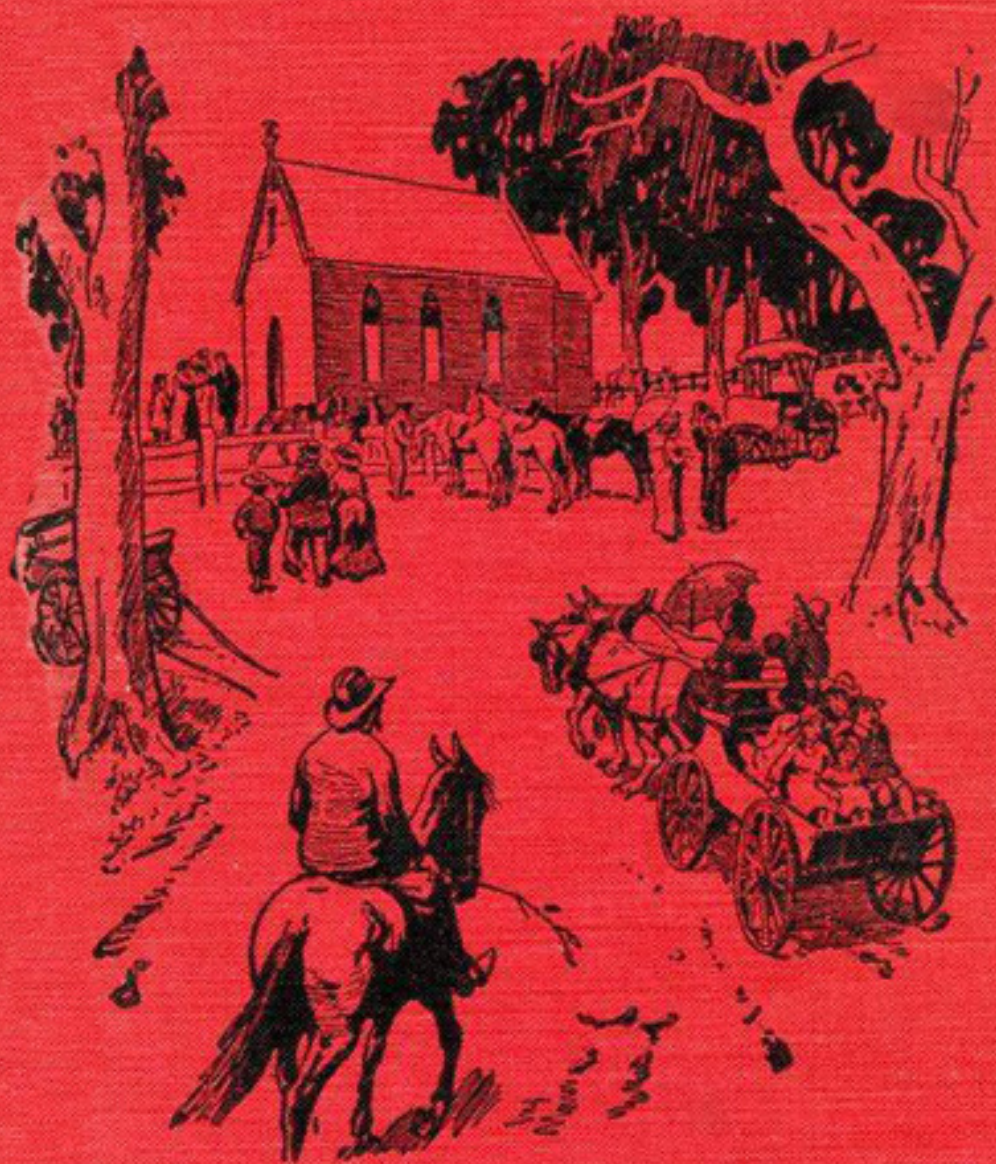


AROUND THE BOREE LOG AND OTHER VERSES



"JOHN O'BRIEN"

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Around the Boree Log and other verses

Date of first publication: 1921

Author: Joseph Patrick Hartigan (as John O'Brien) (1878-1952)

Date first posted: Feb. 2, 2021

Date last updated: Feb. 2, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210230

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Jen Haines & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

AROUND THE BOREE LOG

AND OTHER VERSES

By
"JOHN O'BRIEN"



ANGUS AND ROBERTSON

First published in 1921 by

ANGUS & ROBERTSON LTD

89 Castlereagh Street, Sydney
54 Bartholomew Close, London
107 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne

This impression 1964

Copyright

Registered in Australia for transmission by post as a book
PRINTED IN AUSTRALIA BY HALSTEAD PRESS, SYDNEY

CONTENTS

AROUND THE BOREE LOG

Oh, stick me in the old caboose this night of wind and
rain, [1](#)

CALLING TO ME

Through the hush of my heart in the spell of its
dreaming [4](#)

THE LITTLE IRISH MOTHER

Have you seen the tidy cottage in the straggling, dusty
street, [6](#)

ONE BY ONE

With trust in God and her good man [10](#)

TEN LITTLE STEPS AND STAIRS

There were ten little Steps and Stairs, [12](#)

THE TRIMMIN'S ON THE ROSARY

Ah, the memories that find me now my hair is turning
gray, [14](#)

THE BIRDS WILL SING AGAIN

She saw The Helper standing near [21](#)

THE OLD BUSH SCHOOL

'Tis a queer, old battered landmark that belongs to other
years; [23](#)

SIX BROWN BOXER HATS

The hawker with his tilted cart pulled up beside the fence,	<u>29</u>
THE LIBEL	
“The flowers have no scent, and the birds have no song,”	<u>31</u>
WHEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO TOWN	
When the circus came to town	<u>33</u>
HIS FATHER	
We meet him first in frills immersed,	<u>36</u>
THE KOOKABURRAS	
Fall the shadows on the gullies, fades the purple from the mountain;	<u>41</u>
PETER NELSON’S FIDDLE	
Do you ever dream you hear it, you who went the lonely track?	<u>43</u>
THE CHURCH UPON THE HILL	
A simple thing of knotted pine	<u>46</u>
CURRAJONG	
Old Father Pat! They’ll tell you still with mingled love and pride	<u>49</u>
THE HELPING HAND	
When that hour comes when I shall sit alone,	<u>54</u>

<i>VALE</i> , FATHER PAT	
Yes, that's the hardest hand at all upon my frosted head —	<u>57</u>
JOSEPHINE	
The presbytery has gone to pot since this house-keeper came;	<u>64</u>
THE OLD MASS SHANDRYDAN	
I can see it in my dreaming o'er a gap of thirty years,	<u>70</u>
PITCHIN' AT THE CHURCH	
On the Sunday morning mustered,	<u>78</u>
SAID HANRAHAN	
"We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,	<u>80</u>
THE TIDY LITTLE BODY	
Faith, and little Miss McCroddie was the tidy little body,	<u>84</u>
THE PILLAR OF THE CHURCH	
Faith, 'tis good to see him comin' when the bell for Mass is flingin'	<u>86</u>
TEDDO WELLS, DECEASED	
Times I think I'm not the man—	<u>92</u>

NORAH O'NEILL	
That Norah O'Neill is a shreel,	<u>96</u>
THE PRESBYT'RY DOG	
Now of all the old sinners in mischief immersed,	<u>98</u>
TANGMALANGALOO	
The bishop sat in lordly state and purple cap sublime,	<u>100</u>
THE ALTAR-BOY	
Now McEvoy was altar-boy	<u>103</u>
AT CASEY'S AFTER MASS	
There's a weather-beaten sign-post where the track turns towards the west,	<u>105</u>
ST. PATRICK'S DAY	
'Tis the greatest splash of sunshine right through all my retrospection	<u>112</u>
THE CAREYS	
Their new house stood just off the road,	<u>119</u>
WHEN OLD MAN CAREY DIED	
A night of wind and driving rain,	<u>125</u>
THE PARTING ROSARY	
They have brought the news, my darlin', that I've waited for so long	<u>128</u>

OWNERLESS

He comes when the gullies are wrapped in the
gloaming [134](#)

LAUGHING MARY

With cheeks that paled the rosy morn [137](#)

MORYAH

“Wisha, where is he goin’ to now [139](#)

A STRANGER IN THE CHURCH

’Twas Callagan who jerked the thumb— [141](#)

TELL ME, WHAT’S A GIRL TO DO?

Tell me, what’s a girl to do [143](#)

THE WIREE’S SONG

The Wiree sang that Christmas Day, [145](#)

WISHA, WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH JIM?

“Wisha, what is the matter with Jim, I dunno? [147](#)

SAID THE WHITE-HAIRED PRIEST

Said the white-haired priest, “So the boy has come, [149](#)

HONEYMOONING FROM THE COUNTRY

To the rooms where I am dining in the glaring city’s
day [152](#)

MAKING HOME

No, you don't quite get the meaning when the fun is at
its height

[156](#)

COULD I HEAR THE KOOKABURRAS ONCE AGAIN

May a fading fancy hover round a gladness that is
over?

[162](#)

COME, SING AUSTRALIAN SONGS TO ME!

Come, Little One, and sing to me

[165](#)

AROUND THE BOREE LOG

Oh, stick me in the old caboose this night of wind and rain,
And let the doves of fancy loose to bill and coo again.
I want to feel the pulse of love that warmed the blood like wine;
I want to see the smile above this kind old land of mine.

So come you by your parted ways that wind the wide world through,
And make a ring around the blaze the way we used to do;
The “fountain” on the sooted crane will sing the old, old song
Of common joys in homely vein forgotten, ah, too long.

*The years have turned the rusted key, and time is on the jog,
Yet spend another night with me around the boree log.^[1]*

Now someone driving through the rain will happen in, I bet;
So fill the fountain up again, and leave the table set.
For this was ours with pride to say—and all the world defy—
No stranger ever turned away, no neighbour passed us by.

Bedad, he’ll have to stay the night; the rain is going to pour—
So make the rattling windows tight, and close the kitchen door,
And bring the old lopsided chair, the tattered cushion, too—
We’ll make the stranger happy there, the way we used to do.

*The years have turned the rusted key, and time is on the jog,
Yet spend another night with me around the boree log.*

He’ll fill his pipe, and good and well, and all aglow within
We’ll hear the news he has to tell, the yarns he has to spin;
Yarns—yes, and super-yarns, forsooth, to set the eyes agog,
And freeze the blood of trusting youth around the boree log.

Then stir it up and make it burn; the poker’s next to you;
Come, let us poke it all in turn, the way we used to do.
There’s many a memory bright and fair will tingle at a name—
But leave unstirred the embers there we cannot fan to flame.

*For years have turned the rusted key, and time is on the jog;
Still, spend this fleeting night with me around the boree log.*

[1]

Boree (sometimes accented on the last syllable) is the aboriginal name for the Weeping Myall—the best firewood in Australia except Gidgee.

CALLING TO ME

Through the hush of my heart in the spell of its dreaming
Comes the song of a bush boy glad-hearted and free;
Oh, the gullies are green where the sunlight is streaming,
And the voice of that youngster is calling to me.

It is calling to me with a haunting insistence,
And my feet wander off on a hoof-beaten track,
Till I hear the old magpies away in the distance
With a song of the morning that's calling me back.

It is calling me back, for the dew's on the clover,
And the colours are mellow on mountain and tree;
Oh, the gold has gone gray in the heart of the rover,
And the bush in the sunshine is calling to me.

It is calling to me, though the breezes are telling
Gay troubadour tales to the stars as they roam;
For the tapers are lit in the humble old dwelling,
And the love that it sheltered is calling me home.

It is calling me home—but the white road lies gleaming,
And afar from it all must I tarry and dree;
Just an echo far off, in the hush of my dreaming,
Is the voice of a youngster that's calling to me.

THE LITTLE IRISH MOTHER

Have you seen the tidy cottage in the straggling, dusty street,
Where the roses swing their censers by the door?
Have you heard the happy prattle and the tramp of tiny feet
As the sturdy youngsters romp around the floor?
Did you wonder why the wiree^[2] comes to sing his sweetest song?
Did the subtle charm of home upon you fall?
Did you puzzle why it haunted you the while you passed along?—
There's a Little Irish Mother there; that's all.

When you watched the children toiling at their lessons in the school,
Did you pick a winsome girleen from the rest,
With her wealth of curl a-cluster as she smiled upon the stool,
In a simple Monday-morning neatness dressed?
Did you mark the manly bearing of a healthy-hearted boy
As he stood erect his well-conned task to tell?
Did you revel in the freshness with a pulse of wholesome joy?—
There a Little Irish Mother there as well.

There's a Little Irish Mother that a lonely vigil keeps
In the settler's hut where seldom stranger comes,
Watching by the home-made cradle where one more Australian sleeps
While the breezes whisper weird things to the gums,
Where the settlers battle gamely, beaten down to rise again,
And the brave bush wives the toil and silence share,
Where the nation is a-building in the hearts of splendid men—
There's a Little Irish Mother always there.

There's a Little Irish Mother—and her head is bowed and gray,
And she's lonesome when the evening shadows fall;
Near the fire she “do be thinkin’,” all the “childer” are away,
And their silent pictures watch her from the wall.
For the world has claimed them from her; they are men and women now,
In their thinning hair the tell-tale silver gleams;
But she runs her fingers, dozing, o'er a tousled baby brow—
It is “little Con” or “Bridgie” in her dreams.

There's a Little Irish Mother sleeping softly now at last
Where the tangled grass is creeping all around;
And the shades of unsung heroes troop about her from the past
While the moonlight scatters diamonds on the mound.
And a good Australian's toiling in the world of busy men
Where the strife and sordid grinding cramp and kill;
But his eyes are sometimes misted, and his heart grows brave again—
She's the Little Irish Mother to him still.

When at last the books are balanced in the settling-up to be,
And our idols on the rubbish-heap are hurled,
Then the Judge shall call to honour—not the “stars,” it seems to me,
Who have posed behind the footlights of the world;
But the king shall doff his purple, and the queen lay by her crown,
And the great ones of the earth shall stand aside
While a Little Irish Mother in her tattered, faded gown
Shall receive the crown too long to her denied.

[2] Also known as the Chocolate Wiree (pronounced “wiry”): a very fine songster, called by ornithologists “Rufous-breasted Whistler.”

ONE BY ONE

With trust in God and her good man
She settled neath the spur;
The old slab dwelling, spick and span,
Was world enough for her;
The lamp-light kissed her raven hair
As, when her work was done,
She lined us up beside her chair
And taught us one by one.

And weaving memories, haunting sweet,
With threads of weal and woe,
The years went by on velvet feet—
We did not hear them go.
The world was calling everywhere
Beneath the golden sun;
When silver streaked her raven hair,
We left her one by one.

Then, turning back on cogs of pain,
The spool that ran so fast
Unwound before her eyes again
The pictures of the past.
The shadows played around her chair,
Where fancy's web was spun;
When time had bleached her raven hair,
She called us one by one.

Oh, say not that we loved her less!
But write them to our shame,
The silence and the loneliness;
And then the summons came—
We found the dark clouds banking there
To hide the setting sun.
Ah, white threads in her children's hair!—
We gathered one by one.

