

Classic Poetry Series

**Barcroft Henry Thomas
Boake
- poems -**

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Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake(26 March 1866 – May 1892)

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake, surveyor, stockman, drover and poet, was born on 26 March 1866 at Waterview Bay, Balmain, New South Wales, eldest son of Barcroft Capel Boake (b. Dublin, 1838), professional photographer, and his wife Florence Eva, née Clarke (1846-1879). His parents had married on 7 March 1865; three of their nine children died in infancy. He was an active child, fond of sport, but showed early signs of depression, forerunner to that melancholia which was to oppress him for much of his life and ultimately to cause his death.

Childhood

Young Barcroft's childhood was spent in Sydney, and for two years in Noumea, where he spent time with a friend of the family. When living in North Sydney, which was then mainly bush, he had to ride his pony to Milson's Point before going to school across the harbour. Later he was to be described "a good horseman, and a first class bushman" and it was said "he looked infinitely better on a horse than off."

His father, though an agnostic, profoundly distrusted state schools and had the boy educated at private institutions. From 8 to 9 he attended a school run by the Misses Cook at Milson's Point. He spent the next two years with Allen Hughan and his wife, friends of the family, in Noumea, where he picked up some French. On his return he had two terms at Sydney Grammar School and then five years at the private school of Edward Blackmore in Hunter Street.

Barcroft had four younger sisters, Adelaide, Violet, Clare and Evie.

When he was thirteen Barcroft's mother died in childbirth and his grandmother took over her role in the household. One of Adelaide's children, Doris Kerr, later became a published author, writing under the pseudonym of Capel Boake.

Adulthood

Barcroft trained as a surveyor in Sydney before taking up a surveyor's assistant position in 1886, based at Rocklands Farm, near Adaminaby in the Monaro district of New South Wales. He spent two happy years in this district, becoming friends with the McKeahnie family, and in particular their two daughters, Jean and May. Their brother Charlie, who features in some of Barcroft's poems, was

an excellent horseman and was said to be one of the men on whom Banjo Paterson based the Man from Snowy River . Barcroft's experiences at this time, which were later to feature in his poems, included chasing brumbies in the Snowy Mountains and skiing at Kiandra.

In July 1886 he began as assistant surveyor to E. Commins near Adaminaby in the Monaro district, where he was to remain for two years. There at Rocklands station on the evening of 14 July 1888 his celebrated mock-hanging took place. For a prank he and a friend hanged themselves from a beam. The friend's performance was tentative, but Boake's was almost fatal. After two days he wrote a rueful account of it to his father. A more imaginative version was published in the Bulletin nearly four years later. At the end of his term he rode some three hundred miles (483 km) to Mullah station, near Trangie in the Narromine district, where he stayed as a stockman until mid-1889. Then he moved north and by June had crossed the Queensland border. His experiences as a drover began about this time, and in October he ended up with cattle at Burrenbilla, near Cunnamulla. There he spent some weeks waiting for his next job, and for the first time read in their entirety the poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon. Some comments he made in letters are revealing enough: 'Gordon is the favourite—I may say only poet of the back-blocker; and I am sorry to say Emile Zola is his favourite prose writer ... I am afraid after all the bushman is not a very fine animal; but at any rate, even in his most vicious moments, he is far above many of the so-called respectable dwellers in towns'. This attitude finds sharper expression: 'If I could only write it, there is a poem to be made out of the back-country. Some man will come yet who will be able to grasp the romance of Western Queensland ... For there is a romance, though a grim one—a story of drought and flood, fever and famine, murder and suicide, courage and endurance ... I wonder if a day will come when these men will rise up—when the wealthy man...shall see pass before him a band of men—all of whom died in his service, and whose unhallowed graves dot his run—the greater portion hollow, shrunken, burning with the pangs of thirst'. At the time Boake could not foresee that he was to be essentially that poet, commemorating in a bitter threnody the never-sleeping drover and in its two final stanzas condemning the absentee owner.

At the end of his term at Rocklands, Barcroft headed north to seek adventure and work as a stockman and a drover. He initially worked on a sheep station at Trangie (near Narromine) then headed north again, droving cattle on the main Queensland-Victoria stock route from the Diamantina and then working at Burrenbilla Station, near Cunnamulla, in Western New South Wales.

On returning to Bathurst in 1890 he lost all his savings when his droving boss splurged his cheque in a drunken spree. He had little choice but to return to

surveying in the Riverina where he began to write poetry based on his bush experiences. His work first appeared in the "Sydney Mail" in 1890, and in 1891 his first verses were published in the "Bulletin".

Death

In December 1891, at the end of his term of engagement in the Riverina, he returned to Sydney where he was caught by the effects of the 1891-1893 financial depression. His last five months were the gloomiest. He returned home at the end of 1891 to find it a place of grief. His father was practically bankrupt, having lost the last of his money in Melbourne land speculations. Boake contributed his savings, some £50, to cover immediate household expenses. His father sums up the position: 'His grandma was invalided and confined to her bed and his eldest sister had found marriage a failure and was domiciled with me her husband being a helpless creature was dismissed from the Railway Dept., I myself was hopeless about everything and quite unfit to cope with the fiend melancholia that I plainly saw was oppressing him'. He mentions a blow that Boake received: 'About this time he received a letter from the country, and in reference to it said to one of his sisters: "I hear that my best girl is going to be married".' A return to the outback might have saved Boake, but he seemed to have lost the capacity to make up his mind about anything. A few attempts to find work in the city proved futile and he sank into brooding inactivity. On 2 May 1892 he left the house. Eight days later his body was discovered in the scrub at Long Bay, Middle Harbour, hanging by his stockwhip from a bough.

Physically tough, emotionally sensitive, temperamentally unstable, financially inept, Boake may appear a predestined victim. This picture, however exaggerated, is closer to the record than one of him reasonedly rejecting materialistic civilization, finding God dead in Australia, and accordingly hanging himself. Modern drugs might have postponed Boake's suicide for years. His extant prose, neither extensive nor very effective, remains unpublished. Nearly all his published verse was collected and issued by A. G. Stephens in 1897, with a 'Memoir' by Stephens, a critical biography on which any later account of Boake's life is almost wholly dependent. The memoir, in its turn, was almost wholly dependent on an account written for Stephens by the poet's father, together with some letters from Boake himself. In a second edition in 1913 some poems were added, the notes were fewer, the first appearance of each poem was not given and Stephens's acknowledgment of his debt to Boake's father was omitted. Boake's reputation with the general reader rests on *Where the Dead Men Lie* (first printed in the *Bulletin* 19 December 1891 and signed 'Surcingle'). Critics have since pointed to other poems and have speculated on Boake's possible development had he lived longer. But his temperament does not afford

any rosy prognosis; and it is at least arguable that he died when he had written his best poetry.

The story of Barcroft's brief but interesting life is told in the form of a novel in Hugh Capel's book, "Where the Dead Men Lie , The Story of Barcroft Boake, Bush Poet of the Monaro ." While the story cannot be entirely "true" historically, it is told in a way that seeks to be true to the spirit of what happened. The nature of Barcroft's relationships with the McKeahnie girls is a key feature in this story.

In 1896 Barcroft's father wrote a detailed Memoir about his son.

A Bushman's Love

You say we bushmen cannot love—
Our lives are too prosaic: hence
We lose or lack that finer sense
That raises some few men above
Their fellows, setting them apart
As vessels of a finer make—
The acme of the potter's art—
Are placed apart upon the shelf.
So he is more than common delf,
And, more than brute in human guise,
Who, seeking, finds his nobler self
Twin-mirrored in a woman's eyes!
Yet these things bring their penalty:
For oft the merest touch will break
These vessels of a finer make;
And throats attuned to noblest key
A draught of air will set awry,
And stifle in an ulcerous sore
The voice that floated to the sky
And silence it for evermore . . .

You say we bushmen cannot love—
That, like our foe, the fire-fiend,
We blaze, until a river-bend—
Nay, less, a pebble-graven groove
Where waters thread—doth bid us stay:
Our passions for a month, a week
Flare out and then they die away—
For separation, like the creek
That stays the bush fire, bars the way.

You say we bushmen cannot love.
Well, have it so! but this I swear—
That she possessed a power to move
The dullest boor to do or dare.
But I, as being somewhat shy,
Became the target for her wit
How oft in wantonness she'd pit
The blazing lances of her eye

And keener rapier of her tongue,
That carelessly made lightning play,
Until to action I was stung,
And, like a dumb beast, stood at bay . . .

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

A Memory

Adown the grass-grown paths we strayed,
 The evening cowslips ope'd
Their yellow eyes to look at her,
 The love-sick lilies moped
With envy that she rather chose
To take a creamy-petalled rose
And lean it 'gainst her ebon hair,
All in that garden fair.

A languid breeze, with stolen scent
 Of box-bloom in his grasp,
Sighed out his longing in her ear,
 And with his dying gasp
Scattered the perfume at her feet
To blend with others not less sweet;
He loved her, but she did not care,
All in that garden fair.

The rose she honoured nodded down,
 His comrades burst with spite:
Poor fool! he knew not he was doomed
 To barely last the night;
Are hearts to her but as that flower,
The plaything of a careless hour,
To lacerate and never spare
All in that garden fair.

I held her hand that I might trace
 Her fortune in its palm;
A bolder moonbeam than the rest
 Crept up and kissed her arm,
And, kissing once, was loth to leave,
So hid himself within the sleeve
That clasped the lithe arm, white and bare,
All in that garden fair.

I traced her fortune: love and wealth,-
 Tho' life, alas! was short,
But will that wealth be bought with love?

Or love with wealth be bought?

I know not, knowing only this -
Her hand seemed waiting for a kiss,
I longed to, but I did not dare
All in that garden fair.

But she, alas! is not for me,
 And I am not for her;
Yet ever deep within my thoughts
 A faint regret must stir
A thrill of longing - that among
Those moonlit paths with lover's tongue
I might return, and woo her there
All in that garden fair.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

A Song

I've a kiss from a warmer lover
 Than maiden earth can be:
She blew it up to the skies above her,
 And now it has come to me;
From the far-away it has come today
 With a breath of the old salt sea.

She lay and laughed on a lazy billow,
 Far away on the deep,
Who had gathered the froth for my lady's pillow -
 Gathered a sparkling heap;
And the ocean's cry was the lullaby
 That cradled my love to sleep.

Far away on the blue Pacific
 There doth my lady roam,
That is oft-times gay, but as oft terrific:
 Her jewels are beads of foam:
In a coral cave, where a blue-green wave
 Keeps guard, is my lady's home.

She claps her hands, and her henchman hurries
 West of the sunset sheen:
'Tis he who comes when a mist-wrack scurries,
 Skirting the deep ravine;
And my heart is stirred by the loving word
 He carries me from my queen.

A drop distilled from a lotos flower -
 That is the magic key
To unlock the cage, and my soul has power

To gather itself and flee,
At my love's behest, where she waits her guest
In a palace beneath the sea.

Joy is ours that is almost anguish:
Pain that is almost sweet:
We kiss; and the ocean creatures languish
Jealously at our feet;
The sight grows dim, and the senses swim
When I and my lady greet.

There to dream, while the soul is swooning
Under a woven spell -
Hushed to sleep by her tender crooning
Learnt from the ocean swell -
There to rest on her jewelled breast,
To love and be loved as well!

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

A Song From A Sandhill

Drip, drip, drip! It tinkles on the fly—
The pitiless outpouring of an overburdened sky:
Each drooping frond of pine has got a jewel at its tip—
First a twinkle, then a sprinkle, and a drip, drip, drip.

Drip, drip, drip! They must be shearing up on high.
Can't you see the snowy fleeces that are rolling, rolling by?
How many bales, I wonder, are they branding to the clip?
P'raps the Boss is keeping tally with this drip, drip, drip.

Drip, drip, drip! while the sodden branches sigh:
The jovial jackass dare not laugh for fear that he should cry:
The merry magpie's melody is frozen on his lip;
He glowers at the showers, with their drip, drip, drip.

Drip, drip, drip! and one's 'nap' is far from dry:
'Tis hard to keep the water out, however one may try:
I'd sell myself to Satan for three fingers of a nip:
There's cramps and vile rheumatics in that drip, drip, drip.

Pat, pat, pat! how it patters on the land!
'Tis certainly consoling to be camped upon the sand:
There's naught but mud and water over yonder on the flat,
Where the spots of rain are splashing with their pat, pat, pat.

Rain, rain, rain! and the day is nearly done:
I wonder shall we see another rising of the sun?
Has the sky shut down and stifled him; or will he come again
And stop the cursed clatter of this rain, rain, rain?

Drop, drop, drop! monotonous as Life,
With now and then a western breeze that cuts one like a knife:
Sputter on the fire: is it never going to stop?
Has the weather-clerk gone crazy, with his drop, drop, drop?

Drip, drip, drip! the squatter wouldn't say
'Thank God!' so earnestly if he were camped in it to-day.
'Tis in at last: I knew it! there's a pool about my hip:
Oh, 'tis maddening and sadd'ning, with its drip, drip, drip!

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

A Valentine

A Valentine
The Bree was up; the floods were out
Around the hut of Culgo Jim:
The hand of God had broke the drought
And filled the channels to the brim:
The outline of the hut loomed dim
Among the shades of murmurous pine,
That eve of good Saint Valentine.

He watched, and to his sleepy gaze
The dying embers of the fire,
Its yellow reds and pearly greys,
Made pictures of his younger days.
Outside the waters mounted higher
Beneath a half-moon's sickly shine,
That eve of good Saint Valentine.

There, in the great slab fire-place
The oak log, burnt away to coal,
Showed him the semblance of a face
Framed in a golden aureole:
Eyes, the clear windows of a soul—
Soul of a maid, who used to sign
Herself, 'Jim, dear, your Valentine.'

Lips, whose pink curves were made to bear
Love's kisses, not to be the mock
Of grave-worms . . . Suddenly a whirr,
And twelve loud strokes upon the clock;
Then at the door a gentle knock.
The collie dog began to whine
That morn of good Saint Valentine.

He opened; by his heels the hound
Sniffed at the night. 'Who comes, and why?
What? no one! Hush! was that a sound?
Methought I heard a human cry.
Bah! 'twas a curlew passing by
Out where the lignum bushes twine,
This morn of good Saint Valentine.

'What ails the dog? Down, Stumpy, down!
No? Well, lead on, perchance a
It is, poor brute, that fears to drown.
Heavens! how chill the waters creep!
Why, Stumpy, do you splash and leap?
'Tis but a foolish quest of thine,
This morn of good Saint Valentine.

'Nay, not so foolish as I thought . . .
Hark! 'mid those reeds a feeble scream!
Mother of God! a cradle—brought
Down from some homestead up the stream!
A white-robed baby! Do I dream?
No, 'tis that dear dead love of mine
Who sends me thus a Valentine!

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

A Vision Out West

Far reaching down's a solid sea sunk everlastingly to rest,
And yet whose billows seem to be for ever heaving toward the west
The tiny fieldmice make their nests, the summer insects buzz and hum
Among the hollows and the crests of this wide ocean stricken dumb,
Whose rollers move for ever on, though sullenly, with fettered wills,
To break in voiceless wrath upon the crumbled bases of far hills,
Where rugged outposts meet the shock, stand fast, and hurl them back again,
An avalanche of earth and rock, in tumbled fragments on the plain;
But, never heeding the rebuff, to right and left they kiss the feet
Of hanging cliff and bouldered bluff till on the farther side they meet,
And once again resume their march to where the afternoon sun dips
Toward the west, and Heaven's arch salutes the Earth with ruddy lips.

