless clouds that drift

O'er the bushman like a blanket that the Lord will never lift —

Dismal land when it is raining — growl of floods, and, oh! the woosh

Of the rain and wind together on the dark bed of the bush —

Ghastly fires in lonely humpies where the granite rocks are piled

In the rain-swept wildernesses that are wildest of the wild.

Land where gaunt and haggard women live alone and work like men,

Till their husbands, gone a-droving, will return to them again:

Homes of men! if home had ever such a God-forgotten place,

Where the wild selector's children fly before a
stranger's face.
Home of tragedy applauded by the dingoes' dismal
yell,
Heaven of the shanty-keeper — fitting fiend for such a
hell —
And the wallaroos and wombats, and, of course, the
curlew's call —
And the lone sundowner tramping ever onward
through it all!

I am back from up the country, up the country where
I went
Seeking for the Southern poets' land whereon to pitch
my tent;
I have shattered many idols out along the dusty track,
Burnt a lot of fancy verses — and I'm glad that I am
back.
I believe the Southern poets' dream will not be
realised
Till the plains are irrigated and the land is humanised.
I intend to stay at present, as I said before, in town
Drinking beer and lemon-squashes, taking baths and
cooling down.

— HENRY LAWSON

Chapter Two

IN DEFENCE OF THE BUSH

So you're back from up the country, Mister Lawson,
where you went,
And you're cursing all the business in a bitter
discontent;
Well, we grieve to disappoint you, and it makes us sad
to hear
That it wasn't cool and shady -- and there wasn't whips
of beer,
And the looney bullock snorted when you first came
into view —
Well, you know it's not so often that he sees a swell
like you;
And the roads were hot and dusty, and the plains were
burnt and brown,
And no doubt you're better suited drinking lemon-
squash in town.
Yet, perchance, if you should journey down the very
track you went
In a month or two at furthest, you would wonder what
it meant;

Where the sunbaked earth was gasping like a creature
in its pain
You would find the grasses waving like a field of
summer grain,
And the miles of thirsty gutters, blocked with sand
and choked with mud,
You would find them mighty rivers with a turbid,
sweeping flood.
For the rain and drought and sunshine make no
changes in the street,
In the sullen line of buildings and the ceaseless tramp
of feet;
But the bush has moods and changes, as the seasons
rise and fall,
And the men who know the bush-land — they are
loyal through it all.

But you found the bush was dismal and a land of no
delight —
Did you chance to hear a chorus in the shearers' huts
at night?
Did they 'rise up William Riley' by the camp-fire's
cheery blaze?
Did they rise him as we rose him in the good old
droving days?
And the women of the homesteads and the men you
chanced to meet —
Were their faces sour and saddened like the 'faces in
the street'?
And the 'shy selector children' — were they better
now or worse
Than the little city urchins who would greet you with
a curse?

Is not such a life much better than the squalid street
 and square
 Where the fallen women flaunt it in the fierce electric
 glare,
 Wher the sempstress plies her needle till her eyes are
 sore and red
 In a filthy, dirty attic toiling on for daily bread?
 Did you hear no sweeter voices in the music of
 the bush
 Than the roar of trams and buses, and the war-whoop
 of 'the push'?
 Did the magpies rouse your slumbers with their carol
 sweet and strange?
 Did you hear the silver chiming of the bell-birds on
 the range?
 But, perchance, the wild birds' music by your senses
 was despised,
 For you say you'll stay in townships till the bush is
 civilized.
 Would you make it a tea-garden, and on Sundays have
 a band
 Where the 'blokes' might take their 'donahs', with a
 'public' close at hand?
 You had better stick to Sydney and make merry with
 the 'push',
 For the bush will never suit you, and you'll never suit
 the bush.

— BANJO PATERSON

Chapter Three

THE FACT OF THE MATTER

I'm wonderin' why those fellers who go buildin'
chipper ditties,
'Bout the rosy times out drovin', an' the dust an' death
of cities,
Don't sling the bloomin' office, strike some drover for
a billet,
And soak up all the glory that comes handy while they
fill it.

P'r'aps it's fun to travel cattle or to picnic with
merinos,
But the drover don't catch on, sir, not much high-class
rapture he knows.
As for sleepin' on the plains there in the shadder of
the spear-grass,
That's liked best by the Juggins with a spring-bed an' a
pier-glass.

