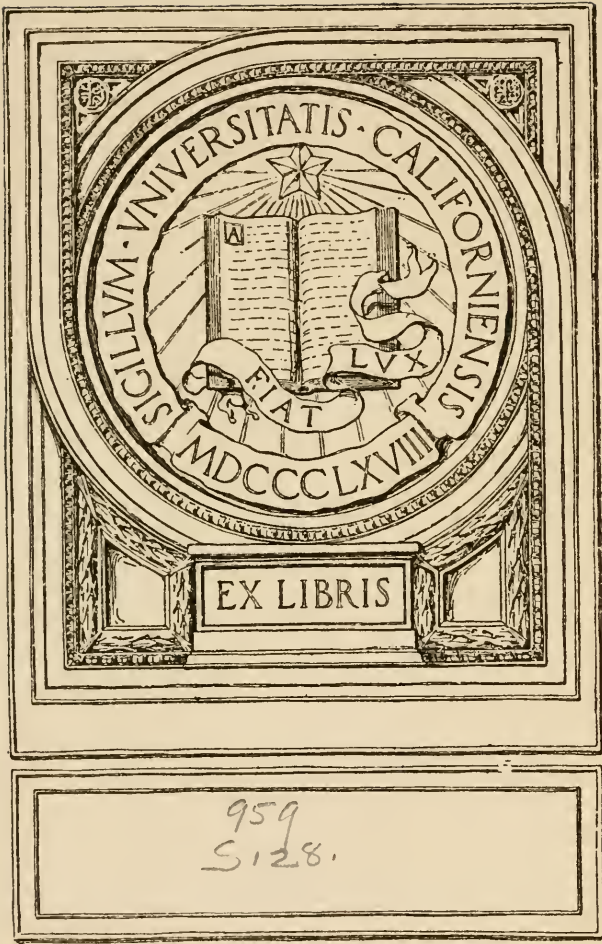


Bush Songs
and
Oversea Voices
A. SAFRONI-MIDDLETON



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Bush Songs & Oversea Voices

OPINIONS OF
A. SAFRONI-MIDDLETON'S FIRST
BOOK OF COLONIAL POETRY

Wm. M. Rosetti.—"A large amount of spirit, impulse, and forcible expression, many striking verses and passages, and generally a tone much superior to the commonplace of ordinary verse writing."

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Bush Songs & Oversea Voices

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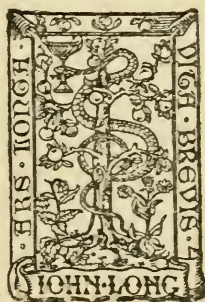
*Songs of the South Sea Islands,
Australia, Etc.*

By

A. Safroni-Middleton

Author of

“The Autobiography of a Sailor-Musician,” etc.,
Composer of British Army Marches, Entr’actes, etc., for the
Regimental Bands



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
PART I.	
FOREWORD	7
TO ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON	11
BETRAYED	13
LOOKING BACK	15
GRAVES OF THE OUTCASTS	17
THE RIVALS	19
THE LEPER ISLE	21
THE EXILE TRADER	23
THE OLD SAILOR	24
A ROVER'S SONG	25
WHY DO I SING?	27
SHEA-OAKS	28
DESIRE OF THE HILLS	30
THE HOMESTEAD	32
IN THE FOREST	34
THE FRIENDLY ISLANDS	35
MAFELETO'S PHILOSOPHY	39
THE MISSING EARL	41
A VOICE FROM THE SOUTH SEAS	43
THE STORM	47
A MEMORY	51
AN EXILE'S DREAM	53
YESTERDAY	55
DRIFTING	56
YEARS PARTED	58
PACIFIC ISLANDS	61
SAMOA	64
HOMeward BOUND	66
THE CHIEF MATE	68
IN THE BUSH	70

	PAGE
THE GOLD COAST	71
A SAILOR'S GRAVE	73
A WINDY NIGHT	75
THE BRIDAL NIGHT	76
A STUDY IN CONTRASTS	78
A BUSH GRAVE	80
ERE I AM OLD	82
I SHALL DREAM AND DREAM	83
RHYMES OF A BEACHCOMBER	85
AFTER MANY YEARS	100
ROMANCE	101
OUTWARD BOUND	103

PART II.

A PIONEER'S SONG	109
THE BUSHMAN'S REVERIE	111
COMRADES	114
THE DROUGHT	116
THE DESERTED HUT	120
BUSH LONELINESS	123
THE OLD SKIPPER	125
LIFE	127
A DREAM	129
GABRIEL	130
ABSENT	132
PAT MCPHIZZ	134
BUSH MEMORIES	136
THE CABIN BOY	139
THE OLD RUSTIC'S REQUEST	142
THE WILD COMPOSER	144
A VOICE FROM THE STOCKHOLD	145
SUNDOWNERS	147
THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN	151
ON THE ROCKS	153
A BUSH DREAM	157
MODERN LONDON	158

Bush Songs & Oversea Voices

FOREWORD

MAY your eyes o'er my rhymes gaze kindly—
 Small gifts, thoughts of mine,
Dreams gather'd where brave men drink blindly
 The gall or the wine.
On ships thro' dead sunsets they're roving,
 Or laughing camp-throngs,
The men who have lived and are moving
 To-night thro' my songs.

Their ghosts thro' dead moonlight come creeping ;
 A wind from the sea
Faint-ruffles deep water long sleeping,
 In mists around me,
Faces shadowy, tenderly clinging,
 Float steppes and the waves ;
By camp-fires again sitting singing
 All out of their graves.

The winds thro' the shea-oaks are sighing
 By deep forest night.
Time's castaways, rough men sleep, lying
 Around me to-night.
The stars thro' dark branches are burning
 Across the dusk-skies ;
The seas on the skyline are churning
 Up tints of moonrise.

By their tents in rows they are snoring,
 Camped, hushed 'neath the gums,
The moon o'er their figures light pouring—
 O'er my sleeping chums.

Hush, the winds drift whiffs from deep hollows—
 Marsh flowers and gum-spray.
 The grey ghost of dawn hunting follows—
 They all rush away !

They are gone, with their stories, their laughter,
 And some with that song
 That sang in their heads years after—
 What grief or whose wrong ?
 Sad exiles from homes o'er deep waters,
 Alive, or long dead ?
 Eyes true as tall sons and fair daughters
 That tramp overhead !

For their souls still live in our cities,
 They sat by your knees—
 Old country, your children's blood it is
 Here over the seas ;
 And beware all foes of the " Home-Land "
 Her stern flag still flies,
 Ablaze in the blood, the grip of the hand,
 The soul of their eyes.

So, take my songs, they are singing
 Of waves by a shore
 Where vines and wattles oft clinging
 Close some shanty-door ;
 And the hut's bright fireside embers
 Outside o'er his grave —
 (O'er the man that no one remembers)
 Where the bush flowers wave.

PART I

TO THE MEMORY OF ROBERT LOUIS
STEVENSON

(BURIED ON TOP OF VAILIMA MOUNTAIN)

WHERE feathery trees stretch fan-shaped fingers streaming—
Dark coco-palms by tumbling waves,
'Neath skies of dusky blue as stars are dreaming
In still lagoons by coral-caves.
Where o'er the silent plateau's mosses creeping,
The stars and moons go stealing by,
With eyelids closed forever, he lies sleeping
Against the sky.

“ Dead Lusitala ” slumb'ring, yet still singing
Thro' feather'd throats of native-birds,
Sweet unborn poems to the sea-winds flinging
As come the roaming, homeless herds
Of seas that creep from other distant seas
To toss white hands below and die
'Gainst barrier reefs as bending island trees
To winds sing high.

A thrill lives in the heart of these my dreams,
Your living eyes, your voice I've known.
I did not dream, there by Samoan streams,
In forest depths with you alone,
Some day in other lands among strange men
I'd hear surfs beat against the joy
Of long ago—like grief—the change since when
I was a boy.

12 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

The ships their weary wings hang in the bay ;
Brown men roam shore tracks of moonlight,
And homeland sailors, 'ere they sail away
To fade with sunset down the night
Of solitude and stars as wild sails race
On with the dark the day's flight west,
But you have met the light beyond—God's Face,
And all the rest ?

Sleep on, dead poet of the sea-nursed South.
Still thro' the hearts of men you creep—
The frozen music of your long-dead mouth
Melts in the warmful passion leap
Of souls that move in living dreams along
The shores by your high silent home
Where lips must cease to sing sweet poet-song,
And eyes to roam.

A grave set 'neath warm skies of mountain'd isles,
Fenced by dim skylines of blue seas,
By typhoons swept—then noiseless velvet miles
Where stars reveal bright mysteries,
And o'er fair slopes, huts of brown savage men,
The South Sea race that mourning dies,
Before the Western tramp to vanish when
The cities rise !

To fade forever as a wondrous dream
Of midnight drums and chieftain songs,
The ambushed tribe, the distant forest scream !
Wild girls, and happy heathen-throngs
Of faces by small huts and glimmering fires,
As on the mountain height you lie
Like some dead Christ, with all your dead desires,
Against the sky.

BETRAYED!*

(TAHITIAN NATIVE GIRL)

As nude as God's first thought of woman plann'd
She stands—like stars her eyes aglow ;
Curved velvet limbs, the Apple in her hand
Of Scripture—in her breast the woe.

The forest winds kiss her uplifting hair,
The jungle-grass tares soft bare thighs,
A blood-stained blossom now she staggers there,
A hunted soul as daylight dies.

Her coral-lips have felt the white man's kiss ; —
Dark trouble lurks below her breast,
Girl, fool ! you heard impassioned lies, the bliss—
You Western cities know the rest.

Deserted stands her little hut to-night,
The Chieftains in the village prayed
With wrathful wives, the gods to curse, to smite
The helpless head of love betrayed !

A child with quivering limbs on flight she stands,
How quickly gaze despairing eyes.
Hark ! death's tom-tom beats in these heathen lands—
Out seaward her last sunset dies !

* A tribal form of justice that falls on the head of the South Sea native girl who has been unfortunate enough to surrender herself to the lure of the white man.

14 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

The hunting tribes race at her heels with hate ;
She fades into the forest deep
To die—decreed by idols cruel as Fate.
Girl!—may God give your sorrow sleep.

LOOKING BACK

I'VE sat on these slopes 'neath tropic skies
As the stars crept over, heard
Lost voices of friends, bright meanings in eyes—
Expressed by the voice of a bird
As it sat safe-high on its skyward twig,
In the banyans by the sea
Chuckling its silver-song to the jig
Of wild men who danced round me !

I've laid in my little doorless hut,
When the moon sailed high in the sky—
With dreaming eyes in the gloom half-shut,
Seen the night swans flying by
Out under the stars, far over the trees,
I've watched them fade in the dusk,
As wind-whiffs crept, came in from the seas
Damp, laden with flower-scent musk.

I've thrown my swag in the bush, cursed Fate,
With tears in my eyes I've stood
By the spot where men sleep on and wait
The Voice of Infinitude !
Then I've crept along by the forest track,
In my ears heard steal the laughter
Of old dead days—a swag on my back
Of memories humped—years after.

Oh, I've sat in my dingy sea-port room,
 Heard my new chum's tale of woe,
Thanked God for the deep surrounding gloom
 As tears from my eyes did flow !
Then, I shared my crust, as we men do
 In distant lands afar,
But he stole my share. If we only knew
 By sight who the best men are !

So you see I've sorrowed, dreamed and thought
 O'er the best, and worst, in men,
Plunged deep in the seas of life and sought,
 Aye—found pearls beyond the ken
Of you men in cities beyond the plain,
 Where the stern black walls arise ;
And so, I can gaze, nor seek in vain
 Pale flowers of your stifled eyes.

And I dream and dream as the stars go by
 O'er my hut, while far at sea
Waves toss and toss 'neath the moonlit sky
 And in fellowship with me—
Taking my exiled heart o'er the seas,
 Like sweet melody in pain—
The night-bird sings in the windy trees
 Over and over again.

GRAVES OF THE OUTCASTS

NUKA HIVA, (SOUTH SEA ISLANDS)

HERE in this silent spot the dead men lie ;
 Hark ! to the singing banyan trees
 O'er homesick men shut out from all the sky
 Who came in haste from overseas !
 Near here they sat and sang their drunken songs,
 Until their dreams hummed that refrain
 That swept their hearts, from wild carousing throngs,
 Out homeward to the past again.

Here, by small savage huts 'neath coco-palms ;
 By starlight in the deep lagoon,
 By love, caressed—some brown girl's clinging arms—
 Eyes shining t'wards the white sea moon—
 They sat, nor heard the maid's soft alien voice,
 But something in the trade wind sighing—
 Their soul the wild sea-shore and murmuring noise
 Of tossing waves thro' mem'ry crying.

Outcasts of life, what scheme matured not right ?
 What flaming passion out of hell
 Seared o'er your souls ? ere from the forlorn fight
 You cursed the game, (we've won !) then fell ?
 Ere castaways adrift to these shores came,
 From other lands your hunted eyes
 To hide your (or may be another's) shame
 Where death completes the grand disguise !

On these sea slopes you built your exile homes ;
 Your sad hearts thought to seal the past,
 But night and silence wails up wandering foams
 To, like remembrance, shoreward cast—

18 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Unto your ears what secret olden times ?
What night-bird sang on in your head
The lyric-song that God's thought kindly rhymes
Off at the end ?—when men lie dead.

Those jungle flowers that smudge the grass across
Where now forgotten quiet you sleep ;
I could half dream they write with blood the loss
That chance might give—the griefs men reap.
In that old shanty by the shore you slept,
Or heard the sleepless friendly trees
Bend 'neath the stars as night-winds wildly swept
Across impassioned typhoon seas.

With fierce-lit eyes, the savage girl there felt
That absence of your soul from hers ;
But trustful till the end, grief-wailing knelt
Where now the bursting blood-flower stirs.
I know, impassioned love remembrance brings,
Though brown lips kiss to crimson flame,
The white girl in the heart still sits and sings
As dies the alien-dream—to shame.

Who nailed you down ?—the men who sang with you !
The photo on your small hut wall,
Your dead hands held ? They, more than most men, knew
If heaven or hell, it was your all,
The truth revealed, the real man lying dead,
All changed, the beer-besotted face—
A pale school-boy in that rough coffin bed,
The devil ousted from the place !