Such is the scene that greets the eye: wide sweep of plain to left and right:
In front low hills that seem to lie wrapped in a veil of yellow light—
Low peaks that through the summer haze frown from their fancied altitude,
As some small potentate might gaze upon a ragged multitude.
Thus does the battlemented pile of high-built crags, all weather-scarred,
Where grass land stretches mile on mile, keep scornful solitary guard;
Where the sweet spell is not yet broke, while from her wind-swept, sun-kissed
dream
Man's cruel touch has not yet woke this Land where silence reigns supreme:

Not the grim silence of a cave, some vaulted stalactited room,
Where feeble candle-shadows wave fantastically through the gloom—
But restful silence, calm repose: the spirit of these sky-bound plains
Tempers the restless blood that flows too fiery through the swelling veins;
Breathes a faint message in the ear, bringing the weary traveller peace;
Whispers, 'Take heart and never fear, for soon the pilgrimage will cease!
Beat not thy wings against the cage! Seek not to burst the padlocked door
That leads to depths thou canst not gauge! Life is all thine: why seek for more?
Read in the slow sun's drooping disc an answer to the thoughts that vex:
Ponder it well, and never risk the substance for its dim reflex.'

Such is the silent sermon told to those who care to read this page
Where once a mighty ocean rolled in some dim, long-forgotten age.
Here, where the Mitchell grass waves green, the never-weary ebb and flow
Of glassy surges once was seen a thousand thousand years ago:
To such a sum those dead years mount that Time has grown too weary for

The keeping of an endless count, and long ago forgot their score.

But now—when, hustled by the wind, fast-flying, fleecy cloud-banks drift
Across the sky where, silver-skinned, the pale moon shines whene'er they lift,
And throws broad patches in strange shapes of light and shade, that seem to
meet

In dusky coastline where sharp capes jut far into a winding-sheet
Of ghostly, glimmering, silver rays that struggle 'neath an inky ledge
Of driving cloud, and fill deep bays rent in the shadow's ragged edge—
Sprung from the gloomy depths of Time, faint shapes patrol the spectral sea,
Primeval phantom-forms that climb the lifeless billows silently,
Trailing along their slimy length in thirst for one another's blood,
Writhing in ponderous trials of strength, as once they did before the flood.

They sink, as, driven from the North by straining oar and favouring gale,
A misty barge repels the froth which hides her with a sparkling veil:
High-curved the sharpened beak doth stand, slicing the waters in the lead;
The low hull follows, thickly manned by dim, dead men of Asian breed:
Swift is her passage, short the view the wan moon's restless rays reveal
Of dusky, fierce-eyed warrior crew, of fluttering cloth and flashing steel;
Of forms that mouldered ages past, ere from recesses of the sea,
With earthquake throes this land was cast in Nature's writhing agony.

As the warm airs of Spring-time chase reluctant snows from off the range,
And plant fresh verdure in their place, so the dim-visions shadows change;
And glimpses of what yet shall be bid the past fly beyond all ken,
While rising from futurity appear vast colonies of men
Who from the sea-coast hills have brought far-quarried spoils to build proud
homes
Of high-piled palaces, all wrought in sloping roofs and arching domes,
Smooth-pillared hall, or cool arcade, and slenderest sky-piercing spire,
Where the late-sinking moon has laid her tender tints of mellow fire,
And golden paves the spacious ways where, o'er the smoothen granite flags,
The lightning-driven car conveys its freight with force that never lags.

A goodly city! where no stain of engine-smoke or factory grime
Blemishes walls that will retain their pristine pureness for all time:
Lying as one might take a gem and set it in some strange device
Of precious metal, and might hem it round with stones of lesser price—
So from encircling fields doth spring this city where, in emerald sheen,
Man hath taught Nature how to bring a mantle of perennial green—
Hewing canals whose banks are fringed by willows bending deeply down

To waters flowing yellow-tinged beneath the moon toward the town—
Filling from mighty reservoirs, sunk in the hollows of the plain,
That flood the fields without a pause though Summer should withhold her rain.
Labour is but an empty name to those who dwell within this land,
For they have boldly learnt to tame the lightning's flash with iron hand:
That Force, the dartings from whose eyes not even gods might brave and live,
The blasting essence of the skies, proud Jupiter's prerogative—
His flashing pinions closely clipt, pent in a cunning-fashioned cage,
Of all his flaming glory stript—these men direct his tempered rage:
A bondman, at their idlest breath with silent energy he speeds,
From dawn of life to hour of death, to execute their slightest needs.

Slow to her couch the moon doth creep, but, going, melts in sparkling tears
Of dew, because we may not keep this vision of the future years:
Swiftly, before the sunrise gleam, I watch it melting in the morn—
The snowy city of my dream, the home of nations yet unborn!

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

A Wayside Queen

She was born in the season of fire,
When a mantle of murkiness lay
On the front of the crimson Destroyer:
And none knew the name of her sire
But the woman; and she, ashen grey,
In the fierce pangs of motherhood lay.

The skies were aflame at her coming
With a marvellous message of ill;
And fear-stricken pinions were drumming
The hot, heavy air, whence the humming
Of insects rose, sudden and shrill,
As they fled from that hell-begirt hill.

Then the smoke-serpent writhed in her tresses:
The flame kissed her hard on the lips:
She smiled at their ardent caresses
As the wanton who smiles, but represses
A lover's hot haste, and so slips
From the arm that would girdle her hips.

Such the time of her coming and fashion:
How long ere her day shall be sped,
And she goes to rekindle past passion
With languorous glances that flash on
The long-straightened limbs of the dead,
Where they lie in a winter-wet bed?

Where the wide waves of evergreen carry
The song sad and soft of the surge
To feathered battalions that harry
The wizen-armed bloodwoods that tarry
For ever, chained down on the verge
Of a river that mutters a dirge.

'Tis a dirge for the dead men it mutters—
Those weed-entwined strangers who lie
With the drift in the whirlpools and gutters—
Swoll'n hand or a garment that flutters

Wan shreds as the waters rush by,
And the flotsam, froth-freckled, rides high.

Is it there that she buries her lovers,
This woman in scarlet and black?
Those swart caballeros, the drovers—
What sovranity set them above hers?
Riding in by a drought-beset track
To a fate which is worse than the rack.

A queen, no insignia she weareth
Save the dark, lustrous crown of her hair:
Her beauty the sceptre she beareth:
For men and their miseries careth
As little as tigresses care
For the quivering flesh that they tear.

She is sweet as white peppermint flowers,
And harsh as red gum when it drips
From the heart of a hardwood that towers
Straight up: she hath marvellous powers
To draw a man's soul through his lips
With a kiss like the stinging of whips.

Warm nights, weighted down with wild laughter,
When sex is unsexed and uncouth:
In the chorus that climbs to the rafter
No thought of the days to come after:
She has little regret and less ruth
As she tempts men to murder their youth.

Is she marked down as yet by the flaming
Great eye of the Righter of Wrong?
How long ere the Dreaded One, claiming
His due, shall make end of our shaming?
'How long, Mighty Father, how long?'
Is our wearisome burden of song.

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Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

An Allegory

The fight was over, and the battle won
A soldier, who beneath his chieftain's eye
Had done a might deed and done it well,
And done it as the world will have it done—
A stab, a curse, some quick play of the butt,
Two skulls cracked crosswise, but the colours saved—
Proud of his wounds, proud of the promised cross,
Turned to his rear-rank man, who on his gun
Leant heavily apart. 'Ho, friend!' he called,
'You did not fight then: were you left behind?
I saw you not.' The other turned and showed
A gapping, red-lipped wound upon his breast.
'Ah,' said he sadly, 'I was in the smoke!'
Threw up his arms, shivered, and fell and died.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

An Easter Rhyme

Easter Monday in the city -
Rattle, rattle, rumble, rush;
Tom and Jerry, Nell and Kitty,
All the down-the-harbour "push,"
Little thought have they, or pity,
For a wanderer from the bush.

Shuffle, feet, a merry measure,
Hurry, Jack and find your Jill,
Let her - if it give her pleasure -
Flaunt her furbelow and frill,
Kiss her while you have the leisure,
For tomorrow brings the mill.

Go ye down the harbour, winding
'Mid the eucalypts and fern,
Respite from your troubles finding,
Kiss her, till her pale cheeks burn,
For to-morrow will the grinding
Mill-stones of the city turn.

Stunted figures, sallow faces,
Sad girls striving to be gay
In their cheap sateens and laces.
Ah! how different 'tis to-day
Where they're going to the races -
Yonder - up Monaro way!

Light mist flecks the Murrumbidgee's
Bosom with a silver stain,
On the trembling wire bridge is
Perched a single long legged crane,
While the yellow, slaty ridges
Sweep up proudly from the plain.

Somebody is after horses -
Donald, Charlie or young Mac -
Suddenly his arm he tosses,
Presently you'll hear the crack,

As the symbol of the cross is
Made on 'Possum's steaming back.

Stirling first! the Masher follows,
Ly-ee-moon and old Trump Card,
Helter skelter through the shallows
Of the willow-shaded ford,
Up the lane and past the "gallows,"
Driven panting to the yard.

In the homestead, what a clatter;
Habits black and habits blue,
Full a dozen red lips patter:
"Who is going to ride with who?"
Mixing sandwiches and chatter,
Gloves to button, hair to "do,"

Horses stamp and stirrups jingle,
"Dash the filly! won't she wait?"
Voices, bass and treble, mingle,
"Look sharp, May, or we'll be late;"
How the pulses leap and tingle
As you lift her featherweight!

At the thought the heart beats quicker
Than an old Bohemian's should,
Beating like my battered ticker
(Pawned this time, I fear, for good).
Bah! I'll go and have a liquor
With the genial "Jimmy Wood."

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

At Devlin's Siding

What made the porter stare so hard? what made the porter stare
And eye the tall young woman and the bundle that she bare?

What made the tall young woman flush, and strive to hide her face,
As the train slid past the platform and the guard swung in his place?

What made her look so stealthily both up and down the line,
And quickly give the infant suck to still its puny whine?

Why was the sawmill not at work? why were the men away?
They might have turned a woman from a woeful deed that day.

Why did the pine-scrub stand so thick? why was the place so lone
That nothing but the soldier-birds might hear a baby moan?

Why doth the woman tear the child? why doth the mother take
The infant from her breast, and weep as if her heart would break?

Why doth she moan, and grind her teeth, and weave an awful curse
To fall on him who made of her a harlot-ay, and worse?

Why should she fall upon her knees and, with a trembling hand,
Clear off the underbrush and scrape a cradle in the sand?

Why doth she shudder as she hears the buzz of eager flies,
And bind a handkerchief across the sleeping infant's eyes?

Why doth she turn, but come again and feverishly twine,
To shield it from the burning sun, the fragrant fronds of pine?

Why, as she strides the platform, does she try hard not to think
That somewhere in the scrub a babe is calling her for drink?

Why, through the alleys of the pine, do languid breezes sigh
A low refrain that seems to mock her with a baby's cry?

Seek not to know! but pray for her, and pity, as the train
Carries a white-faced woman back to face the world again.

At The "J. C."

None ever knew his name,
Honoured, or one of shame,
Highborn or lowly;
Only upon that tree
Two letters, J and C,
Carved by him, mark where he
Lay dying slowly.

Why came he to the West?
Had then the parent nest
Grown so distasteful?
What cause had he to shun
Life, ere 'twas well begun?
Was he that youngest son,
Of substance wasteful?

Were Fate and he at War?
Was it a pennance, or
Renunciation?
Is it a glad release?
Has he at length found peace,
Now Death hath bid him cease
Peregrination?

Hands white, without a blot,
Told us that he was not
One of "the vulgar."
What can those cyphers be?
Two only, J and C.
Carved in his agony
Deep in the mulga.

Was there no woman's face
Whose sunny smile might chase
Clouds from above him?
No bosom white as snow?
No lips to whisper low,
"Why doth he seek to go?
Do I not love him."

Haunted by flashing charms -
White bosoms, rounded arms,
Lips of fair ladies,
Striving to break some link,
Was 't that which made him sink,
Dragged by the curse of drink
Deeper than Hades?

Now, the wind across the grave,
Tuning a sultry stave,
Drearly whistles,
Stirring those branches where
Two silent cyphers stare,
Two letters of a prayer,
God's Son's initials.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Babs Malone

Babs Malone Now the squatters and the cockies,
Shearers, trainers, and their jockeys
Had gathered them together for a meeting on the flat;
They had mustered all their forces,
Owners brought their fastest horses,
Monaro-bred—I couldn't give them greater praise than that.

'Twas a lovely day in Summer—
What the blacksmith called a hummer—
The swelling ears of wheat and oats had lost their tender green,
And breezes made them shiver,
Trending westward to the river—
The river of the golden sands, the moaning Eucumbene.

If you cared to take the trouble
You could watch the misty double,
The shadow of the flying clouds that skimmed the Boogong's brow,
Throwing light and shade incessant
On the Bull Peaks' ragged crescent,
Upon whose gloomy forehead lay a patch of winter's snow.

Idly watching for the starting
Of the race that he had part in,
Old Gaylad stood and champed his bit, his weight about nine stone;
His owner stood beside him,
Who was also going to ride him—
A shearer from Gegerick, whose name was Ned Malone.

But Gaylad felt disgusted,
For his joints were fairly rusted:
He longed to feel the pressure of the jockey on his back;
And he felt that for a pin he'd
Join his mates, who loudly whinnied
For him to go and meet them at the post upon the track.

From among the waiting cattle
Came the sound of childish prattle,
And the wife brought up their babe to kiss his father for good luck.
Said Malone: 'When I am seated

On old Gaylad, and am treated
With fairish play, I'll bet we never finish in the ruck.'
But the babe was not contented,
Though his pinafore was scented
With oranges and sticky from his lollies, for he cried—
This gallant little laddy,
As he toddled to his daddy,
And raised his arms imploringly—'Pease dad! div Babs a wide!'

Then the father, how he chuckled
For the pride of it! and buckled
The surcingle, and placed the babe astride the racing pad:
He did it, though he oughtn't;
And by pure good luck he shortened
The stirrups, and adjusted them to suit the tiny lad,

Who was seemingly delighted:
Not a little bit affrighted,
He sat and twined a chubby hand among the horse's mane:
His whip was in the other;
But all suddenly the mother
Shrieked, 'Take him off!' and then the field came thund'ring down the plain!

'Twas the Handicap was coming,
And the music of their drumming
Beat dull upon the turf that in its summer coat was dressed:
The racehorse reared and started;
Then the flimsy bridle parted,
And Gaylad, bearing featherweight, was striding with the rest!

That scene cannot be painted—
How the poor young mother fainted!
How the father drove his spurs into the nearest saddle-horse!
What to do he had no notion;
For you'd easier turn the ocean
Than stop the Handicap that then was half-way round the course.

On the bookies at their yelling,
On the cheap-jacks at their selling,
On the crowd there fell a silence as the squadron passed the stand;
Gayest colours flashing brightly,
And the baby clinging tightly,

A wisp of Gaylad's mane still twisted in his little hand.

Not a thought had he of falling,
Though his little legs were galling,
And the wind blew out his curls behind him in a golden stream;
Though the motion made him dizzy, Yet his baby brain was busy:
For hadn't he at length attained the substance of his dream?

He was now a jockey really!
And he saw his duty clearly
To do his best to win and justify his father's pride;
So he clicked his tongue to Gaylad,
Whispering softly, 'Get away, lad!' . . .
The old horse cocked an ear and put six inches on his stride.

Then the jockeys who were tailing
Saw a big bay horse come sailing
Through the midst of them with nothing but a baby on his back;
And this startling apparition
Coolly took up its position
With a view of making running on the inside of the track.