An' the camp-fire, an' the freedom, and the blanky
constellations,

The 'possum-rug an' billy, an' the togs an' stale ole
 rations -
 It's strange they're only raved about by coves that
 dress up pretty,
 An' sport a wife, an' live on slap-up tucker in the city.

I've tickled beef in my time clear from Clarke to
 Riverina,
 An' shifted sheep all round the shop, but blow me if
 I've seen a
 Single blanky hand who didn't buck at pleasures of
 this kidney,
 And wouldn't trade his blisses for a flutter down in
 Sydney.

Night-watches are delightful when the stars are really
 splendid
 To the chap who's fresh upon the job, but, you bet, his
 rapture's ended
 When the rain comes down in sluice-heads, or the
 cuttin' hailstones pelter,
 An' the sheep drift off before the wind, an' the horses
 strike for shelter.

Don't take me for a howler, but I find it come annoyin'
 To hear these fellers rave about the pleasures we're
 enjoyin',
 When p'r'aps we've nothin' better than some fluky
 water handy,
 An' they're right on all the lickers - rum, an' plenty
 beer an' brandy.

The town is dusty, may be, but it isn't worth the curses
 'Side the dust a feller swallows an' the blinded thirst he

nurses

When he's on the hard macadam, where the jumbucks
cannot browse, an'

The wind is in his whiskers, an' he follers twenty
thousan'.

This drovin' on the plain, too, it's all O.K. when the
weather

Isn't hot enough to curl the soles right off your upper
leather,

Or so cold that when the mornin' wind comes hiss'in'
through the grasses

You can feel it cut your eyelids like a whip-lash as it
passes.

Then there's bull-ants in the blankets, an' a lame
horse, an' muskeeters,

An' a D.T. boss like Halligan, or one like Humpy
Peters,

Who is mean about the tucker, an' can curse from
start to sundown,

An' can fight like fifty devils, an' whose growler's never
run down.

Yes, I wonder why the fellers what go building chipper
ditties

'Bout the rosy times out drovin' an' the dust an' death
of cities,

Don't sling the bloomin' office, strike ole Peters for a
billet,

An' soak up all the glory that comes handy while they
fill it.

— EDWARD GEORGE DYSON

Chapter Four

THE CITY BUSHMAN

It was pleasant up the country, City Bushman, where
you went,
For you sought the greener patches and you travelled
like a gent;
And you curse the trams and buses and the turmoil
and the push,
Though you know the squalid city needn't keep you
from the bush;
But we lately heard you singing of the `plains where
shade is not',
And you mentioned it was dusty -- `all was dry and all
was hot'.

True, the bush `hath moods and changes' -- and the
bushman hath 'em, too,
For he's not a poet's dummy -- he's a man, the same
as you;
But his back is growing rounder -- slaving for the
absentee --

And his toiling wife is thinner than a country wife
 should be.
 For we noticed that the faces of the folks we chanced
 to meet
 Should have made a greater contrast to the faces in
 the street;
 And, in short, we think the bushman's being driven to
 the wall,
 And it's doubtful if his spirit will be 'loyal thro' it all'.

Though the bush has been romantic and it's nice to
 sing about,
 There's a lot of patriotism that the land could do
 without --
 Sort of BRITISH WORKMAN nonsense that shall
 perish in the scorn
 Of the drover who is driven and the shearer who is
 shorn,
 Of the struggling western farmers who have little time
 for rest,
 And are ruined on selections in the sheep-infested
 West;
 Droving songs are very pretty, but they merit little
 thanks
 From the people of a country in possession of the
 Banks.

And the `rise and fall of seasons' suits the rise and fall
 of rhyme,
 But we know that western seasons do not run on
 schedule time;
 For the drought will go on drying while there's
 anything to dry,

Then it rains until you'd fancy it would bleach the
 sunny sky --
 Then it pelters out of reason, for the downpour day
 and night
 Nearly sweeps the population to the Great Australian
 Bight.
 It is up in Northern Queensland that the seasons do
 their best,
 But it's doubtful if you ever saw a season in the West;
 There are years without an autumn or a winter or a
 spring,
 There are broiling Junes, and summers when it rains
 like anything.

In the bush my ears were opened to the singing of the
 bird,
 But the `carol of the magpie' was a thing I never
 heard.
 Once the beggar roused my slumbers in a shanty, it is
 true,
 But I only heard him asking, `Who the blanky blank
 are you?'
 And the bell-bird in the ranges -- but his `silver chime'
 is harsh
 When it's heard beside the solo of the curlew in the
 marsh.

