

Classic Poetry Series

Alfred Thomas Chandler

- poems -

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Alfred Thomas Chandler(1852-1941)

Born in 1852 in Geelong Victoria.

Alfred Chandler was to begin his journalistic career at the Hamilton Spectator. He moved to Adelaide in 1878 and was the co-founder of the Adelaide satirical weekly Quiz in 1892. In 1894, as the Western Australian gold rush began, he arrived in Coolgardie. He edited The Goldfield Courier, The Coolgardie Miner and later, The Sunday Times. He resigned from The Sunday Times in 1925 and became a prominent member of the Secession movement. Chandler was an active member of Perth's literary world.

He died in Perth in 1941.

Catching The Coach

At Kangaroo Gully in 'Fifty-two
The rush and the scramble was reckless and rough;
'Three ounces a dish and the lead running true!'
Was whispered around concerning the stuff.

Next morning a thousand of fellows or more
Appeared for invasion along the brown rise,
Some Yankees, and Cockneys, and Cantabs of yore
And from Oxford in blue-shirt disguise.

And two mornings later the Nugget saloon,
With billiards and skittles, was glaring with signs,
A blind fiddler, Jim, worked out a weak tune,
Beguiling the boys and collecting the fines.

Then tents started up like the freaks of a dream
While heaps of white pipeclay dotted the slope,
To 'Dern her -- a duffer!' or 'Creme de la creme!'
That settled the verdict of languishing hope.

And bustle and jollity rang through the trees
In strange combination of humankind traits;
With feverish searchings and gay levities
The fires of excitement were fully ablaze.

Well, three mornings after, the stringybark gums
All rustled their leaves with further surprise;
They'd seen old stagers and limey new-chums,
But here were galoots in peculiar guise:

With nondescript uniform, booted and spurred,
A fierce-looking strap on the underneath lip,
An ominous shooter, a dangling sword,
A grim leather pouch about the right hip!

And maybe a dozen came cantering so,
All clanking and jaunty --- authority vain --
When down through the gully rang out the word 'Joe',
And 'Joe' was sent on with a sneering refrain.

There was hunting for 'rights', and producing the same,
Or passing them on to a paperless mate,
Or hiding in bushes or down in the claim --
Such various expedients to baffle the State.

Then 'Who put him on?' -- 'Twig his illigant seat!'
'Cuss me, but he's purty!' -- 'The thing on the horse!'
'His first dacent clothes!' -- 'What surprise for his feet!'
Such volleys as these were soon fired at the Force.

But duty was duty. Just then through the scrub
A digger made off -- he a culprit no doubt!
'Dismount you then, Wilson!' roared Sergeant Hubbub;
'Quick! follow the rascal and ferret him out.'

The sapling cadet, with budding moustache,
Then sprang to the ground in dauntless pursuit
And, filled up with zeal and a soldier-like dash,
He felt a true hero of saddle and boot.

The gully quick echoed with taints that were real,
Keen chaff of defiance allied to revolt,
Such sharp wordy weapons as might have been steel
From skirmishers laughing on hillock and holt.

Away went the fugitive, spurred on by haste,
Escaping the undergrowth, leaping the logs,
Yet ne'er looking back -- did he know he was chased?
Said Wilson, 'He's one of the worst of the dogs!

'Some greater misdeed must have blackened his hand;
I'll have him -- promotion! Stop there, or I'll shoot!'
the other ahead didn't hear the command
But sprang on unheeding o'er dry branch and root.

The chase settled down to a heavy set-to;
They ran o'er the hill and across the clear flat;
And Wilson was chuckling -- the villian he knew
Was making a bee-line for jail -- Ballarat!

'I'll follow the rogue safely into the trap --

Confound him, he's speedy; I can't run him down;
But there, quite unconscious of any mishap,
I'll fix him up neatly in gay Canvas Town!

Then over a creek where a line of sage-gums
All flourishing grew, then away to the right;
Their loud breathings mingled with strange forest hums,
And wallabies scampered with terror and fright.

And cockatoos screeched from the loftiest trees,
The minahs and magpies all fluttered and flew,
The drowsy old possums were roused from their ease,
The locusts and lizards quick stepped out of view.

