

Classic Poetry Series

Joseph Furphy
- poems -

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Joseph Furphy(1843 - 1912)

Joseph Furphy was born at Yering in the upper valley, Victoria, the son of Protestant Irish bounty emigrants who arrived in Australia in 1841. It was Joseph's older brother, John, who invented the Furphy water-cart, which was the means the expression 'furphy' came into Australian English.) Joseph Furphy gained his education at a small school in Kyneton, and subsequently worked on his father's farm before trying his luck on the goldfields. He was then employed as a threshing machine operator in the Daylesford district. Joseph married Leonie Germaine, a French girl, in 1867, and worked her mother's vineyard and farm. In 1868 he acquired a selection in the Lake Cooper district, but was unsuccessful and after five years left the farm to find work on the goldfields and as a labourer. He then moved his family to the Riverina in NSW and became a bullocky with his own team in 1877. Furphy carted wool and various other goods from his base in Hay along the Murray and to northern stations. It was not an easy life for him or his family and after the 1883 drought, which practically decimated his team, he went to work in his brother's foundry in Shepparton, Victoria. With the security of a weekly wage he had time to write and in 1889 he submitted essays and short stories to the Bulletin under the pseudonym 'Warrigal Jack'; From 1893 he became 'Tom Collins'. In 1897 he concluded a novel of 1125 pages and sent it to the editor of the Bulletin, J.F. Archibald. Archibald's literary editor, A.G. Stephens suggested revisions and the book was finally published in 1903. Furphy used the excised sections of his novels to compose two more books. However, due to the slow sales of *Such is Life*, neither was published during his life. In 1905 Furphy moved to WA to join his sons who had set up an iron foundry. He died there in 1912. Furphy is regarded as one of the most substantial of pre-First World War Australian fiction writers.

A Christmas Greeting To K.B.

While changing Seasons run their course,
Controlled and guided from above,
It is thy part to re-enforce
The broadening stream of Light and Love.

Joseph Furphy

A Christmas Hymn

The Seraph-song of morning's prime
That hail'd Messiah's birth,
The charter of a coming time
When Love shall rule the earth,
Rings from yon far Judaeen hill —

Joseph Furphy

A Psalm Of Council

Though some good folks may take it ill,
As trifling with parsonic frill,
Thus saith the Lord to Jim and Bill,
In admonition stern and straight:—
Ye hold from Me the brightest zones,
The fairest realm this planet owns,
Guarded on every side by Jones,
And standing yet inviolate.
So far, so good. And all the rest,
Amounting to a racial test,
May be compendiously express'd
In four short words — Be Up To Date.

Australia is the unit. There!
This Commonwealth denotes your share;
Ye have no loyalty to spare,
In spite of all your Empire prate.
For though the Motherland be good,
Yet may some oddities intrude,
Which it would be extremely rude
On your poor part to imitate.
For instance, if she should be lame,
It's not included in the game
That you should limp behind the dame,
By way of keeping Up To Date.

AUSTRALIA IS THE UNIT, mind!
With bounds unchangeably defin'd;
A continent to you assign'd —
That is the primary postulate.
One 'angry cloth' to call your own;
One scorn for every brand of drone;
One slant-eyed menace — yours alone! —
Involving each ingredient State.
The Commonwealth is paramount;
City or province merely count
As streamlets from that central fount —
Provided you are Up To Date.

If you should fail, with such a start,
To lead the world in Thought and Art,
You're only fit to draw a cart,
Which probably would be your fate.
Now take the tip of Holy Writ —
You won't survive unless you're fit;
And something more than honest grit
Must go to make a people great.
An Asiatic boundary fence
Is little better than pretence
Unless you're white in every sense —
Unless, in fact, you're Up To Date.

Ye have an old-man job on hand,
One that will tax your sense and sand;
The building of a nation grand
Is not accomplish'd while you wait.
Put not your trust in men of girth,
Who should have left this waken'd earth
About the period of their birth,
And lived in times appropriate.
For well-a-day! their date is fled;
Unearned Prerogative is dead,
And Decency may reign instead —
But only if you're Up To Date.

Touching your own forefathers' case,
Ask History what has taken place
Since Dago legions made the pace —
Say, Anno Domini 78.
Thrice has the Motherland been lost —
Three separate times has she been boss'd
By enterprising foes who crossed
The German Sea or Dover Strait;
While Bulldog Boys, with clods and sticks,
Fail'd to frustrate their knavish tricks;
Hence Freedom's show was simply nix —
Which came of not being Up To Date.

Till torn with feud, or sick with rot,
Or reconciled to Slavery's lot,
And ripe for wiping off the slate.

A parcel of anointed skunks;
A crowd that views its work, and funks;
A push of despots, scabs, and drunks,
I will by no means tolerate.
Assyria therefore had to go,
The Roman, Greek, and Ikey Mo.
Gehenna gapes — and rightly so —
For nations drifting Out Of Date.

Look out for snakes among the grass —
The noisy parish-minded ass;
The paltry devotee of Class;
The preacher of sectarian hate.
To give such pests an honest deal,
With justice to the public weal,
You may respect their narrow zeal,
But count them foes within the gate.
Should they as candidates appear,
Dispose them in their proper sphere,
That is to say, upon their ear
Your statesmen must be Up To Date.

Beware of Thrift's insidious creed,
That gospel of the moral weed;
For when a race professes Greed,
True aspiration must stagnate.
But don't denounce, with censure rash,
The helpful medium known as cash,
Nor swamp it in a futile splash,
Blind to what may eventuate.
Don't underrate what gonce can do,
Yet always keep in easy view
The unpretentious six-by-two,
Which places Mammon Out Of Date.

You can't do better than apply
The Reverend Hervey's rousing cry,
Who bids you Set Your Standards High,
And never pause nor deviate.
This also you must realize —
However high those standards rise,
In ethic or artistic guise,

Your potencies are adequate.
By all-round worth success is won;
And though you have no soft thing on,
Be sure distinction waits upon
The nation that is Up To Date.

The point of honour is your crux;
Run always straight, and chance the ducks;
For in this world of constant flux,
The higher type must dominate.
All fetish forms you may neglect,
But vices that command respect,
And virtues that are least correct,
You will do well to cultivate.
Confront the proud, sustain the weak,
And not for you shall Freedom shriek
Till falls your Kosciusko peak —
Assuming you are Up To Date.

Joseph Furphy

A Psalm Of Fortitude

Are you, like me, a peevish brat,
With feelings extra-fine?
Are you disposed to whip the cat
When misadventure lays your flat?
Then paste this memo in your hat —
A Man Should Never Whine.

The axiom is no safeguard rare,
Nor talisman divine;
For, deaf to bounce as well as prayer,
Grim Fate will never turn a hair.
But still the principle is there —
A Man Should Never Whine.

When 'Answers' spurns your doggerel lay
(He often baskets mine)
And balks you of renown and pay,
Squirm not, but laugh, and darkly say,
'Ha! tyrant! there will come a day!'
A Bard Should Never Whine.

