Bush-Land Ballads

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Bush-Land Ballads

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Thomas C. Lothian

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Bush-Land Ballads
The Garden of Youth

_Shall Youth endure?_ . . .
Before mine eyes
In pale, lost Beauty all
Its vanished splendours far uprise;
And, as the long years fall,
A Voice unto my quest replies
As Samuel spake to Saul.

Behind it sloped the sunlit hills;
Around it burned the three-
Fold wealth of cloudless blue that fills
All mountain, sky and sea
What time our Southern summer trills
Her lute of ecstasy.

So faint and far; so long ago,
Some other eye than mine
Beheld, 'twould seem, in gallant show
Its lilies all a-line;
Its lilacs and the petalled snow
Of white moss-roses fine.

Blue larkspurs by its borders grew;
With cat-faced pansies rare.
To Illawarra winds out-threw
The stocks their perfumes fair.
And brave hibiscus banners flew
Bold challenge to the air.

The splendid sunflow'r on his stalk
Day-long his lord obeyed;
And proudly by the pebbled walk,
Like soldiers on parade,
The poppy and the hollyhock
Gay uniforms displayed.

Old-fashioned wall-flow'rs in their prim
Cut robes of spinster brown,
Upon the dancing crocus slim,
In débutante gown,
From social altitudes of dim,
Ancestral pride looked down.

With yellow pollen at their thighs
The bees, an earnest throng
Unto the spendthrift butterflies,
Droned out a warning song,
That in each honeyed cup the prize
Is offered not for long.

And Thou, whose deft hands gently looped
The over-burdened vine,
Who in thy tender girlhood stooped
A vagrant bloom to twine;
I wonder if the years have duped
Thy memories, like mine,

With dreams. If in thy heart the tongue
Of youth may yet recall,
In silver echoes softly sung,
The glamour of it all;
Or is its voice with portent hung,
As Samuel spake to Saul?

That garden of the south, in rare
Fresh fragrance of young joy,
No more, oh penitent, a snare
Of roses shall employ
To lure our feet, in passion where
We dallied, girl and boy.

And yet, thy callow love, in sooth,
Than all earth's offering gleams
More fair. As Boaz unto Ruth
My heart will cling, it seems,
To that remembered shrine of Youth,
And all its youthful dreams.
The Lake

Its call is Peace—deep sylvan rest,
Unbroken, save by chords
The Mozart touch of Nature, best
In low, harmonic words
Of Music, draws from bough and breast
Of tuneful trees and birds.

Through silv'n Morns and golden Noons
And jewelled Nights, ablaze
With sapphire stars and opal moons
Of topaz-tinted rays;
From wooded hills to seaward dunes
It spreads its sparkling ways.

Mount Howe red granite walls uprears
To guard its Northern verge;
And West, with sharp, forbidding spears,
The grass-tree plains emerge;
While South and East one faintly hears
The warnings of the surge.

So—shielded round by mount and sea—
O'er scarcely trodden shores,
The Bird of Ancient Mystery
On musing pinion soars,
While yet its beauties virgin be
To Vandal sail or oars.

No ash of tribal camp fires gray,
No cryptic trunk or mound—
Whereon the naked savage lay
By vanished fires—are found;
For 'twas, the dusky greybeards say,
All times a sacred ground.

Its note is peace! While Theban kings
In robes of conquest shone;
While lions fierce with flaunting wings
Were carved in Babylon;
Its autumns and its southern springs,
To woodland harps, danced on.

No song Hellenic fluted o'er
Its calm and placid tide;
No beacon lights the white dunes wore
Home-coming ships to guide;
No mourning voice along its shore
Proclaimed how Cæsar died.

Mailed legions marched; green harvest lands
Were reddened as they sped;
Proud monarchs, mouthing high commands,
Came forth, and backward fled;
Their names were written on the sands,
And by the sands o'er spread.

As ever Time's all-circling blade
In steady downstrokes whirled,
Gaunt prophets, standing in the shade
Of frowning temples, hurled
Fierce inspirations forth that made
And yet unmade the World.

