

Since Then

Henry Lawson, 1895

I met Jack Ellis in town to-day —
Jack Ellis — my old mate, Jack —
Ten years ago, from the Castlereagh,
We carried our swags together away
To the Never-Again, Out Back.
To the Never-Again, Out Back.

He saw me first, and he knew 'twas I —
The holiday swell he met.
Why have we no faith in each other? Ah,
why?
He made as though he would pass me by,
For he thought that I might forget.
He thought that I might forget.

He ought to have known me better than
that,
By the tracks we tramped far out —
The sweltering scrub and the blazing flat,
When the heat blazed down through each
old felt hat
In the hell-born western drought.
In the hell-born western drought.

I asked him in for a drink with me —
Jack Ellis — my old mate, Jack —
But his manner no longer was careless
and free,
He followed, but not with the grin that he
Wore always in days Out Back.
Wore always in days Out Back.

I tried to live in the past once more —
Or the present and past combine,
But the days between I could not ignore —
I couldn't help notice the clothes he wore,
And he couldn't but notice mine.
And he couldn't but notice mine.

He placed his glass on the polished bar,
And he wouldn't fill up again;
Then he hurried away through the
crowded street
And the rattle of buses and scrape of feet
Seemed suddenly loud to me.
Seemed suddenly loud to me.

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As Good As New

Words: Henry Lawson. Tune: C & J Roweth

Oh this is a song of the old lights,
That came to my heart like a hymn;
And this is a song for the old lights -
The lights that we thought grew dim,
That came to my heart to comfort me,
And I pass it along to you;
And here is a hand to the good old friend
Who turns up as good as new.

And this is a song for the camp-fire
Out west where the stars shine bright
Oh this is a song for the camp-fire
Where the old mates yarn tonight;
Where the old mates yarn of the old days,
And their numbers are all too few,
And this is a song for the good old times
That will turn up as good as new.

Oh this is a song for the old foe -
We have both grown wiser now,
And this is a song for the old foe,
And we're sorry we had that row;
And this is a song for the old love -
The love that we thought untrue
Oh this is a song of the dear old love
That comes back as good as new.

Oh this is a song for the black sheep,
For the black sheep that fled from town,
And this is a song for the brave heart,
For the brave heart that lived it down;
And this is a song for the battler,
For the battler who sees it through -
And this is a song for the broken heart
That turns up as good as new.

Ah, this is the song of the brave mate,
Be he Bushman, Scott, or Russ,
A song for the mates we will stick to -
For the mates who have stuck to us;
And this is the song for the old creed,
To do as a man should do,
'Till the Lord takes us all to a wider world,
Where we'll turn up as good as new.

Second Class Wait Here

On suburban railway stations — you may see them as you pass
There are signboards on the platforms saying, 'Wait here second class;'
And to me the whirr and thunder and the cluck of running gear
Seem to be for ever saying, saying 'Second class wait here' —
'Wait here second class, 'Second class wait here.'
Seem to be for ever saying, saying 'Second class wait here.'

And the second class were waiting, in the days of serf and prince,
And the second class are waiting — they've been waiting ever since.
There are gardens in the background, and the line is bare and drear,
Yet they wait beneath a signboard, sneering 'Second class wait here.'

I have waited oft in winter, in the mornings dark and damp,
When the asphalt platform glistened underneath the lonely lamp.
Ghastly on the brick-faced cutting 'Sellum's Soap' and 'Blower's Beer;'
Ghastly on enamelled signboards with their Second class wait here.

And the others seemed like burglars, slouched and muffled to the throats,
Standing round apart and silent in their shoddy overcoats,
And the wind among the wires, and the poplars bleak and bare,
Seemed to be for ever snarling, snarling 'Second class wait there.'

Out beyond the further suburb, 'neath a chimney stack alone,
Lay the works of Grinder Brothers, with a platform of their own;
And I waited there and suffered, waited there for many a year,
Slaved beneath a phantom signboard, telling our class to wait here.

Ah! a man must feel revengeful for a boyhood such as mine.
God ! I hate the very houses near the workshop by the line;
And the smell of railway stations, and the roar of running gear,
And the scornful-seeming signboards, saying 'Second class wait here.'

There's a train with Death for driver, which is ever going past,
And there are no class compartments, and we all must go at last
To the long white jasper platform with an Eden in the rear;
And there won't be any signboards, saying 'Second class wait here.'