Comrades sleep well ! here on this heathen isle,
This savage land o'er seas afar,
God knows you mostly need His special smile—
Graves, where the sad lost children are.

THE RIVALS

(SAMOA)

IN my wattle hut by Maffalo I lay nor can I sleep,
Deep waters beat against my heart, thro' my head the
 night winds sweep,
For the brown one sleeps by the forest track with the
 banyans overhead,
And the white girl sleeps by the Channel cliffs where the
 white men bury their dead.
And the tin roofs shine, as the traders rest by the beach
 and still canoes,
Where the shoreline huts in silence stand by the wave-
 less straight bamboos,
And when the moonlight whitely falls slantwise across
 the hill,
And the palms and shore lagoons for miles, with the
 sleeping winds, are still,
The brown one from the forest runs, the white girl from
 the sea—
With shining eyes by my hut door in silence gaze on me.
And I cannot sleep as the dead eyes meet, fierce eyes
 of ebon flame!
The grey eyes gleam thro' shadowy hair, as of old she
 moans my name.
In moonlight struggling silently they glimmer in the
 gloom,
As wails the native dead child far in forest deep—of
 doom;

20 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

And the wistful unborn children rise down by the shore-
ward palms,
Peep from the sea with anxious eyes, and toss their
small white arms !
But deep in my heart the dead one screams—from its
grave across the steep,
And I know it will with frightened eyes soon out of the
forest creep !
As I watch the figures ebon and gold oft brighten by
moonlight,
Till the white one wins and the brown one runs back to
the forest night—
And, in vain, I leap to shadowy arms, as she crying
flees from me,
Down shoreward runs, in a flash of flame dives back to
the moonlit sea.
So, I drink and drink as the nights go by, and the
schooners day by day,
Taking my heart with the white sails home, where the
sunsets fade away.
Till the sea-winds cease and the trees all sleep, and the
hushed waves are all still,
And the moonlight slantwise falls across the forest track
and hill
As I listening wait for the rustling sound with my
dreaming eyes—unshut !
Till out in the night by the pale moonlight their
shadows seek my hut—
Out of the forest depth one runs, and the white girl up
the shore ;
Till the dead child screams and the unborn watch the
shadows by my door.

THE LEPER ISLE *

(MOLOKAI, HAWAII)

OUT of grey crags by warder-seas they creep
 With wailing voices as the stars steal by ;
 Dead men fast rotting on dark shores of sleep,
 Their earthly eyes still shape the shadowed sky !
 Poor skeletons, they moan, laugh, grin and weep ;
 In loathsome, amorous arms some still lie.
 Entombed, they curse the sun—Time's cruel dial
 Above that vault, the South Sea Leper Isle.

Hark ! to the midnight scream, then silence after
 Of desolation voiced by waves that leap
 By sepulchres—damp huts of sheltered rafter,
 Where dreaming dead men shout thro' shroudless sleep !
 As windy trees wail dreams of long dead laughter ;
 As o'er each wattle hut the night winds sweep,
 And dying eyes watch ships out o'er the night,
 Past shores of death ! with port-holes gleaming bright.

'Twas on that Charnel Isle with watching eyes
 He sat by dead men who still heard the waves
 Beat shoreward, saw the south sea white moonrise
 Bathe their own long forgotten flowerless graves !
 Exiled, pale hero-priest, and oft their cries

* The missionary J. Damien, sacrificed his life on "Molokai," the Leper Isle, for many years, and eventually contracted the disease. After his death, he was denied his splendid self-sacrifice by jealous missionaries, men who quickly fell, impaled on the mighty sword (the pen) of Robert Louis Stevenson, in his celebrated open letter to the Rev. C. M. Hyde.

22 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Smote his sad listening ears, like unto caves
That voice the mournful tone of ocean's roll,
Infinity entombed sang in his soul.

Lonely as God, he sat enthroned o'er pain,
Brave music made of desolation's sorrow,
Christ-like gazed o'er the deathless crying slain !
Eyes breathing light, foretelling some bright morrow ;
Till from their tombs they rose—the dead again !
Dark skeletons of woe, arose to borrow
Life from Molokai's hero ;—men denied
That leper priest (like Christ) when Damien died.

THE EXILE TRADER

WHAT is life worth when fate-waters are breaking
 'Gainst the gloom of the night the dreaming man hears !
 When the best men are gone and time's stern hand is making
 Dark walls 'tween the silence of old and new years.
 When the letters that came with small flowers inside,
 And memories sweet, a girl's laughing brown eyes,
 Cease, and you feel in your heart she has died,
 By the sickening gaze of the sun in the skies.

As you lay in your bunk, in your hut in the dark,
 Hear wings of night-birds, tap-tapping outside ;
 See shadows glide moonlight, by clumps of iron-bark—
 Trooping dead men out on some lonely night ride !
 Pale campfires bright-burning lit by the moonbeams,
 Out over the hillsides all gleaming again,
 The dead—sitting laughing, brave rollicking streams,
 The men of the past in the dreams that remain.

The stars fade away, my soul wings the seas,
 Till dawn like a maiden steps out of the night,
 Springs out of the skyline as winds stir the trees,
 Stands blushing, her sandals dipp'd, crimsoned with light !
 The village still sleeps, folks abed are still dreaming,
 (All years ago dead) Oh, how my heart beats
 As I creep, a sad ghost, ere children rush streaming
 The grey stealing dawn of those small silent streets.

THE OLD SAILOR

(REVERIE)

(MARQUESAS ISLANDS)

I DON'T know why the Past comes back in dreams again
to-night,

But men, remembering, live this way again.

My old feet toil towards the stars, just like a fly for light,

That slipping climbs the window pain in vain !

I've had my day ; men all must die, yet life seems sweet,
heaven knows

We grabbed the chances in wild lands afar.

And now, the lads are dead and gone until the grand storm
blows

Me out to meet them all where'er they are.

God, drift my soul away to sea, aye ! as the lone ship flies—

The derelict's torn sails and trailing spars—

That in some tropic calm afar, into the sunset dies

Away as night's great sorrow sighs the stars.

Nor shall I be dead utterly ; in sea-ports of the world

Rosy boys and girls will have some look of me !

Though dead, my passions in young limbs and eyes will
dance unfurl'd

Where'er tired ships come creeping in from sea.

A ROVER'S SONG

OLD comrades, by my fire in dreams
Your hands I clasp to-night ;
Heaven starlit o'er the forest gleams
As 'neath the blood-wood's height
You lie with folded hands asleep
By shores of tumbling waves,
As I creep up each silent steep
To kiss forgotten graves.

The soul of all the songs I sing,
Whatever sounds most true,
I dedicate each wild true ring,
Inspired, old chums, by you.
The world grieves not that you are dead—
Brave, reckless men who died,
Crept from their camp-fires back to bed
Along the wild hill-side.

But, comrades, 'neath the hills or waves,
Could one sad song of mine
Reveal dead souls of far-off graves,
'Twould be a song divine.
As pure and sweet as flowers that grow
Where once with wild delight
You sang, where bush-flowers, bursting, blow
Thro' dead fire-ash to-night.

26 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

And so in dreams I take your hands,
 In long-dead eyes I gaze,
And half in tears from other lands
 Bring back the dear old days.
In other lands 'neath greyer skies
 Wild rides again recall,
Your songs, your laughing, manly eyes—
 The boy who loved you all.

Lies in my sea-chest 'neath my bed
 The fiddle, stringless, still ;
Old chums, since all of you are dead,
 'Neath forest steep and hill,
I cannot play the songs you loved ;
 But with tired eyes and pen
I strive to tell the truth, who roved,
 And found you—God's best men.

WHY DO I SING

WHY do I sing of sunsets far, where the dying skyline ends,
And why, oh why, are the world's worst men my very dear,
best friends?

Deep in my heart I somehow know 'tis the sad lips say
those things,

That fluttering cry and steal away to God on Angel-wings.

Why do I sing of homeless men and happy, singing birds,
Of sunsets on the boundless seas with tender, poet words?
Because I know men, birds, and flowers on lands 'neath all
the skies

Are beautiful, are sorrow-tears of God's creating eyes.

SHEA-OAKS

(AUSTRALIA)

THE breeze-wail of myalls, and shea-oaks
 I can hear ; on the steep
 Faint echoes the wood-cutter's axe-strokes
 From forest glooms deep ;
 And sweet sounds,—oh, a girl's bright laughter
 Comes back like a song
 That brings tears to our eyes years after
 As memories throng.

I know that time's hand has rung changes,
 That only in dreams
 Moonlight falls asleep on the ranges.
 The voices of streams
 To my ears in moonlight are singing
 Beneath the gum-trees.
 Yet only one voice is still ringing—
 The voice of the seas.

Old comrades, with ships down the skylines,
 Have faded away
 With sunsets, and only one star shines—
 My soul's mystic ray.
 In the mist and rain of the long nights
 My dreaming remains ;
 But I'm happy in dreams of those old fights
 O'er seas and the plains.

And I greet you all of the old times—

Brave sea-chums afar.

Here's a toast! The soul of my rough rhymes

Wherever you are!

I gaze in your eyes, dead or living,

In alien lands.

If in heaven you'll cherish this giving,

This clasp of the hands.

DESIRE OF THE HILLS

I LOVE the hills, the wilds, the hollows ; I somehow
know a sweet dead swallow's

Fluttering soul imprisoned in mine cries ;

I never see the dying flowers and mists of sunset autumn
hours,

Out on the hills, but southward turn my eyes.

I hear the reckless drover singing, the scatter'd stock all
homeward bringing,

Across the plains where bushmen racing go !

I see the tall red woods stand sleeping, thro' moon-bright
branches 'possoms leaping,

As men move by their small tents just below.

Where life is one unpolished song of rhythms as you jog
along,

Old trees your friends, night and the starry skies ;

A sweet bird singing in the trees to serenade your
memories,

As in the camp-fire stare your dreaming eyes.

Oh, for the sea-slopes curved and slanting, the tree-frogs
round me weirdly chanting,

And in the moonlit, marsh-flowered scented swamp ;

And far off, on the dim sky-line, the swagman's tiny
bush-fire shine,

Where, homeless on the plains, he's pitched his camp.

Oh, for the cattle o'er plains crawling, the chuckling
cockatoos soft-calling,

Big, bright-winged blossoms breathing on a branch,

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 31

As creeping ragged from the gums, the swagman safe
at sunset comes,

To sleep inside the friendly squatter's ranch.

And o'er the slopes the flame-tree blooms, all fiery in
soft twilight glooms ;

As westward o'er the skyline's scant gum-trees

The parrots all fade far away, ring-specks dim down the
dying day.

In tiny fleets, o'er sunset's golden seas,

As o'er the hills tired sea-winds drifting creep down deep
hollows, leaves uplifting,

And whiffs from bush flowers and sweet-scented musk

The day's death-blood far westward flushing.

The woods asleep, the birds all hushing,

As God sighs all the stars across the dusk.

There in my hut on some lone steep I long to lay my
head and sleep,

Half-dream the night-bird's clandestine refrain

Is some dead girl's voice outside singing, as moonlit
flowers the walls soft clinging,

Scent dreams that drift me o'er the seas again !

THE HOMESTEAD

(QUEENSLAND)

I CAN still see the forest trees
 All waving in the dusk,
 Smell from damp glooms, sweet whiffs of breeze,
 Dead wattle blooms and musk.
 Where sunset floods the dying day—
 Ring-specked, where parrots flock—
 Roams o'er the plateau far away
 The drover with his stock.

The small bush homestead by the sea
 Still stands, the front door swings
 As on the tall, gaunt dead gum-tree
 The magpie sits and sings.
 There, by the door, the stockman sits
 And smokes. On her red rug
 His pale wife sits just by and knits—
 His beard three children tug !
 And as I stand and dreaming gaze,
 The years have taken wing,
 And from my heart out of old days,
 Comes this sad song I sing.
 That garden where those children ran,
 Raced me, laughed, screamed with joy,
 Is overgrown—and I, a man,
 Have overgrown the boy.

I know the redwood forest height—
 Big branches thrilled with words,
 Rich-laden'd with God's golden light,
 Songs of soft, bright-winged birds—

Has blazed to ash in homestead fires
Of cities o'er the plains ;
Of all those woods and sweet desires
This poem now remains.

Sweet Ellen, curled hair and brown eyes,
I loved her pretty ways ;
And as I dream sad heart-mists rise
From those wild boyhood days.
My love was half a passion then,
That pure love God earth gave,
That comes in after years to men
For some one in a grave.

Their shanty where I sweetly slept
And heard the night-bird screams—
As thro' the scrub the dingo crept—
Has rotted into dreams :
Now thro' those hills the echoes fly
Of hearts o'er shining rails,
The night express fast thundering by
That brings the English mails.

Yet often I go back again
To where the homestead stands,
Gaze in old eyes thro' mists of pain
And clasp old shadow hands ;
Kiss Ellen, Bertha, and Lurline :
Those pretty children three
May some day read these lines of mine
And all remember me.

IN THE FOREST

THRO' dark-branched glooms oft do I creep, smell old
campfires, and know
Some strange delight deep in my heart, dead ages long
ago ;
Lost in the forest far, I creep 'neath thick-mossed ancient
trees,
My listening ears echoing shells of immemorial seas ;
Old winds drift damp scents o'er a lake, whiffs by my
nostrils stray,
The wild men in canoes afar in sunset steal away !
Blue flowers, blood-fringed, peep wistfully 'tween crags
where damp-drip curls,
Gaze up—are half-remembered eyes of lovely wild dead
girls.
Then in the stillness sadly cries a lone-bird's song above
And thrills my heart to tears for some forgotten voice of
love.

THE FRIENDLY ISLANDS

THE seas I've roamed, hypocrisy I hate ;
 God grafted in my soul sweet fire of song ;
 On life's dark hills I've wrestled, fought with fate.
 Stuck in South Seas, still young I jog along.
 'Neath strange stars sit, o'er me the banyan bends
 These heathens round about their huts my friends.

We call them heathens—well, 'tis habit most ;
 King Mafeleto is my royal friend ;
 His ancestors, 'tis true, did eat on toast
 Their mortal enemies, but heaven defend
 That I should judge men by their long past crimes—
 We Christians too have had some fine old times.