Oh, Gaylad was a beauty!
For he knew and did his duty:
Though his reins were flying loosely, strange to say, he never fell;
But held himself together,
For his weight was but a feather.
Bob Murphy, when he saw him, murmured something like 'Oh, hell!'

But Gaylad passed the filly;
Passed Jack Costigan on Chili;
Cut down the coward Wakatip and challenged Guelder Rose . . .
Here it was he showed his cunning—
Let the mare make all the running:
They turned into the straight at stride for stride and nose for nose.

But Babs was just beginning
To have fears about his winning:
In fact, to tell the truth, my hero felt inclined to cry;
For the Rose was still in blossom;
And two lengths behind her Possum
And gallant little Sterling, slow but sure, were drawing nigh.

Yes! Babsie's heart was failing;
For he felt old Gaylad ailing:
Another fifty yards to go! . . . he felt his chance was gone.
Could he do it? much he doubted:
Then the crowd—oh, how they shouted!
For Babs had never dropped his whip, and now he laid it on!

Down the straight the leaders thundered
While the people cheered and wondered,
For ne'er before had any seen the equal of that sight;
And never will they, maybe,
See a flaxen-headed baby
Flog racehorse to the winning-post with all his tiny might.

But Gaylad's strength is waning—
Gone, in fact, beyond regaining:
Poor Babs is flogging hopelessly, as pale as any ghost:
But he looks so brave and pretty
That the Rose's jock takes pity,
And, pulling back a trifle, lets the baby pass the post.

What cheering and tin-kettling
Had they after at the settling!
And how they fought to see who'd hold the baby on his lap;
As President Montgomery,
With a brimming glass of Pommery,
Proposed the health of Babs Malone, who'd won the Handicap.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Desiree

Will she spring with a blush from the arms of Dawn,
When the sleepy songsters prune
Their dewy vestments on bush and thorn,
And the jovial magpie winds his horn
In sweet réveil to the lazy morn
And the sun comes all too soon?
Will she come with him from the farthest rim
Of the blue Pacific sea?
But how shall I know my lady? and by
What token will she know me?

Will she come to me in the noonday hush,
When the flowers are fast asleep
'Neath their counterpane of emerald plush
In the fragrant warmth of the under-brush,
Where Spring still lingers on moist and lush—
While naught but the shadows creep,
And all is rest but the eager quest
And the buzz of the tireless bee?
But how shall I know my lady then?
And how will my love know me?

Or will she come when the gallant Day
At the hands of the Night lies dead?
When stealthy creatures have right of way
Among the branches to romp and play,
And the great green forest turns ashen gray
At the sound of the dead men's tread?
Will my lady slip with smile on lip
From the heart of a white box tree?
But how shall I know 'tis she who comes?
And how will she know 'tis me?

Will her hair be tinged as when sunbeams gird
A castle of carmine rock?
Or brown as a leaf in the sun's kiss curled?
Or dark as the wing of that sable bird
Whose hated voice is so often heard
In the wake of the bleating flock?

Or will it be rolled in a crown of gold,
An emblem of royalty?
But how will I know 'tis she who comes?
And how will she know 'tis me?

Is her ear as shapely as Venus' shell,
And pierced by a diamond gleam?
Is her hand as white as the immortelle?
Her voice as sweet as that sounding bell
The gray bird tolls to the listening dell
Where the ti-tree hides the stream?
Have the words been said? is my lady wed?
Is my lady bond or free?—
No matter who claims her earthly form,
For her heart belongs to me!

Will her eyes be clear as the amber flight
Of the stream over sandstone bar?
Or darkly blue as the vault of night?
Will her flesh show pink through its veil of white,
And its violet-pencilled curves be bright
As the polished breast of a star?
And where, oh, where may you find a pair
Who shall love so well as we?
But how shall I know my lady? by
What token will she know me?

Will her cloak be shaped from the southern skies
And girt by a starry sash—
Like an azure mist, as my lady hies
With the light of love in her kindling eyes?
Will she move with the solemn grace that lies
In the towering mountain ash! . . .
Will she come at all? may it not befall
That our fates are dark and dree?
That I may never know her at all,
And she may never know me?

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Down The River

Hark, the sound of it drawing nearer,
Clink of hobble and brazen bell;
Mark the passage of stalwart shearer,
Bidding Monaro soil farewell.

Where is he making for? Down the river,
Down the river with eager tread;
Where is he making for? Down the river,
Down the river to seek a 'shed'.

Where is his dwelling on old Monaro?
Buckley's Crossing, or Jindaboine?
Dry Plain is it, or sweet Bolaira?
P'raps 'tis near where the rivers join
Where is he making for? Down the river.
When, oh when, will he turn him back?
Soft sighs follow him down the river,
Moist eyes gaze at his fading track.

See, behind him his pack-horse, ambling,
Bears the weight of his master's kit,
Oft and oft from the pathway rambling,
Crops unhampered by cruel bit.
Where is he making for? Equine rover,
Sturdy nag from the Eucumbene,
Tempted down by the thought of clover,
Springing luscious in Riverine.

Dreams of life and its future chances,
Snatch of song to beguile the way;
Through green crannies the sunlight glances,
Silver-gilding the bright 'Jack Shay'.
"So long, mate, I can stay no longer,
So long, mate, I've no time to stop,
Pens are waiting me at Mahonga,
Bluegong, Grubben and Pullitop.

"What! you say that the river's risen?
What! that the melted snow has come?

What! that it locks and bars our prison?
Many's the mountain stream I've swum.
I must onward and cross the river,
So long, mate, for I cannot stay;
I must onward and cross the river,
Over the river there lies my way."

One man short when the roll they're calling;
One man short at old Bobby Rand's;
Heads are drooping and tears are falling
Up on Monaro's mountain lands.

Where is he making for? Down the river,
Down the river of slimy bed;
Where is he making for? Down the river,
Down the river that bears him, dead.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Featherstonhaugh

Brookong station lay half-asleep
Dozed in the waning western glare
('Twas before the run had stocked with sheep
And only cattle depastured there)
As the Bluccap mob reined up at the door
And loudly saluted Featherstonhaugh.

"My saintly preacher," the leader cried,
"I stand no nonsense, as you're aware,
I've a word for you if you'll step outside,
just drop that pistol and have a care;
I'll trouble you, too, for the key of the store,
For we're short of tucker, friend Featherstonhaugh."

The muscular Christian showed no fear,
Though he handed the key with but small delay.
He never answered the ruffian's jeer
Except by a look which seemed to say -
"Beware, my friend, and think twice before
You raise the devil in Featherstonhaugh."

Two hours after he reined his horse
Up in Urana, and straightway went
To the barracks - the trooper was gone, of course,
Blindly nosing a week-old scent
Away in the scrub around Mount Galore.
"Confound the fellow!" quoth Featherstonhaugh.

"Will any man of you come with me
And give this Bluecap a dressing-down?"
They all regarded him silently
As he turned his horse, with a scornful frown.
"You're curs, the lot of you, to the core -
I'll go by myself," said Featherstonhaugh.

The scrub was thick on Urangeline
As he followed the tracks that twisted through
The box and dogwood and scented pine
(One of their horses had cast a shoe).

Steeped from his youth in forest lore,
He could track like a nigger, could Featherstonhaugh.

He paused as he saw the thread of smoke
From the outlaw camp, and he marked the sound
Of a hobble-check, as it sharply broke
The silence that held the scrub-land bound.
There were their horses - two, three, four -
"It's a risk, but I'll chance it!" quoth Featherstonhaugh.

He loosened the first, and it walked away,
But his comrade's science could not be bought,
For he raised his head with a sudden neigh,
And plainly showed that he'd not be caught.
As a bullet sang from a rifle-bore -
"It's time to be moving," quoth Featherstonhaugh.

The brittle pine, as they broke away,
Crackled like ice in a winter's ponds,
The strokes fell fast on the cones that lay
Buried beneath the withered fronds
That softly carpet the sandy floor -
Swept two on the tracks of Featherstonhaugh.

They struck that path that the stock had made,
A dustily-red, well-beaten track,
The leader opened a fusillade
Whose target was Featherston's stooping back
But his luck was out, not a bullet tore
As much as a shred from Featherstonhaugh.

Rattle 'em, rattle 'em fast on the pad,
Where the sloping shades fell dusk and dim.
The manager's heart beat high and glad
For he knew the creek was a mighty swim.
Already he heard a smothered roar -
"They're done like a dinner!" quoth Featherstonhaugh.

It was almost dark as they neared the dam.
He struck the crossing as true as a hair;
For the space of a second the pony swam,
Then shook himself in the chill night air.

In a pine-tree shade on the further shore,
With his pistol cocked, stood Featherstonhaugh.

A splash - an oath - and a rearing horse,
A thread snapped short in the fateful loom,
The tide, unaltered, swept on its course
Though a fellow creature had met his doom:
Pale and trembling, and struck with awe,
Bluccap stood opposite Featherstonhaugh.

While the creek rolled muddily in between
The eddies played with the drowned man's hat.
The stars peeped out in the summer sheen,
A night-bird chirruped across the flat -
Quoth Bluecap, "I owe you a heavy score,
And I'll live to repay it, Featherstonhaugh."

But he never did, for he ran his race
Before he had time to fulfil his oath.
I can't think how, but, in any case,
He was hung, or drowned, or maybe both.
But whichever it was, he came no more
To trouble the peace of Featherstonhaugh.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Fogarty's Gin

A sweat-dripping horse and a half-naked myall,
And a message: 'Come out to the back of the run—
Be out at the stake-yards by rising of sun!
Ride hard and fail not! there's the devil to pay:
For the men from Monkyra have mustered the run—
Cows and calves, calves of ours, without ever a brand,
Fifty head, if there's one, on the camp there they stand.
Come out to the stake-yards, nor fail me, or by all
The saints they'll be drafted and driven away!'
Boot and saddle it was to the rolling of curses:
Snatching whip, snatching spurs, where they hung on the nail.
In his wrath old McIvor, head stockman, turned pale,
Spitting oaths with his head 'neath the flap of his saddle;
Taking up the last hole in the girth with his teeth;
Then a hand on the pommel, a quick catch of breath,
A lift of the body, a swing to the right—
And, ten half-broken nags with ten riders astraddle,
We sped, arrow-swift, for the heart of the night.
Thud of hoofs! thud of hearts! breath of man! breath of beast!
With M'Ivor in front, and the rest heel to flank,
So we rode in a bunch down the steep river bank,
Churning up the black tide in the shallows like yeast.
Through the coolabahs, out on the plain, it increased
Till we swung with the stride of the dingo-pack, swooping
On scent of weak mother with puny calf drooping.
Staring eyes, swaying forms o'er the saddle-bow stooping,
With the wind in our shirts, grip of knee, grip of rein,
Losing ground, falling back, creeping forward again.
Behind us the low line of dark coolabah;
Overhead a sky spangled by planet and star;
And to left, on our shoulder, the mighty Cross flaring,
While afoot the quick pulsing of hoof-beats disturbs
Moist silence of grasses and salty-leaved herbs.

Steering on by the stars, over hollow and crest;
Tingling eyes looking out through a curtain of tears
From the slap of the wind over forward-pricked ears,
Over forehead and nose stretching out for the west,
And into the face of the sombre night staring.

Threading in, threading out, through a maze of sand rises
That spring either side, loom a moment, then flee:
Dim hillocks of herbage and sun-blasted tree,
Till again a dark streak of far timber arises;
And anon, through the thick of a lignum swamp tearing,
Bare tendrils, back-springing, switch sharp on the knee.
Plain again! and again, with the speed of the wind,
The long miles in front join their comrades behind;
Then a sound in our ears like to far summer thunder
Or the booming of surf in a southerly gale;
And we shouted aloud each to each in our wonder,
For we knew that those beasts must have come fast and far,
That they moaned as the breaking of waves on a bar.

But behold! overhead the dark sky had grown pale,
With the azure-tinged paleness of newly-skimmed milk,
And the dawn-spiders floated on threads of floss-silk
As the guards of the sun drew aside the thick veil
And made ready to fling the dawn-portals asunder.
Still that sound swelled and rolled, thrilling deep on the air,
Calling long, calling loud in the ear of each steed,
Bringing courage and strength in the moment of need,
And light'ning the weight of the burdens they bare.

But that moment behind us upshot a red glare
As the sun swept the sky with a roseate sponge;
And McIvor's blue roan gave a rear and a plunge,
A half-sob, and so fell, like an over-ripe pear.
Not a rein did we pull, not a stride did we stay,
Speeding onward and speeding! For long we could hear
Old Mac.'s maledictions ring loud in our rear
As we rode in hot haste from the incoming day.
Then all sudden and strangely we came face to face
With the lead of the cattle, and lo! our long race
Was run out; and we drew up the horses, all panting
In stress of the chase, and yet ready for more;
And our eager ears drank in that thunderous roar,
While we watched the red squadrons come over the levels
As if view-holloa'd by a pack of night-devils—
Cow and calf chasing heifer and lumbering steer,
With their grey, dripping nostrils, and eyes wide with fear,
As if Burgess's cob followed hard on their rear.

So we blocked them, and lo! the new sun laid a slanting
Red finger on one who rode over the plain,
Steed treading full slowly, head drooping, slack rein,
Turning often aside through the dew-laden grasses
To crop a sweet mouthful. We needed no glasses
To see it was Fogarty. Once and again,
And again did we hail—yet he never looked round,
Neither made the least motion of hearing the sound.

Riding on like a man who should ride in his sleep,
Or as one in the web of some deep-woven charm,
So he came through the grass—his horse striding breast-deep—
With a woman held close in the crook of his arm;
And her hair, all unbound, rippled over his shoulder,
Dead black; and her brow, where the sweat of fierce pain
Had dried, was brown-tinged as bronze is, but colder—
Ah, many times colder! and as he pulled rein,
He unwrapped saddle-blanket in which he had rolled her,
And lo! the gay sunlight lit ominous stain,
Where a murderous bullet had torn a blue vein
And let out her life in a warm crimson rain.

Then gently he laid his sad load on the ground,
And with sorrowing glances we gathered around.
Then he turned to the west, with his eyes all aflame,
With his brawny fists raised, calling witness from Heaven—
On his shoulder and flank the dark blood of the slain—
And he hurled his curse back on the place whence he came:
A loud curse, and a threat that he yet would stand even
With those of Monkyra who wrought this foul shame—
Though, to tell the God's truth, we'd have done just the same
In their place, and have reckoned it nothing but right:
For the black girl and Fogarty quietly crept
On the Monkyra men in the dead of the night;
And it happened the watchman was weary and slept,
So the gin, who no doubt was a game little pullet,
Slipped in, and brought both their night horses away,
While Fogarty started the cattle that lay
On the camp; and the trick was so bold it succeeded;
For the Monkyra men, when their cattle stampeded,
Had nothing to send in pursuit but a bullet.

Yet that was as much as the little gin needed:
She made no great fuss, though, nor murmured nor cried;
Only rode on the right of her lord till she died.
Her life ended well—nothing scamped or by halves:
Where she went who can tell? But we branded the calves.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

From The Far West

'Tis a song of the Never Never land—
Set to the tune of a scorching gale
On the sandhills red,
When the grasses dead
Loudly rustle, and bow the head
To the breath of its dusty hail:

Where the cattle trample a dusty pad
Across the never-ending plain,
And come and go
With muttering low
In the time when the rivers cease to flow,
And the Drought King holds his reign;

When the fiercest piker who ever turned
With lowered head in defiance proud,
Grown gaunt and weak,
Release doth seek
In vain from the depths of the slimy creek—
His sepulchre and his shroud;

His requiem sung by an insect host,
Born of the pestilential air,
That seethe and swarm
In hideous form
Where the stagnant waters lie thick and warm,
And Fever lurks in his lair:

Where a placid, thirst-provoking lake
Clear in the flashing sunlight lies—
But the stockman knows
No water flows
Where the shifting mirage comes and goes
Like a spectral paradise;

And, crouched in the saltbush' sickly shade,
Murmurs to Heaven a piteous prayer:
'O God! must I
Prepare to die?'