Should Gladys freeze you from her sight,
Don't languish or repine;
But let her know, in terms polite,
That she has made your future bright;
Then marry Ermyintrude for spite —
A Bloque Should Never Whine.

A killing frost may nip your buds
(There's Wolsey as a sign);
You may forego your stylish duds,
And trade away your pin and studs,
To live on bandicooted spuds;
But you Must Never Whine.

Religiously, your cake is dough —
You haven't walk'd the line.
Peter won't know you from a crow;
So your address must be 'Below,'

Where Socialists and such-like go;
Still You Must Never Whine.

But even should Repentance come,
Don't supplicate and pine.
Seek out the corybantic scrum,
And caper round the mighty drum,
And make Salvation fairly hum —
A Saint Should Never Whine.

Beneath such petty details lies
Calm Nature's great design,
That we on stepping-stones should rise;
And any decent chap who tries
To score some points before he dies
Can Surely Never Whine.

Things standing thus, it is not nice
To rate yourself a swine;
Just let this argument suffice:
An abject whimper cuts no ice,
But only tends to lower your price —
A Man Should Never Whine.

Joseph Furphy

A Psalm Of Patience

O kid! with face of healthy tan,
With lunch-bag, books and slate;
You needn't long to be a man,
Self-confident and great;
For ever since the world began
Each boy must spring to Nature's plan,
Must worry through as best he can —
Make up your mind to Wait.

O young galoot! you find it rough —
This iron hand of Fate!
Your confidence is mostly bluff,
And doubts preponderate —
Are you the genuine all-wool stuff?
Are you a daisy or a muff? —
Patience! you'll find out soon enough,
If you can only Wait.

O baffled bloke! with no resource!
Whose knowledge comes too late;
Whose prospects change from bad to worse,
Till Hope gives place to Hate!
Sick of existence, and perforce
Impatient for the long divorce —
You'll get your call in proper course,
Take my advice, and Wait.

O geezer! drawing near the test
That none may obviate;
Don't waste your time in fruitless quest
Re man's post-mortem state.
That doubt will soon be set at rest —
You'll be extinguish'd, grill'd, or blest,
Or spook the world from east to west.
Meanwhile, you have to Wait.

Joseph Furphy

A Psalm Of Resignation

In spite of his imposing plea,
A freeman whom the truth makes free
Is often fairly up a tree,
And marvels why it should be thus.
Then reasoning in his tin-pot way
That honesty can never pay,
He loses faith, as well he may;
Yet he has simply Miss'd the 'Bus.

Concerning noodles who profess
By moral rules to gauge success:
Their thinking tackle's in a mess,
And they are wrong to Tartarus.
Don't say the worthiest lead the van.
That gag is deader than Queen Anne.
If it were straight, no honest man
Need grieve that he had Miss'd the 'Bus.

All are alike in Satan's grip,
If we accept your Shakespeare's tip,
Who hints, per Hamlet, that the whip
Is earned by every one of us.
Which is absurd (as Euclid says),
For all have good and evil traits,
Though some go smoothly all their days,
And some are doom'd to Miss the 'Bus.

Even the Yiddish Sage confess'd
He had to give this problem best,
Namely, to find desert express'd
In terms of Need and Overplus.
He saw not damper to the wise,
Nor gonce to men of enterprise,
But Buckley's prospect of a rise
For anyone who Miss'd the 'Bus.

What agencies manipulate
This economic drafting-gate
Through which we pass to find our fate,

It would be futile to discuss;
But any man with half an eye
Can see that mysteries underlie
The great 'Whaffor'? — the age-long, 'Why'? —
Required by those who Miss the 'Bus.

Some swell-coves, narrow'd by their luck,
In Evolution's rut are stuck,
Like that wool-bearing reptile-duck
Which bushmen term the platterpuss;
Whilst in our class we often find
A stubborn attitude of mind
Attending the demnition grind
Dealt out to those who Miss the 'Bus.

'Read Samuel Smiles, you dreaming flats!'
Say thrift-apostles, through their hats;
But wearily we answer, 'Rats!
It's not worth while to make a fuss,
Preach us no Self-made Merchant's creed —
Columbia's Curse — which holds, indeed,
That we should loot our fellow-weed,
And help him but to Miss the 'Bus.'

Again, we could 'arise! awake!'
And whoop with 40-devil, brake;
But no improvement should we make,
No more than doth the hairy Russ.
If we decline to act the goat,
But sanely think, resolve, and VOTE,
Then doubtless we shall keep afloat,
And Johnny need not Miss the 'Bus.

This seems to summarise our case.
I hope we carry it with grace,
Acknowledging in Fate's embrace
The nelson of an octopus.
And when the Last Conveyance comes,
Neither the swell who pots the plums,
Nor we who fossick round for crumbs,
Shall be allowed to Miss the 'Bus.

A Psalm Of Subjection

Nurse your 'unconquerable soul,'
But diligently bear in mind
That Life is not a wayward stroll,
For Circumstance asserts control,
And fiercely prods you up behind.
This dictum you can safely trust —
Growl you may, but Go you must.

Though you may shaft with all your might,
And kick against the goad, like Paul,
Though you may prop, and squeal, and bite,
You still put up a losing fight —
Unconquerable soul, and all.
Still subject to Compulsion's thrust,
Growl you may, but Go you must.

Have done with bluff, for Satan's sake,
A bulrush never can be strong.
You're overmatch'd — make no mistake —
The option is to bend or break;
In either case, you're forced along,
And what avails your cheap disgust?
Growl you may, but Go you must.

In point of fact, your name is Sludge,
And puppet-like your lot is cast,
For though you may rebel and grudge,
And spitefully refuse to budge,
Your claim will be pegg'd out at last.
Sludge to sludge, and dust to dust —
Growl you may, but Go you must.

Next hear St. Peter's challenge keen,
'My son, you've fail'd to nick a goal.
In headstrong wickedness serene,
You fear'd not parson, king or queen;
Your Bible was the BULLYTEEN;
Wherefore, your name is off the roll.
No picnic on these meadows green,

No part in this celestial scene,
For your unconquerable soul.
March down yon steps — the doom is just —
Growl you may, but Go you must.'

Joseph Furphy

A S.S.T.'s Lament

Would I were a profit monger,
Buying cheap, and selling dear,
Groceries, or something stronger,
Toys, or pipes, or sporting gear,
Wrong, maybe, but ain't it wronger
That I should be stranded here,
While my upper lip grow longer,
Month by month, and year by year?

Joseph Furphy

Are You The Cove?

"Are you the Cove?" he spoke the words
As swagmen only can;
The Squatter freezingly inquired,
"What do you mean, my man?"

"Are you the Cove?" his voice was stern,
His look was firm and keen;
Again the Squatter made reply,
"I don't know what you mean."

"O! dash my rags! let's have some sense –
You ain't a fool, by Jove,
Gammon you dunno what I mean;
I mean – are you the Cove?"

"Yes, I'm the Cove," the Squatter said;
The Swagman answered, "Right,
I thought as much: show me some place
Where I can doss tonight."