Yes, I heard the shearers singing `William Riley', out
 of tune,
 Saw 'em fighting round a shanty on a Sunday
 afternoon,
 But the bushman isn't always `trapping brumbies in
 the night',

Nor is he for ever riding when `the morn is fresh and
bright',

And he isn't always singing in the humpies on the run -

-

And the camp-fire's `cheery blazes' are a trifle
overdone;

We have grumbled with the bushmen round the fire
on rainy days,

When the smoke would blind a bullock and there
wasn't any blaze,

Save the blazes of our language, for we cursed the fire
in turn

Till the atmosphere was heated and the wood began to
burn.

Then we had to wring our blueys which were rotting
in the swags,

And we saw the sugar leaking through the bottoms of
the bags,

And we couldn't raise a chorus, for the toothache and
the cramp,

While we spent the hours of darkness draining
puddles round the camp.

Would you like to change with Clancy -- go a-droving?
tell us true,

For we rather think that Clancy would be glad to
change with you,

And be something in the city; but 'twould give your
muse a shock

To be losing time and money through the foot-rot in
the flock,

And you wouldn't mind the beauties underneath the
starry dome

If you had a wife and children and a lot of bills at
home.

Did you ever guard the cattle when the night was
inky-black,
And it rained, and icy water trickled gently down
your back
Till your saddle-wearied backbone fell a-aching to the
roots
And you almost felt the croaking of the bull-frog in
your boots --
Sit and shiver in the saddle, curse the restless stock
and cough
Till a squatter's irate dummy cantered up to warn
you off?
Did you fight the drought and pleuro when the
'seasons' were asleep,
Felling sheoaks all the morning for a flock of starving
sheep,
Drinking mud instead of water -- climbing trees and
lopping boughs
For the broken-hearted bullocks and the dry and dusty
cows?

Do you think the bush was better in the 'good old
droving days',
When the squatter ruled supremely as the king of
western ways,
When you got a slip of paper for the little you could earn,
But were forced to take provisions from the station in
return --
When you couldn't keep a chicken at your humpy on
the run,

For the squatter wouldn't let you -- and your work was
 never done;
 When you had to leave the missus in a lonely hut
 forlorn
 While you `rose up Willy Riley' -- in the days ere you
 were born?

Ah! we read about the drovers and the shearers and
 the like
 Till we wonder why such happy and romantic fellows
 strike.
 Don't you fancy that the poets ought to give the bush
 a rest
 Ere they raise a just rebellion in the over-written
 West?
 Where the simple-minded bushman gets a meal and
 bed and rum
 Just by riding round reporting phantom flocks that
 never come;
 Where the scalper -- never troubled by the `war-
 whoop of the push' --
 Has a quiet little billet -- breeding rabbits in the bush;
 Where the idle shanty-keeper never fails to make a
 draw,
 And the dummy gets his tucker through provisions in
 the law;
 Where the labour-agitator -- when the shearers rise in
 might --
 Makes his money sacrificing all his substance for The
 Right;
 Where the squatter makes his fortune, and `the
 seasons rise and fall',
 And the poor and honest bushman has to suffer for
 it all;

Where the drovers and the shearers and the bushmen
and the rest
Never reach the Eldorado of the poets of the West.

And you think the bush is purer and that life is better
there,
But it doesn't seem to pay you like the 'squalid street
and square'.

Pray inform us, City Bushman, where you read, in
prose or verse,
Of the awful 'city urchin who would greet you with a
curse'.

There are golden hearts in gutters, though their
owners lack the fat,
And we'll back a teamster's offspring to outswear a
city brat.

Do you think we're never jolly where the trams and
buses rage?
Did you hear the gods in chorus when 'Ri-tooral' held
the stage?
Did you catch a ring of sorrow in the city urchin's
voice
When he yelled for Billy Elton, when he thumped the
floor for Royce?
Do the bushmen, down on pleasure, miss the
everlasting stars
When they drink and flirt and so on in the glow of
private bars?

You've a down on 'trams and buses', or the 'roar' of
'em, you said,
And the 'filthy, dirty attic', where you never toiled for
bread.

(And about that self-same attic -- Lord! wherever have
you been?)

For the struggling needlewoman mostly keeps her
attic clean.)