How quaintly sere, how small and strange
The old home and the spur;
But stranger this—the only change
Was wrought in us and her.
The lamp-light kissed her faded chair,
Where, ere the sands had run,
The sheen still on her raven hair,
She'd nursed us one by one.

Oh, vain the word that each could tell
With full heart brimming o'er,
That we, who ever loved her well,
Might still have loved her more!
Then back into the world of care—
To bless till life is done—
A memory crowned with milk-white hair
We carried one by one.

TEN LITTLE STEPS AND STAIRS

There were ten little Steps and Stairs.

Round through the old bush home all day
Romping about in the old bush way.

They were ten little wild March hares,

Storming the kitchen in hungry lines,
With their naked feet, doing mud designs,
“All over the place like punkin vines.”

There were ten little Steps and Stairs.

There were ten little Steps and Stairs.

In their home-made frocks and their Sunday suits,
Up through the church with their squeaky boots,
While the folk went astray in their prayers,
They hustled along, all dressed and neat—
Oh, they bustled a bit as they filled the seat;
From the first to the last, the lot complete.

There were ten little Steps and Stairs.

There were ten little Steps and Stairs.

But the years have shuffled them all about,
Have worn them thin, and straightened them out
With the tramp of a hundred cares;
Ay, and each grim scar has a tale to tell
Of a knock and a blow and a hand that fell,
And a break in the line, and a gap. Ah, well—
There *were* ten little Steps and Stairs.

THE TRIMMIN'S ON THE ROSARY

Ah, the memories that find me now my hair is turning gray,
Drifting in like painted butterflies from paddocks far away;
Dripping dainty wings in fancy—and the pictures, fading fast,
Stand again in rose and purple in the album of the past.
There's the old slab dwelling dreaming by the wistful, watchful trees,
Where the coolabahs are listening to the stories of the breeze;
There's a homely welcome beaming from its big, bright friendly eyes,
With The Sugarloaf behind it blackened in against the skies;
There's the same dear happy circle round the boree's cheery blaze
With a little Irish mother telling tales of other days.
She had one sweet, holy custom which I never can forget,
And a gentle benediction crowns her memory for it yet;
I can see that little mother still and hear her as she pleads,
“Now it's getting on to bed-time; all you childer get your beads.”
There were no steel-bound conventions in that old slab dwelling free;
Only this—each night she lined us up to say the Rosary;
E'en the stranger there, who stayed the night upon his journey, knew
He must join the little circle, ay, and take his decade too.
I believe she darkly plotted, when a sinner hove in sight
Who was known to say no prayer at all, to make him stay the night.
Then we'd softly gather round her, and we'd speak in accents low,
And pray like Sainted Dominic so many years ago;
And the little Irish mother's face was radiant, for she knew
That “where two or three are gathered” He is gathered with them too.
O'er the paters and the aves how her reverent head would bend!
How she'd kiss the cross devoutly when she counted to the end!
And the visitor would rise at once, and brush his knees—and then
He'd look very, very foolish as he took the boards again.
She had other prayers to keep him. They were long, long prayers in truth;
And we used to call them “Trimmin's” in my disrespectful youth.
She would pray for kith and kin, and all the friends she'd ever known,
Yes, and everyone of us could boast a “trimmin' ” all his own.
She would pray for all our little needs, and every shade of care
That might darken o'er The Sugarloaf, she'd meet it with a prayer.
She would pray for this one's “sore complaint,” or that one's “hurt hand,”
Or that someone else might make a deal and get “that bit of land”:

Or that Dad might sell the cattle well, and seasons good might rule,
 So that little John, the weakly one, might go away to school.
 There were trimmin's, too, that came and went; but ne'er she closed without
 Adding one for something special "none of you must speak about."
 Gentle was that little mother, and her wit would sparkle free,
 But she'd murder him who looked around while at the Rosary:
 And if perchance you lost your beads, disaster waited you,
 For the only one she'd pardon was "himself"—because she knew
 He was hopeless, and 'twas sinful what excuses he'd invent,
 So she let him have his fingers, and he cracked them as he went,
 And, bedad, he wasn't certain if he'd counted five or ten,
 Yet he'd face the crisis bravely, and would start around again;
 But she tallied all the decades, and she'd block him on the spot,
 With a "Glory, Daddah, Glory!" and he'd "Glory" like a shot.
 She would portion out the decades to the company at large;
 But when she reached the trimmin's she would put herself in charge;
 And it oft was cause for wonder how she never once forgot,
 But could keep them in their order till she went right through the lot.
 For that little Irish mother's prayers embraced the country wide;
 If a neighbour met with trouble, or was taken ill, or died,
 We could count upon a trimmin'—till, in fact, it got that way
 That the Rosary was but trimmin's to the trimmin's we would say.
 Then "himself" would start keownrawing^[3]—for the public good, we
 thought—
 "Sure you'll have us here till mornin'. Yerra, cut them trimmin's short!"
 But she'd take him very gently, till he softened by degrees—
 "Well, then, let us get it over. Come now, all hands to their knees."
 So the little Irish mother kept her trimmin's to the last,
 Ever growing as the shadows o'er the old selection passed;
 And she lit our drab existence with her simple faith and love,
 And I know the angels lingered near to bear her prayers above,
 For her children trod the path she trod, nor did they later spurn
 To impress her wholesome maxims on their children in their turn.
 Ay, and every "sore complaint" came right, and every "hurted hand";
 And we made a deal from time to time, and got "that bit of land";
 And Dad did sell the cattle well; and little John, her pride,
 Was he who said the Mass in black the morning that she died;
 So her gentle spirit triumphed—for 'twas this, without a doubt,
 Was the very special trimmin' that she kept so dark about.

But the years have crowded past us, and the fledglings all have flown,
And the nest beneath The Sugarloaf no longer is their own;
For a hand has written "*finis*" and the book is closed for good—
There's a stately red-tiled mansion where the old slab dwelling stood;
There the stranger has her "evenings," and the formal supper's spread,
But I wonder has she "trimmin's" now, or is the Rosary said?
Ah, those little Irish mothers passing from us one by one!
Who will write the noble story of the good that they have done?
All their children may be scattered, and their fortunes windwards hurled,
But the Trimmin's on the Rosary will bless them round the world.

[3] Grumbling, "grouching."

THE BIRDS WILL SING AGAIN

She saw The Helper standing near
When grief and care oppressed;
“A Great, Big God,” Who wiped the tear,
And soothed the aching breast.
So, in the stress of sorrows piled,
The gloom was lifted when
She pointed up and sweetly smiled
“A Great, Big God; be brave, my child,
The birds will sing again.”

When dark misfortune, hovering o'er,
Brought woes on every hand;
And care was camping by the door,
And drought was on the land;
When lingering hope in rags was clad,
Her faith shone brightest then—
“A Great, Big God; so cheer up, Dad.
Don't mope about and take it bad,
The birds will sing again.”

And always some soft silver ray
Athwart the gloom would burst
To chase the heavy clouds away,
When things were at their worst.
Her “Great, Big God” would justify
The trembling trust of men;
For, when the cheerless night passed by,
The sun would wink his golden eye,
And birds would sing again.

THE OLD BUSH SCHOOL

'Tis a queer, old battered landmark that belongs to other years;
With the dog-leg fence around it, and its hat about its ears,
And the cow-bell in the gum-tree, and the bucket on the stool,
There's a motley host of memories round that old bush school—

With its seedy desks and benches, where at least I left a name
Carved in agricultural letters—'twas my only bid for fame;
And the spider-haunted ceilings, and the rafters, firmly set,
Lined with darts of nibs and paper (doubtless sticking in them yet),
And the greasy slates and blackboards, where I oft was proved a fool
And a blur upon the scutcheon of the old bush school.

There I see the boots in order—" 'lastic-sides" we used to wear—
With a pair of "everlastin's" cracked and dusty here and there;
And we marched with great "high action"—hands behind and eyes before—
While we murdered "Swanee River" as we tramped around the floor.

Still the scholars pass before me with their freckled features grave,
And a nickname fitting better than the name their mothers gave;
Tousled hair and vacant faces, and their garments every one
Shabby heirlooms in the family, handed down from sire to son.
Ay, and mine were patched in places, and half-masted, as a rule—
They were fashionable trousers at the old bush school.

There I trudged it from the Three-mile, like a patient, toiling brute,
With a stocking round my ankle, and my heart within my boot,
Morgan, Nell and Michael Joseph, Jim and Mary, Kate and Mart
Tramping down the sheep-track with me, little rebels at the heart;
Shivery grasses round about us nodding bonnets in the breeze,
Happy Jacks and Twelve Apostles^[4] hurdle-racing up the trees,
Peewees calling from the gullies, living wonders in the pool—
Hard bare seats and drab gray humdrum at the old bush school.

Early rising in the half-light, when the morn came, bleak and chill;
For the little mother roused us ere the sun had topped the hill,
"Up, vou children. late 'tis gettin'." Shook the house beneath her knock.

And she wasn't always truthful, and she tampered with the clock.

Keen she was about "the learnin'," and she told us o'er and o'er
Of our luck to have "the schoolin'" right against our very door.
And the lectures—Oh, those lectures to our stony hearts addressed!
"Don't be mixin' with the Regans and the Ryans and the rest"—
"Don't be pickin' up with Carey's little talkative kanats"—^[5]
Well, she had us almost thinking we were born aristocrats.
But we found our level early—in disaster, as a rule—
For they knocked "the notions" sideways at the old bush school.

Down the road came Laughing Mary, and the beast that she bestrode
Was Maloney's sorry piebald she had found beside the road;
Straight we scrambled up behind her, and as many as could fit
Clung like circus riders bare-back without bridle-rein or bit,
On that corrugated backbone in a merry row we sat—
We propelled him with our school-bags; Mary steered him with her hat—
And we rolled the road behind us like a ribbon from the spool,
"Making butter," so we called it, to the old bush school.

What a girl was Mary Casey in the days of long ago!
She was queen among the scholars, or at least we thought her so;
She was first in every mischief and, when overwhelmed by fate,
She could make delightful drawings of the teacher on her slate.
There was rhythm in every movement, as she gaily passed along
With a rippling laugh that lilted like the music of a song;
So we called her "Laughing Mary," and a fitful fancy blessed
E'en the bashful little daisies that her dainty feet caressed.

She had cheeks like native roses in the fullness of their bloom,
And she used to sing the sweetest as we marched around the room;
In her eyes there lurked the magic, maiden freshness of the morn,
In her hair the haunting colour I had seen upon the corn;
Round her danced the happy sunshine when she smiled upon the stool—
And I used to swap her dinners at the old bush school.

Hard the cobbled road of knowledge to the feet of him who plods
After fragile fragments fallen from the workshop of the gods;
Long the quest, and ever thieving pass the pedlars o'er the hill
With the treasures in their bundles, but to leave us questing still.
Mystic fires horizons redden, but each crimson flash in turn

Only lights the empty places in the bracken and the fern;
So in after years I've proved it, spite of pedant, crank, and fool,
Very much the way I found it at the old bush school.

[4] These names are often applied to the same bird; but Happy Jacks (*alias* Gray-crowned Babblers) are brown with white markings; Twelve Apostles (*alias* Apostle-Birds) are gray with brown wings. Peewees, in the next line, are of course Magpie Larks.

[5] The essential kanat (possibly a corruption of gnat) is undersized, mischievous, useless and perky.

SIX BROWN BOXER HATS

The hawker with his tilted cart pulled up beside the fence,
And opened out his wondrous mart with startling eloquence;
All sorts of toys for girls and boys upon the grass he spread,
And dolls, dirt-cheap, that went to sleep when stood upon their head;
But our male hearts were beating high for balls and cricket-bats
When mother, with the business eye, bought six brown boxer hats.

Six out-of-date extinguishers that fitted us too soon—
Six ugly, upturned canisters—but through the afternoon
Our rage and scorn were overborne to see swift fingers flit
With pad and trim, around the rim, to make the stove-pipes fit.
So Monday morning came, and six “ungrateful young kanats”
Went off to school like lunatics in six brown boxer hats.

Then friends at every meeting showed an interest all too rare
Or chilled our faltered greetings with the silence of a stare;
And comrades who, we thought, were true indulged in vulgar jeers,
While willing fists of humorists slambanged them round our ears;
But worst of all the social smart from taunting plutocrats—
“Yez pinched them from the hawker’s cart, them six brown boxer hats.”

(Dress how we will, we feel it still, when friends will stop to chat,
To see a broad good-humoured smile is trained upon the hat.)
We could not fight with wonted might, for bitter black distress
Was in our souls, and on our polls the hateful ugliness.
We faced a fine barrage of sticks; and six “broke-up” kanats
Went home to meet the storm in six brown battered boxer hats.

THE LIBEL

“The flowers have no scent, and the birds have no song,”
We read in the lesson before us,
While carols enchanted came floating along,
And lifted our hearts in the chorus.

“The landscape is sombre, and dreary, and gray,
No colour its mantle adorning”;
O’er carpets spread far in a golden array
We tramped it to school in the morning.

“The flowers have no scent,” but the wattle we brought
From hill-sides and glens where we found it
Was filling the room with its glory, we thought,
And wafting its sweetness around it.

And fragrant the greeting the eucalypts threw
From branches of amber and sorrel;
While hard by the door a pittosporum grew—
We called it “The Japanese Laurel.”

The birds have no song,” so they told us at school;
But sweet in our souls was the ringing
Of notes soft and clear from the edge of the pool,
Where dainty gay thrushes were singing.

The magpie, the spink,^[6] and the pretty blue wren,
The butcher-bird up in his eyrie,
The trills! Oh, I wish I could hear you again,
My dear little Chocolate Wiree!

To the ears of a stranger our birds may lack song,
Our flowers have no scent for the alien;
But we, who have rambled the gullies along
Bedecked in soft colours Australian,

We laugh them to scorn as we read the old phrase—
We’ve laughed, since, at many another—
And bless in our hearts in a chorus of praise
The face of our happy young mother.

[6]

No apology is needed for using this name to replace White-shouldered Caterpillar.

WHEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO TOWN

When the circus came to town
With its coaches and four, and its steeds galore,
And a band and a painted clown,
Out to the road with a shout we'd fly
To gape at the elephants trudging by,
And our hearts beat fast and our hopes ran high,
As we followed it up and down;
For nought in the air, the sea, or sky
Could fill a spot in our youthful eye,
When the circus came to town.

So after the show we went,
And we got in the way of the men when they
Were rigging the circus tent,
And we knew that we stood on holy ground,
As we followed an empty van around—
And got for ourselves a belting sound,
Which a charm to the business lent.
But we wagged it from school behind the pound,
Till some Jack Pudding our shelter found
And word to headquarters sent.

When the circus came to town,
We swallowed hot tea with tears of glee,
And rushed in a tumult down;
We took quite the full of our shilling's worth,
And roared at the dummy's ponderous girth,
Or yelled in a salvo of noisy mirth
At the tricks of the painted clown.
Oh, wondrous thoughts in our minds had birth,
And we felt that the band was the best on earth,
When the circus came to town.