But on went the pair, never noticing this,
For both had a serious business in hand.
With one there were feelings that prophesied bliss,
The other saw capture and glory so grand.

O'er the hillside and creek, beyond hollow and spur,
Through brief strips of woodland, they hurried on still;
The trooper lost ground, but he wasn't a cur;
Besides, they were nearing on Bakery Hill.

Then suddenly broke on each sweltering sight
The thousand of tents in the city of gold;
And straight to the thick of them ran with delight
The chased and the chaser -- what luck for the bold!

The coach was just starting for Melbourne that day
As Wilson rushed eagerly on to his man.
'I'll put you with care where you won't be so gay,'
The trooper in triumph already began.

'You've led me a dance in a lively hour's sun;
Now trip out your licence, or waltz off to jail!
What! got one? Oh, ho! Why the ____ did you run?'
'To post this here letter for Nell by the mail.'

Alfred Thomas Chandler

Lights Along The Mile

THE NIGHT descends in glory, and adown the purple west
The young moon, like a crescent skiff, upon some fairy quest,
Has dropped below the opal lights that linger low and far
To havens that are beacons by the Pilot's evening star;
And slowly, softly, from above the darkness is unfurled
A wondrous curtain loosened on the windows of the world.
Then suddenly, like magic, where smoke-stacks fumed the while,
Ten thousand lights flash out aflame along the Golden Mile.

And thro' the dusky gauze that falls upon the looming mines
Dim spires and spars of poppet-heads in faintly broken lines
Grow clearer to the vision, till the shadow picture seems
The argosies from half the world i' the misty Port o' Dreams;
And lo! where golden Day had reigned in radiant robes of blue,
A god of joy and hope, who thrilled the sons of toil and rue,
Now comes the Queen of Starland forth to scatter with a smile
Her diamonds that flash and blaze along the Golden Mile.

And all the night a thousand stamps in ceaseless rhythmic roar
Are beating out the tragic gold from endless streams of ore,
These harnessed giants of the will that so are trained and taught
To answer to the sentient touch and catch the thrill of thought,
From nerve to nerve that quivers thro' the animated steel,
And makes it live and makes it move and strength emotions feel,
Till in their voices music comes insistent all the while
Reverberating massive chants along the Golden Mile.

And down below, a thousand feet, a thousand miners tear
The golden ore, the glistening ore that holds such joy and care;
Ah! down below, another world, with hopes, desires, and dreams,—
Such playthings as the tyrant Fate in fickle will beseems.
Ah! down below, where panting drills are eating thro' the rock,
Where life and death are lurking in the fire's convulsive shock,—
Where many a sturdy hero delves within the lode's long aisle
To win him love, the gold of love, along the Golden Mile.

Now speeding westward flies the train into the wondrous night,
The engine pulsing as a man who strives with strenuous might;
Its great heart seems to throb and throb, its breath comes fierce and warm

To vitalize the force that sleeps along its sinuous form;
So dreaming back from Somerville, a sad thought fills the air,
And starts a poignant fancy o'er the wondrous city where
From Lamington to Ivanhoe there's many a tear and smile
Beneath the myriad lights that gleam along the Golden Mile.

How bright they glitter down the streets o'er camp, and mill, and mine,
The reflex of that mystic stream that flows from dark to shine—
The brother of that vital spark that wakes from mystery,
And grows to life and will and power and human entity;
The confluent currents of the mind that holds us all in fief,
And gives to some the thrill of joy, to some the pang of grief—
Ah! many noble deeds are done and many that are vile
Where love is lost and love is won, along the Golden Mile.

So midnight chimes across the gloom, as we are speeding west,
And sirens screech the respite sweet that ends in sleep and rest;
The cool breeze meets the tired brow and whispers gentler tales
That seem to murmur with the metre sung by wheels and rails.
The night has grown in glory and from out the purple dome
Ten thousand stars are gleaming to show the wanderer home;
While fainter fades the glimmer, like a city on an isle,
Till swallowed in the darkness are the lights along the Mile.

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