The Day Before I Die

Henry Lawson, 1907

There's such a lot of work to do, for such a troubled head!
I'm scribbling this against a book, with foolscap round, in bed.
It strikes me that I'll scribble much in this way by and by,
And write my last lines so perchance the day before I die.

There's lots of things to come and go, and I, in careless rhyme,
And drink and love (it wastes the most) have wasted lots of time.
There's so much good work to be done it makes me sure that I
Will be the sorriest for my death, the day before I die.

But, lift me dear, for I am tired, and let me taste the wine —
And lay your cheek a little while on this lined cheek of mine.
I want to say I love you so — your patient love is why
I'll have such little time, you know, the day before I die.

The Watch On The Kerb

Night-Lights are falling;
Girl of the street,
Go to your calling
If you would eat.
Lamplight and starlight
And moonlight superb,
Bright hope is a farlight,
So watch on the kerb.
Watch on the kerb,
Watch on the kerb;
Hope is a farlight;
Then watch on the kerb.

Comes a man: call him —
Gone! he is vext;
Curses befall him,
Wait for the next!
Fair world and bright world,
Life still is sweet —
Girl of the night-world,
Watch on the street.

Dreary the watch is:
Moon sinks from sight,
Gas only blotches
Darkness with light;
Never, Oh, never
Let courage go down;
Keep from the river,
Oh, Girl of the Town!

Faces in the Street

Henry Lawson

THEY lie, the men who tell us in a loud decisive tone
That want is here a stranger, and that misery's unknown,
For where the nearest suburb and the city proper meet
My window-sill is level with the faces in the street—
Drifting past, drifting past,
To the beat of weary feet—
While I sorrow for the owners of those faces in the street.

And cause I have to sorrow, in a land so young and fair,
To see upon those faces stamped the marks of Want and Care;
I look in vain for traces of the fresh and fair and sweet,
In sallow, sunken faces that are drifting through the street—
Drifting on, drifting on,
To the tread of listless feet;
I can sorrow for the owners of those faces in the street.

In hours before the dawning dims the starlight in the sky,
The wan and weary faces first begin to trickle by,
Increasing as the moments hurry on with morning feet,
Till like a pallid river flow the faces in the street—
Flowing in, flowing in,
To the beating of their feet—
Ah! I sorrow for the owners of those faces in the street.

The human river dwindles when 't is past the hour of eight,
Its waves go flowing faster in the fear of being late;
But slowly drag the moments, whilst, beneath the dust and heat,
The city grinds the owners of the faces in the street—
Grinding flesh, grinding bone,
Yielding scarce enough to eat—
Oh! I sorrow for the owners of the faces in the street.

And then the only faces till the sun is sinking down
Are those of outside toilers and the idlers of the town,
Save here and there a face, that seems a stranger in the street,
Tells of the city's unemployed upon his weary beat—
Drifting round, drifting round,
To the scrape of restless feet—
Ah! my heart aches for the owner of that sad face in the street.

And when the hours on lagging feet have slowly dragged away,
And sickly yellow gas-lights rise to mock the going day,
Then, flowing past my window, like a tide in its retreat,
Again I see the pallid stream of faces in the street—
Ebbing out, ebbing out,
To the drag of tired feet,
While my heart is aching dumbly for the faces in the street.

And now all blurred and smirched with vice the day's sad pages end,
For while the short "large hours" towards the longer "small hours" trend,
With smiles that mock the wearer, and with words that half entreat,
Delilah pleads for custom at the corner of the street—
Sinking down, sinking down,
Battered wreck by tempests beat—
A dreadful, thankless trade is hers, that Woman of the Street.

But, ah! to dreader things than these our fair young city comes,
For in its heart are growing thick the filthy dens and slums,
Where human forms shall rot away in sties for swine unmeet,
And ghostly faces shall be seen unfit for any street—
Rotting out, rotting out,
For lack of air and meat—
In dens of vice and horror that are hidden from the street.

I wonder would the avarice of wealthy men endure
Were all the windows level with the faces of the Poor?
Ah! Mammon's slaves, your knees shall knock, your hearts in terror beat,
When God demands a reason for the sorrows of the street!
The wrong things and the bad things
And the sad things that we meet
In the filthy lane and alley, and the cruel, heartless street.