And, gazing up at the brazen sky,
Reads his death-warrant there.

Gaunt, slinking dingoes snap and snarl,
Watching his slowly-ebbing breath;
Crows are flying,
Hoarsely crying
Burial service o'er the dying—
Foul harbingers of Death.

Full many a man has perished there,
Whose bones gleam white from the waste of sand—
Who left no name
On the scroll of Fame,
Yet died in his tracks, as well became
A son of that desert land.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

How Babs Malone Cut Down The Field

Now the squatters and the "cockies,"
 Shearers, trainers and their jockeys
Had gathered them together for a meeting on
 the flat;
 They had mustered all their forces,
 Owners brought their fastest horses,
Monaro-bred - I couldn't give them greater praise
 than that.

"Twas a lovely day in Summer -
 What the blacksmith called "a hummer,"
The swelling ears of wheat and oats had lost
 their tender green,
 And breezes made them shiver,
 Trending westward to the river -
The river of the golden sands, the moaning
 Eucumbene.

If you cared to take the trouble
 You could watch the misty double,
The shadow of the flying clouds that skimmed the
 Boogong's brow,
 Throwing light and shade incessant
 On the Bull Peak's ragged crescent,
Upon whose gloomy forehead lay a patch of
 winter's snow.

Idly watching for the starting
 Of the race that he had part in,
Old Gaylad stood and champed his bit, his
 weight about nine stone;
 His owner stood beside him,
 Who was also going to ride him,

A shearer from Gegederick, whose name was
Ned Malone.

But Gaylad felt disgusted,
For his joints were fairly rusted,
He longed to feel the pressure of the jockey on his
back,
And he felt that for a pin he'd
Join his mates, who loudly whinnied
For him to go and meet them at the post upon
the track.

From among the waiting cattle
Came the sound of childish prattle,
And the wife brought up their babe to kiss his
father for good luck;
Said Malone: "When I am seated
On old Gaylad, and am treated
With fairish play, I'll bet we never finish in the
ruck."

But the babe was not contented,
Though his pinafore was scented
With oranges, and sticky from his lollies, for he
cried,
This gallant little laddie,
As he toddled to his daddy,
And raised his arms imploringly - "Please, dad,
div Babs a wide."

The father, how he chuckled
For the pride of it, and buckled
The surcingle, and placed the babe astride the
racing pad;

He did it, though he oughtn't,
And by pure good luck he shortened
The stirrups, and adjusted them to suit the
 tiny lad,

Who was seemingly delighted,
Not a little bit affrighted,
He sat and twined a chubby hand among the
 horse's mane:
His whip was in the other;
But all suddenly the mother
Shrieked, "Take him off!" and then "the field" came
 thund'ring down the plain.

'Twas the Handicap was coming,
And the music of their drumming
Beat dull upon the turf that in its summer coat was
 dressed,
The racehorse reared and started,
Then the flimsy bridle parted,
And Gaylad, bearing featherweight, was striding
 with the rest.

That scene cannot be painted
How the poor young mother fainted,
How the father drove his spurs into the nearest
 saddle-horse,
What to do? he had no notion,
For you'd easier turn the ocean
Than stop the Handicap that then was half-way
 round the course.

On the "bookies" at their yelling,
On the cheap-jacks at their selling,

On the crowd there fell a silence as the squadron
passed the stand;
Gayest colours flashing brightly,
And the baby clinging tightly,
A wisp of Gaylad's mane still twisted in his
little hand.

Not a thought had he of falling,
Though his little legs were galling,
And the wind blew out his curls behind him in a
golden stream;
Though the motion made him dizzy,
Yet his baby brain was busy,
For hadn't he at length attained the substance
of his dream!

He was now a jockey really,
And he saw his duty clearly
To do his best to win and justify his father's
pride;
So he clicked his tongue to Gaylad,
Whispering softly, "Get away lad;"
The old horse cocked an ear, and put six inches
on his stride.

Then, the jockeys who were tailing
Saw the big bay horse come sailing
Through the midst of them with nothing but a baby
on his back,
And this startling apparition
Coolly took up its position
With a view of making running on the inside
of the track.

Oh, Gaylad was a beauty,

For he knew and did his duty;
Though his reins were flying loosely, strange to
say he never fell,
But held himself together,
For his weight was but a feather;
Bob Murphy, when he saw him, murmured
something like "Oh, hell!"

But Gaylad passed the filly;
Passed Jack Costigan on "Chilli,"
Cut down the coward "Watakip" and challenged
"Guelder Rose;"
Here it was he showed his cunning,
Let the mare make all the running,
They turned into the straight stride for
stride and nose for nose.

But Babs was just beginning
To have fears about his winning,
In fact, to tell the truth, my hero felt inclined
to cry,
For the "Rose" was still in blossom,
And two lengths behind her "Possum,"
And gallant little "Sterling," slow but sure,
were drawing nigh.

Yes! Babsie's heart was failing,
For he felt old Gaylad ailing,
Another fifty yards to go, he felt his chance
was gone.
Could he do it? much he doubted,
Then the crowd, oh, how they shouted,
For Babs had never dropped his whip, and now he
laid it on!

Down the straight the leaders thundered
While people cheered and wondered,
For ne'er before had any seen the equal of that
sight
And never will they, maybe,
See a flaxen-haired baby
Flog racehorse to the winning post with all his
tiny might.

But Gaylad's strength is waning,
Gone in fact, beyond regaining,
Poor Babs is flogging helplessly, as pale as any
ghost,
But he looks so brave and pretty
That the "Rose's" jockey takes pity,
And, pulling back a trifle, lets the baby pass the post.

What cheering and tin-kettling
Had they after at the "settling,"
And how they fought to see who'd hold the baby on
his lap;
As President Montgom'ry,
With a brimming glass of "Pomm'ry,"
Proposed the health of Babs Malone, who'd
won the Handicap.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

How Polly Paid For Her Keep

Do I know Polly Brown? Do I know her? Why,
damme,
You might as well ask if I know my own name?
It's a wonder you never heard tell of old Sammy,
Her father, my mate in the Crackenback claim.

He asks if I know little Poll! Why, I nursed her
As often, I reckon as old Mother Brown
When they lived at the "Flats," and old Sam
went a burster
In Chinaman's Gully, and dropped every crown.

My golden-haired mate, ever brimful of folly
And childish conceit, and yet ready to rest
Contented beside me, 'twas I who taught Polly
To handle four horses along with the best.

"Twas funny to hear the small fairy discoursing
Of horses and drivers! I'll swear that she knew
Every one of the nags that I drove to the "Crossing,"
Their vices, and paces, and pedigrees too.

She got a strange whim in her golden-haired noodle
That a driver's high seat was a kind of a throne,
I've taken her up there before she could toddle,
And she'd talk to the nags in a tongue of her own.

Then old Mother Brown got the horrors around her:
(I think it was pineapple-rum drove her daft)

She cleared out one night, and the next morning they
found her,
A mummified mass, in a forty foot shaft.

And Sammy? Well, Sammy was wailing and weeping,
And raving, and raising the devil's own row;
He was only too glad to give into our keeping
His motherless babe - we'd have kept her till now

But Jimmy Maloney thought proper to court her,
Among all the lasses he loved but this one:
She's no longer Polly, our golden-haired daughter,
She's Mrs Maloney, of Paddlesack Run.

Our little girl Polly's no end of a swell (you
Must know Jimmy shears fifty thousand odd sheep) -
But I'm clean off the track, I was going to tell you
The way in which Polly paid us for her keep.

It was this way: My wife's living in Tumbarumba,
And I'm down at Germanton yards, for a sale,
Inspecting coach-horses (I wanted a number),
When they flashed down a message that made me
turn pale.

"Twas from Polly, to say the old wife had fallen
Down-stairs, and in falling had fractured a bone -
There was no doctor nearer than Tumut to call on,
So she and the blacksmith had set it alone.

They'd have to come down by the coach in the
morning,
As one of the two buggy ponies was lame,
Would I see the old doctor, and give him fair warning
To keep himself decently straight till they came?

I was making good money those times, and a fiver
Per week was the wages my deputy got,
A good, honest worker, and out-and-out driver,
But, like all the rest, a most terrible sot.

So, just on this morning - which made it more sinful,
With my women on board, the unprincipled skunk
Hung round all the bars till he loaded a skinful
Of grog, and then started his journey, dead drunk.

Drunk! with my loved ones on board, drunk as Chloe,
He might have got right by the end of the trip
Had he rested contented and quiet, but no, he
Must pull up at Rosewood, for one other nip.

That finished him off, quick, and there he sat, dozing
Like an owl on his perch, half-awake, half-asleep.
Till a lurch of the coach came, when, suddenly losing
His balance, he fell to the earth all of a heap,

While the coach, with its four frightened horses,
went sailing
Downhill to perdition and Carabost "break,"
Four galloping devils, with reins loosely trailing,
And passengers falling all roads in their wake.

Two bagmen, who sat on the box, jumped together
And found a soft bed in the mud of the drain;
The barmaid from Murphy's fell light as a feather -
I think she got off with a bit of a sprain;

While the jock, with his nerves most decidedly
shaken,
Made straight for the door, never wasting his
breath
In farewell apologies; basely forsaken,
My wife and Poll Brown sat alone with grim
Death.

While the coach thundered downward, my wife fell
a-praying;
But Poll in a fix, now, is dashed hard to beat:
She picked up her skirts, scrambled over the swaying
High roof of the coach, till she lit on the seat,

And there looked around. In her hand was a pretty,
Frail thing made of laces, with which a girl strives
To save her complexion when down in the city -
A lace parasol! yet it saved both their lives.

Oh, Polly was game, you may bet your last dollar -
She leans on the splashboard, and stretches and
strains
With her parasol, down by the off-sider's collar,
Until she contrives to catch hold of the reins.

They lay quite secure in the crook of the handle,
She clutched them - the parasol fell underneath.
I tell you no girl ever could hold a candle
To Polly, as she hung back and clenched her white
teeth.

The bolters sped downward, with nostrils distended,
She must get a pull on them ere they should reach
The fence on the hill, where the road had been
mended;
The blocks bit the wheels with a "sroope" and a
screech;

The little blue veins in her arms swelled and
blackened;
The reins were like fiddle-strings stretched in her grip;
When the "break" hove in sight, the mad gallop
had slackened,
She had done it, my word, they were under the whip.

They still had the pace on, but Polly was able
To steer 'twixt the fences with never a graze,
They flashed past the "Change" where the groom at
the stable
Just stood with his mouth open, dumb with amaze.

On the level she turned them, the best bit of driving
That was ever done on this side of the range,
And trotted them back up the hill-side, arriving
With not a strap broken in front of the "Change."

And the wife? - well she prayed to the Lord till

she fainted;

I reckon He answered her prayers all the same -
He must have helped Polly, it's curious now, ain't it,
To see a thin slip of a girl be so game?

Did I summons the driver? I had no occasion -
The coroner came with his jury instead,
Who found that he died from a serious abrasion -
Both wheels of the coach had gone over his head.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Jack Corrigan

"It's my shout this time, boys, so come along and
breast the bar,
And kindly mention what you're going to take;
I don't feel extra thirsty, so I'll sample that
"three-star"-
Now, lad! come, look alive, for goodness sake."
So spake he, as he raised the brimming glass towards
the light;
So spake "Long Jack," the boldest mountaineer
Who ever down from Nungar raced a "brumby" mob
in flight,
Or laid a stockwhip on a stubborn steer.
From Jindabyne to Providence along the Eucumbene
The kindest-hearted fellow to be found;
And when he crossed the saddle not a horse was ever
seen
That could make Jack quit his hold to seek the
ground.
The women smiled with pleasure, the children laughed
aloud,
The very dogs came barking at his feet,
While outside the "Squatter's Arms" the men came
forward in a crowd
To welcome Jack when he rode up the street.

But though the boldest horseman who by midnight
or by day
E'er held a mob of cattle on a camp,
There were squatters on Monaro, who had yet been
known to say
That Jack was an unmitigated scamp.
And true it is Jack Corrigan possessed a serious fault
Which caused his gentle, blue-eyed wife much grief,
And many were the bitter tears she mingled with the
salt
With which she cured their neighbours' tend'rest beef.
And often would she tearful take her smiling spouse

to task,
Who'd answer, as her pretty face he kissed,
That a beast lost all identity when pickled in the
cask,
And a bullock more or less would ne'er be missed.

But now as Jack stood all prepared to toss his
nobbler down,
A softly-murmured whisper met his ear -
"I just saw Trooper Fraser get a warrant up the town,
He's after you, old man: you'd better clear!"
Jack never thanked the donor of this excellent advice,
As the glass fell through his fingers with a crash.
With a bound across the footpath, he was mounted
in a trice
And speeding down the roadway like a flash,
While Trooper William Fraser wore a very gloomy face,
As he watched his prey go flying down the road.
But he settled in the saddle and prepared to give him
chase,
As Jack struck out a line for his abode.

On the road toward the Show Ground, then, there
hung a big swing-gate,
Jack's filly cleared its bars in glorious style,
But he held her well together, for he knew the
trooper's weight
Would give him distance in each mile;
For Jack rode twelve stone fully, while Bill Fraser
rode but nine,
Sweetbriar's strength must surely soon be spent,
Being grass-fed, while the trooper's chestnut horse
could always dine
Off oats and barley to his heart's content.
And all aloud Jack cursed the day he'd ever killed a
beast
Or branded calf he couldn't call his own,
While the hoof-strokes on the road beat out a song

that never ceased
To echo in his ears with mocking tone.

"Three years in gaol, in gaol three years," the
jeering echoes sang;
The granite boulders caught the wild refrain.
"A broken life, a weeping wife," 'twas thus the
rhythm rang,
"And a baby boy you'll never see again" –

He groaned, and then, to dull the sound, spoke
loudly to the mare,
And bade her never slacken in her speed.
"For God's sake take me home, lass, with a little
time to spare;
Five minutes, at the most, is all I need -
Just time to catch old Dandy, where he's munching
second growth
Of hay; just time to leap upon his back,
And then the smartest trap who ever swore a
lying oath
Could never foot me down the River track."

Sweetbriar pricked her ears, and shook a foam flake
from her bit,
As she heard his words, and doubtless caught their
sense,
And the rotten granite pebbles rattled round her as
she lit
On the homeward side the Rosedale bound'ry fence –

As they scrambled round by Locker's-Hill, Jack
Corrigan looked round,
And as he looked was filled with stern delight,

For he saw the baldfaced chestnut struggling fiercely
on the ground,
Though the hill shut out the sequel from his sight;
His triumph was but short, for, as he stemmed the
wide morass,
Where floods had muddied waters once so clear,
And left the giant tussocks tangled tightly in a mass,
The trooper still kept drawing on his rear;

The Murrumbidgee's icy stream was widened out by
flood;
They swam it at the willow-shaded ford,
As they passed the station buildings his long spurs
were red with blood,
Sweetbriar's heaving flanks were deeply scored.
Her stride grew more uneven, though she answered
every call,
No jockey rode a better race than Jack
As he eased her up the hills and pressed her onward
down the fall,
Round the sidlings of the Billylingra track.