We fondly recalled the scene,
Horses that pranced, and eyes entranced,
And the smell of the kerosene:

The mule, and the monkey, and tall giraffe,
The “juggerlin’-man” with his magic staff,
The girl who went round with her photograph
 (And oh, but we thought her a queen!)
We started a show on our own behalf,
“Performed” on the back of a poddy calf,
 And sighed for the might-have-been.

Now the circus comes to town,
And it rattles along, and a bare-foot throng
 Is pacing it up and down;
And the elephants trudge as they trudged of yore,
With the shabby shebangs, and the steeds galore;
But the glee of the youngsters who shout and roar
 At the tricks of the painted clown
Is balm to my soul, and I call *encore*
To the frowsy old jokes I’ve heard before,
 When the circus came to town.

HIS FATHER

We meet him first in frills immersed,
By everyone caressed and nursed,
 A bonny baby—rather!
But, though they please his every whim,
Fill up his comforts to the brim,
And “ketchie ketchie” say to him,
 He whimpers for his father;
Nor any plan of all the clan,
Nor fiction *re* the bogie-man
 Can coax him from his father.

Then, done with frocks and curly locks,
Promoted into knickerbocks,
 This wholesome, healthy laddie
Will entertain the other kid
With tales of what his Daddy did;
He lives a splendid dream amid
 Heroic deeds of Daddy.
In grief or mirth he’s proved his worth;
The greatest man in all this earth
 Is Knickerbocker’s Daddy.

Long pants at last, and stretching fast—
Said pants are what is termed “half-mast.”
 And most attenuated—
Great notions now his head doth hold,
And schemes of mischief manifold.
He talks as though he had a cold
 In slang adulterated.
He has the shy and shifty eye,
He burns tobacco on the sly,
 In black butts immolated.

Now mark his ways these latter days;
He sounds no more his father’s praise
 With fervent admiration:

In fact, his father's got to be
An out-of-date necessity,
A clog upon his destiny
And youthful recreation.
As like as not, in anger hot,
He'll speak of him as "my old pot"—
A homely appellation.

Another page, the dandy stage
That starts at eighteen years of age.
His talk is all of horses;
He now selects his socks and ties
To match the colour of his eyes;
He's learnt the art of looking wise,
And on his Dad's resources
He gaily goes in Yankee clothes,
And backs the ponies through his nose
At most suburban courses.

He swaggers when amongst the men,
And takes a "tonic" now and then
To make a good impression;
And by the hour he will relate
The deeds that made him truly great,
Just pausing to expectorate
By way of a digression.
And here, mayhap, to fill a gap
He'll just allude to his "old chap"—
A valueless possession.

Next, older grown, the rolling-stone
Is out in business on his own.
We find him somewhat later
With this new burden to his song,
"Your old contraptions all are wrong."
He's going to move the world along,
His fortune's own dictator.
And, all the while, he can but smile
About the antiquated style
That ruled the poor old Pater.

We meet him next somewhat perplexed,
By business problems badly vexed—
 The other fellow's caught him.
Then, while he's chafing in the thrall,
Dad in some ways, he can recall,
Was not so hopeless after all
 As in the past he thought him;
At any rate, he's free to state
The old man's head was "screwed on straight,"
 And knocking round had taught him.

We come again to find him when
He's stood within the lion's den,
 And trembled at disaster.
It was the Dad who pulled him through,
And now he will admit to you
The old man knows a thing or two;
 Then, troubles coming faster,
He's very glad to mount his prad
And go and have a word with Dad,
 For Dad is now the Master.

But further on, life's springtime gone,
The winter snow his brows upon,
 Adown the current carried,
He'll show you with a tender glance
A photo framed with elegance—
The old man in the "bell-bot" pants,
 The suit in which he tarried
That day in town a joy to crown
(Most likely 'twas a "reach-me-down"),
 The day the Dad was married.

His dreams dispersed, the bubble burst,
We find him where we found him first.
 Right proud about his father;
And now again he writes in sooth
The head-line of his early youth,
But he observes—unwelcome truth,
 At times he's worried, rather—
His hopeful son has just begun

The same old devious course to run:
And now it's he's the father.

THE KOOKABURRAS

Fall the shadows on the gullies, fades the purple from the mountain;
And the day that's passing outwards down the stairways of the sky,
With its kindly deeds and sordid on its folded page recorded,
Waves a friendly hand across the range to bid the world "good-bye."
Comes a buoyant peal of laughter from the tall, white, slender timber,
Rugged mirth that floods the bushland with the joy of brotherhood,
With the rustic notes sonorous of a happy laughing chorus,
When the kookaburras bless the world because the world is good.

Oh, 'tis good and clean and wholesome when we take the sheep-track
homewards,
And the kindly kitchen chimney flaps its homely bannerets;
All our twigs of effort, shooting golden promise for the fruiting,
Bring a night in peace enfolded that a useful day begets.
Hopeful dreams, their visions weaving, steel our hearts against to-morrow,
And we dare the challenge, strengthened by to-day's assaults withstood;
Beam the pregnant days before us; and another laughing chorus
Wraps the world in rippling revelry, because the world is good.

Loving eyes to watch our coming, loving arms to twine around us—
Tender tendrils, soft and silken, firmer far than iron stay—
All our little world upholding, gentle hearts and home enfolding,
And a cheery, friendly neighbour dropping in upon his way:
Mellow joy the soul refreshes with the scented breath of heaven,
With the whispered songs of other spheres, hereafter understood:
Angels keep their sure watch o'er us: and another laughing chorus
Flings a vesper blessing round the world, because the world is good.

PETER NELSON'S FIDDLE

Do you ever dream you hear it, you who went the lonely track?
Do you ever hear its simple melodies
Tossing round deserted beaches, with the flotsam and the wrack,
When the moonlight sprinkles silver on the trees?

Do you hearken now, I wonder, when the birds have gone to rest,
And the blotted book of day once more is shut?
When the saffron stains have faded, and the swans have vanished west,
Does your heart remember Peter Nelson's hut?

Lonely, stooped old Peter Nelson, with his "most peculiar" ways,
With the clean-cut face, and hair as white as snow!
Something lingering round the old man seemed to tell of better days,
Seemed to hint of love and laughter long ago.

Kindly silence wrapped the bushland; every warring note was still;
Soft heart-tremors stirred, and smiling eyes grew dim.
Weaving fancies went the fiddle; dreams prophetic made us thrill—
From the grave the visions stretched their hands to him.

There was rapture in the stillness; there were voices in the night;
Trooped the angels with a beat of velvet wings;
And the stars stood still and listened, and the moon's face, strangely white,
Kissed the sleeping world to dreams of better things.

Joy was lit in every corner, love was smiling at our side,
Golden glamour o'er the dawning days was cast;
Gaily, gaily sang the fiddle, while we marched with swinging stride
Through the flowers that hid the failures of the past.

Do you ever dream you hear it? Does it bring the vision back,
With the curlew, and the moonlight on the trees?
Do the wavelets ripple shoreward with the flotsam as the wrack,
When a fiddle plays the simple melodies?

Lonely, bent old Peter Nelson with the quaint, uncommon ways,
"Spruced and tidied" when the book of day was shut,
With the dim light in the window, and the friends of better days
Summoned round him by the fiddle in the hut.

THE CHURCH UPON THE HILL

A simple thing of knotted pine
And corrugated tin;
But still, to those who read, a sign,
A fortress on the farthest line
Against the march of sin.

Though rich man's gold was lacking quite,
We built it strong and sure,
With willing hands and (Faith's delight)
The savings spared, the widow's mite,
The shillings of the poor.

Nor could it fail to meet the eye
And reverent thoughts instil,
As there above the township high,
And pointing always to the sky,
It stood upon the hill.

And through our lives in wondrous ways
Its holy purpose led
From limpid lispings cradle-days
To where the silent moonlight lays
White hands upon the dead.

For when the Holy Morning strung
Its beads upon the grass,
You'd see us driving—old and young—
The tall white graceful trees among,
On every road to Mass.

It brought the brave young mother there,
Surrounded by her brood,
To wrap their tiny hearts in prayer,
And teach them how to cast their care
Upon the Holy Rood.

It watched the little bush girl grow,
And kept her life from harm,
Till, spotless as the virgin snow
In wreath and veil, it saw her go
Upon her husband's arm.

It blessed strong, trembling shoulders bent:
Helped many a soul in thrall
To climb again the steep ascent,
And reft the grim entanglement
That brought about the fall.

It soothed the gray old mother's pain,
A-swaying while she told
Her rosary o'er and o'er again,
For griefs that rent her heart in twain—
So new, and ah, so old!

(There's "that poor boy who went astray,"
And lined her gentle brow;
There's "them that's wand'rin' fur away,"
And "them that's in their grave to-day"
And "beck'nin' " to her now.)

Refuge it gave the weary heart,
Beyond the sordid din
And conflict of the crowded mart,
One sweet, sequestered nook apart,
Where all might enter in.

Though high and grand cathedrals shine,
To my mind grander still
Is that wee church of knotted pine,
That rampart on the outer line
That stood upon the hill.

CURRAJONG

Old Father Pat! They'll tell you still with mingled love and pride
Of stirring deeds that live and thrill the quiet country-side;
And when they praise his *tours-de-force*, be sure it won't be long
Before they talk about his horse—the old gray Currajong.

For twenty years he drove him through the bush and round the town,
Until the old white stager knew the parish upside down;
He'd take his time, and calculate, and have his wilful way,
And stop at every Catholic gate to bid them all good day.

But well I mind the stories told when Father Pat was young—
At least, when he was not so old—his scattered flock among;
When health and strength were on his side, you'd see him swing along
With that clean, easy, sweeping stride that marked old Currajong.

Through all the years he ne'er was late the second Mass to say,
And twenty miles he'd "duplicate," and pass us on the way.
Hard-held and beating clean tattoos, the old gray, stepping kind,
Like gravel from his twinkling shoes would fling the miles behind.

And often some too daring lad, a turn of speed to show,
Would straighten up his sleepy prad and give the priest a "go";
But, faith, he found what others found, and held the lesson long,
That nothing in the country round could move with Currajong.

And, oh, the din! and, oh, the fuss! mere words were vain to tell
Of how they stopped the night with us; and don't I mind it well?
The boree log ablaze "inside," and gay with rug and mat;
The "front-room," to the world denied, made snug for Father Pat.

We knew his distant hoof-beats; ay, and grief they could forebode;
So, when we heard a horse go by, clean-stepping down the road,
Round many a log-fire burning bright there passed the word along,
"There's someone sick and sore the night; I'll bet that's Currajong."

Whereat you'd hear the old men tell—perhaps a trifle add—

Of some sick-call remembered well, when “so-and-so took bad.”
“You couldn’t see your hand in front.” “ ’Twas rainin’ pitchforks, too.”
“The doctor jibbed, to put it blunt—but Father Pat went through.”

Ay, he went through in shine or shade; so, when the days were fair,
And at our simple sports we played, ’twas good to see him there;
And under troubled, angry skies, when all the world went wrong,
With aching hearts and misted eyes we watched for Currajong.

We watched, and never watched in vain, whatever might befall.
When summoned to the bed of pain, he answered to the call.

He came through rain or storm or heat; and in the darkest night
We heard his hoofs the music beat, we saw the welcome light.

And when again, with plumes ahead and horses stepping slow,
We followed on, behind our dead, the road all men must go,
A loitering line, with knots and gaps, the funeral passed along,
And half a mile of lurching traps was led by Currajong.

But, as the good priest older grew, and aches and troubles came,
His buggy and the white horse, too, were stricken much the same.
The springs went down the side he sat, and altar-boys and such
Kept sliding in on Father Pat, and woke him at the touch.

Then, pensioned off at last and done, a sorry thing it stood,
With sagging cobwebs round it spun, and nest-eggs in the hood.
Just once a year it lived again, and groaned and creaked along
To fetch the bishop from the train with limping Currajong.

Ah, newer methods, younger men! the times are moving fast,
And but in dreams we tread again the wheel-ruts of the past;
The eyes are filmed that watched of old, the kindly hearts are still,
And silent tombstones white and cold are glimmering on the hill.

While scorching up the road, belike, with singing gears alive
The curate on his motor-bike hits up his forty-five;
But tender, tingling memories swell, and love will linger long
In all the stirring yarns they tell about Old Currajong.

THE HELPING HAND

When that hour comes when I shall sit alone,
And ponder on the things that were, but are no more,
The while the weird night-breeze's dirge-like monotone
Is sobbing fitful anthems round the door;

When homing billows moan and croon unchecked,
And no light glimmers on the ocean's broad expanse;
When all my anxious hopes are safe in port, or wrecked
On sharp uncharted rocks of circumstance;

When I have lived my life, and Time at last
Displays the mottled fate the sisters three have spun,
When the night's mystic, sombre, starless cloak is cast
Around the naked shoulders of the sun;

I shall be tired, I know, and long to rest,
And o'er the past sleep's veil of sweet oblivion draw,
To feel myself drawn softly, dream-like on the breast
Of life's ebb-tide that laps the Eternal Shore.

When that hour comes, and I am drifting slow
To azure distance stretching on, and on, and on;
When earth's coast-lights are dim and blurred and burning low,
And other stars rise other worlds upon;

I shall not fear to meet my Master's gaze,
Nor, like an idling child, His Searching Presence shun,
E'en though no herald trumpet-voice pronounce my praise,
And earth-won hero garlands wear I none.

E'en though the best the world shall know of me,
When mouldering clay is laid with kindred clay again,
Is but a stone on which the stars shine carelessly
Smooth-polished by the fingers of the rain:

I shall not fear to stand before His Face

And answer for the schemes I reared on shifting sand,
Whereon the waves are trailing albs of pointed lace,
If on my way I've lent the helping hand

To fellow-pilgrims toiling at my side,
Who, worn and weary, faint and fall beside the road,
If here betimes the blinding, scalding tear I've dried,
Or soothed a heart, or eased a galling load,

For He shall say "Your name in dust is hid,
No thought or word has earned you immortality;
Immortal only are the kindly things you did—
Amen I say, you did them unto me."

VALE, FATHER PAT

Yes, that's the hardest hand at all upon my frosted head—
That telegram that brought the news that Father Pat is dead—
I cannot grip its message yet; we were such cronies, that
The world is not a world to-night without poor Father Pat.

Nigh eighty years I've known him now. Since ever we were boys
Across the sea in Ireland, each other's cares and joys
We've shared as with their leaden step they strode across the mat;
The kindest heart that ever beat is stilled in Father Pat.

They knew him round the country wide; from here to Carrathool
The teamster toiling by his dray, the youngsters home from school,
Would greet him with a curt "good day," and shyly pull the hat
Down farther on the forehead in respect for Father Pat.

I see him in my mind to-night, a diamond in the rough,
A kindly soul that hid the gold, but showed the sterner stuff—
The wise old eye, the homely face, the scant hairs pasted flat
Across the wide wise baldness of the head of Father Pat;

The collar caught with honest tape when fleeting studs had gone;
The suit that said good-bye to cut the day he put it on;
The handsome stock the sisters built, the tassels on the hat,
The stout umbrella in the hand of manly Father Pat.