Lone sons of Genius, from the Night
Where dead Dust crowds the Urn
Of Nothingness, uprose in bright
Mortality, to burn
Their tapers at the Shrine of Light—
And . . . into Night return;

Their deathless Words o'er years between
Yet loud reverberate;
No Echo fell; in jungles green
The wild wood pigeon sate,
And cooed across that still demesne,
Love greetings to her mate.

O'er water clear the black swan plied
His graceful gondolet;
Or slowly from his glossy side
A vagrant white wing set
To sail the Lake's unrippled tide
In roving amoret.

Peace bideth here. Clear skies, unstained
By smoke of Progress, blue
Its daylight loveliness. Gold maned,
Apollo's horses through
Their cloudless sky tracks tramp, unreined
From dew to ev'ning dew:

On slender pipes of reed the West
Wind plays a silken song,
When from their dry, discarded nest
The feathered cygnets throng,
And Summer's sandalled footsteps rest
That cooling marge along.

In iridescent flight swift pass
Winged insects o'er its stream;
A python windeth through the grass,
His patterned length a-gleam;
Their shadows mirrored in a glass,
The mottled bitterns dream.

But, when the lonely ranges hide,
Deep-mantled, from the day,
She lays her golden gown aside
And locks her pearls away,
With chilly vassals at her side
To meet the Cloud Kings grey.

Lean Cares that hunt the highways hard
And trodden tracks austere
Of men who hold in most regard
Earth's goods, and gods revere
Of Might and Gold, the musing bard
May not encounter here.

For, velvet Dawn and damask Eve,
And Night with stars o'erstrown,
Afar from harried Hours that grieve
And driven Days agroan,
By this fair lakeside soft achieve
Their pleasant tasks alone.

And at the Dusk one dimly hears,
In echoes, faint and low
As dew upon the rustling ears,
Or clouds on moonlit snow,
The Voices of the ended years
From crystal depths below.
Land of Mine

The Deutscher sings his Rhineland;
The Frenchman boasts a vine land;
But South there lies a fine land,
A Roses-Love-and-Wineland—
Australia, land o' mine.

Now have ye seen the green palms
Along her Nor'ward strand?
Now have ye seen the brown grass
Across the cattle-land?
Oh, have ye seen the morning
Hang out a crimson warning
Above the mountains grand?

Oh, have ye seen Monaro
In samite robes of snow,
When down her hills of Winter
The swift ski-runners go?
Ere Summer's magic changes
The blue Australian ranges
From Drake to Omeo!

Where fare the Northern Rovers,
And down the Riverine,
In dry time and in rain time,
Thank God, betimes, I've been:
And I have seen what splendour
A changing Bush can lend her,
Varied, vast demesne.

And I have ta'en the Blue-road
That lies around her main;
The bonny, circling Blueroad
That brought me home again,
By rocky cape and foreland,
By bay and beach and shoreland,
Unto the headlands twain.

The Celt may dream his Ireland;
The Scotsman toast his sireland;
The Latin praise a lyre-land;
Give me my own Desire-land,
Australia—Land o' Mine.

It's oh to watch the spindrift
Come clouding from the seas;
It's oh, the storied cargoes
Beside Australian quays,
When some deep-laden carrier
Brings homeward from the Barrier
Her cedar and her cheese!

And hey, the dish and wind lass,
The stockwhip and the pack,
The quart-pot on the saddle,
The camp beside the track.
The wide trails West and Nor'ward,
The joys of going forward.
The joys of coming back!

The wind among the pine trees
Blows chill by Hobart town;
But where a broad pandanus
Uplifts its shady crown,
Where Queensland suns endure a
Warm wind from Arafura,
Spice-scented, bloweth down.

Of red and golden roses
Old Sydney hath no dearth;
Boronia its sweetness
Sheds pleasantly in Perth;
And far and wide she graces
Her miles with fertile places
This fairest land on Earth.

There is no land but Our land,
The rolling field and flower land,
The golden sun-and-shower land,
The burning Bush and bower land—
Australia! land of ours.
Brown Eyes

This is the ballad of Brown Eyes, sung by a Man of Sin,
Saved from the Slough of Despond his soul hath wallowed in.

She dwelled with her great-limbed clansmen; I was a stranger there.
I bore her over the threshold and carried her otherwhere.
I was a Rebel Chieftain. She was a Rebel Queen.
We set our feet to the future, and all the world was green.

