

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Barcroft Henry Boake**

**- poems -**

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## 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 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 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 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 Boake

## **An Easter Rhyme**

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Barcroft Henry 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.

Barcroft Henry Boake

## 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 penance, 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 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 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 sfience 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 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 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 Poll, 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 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 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 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 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 Boake

## **Josephus Riley**

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Barcroft Henry 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,  
    Galloping 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 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 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 spurted 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 Boake