They left O'Rourke's behind them, where it fronts the
big bald hill,
At the Flat Rock Jack was riding all he knew -
With all the dash and judgement of the famed Monaro
skill,
Yet he couldn't keep the trooper out of view;
He spied his tiny homestead as Bill Fraser gained
apace
And loudly warned the fugitive to yield,
Who turned half round but saw no sign of pity in his
face
As they swept across the cultivation field;

Their hoofs' dull thunder brought the wife in wonder

to the gate,
She waved her hand in answer to his shout;
While Dandy from his paddock whinnied loudly to
his mate,
To know what all the trouble was about.

"God help us now - the end has come!" the wretched
woman cried,
And leant against the gate to catch her breath;
While the tiny, blue-eyed toddler cheered his father
on his ride
Towards the ghastly winning-post of Death.

"The filly's failing fast," thought Jack; "she's
nothing but a weed,
It's a certainty she can't keep long in front.
I'll make a splendid target, if he likes to draw a
bead,
As I try to cross the river on the punt."

He left the mare and scrambled through the ti-tree
growing rank,
Deep rooted in its bed of yellow clay,
But when he reached the river, stood and trembled
on the bank -
"My God!" he hoarsely said, "it's swept away!"
The punt was gone, the rope of wire still stretched from
shore to shore,
Jack paused but half a moment to decide,

And as he scrambled down the bank the wond'ring
trooper saw
Him struggling half across the rushing tide,
The angry waters swept him down, and every nerve

was strained
To keep his hold upon the frail support,
Though icy numbness seized him, yet his courage
never waned,
The hope of freedom filled his every thought.

The rope swayed low beneath his weight and bellied
to the stream,
Around his head the flying ripples curled,
While high above the river's roar rang out the awful
scream
Of a soul that flies in terror from the world.
A mighty log, borne swiftly on the bosom of the
flood,
Resistless swept him 'neath the eager wave,
And sucked him down to river depths, and there
beneath the foam,
Jack Corrigan sought out a nameless grave -
"Good-bye to life, good-bye to life," the mocking
wavelets sang,
The towering cliffs took up the wild refrain,
"A broken life, a weeping wife," 'twas thus the
rhythm rang,
"And a baby boy he'll never see again."

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Jack's Last Muster

The first flush of grey light, the herald of daylight,
Is dimly outlining the musterer's camp,
Where over the sleeping, the stealthily creeping
Breath of the morning lies chilly and damp,

As, blankets forsaking, 'twixt sleeping and waking,
The black-boys turn out to the manager's call;
Whose order, of course, is, "Be after the horses,
And take all sorts of care you unhobble them all."

Then, each with a bridle (provokingly idle)
They saunter away his commands to fulfil -
Where, cheerily chiming, the musical rhyming
From equine bell-ringers comes over the hill.

But now the dull dawning gives place to the morning,
The sun, springing up in a glorious flood
Of golden-shot fire, mounts higher and higher,
Till the crests of the sandhills are stained with his
 blood.

Now the hobble-chains' jingling, with the thud of hoofs
 mingling,
Though distant, sound near - the cool air is so still -
As, urged by their whooping, the horses come trooping
In front of the boys round the point of the hill.

What searching and rushing for bridles and brushing
Of saddle marks, tight'ning of breastplate and girth;

And what a strange jumble of laughter and grumble -
Some comrade's misfortune the subject of mirth.

I recollect well how that morning Jack Bell
Had an argument over the age of a mare,
That C O B gray one, the dam of that bay one
Which Brown the storekeeper calls the young Lady
 Clare.

How Tomboy and Vanity caused much profanity,
Scamping away with their tales in the air,
Till after a chase, at a deuce of a pace,
They ran back in the mob and we collared them
 there.

Then the laugh and the banter, as gaily we canter,
With a pause for the nags at a miniature lake,
Where the "yellowtop" catches the sunlight in patches,
And lies like a mirror of gold in our wake.

Oh! the rush and the rattle of fast-fleeing cattle,
Whose hoofs beat a mad rataplan on the earth;
Their hot headed flight in! Who would not delight in
The gallop that seems to hold all that life is worth.

And over the rolling plains, slowly patrolling
To the sound of the cattle's monotonous tramp,
Till we hear the sharp peeling of stockwhips,
 revealing
The fact that our comrades have put on the camp.

From the spot where they're drafting the wind rises,
wafting
The dust, till it hides man and beast from our gaze,
Till, suddenly lifting and easterly drifting,
We catch a short glimpse of the scene through the
haze.

What a blending and blurring of swiftly recurring
Colour and movement, that pass on their way
An intricate weaving of sights and sounds, leaving
An eager desire to take part in the fray:

A dusty procession, in circling succession,
Of bullocks that bellow in impotent rage;
A bright panorama, a soul stirring drama,
The sky for its background, the earth for its stage.

How well I remember that twelfth of November,
When Jack and his little mare, Vanity, fell;
On the Diamantina there never was seen a
Pair who could cut out a beast half so well.

And yet in one second Death's finger had beckoned,
And horse and bold rider had answered the call
Brooking no hesitation, without preparation,
That sooner or later must come to us all.

Thrice a big curly horned Cobb bullock had scorned
To meekly acknowledge the ruling of fate;
Thrice Jack with a clout of his whip cut him out,
But each time the beast galloped back to his mate.

Once more, he came blund'ring along, with Jack
thund'ring
Beside him, his spurs in poor Vanity's flanks,
As, from some cause or other forsaking its mother,
A little white calf trotted out from the ranks.

'Twas useless, I knew it, yet I turned to pursue it;
At the same time, I gave a loud warning to Jack:
It was all unavailing, I saw him come sailing
Along as the weaner ran into his track.

Little Vanity tried to turn off on one side,
Then altered her mind and attempted to leap;
The pace was too fast, that jump was her last,
For she and her rider fell all in a heap.

I was quickly down kneeling beside him, and feeling
With tremulous hand for the throb of his heart.
"The mare - is she dead?" were the first words he
said,
As he suddenly opened his eyes with a start.

He spoke to the creature, his hand could just reach
her,
Gently caressing her lean Arab head;
She acknowledged his praising with eyes quickly
glazing,
A whinny, a struggle, and there she lay
dead.

I sat there and nursed his head, for we durst
Not remove him, we knew where he fell he would die.
As I watched his life flicker, his breath growing
 thicker,
I'd have given the world to be able to cry.

Roughvoiced, sunburnt men, far away beyond ken
Of civilisation, our comrades, stood nigh,
All true hearted mourners, and sadly forlorn, as
He gave them a handshake and bade them goodbye.

In my loving embrace there he finished life's race,
And nobly and gamely that long course was run;
Though a man and a sinner he weighed out a winner,
And God, the Great Judge, will declare he has won.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Jimmy Wood

There came a lonely Briton to the town,
A solitary Briton with a mission,
He'd vowed a vow to put all "shouting" down,
To relegate it to a low position.
Transcendently Britannic in his dress,
His manners were polite, and slightly formal;
And—this I mention with extreme distress—
His "put away" for liquid was abnormal.

He viewed this "shouting" mania with disgust,
As being generosity perverted,
When any of the "boys" went on the bust
He strove his best that they might be converted.

He wouldn't take a liquor with a man,
Not if he was to be hanged, drawn, and quartered,
And yet, he drank—construe it as you can—
Unsweetened gin, most moderately watered.

And when the atmosphere was in a whirl,
And language metaphorical ran riot,
He'd calmly tender sixpence to the girl,
And drink his poison—solus—nice and quiet.

Whenever he was asked to breast the bar
He'd answer, with a touch of condescension:
"I much regret to disoblige so far
As to decline your delicate attention.

"That drink's a curse that hangeth like a leech—
A sad but most indubitable fact is,
Mankind was meant to drink alone, I preach,
And what I preach invariably practise.

"I never pay for others, nor do I
Take drink from them, and never, never would, sir—
One man, one liquor! though I have to die
A martyr to my faith—that's Jimmy Wood, sir.

"My friend, 'tis not a bit of use to raise
A hurricane of bluster and of banter:
I preach my humble gospel in the phrase,
Similia similibus curantur;

"Which means: by drinking how and when I like,
And sticking to the one unsweetened sample,
I hope in course of time that it will strike
All men to follow up my good example."

In course of time it struck all men that Jim
Was fast developing into a soaker—
The breath of palsy on his every limb,
A bleary face touched up with crimson ochre.

Yet firmly stood he by the sinking ship,
Went down at last with all his colours flying;
No hand but his raised tumbler to his lip,
What time J. Woods, the Martyr, lay a-dying.

Misunderstood reformer! gallant heart!
He gave his path to Death—the great collector.
Now . . . in Elysian fields he sits apart
And sips his modest "Tommy Dodd" of nectar.

His signature is on the scroll of fame,
You cannot well forget him, though you would, sir,
The man is dead, not so his homely name,
Who drinks alone—drinks toast to Jimmy Wood, sir.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Jim's Whip

Yes, there it hangs upon the wall
And never gives a sound,
The hand that trimmed its greenhide fall
Is hidden underground,
There, in that patch of sallee shade,
Beneath that grassy mound.

I never take it from the wall,
That whip belonged to him,
The man I singled from them all,
He was my husband, Jim;
I see him now, so straight and tall,
So long and lithe of limb.

That whip was with him night and day
When he was on the track;
I've often heard him laugh, and say
That when they heard its crack,
After the breaking of the drought,
The cattle all came back.

And all the time that Jim was here,
A-working on the run,
I'd hear that whip ring sharp and clear
Just about the set of sun,
To let me know that he was near
And that his work was done.

I was away that afternoon,
Penning the calves, when, a bang!
I heard his whip, 'twas rather soon -

A thousand echoes rang
And died away among the hills,
As towards the hut I sprang.

I made the tea and waited, but,
Seized by a sudden whim,
I went and sat outside the hut
And watched the light grow dim -
I waited there till after dark,
But not a sign of Jim.

The evening air was damp with dew,
Just as the clock struck ten
His horse came riderless - I knew
What was the matter then.
Why should the Lord have singled out
My Jim from other men?

I took the horse and found him, where
He lay beneath the sky,
With blood all clotted on his hair;
I felt too dazed to cry -
I held him to me as I prayed
To God that I might die.

But sometimes now I seem to hear -
Just when the air grows chill -
A single whip-crack, sharp and clear;
Re-echo from the hill,
That's Jim, to let me know he's near
And thinking of me still.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Josephus Riley

The rum was rich and rare,
There were wagers in the air,
The atmosphere was rosy, and the tongues were
wagging free;
But one was in the revel
Whose occiput was level -
Plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

The conversation's flow
Was not devoid of "blow,"
And neither was it wanting in the plain, colloquial "D."
With a most ingenuous smile -
'This here is not my style,'
Said plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

'And I wouldn't be averse
To emptying my purse,
And laying some small wager with the present
companeer,
To cut the matter short -
Foot racing is my forte,'
Said plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

"I think it's on the cards
That I can run three hundred yards
(The match to be decided where you gentlemen
agree)
Against your fleetest horse;
The race would prove a source
Of pleasure,' said Josephus, from the North Countree.

'To equalise the task,
This little start I ask -
The rider, ere he follows, must imbibe a cup of tea;
A simple breakfast-cup
He will have to swallow up.
That's me - Josephus Riley, from the North
Countree.'

Then a "knowing 'un" looked wise,
"Begged to apologise;
But might he ask what temp'rature the liquid was
to be!
Would it come from out the pot
Milkless, steaming, boiling-hot?"
'Oh, not at all,' said Riley, from the North
Countree.

'Allow me to explain;
I do observe with pain,
This jocular reflection on my native honestee,
My bump of truth is huge,
I'd scorn a subterfuge' -
Said plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

"Before the parties start
I'll take the Judge apart
To prove, by tasting, whether I have tampered with
the tea;
And I beg to state again
Your suspicions give me pain,'
Said plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

Then they were all satisfied
That the match was 'boneefied,'
The bond was signed, and Riley went to 'preparate"
the tea;
But his slow, ambiguous smile
Would have seemed to token guile
In any man but Riley, from the North Countree.

He brought the fatal cup -
By its saucer covered up -
The Judge examined its contents with awful gravitee,
Then read the papers o'er,
But could not find a flaw:
'Wade in! Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.'

Then the "wagerer" just bowed,
And, passing through the crowd,
He handed up the beverage unto the "wageree;"

And off across the flat,
Springing gaily, pit-a-pat,
Went plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

But behind him what a yell
Of execration fell
From lips that lent themselves to shapes of great
profanitee!
For the people of that town
Were done a lovely brown
By plain Josephus Riley, from the North Countree.

And here's the reason why:
The tea was simply DRY,
You might eat it, but to drink it was impossibilittee;
But, curious to state,
Men did not appreciate
This hum'rous innovation from the North Countree.

You'll understand, of course,
That wager was a source
Of very little profit to the hapless "wageree,"
And, dating from that day,
I much regret to say,
Men look askance at Riley, from the North Countree.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Kelly's Conversion

KELLY the Ranger half opened an eye
To wink at the Army passing by,
While his hot breath, thick with the taint of beer,
Came forth from his lips in a drunken jeer.
Brown and bearded and long of limb
He lay, as the Army confronted him
And, clad in grey, one and all did pray
That his deadly sins might be washed away—
But Kelly stubbornly answered 'Nay.'
Then the captain left him in mild despair,
But before the music took up its blare
A pale-faced lassie stepped out and spoke—
A little sad girl in a sad grey cloak—
'Rise up, Kelly! your work's to do:
Kelly, the Saviour's a-calling you!
He strove to look wise; rubbed at his eyes;
Looked down at the ground, looked up at the skies;
And something that p'r'aps was his conscience stirred:
He seemed perplexed as again he heard
The girl with the garments of saddest hue
Say, 'Kelly, the Saviour's a-calling you!'
He got on his knees and thence to his feet,
And stumbled away down the dusty street;
Contrived to cadge at the pub a drink,
But still in his ear the glasses chink
And jingle only the one refrain,
Clear as the lassie's voice again:
'Kelly, Kelly, come here to me!
Kelly the Rager, I've work for thee!
He trembled, and dropped the tumbler, and slopped
The beer on the counter: the barman stopped,
With a curious eye on his haggard face.
'Kelly, old fellow! you're going the pace.
Don't you fancy it's time to take
A pull on yourself—put your foot on the brake?
You'll have the horrors, without a doubt,
This time next week, if you don't look out.'
But he didn't—he sobered himself that night:
'That time next week' he was nearly right:

Yet still at the mill, though he'd stopped the grog,
As the saw bit into the green pine log,
The wood shrieked out to him in its pain
A fragment caught of the same refrain,
As the swift teeth cut and the sawdust flew—
'Kelly, Kelly, I've work for you!'

Then the seasons fell and the floods came down
And laid the dust in the frightened town.
No more the beat of hoofs and feet
Was heard the length of the crooked street;
For, leaving counter and desk and till,
All had fled to the far sandhill;
But everywhere that a man might dare
Risk life to save it—Kelly was there!
No more the voice had a tale to tell:
He'd found his work and he did it well.
Who stripped leggings and hat and coat
To swim the lagoon to reach the boat?
Who pushed out in the dead of night
At the mute appeal of a beacon-light?
Who was blessed by the women then,
And who was cheered by the stalwart men,
As he shot the rapids above the town
With two pale Smiths and a weeping Brown,
Landing them safe from his cockle-shell,
Woefully frightened, but safe and well,
With their friends on the sandhill all secure?
Who but Kelly, you may be sure!