Joseph Furphy

Autograph Verses

'Prove what Life can give of gladness;
Seek for aught that merits trust —
All thy mirth will turn to sadness,
All thy bliss to cold disgust.
Soon revolving years will banish
Fairest hopes, in darkness laid;
Earthly treasures soon must vanish,
Strength and beauty fail and fade.'

Thus, life-weary, spake the preacher,
Closing his misguided quest.
Heed him not, the half-truth teacher,
Deaf to Love's supreme behest.
But with Faith thy life adorning,
Serve thy race as Heaven hath plann'd;
Sow thy seed at dawn of morning,
Nor at evening stay thy hand.
Never shall this path seem weary;
Never hath such purpose fail'd;
Nor the retrospect proved dreary,
When Life's furthest heights are scaled.
And in bright realms still above thee,
On some ever-verdant shore,
Those thou servest, and who love thee,
Shall rejoin, to part no more.

Joseph Furphy

Birthday Lines For K.B.

Life is a Poem, short or long,
A dismal Dirge, or jovial Song,
A Psalm of faith, or Lay of Pride,
One stanza by each year supplied.

And thy sweet Hymn of love and truth,
A carol of unfading youth,
Which God hath given thee to rehearse,
Enlightening others' chequered way,
Is strengthened by a further verse
Upon the gracious April day.

Joseph Furphy

Brahm

A spectral film that came and went,
In its elusive way gave vent
In some unreal words which meant;
'I think therefore I am.'
That phantasm only thought it thought;
A vain conception crudely wrought;
An egotistic sham.
Which brings us up against the fact
By Chunder's attestation backed —
There is no Substance, Thought, nor Act
Nothing exists but Brahm.

This quaint contraption here below
Is not a magic shadow show
Where phantom figures come and go,
As held by old Khayyam.
A show has time and space enough,
But here we only have such stuff
As dreams are made of — mental fluff
And visionary flam,
Throughout the universal scheme,
Be sure things tare not what they seem,
(To quote a well-known psalm)
They're only whimsies of a dream
A transient dream of Brahm.

All through the cycles of the Past
At which Notation stands aghast
He has subsisted, first and last,
Lone, functionless and calm.
Nothing extraneous can obtrude
Upon his Sabbath quietude,
Or discompose his tranquil mood,
For nothing is but Brahm.
'The Past and Present here unite
Beneath Time's flowing tide' (to cite
A Bard of Uncle Sam)
For Time stretched out in aeons dim
To Apprehension's very rim,

Is insignificant to him
A Bagetelle to Brahm.

For once in his negation deep,
He somehow chanced to drop asleep;
And through that forty-wings there ran
A flitting dream. So time began —
He dreamed this stellar lens of ours,
Which mocks at telescopic powers
Innumerable suns sublime,
At furious speed yet keeping time!
And so remote that to the eye,
They look like fixtures in the sky,
But that's a trifle. Round about
A million light-years further out,
The wisps of nebular portend.
Sidereal schemes without an end
And this is no poetic flight
Nor idiotic blatherskite,
Nor what is termed a cram.
However vast these plans may seem,
They're only figments of a dream
A trifling dream of Brahm.

He dreamed our System's fiery gas
Condensing into solid mass;
And during several billion years,
Evolving planetary spheres.
But take this globe, alone, to prove
How things have moved — or seemed to move.
He dreamed some pulpy form of life:
Mutation slow; and savage strife:
With Nature's forces all in play,
And Darwin's system under way;
While bits of hide and tufts of hair
For countless centuries fill'd the air;
And only those were left alive
Whose fitness caused them to survive.

Monsters that lived in Gulfs of slime
With names that balk and baffle rhyme
Prodigious sloths, whose daily food

Was half a ton of leaves and wood —
Grim saurians of terrific strength,
A quarter of a mile in length,
Unsightly bats, with twelve-foot wings,
And endless tribes of fearsome things
Cull'd down, in point of fact, so fit
That they should thrive in Sheol's pit
And breathe its exhalations thick,
Holding their own with Ancient Nick.

And so, while ocean bottoms rose
To stand awhile as high plateaus
And mountains sank beneath the main,
To rise time after time again:
And rocks were formed, and strata rent
And Polar ice-caps came and went;
And geological ages pass'd
Each an improvement on the last;
And on the wrinkled crust of earth
More decent forms of life had birth;

Man was evolved a product queer;
A breed that it would pay to sheer;
And which it might be safe to say,
Has reached a higher stage to-day
Since restless generations gone
Have passed a few ideas on.
But, bear in mind, this human race
Diverse in colour, smell, and face;
These off-shoots from the simian stem
The Sons of Japheth and of Shem,
The progeny of Ham.
With mongrel races that infest
The isles and mainlands, east and west,
From Chili to Siam,
Are less than ripples in a stream,
They're only ripples on a dream
Namely the dream of BRAHM.

Even that race, divinely nursed,
Which for its virtues has been cursed

And booted into seven times seven
By every nation under Heaven
The seed of Abraham;
And those brave lions in their den
Each one a match for aliens ten,
With fist or rifle, bat or pen
I mean God's modest Englishmen,
Whose very fog is balm;
These are less tangible withal
Than shadowy rabbits on the wall
Nothing exists but BRAHM.

Our swarming brethren of the North
Whatever you may judge them worth
Sling Muck and Soogoo Ram,
Are fantoids like yourself and me,
Though differing somewhat in degree
Nothing exists but BRAHM.

That Fatman, dining at his club,
On costly wet and sumptuous grub;
The pilgrims in the roadside pub;
The washerwoman at her tub;
And Jacky in his native scrub,
On bandicoot and yam
Are momentary sports of thought
That flicker out and come to nought
In this brief dream of BRAHM.

Illusion in the very air
(If such an envelope were there);
And things that seem to claim your care
Your Wife, with her untidy hair:
And Grandma, in her easy chair:
And baby in the pram —
Are all a visionary crew
Which fact need never worry you,
For you're an apparition too,
Nothing exists but BRAHM.

But flies are in the ointment sweet,
And jumpers in the cheese we eat,

And maggots in the treacherous meat;
And mildew on the jam.
That is to say, we might complain
Of many a kink in things mundane;
Of barbarisms that still remain
For instance 'Sport' imposing pain;
Monarchial 'loyalty' inane;
The gnats at which the Wowzers strain;
The camels that they entertain:
Sectarian bigotry insane.
The ruthless quest of sordid gain —
A sad, perennial stream of bane,
Which only in a sense profane
We're competent to dam.
The feckless poet's cult of grog:
The idle bummer's cadge for prog;
The stern official's odious 'gog'
The flunkey's meek Salaam —
Such provocations, daily met,
And grounds of meddlesome regret,
Shall find their panacea yet;
With ratling promptitude you bet,
In this same dream of BRAHM.