But you'll find it very jolly with the cuff-and-collar
push,

And the city seems to suit you, while you rave about
the bush.

You'll admit that Up-the Country, more especially in
drought,

Isn't quite the Eldorado that the poets rave about,
Yet at times we long to gallop where the reckless
bushman rides

In the wake of startled brumbies that are flying for
their hides;

Long to feel the saddle tremble once again between
our knees

And to hear the stockwhips rattle just like rifles in the
trees!

Long to feel the bridle-leather tugging strongly in
the hand

And to feel once more a little like a native of the land.

And the ring of bitter feeling in the jingling of our
rhymes

Isn't suited to the country nor the spirit of the times.

Let us go together droving, and returning, if we live,

Try to understand each other while we reckon up
the div.

— HENRY LAWSON

Chapter Five

CLANCY OF THE OVERFLOW

I had written him a letter which I had, for want of
better
Knowledge, sent to where I met him down the
Lachlan, years ago,
He was shearing when I knew him, so I sent the letter
to him,
Just 'on spec', addressed as follows, 'Clancy, of The
Overflow'.
And an answer came directed in a writing unexpected,
(And I think the same was written with a thumb-nail
dipped in tar)
'Twas his shearing mate who wrote it, and verbatim I
will quote it:
'Clancy's gone to Queensland droving, and we don't
know where he are.'
In my wild erratic fancy visions come to me of Clancy
Gone a-droving 'down the Cooper' where the Western
drovers go;
As the stock are slowly stringing, Clancy rides behind
them singing,

For the drover's life has pleasures that the townsfolk
never know.
And the bush hath friends to meet him, and their
kindly voices greet him
In the murmur of the breezes and the river on its bars,
And he sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains
extended,
And at night the wond'rous glory of the everlasting
stars.
I am sitting in my dingy little office, where a stingy
Ray of sunlight struggles feebly down between the
houses tall,
And the foetid air and gritty of the dusty, dirty city
Through the open window floating, spreads its
foulness over all.
And in place of lowing cattle, I can hear the fiendish
rattle
Of the tramways and the buses making hurry down
the street,
And the language uninviting of the gutter children
fighting,
Comes fitfully and faintly through the ceaseless tramp
of feet.
And the hurrying people daunt me, and their pallid
faces haunt me
As they shoulder one another in their rush and
nervous haste,
With their eager eyes and greedy, and their stunted
forms and weedy,
For townsfolk have no time to grow, they have no time
to waste.
And I somehow rather fancy that I'd like to change
with Clancy,

Like to take a turn at droving where the seasons come
and go,
While he faced the round eternal of the cash-book
and the journal —
But I doubt he'd suit the office, Clancy, of 'The
Overflow'.

— BANJO PATERSON

Chapter Six

BANJO, OF THE OVERFLOW

I had written him a letter which I had for want of
better
Knowledge given to a partner by the name of
Greenhide Jack -
He was shearing when I met him, and I thought
perhaps I'd let him
Know that I was stiff, and, maybe, he would send a
trifle back.

My request was not requited, for an answer came
indited
On a sheet of scented paper, in an ink of fancy blue;
And the envelope, I fancy, had an 'Esquire' to the
Clancy
And it simply read, 'I'm busy; but I'll see what I can
do! '

To the vision land I can go, and I often think of
'Banjo' -
Of the boy I used to shepherd in the not so long ago,

He was not the bushman's kidney, and among the
 crowds of Sydney
 He'll be more at home than mooning on the dreary
 Overflow.

He has clients now to fee him, and has friends to
 come and see him,
 He can ride from morn to evening in the padded
 hansom cars,
 And he sees the beauties blending where the throngs
 are never ending,
 And at night the wond'rous women in the everlasting
 bars.

I am tired of reading prattle of the sweetly-lowing
 cattle
 Stringing out across the open with the bushmen riding
 free;
 I am sick at heart of roving up and down the country
 droving,
 And of alternating damper with the salt-junk and
 the tea.

And from sleeping in the water on the droving trips
 I've caught a
 Lively dose of rheumatism in my back and in my knee,
 And in spite of verse it's certain that the sky's a leaky
 curtain -
 It may suit the 'Banjo' nicely, but it never suited me.

And the bush is very pretty when you view it from the
 city,
 But it loses all its beauty when you face it 'on the pad;

And the wildernesses haunt you, and the plains
 extended daunt you,
Till at times you come to fancy that the life will drive
 you mad.