They're shouting heathen songs by their hut fires !
 At each brown breast clings one sweet little mouth,
 Their busy babes, unsatisfied desires—
 Eyes sparkling starlight of the sea-nursed south !
 As down the forest-track, from hut to hut
 Pass natives dressed in half a coco-nut !

Writhes that grand pain—where dark Pacific Seas
 Lash tiny isles 'neath midnight's crystal skies,
 Like tumbling silver glimmering thro' dark trees
 O'er wild shore reefs sea-dark waves, curling, rise ;
 Through bamboo branches shine wild eyes, those sins,
 Savages clothed in loin strip and their own skins.

36 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Some nights I creep down, visit my brown brothers
 In hive-shaped den, each on a small mat squats,
Wild jabbering men and rough-haired squatting mothers,
 All eating fish stuff steaming in earth pots.
They turn, smile, show white teeth as I creep in,
Such pleased dark eyes, as knees support each chin.

Big tattooed men like statues thrilled with life,
 They roam these forests old. Lithe curved-limbed
 girls,
In modest rudi's dressed, laugh, race with strife,
 My prize to win as fade their sun-flashed curls,
Gleam o'er the slopes as long legs, racing, run,
Their bright eyes flying back—my brass ring won!

Sweet eyes of innocence, so clear, wherein
 Surprised you gaze, to see calm virgin light ;
Real colour shades of life, and still the sin
 Bright bubbling with sweet laughter in God's sight—
Our sins unborn, those diamond-sparkling eggs
That hatched are spiders creeping on black legs.

I've seen wild orgies 'neath these moonlit palms,
 Like skeletons men dance thro' moonbeams white ;
The midnight tribal drums beat loud alarms !
 A glimpse of whirling legs glide thro' moonlight.
All come and vanish with the tom-tom's tune
As clouds passed one by one across the moon.

And silently swayed shadows to and fro
 In sheets of glass that mirror'd curved dark limbs—
All imaged in lagoons !—where now below
 Night's one small imaged cloud across soft-swims—
When Bingo took to wife Melango fair,
 Hot-blushing in soft bridal robe—her hair !

I've seen their King in solemn state enthroned,
 And fire-majestic gleam in his big eyes,
 As maidens swayed their bodies, chanting, moaned
 Fierce tribal songs of deathless histories.
 In dead of night as tom-toms loud did beat
 The grim Court jester tickled his big feet.

Like cherubims by each small hive-hut door
 Peeped small wild faces with sweet wondering eyes
 As that old King, to hear such ancient lore,
 Did lift long arms and chin towards the skies,
 To call down spirits of the mighty dead,
 To bless his isle and fat anointed head !

Then have I, dreaming, safe there up a tree,
 Thought of my England's splendour and royal Courts,
 Gazed sadly at stars out across the sea,
 And wondered why creation changed first thoughts,
 Made cities with crimes shuffling round in boots,
 When men so happy seemed in their skin suits !

Men say mosquitoes' fever, South Sea damp
 On velvet skins, and such like living lies !
 By heaven ! here's half the truth, it is the tramp
 Of white men that the brown ones die like flies.
 Nor could I sleep last night for traders' rows,
 And Germans with wild women for their frows !

You could run out a regiment of wild men,
 Parade them up and down for fifty years,
 Peer in their eyes, and bury them, and then
 Swear from your soul those fearless pioneers,
 That build a nation's glory, pomp and pride,
 Had less of virtue than the helpless side !

38 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

I've sailed the seas, the lost brigade, those wrecks,
I've chummed with them on their wild flight of haste,
They'd killed some one, may be passed those bad
cheques.

Rough diamonds? well, yes, some just bits of paste!
There's two here now, clean-shaved, dyed! bless your
hearts,

I've seen some funny beggars round these parts!

They'll build a church! a prison's gloomy walls
Where wild men by their huts now squat and sing.

Erect a gallows! when the trap-door falls,

Civilisation will be in full swing!

Nor is this satire, but my modest pun

On justice and grim truth beneath the sun!

Where are the unknown seas where they'll ne'er come?

Wild, hurrying souls, the poet's pioneers!

Sing me a song of silent tribal drum,

Dead camp-fires and bush griefs of other years.

God, where's the wave that runs up singing, soars

And breaks to spray on undiscovered shores?

Old world, good-bye! my dreams have ceased to borrow,

Strange gleam of stars across this mystic isle.

Heaven's calm face brightens like an eye from sorrow,

As dawn swamps skyline dark where drift clouds
smile,

And tumbling down the slopes, rush, plump and brown,

The wild man's children from the small hut town!

MAFELETO'S PHILOSOPHY

(SOUTH SEA ISLANDS)

An old South Sea Islander's real opinion of the white man's trek with his creed into his primeval provinces, and interesting, inasmuch as it gives one an insight into his view of thinking and seeing things as they are.

COME round me, kinsmen, let the white man go,
What knows he of our soul, to heathen us,
Who drink the virgin forest sap? We know
This much—enough, he is a knowing cuss.
Are there no shadows 'neath his native sky,
No children starving by his forest tent
As from the Royal King's comes the roystering cry
Of festive song, no souls, no heart's grief rent?

Let him shout on, pass me the full nut-bowl,
I'm old, would I trust to his wretched creed?
I, with my fifty gods, that soothe my soul,
Must fail them all—trust to one god—indeed!
Look you—I'm wise, a dead white man is dead
Should he offend his Heav'n while 'neath the sun—
And we?—well, at the worst, when our soul's fled,
If fifty fail, we've still his Mighty One!

He'd steal our souls, curse him, his lying race
Claimed by blue seas and this my ancient isle!
Remember well do I that first white face
That blessed my head, with hand t'wards heaven did
smile,

Pah ! I believed that grin !—had I known then
 Those eyes gazed from the spirit heart of hell
 I'd slain him !—faith, 'tis true these strange white men
 One virtue have when cooked—yes, do eat well !

Pass me the bowl, time 'tis to grieve, at most,
 When in sick dying eyes the last stars sleep.
 We've won our battles too, enjoyed the roast
 Of what sweet foes ! 'tis even so we reap
 Sweet vengeance ! They, those prating white men
 skunks,
 Our wives defiled, our land made one vile hell ;
 Cursed missionaries, and traders on night-drunks—
 Ah ! I've a tale, when dead, their God to tell !

THE MISSING EARL

(FIJI)

HERE, 'neath strange skies, the South Sea moon
Doth ghostly fire the helmet fringe—
The regiment line of seas in tune
That charge the shore, where monsters cringe—
Those huge dark rocks—while round me whirls,
In moonlight, wild men and wild girls !

Hark ! how they jump and joyous shriek
'Neath palms, as falls the moonbeam rain !
As with brown legs my white legs weak
Strive, likewise toss and jerk in vain,
As spitefully I throw them higher,
Think of old England and perspire.

I'm happy being dead ; I stand
An exile in dark ages grim,
This other world, this magic land,
This unknown isle of Ocean dim,
As like grey souls that 'scape the grave,
Outrigged canoes come o'er the wave.

There sits the royal queen, and black king
With chin on knees, dressed in no clothes,
As round the dusky-maiden ring
Whirls in moonlight, his fat broad nose
A bone ring shakes ; what sadder sight
For me whose king once made a knight !

I, who have watch'd white bodies shine
Thro' gauzy veils in splendid halls,
And eyes that sparkled rich with wine,
And now, ye gods, hear that applause,
As white-teethed maidens clap and praise
Each effort, as my knees I raise !

I have discarded evil dress,
What care I now for life's sweet chance,
As naked in my fig-leaf-ness
Beneath the South Sea moon I dance !
Gaze in these dusky lovelit eyes—
This thing I'll love thro' changeless doom,
For she, my wife, 'neath English skies,
Alas ! did vanish—with my groom.

A VOICE FROM THE SOUTH SEAS

COOL under the gums a river runs down Murrumbidgee
way,
And every night in the redwood height the star-eyed
'possums play
Till over the slopes the stockwhip rings and the echoing
hoofs faint beat
As up in the hills the lyre-bird fills the bush with music
sweet ;
And far away by the eyes of day the big black swans in
lines
Of curling wings like paddling things glide where the
sunrise shines.
Out over the mountain ridge they pass, while far o'er
the velvet steep
The stockmen ride the scrub slope side chasing the flying
sheep !
And miles away the dim sea waves like white moss rise
and fall
As the deep-sea ships where the skyline dips across the
wide world crawl,
As the sea winds roam from their wild storm home to
kiss the rich bush-flowers,
And threading the slopes the green vine gropes where the
karri-karri towers,
While over the western slopes away on the winds I
dreaming go !
Away with my comrades of the hills where the scented
wattles blow.

44 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

As the galloping hoofs beat to the tune of the landscape
flitting by!

And the screaming cockatoos above as we crash 'neath
the blue gums high,

Till scrambling from the dead scrubwood to their roosts
they flapping scream,

As far away the deep sea waves toss in the moon's
white dream,

As racing the mossy open slopes we hear their fading cries.

And bending my head I kiss my mare, gaze down in her
beautiful eyes

And the wild star-flowers seem dancing through the
lakes of all the skies.

Then down in the hollow gullies gloom, around the camp
bush-fire

The winds from seaweed creeping come to sweep each
leafy lyre,

With spirit fingers wail thro' trees and the shea-oaks o'er
the plains,

And we are the souls of the melodies of the all-night-long
refrains. . . .

Ah, those were the days when life was sweet, when we
galloped side by side,

And where was the stockman who could race me over
the reaches wide

When I was a boy and all the world gazed in my eyes
with pride?

.

Days follow days, nights follow nights, and the traders
come and go

As I watch the lonely schooner pass where the deep,
wide waters flow,

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 45

Fading away o'er ocean dark as the dying simooms blow,
Till the stars pale fall in the mirroring deep of each wild
shore lone lagoon

As the smoke-like sails all silver fired glide by the low
sea-moon.

And who am I that sings this song? As the sunset wind
soft grieves

With the wild birds' bubbling music blown thro' scented
wild fruit leaves,

As I sit and dream of the old dead days here on these
South Sea isles,

With undressed blacks, shut in alone by the skyline's
wide sea-miles.

As toiling in for ever creep up ocean's breast of sands

The little South Sea wailing waves to toss their snow-
white hands—

Time's homeless waifs, they crying kiss wild red-lipped
coral lands.

Hark! chanting on the steep slope-side the big brown
wild men squat

By beehive dens, while sadly I half-envy their wild lot;

A white man I who sadder am to hear those old-world
tunes

That seem the sad survival of dead sunsets and dead
moons,

And I, a moral white-bleached thing, who left here long
ago,

And have returned to find, alas! I am no better so!

As seaward stare my weary eyes, for Fate has willed that I
Should wake the little conscious things that watch the
stars go by.

For oh! I love their small plump backs and little demon
eyes—

46 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Six of them romping on the slopes as lolling fat she lies,
My half-caste wife, the blacker for the blue of tropic skies—
And me also!—disgraced, exiled from all the family ties.
As the swallows swift are flying by the shores of English
 seas,

And the swaying rooks hoarse calling from the inland
 tall elm-trees,

As the scented hedgerow flowers' warm pulse are musical
 with bees,

As I watch the dipping sunsets sink from skyline to
 skyline,

O'er the whole wide world that lies between this isle and
 dreams of mine.

THE STORM

CRASH! over a world of wind and dark the thundering
wild seas leapt,
And the swaying sails cried overhead where the homeless
night-wind swept;
Like monsters hungry from the deep, heaved up each giant-
back'd sea,
'Neath sailors clinging on the yards who swore most
fearfully;
And the lightning whipp'd the wind-blown black, each vivid
sapphire flash,
Up-raising night's roof, beautiful, that fell with thunderous
crash!
That boomed and roll'd 'way southward faint, as shouting
on the wind,
The Bo'sun's yelling trumpet-voice died phantom-like behind.
The old ship dived, crouched, shivering swerved, a moment
broadside laid;
A flash revealed her figure-head, uplifted hands that prayed!
The bearded skipper tramp'd the poop as lightning streaked
the clouds,
Breathed night's wild brilliance o'er the sea, and on the
tattered shrouds.
As we sailed along, and the skyline winked each flash and
muttering coughed
The thunder far, and the sailors climbed, singing high aloft,
And all the fierce wild hunting seas, like troops by night
turned out,

48 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Wild regiments, charged and charged the ship ; the baffled
winds did shout ;
Then lovely o'er wild ocean dark, swept moon-white
mystery,
And up the brave boat wounded sprang, o'er hollows of
the sea,
Like some wild-hunted, frighten'd stag, from chasing winds
did flee !

Then we shouted a wild sea chanty, ' Blow ! blow ! blow !
the man down ! '
All English sailors flying along home bound for London
Town.
Till breathless stopp'd each shouting mouth, Death
screamed across the sky ;
It chilled our blood to creeping ice, a comrade's far lost
cry !
To windward rose sheer breaking walls, the brave ship
swerved and stopped.
Like thundering icebergs, seas arose, crash over deckward
dropped !
Wild, wrecking clouds the storm-moon smashed, left not
one little spark,
To light the travelling mountain seas' fierce charging—
ebon dark !
We hove her to, each storm flash swept a bright dream o'er
the wave,
Revealed a crew of faces white, all huddled by a grave !
Head over all the skipper stood, hand arched, out seaward
stared,
Each flash revealed his grand old face, winds sideways
swung his beard :

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 49

All ready stood, real brotherhood, staunch by the starboard
boat;

Triumphant ran the seas, but we, gripp'd death hard by
the throat

And the 'old man' roared away like hell, mad cursed the
whole night wild;

Alone at sea, our father he, and every man his child.

There by the bulwarks all hands stood, as came the thrilling
cry—

'Right! lower away!' Up like a cork the lifeboat bobbed,
seas high.

As hairy-chested sailormen, strong shouldered, broad arms
bared,

Pulled from their hearts! thro' one small chink the moon
from heaven stared!

There, on the ramping wild dark seas, the tiny craft did
rise.

Like phantom voices on the wind swept by their 'Halloo'
cries.

As white-faced on the hove-to ship, like sculptured stone
men stood,

A comrade's dying cry, faint heard, that froze their very
blood.