They reckoned the heads up, one by one,
And he sighed as he thought that the work was done;
But soon found out that 'twas not begun.
They counted away till it came to pass
They missed the little Salvation lass:
She'd been to pray with a man who lay
Sick on the river-shore, far away.
Men looked askance and the women smote
Their hands in grief, as he launched the boat.
He turned as he cast the painter loose:
'Who'll make another? It's little use
My going alone; for I'm nearly done,

And from here to the point is a stiffish run.'
Then one stepped forward and took an oar,
And the boat shot out for the other shore.
To and fro where the gums hang low
And bar their passage, the comrades row;
Hard up stream where the waters race;
Steady, where floating branches lace;
Through many a danger and sharp escape
And catch of breath, as the timbers scrape
And thrill to the touch of some river shape;
Till at last the huts on the point draw near,
And over their shoulders the boatmen peer.

The flood was running from door to door—
Two-feet-six on the earthen floor;
Half-way up to the bed it ran,
Where two pale women and one sick man
Crouched, and looked at the water's rise
With horror set in their staring eyes;
While the children wept as the water crept.
But how the blood to their hearts high leapt
As over the threshold the rescuers stepped,
And, wrapped in blanket and shawl and coat,
Carried the saved to the crazy boat!

Then Kelly circled the little lass
With his strong right arm, and as in a glass
Saw himself in her eyes that shone
Sweet in a face that was drawn and wan:
And he felt that for her life he'd give his own.
Too short a moment her cheek was pressed
Close to the beat of his spray-wet breast;
While her hair just lay like a golden ray,
The last farewell of a passing day.
Gently he settled her down in the stern
With a tender smile, and had time to turn
To look to the others, and then he saw
That the craft was full and could hold no more.
He looked at the party—old, young, and sick—
While he had no tie, neither wife nor chick.

Then with a shove he sent out the boat

Far on the turbid stream afloat.
'Pull!' said Kelly; 'now pull!' said he;
'Pull with your load and come back for me.
You may be late, but at any rate
I'm better able than you to wait.'
They pulled and, looking back, saw him stand
Shading his eyes with his big, rough hand—
Silent, patient, and smiling-faced,
With the water curling around his waist.

Return they did, but they found him not:
Nought but the chimney then marked the spot.
They found him not when the boat went back—
Never a trace of him, never a track;
Only the sigh and the dreary cry
Of the gums that had wept to see him die:
These alone had a tale to tell
Of a life that had ended passing well—
The sad refrain of a hero's fate
Tuned in a tongue we may not translate.

Facing Death with a stout, brave heart;
Choosing the nobler and better part;
Home to the land of eternal sun
Kelly had gone—for his work was done.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Kitty McCrae - A Galloping Rhyme

The Western sun, ere he sought his lair,
 Skimm'd the treetops, and glancing thence,
Rested awhile on the curling hair
 Of Kitty McCrae, by the boundary fence;
Her eyes looked anxious, her cheeks were pale,
For father was two hours late with the mail.

Never before had he been so late,
 And Kitty wondered and wished him back,
Leaning athwart the big swing gate
 That opens out on the bridle-track,
A tortuous path that sidled down
From the single street of a mining town.

With her raven curls and her saucy smile,
 Brown eyes that glow with a changeful light,
Tenderly trembling all the while
 Like a brace of stars on the breast of night,
Where could you find in the light of day
A bonnier lassie than Kitty McCrae?

Born in the saddle, this girl could ride
 Like the fearless queen of the silver bow;
And nothing that ever was lapped in hide
 Could frighten Kitty McCrae, I trow.
She would wheel a mob in the hour of need
If the Devil himself were in the lead.

But now, in the shadows' deepening
 When the last sun-spark had ceas'd to burn,
Afar she catches the sullen ring
 Of horse-hoofs swinging around the turn,
Then painfully down the narrow trail
Comes Alex McCrae with the Greytown mail.

"The fever-and-ague, my girl," he said,
 "'Twas all I got on that northern trip,
When it left me then I was well-nigh dead,
Has got me fast in its iron grip;

And I'd rather rot in the nearest gaol
Than ride to-night with the Greytown mail.

"At Golden Gully they heard to-day -
 'Twas a common topic about the town -
That the Mulligan gang were around this way,
 So they wouldn't despatch the gold-dust down,
And Brown, the manager, said he thought
'Twere wise to wait for a strong escort.

"I rode the leaders, the other nags
 I left with the coach at the "Travellers' Rest".
Kitty, my lass, you must take the bags -
 Postboy, I reckon's about the best;
'Tis dark, I know, but he'll never fail
To take you down with the Greytown mail."

It needed no further voice to urge
 This dutiful daughter to eager haste;
She donned the habit, of rough blue serge,
 That hung in folds from her slender waist,
And Postboy stood by the stockyard rail,
While she mounted behind the Greytown mail.

Dark points, the rest of him iron-grey,
 Boasting no strain of expensive blood,
Down steepest hill he could pick his way,
 And never was balked by a winter flood -
Strong as a lion, hard as a nail,
Was the horse that carried the Greytown mail;

A nag that really seemed to be
 Fit for a hundred miles at a push,
With the old Manaro pedigree,
 By "Furious Rising," out of "The Bush,"
Run in when a colt from a mountain mob
By Brian O'Flynn and Dusty Bob.

And Postboy's bosom was filled with pride
 As he felt the form of his mistress sway,
In its easy grace, to his swinging stride
 As he dashed along down the narrow way.

No prettier Mercury, I'll go bail,
Than Kitty ere carried a Guv'nment mail.

Leaving the edge of O'Connor's Hill,
 They merrily scattered the drops of dew
In the spanning of many a tiny rill,
 Whose bubbling waters were hid from view:
In quick-step time to the curlew's wail
Rode Kitty McCrae, with the Greytown mail.

Sidling the Range, by a narrow path
 Where towering mountain ash-trees grow,
And a slip meant more than an icy bath
 In the tumbling waters that foamed below;
Through the white fog, filling each silent vale,
Rode Kitty McCrae, with the Greytown mail.

The forest shadows became less dense,
 They fairly flew down the river fall,
As out from the shade of an old brush-fence
 Stepped three armed men with a sudden call,
Sharp and stern came the well-known hail:
"Stand! for we want the Greytown mail!"

Postboy swerved with a mighty bound,
 As an outlaw clung to his bridle rein,
A hoof-stroke flattened him on the ground
 With a curse that was half a cry of pain,
While Kitty, trembling and rather pale,
Rode for life and the Greytown mail.

To save the bags was her only thought
 As she bent 'fore the whistle of angry lead
That follow'd the flash and the sharp report;
 But, "Oh, you cowards!" was all she said.
Fast as fast as the leaden hail -
Kitty rode on with the Greytown mail.

Safe? ah, no, for a tiny stream
 On Postboy's coat left its crimson mark.
Still she rode on, but t'was in a dream,
 Through lands where shadows fell drear and dark,

Like a wounded sea-bird before the gale
Fled Kitty McCrae with the Greytown mail.

And ever the crimson life-stream drips,
For every hoof-stroke a drop of blood,
From feeble fingers the bridle slips
As down the Warrigal Flat they scud,
And just where the Redbank workings lie,
She reels and falls with a feeble cry.

The old horse slacken'd his racing pace
When he found the saddle his only load,
And nervously sniffed at the still, pure face
That lay upturned in the dusty road;
Like a gathered rose in the heat of day,
She droop'd and faded, Kitty McCrae.

Did Postboy stay by the dead girl's side?
Not he. Relieved of her feather-weight,
He woke the echoes with measured stride,
Gallop'ing up to the postal gate -
Blood, dust, and sweat from head to tail,
A riderless horse with the Greytown mail!

And now a river-oak, drooping, weeps
In ceaseless sorrow above the grave
On the lush-green flat where Kitty sleeps,
Hush'd by the river's lapping wave -
That ever tells to the trees the tale
Of how she rode with the Greytown mail.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

On The Boundary

I Love the ancient boundary-fence,
That mouldering chock-and-log.
When I go ride the boundary
I let the old horse jog
And take his pleasure in and out
Where the sandalwood grows dense,
And tender pines clasp hands across
The log that tops the fence.
'Tis pleasant on the boundary-fence,
These sultry summer days;
A mile away, outside the scrub,
The plain is all ablaze,
The sheep are panting on the camps,
The heat is so intense;
But here the shade is cool and sweet
Along the boundary-fence.

I love to loaf along the fence,
So does my collie dog,
He often finds a spotted cat
Hid in a hollow log;
He's very near as old as I
And ought to have more sense,
I've hammered him so many times
Along the boundary-fence.

My mother says that boundary fence
Must surely be bewitched;
The old man says that through that fence
The neighbours are enriched;
It's always down, and through the gaps
Our stock all get them hence,
I takes me half my time to watch
The doings of that fence.

But should you seek the reason
You won't travel very far,
'Tis there a mile away among
The murmuring Belar:

The Jones's block joins on to ours,
And so, in consequence,
It's part of Polly's work to ride
Their side the boundary-fence.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

On The Range

On Nungar the mists of the morning hung low,
The beetle-browed hills brooded silent and black,
Not yet warmed to life by the sun's loving glow,
As through the tall tussocks rode young Charlie Mac.
What cared he for mists at the dawning of day,
What cared he that over the valley stern "Jack,"
The Monarch of frost, held his pitiless sway? -
A bold mountaineer born and bred was young Mac.
A galloping son of a galloping sire -
Stiffest fence, roughest ground, never took him aback;
With his father's cool judgement, his dash, and his fire,
The pick of Manaro rode young Charlie Mac.
And the pick of the stable the mare he bestrode -
Arab-grey, built to stay, lithe of limb, deep of chest,
She seemed to be happy to bear such a load
As she tossed the soft forelock that curled on her
crest.

They crossed Nungar Creek where its span is but
short

At its head, where together spring two mountain rills,
When a mob of wild horses sprang up with a snort -
"By thunder!" quoth Mac, "there's the Lord of
the Hills.

Decoyed from her paddock, a Murray-bred mare
Had fled to the hills with a warrigal band;
A pretty bay foal had been born to her there,
Whose veins held the very best blood in the land -
"The Lord of the Hills" as the bold mountain men
Whose courage and skill he was wont to defy
Had named him, they yarded him once, but since
then

He held to the saying, "Once bitten, twice shy."

The scrubber, thus suddenly roused from his lair,
Struck straight for the timber with fear in his heart;
As Charlie rose up in his stirrups, the mare
Sprang forward, no need to tell Empress to start.

She laid to the chase just as soon as she felt
Her rider's skill'd touch, light, yet firm, on the rein;
Stride for stride, lengthened wide, for the green
 timber belt,
The fastest half-mile ever done on the plain.
They reached the low sallee before he could wheel
The warrigal mob; up they dashed with a stir
Of low branches and undergrowth - Charlie could feel
His mare catch her breath on the side of the spur
That steeply slopes up till it meets the bald cone.
'Twas here on the range that the trouble began,
For a slip on the sidling, a loose rolling stone,
And the chase would be done; but the bay in the van
And the little grey mare were a sure-footed pair.
He looked once around as she crept to his heel,
And the swish that he gave his long tale in the air
Seemed to say, "Here's a foeman well worthy my
 steel."

They raced to within half a mile of the bluff
That drops to the river, the squadron strung out -
"I wonder quoth Mac, "has the bay had enough,"
But he was not left very much longer in doubt,
For the Lord of the Hills struck a spur for the flat
And followed it, leaving his mob, mares and all,
While Empress, (brave heart, she could climb like a
 cat)
Down the stony descent raced with never a fall.
Once down on the level 'twas galloping ground,
For a while Charlie thought he might yard the big bay
At his uncle's out-station, but no! He wheeled round
And down the sharp dip to the Gulf made his way,

Betwixt those twin portals, that, towering high
And backwardly sloping in watchfulness, lift
Their smooth grassy summits to the far sky,
The course of the clear Murrumbidgee runs swift;
No time then to seek where the crossing might be,

It was in at the one side and out where you could
But fear never dwelt in the hearts of those three
Who emerged from the shade of the low muzzle-wood.
Once more did the Lord of the Hills strike a line
Up the side of the range, and once more he looked
back,

So close were they now he could see the sun shine
In the bold grey eyes flashing of young Charlie Mac.
He saw little Empress, stretched out like a hound
On the trail of its quarry, the pick of the pack,
With ne'er tiring stride, and his heart gave a bound,
As he saw the lithe stockwhip of young Charlie Mac
Showing snaky and black on the neck of the mare,
In three hanging coils, with a turn round the wrist;
And he heartily wished himself back in his lair
'Mid the tall tussocks beaded with chill morning mist.

Then he fancied the straight mountain-ashes, the
gums

And the wattles, all mocked him and whispered,
"You lack

The speed to avert cruel capture, that comes
To the warrigal fancied by young Charlie Mac,
For he'll yard you, and rope you, and then you'll be
stuck

In the crush, while his saddle is girthed to your back,
Then out in the open, and there you may buck
Till you break your bold heart, but you'll never
throw Mac!"

The Lord of the Hills at the thought felt the sweat
Break over the smooth summer gloss of his hide:
He spurred his utmost to leave her, but yet
The Empress crept up to him, stride upon stride.
No need to say Charlie was riding her now,
Yet still for all that he had something in hand,
With here a sharp stoop to avoid a low bough,
Or quick rise and fall, as a tree-trunk they spanned.
In his terror the brumby struck down the rough falls
T'wards Yiack, with fierce disregard for his neck -
"Tis useless, he finds, for the mare overhauls

Him slowly, no timber could keep her in check.

There's a narrow-beat pathway, that winds to and fro
Down the deeps of the gully, half hid from the day,
There's a turn in the track where the hop-bushes grow
And hide the grey granite that crosses the way;
While sharp swerves the path round the boulder's
 broad base,

And now the last scene in the drama is played;
As the Lord of the Hills, with the mare in full chase,
Swept t'wards it, but, ere his long stride could be
 stayed,

With a gathered momentum that gave not a chance
Of escape, and a shuddering, sickening shock,
He struck on the granite that barred his advance
And sobbed out his life at the foot of the rock;
While Charlie pulled off with a twitch of the rein,
And an answering spring from his surefooted mount,
One might say, unscathed, though a crimsoning stain
Marked the graze of the granite, but that would
 ne'er count

With Charlie, who speedily sprang to the earth
To ease the mare's burden, his deft-fingered hand
Unslackened her surcingle, loosened tight girth,
And cleansed with a tussock the spurs' ruddy brand.

There he lay by the rock - drooping head, glazing eye,
Strong limbs stilled for ever; no more would he fear
The tread of a horseman; no more would he fly
Through the hills with his harem in rapid career.
The pick of the "Mountain Mob," bays, greys, or roans,
He proved by his death that the pace 'tis that kills,
And a sun-shrunken hide o'er a few whitened bones
Marks the last resting-place of the Lord of the Hills.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Our Visitor

There's a fellow on the station
(He dropped in on a call,
Just casual—to stay a pleasant week),
He's a banker's near relation,
Strongly built, and very tall,
Not altogether destitute of cheek;
He's a descent judge of whisky,
And the hardest working youth
Who ever played a polo on a cob;
His anecdotes are risky,
And to tell the honest truth,
He's waiting here until he gets a job.
He's waiting, as I mention,
And whenever he says his prayers,
Which he doesn't do as frequently as some,
And I fear that his intention
Isn't quite so good as theirs—
For he prays to God the work may never come.
He marches with the banner
Of the noble unemployed,
He mixes with the fashionable mob,
But while he's got a tanner
He scorns to be decoyed
Where there's any chance he may get a job.