I left the dreadful corner where the steps are never still,
And sought another window overlooking gorge and hill;
But when the night came dreary with the driving rain and sleet,
They haunted me—the shadows of those faces in the street,
Flitting by, flitting by,
Flitting by with noiseless feet,—
And with cheeks but little paler than those real in the street.

Once I cried: "Oh, God Almighty! if Thy might doth still endure,
Now show me in a vision, for the wrongs of Earth, a cure."
And lo! with shops all shattered, I beheld a city's street,
And in the waning distance heard the tramp of many feet,
Coming near, coming near,
To a drum's dull distant beat,
And soon I saw the army that was marching down the street.

And, like a swollen river that has burst o'er bank and wall,
The human flood came pouring with the red flags over all!
And kindled eyes all blazing bright with revolution's heat!
And flashing swords reflecting rigid faces in the street
Pouring on, pouring on,
To a drum's loud threatening beat,
And the war-hymns and the cheering of the people in the street.

And so 't will be while aye the world goes rolling round its course,
The warning pen shall write in vain, the warning voice grow hoarse,
But not until a city feels red revolution's feet
Shall its sad people miss awhile the terrors of the street—
The dreadful everlasting strife
For scarcely clothes and meat
In that great mill for human bones—the city's cruel street.

The Good Old Concertina

Henry Lawson, 1891

'Twas merry when the hut was full
Of jolly girls and fellows.
We danced and sang until we burst
The concertina's bellows.
From distant Darling to the sea,
From the Downs to Riverina,
Has e'er a gum in all the west
Not heard the concertina?

'Twas peaceful round the campfire blaze,
The long white branches o'er us;
We'd play the tunes of bygone days,
To some good old bush chorus.
Old Erin's harp may sweeter be,
The Scottish pipes blow keener;
But sing an old bush song for me
To the good old concertina.

'Twas cosy by the hut-fire bright
When the pint pot passed between us;
We drowned the voice of the stormy night
With the good old concertina's.
Though trouble drifts along the years,
And the pangs of care grow keener,
My heart is gladdened when it hears
That good old concertina.

Out Back

THE old year went, and the new returned, in the withering weeks of drought,
The cheque was spent that the shearer earned, and the sheds were all cut out;
The publican's words were short and few, and the publican's looks were black —
And the time had come, as the shearer knew, to carry his swag Out Back.

For time means tucker, and tramp you must, where the scrubs and plains are wide,
With seldom a track that a man can trust, or a mountain peak to guide;
All day long in the dust and heat — when summer is on the track —
With stinted stomachs and blistered feet, they carry their swags Out Back.

He tramped away from the shanty there, when the days were long and hot,
With never a soul to know or care if he died on the track or not.
The poor of the city have friends in woe, no matter how much they lack,
But only God and the swagmen know how a poor man fares Out Back.

He begged his way on the parched Paroo and the Warrego tracks once more,
And lived like a dog, as the swagmen do, till the Western stations shore;
But men were many, and sheds were full, for work in the town was slack —
The traveller never got hands in wool, though he tramped for a year Out Back.

In stifling noons when his back was wrung by its load, and the air seemed dead,
And the water warmed in the bag that hung to his aching arm like lead,
Or in times of flood, when plains were seas, and the scrubs were cold and black,
He ploughed in mud to his trembling knees, and paid for his sins Out Back.

And dirty and careless and old he wore, as his lamp of hope grew dim;
He tramped for years till the swag he bore seemed part of himself to him.
As a bullock drags in the sandy ruts, he followed the dreary track,
With never a thought but to reach the huts when the sun went down Out Back.

It chanced one day, when the north wind blew in his face like a furnace-breath,
He left the track for a tank he knew — 'twas a short-cut to his death;
For the bed of the tank was hard and dry, and crossed with many a crack,
And, oh! it's a terrible thing to die of thirst in the scrub Out Back.

A drover came, but the fringe of law was eastward many a mile;
He never reported the thing he saw, for it was not worth his while.
The tanks are full and the grass is high in the mulga off the track,
Where the bleaching bones of a white man lie by his mouldering swag Out Back.

For time means tucker, and tramp they must, where the scrubs and plains are wide,
With seldom a track that a man can trust, or a mountain peak to guide;
All day long in the flies and heat the men of the outside track
With stinted stomachs and blistered feet must carry their swags Out Back.