The sun went under the mountain that rose from over the sea,
Into the night we journeyed, but Brown Eyes clung to me.
I laid my hand in the darkness—as ever a man will do—
On the heart of a timid maiden, and ever the heart beat true.
Ever she walked in patience; ever she walked in love,
For this is the gift to woman that falls from the Lord above.

We came to the Place of Dwelling. I called to my fighting kin—
“'I have reived me a foreign woman! Arise! and take her in.'”
My father strode to the gateway; sternly and strong he stood;
He scanned her face in the gloaming, and measured her womanhood.

I saw the eyes of a greybeard light up with a sudden fire;
And naught in the world I'd dreaded, but I feared my father's ire.
I shrank from his cold, sharp anger. He laughed like a Viking old,
The torches lighting the silver of his hair that once was gold.

“You have wroughten many an evil”—he spake with an acid tongue—
“You have brought me many a sorrow since the days of your years were young.
You have drunken and diced and wantoned. You have housed with the Devil's Three,
And 'tis little of fame or honour you have brought to my house or me.

“But”—again he faced my woman and measured her womanhood
(I saw that the end was coming, and knew that the end was good)—
“But this,” he roared, “is a penance that shrives you many a sin,
You have found me a goodly daughter”—and he led my Brown Eyes in!

We slaughtered the calf at sunset; filling our flagons high,
We drank to our Kings and Clansmen, my stern old sire and I.
We drank to the Future Leaders—the sons of her strong-limbed sons,
Who'd sit in the Halls of Council, and stand by the roaring guns.

We were a fighting household, born of a fighting race,
Flouting the milk-faced merchant, scorning the market-place;
Proud as the landless Arabs, vain as they be and poor;
Yet never a hungry stranger went unfed from the door.

That year I followed the furrow, tho' the seas were full of song,
And the heart in me leaped to hear them calling their coasts along.
Spring in her queenly raiment came over the hills again,
And Brown Eyes moaned in her travail and knew of the woman's pain.

She bore me a goodly manchild, sire of the sons to be,
We wassailed him mighty welcome down by the shouting sea.

The Autumn, robed in her russet, walked with the sleety rain;
The seas in their magic called me; I took to the seas again.

Brown Eyes sate by the window crooning a cradle song.
Brown Eyes sate by the window, patient and brave and strong.
I fared to a foreign country. *This is the weird I dree.*
I fared to a lotos country, where sirens sang to me.

The sun comes up in the morning, the sun in the twilight sets;
The strength of a man is water; the mind of a man forgets.
The Lotos Woman witched me! God and the Devil know
How the soul of man is perilled when woman works his woe.

The heart of me turned to ashes, the soul of me changed to mud,
For I had eaten the lotos that poisoneth all the blood!
My sword in its scabbard rusted; my head was filled with the wine;
I sate in the House Uncleanly and swilled with the grubbing swine!

Came there a fighting kinsman over the land and sea
Bearing a household message: "Thy Brown Eyes waits for thee."
Never a word of anger, never a curse of scorn—
I rose and followed my clansman into the grey, cold morn!

Never a word he spake me; never a word he said,
Till we came to the Lotos Chamber, with the Lotos Queen abed.
Then did my footsteps falter; then did my heart grow cold;
Seeing her milk-white bosom warmed by her hair of gold.

Slowly her dream eyes opened —eyes of the lissome grey—
Softly her red lips murmured: "Love of my longing, stay." . . .
God in Thy mercy hear me, this is the weird I dree,
The strength of my manhood failed me—I crawled to the woman's knee.

Then was I spelled for ever; then was I damned as well,
Lost to the World of Honour, lost by the gates of Hell,
But that my noble kinsman, priest and warrior too,
Out of its rusted scabbard my good sword sternly drew.

Grasping the mighty weapon, raising the hilt full high,
He held its cross o'er the woman of the grey soul-killing eye—
God in Thy mercy hear me, God in Thy might forgive,
Out of Thy pleasure only planets and flowers live.

Surely as high he raised it, gracious and wondrous sign,
The lees of my weakness left me e'en as the lees of wine,—
She of the silken presence, she of the perfumed hair,
Hissed like a scalded serpent, cowered and mumbled there!