He's an excellent musician,
And the song that suits him best,
"Old Stumpy" is a masterpiece of art;
'Tis a splendid composition
As he chucks it off his chest,
Though there's something of a hitch about the start.
He's an artist, too, in colours
For he painted up the boat.
You wonder—but he did, so help me bob,
And all the champion scullers,
When once he gets afloat,
Couldn't catch him—if they offered him a job.

He's very unpretending,

Most affable and kind,
He'll take a whisky any time it suits;
Extremely condescending,
He really does not mind,
He'll even, when it's muddy, wear your boots.
Some think he isn't clever,
But it's my distinct belief
That there's much more than they fancy in his nob.
But he's travelling on the "never"
And will surely die of grief
On the day when he's compelled to take a job.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Skeeta (An Old Servant's Tale)

Our Skeeta was married, our Skeeta! the tomboy
and pet of the place,
No more as a maiden we'd greet her, no more
would her pert little face
Light up the chill gloom of the parlour; no more
would her deft little hands
Serve drinks to the travel-stained caller on his way
to more southerly lands;
No more would she chaff the rough drovers and
send them away with a smile,
No more would she madden her lovers, demurely,
with womanish guile -
The "prince" from the great Never-Never, with
light touch of lips and of hand
Had come, and enslaved her for ever - a potentate
bearded and tanned
From the land where the white mirage dances its
dance of death over the plains,
With the glow of the sun in his glances, the lust of
the West in his veins;

His talk of long drought-stricken stretches when the
tongue rattled dry on the lips;
Of his fights with the niggers, poor wretches, as
he sped on his perilous trips.
A supple-thewed, desert-bred rover, with naught to
commend him but this,
That he was her idol, her lover, who'd fettered her
heart with a kiss.

They were wed, and he took her to Warren, where
she with his love was content;
But town-life to him was too foreign, so back to the
droving he went:
A man away down on the border of "Vic." bought

some cattle from "Cobb,"
And gave Harry Parker the order to go to "the
Gulf" for the mob:
And he went, for he held her love cheaper than his
wish to re-live the old life,
Or his reason might have been deeper - I called it
deserting his wife.

Then one morning his horses were mustered, the
start on the journey was made -
A clatter, an oath through the dust heard, was the
last of the long cavalcade.
As we stood by the stockyard assembled, poor child,
how she strove to be brave!
But yet I could see how she trembled at the careless
farewell that he gave.
We brought her back home on the morrow, but none
of us ever may learn
Of the fight that she fought to keep sorrow at bay
till her husband's return.
He had gone, but the way of his going, 'twas that
which she dwelt on with pain -
Careless kiss, though there sure was no knowing,
when or where he might kiss her again.
He had ridden away and had left her a woman,
in all but in years,
Of her girlhood's gay hopes had bereft her, and
left in their place nought but tears.

Yet still, as the months passed, a treasure was
brought her by Love, ere he fled,
And garments of infantile measure she fashioned
with needle and thread;
She fashioned with linen and laces and ribbons a
nest for her bird,
While colour returned to her face as the bud of
maternity stirred.
It blossomed and died; we arrayed it in all its soft

splendour of white,
And sorrowing took it and laid it in the earth
whence it sprung, out of sight.
She wept not at all, only whitened, as Death, in
his pitiless quest,
Leant over her pillow and tightened the throat of the
child at her breast.

She wept not, her soul was too tired, for waiting is
harrowing work,
And then I bethought me and wired away to the
agents in Bourke;
'Twas little enough I could glean there; 'twas little
enough that they knew -
They answered he hadn't been seen there, but might
in a week, perchance two.
She wept not at all, only whitened with staring too
long at the night:
There was only one time when she brightened, that
time when red dust hove in sight,
And settled and hung on the backs of the cattle, and
altered their spots,
While the horses swept up, with their packs of blue
blankets and jingling pots.
She always was set upon meeting those boisterous
cattle-men, lest
Her husband had sent her a greeting by one of them,
in from the West.
Not one of them ever owned to him, or seemed to
remember the name
(The truth was they all of them knew him, but
wouldn't tell her of his shame)
But never, though long time she waited, did her faith
in the faithless grow weak,
And each time the outer door grated, an eager flush
sprang to her cheek -

'Twasn't he, and it died with a flicker, and then

what I had long dreaded came:
I was serving two drovers with liquor when one of
them mentioned his name.
"Oh, yes!" said the other one, winking, "on the
Paroo I saw him, he'd been
In Eulo a fortnight then, drinking, and driving
about with "The Queen"
While the bullocks were going to glory, and his
billet was not worth a G --- d --- ;"
I told him to cut short the story, as I pulled-to the
door with a slam -
Too late! for the words were loud-spoken, and Skeeta
was out in the hall,
Then I knew that a girl's heart was broken, as I
heard a low cry and a fall.

And then came a day when the doctor went home,
for the truth was avowed;
And I knew that my hands, which had rocked her in
childhood, would fashion her shroud,
I knew we should tenderly carry and lay her where
many more lie,
Ah, why will the girls love and marry, when men are
not worthy, ah, why?
She lay there a-dying, our Skeeta; not e'en did she
stir at my kiss,
In the next world perchance we may greet her, but
never, ah, never, in this.
Like the last breath of air in a gully, that sighs as
the sun slowly dips,
To the knell of a heart beating dully, her soul
struggled out on her lips.
But she lifted great eyelids and pallid, while once
more beneath them there glowed
The fire of Love, as she rallied at sound of hoofs
out on the road;
They rang sharp and clear on the metal, they ceased
at the gate in the lane,
A pause, and we heard the beats settle in long,
swinging cadence again;

With a rattle, a rush, and a clatter the rider came
down by the store,
And neared us, but what did it matter? he never
pulled rein at the door,
But over the brow of the hill he sped on with a
low muffled roll,
"Twas only young Smith on his filly; he passed, and
so too did her soul.

Weeks after, I went down one morning to trim the
white rose that had grown
And clasped, with its tender adorning, the plain
little cross of white stone.
In the lane dusty drovers were wheeling dull cattle,
with turbulent sound,
But I paused as I saw a man kneeling, with his
forehead pressed low on the mound;
Already he'd heard me approaching, and slowly I
saw him up-rise
And move away, sullenly slouching his "cabbage-
tree" over his eyes,
I never said anything to him, as he mounted his horse
at the gate,
He didn't know me, but I knew him, the husband
who came back too late.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

The Babes In The Bush

Dozens of damp little curls;
One little short upper lip;
Two rows of teeth like diminutive pearls;
Eyes clear and grey as the creek where it swirls
Over the ledges—that's Tip!
With a skip!—
A perfectly hopeless young nip!

Smudge on the tip of his nose;
Mischievous glance of a Puck;
Heart just as big as the rents in his clothes;
Lungs like a locust and cheeks like a rose;—
Total it!—there you have Tuck!
And bad luck
To the man who would question his pluck!

School is all over at last—
School with its pothooks and strokes:
Homeward they toddle, but who could go fast?—
So many wonderful things to be passed—
Froggie, for instance, who croaks
'Neath the oaks
By the creek where the watercress soaks.

Sandpipers dance on the bars;
Swallows, white-throated and fleet,
Dip thirsty beaks in the stream as they pass;
Smooth water-beetles that twinkle like stars
Watch the gay dragon-flies greet.
Hark how sweet
Is the pipe of the tiny pee-weet!

Near, too, the earth is all torn:
Strong, willing workers have thrown
Great heaps of tailings, smooth-polished and worn,
Round the mysterious caverns that yawn—
Stacks of the snowy quartz stone,
Grass-grown
Piles of the Earth's dry bone.

Grasshoppers chirp on the brace;
Briars drop berries blood-red
Into the mouldering void of the race;
Green mosses flourish on cutting and face;
Children speak softly, with dread,
When they tread
In this desolate place of the dead.

'Tum on!' said Tip, 'here's a nest!'
Looking behind as he ran.
'No,' said his brother, expanding his chest,
'I like to play at pro'pectin' the best'—
Thumping a rusty old pan;
Then began
To wash up a dish like a man.

'Tum on! here's four little eggs!
Do tum!'—he whimpers his lip:
A-tremble his eyes, wet by tears as he begs,
And sharp briars are scratching his legs.
A branch strikes his face like a whip;
Then a slip—
And a shaft swallows poor little Tip!

Peering and catching his breath,
Tuck felt his little heart swell:
Nothing at all could he see underneath—
P'r'aps poor old Tippy had gone to his death—
Would it hurt him if he fell?
Who could tell
The depth of that horrible well?

'Tippy! oh, Tip! are you dead?' . . .
Never a sound or a sigh!
Tuck held his breath, his heart heavy as lead:
Then: 'Tuck! where are you? I've hurted my head!'
Came up the quav'ring reply;
And a cry:
'Oh, Tuck! don't go 'way, or I'll die!

'Tuck! it's so dark; I'm afraid!' . . .

He drew down his eyebrows and frowned
Up the creek, down the creek, somewhat dismayed.
Miles to go home; but, again, if he stayed,
How would they ever be found Underground
In that cavern that swallowed all sound?

'Tuck, I'm all covered with blood!
Sobbed the small voice without cess.
'Why don't you help me up out of the mud?'
Tuck foraged out a long length of pine wood;
Stripped off his little print dress,
And—just guess!
Rigged a white flag of distress!

Truly the depth was not great—
That, though, the babe did not know;
Lowering himself till the whole of his weight
Hung on the fingers that clutched the blue slate . . .
'Please God!' . . . he let himself go;
And I trow
That angel hands caught him below.

Never a scratch or a mark!
No, and not even a tear!
Little hands feeling their way through the dark . . .
What if that other should be stiff and stark?
'Here I am, Tippy! quite near—
Oh, dear!'
Then came the answer: 'I'm here!'

Crouched in the mouth of a drive,
Tippy sobbed out his delight—
Not so much hurt, after all—quite alive:
Almost convinced that no harm could arrive
Now that Tuck's arms clasped him tight.
Then the light
Died slowly, and lo! it was Night.

Above—the flag blows to the air:
Sad parents seek vainly and weep:
There are lights 'mid the thistles, and cries of despair:
A rifle cracks loudly, and bonfires glare . . .

Below—where the blind creatures creep,
Hidden deep,
Two pretty babes smile in their sleep.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

The Box-Tree's Love

Long time beside the squatter's gate
A great grey Box-Tree, early, late,
Or shine or rain, in silence there
Had stood and watched the seasons fare:
Had seen the wind upon the plain
Caress the amber ears of grain;
The river burst its banks and come
Far past its belt of mighty gum:
Had seen the scarlet months of drought
Scourging the land with fiery knout;
And seasons ill and seasons good
Had alternated as they would.
The years were born, had grown and gone,
While suns had set and suns had shone;
Fierce flames had swept; chill waters drenched;—
That sturdy yeoman never blenched.

The Tree had watched the station grow—
The buildings rising row on row;
And from that point of vantage green,
Peering athwart its leafy screen,
The wondering soldier-birds had seen
The lumbering bullock-dray draw near,
Led by that swarthy pioneer
Who, gazing at the pleasant shade,
Was tempted, dropped his whip and stayed;
Brought there his wanderings to a close;
Unloosed the polished yokes and bows.

The bullocks, thankful for the boon,
Rang on their bells a merry tune:
The hobbles clinked; the horses grazed;
The snowy calico was raised;
The fire was lit; the fragrant tea
Drunk to a sunset melody
Tuned by the day before it died
To waken on Earth's other side.
There 'twas, beneath that Box-Tree's shade,
Fortune's foundation-stone was laid;

Cemented fast with toil and thrift,
Stone upon stone was laid to lift
A mighty arch, commemorate
Of one who reached the goal too late.
That white-haired pioneer with pride
Fitted the keystone; then he died:
His toil, his thrift, all to what boot?
He gave his life for Dead Sea fruit:
What did it boot his wide domain
Of feathered pine and sweeping plain,
Sand-ridge and turf? for he lay dead—
Another reigning in his stead.

His sons forgot him; but that Tree
Mourned for him long and silently,
And o'er the old man's lonely bier
Would, if he could, have dropped a tear.
One other being only shared
His grief: one other only cared:
And she was but a six years' maid—
His grandchild, who had watched him fade
In childish ignorance; and wept
Because the poor old grand-dad slept
So long a sleep, and never came
To smile upon her at her game,
Or tell her stories of the fays
And giants of the olden days.
She cared; and, as the seasons sped,
Linked by the memory of the dead,
They two, the Box-Tree and the Child,
Grew old in friendship; and she smiled,
Clapping her chubby hands with glee,
When for her pleasure that old Tree
Would shake his limbs, and let the light
Glance in a million sparkles bright
From off his polished olive cloak.
Then would the infant gently stroke
His massive bole, and laughing try
To count the patches of blue sky
Betwixt his leaves, or in the shades
That trembled on the grassy blades
Trace curious faces, till her head

Of gold grew heavy; then he'd spread
His leaves to shield her, while he droned
A lullaby, so softly toned
It seemed but as the gentle sigh
Of Summer as she floated by;
While bird and beast grew humble-voiced,
Seeing those golden ringlets moist
With dew of sleep. With one small hand
Grasping a grass-stem for a wand,
Titania slept. Nature nor spoke,
Nor dared to breathe, until she woke.

The years passed onward; and perchance
The Tree had shot his tufted lance
Up to the sky a few slow feet;
But one great limb grew down to greet
His mistress, who had ne'er declined
In love for him, though far behind
Her child-life lay, and now she stood
Waiting to welcome womanhood.
She loved him always as of old;
Yet would his great roots grasp the mould,
And knotted branches grind and groan
To see her seek him not alone;
For lovers came, and 'neath those boughs
With suave conversing sought to rouse
The slumbering passion in a breast
Whose coldness gave an added zest
To the pursuit;—but all in vain:
They spoke the once, nor came again—
Save one alone, who pressed his suit
(Man-like, he loved forbidden fruit)
And strove to change her Nay to Yea,
Until it fell upon a day
Once more he put his fate to proof
Standing beneath that olive roof;
And though her answer still was 'No'
He, half-incensed, refused to go,
Asking her, Had she heart for none
Because there was some other one
Who claimed it all? Whereon the maid
Slipped off her ring and laughing said:

'Look you, my friend! here now I prove
The truth of it, and pledge my love!—
And, poised on tiptoe, touched a limb
That bent to gratify her whim.
She slipped the golden circle on
A tiny branchlet, whence it shone
Mocking the suitor with its gleam—
A quaint dispersal of his dream.
She left the trinket there; but when
She came to take it back again
She found it not; nor—though she knelt
Upon the scented grass and felt
Among its roots, or parted sheaves
And peered among the shining leaves—
Could it be found. The Box-Tree held
Her troth for aye: his great form swelled
Until the bitter sap swept through
His veins and gave him youth anew.

With busy fingers, lank and thin,
The fatal Sisters sit and spin
Life's web, in gloomy musings wrapt,
Caring not, when a thread is snapt,
What harm its severance may do—
Whether it strangleth one or two.

Alas! there came an awful space
Of time wherein that sweet young face
Grew pale, its sharpened outline pressed
Deep in the pillow; for a guest,
Unsought, unbidden, forced his way
Into the chamber where she lay.
'Twas Death! . . . Outside the Box-Tree kept
Sad vigil, and at times he swept
His branches softly, as a thrill
Shot through his framework, boding ill
To her he loved; and so he bade
A bird fly ask her why she stayed.
The messenger, with glistening eye,
Returned, and said, 'The maid doth lie
Asleep. I tapped upon the pane:
She stirred not, so I tapped again.