Freedom on the Wallaby

*Australia's a big country an' Freedom's humping bluey
An' Freedom's on the Wallaby Oh don't you hear her cooey
She's just begun to boomerang she'll knock the tyrants silly
She's going to light another fire and boil another billy*

Our fathers toiled for bitter bread while loafers thrived beside them
But food to eat and clothes to wear their native land denied them
And so they left their native land in spite of their devotion
And so they came or if they stole were sent across the ocean

Then Freedom couldn't stand the glare of Royalty's regalia
She left the loafers where they were and came out to Australia
But now across the mighty main the chains have come to bind her
She little thought to see again the wrongs she left behind her

Our parents toiled to make a home hard grubbing twas and clearing
They wasn't troubled much by lords when they was pioneering
But now that we have made the land a garden full of promise
Old Greed must crook his dirty hand and come and take it from us

So we must fly a rebel flag as others did before us
And we must sing a rebel song and join in rebel chorus
We'll make the tyrants feel the sting of those that they would throttle
They needn't say the fault is ours if blood should stain the wattle

Jack Cornstalk

I MET with Jack Cornstalk in London to-day,
He saw me and coo-eed from over the way.
Oh! the solemn-faced Londoners stared with surprise
At his hair and his height as compared with his size!
For his trousers were short and his collar was low,
And—there's not room to coo-ee in London, I know
But I said to him, 'Jack!' as he gripped my hand fast,
'Oh, I hear that our Country's a nation at last!

'I hear they have launched the new ship of the State,
'And with men at the wheel who are steering it straight.
'I hear 'twas the vote of your Bush mates and you;
'And, oh, tell me, Jack Cornstalk, if this can be true?
'I hear that the bitter black strike times are o'er,
'And that Grabbitt and Co. shall crush Labour no more;
'That Australians are first where Australia was last,
'And the day of the foreign adventurer's past;
'That all things are coming we fought for so long;
'And, oh, tell me, Jack Cornstalk, if I have heard wrong?'

For a moment he dropped the old grin that he wore—
He'd a light in his eyes that was not there before—
And he reached for my hand, which I gave, nothing loth,
And replied in two words, and those words were 'My Oath!
'They are standing up grand, Toby Barton and See,
And Australia's all right, you can take it from me.'

Take it Fightin'

When you've got no chance at all
Take it fightin'.
When you're driven to the wall
Take it fightin'.

There are things that we delight in,
For the wrogin' or the rightin'
But the fool you cannot frighten,
(That you cannot bluff nor frighten)
He is King of all.
(Take it fightin'.)

When you're down an' out an' utter
Take it fightin';
When they put you in the gutter
Take it fightin'.

There are things that we delight in,
For the wrongin' or the rightin'
But the fool you cannot frighten,
(That you cannot bluff nor frighten)
He is King of all.
(Take it fightin'.)

The Soul of a Poet

Henry Lawson, 1905

I have written, long years I have written,
For the sake of my people and right,
I was true when the iron had bitten
Deep into my soul in the night;
I wrote not for praise nor for money,
I craved but the soul and the pen,
And I felt not the sting in the honey
Of writing the kindness of men.

You read and you saw without seeing,
My work seemed a trifle apart,
While the truth of things thrilled through my being,
And the wrong of things murdered my heart!
Cast out, and despised and neglected,
And weak, and in fear, and in debt,
My songs, mutilated! rejected!
Shall ring through the Commonwealth yet!

And you to the pure and the guileless,
And the peace of your comfort and pride —
You have mocked at my bodily vileness,
You have tempted and cast me aside.
But wronged, and cast out, drink-sodden,
But shunned, and "insane" and unclean,
I have dared where few others have trodden,
I have seen what few others have seen.

I have seen your souls bare for a season!
I have heard as a deaf man can hear!
I have seen you deprived of your reason
And stricken with deadliest fear.
And when beautiful night hid the shocking
Black shame of the day that was past,
I felt the Great Universe rocking
With the truth that was coming at last.

Shearers' Song

Henry Lawson, 1888

The season is over;
The shearing is done;
The wages are paid; and
The "sprees" have begun.
But never a shanty
Gets sight of my cheques;
For far down the Murray
My Annie expects
A heart that is faithful,
A head that is clear,
And sufficient provisions
To last for a year