But I somehow often fancy that I'd rather not be
 Clancy,
That I'd like to be the 'Banjo' where the people come
 and go,
When instead of framing curses I'd be writing
 charming verses -
Tho' I scarcely think he'd swap me, 'Banjo, of the
 Overflow'.

— FRANCIS KENNA

Chapter Seven

AN ANSWER TO VARIOUS BARDS

Well, I've waited mighty patient while they all came
rolling in,
Mister Lawson, Mister Dyson, and the others of
their kin,
With their dreadful, dismal stories of the Overlander's
camp,
How his fire is always smoky, and his boots are always
damp;
And they paint it so terrific it would fill one's soul
with gloom --
But you know they're fond of writing about "corpses"
and "the tomb".
So, before they curse the bushland, they should let
their fancy range,
And take something for their livers, and be cheerful
for a change.
Now, for instance, Mr Lawson -- well, of course, we
almost cried
At the sorrowful description how his "little 'Arvie"
died,

And we lachrymosed in silence when "His Father's
 mate" was slain;
 Then he went and killed the father, and we had to
 weep again.
 Ben Duggan and Jack Denver, too, he caused them to
 expire,
 After which he cooked the gander of Jack Dunn, of
 Nevertire;
 And, no doubt, the bush is wretched if you judge it by
 the groan
 Of the sad and soulful poet with a graveyard of
 his own.

And he spoke in terms prophetic of a revolution's
 heat,
 When the world should hear the clamour of those
 people in the street;
 But the shearer chaps who start it -- why, he rounds on
 them the blame,
 And he calls 'em "agitators who are living on the
 game".
 Bur I "over-write" the bushmen! Well, I own without a
 doubt
 That I always see the hero in the "man from furthest
 out".
 I could never contemplate him through an atmosphere
 of gloom,
 And a bushman never struck me as a subject for "the
 tomb".

If it ain't all "golden sunshine" where the "wattle
 branches wave",
 Well, it ain't all damp and dismal, and it ain't all
 "lonely grave".

And, of course, there's no denying that the bushman's
 life is rough,
 But a man can easy stand it if he's built of sterling
 stuff;
 Though it's seldom that the drover gets a bed of
 eiderdown,
 Yet the man who's born a bushman, he gets mighty
 sick of town,
 For he's jotting down the figures, and he's adding up
 the bills
 While his heart is simply aching for a sight of
 Southern hills.

Then he hears a wool-team passing with a rumble and
 a lurch,
 And, although the work is pressing, yet it brings him
 off his perch,
 For it stirs him like a message from his station friends
 afar
 And he seems to sniff the ranges in the scent of wool
 and tar;
 And it takes him back in fancy, half in laughter, half in
 tears,
 to a sound of other voices and a thought of other
 years,
 When the woolshed rang with bustle from the
 dawning of the day,
 And the shear-blades were a-clicking to the cry of
 "Wool away!"

Then his face was somewhat browner, and his frame
 was firmer set --
 And he feels his flabby muscles with a feeling of
 regret.

But the wool-team slowly passes, and his eyes go
 slowly back
 To the dusty little table and the papers in the rack,
 And his thoughts go to the terrace where his sickly
 children squall,
 And he thinks there's something healthy in the bush-
 life after all.
 But we'll go no more a-droving in the wind or in
 the sun,
 For out fathers' hearts have failed us, and the droving
 days are done.

There's a nasty dash of danger where the long-horned
 bullock wheels,
 And we like to live in comfort and to get our reg'lar
 meals.
 For to hang around the township suits us better, you'll
 agree,
 And a job at washing bottles is the job for such as we.
 Let us herd into the cities, let us crush and crowd
 and push
 Till we lose the love of roving, and we learn to hate the
 bush;
 And we'll turn our aspirations to a city life and beer,
 And we'll slip across to England -- it's a nicer place
 than here;

For there's not much risk of hardship where all
 comforts are in store,
 And the theatres are in plenty, and the pubs are more
 and more.
 But that ends it, Mr Lawson, and it's time to say
 good-bye,
 So we must agree to differ in all friendship, you and I.

Yes, we'll work our own salvation with the stoutest
 hearts we may,
And if fortune only favours we will take the road
 some day,
And go droving down the river 'neath the sunshine
 and the stars,
And then return to Sydney and vermilionize the bars.