With Fate wild wrestling in his grave, his tossed hands
clutching air,

They saved him! caught him by the ear and grabbed him
by the hair!

We warmed him up, the skipper cried to see we'd saved
our chum,

And every man with joy that night drank up one pint of
rum!

And why keep back the sterling truth? We danced, we
fought, we sang!

50 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Forgot the ship, and for the storm—well, did not care a
hang!

The wheelsman hung *tight* to the wheel, the skipper to
his bunk

We lifted up with due respect, and dropped him in—dead
drunk!

And only God knows, I don't, why the old ship wasn't
sunk.

And if my brave chums of the sea by some strange chance
should look

And see these lines of mine rhymed out, the old days in
my book,

Although I'm now a country squire, *whoever they may be*,
If they be comrades of those days, come inland down
to me.

We'll drink and shout with wild delight here round this
friendly blaze,

And wake the silent village night with songs of other
days!

A MEMORY

THE grey old skipper on the poop
 Sways on from left to right
 Out on the moonlit, shining sea—
 He's in his grave to-night !
 I see his bearded, sea-worn face,
 Sea-boots rise to his knees,
 His oilskin cap bashed o'er his eyes,
 That gaze o'er unknown seas.

A travelling, windy, wooden world,
 The scented sails o'erspread,
 As like some pale beseeching Christ,
 The praying figure-head
 Voyaging fast roams Southern Seas.
 The swaying masts and spars
 With rhythmic chime swing heaven's vast dome
 And silently the stars !

As dreaming o'er the decks I move,
 Thro' fo'c's'le gloom I creep ;
 The oil lamp showers its dingy gleam
 O'er sailors fast asleep.
 Their slumbering faces glide along
 Each in small tossed bunk-bed ;
 I hear the muffled tramp, tramp, tramp—
 The night watch overhead.

52 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Out o'er the ocean's brink clouds rise,
 Like phantom mountains driven ;
As though a door ope's silently
 And shuts, stars steal in Heaven.
Hark ! on the winds the cry—' 'Bout ship !'
 The watch creep from below,
Like ghosts in oilskins, in moonlight
 Aloft they climbing go !

Their figures clinging to the yards
 Move as the grey sails flop,
Their toiling shadows to the decks
 Through moonlight softly drop.
But in their bunks for years, I know,
 The 'Old Hands' are asleep,
The thund'ring seas above, and God
 The long night watch doth keep !

AN EXILE'S DREAMS

OLD dreams are dead, and blown life's magic rose.
As light of all dead women's eyes
The winter sunset gleams, the starving crows
Are flapping home where daylight dies.
Far off the deep-sea ships in twilight pass
Like shadows down some magic mirror-glass.

Heaven, send me dreams again of other lands,
Where women fair and brave men roam ;
Where love and hate clasped are fast by the hands ;
And sleeping lies my boyhood home,
As by my bed the old torn novel lies,
Its wild romance behind my sleeping eyes.

Oh, let me hear the robin sing again,
Where sunset streaks the winter sky ;
And hear the old piano's strummed refrain.
Oh, ne'er on earth, not till I die,
My soul will music touch and turn to tears,
Like songs remembered sweet of other years !

Heaven send me love such as I've known in dreams
When winds and flowers with me did dance
As sails at sea died down the sunset streams
Bound for far shores of wild romance !
Till slept my childish eyes, in bed upstairs,
Loved by old heroes, dead a thousand years !

54 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Oh, maidens beautiful, in bed asleep,
Curl 'tween soft sheets, close your bright eyes.

Oh, wayward boys, dream on, in slumber deep,
Your wildest dreams there realize.

Let angels whisper ere unto your ears—
The sweetest singer's song is full of tears.

Let God's south wind kiss every wild flower dream
That bloweth in sweet fields of youth ;
And swallow-birds far down the valley gleam
Ere wails the winter wind of truth ;
Ere woods lie hushed, and o'er the sunset plain
The birds have flown that ne'er return again.

YESTERDAY

To you, my saddest song I sing,
A song weaved from the breath
Of all sweet birds that thrill the spring,
And all the grey of death.

The calm, clear beauty of your eyes
Gleams far across the years,
A tiny sparkling bridge of sighs
From now—to boyhood tears.

Deep in my heart pale flowers grow,
Spring up in dreaming light,
And, shivering, softly burst and blow
In tears of mist to-night.

For years have flown away, dear girl,
Since on your lovely head
Winds kissed each sunlit golden curl,
And all our vows are dead.

DRIFTING

My soul, dear, as a star out Heavenward burning,
 Sings doom as deep as that unquiet sea,
 And, as a star in darkness far is turning
 Out glad blue days, your eyes return to me.
 Blue shining depths of gladness to mine lifted—
 As hung impassion'd souls 'twixt Earth and Heaven—
 Oh, could the tide return that our lives drifted—
 And bring me to your arms again—forgiven!

Leave faults asleep—remember wild vows only,
 The blue-gums, oh, the bush-bird, now years dead,
 As mirror'd in your eyes we kiss'd, it lonely
 Sang in the sunlit branches overhead.
 The river in the hills still wanders, singing,
 And, in those boughs by night the parrots sleep—
 Like my old thoughts, the moonbeams, to leaves clinging,
 Reveal their frightened eyes as possums leap.

No day breaks o'er the hills of that sad dream-land,
 But from those boughs the birds awake and fly,
 No sunset falls, but on those hills I lone stand
 And watch them down the skyline fade and die.
 Thick-overgrown, the shanty by the hillside
 Still stands; when through its doorless, moonlit room
 The dead leaves fall, the creeping dingo's feet glide
 Till sunrise streaks each day of changeless gloom.

And, on the walls old picture frames are clinging ;
The fireside where we sang and dreamed for hours—
Sat o'er by nights, watch'd ember-bright flames flinging—
Moss-grown, now blossoms red and blue bush flowers.
Where are those dreams, your eyes and all the laughter ?
The comrades of " Dead Gum-tree Camp," hard by ?
All faded into sunsets—silence after
Of night and loneliness across the sky.

In dreams I watch the unborn Ages breaking—
As waves in moonlight toss white hands and climb
For ever up dark shores—new eyes awaking
Are romping round the skirts of agéd Time,
Blue days, the stars behind for ever flying,
Bring music and strange voices with the years
And on the hills I stand with Autumn dying,
Her lakes asleep are deep with huddled tears.

Come to me, dear, in dreams of sleepless longing,
As moonlight falls where few sad flowers remain,
As southbound swallows 'neath the stars rush thronging
All homeward fly, come back to me again.
The winds asleep, keep secrets of the hollows,
The birds that sang—for years their songs have fled,
Come back, ere, all too soon, the darkness follows,
Come back, ere these few flowers my dreams, are dead.

YEARS PARTED

I've loved and lost in this sad spirit sense—
 My dreams have blossom'd as a field-wildflower
 That breathes its fragrance to the Soul Immense,
 Drops sodden in the mud in one brief hour.

God knows, my love once was as pure as this
 And steadfast as a star's flame through the night ;
 God knows, our lips met in one sacred kiss
 Ere my star falling curved swept out of sight.

Love's mystery I've known, fair secret charms :
 And as death steals the loveliest of Earth's eyes—
 Dissolving them to dust—from out my arms
 Winds scatter'd her as dust beneath the skies.

I shall love her when o'er the twilight falls ;
 My soul will cling with trailing, beating wings
 Among the stars till that lost voice soft-calls
 My spirit through the dark from mortal things.

From men I've sat apart : stared at her book—
 One verse marked off that praised love's length of years—
 Whoe'er you are, may you, friend, never look
 Till words seemed blurred as gaze your eyes through
 tears.

Man shouts of Heav'n and what his soul is worth,
 As though God bargains o'er some merchandise.
 I pray eternal life is some sweet birth
 Where my awakening gaze sees Heav'n—her eyes.

I've felt love's wildest passion stir my soul,
As singing winds do bending moonlit trees.
Wailed—as dead sailors 'neath dark Ocean's roll
Tossed white hands to the moons of southern seas!

And where are you? fair image of lost Heaven,
Your loveliness—'twas my soul and these eyes
That fashion'd Earth's wild-angel soft thing driven
To my glad arms—out of dreamed Paradise.

Can dreams forget, can you forget, 'twas I
Gazed in those eyes, with rapture, saw strange light
Steal like sunrise across a midnight sky?
Ah, God, the very stars abashed took flight.

Then, climbed the moon, peeped through that window-
pane,
Saw your face fast asleep on love's strong arm,
Thick hair unloosed o'er warm white bosom reign
As smiled your sleeping lips through moonlight's charm.

Is sorrow one sad song of earthly things?
And trust in woman's love the dying day?
Are dreams sunsets soft-specked with curling wings—
Birds o'er the skyline fading far away?

Now—like to swallows lost far out at sea,
I seek love's south, warm spirit eyes, true lips;
And, as lost trembling birds cling—woe is me!
With tiny feet to masts of passing ships,

My thoughts roam o'er the universe in vain
To find the splendour of some dream I knew,
Out to the stars cling fluttering, till again
My arms hold fast my loveliest dream—of you.

60 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

I've loved the stars—and all those things that shine
With happiness of pure enduring light,
Ere from your eyes across brief day of mine
Clouds crept, hid starlit Heaven out of sight.

And, now—my very faith in God seems dead ;
The music of my heart moans like the sea ;
My Heaven—where slumbering lies my tired head
As in a dream you come back, dear, to me.

PACIFIC ISLANDS

(FIJI)

WE watched, bewilder'd, 'neath the pale moonshine ;
 The Bay's clear water mirror'd mighty trees.
Out o'er the shore's wild rampart curled the line—
 The white-ridged line of long Pacific seas !
The fireflies danced ; across the still lagoons
Canoes dark-floated o'er pale mirrored moons.

Out on the pale sea rode our full-rigged barque,
 Fast anchor'd, rocking to the swinging tide ;
The hanging topsails silvered in the dark
 As swung the poop-lamp o'er the wooden side.
We sniffed, like wine, as up the shore we crept,
Cool whiffs of flowers from leafy damp glooms swept.

We sighted tiny huts, neath coco-palms,
 Big native men, like black ghosts wrapped in towels
Thro' moonlight passed, we heard faint-chanting psalms
 Of ancient creeds, then silence brought the howls
And beat of drums that told our wondering ears
Some warrior encored was by tribal cheers !

Far-off, beneath the sailing South Sea moon,
 The boundless ocean crinkled. By dark caves
All hurrying up the shore—where each lagoon
 Shone like a mirror, ran the singing waves
Like frighten'd children o'er the reefs to peep,
All imaged, curling in still water's deep.

62 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

As though space lay in miniature outspread—
The Universes sparkling, dancing stars!—
Firefly-swarms twinkled, where waved overhead
Dark tropic palms by leagues of coral bars
By leafy glooms and foams of Southern Seas;
And like an Angel's flute blown in the trees,

A night-bird's throat poured forth its lovely song
As on we crept; the boatswain brave, ahead;
His pale bald pate in moonlight bobbed along,
The whole crew followed close, with noiseless tread,
My shipmate Wells and I with tremulous mind—
Both young—together bravely crept behind!

Deep in the forest hid, big savage men
By camp-fires rose; gleamed fiercely startled eyes!
Wild women crept from out each bee-hive den,
Gazed on our faces white with glad surprise!
Proud, sat the dark King on his bamboo throne;
A sailor's shirt about his bare limbs blown.

Three grim barbarians sat like long dead sages,
Like mummy things; in wrinkles deep, their eyes
Gave wistful gleams—as though the dead dark ages
On watch sat by that moonlit Paradise—
Sat by a little fire 'neath three giant trees,
Their bowed heads touch'd their huddled thin bone knees.

One strange old man on that dim, far-off world—
Where round the waves in moonlight ran up singing—
Danced wildly, his thin legs oft skyward hurled,
To chanting maidens' bodies bare, arms flinging,
His shadow in moonlight oft jumped about,
Once thro' the forest height its head stuck out!

Our old cook, through some strange drink maudlin drunk,
 Stamped with delight the leafy forest floor
Where girls, bare limbed, half rose in flowers, then sunk ;
 His big eyes stared, he shouted out ' Encore !'
In royal nude-state the old King fiercely sat,
His big fat feet spread on a little mat.

Like dead men on some unknown world we stood ;
 Brown girls in moonlight danced, their glimmering
 eyes,
Whirled ghost-like round the leafy solitude,
 They touched our shirted bodies ; with wild cries
All joyous-circling, clapped and danced again
To find us real, warm-blooded sailor-men !

Out flopp'd the sails. In shoals just o'er the side
 Glad swimming eyes in sunset upturned gleamed ;
Safe on those wave-washed backs their babes did ride ;
 By night did seem as though it had been dreamed,
Wild campfire and weird song of those far isles,
As wailed the swaying sails o'er lone sea miles.

SAMOA

IN the west the sunsets seaward sink,
 Few sails fade over that ocean's brink
 As Catamarans glide like ghostly wings
 In moonlight, as each cargo sings,
 Swarms of wild faces sailing along
 O'er the South Sea Bay chanting wild song ;
 We anchored down by the still lagoons,
 By the dark-branched palms and mirrored moons ;
 By the shore-bamboos, where moved wild eyes,
 Peeping through leaves, bright with surprise.
 Wild women ran from each secret den,
 Admired, gazed at white sailor-men.
 As we crept up shores of mystic-lands,
 Our sea-boots tossing silver sands,
 Out in the lovely vault of night
 The South Sea moon was hanging bright ;
 Our shadows in still water glassed
 Like crowds of ghosts, crept as we passed !
 There in a space sat the old king,
 And women bare their legs did fling,
 Danced silently in pale moonlight
 As Mile-End cheered with wild delight !
 That old king's nose with grin immense
 Did spread, revealed real innocence !
 His white teeth gleamed as all the crew
 Laughed louder, still—Heavens, 'tis most true,
 Up went her legs, the South Sea Queen,

Hysterical, the crew did lean
One on the other as supports,
They nudged each other, those old salts.
The cook forgot his place, did smack
Our stern Scotch skipper on the back !
I'm glad they laughed and did not weep,
They're all now in their graves asleep.