Unquestionably, no one knows
The likely period of his doze;
But this we know that when he wakes
We vanish in a brace of shakes;
Without dismay or qualm.
The earth, the sun, and every star
Shall vanish like the freaks they are;
The corn and oil, the flower and grass,
The fig and vine, shall simply pass,
The eucalypt and palm:
The microbe small, the ponderous whale;
The greyhound swift, the tardy snail;
The lion and the lamb;
The sand and granite, quartz and schist,
Shall vanish like a so-called mist
Which the fictitious sun has kiss'd
(Of course they never did exist),
NOTHING EXISTS BUT BRAHM.

Joseph Furphy

Breaking The News

Johnny's drowned — here's his clo'es
Where he's got to, we dunno;
Sure enough, he never rose;
So we thought we'd let you know.
Gosh! the fright has knocked us flat —
Here's his shirt, an' here's his hat.

Never seen him since he plopp'd,
Jist a'side the big red-gum;
So, thinks we, poor Johnny's copp'd —
All so suddent! — ain't it rum?
Must be snagg'd among the roots —
Here's his pants, an' socks, an' boots.

Simplest thing you ever seen —
Only just a common swim —
Cripes! it might as ready been
Me or Bill in place o' him!
Try to snake him out, I s'pose?
Anyway, we fetch'd his clo'es.

Joseph Furphy

Elegy Of Lincoln

Lincoln is gone — who ruled the Western Land
From the Pacific to the Atlantic's brim —
And cold and nerveless lies the mighty hand
That struck the fetters from the negro's limb.

Lincoln is gone — and now for ever still
The gentle, manly, and the feeling heart
And quench'd in might the endless will
That never flinch'd from Duty's sternest part.

The Negro mourns for him who wont to stand
The foremost Champion in fair freedom's train;
Who took the dusky Ethiope by the hand
And from his forehead wiped the shameful stain.

The gloomy Indian hears the tale with grief
Of his Protector's dark untimely end —
And sternly sorrows for the Pale-face Chief,
The red man's brother and his constant friend.

Now anarchy and rest overwhelm
In mid-career our lordly ship of state
For Lincoln's hand no longer holds the helm
To guide her passage through the fearful strait.

His foresight deep, his judgment keen and cool,
Would hush Sedition's voice and Discord's jar —
Oh! For another year of Lincoln's rule
To blot the footprints of intestine war.

But though we view the blank where late he stood
Discharging fearlessly his country's trust,
His name shall number with the great and good
When his proud tomb has moulder'd in the dust.

When dove-eyed peace shall have eternal birth,
And spread Millennial bliss along our shore
And all the nations of the smiling earth
Shall learn the horrid art of war no more.

Yes! we may search from Boston's busy street
To far Nebraska's wide untrodden plain
But no such man as Lincoln may we meet,
Nor shall his country see his like again.

Joseph Furphy

Finis. Time.

O Time! Time! Time!
Thou wondrous mystery!
Within whose rune and rhyme
Lies all Man's history
Before Creation's birth
Or yet the Heavens were made
With darkness all was girth,
Till word Creative said
'Let there be Light;'
And lo! from out the deep
In grandeur and with might
Rolled back the ages of sleep,
And born was Night-and-Day,
And stars together sang
Their glad harmonic lay
And all Creation rang
With 'Glory to God in the Highest.'
Now let the strain resound
And Man to God the nighest
With Light and Life be crowned,
Till in the time appointed,
Unfolding from Man's breast
Be Life with Love anointed
And God made manifest.

Joseph Furphy

Glory To God; To Men Good Will!

Opposed to Jewish Temple-rites,
Strange to the lore of Greece,
That message comes from starry heights,
A key to lasting Peace.
What-e'er our creed, we own its thrill —
'Glory to God; to men good will!'

Though Art may strive for utterance yet,
And Science grope her way,
A wider zone of thought is set
Where shines the perfect day;
A motive passing earthly skill —
'Glory to God; to men good will!'

For let the wise and prudent know,
As trustful children would,
That oracle of long ago
Contains the Greatest Good;
Unvex'd by doubt, unmix'd with ill —
'Glory to God; to men good will!'

A wiser world grows sick of strife,
Of mockery dearly bought;
And man, achieving truer life,
And brave, unselfish thought,
That high behest shall yet fulfil —
'Glory to God; to men good will!'

So lies millennial peace in reach,
While empires rise and fall;
For, age on age, and new to each,
That glad prophetic call
Comes pealing down the cycles still —
'Glory to God; to men good will!'

Joseph Furphy

Impromptu Lines

Deem not this wielder of this pen
The happiest bloke alive,
For I am only five-foot-ten,
And ye are ten-foot-five.
Wherefore I clothe myself in jute,
And likewise softly go,
Like that historical galoot
Whose tale you surely know.

Joseph Furphy

In Memoriam

A gentle loving thoughtful boy,
But happy gay and bright:
A gleam of sunshine from the sky
That filled a home with light.
And whether busied with his play
Throughout the passing summer day,
Or sleepless in the night
A simple song by children sung,
For ever in his memory rung,
Found gleeful utterance from his tongue
And filled him with delight —
'Jesus loves me — He will stay
Close beside me all the way.'

But now across the morning sky
The shade of night has rolled —
Lay all his little playthings by,
His hands are still and cold.
His loving eyes once bright as day
Are turning to their former clay —
No more:— the tale is told:
The soul has left that pulseless breast
For regions of eternal rest.
Ay but to die — a child, alone
Without a guard or guide
To launch into the vast unknown
Where shapeless phantoms glide,
To cross the gulf no bridge can span
To realms unseen by living man
All strange and yet untried.
With no familiar loved one near
To charm away his childish fear,
And give him one soft word of cheer
To break the dreary void.
Alas! conjecture seems to swim
And reason waxes faint and dim,
But faith affirms 'tis well with him
Whatever may betide.
Jesus loves him — He will stay

Close beside him all the way.

(February, 1879.)

Joseph Furphy

Lines For Lizer-Jane's Album.

No two leaves that wave in Arden,
No two grass blades on the plain,
No two flowers that gem the garden,
Show as twins in form or vein,
No two grains of desert sand
Counterpart leave Nature's hand.

So the all resourceful mother
Forms her children each unique
Meet to supplement each other
In the purpose all should seek
Thus her aim deciphered shows
None must copy, none may pose —

Hence no trodden path can guide thee;
Thou art duplicate of none;
Untried issues shall betide thee;
Options new beneath the sun
And thou can'st not copy well
Failing perfect parallel —

Let thy course be independent
Steered by three bright stars above,
Ever shining soft, resplendent
Boding Faith and Hope and Love,
These shall guide thee to thy best,
Like the wise men's beacon blest.

(Miss Drewitt.)

Joseph Furphy

The Bullfrog Bell

Now the truce of night brings respite to the sordid care of day,
And in listlessness I pace the river side,
Where the solitude is wounded by no lighted window's ray;
But illicit fancy will not be denied
For the darkening flat reiterates a freer life's farewell,
In the long familiar knocking of a bullfrog bell.

And in reverie I see the loaded waggons slowly creep,
Far across the western plains of New South Wales;
With 'talking' wheels and platforms, with wool-ropes biting deep,
And the dust of two broad countries on the vales.
Till the stars take shape in patterns, and through their dreamy spell
Comes the low, incessant knocking of the bullfrog bell.