I see the ordered sitting-room he'll never enter more,
The ivory bead-crowned crucifix, the font behind the door,
The parish books, the registers and, handy where he sat,
The well-thumbed breviary that warmed the heart of Father Pat.

A man of method all the time—the pigeon-holes a-line,
A dozen keys upon a chain, his pockets filled with twine.
His actions told the time of day, and rivalled e'en in that
The sober clock that ticked away the life of Father Pat.

He used to run the curate on the lines he ran himself:

A list of parish duties stood upon the mantel-shelf,
As binding as the decalogue, so all-embracing that
The bishop had to keep the step, when guest of Father Pat.

He'd argue till the cows came home, and never know a doubt;
But when he "showed the p'liteness," it was then, my boy, look out!
He'd lay the shoneen^[7] by the heels, and shake him like a rat;
He wasn't worth a straw, bedad, when trimmed by Father Pat.

His sermons were tremendous things, and thunder-bolts would drop;
The trouble with poor Father Pat was when and how to stop.
Theology? don't mention it! he'd talk the bishop flat;
One half was Father Gury, and the rest was Father Pat.

I'd quoted him so often to the young lads round about
To show that we old fellows still were far from petered out,
Could take a hand at ceremonies, could sing a Mass and that;
So when we had a big day here I called on Father Pat.

He came—but didn't conquer, faith, though every nerve was strained;
He'd waved his hand to rubrics on the day he was ordained;
He went along his old, old way in broken notes and flat—
To tell the truth, I felt ashamed for once of Father Pat.

These young lads build their castles up, and fancy's beacons glow.
Ah well, poor Father Pat and I went through that years ago;
And some of those ideals are dead, and some we've jested at,
And some are where the failures wait for me and Father Pat.

Though brighter far the morning seems than does the setting sun,
Still, they but carry on the work by such as us begun.
We blazed the tracks they tread to-day—at least they'll grant us that—
The men who sailed in sixty-five along with Father Pat.

We left the friendly stars astern, the Irish lights agleam,
We dared the seas in sailing-ships before the days of steam,
We faced a weird wild waste of world that brave men trembled at:
No shipside welcome met the men who came with Father Pat.

We turned our horses' heads out west, beyond the farthest track,
With nothing but an alien star to light the journey back.

The echoes mocked us as we went, and silence startled sat
When out beyond the rim of things we marched with Father Pat.

We said our Mass in canvas tents, and neath the gnarléd trees;
Of red-gum slabs and sheets of bark we built our sanctuaries;
Our axes rang on timbered slopes above the mining flat,
And church and school and convent mark the path of Father Pat.

We made our bow to wild and waste, and hardships worse than those;
We leave a gracious golden land that blossoms like the rose.
Far defter hands may now adorn the work we laboured at,
But granite base and buttressed wall were built by Father Pat.

Well may his arms drop idly down at eighty years of age;
His story goes behind him with no stain upon its page.
I'll bet he played the innings through and carried out his bat,
And none dare hint "retiring hurt" in front of Father Pat.

And with him goes the little band that sailed in sixty-five;
A dreamer by his lamp to-night is all that's left alive.
Poor Father James, and Father Ned, and jovial Father Mat
Are waiting out beyond the dark to welcome Father Pat.

I'll not attend the obsequies: I feel I could not face
The office that I know so well, and see his vacant place:
We saw a generation pass while side by side we sat:
Another starts its march to-day—without us, Father Pat.

They'll wonder why I am not there—I, last of all the band—
To take farewell of him that's gone; but he will understand.
We'll have a little requiem my own loved altar at,
And just ourselves—alive and dead—shall chant it, Father Pat.

[7] An over-smart would-be gentleman; a term of
contempt.

JOSEPHINE

The presbytery has gone to pot since this house-keeper came;
She's up-to-date and stylish, but the place is not the same
Since Death's hard summons robbed me of the sterling old machine,
That wore out in my service here—my faithful Josephine.

Poor Josephine, she knew me well—and, faith, she ought to know;
For since the bishop sent me here, some thirty years ago,
My one and only manager, my right-hand man she'd been;
I never had a word against my trusted Josephine.

She potted round the place herself for thirty years and more—
This new one has a thuckeen now to sweep and mind the door
And entertain with parish chat each gossiping voteen^[8]
She'd have no thuckeen near the place, would crabbéd Josephine.

They tell me this one's up-to-date—too up-to-date for me;
I tremble at her polished floors, and modern cookery,
The old man finds the old ways best—old springs were twice as green—
I've heard His Lordship praise the stews of clever Josephine.

My study was my sanctum once—a castle all my own—
But this one with her natty ways can't leave the place alone.
Her fingers ache to tidy up; and, when she's extra clean,
I sit a stranger in my room and sigh for Josephine.

She says that table's "awful" and it drives her to despair;
Perhaps it does, but method's in what seems confusion there—
I know where every paper is, each book and magazine.
That jumbled pile was sacred in the eyes of Josephine.

This new one hides my things away in pigeon-hole and drawer,
And, faith, she does her job so well, they're lost for evermore.
She'll have to learn to let things be as they have ever been—
Just make the bed, and sweep the floor, the same as Josephine.

And vet no sthreel was Josephine. for quick was she to note

My native country's colour coming gently through my coat;
I teased her—said she ought to like the wearing of the green;
She couldn't see a joke at all, poor, solemn Josephine.

She used to hide my battered hats; my old birettas, too,
Just when I had them broken in, would disappear from view.
I wondered where my wardrobe went, until by chance I'd seen
A tramp in full pontificals subscribed by Josephine.

I mind the time the bishop came, one day in early spring.
We brought him round to see the school, and hear the children sing;
Bedad, I was a toff that day; you'd think I was a dean,
Or some commercial traveller—my thanks to Josephine.

My coat was pressed, just like a swell's; the breeches that I wore
Had creases in them fore and aft like new ones from the store.
I smelt like some old motor-car, exuding kerosene;
I noted, too, the furtive glance of anxious Josephine.

She watched His Lordship's portly form pass proudly o'er the mat,
His Majesty the curate next, with gloves and shiny hat;
I'd stuck an old biretta on, that better days had seen;
She came and dragged it off my head—ah, wisha, Josephine!

It sometimes strikes me, now she's gone, she'd no drawbacks at all:
Her features just a shade severe, her age canonical,
In fashions of her mother's day she trod her way serene,
And wasteful ways of worldly dames disgusted Josephine.

She knew the place from back to front, she knew the parish through,
And those who never went to Mass, and those who did, she knew;
The hours arranged for this and that—she had the whole routine—
And oftentimes to ease a doubt I went to Josephine.

She thought I couldn't make mistakes, not even if I tried;
She felt the Holy Ghost would send a mitre ere I died;
She lay in wait for wagging tongues—and, faith, her own was keen;
God help the one who dared complain in front of Josephine!

The people called her "curate," yes, and "bishop" too, I hear;
They even called her "parish-priest"—in disrespect, I fear.

They told me that she'd "roon" the church—too long with me she'd been;
But only death could give the sack to faithful Josephine.

Ah, soft and sweet be sleep to her who friendless trod her track
Along the beaten road of life that knows no turning back.
I marked the splendid Irish faith that met the closing scene,
And heard the beat of angels' wings that came for Josephine.

She's in her lonely grave to-night beneath the Murray pines,
And haply in their breeze-swept song a requiem divines:
The people raised a little stone to keep her memory green,
And handed to the winds and rain the name of Josephine.

How quickly have the days gone by! she's dead—now, let me see—
She's dead twelve months: to-morrow is her anniversary:
Now who's the Saint to-morrow? Ah, a semi—"Hedwig, Queen."
I'll use the black—and may God rest the soul of Josephine!

[8] A person who exaggerates his or her religious devotion.

THE OLD MASS SHANDRYDAN

I can see it in my dreaming o'er a gap of thirty years,
And the rattle of its boxes still is music in my ears:
With a bow to family vanity it rises from the past
As the pride of the selection where my humble youth was cast.
It was fashioned in a nightmare by some wandering genius,
And it wasn't quite a waggon, and it wasn't quite a 'bus;
'Twas an old four-wheeled gazabo that was something in between,
And the wheels were painted yellow, and the rest was painted green
(It would waken lively interest in the antiquarian)
And 'twas known to all the country as the Old Mass Shandrydan.

It did duty on a week-day in a dozen ways and more,
And it seemed just made to order for whate'er 'twas wanted for;
It would cart the chaff to market, carry wood and hay in turn,
And the neighbours in rotation used to cadge the old concern.
But the Sundays we were due for Mass would cancel every loan,
For the Little Irish Mother then would claim it for her own.
She inspected it the day before (and criticized it, too),
And the ten of us were set to work to make it look like new.
There was one to every yellow wheel—ay, one to every spoke;
One to nail a piece of hardwood on the part “them Careys” broke:
Another from the floor of it the chips and straw would rake,
While the Dad went searching rubbish-heaps for old boots for the brake:
So we rubbed and scrubbed and hammered up, and beat the rattertan
Till it stood in all its glory as the Old Mass Shandrydan.

When at last, with velvet sandals shod, the Holy Morning crept
Through the mists above The Sugarloaf, that silent vigil kept
O'er a little old slab dwelling which the years have brushed away,
You would hear the Little Mother stirring round before the day,
Rousing sleepy heads from blankets, washing faces, doing hair,
Scolding, coaxing, bustling, breathless in her hurry everywhere.
Half the night before she laboured, and we'd hear her come and go
With the Sunday suits of “reach-me-downs” to place them in a row.
There was this to patch, and that to darn, and something else to mend;
She would see to every single thing before her work would end.

To the dresses and the pinnies—oh, the memory she had!—
There were lace-up boots for Morgan, and a clean white shirt for Dad.
And the hubbub and the murder that the household used to make,
When she had us tumbled out of bed, and painfully awake.
Here a voice in anguish lifted to announce a button gone;
Someone calling from the back-room “Mum, what socks will I put on?”
While “Himself” was like a Bolshevik athirst for human blood,
Shouting “Mother,” as he wrestled with a fractious collar-stud.
But she kept the tumult under till she had us spick and span,
Packed like pickles in a bottle in the Old Mass Shandrydan.

We had ten good miles to drive to Mass—and Mass was sharp at eight;
But we’d never hear the end of it if something kept us late;
So we started ere the morning hung its bunting in the sky,
And the kookaburras chortled as we rumbled slowly by.
For the frost was on the barley, and the rime was on the trees,
And our little faces smarted with the whip-lash of the breeze,
Still we watched the branches redden to the first kiss of the sun
And we counted all the cart-wheels that the busy spiders spun,
Then the magpies sang to greet us, and our little hearts began
To forget that we were shivering in the Old Mass Shandrydan.

So the old contraption lumbered, safely towed, as Dad knew how,
By a pair of hefty elephants promoted from the plough,
And it rattled like a saw-mill, and it thundered like a dray;
Faith, you’d hear the circus coming a half-a-dozen miles away!
All along the road the neighbours used to take the time from us,
For they never made a start until they heard our omnibus;
Then a shrill soprano shouted, “Put the horses in the van,
“Them’s The Sugarloaf O’Briens in the Old Mass Shandrydan.”

We were first to Carey’s Crossing, first to reach Moloney’s Mill,
But the opposition caught us as we laboured up the hill;
Then the air became electric as they tried to pass us by,
For “Himself” for family reasons (which I needn’t specify)
Kept the road in deadly earnest, and would never seem to hear
The abuse of the procession that was gathering in the rear.
Oh, they whistled and they shouted till their feelings overflowed,
But the old man in the Dreadnought was the master of the road.
It was suicide to bump it, and the horses wouldn’t shy,
So he trundled on before them with a bad look in his eye.

Then, as suddenly the whistling and the bantering shouting ceased
And a solemn hush denoted the arrival of the priest,
Would a fine “good Catholic” thunder “Yerra, shame upon you, man!
Pull one side there, Pat O’Brien, with your Old Mass Shandrydan.”

Pull! Bedad, he’d pull the town down when His Reverence hove in sight,
Pulled his hat off with the left hand, and pipe out with the right;
Pulled his family in the gutter, pulled the horses off their feet,
And a shower of small O’Briens went skedaddling from the seat.
Then they rattled loudly past us, and a wild stampede began,
For they all had family reasons to outpace the other man.
There were buggies, traps, and turnouts there of every shape and rig;
There were Murphys in a spring-cart, and the Caseys in a gig;
There were Barnes’ ponies pounding twixt a gallop and a trot,
While the Careys with their pacing-mare went sailing past the lot.
Faith, we had it in for Carey, and our disrespect increased
At the cheek of “them there Careys who would try to beat the priest.”
No, we wouldn’t stoop to things like that; we’d act the gentleman
Half a mile behind the others in the Old Mass Shandrydan.

It’s a long way back I’m gazing, and the stage has changed since then;
Just an echo finds me sometimes, bringing back the scene again.
Oh, the heart beats slower measure than it used to beat, alas,
When a Little Irish Mother dressed us all in time for Mass.
I have lounged in fast expresses, I have travelled first saloon,
I have heard the haunting music that the winds and waters croon,
I have seen the road careering from a whirring motor-car,
Where the Careys couldn’t pass us, or our sense of fitness jar;
But the world is somehow smaller, somehow less enchanting than
When I saw it o’er the tail-board of the Old Mass Shandrydan.

PITCHIN' AT THE CHURCH

On the Sunday morning mustered,
Yarning at our ease;
Buggies, traps and jinkers clustered
Underneath the trees,
Horses tethered to the fences;
Thus we hold our conferences
Waiting till the priest commences—
Pitchin' at the Church.

Sheltering in the summer's shining
Where the shadows fall;
When the winter's sun is pining,
Lined along the wall;
Yarning, reckoning, ruminating,
"Yeos" and lambs and wool debating,
Squatting, smoking, idly waiting—
Pitchin' at the Church.

Young bloods gathered from the others
Tell their dreamings o'er;
Beaded-bonneted old mothers
Grouped around the door:
Dainty bush girls, trim and fairy,
All that's neat and sweet and airy—
Nell, and Kate, and Laughing Mary—
Pitchin' at the Church.

Up comes someone briskly driving,
"Cutting matters fine":
All his "fam'ly lot" arriving
Wander in a line
Off in some precise direction,
Till they find their proper section,
Greet it with an interjection—
Pitchin' at the Church.

“Mornun’, Jack.” “Good mornun’, Martin.”

“Keepin’ pretty dry!”

“When d’you think you’ll finish cartin’?”

“Prices ain’t too high?”

Round about the yarnin’ strayin’—

Dances, sickness—frocks surveyin’—

Wheat is “growed,” the “hens is layin’ ”—

Pitchin’ at the Church.

SAID HANRAHAN

“We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
In accents most forlorn,
Outside the church, ere Mass began,
One frosty Sunday morn.

The congregation stood about,
Coat-collars to the ears,
And talked of stock, and crops, and drought,
As it had done for years.