HOMEWARD BOUND

(CAPE HORN)

WE were thirty-four, and one behind where the seas raved
overhead.
And his empty bunk a coffin seemed—where his sea-chest lay
instead.
But we couldn't grieve for the slasher came and blew the
main-mast out!
As they clung aloft, and the moon-bright clouds were
knocking the skies about!
Six overboard! the cook and the mate, and the stowaway,
young Jim.
How we reefed her up and we hove her to. On the heave
of a sea's ridged rim
We saw white struggling hands go up! then the moon
smashed by a cloud
Covered them down alive beneath the blind sea's lifting
shroud!
The Bo'sun shouted, roared on the wind, "clear the
tackle" and though he roared,
His voice whipped off like a pistol shot. Crash the crew
to the deck went floored,
The mast clear, overside! up she came, in the hollows,
wallowing righted—
Ah! they were the boys for pluck, my lads, brave souls
that God has knighted.
And the mammoth seas o'er the world came down! the
winds their backs astride;

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 67

How they rose and moaned as the sailors cheered—
struggling to get inside,
As the life-boat dropped! Almighty Fate remember the
dark sea grave
If sailors forgotten, asleep, don't hear the last trump
down under the wave ;
Call first the plucky dead sailor-men, why, even the
cook's mate cried
For an oar to save his swearing boss ! nearly jumped o'er
the bulwark side !
Then over the deck pale moonlight swept ; we saw the
small life-boat rise
And the figures of men out tossing beneath infinite
wind-whipped skies !
And the "old man" stood on the poop, hand arched,
watched his brave wild children go
To the dark and the shriek of the ramping seas. How the
fate-dark winds did blow !
As we heard faint cries from the vast blind night,—
and I often see the wind
O'er the dark imagination seas, drift stars of the nights
behind—
O'er sailors asleep as over their heads the deep sea
clippers roam,
O'er the Life-boat men of our ship that turned—without
them all crept home !

THE CHIEF MATE

My ship's at sea, the sails outspread, the moon flies
backward overhead,
The bow heaves up, the swell is strong, she broadside
lies and skims along!
The figure-head with lifted hands—prays on, the skipper
staring stands
In full view on the poop, beard white—I know the old
man's sad to night.
The “ ‘off watch ’ ” restless, cannot sleep, as roam their
bunks across the deep.
Some, whispering by the foremast, smoke, where wind-
ward booms each wild sea-stroke!
Here, on the endless waters hurled, we are half-way
across the world!
My mate, young Wells, he's on watch too, my nose and
ears sting, with cold blue.
This is no Spanish Main, the breeze comes straight from
icy Arctic seas!
We are both nervous, Wells and I; there on the main-
hatch it doth lie,
In canvas wrapt, the chief mate's length, devoid of light
his eyes, his strength
Of limb and soul, and hand-grip warm, all vanished from
that silent form!
He jumped at sunset in wild seas to save a sailor!
grasped his knees!
I saw it all; two struggling men together fighting wild
seas, when

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 69

They went beneath the hissing waves. By God! the
seas to-day did rave,
The skipper waved his arms, and roared, the thundering
seas leapt up on board
Like hissing fiends to stop the chase of comradeship with
flinchless face!
We sat, a lump in every throat, out there tossed in the
small lifeboat.
We brought that dead form back alone, the other one he
had clean gone!
The crew his orders had obeyed, but like a sleeping child
they laid
His wet head down; his brave blue eyes looked through
their arms straight at the skies.
At sunset stood round pale with sorrow, they'll drop him
over there to-morrow!
And now the lone ship flies along, as swaying 'neath the
stars in song
The sails are singing overhead, above the hatch where
he lies dead.
No wonder winds and sails fast flying sound something
like dead sailors crying.

IN THE BUSH

I'M back in the bush with a trustful chum,
 With our drawing-room spread 'neath a gum !
 I was sick of myself and evil ways
 And the splendid scheme that never pays !
 And life that is made up, O my brother,
 Of one curs'd thing and then another !
 'Tis night and the forests sleep so still :
 If I climb up there on that little hill,
 And stand beneath those tall red trees,
 I can spot the far-off moonlit seas !
 And the waves all tossing splash the sky,
 Where the full-rigged home-bound pitches by !
 There sits my chum, old sober-side,
 We've travelled, we two, the whole world wide.
 He's thick-necked, low, but he has no fears,
 And his mouth as he gapes ends near his ears !
 As we sit by this camp-fire blazing bright—
 Here where we need not be polite,
 And sit in a little chair upright
 To a guest that will call every night !
 Where no one bangs at your shanty door,
 And growls, ' I've been here twice before,
 And I don't care a damn 'bout your good intent ;
 All that I want is my overdue rent ! '
 If he did—these hills are silent, deep,
 The gullies dark by the moonlit steep,
 And here you could kill a man outright,
 And no one know that he died that night !
 Though he stood by your door a month upright—
 Till he shrank and his clothes flapped in moonlight.
 Oh ! 'tis sweet to sit on this dead gum-log
 As he waggeth his tail, my chum—my dog !

THE GOLD COAST

(HOMESICK)

HERE, sweltering 'neath blue tropic skies,
 For miles and miles deep jungle lies,
 Like big brown peg-tops upside down,
 Just out there stands the black man's town.
 And men call this the Golden South—
 No wonder I'm down in the mouth!
 About five thousand hissing flies
 Swarm round my sun-blazed, blinded eyes!
 And though the gold-mines are round here,
 I'd sell my soul for English beer!
 I've sweated all night in these pants,
 You dare not take them off; the ants,
 The fleas, and awful crawling things,
 Creep 'tween the sheets and flap their wings—
 My body smarts now with their stings!

Hot fevers own this curséd place,
 Grip tight your throat, stare in your face,
 And through your frenzied brain all night
 Black devils leap with wild delight!
 Until you sleep, then from far lands,
 Stretched o'er the seas come shadow hands
 And lips that kiss your fevered brow—
 Ah, God! to feel such kisses now!
 On that small steep, the red trees by,
 The dead white men all homesick lie!
 They cannot hear the tom-tom's tune

By night, when 'neath the Afric moon
The black's blood-curdling shriek, as run
From jungles dark things one by one,
In moonlight jump that silent steep:
Thank God, dead men lie deep in sleep!
There's something shouting in my head—
'Clear out, old man, before you're dead!'
And if when you all read these lines,
No letter comes, and no old signs,
To tell I'm back in London Town,
You'll know they too have got me down!

A SAILOR'S GRAVE

OH, sink me down deep under the sea,
 And the wild waves will beat over me ;
 The foam of my shroud toss under the sky
 When over my head the ships go by,
 As the south-bound swallows screaming go
 From the mists where the wild lone shore looms low.
 I will live in the beat of storms, though dead !
 As the tides sway over my moving bed,
 And I'll hear collide the wild green waves
 As they clash and meet the dark sea-caves ;
 When sunset flames the low skyline far,
 Till the waters deep around me are
 A mirror wide for every star,
 My dead eyes will stare up and be
 With pale shadows in eternity.
 When the shadow keels of the home-bound ships
 Glide over my shroud as the moonlight slips
 Thro' dark depths to kiss my pale dead lips,
 I'll hear the sailors right over me singing,
 In the moonlit flying rigging—clinging,
 Till their voices fading leave the sound
 Of deep moving waters lapping around.
 Oh, my soul and the sea have been as one,
 And the depth of my passion bright as the sun,
 So in other years—oh, eyes to be—
 Oh, unborn women, stare out to sea—
 When the spring flowers blow dream then of me,
 For I have loved the soul of your eyes,

And am lying where round the cold wave cries
As my dead limbs lift with each deep tide rise.
Oh, maidens to grieve, unloved, come, creep
To the shore where the waters around me sweep,
And there dip your lovely warm, white limbs,
For dead eyes glide where the moonlight swims,
And your prayers—will they all be dreamed in vain
If a dead man is love-thrilled again?

A WINDY NIGHT

THE wild-night seas are thundering in my little moonlit
room,

All tossing, tossing by my lone bedside.

Across the silent dreaming night, deep moving waters boom,

As o'er my head the wailing torn-sails glide.

Death's hungering hounds are moaning on dark shores of
starlit doom

For tired sailors on the ocean wide.

The sailor-men are clinging to the broken floating mast,

Along Fate's phantom shore the hounds still cry.

As one by one the overboards, into the ocean cast,

In moonlight toss up white hands once—and die.

The old ship trembling wails her lonely sinking cry at last,

The blind seas onward roll beneath the sky.

Dawn creeps along the sea skyline, the waves are all asleep ;

The stars steal frighten'd home, all creep indoors.

A magic shore is looming up across the eastern deep.

Where on the emerald waves bright sunrise pours,

The sinful " ' Old Hands ' " from the sea together huddled
creep—

Half frightened—up God's silent, unknown shores.

THE BRIDAL NIGHT

(HER CONFESSION)

FOR ever warm and lovely are my limbs,
 For him each secret white, caressing curve.
 Within my chamber glass my image swims,
 As love bewitched my limbs I sway and swerve,
 To sweeter show my body's bare outline,
 As thro' my tumbling hair my pleased eyes shine.

For ever young I'll be, with warm desires
 To be imprisoned in love's sweet, strong arms.
 I shall for him create from my soul's fires
 His image, or mine own, that his soul charms!
 I will curve these fond arms o'er him by night,
 As thro' sweet dreams repose my warm limbs white.

For him my rich red blood, my eyes, this hair,
 Unloosed, dark tumbling o'er my maiden breast,
 Made lovelier for this thought—he'll clasp me there,
 Whene'er at dawn our farewell lips are pressed.
 His bearded face I'll kiss when moonlight creeps
 His eyelids—quivering as still on he sleeps!

O Heaven! I thank thee that I live, that I
 The thrill have felt thou hadst who sighed the skies!
 O midnight stars! unloved, big dumb-struck sky!
 Since he so praised light of my violet eyes,
 Where thro' my soul's love pleased, blushed as the rain
 Kissed to a rainbow by the sun again.

Heaven made me as I am, with rounded form,
The splendid strength and frailness of the world !
The universe I feel, of bright suns warm,
Flashed out and sang ! bright thoughts thro' darkness
whirled

Thro' love supreme, that found, that came to bless
God, brooding in eternal loneliness.

I do not fear the winds of heaven or sea,
Those breakers tumbling shoreward, far away ;
Or Him whose pale moon sheds beams silently
O'er hills where dark, tall trees oft silvered sway.
But those old ogres in the hills asleep,
'Twere death if from their beds they did unleap !

My silken robe falls as I lean, o'erpeep
My window open wide, thro' lattice bars
Cool airs breath o'er sweet-scented flowers asleep ;
The cedars far beyond sway 'neath pale stars,
The thick leaves stir. Hush ! in cold moonlight dim
A shadow slips—O joy ! my love, 'tis him !

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

SOME day I shall command respect,
 With earnest eyes men will acclaim
 Some virtue mine, which to my shame
Is hidden by their sad neglect.

I shall be dead then, fast asleep !
 They'll shout and praise my published songs,
 Make wild romance of all my wrongs.
My creditors will hear—and weep.

The friend who gave the loyal trust,
 That in some weakness I forgot,
 Will hear, and say, ' I hate him not !'
Why hate a little bit of dust ?

They'll say, when stone-deaf I'm in bed,
 Though of their name I am the worst—
 ' He's dead, alas ! the best go first !'
True 'tis, the best men are men dead.

My shabbiest friend will knock the door,
 Be ushered in, in tears stand mute ;
 Gaze round my room, spot my best suit—
Depart, and will return no more !

That night, around the festive board,
 With glee they'll stuff, then one will cough,
 And say, ' Poor chap, he's better off
Than we.' But shall I be, O Lord ?

Kind words they'll publish o'er my bones—
 Alas ! that I, who so much need
 Such praise cannot stand there and read !
I wish for births there were tombstones !

To think, they who looked in my face
 With calm contempt, will gaze with awe,
 All hushed, on me, who ne'er once saw
Such looks in life for a scapegrace !

Oh, to sit there with pride and share
 The pomp and state imperial
 That will attend my funeral.
They'd blush with shame to see me there !

So not on Earth, but underneath,
 We're beautiful to eyes o'erhead
 Have all the virtues when we're dead,
In life walk arm-in-arm with death.

So do I dream, in sad disguise,
 Here in my attic-room to-night.
 My pinched face in that mirror's light
Moves with my hungry, restless eyes.

This crust of bread my wealth ; a lent
 Felt hat unpawned my hope in gloom,
 As ticks the clock t'wards changeless doom,
That thumps and thumps my door for rent.

A BUSH GRAVE

I KNOW a grave down Murrumbidgee way
Alone within the hills where no one goes,
Where years blow into sleep their leafy day ;
While overhead the bush-flower wakes and blows,
For spirit fingers visit there with flowers—
Where o'er one faithful friend a blue-gum towers.

And thro' thick, leafy clumps by sea-winds blown
Bright music of the woods with sunset dies,
Till every wild musician home has flown,
And o'er the darken'd waves the sea-gull cries,
Where, like a tunnel way for realms divine,
Upon the waves the big moonrise doth shine.

Oft o'er the slopes the night winds wailing blow,
While parrots in the gum-clumps roost asleep,
And dark things in the redwoods flitting go—
Where 'possums thro' the moonlit branches leap ;
While in the lonely hollow by the sea
Toils on the sweet night-bird in melody.

And when the gums in moonlight are all still,
And not a breath steals o'er the scented foam
Of forest leaves ; just by the seaward hill
A ghostly camp-fire brightens our hut-home ;
Out on the slope once more the hammock swings,
As in the shadows near he sits and sings.

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 81

Where marsh-flowers' breathing scent the swamp's cool
damp,

And o'er the winter white mists creeping lie,
Stands pitched my old chum's silent last sad camp ;

And far away the deep-sea ships go by.
Tired winds from seaward o'er the hollows creep
When on his grave the moonlight lies asleep.

I know a hut, strong-fashioned by our hands,
Upon a hill, half hid in thick bush grass,
Below an old dead gum alone it stands,

Where overhead the moonlit curlews pass,
I hear them piping low on westward flight,
'Way out across the dead years—far to-night.

And oft, the moonlight creeps those old log walls ;
And steals across each empty small bunk-bed,
Where only now within, the dead leaf falls
Thro' chinks from clinging wild vines overhead.
Lace flowers breathe earth's sweet poetry and die
O'er huddled tears—that fell from out the sky.