And the retrospection lingers, bringing spiritless regret,
Though the northward track is open to me still
I may count the morning muster — I may track the stragglers yet
I may spell or battle onward, as I will
I may wake at night to listen, and know that all is well
By the reassuring answer of the bullfrog bell.

But that virile life repeated would be wearisome and trite,
Since the glamour of adventure cannot last
When the future, with its freshness, its pulsing, roseate light,
Has congealed into a leaden-coloured Past.
So an unreturning era owns its sympathetic knell
In the melancholy knocking of that bull-frog bell.

Joseph Furphy

The Death Of President Lincoln

(A Romance.)

December 11th, 1867.

The fleecy clouds had passed away
Before the bright approach of day,
And now the morning's radiance shines
Upon an Army's order'd lines,
And light the glancing sunbeams play'd
On bayonet point and sabre-blade.
Slow rolled the ponderous mass along —
A hundred thousand bayonets strong,
And thirty thousand horses prance
Impatient of the slow advance,
While o'er those glittering groves of steel
The striped and coloured spangles reel
And Hail! Columbia! lofty notes
Peel from the trumpets brazen throats.

From post to post the generals ride.
The army's steady march to guide,
And aides fly swiftly o'er the plain
With bloody spur and slacken'd rein;
And far and wide on every side
The hollow trembling earth replied
To those grim legions measured stride
On dark Virginia's shore —
And many a heart bounds high with pride
That soon shall beat no more.

The foe, of far inferior force,
Scarce sixty thousand foot and horse,
Stand watching with undaunted glance
The Federal foeman's grim advance;
And turn again their hopeful eyes
To where their own loved banner flies —
That flag of tessellated bars,
That on its checks bore seven white stars
Which waved on many a field before

But now, alas! is seen no more:
Its short and bright career is o'er,
Its light was quenched in streams of gore.

Far on the left, where rank on rank,
Kentucky's footmen held the flank,
A youthful warrior rode alone,
To every Southern soldier known,
For that long falchion by his side
Had turn'd the battle's doubtful tide
In many a dark and desperate fight
When right still triumphed over might.
His simple dress, undeck'd with lace,
Bore no brigade's distinctive trace —
'Twas Booth, who long had vow'd to stand
The Champion of his Fatherland;
Unflinching, faithful, firm and fast,
And strike for freedom to the last.

He rode a horse of spotless white,
With ample chest, and limbs of might —
That fiercely strains upon the reins
As, slow advancing o'er the plains,
He marks the Union ranks of grey
And greets them with a furious neigh —
He lists the hollow thundering drum
Which tells him that the time is come
To charge these hostile columns home,
And flashing flakes of feathery foam
Fly from his chafing mouth.
First in the charge's wild career,
And in retreat the last in rear,
And, first or last, unknowing fear,
That noble beast had not his peer
In all the spacious South.

At once, on centre, left and right,
The loud artillery woke the fight
With round-shot, grape and shell —
And loud the cry of conflict rose
As fiercely now the armies close

And vain it were to tell
How, charging on the cannon's mouth,
The fiery soldiers of the South
Were midway met in deadly strife,
Where each man fought for death or life
And thousands bled and fell.
Before the Federals charged — ere yet
The heavy armed battalions met
In conflict fierce and dire.
While skirmishers in scatter'd rank,
Extended far on front and flank,
Maintained a dropping fire —
While every ear was bent to hear
Their proud Commander's word.
To bid them charge at full career
With bayonet and sword.

Booth calmly watched their threatening course
And sternly reined his furious horse.
But when the opening cannon rung
And bugles blew and charged aloud,
His weapon from the scabbard sprung
Like lightning from the thunder-cloud —
And where the bayonets reddest shine
Along the Federals' charging line —
Where wounded horses wildly leap
Through pools of life-blood fetlock deep —
There his gigantic battle-horse
Swept onward in resistless course.
Round his invulnerable head
His reeking crescent blade,
Still scattering drops of crimson red,
In lightning circles played.
Through fire and smoke the war horse dash'd
Unharm'd by shot or shell,
And where that falling weapon flash'd
A Federal soldier fell.

But Lee, who mark'd with eagle glance
The Federals' last reserve advance,
Call'd up his veterans grim and grey,
The flower of Southern infantry —

Down where the dark palmettos wave
Ten thousand Carolinians brave
Their double column shows —
Each moment fringed their ranks with flame,
And fast the withering volleys came
Against their flinching foes,
And through the batteries of the North
Their fatal welcome thunder'd forth
In showers of iron rain.
Still fiercer rose their music's swell
And wilder pealed their battle-yell,
While fast and faster still they fell
As whistling shot and shrieking shell
Clove many a ghastly lane —
And thicker still their bullets came,
And closer deadlier grew their aim,
The Federal lines were heaped with dead
And fast the rising panic spread

Along their wavering force,
Till passing round their left-ward flank
Their own reserve came rank by rank —
New England's hardy horse
Forth to the front each troop advanced,
Each ready sabre naked glanced,
And every horse's flank was lanced
And slacken'd every rein —
In charging column firm and deep,
At racing gallop on they sweep
Who seldom charge in vain.
That swift advancing avalanche
Boasts the same spirit stern and stanch
That tamed a haughty tyrant's pride
And crushed his servile train
On Glorious Marston's swarthy side
And Naseby's bloody plain —
The Puritan and Cavalier
Of other days are pitted here.

But well the rifles played their part
For many a steed, shot through the heart
Came headlong to the plain.

And many another kept the ranks
With empty stirrups smote his flanks
Whose rider reeling from his seat,
And trampled neath the horses' feet,
Might never mount again.
Till, like a sea that bursts its banks
They dash against the bristling ranks
And now through whirling clouds of dust
And surging wreaths of smoke
Is seen the bayonet's furious thrust
The sabre's dazzling stroke.

With fearful slaughter backward driven
Their shatter'd columns rent and riven
The cavalry recoil —
A shout of triumph rose to heaven,
And to the Southern ranks is given
Brief respite from their toil.
Again the madden'd horses wheel,
Obedient to the armed heel,
And charging to the bugle's peal
They rush against the serried steel
With tenfold rage and force —
But as the wave breaks on the rock
That seems its futile rage to mock,

Still stagger'd backward from the shock
The baffled Northern horse.
Five times with spirit unsubdued,
They charged in reckless hardihood
And still the foe his squares made good,
And still the stubborn bayonets stood
With more than spartan fortitude.
And thicker still the ground was strew'd
With many a quivering corse. Though firmly stood the fearless few,
And proudly still their banner flew
Full well each brave Confederate knew
Another charge would pierce them through
For hollow was the war-like show —
No strength was left to meet the foe,
Their rifles clogg'd, their bayonet bent
And well nigh every cartridge spent.