Strangely her milk-white bosom, robed in a hair of gold,
Shrank to a dry witch-semblance, withered and brown and old,
Slowly her glory faded, till at last she lay
Like to a corpse, long covered, bared to the light of day.

I followed my priestly kinsman out to the Lotos strand,
Where his arméd henchmen bided, sword and shield in hand.
We sailed to our own green country over the leaping sea,
Where Brown Eyes sate by her casement waiting amont for me.

Shame, like a horse-hair garment, unto my spirit clung,
Torn was my heart with anguish, hard were my withers wrung.
This was my thorn of sorrow; this is the weird I dree—
“What would I say to Brown Eyes? What would she say to me?”

We came to our pleasant Nor'land, from out of the horrid South.
We came to the iron headland that frowns at the harbour mouth.
I saw the place of my people, fair-watered and hilled and high;
I saw the Place of Abiding, and I willed that I might die.

Never a word of anger, never a curse of scorn,
Fell from my priestly kinsman, sponsor of my first-born,
Till that our ship had ground her keel on the soft home sand
He rose as a Chief of Prophets, and held me by the hand.

This is my thorn of penance; this is the weird I dree:
“By the seaward casement yonder, thy Brown Eyes waits for thee;
By the seaward casement yonder”—these be the words he said:
“Lieth thy Brown Eyes waiting: lieth thy Brown Eyes . . . dead!”

God in Thy mercy spare me! God in Thy might forgive!
Out of Thy pleasure only, planets and flowers live.
This is my crown of Sorrow; this is the weird I dree—
Over the seas for ever my Brown Eyes waits for me.
Australia First

She holds no urnéd dust in fee. She claims no classic age;
Her Past is volumed not in stone, nor scribed on parchment page;
No feudal fortress fronts her peace; nor, through her written years
Hath flag of friend or foeman waved along her blue frontiers.

From Neolithic sleep she woke. The dove of Better Things
Behind the bars of Tyranny already beat its wings;
The youngest Daughter of the Earth, red tides of Time had swept
Her sister continents with War and Conquest while she slept.

The sum of Human Thought was hers; the harvest of the Past
Was ready garnered to her hand and left her free, at last,
To mill the golden grain of Good and cast the husks away—
Rich dowered by the centuries, so fell her natal day.

She knows no High Achievement yet; but in a Vision grand
The True Australian sometimes dreams his future Motherland:
Untrammelled by ancestral gyves; from ancient usage free,
Her sword of patriotic steel, her shield—Democracy;

He sees her proud, reliant head uplifted to the skies,
With Freedom's star-flash on her hair; and, burning in her eyes,
The fire that great Mazzini fed, the fire that Lincoln nursed,
And in his secret heart is writ, all times—"Australia First."

What claims on us have older lands? Beyond our sunlit seas
They hide their rags 'neath royal silk—tired hags with histories.
Their ancient courtyards reek with filth, their walls are splashed with crime;
They wait, in arméd dread, the Sword of All-Avenging Time.

The high lord, in his motor car, along their ways goes by;
Where serfs and peasants from the fields look up with sullen eye;
The yoke is fastened to the neck, the shackles to the shin,
Nor shall these helots e'er escape the slough they travail in.

They hunger 'mid the granaries; they thirst beside the streams.
Content and Plenty sound to them as echo words in dreams;
And they must tread Rebellion's road, to gain their high desire,
Through bloody streets and scaffolds lit by Revolution's fire.

But here a kinder Custom holds; from Broome to Tasman snow
She opes her gates of bounty wide, the great, Free Land we know;
Nor in her trodden ways of Man shall children crave or thirst,
Nor women hunger while we keep Australia best—and first.

She shines among the lands of Earth with glories of her own;
Her robes are rich with radiant gems; with pearls her neck is strown;
Rare fabrics drape her throneroom high; and native wealth untold
She holdeth in her treasuries, of wine, and wheat and gold.

The planter of a tropic North from deep palm shadow views
A carpet Oriental spread in vivid greens and blues;
A sun of gold upon a field of azure velvet laid—
When Morning walks, in robes of rose, the Capricornian glade.

The Miner from his hut of bark looks out on hills of snow
That billow to the border-line away from Omeo;
Dark gullies walled by mountains steep, and Gippsland gorges grim,
Where forest shadows lie at noon, the Picture make for him.