“It’s lookin’ crook,” said Daniel Croke;
“Bedad, it’s cruke, me lad,
For never since the banks went broke
Has seasons been so bad.”

“It’s dry, all right,” said young O’Neil,
With which astute remark
He squatted down upon his heel
And chewed a piece of bark.

And so around the chorus ran
“It’s keepin’ dry, no doubt.”
“We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan
“Before the year is out.

“The crops are done; ye’ll have your work
To save one bag of grain;
From here way out to Back-o’-Bourke
They’re singin’ out for rain.

“They’re singin’ out for rain,” he said,
“And all the tanks are dry.”
The congregation scratched its head,
And gazed around the sky.

“There won’t be grass. in anv case.

Enough to feed an ass;
There's not a blade on Casey's place
As I came down to Mass."

"If rain don't come this month," said Dan,
And cleared his throat to speak—
"We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,
"If rain don't come this week."

A heavy silence seemed to steal
On all at this remark;
And each man squatted on his heel,
And chewed a piece of bark.

"We want a inch of rain, we do,"
O'Neil observed at last;
But Croke "maintained" we wanted two
To put the danger past.

"If we don't get three inches, man,
Or four to break this drought,
We'll all be rooned," said Hanrahan,
"Before the year is out."

In God's good time down came the rain;
And all the afternoon
On iron roof and window-pane
It drummed a homely tune.

And through the night it pattered still,
And lightsome, gladsome elves
On dripping spout and window-sill
Kept talking to themselves.

It pelted, pelted all day long,
A-singing at its work,
Till every heart took up the song
Way out to Back-o'-Bourke.

And every creek a banker ran,
And dams filled overtop;

“We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
“If this rain doesn’t stop.”

And stop it did, in God’s good time;
And spring came in to fold
A mantle o’er the hills sublime
Of green and pink and gold.

And days went by on dancing feet,
With harvest-hopes immense,
And laughing eyes beheld the wheat
Nid-nodding o’er the fence.

And, oh, the smiles on every face,
As happy lad and lass
Through grass knee-deep on Casey’s place
Went riding down to Mass.

While round the church in clothes genteel
Discoursed the men of mark,
And each man squatted on his heel,
And chewed his piece of bark.

“There’ll be bush-fires for sure, me man,
There will, without a doubt;
We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
“Before the year is out.”

THE TIDY LITTLE BODY

Faith, and little Miss McCroddie was the tidy little body,
Just as trim and prim and handy as you'd ever wish to see
(She was well upon the weather-beaten side of thirty-three);
And she'd chuckle and she'd titter when the people used to twit her
On the most pronounced attentions of one Lanty Hallissey
(Now this Lanty was a bachelor of some antiquity).

Well, he'd said good-bye to fifty; he was solemn, he was thrifty,
And he'd come to Mass each Sunday decorated handsomely
(With an eye upon the Tidy Little Body, don't you see);
And you'd see him titivated in a much abbreviated
Kind o' sort o' style of swallow-tail that flogged him viciously
(Which it needed the judicious use of treacle at the knee);

And his hat was like a Quaker's; but some fifteen hundred acres
More than evened up the lee-way of the said deficiency
(Faith, he had a tidy cottage on the little property).
So, when Mass at length was over, round his jinker he would hover,
While the women teased the Tidy Little Body merrily
(And my hero was unconscious of their jesting, homely glee);

There he'd fool about, and truckle with a strap or with a buckle,
And tighten this, and loosen that, a-gammon he do be
(With the eye out for the Tidy Little Body, don't you see).
And the more they used to tease her, well, the more it seemed to please her;
And she wriggled and she giggled, and she tittered girlishly—
“Oh, it's all so very silly. Picture Mr. Hallissey!”

*But, bedad, for all her stricture on the paintin' of the picture,
There were some of 'em a-bouncin' in the swithers—true for me—
When the Tidy Little Body married Lanty Hallissey.*

THE PILLAR OF THE CHURCH

Faith, 'tis good to see him comin' when the bell for Mass is flingin'
Gladsome golden notes appealin' on the Sabbath-softened air,
Sweet compellin' invitations to the congregation stringin'
Up the road to old St. Michael's, on the blessed day of prayer.
You might seek the boundin' gait of him in any youth or maiden
With the rhythmic pulse of summer, and in vain would be the search;
Steppin' on with fine importance, like a general paradin'
In his Sunday regimentals, comes the Pillar of the Church.

There be mighty ones a-comin', most bedazzlin' in their dressin'—
Silken, swishin', sweepin' garments, gold and gems so fine to see;
There be homely ones in "fine clothes" with no less assurance pressin',
And the candid smell of moth-balls clingin' round the finery,
There be strength and fashion flauntin' this their hour above their
neighbours;
Little faded beaded bonnets droppin' slowly to the rear;
Aged achin' shoulders stoopin' 'neath the trials and the labours,
Hobblin' on and crutch-supported where they hastened yester-year.

But there's somethin' in the step of him, there's somethin' in his bearin',
Somethin' haughty-like and scornful, as he paces to the fore,
Somethin' swellin' out responsive to the flattery of the starin',
Of the little groups discussin' parish gossip round the door.
What if through the workin' week-days, fame his humble labours scornin',
He is just a common mortal whom the stains of toil besmirch,
Whose opinions matter nothin'—here he is the Blessed Mornin'
In his Sunday regimentals,—and the Pillar of the Church.

Ay, the Pillar of the Church is he, and woe to them who'd doubt him;
Faith, he'd put them to the right-about, and face them to the rear,
For it's never parish-priest there's been could carry on without him,
Since St. Michael's been a parish church—it's goin' on fifty year.
Don't we see him time and time again, the chest of him expandin',
Superintendin' things that matter not, and things that matter much?
Don't we see him with "the gentlemen," the officer commandin',
Every Christmas Day and Easter writin' down the names and such?

Ain't he present all occasions when there's grave deliberatin'
On important parish matters at the school or presbyt'ry?
With the eyes of him a-blinkin' and the wisdom radiatin'—
He, the sole survivin' member of the first church "Komitee"?
And maintainin' which distinction, don't it make stonewallin' sweeter?—
And a heap of "argyfyin'" cannot shift him from his perch—
Don't he tell them how they did things in the time of Father Peter?
Faith, he shows 'em there's a kick left in the Pillar of the Church.

Sure the Pillar of the Church it was that saved the situation,
"With the whole of 'em agin him," as I've often heard him tell;
'Twas he "seen the danger comin'," he that "med the suggestion."
He that "druv 'em to their rat-holes," where he shook 'em good and well.
He's the Pillar of the Church, bedad, and never shy or shrinkin',
Nor afraid to be upstandin' his opinions for to state.
Times the priest he's flabbergasted; once he set the bishop thinkin';
That he did, Man—"ups and ats" him, "lets him have it purty straight."

Och, 'twould do you good to hear him, with an "audjunce" round him
gawkin',

Tell of openin's here and "big days," puttin' modern feats to scorn;
And the banquets and the speeches, and the "Arrah, don't be talkin',
Sure the half of them that's livin' now don't know that they are born."
And the priests he knew by dozens, and the strugglin' and the strivin',
And the failure starin' at 'em, had he left 'em in the lurch;
Times and times he travelled with 'em, and "tremenjus" was the drivin'—
Pshaw, a hundred miles was larkin' to the Pillar of the Church.

Ay, the Pillar of the Church is he; and still at Mass or meetin'
There's the crabbed old bald head of him, conspicuous to the view.
And at answerin' up the prayers betimes the voice of him competin'
With its thunders shames the thin attempts of others in the pew;
See the poisonous little face of him at Cooney's baby screechin',
And the twistin' and the glarin', and then listenin' like a hare
While His Reverence reads the notices—but plottin' through the preachin'
For to get a kick at Murphy's dog, that's ramblin' everywhere.

Times and times he's "riz their dander"—every member up agin him—
And the jealous call him "Curate," while the flippant call him "Pope";
But he doesn't care a "thraneen," for "the venyum" isn't in him,

Happy just to be a leader where the lesser spirits grope,
Priests have come and priests have left us; change has blown from every
quarter;

Him alone the grim marauder ne'er has chanced on in the search;
But we'd miss him were he taken, as we'd miss the holy water—
He's the feature of the Sunday, is the Pillar of the Church.

TEDDO WELLS, DECEASED

Times I think I'm not the man—
Must be some mistake.
Me among the also ran?
Cute and wideawake!
Old and beat and crotchety—
Sixty-five, at least—
Knockin' round the presbytery,
Groomin' for the priest,
Choppin' wood, and ringin' bells,
Dodgin' work and takin' spells!
Me all right, one Ed'ard Wells
(Late Teddo Wells, deceased)—
Wheelin' barrows round the yard,
Gammon to be workin' hard,
A-groomin' for the priest!

Trainin' prads was Teddo's game;
Made a tidy bit.
Everybody knew the name,
Teddo Wells was "It."
Bought that bit of property
(Value since increased),
Gettin' on tremendously,
Married by the priest.
Papers full of Teddo Wells,
Trainin' horses for the swells;
Since redooced to ringin' bells
(Teddo Wells, deceased)
Shinin' boots and learnin' sense,
Nailin' palin's on the fence,
A-groomin' for the priest.

Lost that bit of property,
Ended up in smoke—
Too much "Jimmie Hennessy"—
Down. and stonv-broke.

Used to think he knew the game
Till they had him fleeced.
“Mud” is this ’ere hero’s name,
Workin’ for the priest—
Unbeknown to sports and swells;
They’ve no time for Ed’ard Wells.
Up the spout and ringin’ bells
As “Teddo Wells, deceased”;
Never noticed up the town,
Never asked to keep one down—
Groomin’ for the priest.

Times I stops a cove to chat,
One as gamed and spieled;
Chips me in the curate’s hat,
“Six to four the field.”
“What-o! Teddo Wells,” sez he,
“Him that horses leased,
Owned that bit of property,
Groomin’ for the priest?”
“Guessin’ eggs and seen the shells;
Brains,” sez I, “and breedin’ tells,
This old gent is Ed’ard Wells,
Late Teddo Wells, deceased.
Ringin’ bells is Ed’ard’s game,
Openin’ doors and closin’ same,
Called ‘groomin’ ’ for the priest.”

Never see a horse nohow,
Just an old machine;
Always in a tearin’ row
With this Josephine.
Got an eye that makes you feel
Well and truly p’liced,
Follerin’ out upon your heels,
A-goin’ to tell the priest.
“Can’t smoke here now, Ed’ard Wells,
That old pipe offensive smells;
Go and smoke outside,” she yells.
So Teddo Wells, deceased,
Him that once was in the boom,

Wood-heap has for smokin' room—
A-groomin' for the priest.

Times I says it's all a joke
Someone's puttin' up;
Me dead-beat and stony-broke,
Me that won a cup,
Owned that bit of property,
Them good horses leased!
Kickin' round the presbytery
A-groomin' for the priest!
Choppin' wood and ringin' bells,
Curby-hocked and takin' spells!
Me it is, one Ed'ard Wells,
(Late Teddo Wells, deceased)
Smokin' hard and talkin' free
Of the man he used to be,
And groomin' for the priest.

NORAH O'NEILL

That Norah O'Neill is a sthree,^[9]
And I'm talking the way that I feel,
With her dowdy old hat, and her hair pasted flat,
And her skirt bobbing after her heel;
And there to the church she will steal,
And under the lamp she will kneel
When confessions are done, and there's never a one
To be heard but that Norah O'Neill.

It annoys the priest's man a great deal,
And it makes every one boogathiel
At him scraping the floor, yes, and rattlin' the door
Just to hurry my lady O'Neill.
But there she will squat on her heel,
While over the forms he will steal;
He would put out the light, and close up for the night—
But he can't for that keershuch O'Neill.

I believe (and I talk as I feel)
When there at the Judgment we kneel,
And, each in his place, is the whole human race—
One half to be sent to the deil—
That, just as they're setting the seal,
A dust-cloud a glance will reveal
At the end of the day, Jerusalem way;
And you'll find 'twill be Norah O'Neill,
With her skirt bobbing after her heel,
And we'll have to go through the whole business anew;
Och, Norah O'Neill is a sthree.

[9] Slattern; also spelt stree. In the next verse boogathiel means uncomfortable, and keershuch much the same as sthree.

THE PRESBYT'RY DOG

Now of all the old sinners in mischief immersed,
From the ages of Gog and Magog,
At the top of the list, from the last to the first,
And by every good soul in the parish accursed,
Is that scamp of a Presbyt'ry Dog.

He's a hairy old scoundrel as ugly as sin,
He's a demon that travels incog.,
With a classical name, and an ignorant grin,
And a tail, by the way, that is scraggy and thin,
And the rest of him merely a dog.

He is like a young waster of fortune possessed,
As he rambles the town at a jog;
For he treats the whole world as a sort of a jest,
While the comp'ny he keeps—well, it must be confessed
It's unfit for a Presbyt'ry Dog.

He is out on the street at the sound of a fight,
With the eyes on him standing agog,
And the scut of a tail—well, bedad, it's a fright;
Faith, you'd give him a kick that would set him alight,
But you can't with the Presbyt'ry Dog.

His rotundity now to absurdity runs,
Like a blackfellow gone to the grog;
For the knowing old shaver the presbyt'ry shuns
When it's time for a meal, and goes off to the nuns,
Who're deceived in the Presbyt'ry Dog.

When he follows the priest to the bush, there is war.
He inspects the whole place at a jog,
And he puts on great airs and fine antics galore,
While he chases the sheep till we're after his gore,
Though he may be the Presbyt'ry Dog.

'Twas last Sunday a dog in the church went ahead
With an ill-bred and loud monologue,
And the priest said some things that would shiver the dead,
And I'm with him in every last word that he said—
Ah, but wait—'twas the Presbyt'ry Dog.

TANGMALANGALOO

The bishop sat in lordly state and purple cap sublime,
And galvanized the old bush church at Confirmation time;
And all the kids were mustered up from fifty miles around,
With Sunday clothes, and staring eyes, and ignorance profound.
Now was it fate, or was it grace, whereby they yarded too
An overgrown two-storey lad from Tangmalangaloo?

A hefty son of virgin soil, where nature has her fling,
And grows the trefoil three feet high and mats it in the spring;
Where mighty hills uplift their heads to pierce the welkin's rim,
And trees sprout up a hundred feet before they shoot a limb;
There everything is big and grand, and men are giants too—
But Christian Knowledge wilts, alas, at Tangmalangaloo.

The bishop summed the youngsters up, as bishops only can;
He cast a searching glance around, then fixed upon his man.
But glum and dumb and undismayed through every bout he sat;
He seemed to think that he was there, but wasn't sure of that.
The bishop gave a scornful look, as bishops sometimes do,
And glared right through the pagan in from Tangmalangaloo.

“Come, tell me, boy,” his lordship said in crushing tones severe,
“Come, tell me why is Christmas Day the greatest of the year?
“How is it that around the world we celebrate that day
“And send a name upon a card to those who're far away?
“Why is it wandering ones return with smiles and greetings, too?”
A squall of knowledge hit the lad from Tangmalangaloo.