But Booth has marked their flagging fire
And his fierce frown of battle-ire
Is changing to a look more dire
Like lion turned to bay —
For that fell smile proves one desire,
To slay, and slay, and slay.
Woe to the foe who now presumes
To face his savage wrath
When gallant zouaves and tall dragoons
Lie bleeding in his path;
Whose cloven heads and bosoms gored
Bear witness of his vengeful sword.
Where bristling ranks unbroken frown'd
Like dark grey rocks with breakers crown'd.
What though his sword no havoc made,
His course was but a moment stay'd
For where the riven columns reel
In hopeless dis-array
That slender blade of pliant steel
Cleaves deep its murderous way.

Once more the charging Federals sped
Across the rampart of the dead
To where upon the self-same spot
Where they had fired their deadliest shot
The doomed Confederates calmly wait
The charge which is to seal their fate.
Why need I tell how patriots die?
The tale has often met our eye
Of those with Leonidas
Braved Xerxes' millions in the pass —
Of Ghebers that disdained to yield
Upon Kadessa's well fought field —
Of Hasting's, Saxons, brave and true,
Of the Old Guard at Waterloo.

Despite their valour true and tried
The Southern ranks were scattered wide
The Federals shout of victory rose,
While faster rain'd their sabre-blows,
And vain the single bayonets force

To check a charger's rushing course,
And weak the fence of rifle butt
Against the sabre's sweeping cut —
The after-carnage has begun
And Gettysburg is lost and won.
A few unbroken ranks of war
Still formed around the sevenfold star,
And there regardless of the shot
That played against them fast and hot
And, meeting with the bayonet's stroke
The charging squadrons whirlwind shock
Linked in close phalanx side by side
They fiercely fought and firmly died.
But vainly, one by one, they fell
Around the flag they loved so well
For dark with dust and torn with shot
And stained with many a crimson spot,
The haughty conquerors bear it home
To Washington's imperial dome.

When Booth had seen the battle lost
And every hope of freedom cross'd
His comrades dead and wounded lie
Or fiercely fighting but to die
He turned his panting horse's rein
And urged him from that fatal plain;
Nor does that charger flinch or fail
Though fast behind his streaming tail,
The shower of bullets thick as hail
Upon the winter's piercing gale,
In whizzing tempests came —
But came in vain — the rider's hand
Still waves the broken battle-brand
And mocks their surest aim.

Far different sights now meet the eye
Where triumph reigns supreme
Where captured colours hung on high
In shot rent fragments stream
And for the cannon's boom of fear
And rifles ringing sharp and clear
And soldiers dying groans.
Voluptuous music greets the ear
In soft and melting tones,
And for the blinding solar rays
Shed through the battle's sulphurous haze
The chastened light falls soft and clear
From many a sparkling chandelier
The dreadful civil war is past
America has peace at last,
Her fertile fields shall now no more
With brothers blood be stained;
The long and hard fought war is o'er
The dear-bought victory's gain'd.

The theatre is filled to-night
With soldiers brave and ladies bright
And Lincoln sat in chair of state
And gaily laughed and spoke elate
Surrounded by the wise and great
How could he fear the stroke of fate?
Or dread the final call
Invested with despotic power
By these his courtiers of the hour
He glanced around well pleased to shower
His smiles upon them all.
But forth the young avenger sprung
And loud the death shot rung
Throughout the lofty hall
A thousand eyes have seen the smoke
That from the pistol's muzzle broke
But Lincoln felt the ball.

And Booth with one triumphant cry
Leapt down upon the stage
And brandishing his weapon high
With thundering voice and flashing cry

He dared the audience rage
'So perish tyrants — there he lies
Who drenched the land with kindred gore
Look on him Minions, trust your eyes;
So perish tyrants evermore.'
Then wildly did the tumult swell

And women shrieked and fainting fell
Who saw that desperate deed:
Sprung many a soldier from his seat
All Lincoln's friends leapt to their feet
But Booth had reached the open street
Where stood his trusty steed.
But moon and stars now reel and swim
Before his vision, faint and dim
And scarce his saddle could he keep
For not till then he knew his limb
Was shatter'd in his reckless leap.

The courser flew with wings of wind,
But oft the rider looked behind
It seemed as while his flight he held
Dark demons still pursue
Ten thousand fiends triumphant yell'd
Behind him as he flew.
They told him how his dreadful deed
Would never serve his country's need
But make her bondage worse;
And how his hated victim's name
Would shine upon the scroll of fame
When his would be a curse.

As through the night he wildly ranged
Those maddening words were hurl'd
'The assassin's deed has never changed
The history of the world.'
And still before his aching eye
He saw those fatal words on high
Emblazon'd on the starry sky;
And on the darken'd earth they shone
Wherever he might gaze upon,
In characters of red —

That message passed o'er land and sea
Transmitting faith and courage free,
But thrilling him with dread:
And lofty England's wise'st peer
Has caught it with prophetic ear
And recognized its truth —
And Booth fled on o'er dale and hill
Those thundering words pursuing still
The mad and desperate youth.

And now till welcome death shall bring
Release from pain and fear
Shall that Sybilline sentence
Still on he races — onward yet —
His hands are clench'd his teeth are set,
And, faint with agonizing pain
He sinks upon his horse's mane
Till the brave beast that bore him well
On many a battle plain,
Spent with his fearful gallop fell
No more to rise again.

The moon hung high upon the sky
And ruled the silent night;
The midnight hour was calm and still
And river, forest, plain and hill
Were bathed in ivory light,
When suddenly a sombre cloud
Eclipsed the moon's pale face —
The rising tempest moan'd aloud
And blacker grew the inky shroud
That overhung the place.
And Booth lay sleepless on the floor
And sadly thought that never more
He might behold the Southern shore
Before his life would close —
Wrapp'd though he was in mournful thought
Upon the burdened night-wind brought
A coming sound with danger fraught
To him whose life was fiercely sought
By his relentless foes.
At last he started from the ground,

And reached his rifle with a bound;
Full well he knew the fatal sound
For, as it came more near,
The clattering beat of horses' feet
Rose plainly in his ear
No time for flight, though dark the night
For, closing round on left and right
The dusky figures met his sight —
He raised his rifle then
Full levelled at the leader's breast,
But ere his hand the trigger press'd
The muzzle sank again —
'Why should another life be shed
In such a fruitless strife,' he said.
But as he spoke six jets of flame
Flash'd redly forth — six bullets came;
Two struck the splintering wall, the rest
Were buried in his dauntless breast.
A lightning's flash shone broad and bright,
And, by its angry, lurid light,
The troopers gathering round the wall
Their hapless victim saw
His rifle drop, and backward fall
Upon his couch of straw.

Just then the threatening tempest woke,
And loud the rolling thunder broke,
As if the voice of Nature spoke
Against the cruel wrong,
While from the stable's roof the smoke
Came issuing thick and strong.
Too prisoned in volume pent
The crackling thatch at length gave vent,
And, fierce as bloodhounds on the scent,
To seize their prey the soldiers went,
So vainly had the hero spent
The efforts of his dying hour
To save his body from their power.
With maledictions deep and dire
They dragged him from his bed of fire
His suffering spirit had not pass'd,
Though each pulsation semed his last;

The scorching fire had left its trace
On his burnt hair and ghastly face,
And paler grew his livid cheek
The while he gathered strength to speak:—
'I ask no mercy at your hands —
I know the law my life demands —
But were existence yours to give
I would not wish one hour to live;
My bleeding country's race is run
And my avenging work is done —
And when my spirit strays afar
Where Bothwellhaugh and Brutus are
'Twill find, I trust, more mercy there
Than men shall grant my memory here.
But tell my mother how I died —
As I have lived — on Freedom's side.'