She rests so silent on the bed,
Friend, that I fear the maid is dead;
For they have cut great sprays of bloom
And laid them all about the room.
The scent of roses fills the air:
They nestle in her breast and hair—

Like snowy mourners, scented, sweet,
Around her pillow and her feet.'
'Ah, me!' the Box-Tree, sighing, said;
'My love is dead! my love is dead!'
And shook his branches till each leaf
Chorused his agony of grief.

They bore the maiden forth, and laid
Her down to rest where she had played
Amid her piles of forest-spoil
In childhood: now the sun-caked soil
Closed over her. 'Ah!' sighed the Tree,
'Mark how my love doth come to me!'
He pushed brown rootlets down, and slid
Between the casket and its lid;
And bade them very gently creep
And wake the maiden from her sleep.
The tiny filaments slipped down
And plucked the lace upon her gown.
She stirred not when they ventured near
And softly whispered in her ear.

The silken fibres gently press
Upon her lips a chill caress:
They wreath her waist: they brush her hair:
Under her pallid eyelids stare:
Yet all in vain; she will not wake—
Not even for her lover's sake.
The Box-Tree groaned aloud and cried:
'Ah, me! grim Death hath stole my bride.
Where is she hidden? Where hath flown
Her soul? I cannot bide alone;
But fain would follow.'

Then he called

And whispered to an ant that crawled
Upon a bough; and bade it seek
The white-ant colony and speak
A message where, beneath a dome
Of earth, the white queen hath her home.
She sent a mighty army forth
That fall upon the tree in wrath,
And, entering by a tiny hole,
Fill all the hollow of his bole;
Through all its pipes and crannies pour;
Sharp at his aching heart-strings tore;
Along his branches built a maze
Of sinuous, earthen-covered ways.
His smooth leaves shrunk, his sap ran dry:
The sunbeams laughing from the sky
Helped the ant workers at their toil,
Sucking all moisture from the soil.

Then on a night the wind swept down
And rustled 'mid the foliage brown.
The mighty framework creaked and groaned
In giant agony, and moaned—
Its wind-swept branches growing numb—
'I come, my love! my love, I come!'
A gust more furious than the rest
Struck the great Box-Tree's shivering crest:
The great bole snapped across its girth;
The forest monarch fell to earth
With such a mighty rush of sound
The settlers heard it miles around,
While upward through the windy night
That faithful lover's soul took flight.

The squatter smiled to see it fall:
He sent his men with wedge and maul,
Who split the tree; but found it good
For nothing more than kindling-wood.
They marvelled much to find a ring—
Asking themselves what chanced to bring
The golden circlet which they found
Clasping a branchlet firmly round.
Foolish and blind! they could not see

The faithfulness of that dead Tree.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

The Demon Snow-Shoes (A Legend Of Kiandra)

The snow lies deep on hill and dale,
In rocky gulch and grassy vale,
The tiny, trickling, tumbling falls
Are frozen 'twixt their rocky walls
That grey and brown look silent down
Upon Kiandra's shrouded town.

The Eucumbene itself lies dead,
Fast frozen in its narrow bed,
And distant sounds ring out quite near,
The crystal air is froze so clear,
While to and fro the people go
In silent swiftness o'er the snow.

And, like a mighty gallows-frame,
The derrick in the New Chum claim
Hangs over where, despite the cold,
Strong miners seek the hidden gold,
And stiff and blue, half-frozen through,
The fickle dame of Fortune woo.

Far out, along a snow capped range,
There rose a sound which echoed strange,
Where snow-emburthen'd branches hang,
And flashing icicles, there rang
A gay refrain, as towards the plain
Sped swiftly downward Carl the Dane.

His long, lithe snow-shoes sped along
In easy rhythm to his song;
Now slowly circling round the hill,

Now speeding downward with a will;
The crystals crash and blaze and flash
As o'er the frozen crust they dash.

Among the hills the first he shone
Of all who buckled snow-shoe on,
For though the mountain lads were fleet,
But one bold rival dare compete,
To veer and steer, devoid of fear,
Beside this strong-limbed mountaineer.

'Twas Davy Eccleston who dared
To cast the challenge: If Carl cared
On shoes to try their mutual pace,
Then let him enter for the race,
Which might be run by anyone -
A would-be champion. Carl said "Done."

But not alone in point of speed
They sought to gain an equal meed,
For in the narrow lists of love,
Dave Eccleston had cast the glove:
Though both had prayed, the blushing maid
As yet no preference betrayed.

But played them off, as women will,
One 'gainst the other one, until
A day when she was sorely pressed
To loving neither youth confessed,
But did exclaim - the wily dame,
"Who wins this race, I'll bear his name!"

These words were running through Carl's head
As o'er the frozen crust he sped,
But suddenly became aware
That not alone he travelled there,
He sudden spied, with swinging stride,
A stranger speeding by his side;

The breezes o'er each shoulder toss'd
His beard, bediamonded with frost,
His eyes flashed strangely, bushy browed.
His breath hung round him like a shroud.
He never spoke, nor silence broke,
But by the Dane sped stroke for stroke.

"Old man! I neither know your name,
Nor what you are, nor whence you came:
But this, if I but had your shoes
This championship I ne'er could lose.
To call them mine, those shoes divine,
I'll gladly pay should you incline.

The stranger merely bowed his head -
"The shoes are yours," he gruffly said;
"I change with you, though at a loss,
And in return I ask that cross
Which, while she sung, your mother hung
Around your neck when you were young."

Carl hesitated when he heard
The price, but not for long demurred,
And gave the cross; the shoes were laced
Upon his feet in trembling haste,
So long and light, smooth polished, bright.
His heart beat gladly at the sight.

Now, on the morning of the race,
Expectancy on every face,
They come the programme to fulfil
Upon the slope of Township Hill;
With silent feet the people meet,
While youths and maidens laughing greet.

High-piled the flashing snowdrifts lie,
And laugh to scorn the sun's dull eye.
That, glistening feebly, seems to say -
"When Summer comes you'll melt away:
You'll change your song when I grow strong,
I think so, though I may be wrong."

The pistol flashed, and off they went
Like lightning on the steep descent,
Resistlessly down-swooping, swift
O'er the smooth face of polished drift
The racers strain with might and main.
But in the lead flies Carl the Dane.

Behind him Davy did his best,
With hopeless eye and lip compressed:
Beat by a snow-shoe length at most,
They flash and pass the winning-post.
The maiden said, "I'll gladly wed
The youth who in this race has led."

But where was he? still speeding fast,
Over the frozen stream he pass'd,
They watched his flying form until

They lost it over Sawyer's Hill,
Nor saw it more, the people swore
The like they'd never seen before.

The way he scaled that steep ascent
Was quite against all precedent,
While others said he could but choose
To do it on those demon shoes;
They talked in vain, for Carl the Dane
Was never seen in flesh again.

But now the lonely diggers say
That sometimes at the close of day
They see a misty wraith flash by
With the faint echo of a cry,
It may be true; perhaps they do,
I doubt it much; but what say you?

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

The Digger's Song

Scrape the bottom of the hole: gather up the stuff,
Fossick in the crannies, lest you leave a grain
behind,
Just another shovelful and that'll be enough,-
Now we'll take it to the bank and see what we can
find,
Give the dish a twirl around,
Let the water swirl around,
Gently let it circulate, there's music in the swish,
And the tinkle of the gravel,
As the pebbles quickly travel
Around in merry circles on the bottom of the dish.

Ah, if man could only wash his life, if he only could,
Panning off the evil deeds, keeping but the
good,
What a mighty lot of digger's dishes would be sold,
Though I fear the heap of tailings would be greater
than the gold,
Give the dish a twirl around,
Let the water swirl around,
Man's the sport of circumstance however he may
wish,
Fortune! are you there now?
Answer to my prayer now,
And drop a half ounce nugget in the bottom of
the dish.

Gently let the water lap, keep the corners dry,
That's about the place the gold will generally stay,
What was that bright particle that just then
caught my eye?
I fear me by the look of things 'twas only yellow
clay,
Just another twirl around,

Let the water swirl around,
That's the way we rob the river of its golden fish,
What's that? can't we snare a one?
Don't say that there's ne'er a one,
Bah, there's not a colour in the bottom of the dish.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

To A Hatpeg

There's a nice little hatpeg that hangs on the wall
That long from its owner has parted,
And though he is wandering far beyond call
Like him it is always true hearted.

Many seasons have passed since his limp Cabbage Tree
Has dangled upon the old rack
But that one single peg, always vacant must be,
For its owner will surely come back.

And though in far countries, he sadly doth roam
While hunger had forced him to beg
Till fortune grows kindly, and sends him back home,
There's an Angel who watches that peg.

One afternoon, after a long weary tramp,
And hard grafting, to which he's no stranger,
He found, that a letter, had come to the camp,
To warn him, his peg was in danger;

The words that he used, are best shown by a dash -
As he swore that no rival he'd brook,
Said he "my fine fellow I'll settle your hash"
As the first train to Cooma he took.

When he came to that town, he bought pistols and knives,
And a sword, with a long shiny blade,
You'd have thought that his rival, had two or three lives,
By the fierce preparations he made;

He bought a chaffcutter, an axe and a saw
With a coffin, lined neatly with satin,
Such a beautiful coffin was ne'er seen before,
With a pious inscription in Latin

A hammerless gun, that went off at a touch,
Of green cartridges nearly a keg.
Said he "When I've used them, there won't remain much,
Of the man with designs on my peg.

Then he planted himself, till his rival came by.
From the weapons he made a selection,
Quoth he "When he comes I shall certainly try,
And give him the warmest reception."

So as the bold stripling, came singing along,
The Exile, sprang out from his lair,
While his rival soon warbled a different song
(T'was less of a song, than a prayer)

Then he shot him with axes, and chopped him with guns,
Till his state, was so utterly utter –
When the Exile, collects all the pieces, and runs
The remnants right through the chaffcutter –

He turns at the handle, with feelings of joy –
And as he put through the last leg,
Quoth he, "this is how I shall treat any boy,
Who dares hang his hat (alt: to lay hands) on my peg –"

Then he shut down the coffin, well pleased to be rid,
Of the youth, who got terribly mauled, for
The sake of a hat peg – Then tacked on the lid
A label – Please keep until called for – "

Read these verses, sweet youth! – for a moral lies there
'Tis short, not much more than a line,
At Rosedale, are plenty of pegs and to spare –
Don't hang up your hat upon mine –

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

'Twixt The Wings Of The Yard

Hear the loud swell of it, mighty pell mell of it,
Thousands of voices all blent into one:
See "hell for leather" now trooping together, now
Down the long slope of the range at a run,
Dust in the wake of `em: see the wild break of `em,
Spear-horned and curly, red, spotted and starred:
See the lads bringing `em, blocking `em, ringing `em.
Fetching `em up to the wings of the yard.

Mark that red leader now: what a fine bleeder now,
Twelve hundred at least if he weighs half a pound,
None go ahead of him. Mark the proud tread of him,
See how he bellows and paws at the ground.
Watch the mad rush of `em, raging and crush of `em.
See when they struck how the corner post jarred.
What a mad chasing and wheeling and racing and
Turbulent talk `twixt the wings of the yard.

Harry and Teddy, there! let them go steady there!
Some of you youngsters will surely get pinned.
What am I saying? I've had my last day in
The saddle: I might as well talk to the wind.
Why should I grieve at all? soon I must leave it all -
Leave it for ever; and yet it seems hard
That I should be lingering here `stead of fingering
Handle of whip `twixt the wings of the yard.

Hear the loud crack of the whips on the back of the
Obstinate weaners who will not go in -
Sharp fusilade of it till, half afraid of it,
Echo herself shuts her ears at the din.
They'll say when it's over now that I'm in clover now -
Happy old pensioner, yet it seems hard,
E'en on the brink of the grave, when I think of the
Times out of mind that I rode to that yard.

Hark to the row at the rails, there's a cow at the

Charge: how she laughs all their lashes to scorn.
Mark how she ran ag'in little Tom Flannagan.
Lucky for him that it wasn't her horn:
He'd make no joke of it had he a poke of it.
There she comes back! but he's put on his guard,
Greenhide descending now, sharp reports blending now,
Flogging her back up the wings of the yard.

The breeze brings their bellowing, soft'ning it, mellowing,
Till it sounds like a spent giant in pain -
Steals up the valley on, sounding a rally on
Sonorous hills that return it again.
Useless my whining now, useless repining now,
'Twon't make me any less battered and scarred;
Though I've grown grey at it - oh, for a day at it,
Oh, for an hour 'twixt the wings of the yard.

Oh, how I yearn for those times, how I burn for those
Days when my weapons, the whip and the spur,
The double reigned bridle, were not hanging idle,
But I'm old, and as useless as Stupmy - that cur;
No good for heeling now, he has a feeling now
Not unlike mine - that it's woefully hard
We should be lying here, groaning and sighing here
Watching the cattle come up to the yard.

Life has no salt in it. See how I halt in it -
I, who once rode with the first of the flight -
Watching and waiting now, feebly debating now
Whether the close will bring darkness or light;
Half my time pondering, back through life wandering,
Groaning to see how life has been marred -
Seeing the blots in it, all the bad spots in it,
Mustering, bringing past sins to the yard.

Shall I be able to show a clean waybill to
God, when he rounds up and drafts off his own -
When, at the mustering, millions of clustering
Souls come to judgement before the white throne?
Is the Lord's hand on me? Have I his brand on me?
When I go up will the passage be barred?
Am I a chosen one? must the gates close on me?

Shall I be left `twixt the wings of the yard?

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake

Where The Dead Men Lie

Out on the wastes of the Never Never -
That's where the dead men lie!
There where the heat-waves dance forever -
That's where the dead men lie!
That's where the Earth's loved sons are keeping
Endless tryst: not the west wind sweeping
Feverish pinions can wake their sleeping -
Out where the dead men lie!

Where brown Summer and Death have mated -
That's where the dead men lie!
Loving with fiery lust unsated -
That's where the dead men lie!
Out where the grinning skulls bleach whitely
Under the saltbush sparkling brightly;
Out where the wild dogs chorus nightly -
That's where the dead men lie!

Deep in the yellow, flowing river -
That's where the dead men lie!
Under the banks where the shadows quiver -
That's where the dead men lie!
Where the platypus twists and doubles,
Leaving a train of tiny bubbles.
Rid at last of their earthly troubles -
That's where the dead men lie!

East and backward pale faces turning -
That's how the dead men lie!
Gaunt arms stretched with a voiceless yearning -
That's how the dead men lie!
Oft in the fragrant hush of nooning
Hearing again their mother's crooning,
Wrapt for aye in a dreamful swooning -
That's how the dead men lie!

Only the hand of Night can free them -
That's when the dead men fly!
Only the frightened cattle see them -

See the dead men go by!
Cloven hoofs beating out one measure,
Bidding the stockmen know no leisure -
That's when the dead men take their pleasure!
That's when the dead men fly!

Ask, too, the never-sleeping drover:
He sees the dead pass by;
Hearing them call to their friends - the plover,
Hearing the dead men cry;
Seeing their faces stealing, stealing,
Hearing their laughter, pealing, pealing,
Watching their grey forms wheeling, wheeling
Round where the cattle lie!

Strangled by thirst and fierce privation -
That's how the dead men die!
Out on Moncygrub's farthest station -
That's how the dead men die!
Hard-faced greybeards, youngsters caflow;
Some mounds cared for, some left fallow;
Some deep down, yet others shallow.
Some having but the sky.

Moncygrub, as he sips his claret,
Looks with complacent eye
Down at his watch-chain, eighteen carat -
There, in his club, hard by:
Recks not that every link is stamped with
Names of the men whose limbs are cramped with
Too long lying in grave-mould, cramped with
Death where the dead men lie.

Barcroft Henry Thomas Boake