He gave a lurch which set a-shake the vases on the shelf,
He knocked the benches all askew, up-ending of himself.
And oh, how pleased his lordship was, and how he smiled to say,
“That's good, my boy. Come, tell me now; and what is Christmas Day?”
The ready answer bared a fact no bishop ever knew—
“It's the day before the races out at Tangmalangaloo.”

THE ALTAR-BOY

Now McEvoy was altar-boy
As long as I remember;
He was, bedad, a crabbéd lad,
And sixty come December.
Faith, no one dared to “interfare”
In things the which concernin’
’Twas right and just to him to trust
Who had the bit o’ learnin’
To serve the priest; and here at least
He never proved defaulter;
So, wet or dry, you could rely
To find him on the Altar.

The acolyte in surplice white
Some admiration rouses:
But McEvoy was altar-boy
In “Sund’y coat-’n-trouses.”
And out he’d steer, the eye severe
The depths behind him plumbin’,
In dread, I wot (he once was “cot”),
The priest might not be comin’:
Then, stepping slow on heel and toe,
No more he’d fail or falter,
But set likewise with hands and eyes
He’d move about the Altar.

A master-stroke of other folk
Might start the opposition,
And some, mebbe, in jealousy
Bedoubt their erudition;
But McEvoy was altar-boy
And, spite of all their chattin’,
It “put the stuns” on lesser ones
To hear him run the Latin.
And faith, he knew the business through,
The rubrics and the psalter:

You never met his “aikals” yet
When servin’ on the Altar.

The priest, indeed, might take the lead
By right of Holy Orders,
But McEvoy was altar-boy,
And just upon the borders.
So sermons dry he’d signify
With puckered brows behoovin’,
An’, if you please, at homilies
He’d nod the head approvin’;
And all the while a cute old smile
Picked out the chief defaulter;
Faith, wet or dry, the crabbéd eye
Would “vet” you from the Altar.

AT CASEY'S AFTER MASS

There's a weather-beaten sign-post where the track turns towards the west,
Through the tall, white, slender timber, in the land I love the best.
Short its message is—"To Casey's"—for it points the road to Casey's;
And my homing heart goes bushwards on an idle roving quest,
Down the old, old road contented, o'er the gum-leaves crisp and scented,
Where a deft hand splashed the purple on the big hill's sombre crest.
Ah, it's long, long years and dreary, many, many steps and weary,
Back to where the lingering dew of morn bedecked the barley-grass,
When I watched the wild careering of the neighbours through the clearing
Down that sweet bush track to Casey's, o'er the paddock down to Casey's;
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

For, as soon as Mass was over, round the church they swarmed like bees,
Filled their pipes and duly lit them, brushed the dust from off their knees;
Then they'd "ready-up" for Casey's—self-invited down to Casey's—
Harness horses for the women with a bushman's careless ease.
With a neat spring to the saddle, soon would start the wild skedaddle,
Passing gigs and traps and buggies packed as tight as they could squeeze;
Hearts as buoyant as a feather in the mellow autumn weather,
While the noisy minahs cheered to see the glad procession pass—
All the Regans and the Ryans, and the whole mob of O'Briens
Bringing up the rear to Casey's—in the Shandrydan to Casey's—
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

Past the kitchen door they rattled and they took the horses out;
While the women went inside at once, the menfolk hung about
Round the stable down at Casey's, waiting dinner down at Casey's;
And they talked about the Government, and blamed it for the drought,
Sitting where the sunlight lingers, picking splinters from their fingers,
Settling all the problems of the world beyond a chance of doubt.
From inside there came the bustle of the cheerful wholesome hustle,
As dear old Mrs. Casey tried all records to surpass;
Oh, there's many a memory blesses her sweet silver-braided tresses;
They were "lovely" down at Casey's—always joking down at Casey's—
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

So they called us in to dinner, five-and-twenty guests—and more—
At the longest kitchen-table ever stood upon a floor.

There was plenty down at Casey's—ay, an open house was Casey's,
Where the neighbour and his missus never, never passed the door;
Where they counted kindly giving half the joy and pride of living
And the seasons came full-handed, and the angels blessed the store;
While the happy Laughing Mary flitted round us like a fairy.

And the big, shy boys stopped business, and looked up to watch her pass—
Ah, but when she caught them staring at the ribbons she was wearing!
Well, they spilled their tea at Casey's—on the good clean cloth at Casey's—
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

Then the reckless feats of daring, and the bushman's fierce delight
When the brumby squealed and rooted, and the saddle-girths were tight!
They could ride 'em down at Casey's—stick like plasters down at Casey's—
When they noticed Mary looking, they would go with all their might;
Ho! they belted, and they clouted, and they yelled, and whooped, and
shouted,

“Riding flash” to “ketch” the ladies, spurring, flogging, left and right!
And the lad with manners airy risked his neck for Laughing Mary
When he summoned all his courage up a rival to surpass;
Oh, the fun went fast and faster, as he landed in disaster
In the puddle-hole at Casey's—with his brand new suit at Casey's—
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

Hoary, hale, bewhiskered veterans, perched like mopokes in a row,
Out of danger on the top-rail, gave advice to those below;
They were wonders down at Casey's, were the old men at the Caseys'—
They're the boys could ride the “bad 'uns” in the days of long ago!
Faith, and old man Casey told 'em of a way he had to hold 'em.
Man, “the deuce an outlaw thrun him,” when he “got a proper show”;
Ay, and each man “upped and showed 'em” how he “handled 'em, an' rode
'em”—

Pshaw! there never was a native these old riders could outclass.
Once again they were “among 'em,” and they “roped 'em” and they “slung
'em”

On the stockyard fence at Casey's—smoking, “pitchin',” down at Casey's—
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

Hard and cold is youth to fancies which around the old men cling;
So they left them perched upon the rail to swap their vapouring,

Took a seat inside at Casey's, on the good chairs at the Casey's;
While the Casey's' new piano made the old house rock and ring.
There their mild eyes stared and glistened, as they sat around and listened
To the tuneful little ditties Laughing Mary used to sing;
There they rubbed their chins and reckoned that to no one was she second—
“Cripes, she'd sing the blooming head off any singer in her class!”
And the banter and the laughter when the chorus hit the rafter!
It was “great” to be at Casey's—healthy, wholesome fun at Casey's—
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

There was something in the old life which I cannot quite forget;
There are happy golden memories that hover round me yet—
Something special down at Casey's, in that wonderland of Casey's,
Where the crowfoot and the clover spread a downy coverlet,
Where the trees seemed always greener, where the life of man was cleaner,
And the joys that grew around us shed no leaves of brown regret.
Oh, the merry, merry party! oh, the simple folk and hearty,
Who can fling their cares behind them, and forget them while they pass
Simple lives and simple pleasure never stinted in the measure.
There was something down at Casey's, something clean and good at Casey's

—
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

Passed and gone that old bush homestead where the hours too swiftly flew;
Silent now the merry voices of the happy friends I knew;
We have drifted far from Casey's. All deserted now is Casey's—
Just a lone brick chimney standing, and a garden-tree or two.
Still the minahs love to linger where the sign-post points the finger
Down the bush track winding westward where the tall white timber grew.
But the big hill seems to wonder why the ties are snapped asunder,
Why the neighbours never gather, never loiter as they pass;
Yet a tear-stained thought beseeming comes along and sets me dreaming
That I'm back again at Casey's, with the old, old friends at Casey's;
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

ST. PATRICK'S DAY

'Tis the greatest splash of sunshine right through all my retrospection
On the days when fairies brought me golden dreams without alloy,
When I gazed across the gum-trees round about the old selection
To the big things far beyond them, with the yearning of a boy.

Drab the little world we lived in; like the sheep, in slow procession
Down the track along the mountain, went the hours upon their way,
Bringing hopes and idle longings that could only find expression
In the riot of our bounding hearts upon St. Patrick's Day.

There were sports in Casey's paddock, and the neighbours would assemble
On the flat below the homestead, where the timber fringed the creek;
With Australian skies above them, and Australian trees a-tremble
And the colours of the autumn set in hat and hair and cheek.

Mighty things were done at Casey's; mighty bouts anticipated
Made the Sunday church-door topic for a month ahead at least;
On the cheerless Sundays after, with misguided hope deflated,
We explained away our failures as we waited for the priest.

So when morning Mass was over, it was trot and break and canter
Helter-skelter down to Casey's, banging, pounding all the way,
And the greetings flung in Irish, and the flood of Celtic banter,
And the hectic flush of racial pride upon St. Patrick's Day.

Everywhere was emerald flashing from the buggies, traps, and jinkers,
There was green in every garment, and a splash in every hat,
In the bows upon the cart-whips, in the ribbons on the winkers,
In the wealth of woven carpet neath the gums on Casey's Flat.

There the new dress faced the critics, and the little beaded bonnet
And the feather flowing freely like a sapling in a gale;
And "himself" inside his long black coat that bore a bulge upon it
Where for twelve forgotten months its weight had hung upon the nail;

And the "splather" of a necktie only once a year paraded.

And the scarf that came from Ireland, “ere a one of you were born,”
And the treasured bunch of shamrock—old and withered now, and faded,
Blessed by every tear that stained it since the cruel parting morn.

Mighty things were done at Casey’s. Men of solid reputation,
Ringing bells and giving orders, kept the programme moving by;
And they made you sickly conscious of your humble situation
When they glared upon your meanness with a cold official eye.

Every “maneen” with a broken voice and backers there beside him,
And his socks outside his breeches, was a hero in his way;
Every nag around the country with a raw bush lad astride him
Was a racehorse with an Irish name upon St. Patrick’s Day.

Oh, the cheering that betokened those I knew so well competing,
With their long legs throwing slip-knots, and the look of men in pain—
Put me back into the reach-me-downs, and let me hear the greeting,
Set me loose in Casey’s paddock, where I’d be a boy again!

Yes, ’twas good to be a pilgrim in a world that held such wonders,
Though eternal bad behaviour put me neath parental ban,
Though the staring, and the wandering, and a score of general blunders
Got me gaoled behind the taffrail of the Old Mass Shandrydan.

“Yerra, Johnnie, stop that gawkin.” Is it—with the pulses pumping,
And the little heart high-stepping to the music of the drum—
Is it “stop it,” with a something in the young blood madly thumping
With a foreword of the purpose of the pregnant years to come?

Mighty things were done at Casey’s. Mighty impulse was behind them,
’Twas the sacred spark enkindled that was burning to the bone;
Never yet were men more loyal to the holy ties that bind them,
And the love they gave their country made me conscious of my own.

Never yet were men more loyal. Be they met in thousands teeming,
Be they gathered down at Casey’s with their kindred and their kind;
They are marching on for Ireland, with the beauteous vision gleaming
Of the altar-fires of Freedom in the land they left behind.

Not a torch was ever lighted at a tomb where Freedom slumbered,
But it smouldered—grimly smouldered—till the stone was rolled away;

When it flashed across the half-light, rallying rocket glares unnumbered,
Like the spangled blades of morning that bespeak the march of day.

Not a voice was ever lifted, but an echo never dying
Flung the slogan once repeated when the hand was on the gun;
Though the prophet tongue was ashes, came the conquering banners flying
With a dazzling watchword flashing, blazing signals in the sun.

Yes, the world has ever seen it in its journey down the ages,
Seen it writ in living scarlet in the blood that has been shed;
And a hand re-writes the head-line deep across the lurid pages,
When the stricken, fearless living meet the deathless, martyred dead.

Thrills a leaping thought within me, when I see a land around me
That has never seen the foeman's steel, nor heard the foeman's shot,
At whose shrine I lit the tapers, when her witching sweetness bound me
With an iron vow of service of a pulsing pride begot;

To that big free land I've given all the love that courses through me;
That her hands have rocked my cradle stirs my heart in every beat.
An Australian, ay, Australian—oh, the word is music to me,
And the craven who'd deny her would I spurn beneath my feet.

Thrills the thought that, did the traitor stretch a tainted hand to foil her,
Did I see her flag of silver stars a tattered thing and torn,
Did I see her trampled, breathless, neath the shod heel of the spoiler,
And her bleeding wounds a byword, and her name a thing of scorn,

There would flash the living bayonets in the strong hands of my brothers,
And the blood that coursed for nationhood, through all the years of pain,
In the veins of patriot fathers and of Little Irish Mothers
Would be hot as hissing lava streams to thrill the world again.

THE CAREYS

Their new house stood just off the road,
A fine big brick two-storey,
All gabled, tiled, and porticoed,
To flaunt its owners' glory.
We never had, to tell the truth,
At Carey's door alighted,
We had good reasons too, forsooth—
We hadn't been invited.
But down to Mass we passed the gate,
And passed it, too, returning,
And hid away in mien sedate
The grievance in us burning.
But in the Old Mass Shandrydan—
Well, envy little varies—
We heard "herself" and her good man
Discourse about the Careys:

"Wisha, that big house of Carey's with its power of fal-de-daries."
"Faith, he's in the bank to build it, so I hear the people say."
"It will break him now to clear it; and it's grieved I am to hear it;
Wisha, I wouldn't be in Carey's boots to-day!"

They came here in the early days,
And settled down as neighbours;
With tilted carts and bullock-drays
They shared our griefs and labours.
We tramped it to the old bush school,
In fine or rainy weather;
And there upon the dunce's stool
We took our knocks together.
But now they stood for "class" among
Our little congregation;
And, as they passed us by, they flung
Mere scraps of toleration.
And sometimes down to Mass they'd bring
Fine strangers holidaying.

Who laughed and gushed at everything
Within their orbit straying.
By soft white hands and modish gowns
They sought the world to measure,
And seemed to think our reach-me-downs
Were staged to give them pleasure.
And, faith, it set the tongues a-wag
And entertained the flippants
To see the fifteen-guinea bag
That held the little “thrippence,”
While in the church they plied the fan
And practised like vagaries;
So in the Old Mass Shandrydan
We gave it to the Careys:

“Wisha, did you see the Careys? They’re the high-falutin fairies.”
“Tell me, who were them play-actors there that had so much to say?”
“Och, the antics and the wrigglin’, and the goin’-s-on and gigglin’—
Wisha, did you see the Careys there to-day!”

They sometimes drove a spanking pair,
Which brought them speed and honour;
They sometimes drove a pacing-mare
With straps and pads upon her;
They covered us with clouds of dust,
As thick as we could wear it;
And we could plod, as needs we must,
And keep the faith and bear it.
When skies were blue and days were bright,
And leaf and bud were sprouting,
They came to Mass in splendour dight,
To make a Sunday’s outing;
But when the morn was blank with storm
And winter blasts complaining,
The Careys kept devotion warm
Beside their fire remaining.
So, while the chilling torrents ran
And soaked our best figaries,
Within the Old Mass Shandrydan
We pummelled at the Careys:

“Wisha, where were all the Careys? Sure the rain might melt the fairies!”

“Faith, and if it was the races then, they wouldn’t stop away.”

“That’d be another story; there they’d be in all their glory—

Wisha, what could keep them all from Mass to-day!”