Then steel blue chains of lightning flash'd
And deafening thunder roar'd and crash'd
And rushing raindrops swept and dash'd
Unheeded by them all.
And thus the gallant patriot dies —
And thus he breathes his latest sighs
As on the bloodstained grass he lies
Without a friend to close his eyes
Or sorrow for his fall;
But when a trooper rais'd his foot
And spurned him with his arm'd boot,
The dying warrior changed his place
And drew his mantle o'er his face.

Now let the howling tempest roar
For Booth can feel its force no more;
Now let the captors bend their steel
Against the form that cannot feel
Their tyranny has spent its hour
And Booth is far beyond their power.

Above the spot where Lincoln lies
The tall funereal sculptures rise —
And awful is the solemn gloom
That lingers round his stately tomb,
For well the artist's efforts show
A grateful nation's pride and woe;
But nobler is the burial place
Where human art has left no trace
And simple wildflowers gently wave
Above the hapless hero's grave —
Who with devoted heart and hand
Still strove to save his native land,
And failing in his generous aim
Died to avenge her wrongs and shame.

So may his spirit rest in peace
Even while his country's woes increase;
While pale Columbia mourns her lord,
And poets thus his praise record.

Joseph Furphy

The Fly In The Ointment

When the great Creator fashion'd us, and saw that we were good,
He commission'd us to dominate the planet as it stood.
But His ordinance meets denial still, and peace remains unknown,
For the Boer is always with us, calling certain lands his own.

Yet the Lord has given us grace to scent a Good Thing from afar —
Are we not our brother's keeper? Most assuredly we are!
So we seek to bear his burden, and benignly take him in,
Though he fight like forty devils in his ignorance and sin.

Once the Boers of Athens met us on the veldt of Marathon,
Where they fired upon our ambulance, and consequently won.
And the Maccabean Dutchmen, by their sniping tactics mean,
Smote our absent-minded beggars round Jerusalemfontein.

The commandos of Arminius denied us land or loot;
Not to speak of that old Dopper, Oom Bruce of Bannockspruit.
At Sempachstrom, at Gransonkop, we met the laager's Swiss,
And they mowed us by the acre, through their white flag artifice.

O the countless tons of swaddies, O the money worth of tools,
We have spent to prove our doctrine — that the Big Battalion rules!
Yet the stolid Boer confronts us still, in dirt and Scripture strong,
While our dividends evaporate — How long? O Lord! how long?

Let us beg the workman's shilling, let us smell our hats in prayer,
For the swift and lasting triumph of the multi-millionaire.
Let us reap the fields we sowed not, gather where we have not strawed
Since your wily operator is the noblest work of God.

Bravely sings the long-hair'd Alfred, 'Forward, forward let us range,
Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of 'Change,'
O be sure the Good Time Coming shall attain its glorious birth
When the patriot owns his blunder, and the boodler owns the earth!

('Bulletin,' March, 1900.)

Joseph Furphy

The Gumsucker's Dirge

Sing the evil days we see, and the worse that are to be,
In such doggerel as dejection will allow,
We are pilgrims, sorrow-led, with no Beulah on ahead,
No elysian Up the Country for us now.

For the settlements extend till they seem to have no end;
Spreading silently, you can't tell when or how;
And a home-infested land stretches out on every hand,
So there is no Up the Country for us now.

On the six-foot Mountain peak, up and down the dubious creek,
Where the cockatoos alone should make a row,
There the rooster tears his throat, to announce with homely note,
That there is no Up the Country for us now.

Where the dingo should be seen, sounds the Amy tambourine,
While the hardest case surrenders with a vow;
And the church-bell, going strong, makes us feel we've lived too long,
Since there is no Up the Country for us now.

And along the pine-ridge side, where the mallee-hen should hide,
You will see some children driving home a cow;
Whilst, ballooning on a line, female garniture gives sign,
That there is no Up the Country for us now.

Here, in place of emu's eggs, you will find surveyors' pegs,
And the culvert where there ought to be a slough;
There, a mortise in the ground, shows the digger has been round,
And has left no Up the Country for us now.

And across this fenced-in view, like our friend the well-sung Jew,
Goes the swaggy, with a frown upon his brow,
He is cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, for the thought is on his mind,
That there is no Up the Country for him now.

And the boy that bolts from home has no decent place to roam,
No region with adventure to endow,
But his ardent spirit cools at the sight of farms and schools,
Hence, there is no Up the Country for him now.

Such a settling, spreading curse must infallibly grow worse,
Till the saltbush disappears before the plough,
But the future, evil-fraught, is forgotten in the thought,
That there is no Up the Country for us now.

We must do a steady shift, and devote our minds to thrift,
Till we reach at length the standard of the Chow
For we're crumpled side by side in a world no longer wide,
And there is no Up the Country for us now.

Better we were cold and still, with our famous Jim and Bill,
Beneath the interdicted wattle-bough,
For the angels made our date five-and-twenty years too late,
And there is no Up the Country for us now.

Joseph Furphy

The Schoolhouse On The Plain

(From 'An Idyll of the Wimmera.')

On the geodetic line, where the parish boundaries join
At a level and interminable lane
You can see it there, alone, standing calmly on its own,
Like an iceberg in a solitary main.
It's a topographic base, and each near or distant place
Is located from the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

It lies open to the road, in the usual country mode,
With a few old waster posts to bridge the drain;
The reserve is clean and dry, being several inches high,
The building standing back about a chain.
Nothing could excel the stand, and it's worth its bit of land,
That inexpensive Schoolhouse on the Plain.

It requires a lick of paint, to correct the weather-taint,
And its windows should have here and there a pane;
The open-jointed floor swallows pencils by the score,
And the veteran desks are inked with many a stain;
Still it's proof against the wet, and there's lots of service yet
In that unpretentious Schoolhouse on the Plain.

Such eventual wear and tear, with contingent disrepair,
Is appointed unto everything mundane —
Bear in mind it braves with ease the fanatic and the breeze,
Spreading influence that nothing can restrain —
Think how superstitions yield, and sectarian feuds are heal'd,
In that nation-building Schoolhouse on the Plain.

All the district, far and near, has a postal centre here,
So suitable that no one can complain;
Here the local Rechabites, on alternate Thursday nights,
Renew their solemn davy to abstain;
Also that improvement class, call'd the Literary Ass,
Holds its meetings at the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

When election time draws near, then the hayseeds rally here,
To catechise the candidate urbane;

To demand a cockspur line, and an open port for twine,
With reduction of the railway freight on grain.
Here on polling day they meet, to discomfort Lygon Street,
No nonsense with the Schoolhouse on the Plain!