ERE I AM OLD

DEAR God, while flowers and fields are lovely
And all my dreams have wings,
While in my soul to you far-soaring
A skylark sings,
My eyelids close in slumber gently,
About my limbs enfold
The silence of the buried ages—
Ere I am old.

Bring sleep—ere stars sing hopeless sorrow,
While on the hedgerow spray
The blackbird is an angel singing
To me all day.
Death—hold me tight, leave no escaping,
Tight to my dead limbs cling
When swallows o'er my grave, returning,
Fly back to spring.

I SHALL DREAM AND DREAM

I SHALL dream and dream, as the years fly by
Till my eyes are elsewhere—
Hid in the dark or ever so high
Far-shining somewhere out there,
Shining, shining, away up in the sky
As the stars go by.

I shall dream and dream while the night winds blow
Wild music out of the seas—
Sails under the moon, as the old ships go
Thro' the mists of memories.
I shall dream and dream this way, I know,
Wherever I go.

I shall never be happy, rich, poor or sad,
Excepting 'tis in my dreams ;
I shall tramp and tramp as I did when a lad
O'er plains and by forest streams
As the world goes wailing, wailing, or glad,
I shall be dreaming-mad !

Oh ! I'm happy, I'm King ! the world's mine, all
The things that dreams can dream,
I climb on God's shoulders—He's not so tall.
Till His eyes in my own eyes gleam !
So I'm sorry for men who rise, sin and fall—
For I am them all.

84 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

The man dead thousands of years ago,—
The woman that loved his eyes—
The flowers that burst thro' their dead dust know—
For their breath on the wind still sighs—
That I love old sorrows, they know, that I know,
All the long ago.

Sad, beautiful women unloved—long dead
Eyes barren of mother-light ;
Their unborn children cry, curled in my head,
So they kiss all the dreams that I write.
They know I will kiss their dead lips instead—
In dreams, when I'm dead.

RHYMES OF A BEACH-COMBER

(A VOICE FROM SAMOA)

PART I

COME, follow me friends, by the still lagoons

And the midnight dance by the waving palms,
Your white men (long missing), here singing tunes !
They dance with delight in the brown maid's arms.
Or fighting like Hell shoot the black dragoons.

Oh ! the death scream, faint ; the drum beat alarms
Of the ambushed tribe blown far out to sea,
Commercial eyes, cold eyes come follow me !

Come, follow me friends, in my rhymes to-night ;

Creep out from your cities' ten thousand walls.
Oh, I've sailed the seas, and such songs I'd write,
'Tis the wild bird song of my soul that calls,
And the stars and moons of a world's delight—
Of my wildest dreams. As the warm wave falls
At my feet on this Isle afar, I'll say
And sing you the songs of the world's highway.

Come, follow me friends, be my comrades brave,

Remember my song, whenever it sneers,
From my native Isles to the South Sea wave
There are souls that sneer to hide their tears.
And I've loved sweet winds, and the storms that rave
In man's heart, that breathes God's truth in our ears.
From this lone sea-Isle 'tis a man's voice calls
I, the child of your own land's blacken'd walls.

86 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Oh, waves cry on by the rugged sea Bay,
Sails flap overhead, Oh! marvellous stars,
Forever, forever shine on far away,
Shine, down the lagoons by coral-reef bars,
Oh, mountains, inland, vast Gods, kneeling pray
In moonlight 'neath skies, as the cloud rift mars
Bright, lonely sea isles, palms, moveless as paint—
Coloured oils—till shore waves tossing, break faint
Up shores, dim sleeping mysterious lands,
Like altars where sea waves arriving, cry,
Time's homeless children toss your white hands,
Knock the dark cave doors outside 'neath the sky!
As I watch by the palms where the dark shore stands,
White necks from the ocean arise! wailing die!
Sink back to the depths, lift white arms and fall
As I dream—and again comes back the call,
“Starboard, All Hands,” as soft pattering feet,
Clambering bodies to the decks, fall, leap,
As the western eyes, and the wild eyes meet!
Like phantoms come out from the shores of sleep,
Chanting wild song till they joyously greet
Sailors! they fall, lithe sea daughters brown
In the amorous arms of old London Town!

* * * * *

I am the Laureate of these wild South Seas!
First Court Musician to the Royal throne;
I've played the fiddle as giant forest trees
Wailed fitfully, night's grand orchestral moan.
My comrades danced a jig, sang sea chanties;
Wild men delighted, blessed each silver tone.
Whirled round and round; the old king got excited,
His fat lips touched my head, I rose up—knighted!

Dark eyes of savage women at my face

Gazed ! rough-haired girls, bare-limbed crept to my side ;
And beautiful are eyes wherein you trace

The wild flower innocence of mountains wide.

'Twas night, their ears caught true the rhythmic pace.

My fingers fast the fiddle strings did glide.

They danced, their shadows whirling in moonlight,
'Neath forest-trees, dark phantoms of delight.

The Queen nude on a stump, austere, amazed—

Red shawl upblown o'er skinny bosom bare,
And shrivelled thighs revealed. Eyelids upraised

Gave gleaming twinkles, faith, a noble pair

That Royal twain. Oft have I been much praised
By kings and queens of other lands, but ne'er,
I'll swear, have seen so much of Royal state,
More than my rough rhymes smoothly can relate.

In dreams I see the long shore line lagoons ;

Beech-combers creeping thro' tracks of moonlight—
Between drinks—by the sweltering hut saloons.

Once more I hear shouts o'er the wondrous night
By magic seas, dark palms, pale mirrored moons,

And swarthy men, a semi-human sight—

Brown figures in short shirts, belts, clubs, sheaf-knives,
And curved-limbed women, bare as poles—their wives !

Our wooden sloop lies anchor'd in the Bay,

Warm night-air's ruffle sails to windy song ;

The moonlit shining waters imaged sway

Decks where our figures stealing move along—

The skipper's drunk, asleep ! We row away,

Creep up dark shores with tattooed men we throng ;

In starry vault across the forest height,

The lovely South Sea moon is hanging bright.

88 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

A dim enchanted land, moonlit trees singing,
And tossing white-armed waves far seaward playing ;
The stealing night winds ghostly voices bringing
Of drunken traders, as brown maidens swaying,
Dance by their huts, bare arms and lithe limbs flinging,
Big chiefs to ancient gods, with much zest praying
In huddled rows ; as from the small Hut Town,
Toward the beach wild men creep up and down.

All long ago, but still the past camp fires
Are burning brightly thro' old dreams again
As native girls, like ghostly things on wires
Are dancing 'neath the palms and moonbeam rain
And in their arms each holds her heart's desires
The drunken trader-sailors, and like pain
For what has been the winds stir all the trees
That keep old secrets of these island seas,

And sighs my song, for 'tis a tuneless tongue
That cannot sing of love. Who e'er has roughed
The lands beyond the harbour foams, and sung
The spicy sweetness of a mummy stuffed ?
Ne'er felt life's splendid blood thrills, being young,
Oh, youthful eyes make haste ! ere sprouts the tuft—
Life's three grey hairs, cold eyes, and sad bald head ;
We're virtuous long enough—when we are dead !

Awake ! for morning flowers the hour of bliss,
Smile, banish withering dreams of palsied age !
You will die youthful by remembering this—
You are your Heaven, and Hell, on life's stern-page,
The wisest, saddest thoughts are those, I wis,
That we ourselves have writ. I am the Sage
Of sorrows o'er seas, lands 'neath many skies ;
So practise what I preach—were I as wise !

Ambushed in woman's warm, white clinging arms,
 Curved lip to lip, dishevelled upblown hair.
 Dark eyes like sunset that the ocean charms—
 Eyes glimmering 'tween the droop of lashes fair.
 Pale moonlight by the shore's dark waving palms,
 Enchanted isles, sea-tossed foams everywhere.
 Love's wild bird music tremulous in your ears
 Are dubious things—when men are old in years!

There was Laoeta, beautiful her eyes,
 Limbs soft as velvet, starlit-night of hair
 About her shoulders ruffled to the sighs
 Of forest winds that kissed her body bare—
 Except for white loin cloth o'er brown, curved thighs—
 Sweet bird-like music voice, no white man dare
 Approach with meaning deeper in his gaze
 Than friendship, she was not of Western ways!

It chanced by fate one night—I mind it well—
 A young apprentice, stranded, this way came.
 They loved at sight. Alas! the truth to tell,
 The South Sea maid's blood, too, warms into flame
 Of passion, from love's spark, and, so, she fell.

Chief Grimbo caught them in the arms of shame—
 Faith, bristling with clasp knives, miles off that night
 We found him—by the festive camp-fire light!

Like drums our hearts beat fast, 'neath giant trees
 We peered, big savage men and jealous wives
 Licked their dark mouths expectant! Hands and knees
 Bound to a spit, he stood. We clutched our knives,
 Leapt just in time, ay, desperate to seize
 Our tight-trussed chum—then battled for our lives.
 Three shots flashed out; like madmen in a jig
 They fought to save their supper of "long pig"!

90 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Three men dead lay ; stuck in my leg a spear ;
Fierce, savage hags clawed like wild forest cats—
The Bo'sun yelled when one bit off his ear !

They scampered off in shoals like mammoth rats
Deep in the moonlit forest. White with fear
Laoeta's lover was, as flapping bats
In droves o'erhead squeaked disappointed tones,
To be denied his roasted, clean-picked bones !

They were the good old days of these South Seas
Ere missionaries came and made them sly,
And by their huts, a Bible on their knees,
Plan out old villainies beneath the sky,
Love ancient gods, sneak off on secret sprints,
Shout out, " Me Christian man," roll up each eye,
Cook their old mother to a turn—say grace ;
Eat her, with kindly eyes look in your face !

I've seen them loafing 'neath the tropic sun,
By their small huts, sprawled bodies bare as eggs !
'Mong bamboos sitting, yawning, one by one
Brown girls and boys outstretch their long thin legs,
Bask in sunlight, as romping round would run
Plump tiny kids, they'd stiff their calves like pegs,
Dive in the Bay like frogs, back from the sea,
Head over heels, come laughing merrily.

My chum and I oft got those boys and girls
Out on the seaward slopes and started races,
Bright scrambling eyes—small teeth like rows of pearls—
To win the prize uplifted to our faces.
I'd shout " Galoota," whiz, dark sun-flashed curls,
Bare flying legs of girls, outdid the paces
Of boys, and won the button—treasured prize—
They'd gaze up in my face with Christ-like eyes.

Stern are these Isles in ways of etiquette,
Waistbelts, sheath knives, no pants, means full court
dress !

White traders in saloons drink, swear and bet,
Their beards brush o'er big broad chest nakedness.
With fearless eyes they lie—I've seldom met
Such downright brave heroic carelessness.
Or seen men o'er their shoulders spit so true
As shuffling cards, some listen, yarn and chew.

The High Courts of South Seas held are by night,
The scales of justice are bright shining flocks
Of eyes, and clubs in hands that itch to fight.
The ravished daughter in the witness box
Naked stands ; the trader bound, face ashen white,
Meets doom, as crash the stern judge club—whiz—
knocks
The skull right off, and if the body stands
Still upright ! loud the praise of clapping hands.

I've seen them by moonlight race for that head,
Like scrambling ghosts, puff ! leap the silent night,
As white footballers do, 'tis caught and led
From hand to hand tossed high. A ghastly sight
I do admit. Alas ! but when all's said
The judge of my own land, crowned with wig white,
In style, with death's black cap, does just the same.
For me, I much prefer the football game !

Real South Sea chivalry is on the wane,
They do not spear or club you by daylight,
But secretly get back their own again
On moonless nights. The good old honest fight

92 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

O'er ravished daughters smarts still in the strain
Of tattooed men, with eyes that hate men white—
Some dyed, disguised, old England's long-missed wrecks,
They left their native land to save their necks !

Just round the forest bend some sleeping lie,
Died, dead-blind-drunk, or in some wild nightmare
O'er what old crime, 'neath their far native sky ?
Hot fever-stricken souls they to the air
Escaped life's doom. Oft when the forest sighs
You can hear wails by moonlight of despair,
As dead white men outbound o'er barrier-foams
On seaward flight flee—bound for English homes !

There's caste the same here as my Western nation,
They strut with pride if they possess a shirt.
Old Mango owns a copra, Yam Plantation ;
His brother's fishing, to his eyes are dirt.
His wife one garment wears—'tis a temptation
It's name to mention—Heavens, she looks a flirt !
A trader's white wife lost them. Such a sight,
White frills to brown knees, baggy, at waist tight.

Stern sly old chiefs slink by her, gaze sideways
To see her plump brown limbs exposed to view
Through frills pure white ! With downcast modest gaze—
Just as stage beauties of my country do,
When in their tights they bow as men loud praise—
By her hut-door she stands 'neath skies of blue,
As envious eyes, for miles the old tribes come
To see winds fill them out—big, like a drum !

I know a South Sea queen, her soul's turned white,
She's eaten men—old passion fires now smoulder—
Her tattooed limbs once made the big chiefs fight ;

Ay, one by one they've had her, bought and sold her
To comrades when they sickened of her sight.

She's pious, virtuous, calm, sedate and older,
Sits by her hut, wears pince-nez, wrinkling, fat,
Stuck on her head—a large Parisian hat!

One night old Gambo crept to her hut side,
By its small door we stole like creeping mice,
We peeped, we saw her squatting, eyes ope'd wide,
Her wrinkled face the breathing map of vice!
She smiled, her figure nude surveyed with pride.

My foot slipped. Heavens I cursed, for in a trice—
Bang, crash! a club whizzed by my peeping head,
Her husbands three—awake, sat up in bed!

By faith, I'll ne'er forget that breathless race,
As down the slopes old Gambo came behind,
Hot, puffing, wild with fear to keep the pace,
In South Sea lingo giving me his mind.
Heavens! how he ran—and me!—I could just trace
Sea-breakers rolling—in moonlight defined
Far off, 'tis ever on my mind engraved
That night—our boat, wherein we jumped—both saved!

PART II

(SAMOA)

Brave R. L. S. sleeps up there in the tomb;
His soul's poetic fire in moonlight singing,
As long Pacific breakers beat their doom
O'er barrier reefs, wild forest birds are flinging
His music to the winds. I see his room,

94 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

His bent form reads—Alas ! how memory's bringing
Back olden days, till flowers and moonlit trees
Are waving thro' deep forest memories.