And when we held the big bazaar—
A fine and lively meeting—
And people came from near and far,
In buoyant zeal competing,
'Twas rush and gush and fulsomeness
And Careys superintending;
They raced about in evening dress,
And deftly dodged the spending.
We might have been in Amsterdam,
Or somewhere out in Flanders;
We sold some tickets for “the ham,”
And stalked about like ganders.
So when we gathered up the clan,
And sought our distant eyries,
Within the Old Mass Shandrydan
We blazed it at the Careys:

“Wisha, did you see the Careys, like some wild things from the prairies?”

“Faith, I never met ‘the bate’ of that for many ’n many a day.”

“Sure it’s pounds we would have taken with them tickets for the bacon,

If them thuckeens^[10] of the Careys were not always in the way.”

And when the little choir we had
In tender hope was springing,
And nervous lass and awkward lad
Were mobilized for singing,
We all went down our own to hear,
As holy triumph crowned them,
But Careys sailed in shrill and clear,
And silenced all around them;
Our Nellie’s range they quite outran,
And even Laughing Mary’s;
So in the Old Mass Shandrydan
We pitched into the Careys:

“Wisha, did you hear the Careys? Don’t they think they’re fine canaries?”

“Yerra, wouldn’t you think they’d hold the tongues, and let the people pray!”

“Faith, my head is all a-reelin’ from them Careys and their squealin’—
Wisha, did you hear them shoutin’ there to-day!”

The angels, in their peaceful skies
Through starry paddocks straying,
Must sometimes smile with kindly eyes
To see the tricks we’re playing.
Now rosy-cheeked and smart and fair
Was Carey’s youngest daughter;
And lo, our Morgan did his hair
With mutton-fat and water;
But days and days the lovers spent
On thorns (and roses) treading,
Till down to Carey’s house we went,
Invited to the wedding.
For life’s a fine comedian,
Whose programme shifts and varies,
And in the Old Mass Shandrydan
We smoodged a bit to Careys:

“Wisha, now we’ll see the Careys in their weddin’ fal-de-daries!”

“Faith, I mind the time the Careys slep’ beneath their bullock-dray.”

“Sure, I wouldn’t hurt their feelin’s, though I never liked their dealin’s;

“An’ if just to please poor Morgan, I’ll be nice to them to-day.”

[10] Celtic for “flapper.”

WHEN OLD MAN CAREY DIED

A night of wind and driving rain,
No light on land or sky—
The sharp squalls shook the window-pane
And scurried loudly by,

When sped abroad the message stern
On cantering hoofbeats borne
That old man Carey “took a turn,”
And might not see the morn.

What though debarred from Carey’s set,
What though ’twas plainly seen
The new house and its etiquette
Had made a gulf between,

What matter if they passed us by
And scorned us heretofore—
We could not spurn a neighbour’s cry
When trouble found his door.

So through the dark, a swinging light
Beneath the axle tied,
The neighbours braved the stormy night
When old man Carey died.

All blank was Carey’s new brick place
As, entering through the gloom
With noiseless step, we just might trace
Within a darkened room

The purple stole that purifies,
The old wife’s stricken head,
The Carey girls, with swollen eyes,
All kneeling round the bed—

We’d move the world to help them. then:

Our feuds were laid aside,
For all were neighbours once again
When old man Carey died.

And, when he'd paid the debt perforce
That every man must pay,
We came again with hearse and horse
To bear him on his way.

We left behind the new brick place
So strangely silent now,
The death-mask on its staring face,
The ashes on its brow;

Slow straggling down the winding road,
Past ripening crops a-sweep
Which old man Carey's hands had sowed
But other hands would reap,

With slap and tap of unshod heels
We followed one by one,
And fifty sets of idling wheels
Were twinkling in the sun.

With many a tale of deeds unguessed,
Deeds of the early years,
We brought him to his long, long rest
Among the pioneers.

THE PARTING ROSARY

They have brought the news, my darlin', that I've waited for so long.
Faith, 'twas little news they brought me; every story, every song
That I've heard since you enlisted seemed to bear the one refrain,
Till the whole world used to tell me that you'd never come again.
They've been cruel times, alannah, since you left us for the fight,
Potterin' dazed-like all the daytime, thinkin', thinkin' through the night;
Yerra, what's the use complainin', when the world is all amiss,
When the hopin' and the strivin' ever come to dust like this.
'Twas the green months when you left me; now the brown, brown months
 have come,

Stand the ripe crops in the paddocks, but the harvesters are dumb.
There'll be flowers again in plenty, and a carpet o'er the plain—
Oh, it's hard you won't be comin' when the green months come again!
Still, I'm thankful, oh, I'm thankful for one golden memory,
That the last time spent together was to say The Rosary.
Don't you mind it, boy? we said it in my own room there beyond,
Where I have the little altar where your early prayers you conned,
By the statue that I cherish of the Holy Mother fair,
With the blue cloak round her shoulders, and her white hands crossed in
 prayer.

They were singin' in the parlour, them that came to say good-bye;
And they sang their gay songs to me—och, I knew the reason why!
They are always land in trouble in this big warm-hearted land;
Ah, but their way wasn't my way, and they mightn't understand.
So I lit the little candles, and I beckoned you away,
And you came—God bless you for it, boy—the partin' prayer to say.
Ay, the partin' Rosary, darlin'—I can see you kneelin' there,
With your big broad shoulders bendin', and your hands joined on the chair,
And your man's voice like an organ rollin' out its soul apart—
Och, to-night, boy, in my dreamin' it is dronin' in my heart.
Yes, we said it with the music strummin' ragtime songs throughout,
Just our two selves there together, answerin' t'other turn about.
'Tis a quare, quare world, alannah, when the storm can work its stress
On the strong limb, while the withered leaf is left in loneliness.
“Lay your treasure up in Heaven,” for there's nothing here below;
Och, we Irish mothers learned it in the old land long ago!

Short life's springtime with its blossom; and it comes not back again,
 Only haggard trees in winter stretchin' naked limbs in pain.
 Oh, I'm thankin' God, my bouhal,^[11] though the achin's in my breast,
 'Twas He took you from me, darlin', and He knoweth what is best:
 And His Holy Mother Mary, with her Baby on her knee,
 Sure she lost Him in His manhood, for He died at thirty-three.
 There's a numbin' in my heart, boy; like a cold, cold hand it grips—
 Oh, I'm thankful that we parted with the Rosary on your lips.
 It has ever been my refuge; it has been my hope and stay,
 Been my hymn of sweet thanksgivin' for what good there came my way.
 It has been my only comfort when the heart was sick and sore,
 When the bad days past the countin' flung their troubles round my door.
 I was taught it by my mother; ay, and when we crossed the sea
 For to seek the gold we never found—the old man there and me
 (Sure he stood six feet and higher then, and coal-black was his hair—
 Och, you'd never know 'twas him at all, that bent old man in there)—
 We have said it in the slab hut, strong and clear in flood and drought,
 Just our two selves there together “answerin' up” and “givin' out.”
 We have said it by the cradle, we have said it by the cot;
 When the babes the angels brought us made us happy in our lot,
 When the house was full of childer, and the pride of livin' glowed,
 Och, we said it till the neighbours heard us, passin' on the road.
 But ye've gone and left me lonely; one by one, my doves, ye flew;
 One by one the circle's dwindled, till the Rosary's said by two—
 Said by two old husky voices, old and weak and wearin' out,
 Just our two old selves together, answerin' t'other turn about.
 Sure it won't be long, alannah, till the troubled sea is calm,
 And the beads drop from my fingers, and they bind them on my arm.
 You would tease me with the “trimmin's” in the dear days that are dead,
 There's another trimmin' now, boy, every time the Rosary's said.
 But there won't be many Rosaries, for the singin's in my ears
 And the Holy Mother's beckonin'—I can see her through my tears.
 These old feet have done their journey, better leave them restin', then;
 They will bring me to the hill-side ere the green months come again.
 Sure I'll tread the House of Glory, where the soul is free from harm,
 And you'll know 'tis me, alannah, by the Rosary on my arm.

[11]

Boy; also spelt bouchal.

OWNERLESS

He comes when the gullies are wrapped in the gloaming
And limelights are trained on the tops of the gums,
To stand at the sliprails, awaiting the homing
Of one who marched off to the beat of the drums.

So handsome he looked in the putties and khaki,
Light-hearted he went like a youngster to play;
But why comes he never to speak to his Darkie,
Around at the rails at the close of the day?

And why have the neighbours foregathered so gently,
Their horses a-doze at the fence in a row?
And what are they talking of, softly, intently?
And why are the women-folk lingering so?

One hand, soft and small, that so often caressed him,
Was trembling just now as it fondled his head;
But what was that trickling warm drop that distressed him?
And what were those heart-broken words that she said?

Ne'er brighter the paddocks that bushmen remember
The green and the gold and the pink have displayed,
When Spring weaves a wreath for the brows of September,
Enrobed like a queen, and a-blush like a maid.

The gums are a-shoot and the wattles a-cluster,
The cattle are roaming the ranges astray;
But why are they late with the hunt and the muster?
And why is the black horse unsaddled to-day?

Hard by at the station the training commences,
In circles they're schooling the hacks for the shows;
The high-mettled hunters are sent at the fences,
And satins and dapples the brushes disclose.

Sound-winded and fit and quite ready is Darkie.

Impatient to strip for the sprint and the flight;
But what can be keeping the rider in khaki?
And why does the silence hang heavy to-night?

Ah, surely he'll come, when the waiting is ended,
To fly the stiff fences and take him in hand,
Blue-ribboned once more, and three-quarters extended,
Hard-held for the cheers from the fence and the stand.

Still there on the cross-beam the saddle hangs idle,
The cobweb around the loose stirrup is spun;
The rust's on the spurs, and the dust on the bridle,
And gathering mould on the badges he won.

We'll take the old horse to the paddocks to-morrow,
Where grasses are waving breast-high on the plain;
And there with the clean-skins we'll turn him in sorrow
And muster him never, ah, never, again.

The bush bird will sing when the shadows are creeping
A sweet plaintive note, soft and clear as a bell's—
Oh, would it might ring where the bush boy is sleeping,
And colour his dreams by the far Dardanelles.

LAUGHING MARY

With cheeks that paled the rosy morn
 She bounded o'er the heather,
And romped with us among the corn
 When we were kids together.
Her mother's help, her mother's mate.
 Her mother's darling daughter,
When riper mind and more sedate
 The rapid years had brought her.
As pure as air from mountain snows,
 As dainty as a fairy,
As fetching as the native rose,
 And always—Laughing Mary.

A little mother round about,
 The happy sunshine bringing—
You'd see her bustle in and out,
 A-working and a-singing;
And then the soul of Casey's place.
 The love, the light, the laughter,
When friendship showed its cheery face,
 And music shook the rafter;
And many a lad went home to find
 A haunting sweet vagary
Was rambling softly through his mind
 Because of Laughing Mary.

But when the smiling stars were blurred,
 And someone's heart was bleeding,
She flew as flies the homing bird,
 With balms of comfort speeding.
An angel in a sweet disguise,
 She filled the measure over,
While tears stood sparkling in her eyes
 Like rain-drops on the clover;
And many a head bowed low to pray,
 Howe'er her skies might vary,
The years would bless her on her way
 And keep her Laughing Mary.

MORYAH

“Wisha, where is he goin’ to now
With the hat on the back of the poll,
And the hair of him curled on the brow,
Like a millionaire out for a stroll?”
“Ar’, Old Man, but he’s yardin’ the cow.”
“Moryah!^[12]
With the hat on the back of his poll?”

“There’s the red heifer’s calf in the lane,
And the gray mare is mad for a bite,
And the dog up above on the chain
Is shoutin’ and bawlin’ all night.”
“Sure, Old Man, you’re keownrawnin’ again.”
“Moryah!
And that Jim gallivantin’ the night?”

“Yer’, Old Man, but the head of him’s young;
And the chubby gossoon with the dart
Have the wits of him straightened and strung
To the tune of the song in the heart,
With the lilt of it there on the tongue.”
“Moryah—
And bad luck from the song in the heart!”

“’Tis that Casey girl now have him caught,
And her mother out baking the bread;
It is there she should be, so she ought,
With the eyes dancing jigs in her head;
Faith, when I was a boy, sure we thought . . .”
“Moryah!
’Twas yourself had an eye in the head.”

“Don’t I mind the old days that are through,
When a boy and a colleen afar
Felt the bound and the hurt of it too
As they swung in a dream on a star—
Thiggim-thu,^[13] my Old Man, thiggim-thu?”
“Ouisha,
Poor old woman, ’tis dreamin’ you are.”

[12] Moryah is the Celtic equivalent of “I don’t think!”

[13] “Don’t you understand?”

A STRANGER IN THE CHURCH

'Twas Callagan who jerked the thumb—
A mute, interrogating thumb—
That set the people staring
At Casey's lot arriving late.
They had in tow a fashion-plate
In tailored garments up-to-date,
And patent leathers wearing.
From heel to collar shining new
(His hair was like a poet's, too),
He went and sat in Casey's pew,
His lofty manners airing.

'Twas Mrs. Cooney raised her veil—
A handsome, netted, spotted veil—
To mop the perspiration;
And while she mopped, she took the chance
To shoot one sly enquiring glance
(Which trivial happy circumstance
Escaped his observation).
And McEvoy, he stole a look,
The while he gravely moved the book.
And certain useful bearings took
To help the situation.

'Twas Mac himself who told the yarn—
An unauthenticated yarn—
While after Mass we waited,
Of bank account, and purse, and pelf
("But, faith, he was a pagan elf—
I never seen him bless himself
Nor read his book," Mac stated)
So there and then we made a bid
To find his secret where 'twas hid;
We found out what his father did,
And how he was related.

'Twas brother Jim made up his mind—
A calculating, jealous mind—
 That “that there toff” was courting.
He saw him smile when Mary spoke,
He watched him help with Mary’s cloak,
And drive away with Mary’s folk,
 At Mary’s side disporting.
And Mary looked so coy and trim—
At least it seemed that way to Jim—
And this it was that rattled him,
 Each trifle misreporting.

TELL ME, WHAT'S A GIRL TO DO?

Tell me, what's a girl to do
When the gossoons court and cozen?
Some have none and some have two,
More can count a baker's dozen.
Mary, Mary, by and by,
With the woman in you wakin',
Boundin' heart and laughin' eye,
There'll be murder, no mistakin'.

Cornered sits each captive lad
Gazin' vacant at the rafter,
Talkin' wisdom with your dad—
Faith, it isn't him they're after.
Wisha, Mary, there you be
Neat and sweet and fair and fetchin',
Heart-whole still and fancy-free!
Yer', Acushla, but 'tis ketchin'.

One can give you gold galore;
Life with gilded gauds he'd smother
One can give you something more,
Love, that ne'er can love another.
Boundin' heart, and laughin' eye,
In the twinklin' sunlight walkin';
Love, you tell me, passes by—
Wisha, Mary, don't be talkin'.

THE WIREE'S SONG

The wiree sang that Christmas Day,
A rippling, limpid, liquid lay
 In clump and cover trilling;
On ripened grain and gleaming road
The molten, golden sunlight glowed,
 The lone land's rapture stilling.