— BANJO PATERSON

Chapter Eight

THE POETS OF THE TOMB

The world has had enough of bards who wish that
they were dead,
'Tis time the people passed a law to knock 'em on the
head,
For 'twould be lovely if their friends could grant the
rest they crave --
Those bards of `tears' and `vanished hopes', those
poets of the grave.
They say that life's an awful thing, and full of care and
gloom,
They talk of peace and restfulness connected with the
tomb.

They say that man is made of dirt, and die, of course,
he must;
But, all the same, a man is made of pretty solid dust.
There is a thing that they forget, so let it here be
writ,
That some are made of common mud, and some are
made of GRIT;

Some try to help the world along while others fret
 and fume
 And wish that they were slumbering in the silence of
 the tomb.

'Twi'xt mother's arms and coffin-gear a man has work
 to do!
 And if he does his very best he mostly worries
 through,
 And while there is a wrong to right, and while the
 world goes round,
 An honest man alive is worth a million underground.
 And yet, as long as sheoaks sigh and wattle-blossoms
 bloom,
 The world shall hear the drivel of the poets of the
 tomb.

And though the graveyard poets long to vanish from
 the scene,
 I notice that they mostly wish their resting-place kept
 green.
 Now, were I rotting underground, I do not think
 I'd care
 If wombats rooted on the mound or if the cows
 camped there;
 And should I have some feelings left when I have gone
 before,
 I think a ton of solid stone would hurt my feelings
 more.

Such wormy songs of mouldy joys can give me no
 delight;
 I'll take my chances with the world, I'd rather live and
 fight.

Though Fortune laughs along my track, or wears her
blackest frown,
I'll try to do the world some good before I tumble
down.
Let's fight for things that ought to be, and try to make
'em boom;
We cannot help mankind when we are ashes in the
tomb.

— HENRY LAWSON

Chapter Nine

A VOICE FROM THE TOWN

I thought, in the days of the droving,
Of steps I might hope to retrace,
To be done with the bush and the roving
And settle once more in my place.
With a heart that was well nigh to breaking,
In the long, lonely rides on the plain,
I thought of the pleasure of taking
The hand of a lady again.
I am back into civilization,
Once more in the stir and the strife,
But the old joys have lost their sensation —
The light has gone out of my life;
The men of my time they have married,
Made fortunes or gone to the wall;
Too long from the scene I have tarried,
And somehow, I'm out of it all.

For I go to the balls and the races
A lonely companionless elf,
And the ladies bestow all their graces

On others less grey than myself;
 While the talk goes around I'm a dumb one
 'Midst youngsters that chatter and prate,
 And they call me "The Man who was Someone
 Way back in the year Sixty-eight."

And I look, sour and old, at the dancers
 That swing to the strains of the band,
 And the ladies all give me the Lancers,
 No waltzes — I quite understand.
 For matrons intent upon matching
 Their daughters with infinite push,
 Would scarce think him worthy the catching,
 The broken-down man from the bush.
 New partners have come and new faces,
 And I, of the bygone brigade,
 Sharply feel that oblivion my place is —
 I must lie with the rest in the shade.
 And the youngsters, fresh-featured and pleasant,
 They live as we lived — fairly fast;
 But I doubt if the men of the present
 Are as good as the men of the past.

Of excitement and praise they are chary,
 There is nothing much good upon earth;
 Their watchword is nil admirari,
 They are bored from the days of their birth.
 Where the life that we led was a revel
 They "wince and relent and refrain" —
 I could show them the road — to the devil,
 Were I only a youngster again.

I could show them the road where the stumps are,
 The pleasures that end in remorse,

And the game where the Devil's three trumps are
 The woman, the card, and the horse.
 Shall the blind lead the blind — shall the sower
 Of wind read the storm as of yore?
 Though they get to their goal somewhat slower,
 They march where we hurried before.

For the world never learns — just as we did
 They gallantly go to their fate,
 Unheeded all warnings, unheeded
 The maxims of elders sedate.
 As the husbandman, patiently toiling,
 Draws a harvest each year from the soil,
 So the fools grow afresh for the spoiling,
 And a new crop of thieves for the spoil.

But a truce to this dull moralizing,
 Let them drink while the drops are of gold.
 I have tasted the dregs — 'twere surprising
 Were the new wine to me like the old;
 And I weary for lack of employment
 In idleness day after day,
 For the key to the door of enjoyment
 Is Youth — and I've thrown it away.

— BANJO PATERSON