While fire-flies dance in bunches by lagoons,
 Along deep shoreline glooms oft twinkling gleam
Like Universes sparkling, singing tunes—
 Immensity squeezed in some tiny dream—
He sleeps for ever—where grave flowers are moons
 From lands afar and Time's strange stealing stream—
Blue tropic days, and stealing stars behind
Migrating o'er the universal Mind !

“ Three waters ” * stands still by the forest there,
 Men came from other lands across that Bay,
Old welcomed friends, ere as immortal air
 Upon the Great-Trade-Wind he sailed away.
At dusk Samoan chiefs round here declare
 When sunset seaward steals its dying ray,
He sits down shoreward gazing tenderly
Fast voyaging dreams his eyes far out at sea.

Still to this beach the traders come and go ;
 And shouts of sailor-songs of many lands
Drift on warm winds as flapping to and fro
 Sails gleam o'er ships deserted by all hands ;
As in the phantom light I gaze below,
 See shadows move where each small beach hut
 stands—
Groups of wild women move, spank their plump brats !
All running round in moonlight like big rats !

* Vailima, R. L. S's. Samoan Home.

The sea miles gleam, a shining mirror glass
 Of stars, as curling waves out shoreward rise
 And break, as 'neath the white sea moon doth pass

The sleepless frigate bird, I see bright eyes—
 My old friend, Pombo by me stands—Alas!

He's dead, I know, but still his spirit sighs
 Here by my side, and still I clasp his hands,
 My dear brown friend gone to his shadow lands.

'Twas Pombo watched when stern chiefs lay asleep ;
 And round her tent she peeped, my South Sea maid,
 Dark velvet eyes, smooth-limbed, brown bosom deep ;

Her scant attire, a white loin cloth, betrayed
 Her modesty. How fast my heart would leap
 If night birds flapped! I need have been afraid,
 I knew brown men in white men had small faith,
 Once caught I was quite sure of certain death!

We still for ever stand on those night steeps,
 Like images of stone clasped in moonlight
 In perfect stillness, gazing down twin deeps—
 Each other's eyes! The moon enchanted night,
 The windless seas, pale stars, still breathless sleeps
 Round that love scene, though years have taken flight,
 While cities rise our eyes stare 'neath palm trees
 Amazed shine 'neath the stars of Southern Seas.

I see the silent forest track ; 'tis night,
 The shadows round about us trembling creep,
 The pale moon brightens o'er the dark-branched height,
 As o'er the forest lanes night winds oft sweep,
 In front they steal, before our watching sight,
 Sad tiny shadows from the shores of sleep,
 Our unborn children creeping—lover's sighs—
 Across the moonlit track before our eyes!

96 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Her spirit lives on in my loveliest dreams ;
 She lies along this shoreline, somewhere, dead ;
We were, both boy and girl, then came the schemes
 Of traders, and she fell—God bless her head.
Old Pombo led me by the forest streams,
 By night we stood beside her moss-grey bed—
The earth I kissed, her dead lips sighed beneath,
Stirred moonlit flowers, where crept a wind's soft breath.
My senses knew the mystic land of dreams,
 The dark-branched moonlit forest of the brain !
Sighed noiselessly o'er singing stealing streams
 Of God's strange music threading thro' the pain
Of far off lands, beneath forgotten gleams
 Of other stars, heard in my head the strain
Of breakers beating 'gainst Eternity
In one swift magic flash of light in me !
I heard sweet-spirit lips o'er memory sigh
 And exiled music moan o'er hills of pain ;
Forgotten moonlit seas tossed 'neath a sky
 Of brilliance—God's creating starry Brain !
I half remembered ere that flash did die,
 Pale mortal faces—that I've met again !
Dead sailors climbed aloft, glad, singing tunes
O'er seas of other worlds 'neath lovely moons !
 * * * * * *
They're virtuous now—wild men by moonlit caves ;
 The missionaries came, reformed the race,
For true it is that dead men by the waves
 Of this fair Isle as ghosts crept by the grace
Of gospel into Hell !—o'er paths man paves
 With good intentions ! Gone the good old days,
Homesteads are graves, forgotten dead desires
Of long dead women's eyes by bright camp fires.

Here on these Isles by night waves wildly beat,
 Up dark shores singing, tossing in moonlight
 Like regiments of dead men that charging meet
 In vain—life's shores through some sad, deathless night!
 Despairing eyes, tribes of lost hunting feet,
 A vanished race, oft in the forest height
 Their unborn children call where moonlight lies
 As tiny shadows wail for lover's eyes!

I've seen warm South Sea starlight in dark eyes,
 Dead moonshine of warm lovely nights; the light
 Of soft blue days or sea-rimmed tropic skies,
 Green waving trees, I've heard the music bright
 Of birds 'mong leaves, the tumbling fall and rise
 Of sleepless waves, I've seen the silent flight
 Of ages in eyes gleam! like stars soft-stirred
 In calm night waters by a wind's breath blurred.

I've heard old forest moans across the past,
 Where thro' brownfooted men together crept—
 Ere o'er the ocean's brink came up each mast—
 Exploring ships—ere shirted white men leapt
 Ashore with thirsty eyes;—ere traders cast
 Their wiles on isles, whereby night camp fires slept
 'Neath forest trees original bright eyes
 Wherein old gospels gleamed undimmed by lies!

Ere sorrow darkened sheltered small hive huts;
 Wherein bush-mothers lived the first life made
 By orange groves and ripening coco-nuts;
 With childish faith to eyeless idols prayed,
 Ere from the far North-West, where crept the sluts
 Of cities old, came white men well arrayed
 In Virtue's robe, with pious eyes and knees
 To raise up Hell's delight in these South Seas!

98 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Who'er you are, who reads my rhythmic air

Of life's stern strain, believe me 'tis no song

Of wild romance, sincere enough, I'll swear,

That thousands died, and all will die ere long,

Through Western virtue! And I too declare

Light throws deep shadow o'er the world, flashed wrong

The Western creed in South Seas is that paint

That blushes—till the whore looks like a saint.

'Tis not for me to judge men's ways and stand,

Heaven knows, in after years 'gainst this palm tree,

Tug at my beard, condemn my native land.

But to ope books, with eyes astonished see

Hell's dubious virtue praised—ye gospel band!

I'll swear your South Sea secret preaching spree

Rewarded was; you know beneath the palms

The native girls danced singing in our arms!

There was "Le Grande," the best one of you all,

Fine eyes he had, and though the king of liars,

In all our yarns, and smokes, I ne'er recall

One impulse that betrayed life's mean desires.

He caught the fever, died, went to the wall;

I've searched your books, until my sad soul tires,

For word of him! Yet, why begrudge you praise?

We all enjoyed ourselves in those old days!

Ah, years have flown, and from my heart the dream

Of warriors and fair women and sweet lore,

That boys drink from life's wild, romantic stream,

All swallowed by the dust, drought-stricken shore—

The "never never land," where flowers but gleam

Out of dust, gently buried, where no more

Eyes flash with light, as flowers grow overhead—

The only flowers we know—where men lie dead.

Yet live ye warriors old, stare flinchless eyes !

Your eager faces lift in pale dreamlight
Of unknown lands, whereon that hero dies—

With smiling lips—strikes one brave blow for right !
Out of dim magic starlit-foams arise

Ye women beautiful, thro' passion's night !
Bend o'er me with warm lovelit eyes, as soars
My soul o'er seas of undiscovered shores

Of wild romance ! as o'er the South Sea Bay

Dark waters brighten, and the lovely stars
All fade with stealing dawn, like faith away,

And out of village huts by coral-bars,
The South Sea children rush, eyes dark, some grey !—

Half-castes of gospel-men and brave Jack Tars !
The western creed expressed, plump tiny tracts
All romping on the slopes with white-splashed backs !

While in far cities, men strive for life's good.

In their cathedrals vast, deceived some sit
And dream their windy-song is soothing food—

Babe-like suck Life's Old Dummy—void of wit,
Nor hear cries of the cities' solitude

At their own doors, pinched bellies—think of it—
The hungry urchins 'neath their wet grey skies—
God's tiny trembling-prayers with wistful eyes.

AFTER MANY YEARS

(THE SON)

OH, give me green hills and cottages, the mill-wheel
whirling round,

And the bright birds warbling soft on shower-wet trees
By the South Coast sunlit scented pines and the rumbling
breakers sound,

As the deep-sea ships creep home from distant seas,
Where I may dream my dreams of home by the wash of
the Channel waves.

When sunset floats with the Sabbath tolling bell,
Go over the hills to where they sleep in their long-neglected
graves,

And feel what a boy—grown old—now cannot tell.
Far from the sound of the stockwhip's ring and the lyre-
bird's sunset strain

As the tropic sun sinks down the world-wide sea,
That takes me round with its stealing light to my English
land again

As the bright Australian stars creep over me.
For my eyes are wet with tears for things I never can recall,
For the hopes set on my young life's strength of limb,
And the wild will ways of other days that made them—
after all—

Sit by their fire and dream with eyes aswim.
And so, I will steal back again to where the high cliffs
white

Are kissed by the English Channel singing waves.
I'll creep up the hills, then go to God—my soul to the
stars some night,

And lie asleep—where men have made their graves.

ROMANCE

I SAILED away across the seas,
I heard the sails soft-singing,
And climbing sailors, to the breeze
The wild sea chanting—flinging.
I climbed aloft, gazed o'er the sea,
I saw the shore-lines rise
Where up, all ramping wild with glee,
Waves tossed before my eyes.

I travelled strange lands wild and wide,
I dived 'mong mirrored moons
In waters where the catamarans glide
By palms and reef lagoons,
I gazed in a dusky maiden's eyes
By a wild man's tiny tent,
Then packed my swag as the black crow flies,
To another land I went.

I lay all night on the homeless plain,
To the skies I prayed in bed
For life's wild Romance, but prayed in vain,
As the stars crept overhead.
But often in the lone bush-night
Bright eyes came, leaned o'er me,
Then glimmering in the pale moonlight,
Ran back into the sea.

And in those waters o'er and o'er
I dived in vain, then cried
For misery on some lone shore
With no one by my side.
And so for years I wandered, friend,
Sought love and wealth alack !
Roamed distant lands, and in the end
Brought this one sad song back.

OUTWARD BOUND

I'M off! outbound o'er wide blue seas. Farewell, ye
unpaid bills!
Great heaven, I've swallowed seas of stuff, ship-loads of
oil and pills!
For mist and rain crept in my bones 'neath English skies,
but I
Wish you good luck, old country, and brave Englishmen,
good-bye!
Farewell, old fenced-in woods, dead dreams, primroses,
and bluebells;
Farewell, ye city alley-ways with your suspicious smells;
Farewell, old shivering Fleet Street moths, by London's
splendid bars!
I'm bound for boundless plains lit by the everlasting
stars.
Respectability, farewell! Oh, God be thanked, tweed
suits
Hide skeletons in top hats, starved, that shuffle round in
boots,
Ring out my soul one real wild cry to touch a nation's ears,
Sing me to wealth—my dear old rhymes awake a nation's
cheers!
I would reflesh old skeletons, I'd stand them all upright,
Stick new eyes in, in rows they'd stand, God laughing at
the sight,
Would be my critic, and I'll swear review my songs—all
right.

104 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Old Fleet Street relics, think of me when your sad eyes
you raise

As down you swallow beer and wail o'er those old better
days.

Maybe I too shall dream of you, and miss your tales of
woe;

Will find my golden age, as now, in dreams of long ago,
For while I rhyme these lines--who knows?—some
rhymers o'er the seas

Looks Englandwards, is cursing scenes the same as I
curse these!

A nation's curse, that built the world, my England's
noble pride,

Where'd be the brave old pioneers if home smells
satisfied?

They've broken up the wooden ships and blazed them in
hearth fires

To warm the dreams of English boys who cherish sea
desires,

Ye figure-heads that roamed 'neath stars to-night a city
roars,

Where curled the singing waves to spray on undiscovered
shores.

And now your sad old faces stare, o'er streets where
traffic streams,

When by the Thames the same old moon pours down its
wistful beams,

I've watched your upraised hands pray on across the
moonlit ridge,

Voyaging seas in dreams across Westminster—by the
Bridge!

Your sailor-men, who sang aloft they're dead, or may,
alas!

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 105

Now old, be cursing on some tramp, all cleaning paint
and brass.

Brave Bill, the boatswain, bossed us all across the seven
seas wide,

He's selling matches, shivering, Heavens! on kerbstones
near Cheapside.

Farewell, we've still the ships that roam, the decks
cleared clean for sea ;

A swarm of hands wave on the wharf, but not one hand
for me.

I'm bound away for southern seas, where the flying
clippers go,

To fight the breath of the ramping winds where the eastern
slashers blow,

Till the moonless summer nights stare down as the
lightning swells the skies,

As silently as love-light flashed from a woman's warm
dark eyes,

As I climb aloft o'er seas of dreams and clasp creation bright
In my arms and kiss the stars, my soul one with the
Infinite,

Oh, I'll see the Leeuwin light afar, in the lone dog-watch
I'll creep

Below to my bunk with praying lips, thank God as I fall
asleep.

I'll not care a d——n for anything ! with a shirt wrapt
up my wealth !

And photos of my few dead friends I'll steal ashore by
stealth

When I smell the scented sweet shore winds come
blowing out to me

As the big grey loafing tramp sea birds wheel round and
put to sea.

106 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

I'll creep up the slopes a happy man who has found life's
one true worth,
My best friend all the world, I will imparadise the earth.
I'll build a tiny wooden house, it must be 'neath some
trees,
Where I can watch the silvered waves of tumbling moon-
lit seas !
And if ever I dream of cities far, and I cannot close my
eyes,
As out in the silent forest depth the wild dog, wailing,
cries,
Till the laughing voices of dead men sad haunt my sleep-
less brain,
With stern deliberation I will rise and heal my pain.
I'll lean o'er my bed and take strong pulls at the bottle
that there I'll keep,
And find the golden age again in draughts of vintage deep,
Oh, I know that only one wind blows the dead man's soul
to sea,
And wherever it blows, oh, what care I, since God's
hand fashioned me ?
On the last foothold that earth man gives, where the day
to night doth change,
As stars come creeping silently over the last dark range.
I'll stand on that last grand silent peak, brave, into the
sunset dive,
For I've loved God's gift of life as much as any man
alive !