And health and strength and youth and grace
Were gathered down at Casey's place
 In mirthful mood of madness;
While, hidden in the currajong,
The wiree sang his limpid song,
 Responsive to the gladness.

And Mary sparkled everywhere,
The sunlight weaving through her hair
 The colours of December;
Ah, two shall strive—but one shall win
And one shall feel the javelin
 'Twere poison to remember!

The silent bush that Christmas Day
In molten, golden sunlight lay,
 Nor bough nor leaf a-tremble;
All hushed and mute, it seemed asleep,
Or wrapped away in musings deep
 That sleep itself resemble.

One voice the outer spaces filled—
That lilting lay the wiree trilled,
 Like raptures of a lover,
“Wir-ree, Wir-ee, Itchong, Itchong”—
Then rippled through its liquid song,
 Leaf-hidden in the cover.

And one has seen the love arise
To shade the light of laughing eyes
 Like white clouds in December;
But one has felt the piercing pang
That thrilled the song the wiree sang—
 And he shall still remember.

WISHA, WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH JIM?

“Wisha, what is the matter with Jim, I dunno?
Is he right in the mind for this last week or so?
Or has he come in for a station?
He is trapesin’ around, and he’s treadin’ on air,
He is brushin’ the clothes, and he’s doin’ the hair;
He is like a play-actor at times, I declare,
And his antics they beggar creation.

“Like a sheep-killing dog he’ll be vanishing quite,
If you leave him one moment get out of your sight,
With the fire and the fever prevailin’;
While his horse is worn down to the skin and the bone
From the hours that he keeps. If you let him alone,
To the Caseys’ he’d canter across on his own,
And tie himself up to the palin’.”

There’s a track, through the timber that rambles along,
And a cantering horse vamps the time to a song
That the heart of a dreamer is singing.
There are bells for a wedding that ring in the breeze,
That sound in the grass that is brushing his knees;
And down in the crowfoot, and up in the trees
They’re ringing, and ringing, and ringing.

SAID THE WHITE-HAIRED PRIEST

Said the white-haired priest, "So the boy has come,
And the old, old dreams are o'er you,
And you give no thought to the gray humdrum
Of the world that lies before you!
'Tis a queer old world; 'tis a jumble wild
Where the fairest hopes may smother;
Ay, and things are just as they seem, my child,
To the likes of your fine old mother.

"Put the dreams one side; give your head a chance,
For the heart discerns but poorly,
And it beats the time of a mad wild dance,
When a lover has gripped it surely.
There is one wise heart in the wanton whirl,
Though you find through life no other;
And it beats with a sober pulse, my girl,
In the breast of your grand old mother.

"Let them paint fresh colours on vale and hill,
Let them say new flowers bloom brighter;
'Tis the same old rut on the highway still
Which she trod when her steps were lighter
And the same old hopes that her way beguiled,
And the same old griefs,—no other,
Ah, they wait hard by for yourself, my child,
As they did for your poor old mother.

"On her tired breast shall you tell your tale
When the drifting doubts distress you;
You shall kneel to her in your bridal veil,
And no holier hands shall bless you.
Put your young bright head, with its wealth of curl,
By that old white head of the other,
And entwine the gold with the gray, my girl,
By the side of your dear old mother.

“Though her eyes be weary and dim to-day,
 In the shade of the dusk advancing
She sees the visions along the way
 Where your young swift feet are dancing;
At your fond sweet dreams she has gently smiled!—
 Yes, and you will smile at another
When you see the tinsel and sham, my child,
 With the eyes of your wise old mother.

“Then go to her side and your story tell
 With its hopes and its fears completed:
She will understand, ah, she knows it well,
 It is merely her own repeated.
She will fold you close, and the tides that swell
 In your bosoms shall choke and smother;
Oh, it's blessed indeed is the bride, my girl,
 When she kneels by a gray old mother.”

HONEYMOONING FROM THE COUNTRY

To the rooms where I am dining in the glaring city's day
Come the happy honeymooners from the country far away,
Two days old, and very awkward as they wander straight ahead,
Much too careful lest the people should suspect them country-bred.
He's a well set-up young fellow; she's a dainty little bride;
And he follows where she leads him with the bush swing in his stride,
Makes himself at home—or tries to—with defiance in his stare,
Thinks he's in the old bush kitchen with his hat beneath the chair.
Every eye is turned upon them, and the kindly smiles that flit
O'er the faces of the diners seem to bless them where they sit;
But for me the past revives with thronging memories in its train.
And I'm thinking that it's Jim and Laughing Mary once again.
Don't I see it all before me? and I feel the mood is good—
There's the horse tied by the sliprails, and a hole worn where he stood;
There's the dreamer riding homewards while the same old fancies throng,
With the same old stars a-staring, and the same old lilting song.
There's the “talkin' matters over,” “gettin' all arrangements straight,”
Mum and Dad in the committee for the fixing of the date;
Then the buggies and the jinkers at the church upon the hill,
And the ribbons and the garlands, and the flounces and the “frill”;
There's the breakfast down at Mother's—oh, the planning o'er and o'er,
And the murder and the tearing that went on the day before!
Working double shifts and bustling—every female in demand—
Half the women of the parish round to lend a helping hand,
Offering loans to bridge the shortage of the cups and spoons, and then
Tying threads around the handles, so they'll know their own again.
Racing in and out and fussing, so to strike the country dumb;
But they'll talk of Mary's wedding for a score of years to come!
Yes, the breakfast down at Mother's—there's the long, long table spread,
And a houseful of the neighbours with the old priest at their head;
And the speeches—Lord, the speeches—hitting hurdles every stride,
Full of awkward, heartfelt blessings for the bridegroom and the bride;
And the lad himself “responدين’,” when the cheers had died away,
Shifting crumbs around the table in the worst speech of the day.
Don't I see it all before me? and my heart and head resent
All the smiles that patronize them. though they may be kindly meant.

“Scent of gum-leaves!” ’Tis a byword in the city’s roar and push,
Where they do not know the greatness and the kindness of the bush.
“Scent of gum-leaves,” so they whisper. Oh, it sweetens not the air
In the overcrowded city, for the spirit is not there.
Scent of gum-leaves to be scoffed at in the land that gave them birth!
“Scent of gum-leaves”—cease your jargon. ’Tis the finest scent on earth.
Ay, it clung around the Anzacs when they stormed Gallipoli;
And it steeps the nation-builders from the centre to the sea.
Speed the day when all united, heart to heart and hand to hand,
We’ll proclaim the scent of gum-leaves to be sacred in the land.

* * * * *

But my honeymooners leave me, and I watch them passing through—
They are homesick for the freshness of the open spaces, too—
So they gather up their bundles, and they wander home again
Back to where the morning magpies lather out the old refrain,
Back to love in fullest measure, pressed and flowing overtop,
Through the green months and the brown months, in the house behind the
crop.
From the overcrowded city, from the bustle and the push
Pass my sturdy, happy couples who are sticking to the bush.

MAKING HOME

No, you don't quite get the meaning when the fun is at its height
With the neighbours at the breakfast, and the world is warm and bright;
And it doesn't come upon you when you're driving to the train;
What with wrastling with the luggage, you've no time to feel the pain,
 But it grips you like a footpad, making home,
And you feel the sun will never drive the dark away again,
 Making home.

Yes, you go in with the rest to see your married girl away;
There's a mopy feeling round you, and you've nothing much to say;
So you crack a joke to mend things, but you make them worse instead.
Yet the loving words in hundreds are a-running through your head,
 Welling from a heart that's melting, making home,
Interrupted by the stabbing of that wretched thing you said,
 Making home.

When the women start a-crying, just to show how glad they feel,
And you rouse upon "herself" a bit to keep the tears to heel,
It's a lot of silly business, and the whole thing gets you beat;
So before you realize it, you are climbing to the seat
 Of your buggy, with the missus, making home,
And the old horse clouts the metal with his heavy awkward feet,
 Making home.

You get glimpses through the timber of the lights a-sliding by,
You can see the red reflection palpitating in the sky;
You can hear the easy puffing as she swings into her stride,
And you feel a sort of pigmy in a world that's cold and wide,
 With the wise old stars above you, making home,
While you've got a notion someone is a-sobbing by your side,
 Making home.

Then the past shows up before you every ghost you thought had fled,
Everything you did unkindly, every peevish word you said;
And the poor old woman, battling with the tears that blind and ache,
She's been showering love around her all for someone else's sake.

And it starts your mind a-wondering, making home,
Whether what you've been attending was a wedding or a wake,
Making home.

So you pull up at the stable, take the harness off the horse,
Hit your shins against a bucket—well, it does no good, of course.
There's a gloom around the kitchen where the banquet still is spread,
And the cat upon the rocking-chair is sleeping like the dead,
While the ghosts come leering at you, and you're home,
And "herself" she lights the candle, and she goes straight off to bed,
When you're home.

But you don't feel much like sleeping with the throbbing in your brain,
And your heart is on a journey vagabonding with a train;
So you peel the choking collar off, and get out in the cool,
Where you light your pipe and smoke upon the old verandah stool,
Thinking matters slowly over when you're home,
Winding back the skein that somehow's got entangled on the spool,
When you're home.

Here's the little home you started when your hopes were all aglow;
Them's the currajongs you planted five-and-thirty year ago;
This here sixty-acre paddock was the first you called your own;
That there clearing was a forest, with the timber overgrown.
So you start a-recollecting, when you're home.
Five-and-thirty years have flitted, and you don't know where they've flown,
When you're home.

Here you've been along to-night to see the married girl away,
And you rocked her in her cradle—well, it seems but yesterday;
And "herself" you thought she looked so old, and bent and worn with care—
Five-and-thirty slaving winters pile the snows on heart and hair—
And you find that you're an old man, making Home;
And the mile-posts on the road have got behind you unaware,
Making Home.

There were joys your heart was craving, but you never gathered them;
Fragrant buds that yearned to blossom, but you hacked them from the stem;
Hearts of children, erring sometimes—ah, but golden through and through,
Beating back to where you led them, big with love of home and you!
Now you see them in the distance, making Home,

Like the three red lights you watched to-night receding from your view,
Making home.

So you sit with eyes wide open, seeing where you've been the fool,
Wise with wisdom born of sorrow, smoking, thinking in the cool,
Reckoning him God's new apostle who is busy being kind,
Hearing angel voices chant it in the music of the wind—

Chastened, lonely, and so weary; making Home,
Praying God to pardon what you've been because your eyes were blind,
Making Home.

COULD I HEAR THE KOOKABURRAS ONCE AGAIN

May a fading fancy hover round a gladness that is over?
May a dreamer in the silence rake the ashes of the past?
So a spirit might awaken in the best the years have taken,
And the love that left him lonely might be with him at the last.
While he searches in the by-ways, shall his heart forget the highways
Where the sunburnt arms are toiling in the sunshine and the rain,
Where the simple things and lowly make their lives sublime and holy,
And the kookaburras chorus once again?

There's a little house a-peeping o'er the swaying and the sweeping
Of the wheat that nods and ripples as the breezes skim its top;
And the days of pioneering in the ringing and the clearing
See the first-born of their labours in the house behind the crop.
There the fallow land is showing where the box and pine were growing,
And a sweet hope gilds the future with the colour of the grain;
Gentle visions softly tripping in the ploughing and the stripping,
While the kookaburras chorus once again.

Let a dying fancy hover round the glories that are over;
Lift a song to sing the present—to the hopeless hope impart—
For above the past's bewailing, golden-writ but unavailing,
Is the simple little ditty that can cheer a drooping heart.
Lift it high for all to hear it. In the Helper's love endear it,
And my ageing heart shall hasten to applaud the sweet refrain;
Yes, I'd feel the pulses stirring to the splendid truth recurring,
Could I hear the kookaburras once again.

Could I hear them as I heard them when the joy of living spurred them,
When the world was clean and wholesome and they laughed the gloom
away,
All the fatal fiction scorning that the canvas of the morning
Is but splashed with faded colours from the brush of yesterday.
Oh, I'd bless them and I'd cheer them, could I wander off and hear them
Boom the head-lights of the coming day that sweep the hills amain,

For I'd know the tocsin sounding of a fuller hope abounding,
Could I hear them hail the dawning once again.

To no age in all the story of the bearded years and hoary
Would I yield the future's promise in the mould of progress cast;
Still, a fading fancy lingers, while the touch of gentle fingers
Moves aside the sombre curtain that was drawn across the past.
Come the fairy visions winging, come the laughter and the singing,
But the shadows fall around me and the echo dies in pain;
Yet I'd feel the wings that bore me when the world was all before me,
Could I hear the kookaburras once again.

COME, SING AUSTRALIAN SONGS TO ME!

Come, Little One, and sing to me
A song our big wide land to bless,
Around whose gentle parent-knee
We've twined the flowers of kindliness.

Your eyes are clear Australian blue,
Your voice like soft bush breezes blown;
Her sunshine steeps the heart of you,
Your tresses are the wattle's own.

What, no Australian song, my child,
No lay of love, no hymn of praise?
And yet no mother ever smiled
With our dear country's winsome ways:

You sing the songs of all the earth,
Of bower and bloom and bird and bee;
And has the land that gave you birth
No haunting, native melody?

Your poets' eager pens awake
The world-old themes of love and youth.
The pulse of life, the joy, the ache,
The pregnant line of earnest truth;

They dress you these in native guise,
And interweave with loving hand
The freshness of your rain-washed skies,
The colours of your sunlit land.

What, no Australian song, my dear?
And yet I've heard the cottage ring
With notes the world would pause to hear,
When at their work your sisters sing.

They sing the songs of all the earth.

Of tender sky, and dimpling sea,
But all their strains have not the worth
Of one Australian song, for me.

I've heard the harp the breezes play
Among the wilding wilga-trees;
I've swept my world of care away
When bush birds lift their melodies;

I've seen the paddocks all ablaze
When spring in golden glory comes,
The purple hills of summer days,
The autumn ochres through the gums;

I've seen the bright folk riding in
O'er blooms that deck the clovered plain,
And neath the trees, when moonbeams spin
Their silver-dappled counterpane.

What, no Australian song, my pet?
No patriot note on native horn,
To bind the hearts in kindness met,
And link the leal Australian-born?

Yet every exile, wandering lone
Our happy careless homes among,
May live the best his heart has known
Whene'er his country's songs are sung.

You sing the songs of all the earth,
Of alien flower and alien tree:
But no one, in my grief or mirth,
Will sing Australian songs to me.

You sing of every land but mine,
Where life is liting neath the sun.
Still all its spirit seems ashine
In you, my little laughing one.

Your eyes are clear Australian blue,
Your face is towards the future set:

The bounding, gladsome heart of you
Is hers—and only hers, my pet.

Ah, Little One, what dreams would rise
If, nestled here upon my knee,
You'd flash those soft Australian eyes,
And sing your country's songs to me!

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Book name and author have been added to the original book cover. The resulting cover is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Around the Boree Log and other verses* by Joseph Patrick Hartigan (as John O'Brien)]