The Rider on the great grey plains that answer to the quest
Of restless hearts that roving seek their fortunes further west;
The stockman and the teamster tall; the hunter and the tramp,
The farmer, shearer, tradesman, clerk; the men of town and camp.

One kind Australian mother fills the measure of their needs;
She clothes them as her climates call, and well the hunger feeds,
And shall they not, in gratitude, predict the years to be;
*Their* Nation of the South proclaim, and her high destiny?

And have I not an equal right to sing this Land of Mine
With him who rolls in trumpet tones his mighty “Watch on Rhine”?
With him who hymns in any tongue his country's pride and praise—
“God Save the Kaiser,” Czar, or King, or Gallic “Marseillaise”?

Green, Irish fields my people trod, and thine the English leas;
Our comrades sprang from Teuton stock, or Greek, or Genoese—
I care not whence our people came; but this all times I care:
The land that gives us birth and bread is ours—Australia fair.

*Her* destiny is ours to shape, her lands are ours to hold;
The plastic clay of nationhood is here to shape and mould;
And 'spite of toadies, Tory-bred, or foreigners, or fools,
I'd write “Australia” on the walls, and teach it in the schools!

The upward beams shall not be carved, nor shall one stone be set,
In that great Edifice-to-Be, the House-That-Is-Not-Yet,
Till in the circle of her shores, throughout the land is sown,
The greater hope that bids us dare to stand or fall, alone;

Serene, secure, and self-contained, a nation in her pride,
Indifferent to the quarrels old that shake the world outside;
For this Ideal should we strive, for this our souls should thirst—
*That forty million freemen yet may hold Australia first!*
The Old Kit Bag

Its musty old leather smells sweeter to me
Than attar of roses, or afternoon tea;
Its mottled skin, showing the wear o' the weather,
Brings back the long trails that we travelled together;
The battered old Kit with its labels and stains,
Mid friends and good fellows, most constant remains.

The grate of the wheel and the kick of the screw;
The fog in the morn with the sun breaking through;
New dreams and new hopes and the lure of new places,
Strange inns and fresh beds and the charm of fresh faces;
These things never weary— the lash of the seas,
The roar of the south wind, the cry of the trees.

Man houses temptation. And once in his life
May come to him dreams of another man's wife.
But an old Kit Bag, like a friend and a fellow,
Will index his tracks to the regions where mellow
The fruits of Love's fancy that ripe in the sun,
Nor sour on his conscience o'er-greatly when won.

For Love is a vestal; as Love is a rake,
Jell baiteth its hooks with A Fair Woman's Sake;
But the old Kit Bag, with the world for a college,
Full crammed to the neck with his collars and knowledge—
With never a heart 'neath his tough, wrinkled hide
Has oft baffled Hell—and the lady beside.

Man sups with Misfortune; the scourge and the flail
Are laid to the backs of the culprits who fail;
But Fortune, her wings like a falcon may fold in
Some Isle of Beyond, or some far gully golden;
And the Old Kit Bags that we packed in despair,
Our guiding stars prove to the good days out there.

A cooler for passion, a cure for the wine,
Dear prodigal comrade, gone husking with swine,
When cash is run out and your credit is ended;
A pill for the patient, well-tried, recommended,
Is the old Kit Bag that you dolefully pack,
Kick under the berth, or consign to the rack;

'Twill carry your pictures pyjamas and clothes;
Your worldly possessions and most of your woes,
For when you are down with your face to the gravel
There's nothing so wholesome and healing as travel;
There's nothing so musical, soothing and true,
As the skirl o' the wheel, or the grunt of the screw.

The plains are a blessing, the seas are a boon:
The surf on the shingle, the scud o'er the moon;
And never a grief or a sour human sorrow,
Is final while dawneth a human to-morrow—
Let Ada go wanton, let Maggie flaunt by,
My son, you'll forget 'em next week—if you try.

So, here's to the Djinn with his leathery grin,
His solace for failure and falsehood and sin!
Here's to the kits of the roving outsiders,
The wandering wild geese the ready rough-riders!
Till the curtain is down, the corpse candles lit,
Here's to the Kit,
The dandy old, bandy old, handy old Kit.