Here the missionary man, fresh from Indian or Japan,
Unblushingly takes on him to maintain
That he labours day and night in a harvest field that's white,
With other statements shaky and inane;
But his magic-lantern show makes the entertainment go,
Till applauses fill the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

Every Sunday, after two, there's an old-man rendezvous,
And the edifice becomes a sacred fane;
Then along the fence, each side, stands a line of horses tied,
And the seats within hold all they can contain;
While some good, well-meaning man, as per local-preachers' plan,
Holds Service in the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

And as he exhorts or prays, or the flock their voices raise
In rendition of some Sankey-book refrain,
A dozen dogs, and more, hold possession of the floor,
Dumbly showing how they need insectibane —
Nor are such things taken ill, for there's no superfluous frill
At those preachings in the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

There the boys deal glances fond, and the girls, of course, respond,
In spite of the indifference they feign;
Whilst the mothers of the youth listen to the word of truth,
Till they feel about as innocent as Cain;
And the toddlers play bo-peep, and the rude forefathers sleep,
Being bosses of the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

But the Monday, coming round, as by ancient usage bound,
Sees our jossless system under way again;
Then the hopefuls mobilize, and the droning murmurs rise,
Whilst the tree of knowledge creaks beneath the strain;
And the R's extend their roots, and the young idea shoots,
Under cover of that Schoolhouse on the Plain.

There are stories carted here, from the Northern Hemisphere,
And design'd to cause a thrill through every vein,

Of monarch's, grave or gay, each distinguish'd in his day
By being feeble-minded or insane —
But here the kids compete for the scorner's sinful seat.
Their troubles at the Schoolhouse on the Plain!

As becometh Jim and Bill, their solicitude is nil
Touching Mary Queen of Scots or Anne Boleyn,
But the ructions of the kings, when their docile underlings
Made a many-figured tally of the slain,
Are consider'd worth review, for the sporting instinct true
Is powerful at the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

There are lessons setting forth how an islet somewhere north
Knock'd the stuffing out of Holland, France and Spain;
How, from east to west, its drum makes our planet fairly hum,
And the sunrise follow meekly in its train;
How that spadeful, all alone, gave us everything we own,
Especially this Schoolhouse on the Plain.

And the lydy-teacher there, comes from heaven alone knows where,
Like some angel they're vouchsafed to entertain.
She controls her motley drove by the gentle power of love,
Emphasising her affection with a cane —
True, she cavils all the while at the rough, untidy style
Of her pupils in the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

She sets up to know a lot, but there's one defective spot
In the dignity she struggles to sustain;
For her days are pass'd in fright, and her sleep's disturb'd at night,
As if she had Inspector on the brain;
And her heart is in her mouth as she watches north and south
From the windows of the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

And when she is elsewhere gone, that old school will still live on —
Just as she herself was not the first to reign —
Since, for better or for worse, Young Australia comes in force,
(As a reference to the Year-Book will explain);
And he only leaves a place for his duplicate to grace;
In the roll-book of the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

They mature, and off they drop, in an intermittent crop,
Not a single soul desiring to remain;

For they know their road about, they can turn things inside out!
But existence, as they quickly ascertain,
Is a great deal harder row than they thought they had to hoe,
When they wagg'd it from the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

Many a shearer, tough and strong; many a drover, two yards long;
Many a bullock driver, hairy and profane;
Many an innocent yahoo; many a red-hot subject too;
Many a law-abiding devotee of gain;
Many a work-girl; many a wife — looking back upon their life,
Cherish memories of the Schoolhouse on the Plain.

Some important changes gleam o'er the spirit of their dream
As they blunder through their honourless campaign —
All that sense of brutal wrong has been dissipated long
From the standard they were driven to attain;
And they wish with all their heart they could make a second start
At the undervalued Schoolhouse on the Plain.

Joseph Furphy

Virtues That Pay

You argue — as sympathy governs your bias —
That Wisdom distributes the capon and crust,
Indulging the sinful, and stinting the pious,
Or starving the wicked, and fattening the just.
You are wrong to the Evil One; hear what I say
There are ruinous virtues, and virtues that pay.

If your purpose be saving your soul and your bacon —
Fruition forthwith, and a sweet by-and-bye;
If your definite project stand clear and unshaken
A fatman on earth, and a seraph on high
In working this out let it still be your lay
There are ruinous virtues, and virtues that pay.

Such virtues are not of the workshop or cloister:
They test every act by the way it pans out;
They prompt you to seize on the world as your oyster,
Inserting our knife with a spirit devout.
For strait is the portal, and narrow the way
Representing the route of the virtues that pay.

Men as good as yourself, or most probably better,
Have gone to the rear, after many a try —
A permanent wage-slave, a usurers' debtor
Reduced to the motto of 'Root, hog or die,'
But their handicap dates from an earlier day,
When they failed in espousals of virtues that pay.

There is nothing outre in the man with the bluey;
He started, like you, for a goal undisclosed
But never in life can he come within coo-ee —
Though he may reach a goal, (with the vowels transposed)
And a similar Sheol gapes fair in your way,
If you turn out deficient in virtues that pay.

You must race, like St. Paul —you must race for the dollar —
No pause of compunction must ever intrude:
You must watch, you must pray, never missing a collar
The course is severe, and the company good.

You must reverence the Thrift-God, and earnestly pray
To be grounded and built up in virtues that pay.

By this means you will serve the Almighty and Mammon,
And die in a state of salvation and wealth;
When the clergy, without a suggestion of gammon,
Will furnish your soul with a clean bill of health.
So you'll sweep through the gates in your spotless array
A shining example of Virtues that pay.

Joseph Furphy

What The Heart Of The Poet Said To The 'Bulletin'

Tell me not in future numbers
That our thought becomes inane,
That our metre halts and lumbers,
When the Wattle blooms again.

Lies of great men all remind us
We can challenge and restrain
Such attempts to bluff and blind us,
When the Wattle blooms again.

Therefore take our gage of battle!
Freedom reasserts her reign:
We are not dumb, driven, cattle
When the Wattle blooms again.

Doubtless ANSWERS, weekly, daily,
Adding to his heap of slain,
Feels a jar, when Nature gaily
Bids the Wattle bloom again.

Nocent censor! time thou learnest
All this contract may contain —
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
But the Wattle blooms again.

Time may change this loyal journal
From religious to profane,
But a rhythmic law eternal
Makes the Wattle bloom again.

Trust no Flossie, howe'er pleasant,
Sweeps are treacherous, totes are vain;
Banks and scrip are evanescent,
But the Wattle blooms again.

Cultivate no fair ideal;
Own no country-seat in Spain;
All these things must go to Sheol,
Whil'st the Wattle blooms again.

Czar, and Pope, and Dei Gratia
Pass like phantoms of the brain
Never so our bright acacia,
For the Wattle blooms again.

Thus you see, austere and lonely,
Sailing o'er Life's solemn main,
One great fact is certain only —
That the Wattle blooms again.

Joseph Furphy