PART II

A PIONEER'S SONG

HE was our glory, he was our pride of the fo'c'sle song's
wild spree ;

And where are the lands, the sea-port towns that he never
tramped with me ?

Where are the stars that ne'er gazed down in our weary
watching eyes

As our ship burst thro' the skyline, sailed the seas of other
skies.

We've tramped with our swags o'er salt-bush plain, we've
camped on the South Seas side,

We've curled together in wind and rain as the camp-fire
blazed and died.

We've heard the wail of the dingo blown o'er Australian
steppes ; the howl

Of ghosts by moonlight climbing up gums—as we both sat
cheek by Jowl !

Met the grey old swags-man tramping along, lonely out on
the track—

(As God, with His fireflies, fretting stars, buzzing behind
His back—)

As he tramped along wiping his beard, mumbling alon
with his dreams ;

A swag on his back and a myriad flies round his head in
dancing streams !

We've sung the songs of the olden days as we dreamed of
London Town ;

We've shared the rough, and the mighty spree when we
once had half-a-crown !

110 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Ah! they were the days of dreams, my lads, when we
 hadn't a cent in hand,
And we tramped two kings of the Overseas passing from
 land to land!
So, I can't get over the curse of things, for we liked the
 world all right,
Were happy together wherever we went, and I'm lonely
 enough to-night—
Eternity laughing out suns with glee—infinite waste in
 space;
Time writing these wrinkles, making the map of sorrow
 over my face!
Him—back in the dark, down under the sea lying alone
 stone dead,
And a million million worlds to-night shining over his
 head.

THE BUSHMAN'S REVERIE

HE will not come again, my chum, by night ;
Hark ! winds are flapping round my cabin door,
And waves are tossing up the white moonlight,
All toiling up the dark wild lonely shore.
There are his boots, and on that peg his hat,
His fiddle on the wall, forever still ;
And on that stump, where yarning, once he sat,
The moss has grown :—out on a windy hill,
His swag beneath his head he silent lies,
Where o'er flowers blow as blue as were his eyes.

I've often seen him since he died, just there
On that dead stump whereon the fire-light falls ;
Dream eyes in shadow, with his crossed arms bare
Upon his breast, when in the hollow calls
The lonely dingo for a mate, I've heard
Him call my name by night, when all was still,
His voice die with the song of some sweet bird
Out in the hollow, o'er the swamp-oak hill.

The Bush flowers in the hollows are awake.
Stars flash across the windy silent skies ;
The waves like tumbling silver tossing break
Far out at sea ! fringed by the curved moonrise.
That dead gum rotting on the shore alive,
All night stands swarmed with coloured breathing
flowers,
But when I stand below at dawn I'll drive

112 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

The roosting parrots up—in fluttering showers!
And so by night I dream; at break of day
My thoughts from out my head all fly away.

Below the redwood heights by night we'd race,
Astride the saddle, tossing side by side,
Damp wattle scent-whiffs stealing o'er each face,
The stars in heaven our romping way would guide;
As though Creation dreamed a world, moonrise
Would flower-like burst, night's wild dark mystery
And mountains' silvered peaks and palms arise—
From range to range, slow, grand and silently!

The bush-bird in the scrub would wake and sing
As thumped the echoing hoofs the night along;
The white moon o'erhead, touching everything;
O'er velvet slopes we'd shout some wild sea-song—
The echoes o'er the plains would rise and fall
As though dead voices somehow had come back,
One for the other, o'er night-hills did call!
As life, full-blooded, raced God's living track.
Ay, long ago, and now an old man's brain
Is dreaming by the moaning, unquiet sea;
Like old crows flapping thro' the mist and rain,
My thoughts are stealing pastward, far from me,
Round sunsets dead, in silence winging flit,
As on this stump; the huddled past—I sit.

* * * * *

There soundly sleeps my dog. He does not know
He will not always be there, by me curl'd,
Snug at my foot—while burns the camp-fire low.
I am a god to him in his dog world;
I would not lay my foot upon his head,

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 113

And crush his feeble dream of life away ;
And my Great Master will not on me tread—
Crush out my life when I have had my day.
Come, shaggy friend—yes, gleam true, faithful eyes ;
The night is old, and I am old. Ah, me !
Dawn soon will rise and sweep the starry skies,
And sunrise burn to-night's philosophy.

COMRADES

(NORTH QUEENSLAND)

The last lone ride I live it again,
 Lost, alone on the drought-swept plain,
 The grey-green gone from the scattered scrub ;
 The frogs stink, dead in the dry creek mud ;
 Away in the sky on southward flight,
 Far specking the waste of blinding light,
 The parrots are curling their glittering wings,
 Soft-croaking their dismal mutterings ;
 By the small hot sun in fleets they pass
 Where the wide sky flames like molten glass,
 On crawls the horse o'er the trackless track,
 The rider scorched on its blistered back !
 A castaway on wide, waveless seas.
 Miles, miles away rise gaunt gum trees,
 Like derelicts old, with sailless mast,
 Cast on the rocks by the drought's hot blast.
 The sun dies down—on the dim skyline
 Faint-twinkles once like a goblet of wine
 Held over that dead world's hazy rim,
 And the lost man's eyes far gaze aswim
 As the tide of dark rolls over him !
 There's hope ! for a tiny cloud doth rise,
 Toils slowly across the noiseless skies,
 Creeps down to a speck on the other side,
 To leave him alone on the desert wide ;
 'Tis night—overhead the bright stars creep,

He lies with his one friend down to sleep :—
And the months and the years have since rolled by,
And the horse and the master still there lie ;
Where those sad eyes of hope peered thro'
The green shoot peeped—A Bush flower blew,
For we found them there, yes, side by side—
Two skeletons white—just as they died,
Our hearts were heavy as on we went,
For his thin bone arm was softly bent—
Curled round the neck of his big comrade,
There, telling us how two friends had laid—
Had died there under the drought-swept sky,
And still out there the white bones lie.

THE DROUGHT

(AUSTRALIA)

I'll tell you a tale of the old days, out on the North West
Way ;
A gallop of three wild hundred miles to the tree-frogs
roundelay !
Under blue space, soft specked with birds, two men fast
rode along :
The great bush sang with a thousand throats her lovely
evensong.
Sunset soft fired the dark range pines, faint blazed with
gold, blue peaks,
And the marsh-frogs opened their overtures—sat leaves in
the swampy creeks,
As the hollow wilds of the great night-way, led by one
pale star—
Like mast-head light of beating barque, behind three bare
pines far,
Came flowing fast with their dusky waves over the Eastern
Bar.
Rollop-pe, rollop-pe, rop, rop, they thumped the silent
night,
Beating the mould and scented scrub out under the red-
wood height.
Giant ancient gums, memorials of brooding summers past,
Dim outlined in primeval gloom, with outspread aged arms
vast,
All solemnly stood, on each side ; oft God's lamps brightly
flashed

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 117

The thick branched roof—thro' chinks the stars! as far
below they crashed.

Those wild battalions far behind, the camp fire blazed
and died.

Blue days, divided by the stars, crept o'er that bush world
wide,

Till o'er the silent wilds they rode, God's trackless no
man's land.

Like scattered scare-crow poles for miles dead stunted
palms did stand,

As toiled two shrunken steeds along slow-tossing, blinding
sand.

No castaways e'er rode such rafts, brave beating flesh and
blood,

Adrift on wild waste, waterless, death-stricken solitude.

Thin outstretched necks, big outlook-eyes, sand blown on
drought-swept plains;

With blistered hands, humanity rocked helpless at the reins.

Low in the hollows they staggered on, the blaze of the
high sun streamed

O'er glittering miles of leafless rock the frighten'd parrots
screamed,

Arose on travelling envied wings! died specks in the blaze
away,

As the sweating, staggering steeds moved on 'neath the
stare of the dread skyway,

The demon of thirst fast gripp'd them, blown foam from
the wild steeds swept

Like mocking snow hot to each face, the soul of terror
crept

Into those big, wild flashing eyes, their nostrils quivered
and spread,

118 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Telling, with awful silent voice, their riders' inward dread.
Like a tropic windless silent sea, Heaven's endlessness did
shine

A mighty trackless molten waste, till on the far skyline,
Like some lone lost sea-raft, a cloud, slow-crossed the
dread waste wide

Like white tossed hands last seen at sea, hope rose once,
— sank and died,

As helpless by the desert swamp, thick spawned, hot
fevered, rank,

With lips to the blue mud, all quiet, knelt and drank,
drank, drank.

The very frogs stunk dead around, the hush'd hills seemed
ablaze ;

The sun crept out, a drop of blood, low in the westward
haze.

The tethered steeds moaned by all night, thro' one man's
fever'd sleep,

Blue English skies crept o'er that wild, lone Australian
steep.

The swallows in the valley flew across a phantom bay ;
Grey seagulls came on tireless wing, in silence swept away.
Like dying bells, dream floating, o'er dead sunset waves
of time,

Came mellow tones to slumbering ears—it was the bell-
bird's chime

O'er wind-cooled gullies drifting, the stars all home had
crept.

They gazed within each other's eyes—nor one word spoke,
but leapt

Astride the saddles, reared each horse, impatient of delay
With voice half human whinnied once to silence sped
away

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 119

Into the night—ay, long ago—they dropp'd where no birds
sing.

And o'er their bones the desert wind a shroud of dust doth
fling ;

While in the hollow just below, stands, where warm, white
mists fall,

Where no one goes—a stump and on, his age and name—
that's all.

THE DESERTED HUT

(QUEENSLAND)

Woe, woe, old mare, tread gently here, where once a camp-
fire blazed,

And some tired Bushman sat and dreamed alone,
These were his old ancestral halls, and time has nearly
razed

With rotting damp, his roof with flowers o'ergrown,
Whereon moonlight half-ghostly falls as I sit dreaming
here,

Astride the saddle gaze with living eyes,
Stare at this relic of the past, for in the hollow near,
The bush flowers only wake, o'er where he lies.

Hark, how the winds sad music make, where wave the
gums o'erhead.

And wattles stir, where swings his small hut door.
As like a ghost, a shadow-thing seems to and fro to tread,
Where flowers in moonlight shiver on his floor.

How dark and still the gullies sleep ; while miles across
the plains

Of this wild God-forsaken land, the trees
Like skeletons wave 'neath the stars, loosely I hold the
reins,

While heaven pours on us both—cool whiffs, the breeze.

'Twas hot, phew ! in the blinding sun ; brave horse you've
done your best

With those tired legs, toiled thro' this sweating day ;

And still, heaven knows we've miles to go, but in that shed
you'll rest ;

Mine host won't care at all—how long we stay.

He must have slept outside for years ! for all his fire stove
bars

Are covered thick with weeds, and his old chair—

Time's hand has plushed with velvet moss ; thro' roof
chinks, faintly stars,

Like flowers oft sparkle fields of Heaven-blown air.

Softly the moonlit marsh flowers stir, where slit-mouth'd
frogs oft poke

Their jewel-eyed heads, to clicker, clack—and sink.

While from the forests' silent depth, like phantom wood-
man's stroke,

Comes faint the night bird's cry ; I could half think

The old man's spirit toils away, as calls that hollow voice,

And yet I know dead men lie deep in sleep,

And that old cynic's real enough, that far faint-mocking
noise—

The laughing jackass, screaming on the steep.

Why do you whinny so, old friend ? What ghosts of long
ago

Are visible to instinct's wild-eyed stare ?

I feel somewhat the same myself, and more so since I
know,

Our welcome for a bed, is his grave there !—

And that faint echo back to me, when all the hills replied

As in moonlight, we listening lonely stood

And heard, " Is any one at home ! " across the gullies
wide,

Re-echo—o'er the silent solitude.

122 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Whoe'er he was, on windy nights in that small bunk he
slept,

His blanket drawn tight round his living frame.

While in the hollow o'er his grave undug, the dingo crept
He dreamed—and so to-night I'll do the same,

Nor will he mind—for such is life, to ride up here to-night,
While outside in the cold, he slumbers on,

To camp awhile, to smoke and dream, then vanish with
the light—

For with sunrise, we, too, shall both be gone.

BUSH LONELINESS

I am not what I was—the world so dark is.
Across my heart the cold rains fall,
The birds of life that sang are songless—
 After all.

My camp fire in the bush is slowly dying,
The forest moan is all I hear ;
My dog, the only friend that loves me—
 Is sitting near.

Like wild-fires where gum-trees are darkly waving,
Moonlight across the flats doth flare ;
At sea a mast-head light is tossing—
 They've got her there.

I gazed upon her face like one in dreaming ;
Came no one from the Far Bush Town,
Until last night they slowly entered—
 And nailed her down.

They came and fetched her from me in the darkness ;
The moon's red rim rose o'er the hill.
They passed like shadows ere I entered—
 My hut so still.

The music of her voice for me is calling
Where winds the river to the sea,
Across the waste goes calling, calling—
 Calling me.

124 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Her dead lips hold my kiss where'er they take her ;
My life is in her soul, God knows,
And I—that he will not deny me
 The way she goes.

Men crave the gift of life somewhere eternal ;
I only want some day to know
My loved one's eyes, to just remember—
 The long ago.

And I have combed her hair, with passion kissed her,
With that deep love that women crave.
Heaven will remember this, when I—am
 In the grave.

Though earth lies on her breast, she'll kiss me sleeping—
Till I awake. The morning light
Will emblem Faith—my sorrow searching
 From night to night.

The grave is not a place for men to live in ;
Yet by her body sweet, I'll sleep ;
In dreams kiss eyelids closed—that all
 My passions keep.

Faith gleamed in eyes of sweetly dreaming sunrise,
Their setting, was my last sunset ;
And if to-morrow means forgetting—
 Let me forget.

THE OLD SKIPPER

OLD am I, and my day is dying, in every limb lies furl'd
The life, that loved to fight the seas, that thrash the whole
wide world,

As homeless as a batter'd hulk, that rolls the sky-rimmed
deep—

Here in my hut unsleeping, while the sea-winds shoreward
sweep,

Thro' lonely tracks of bending pines, are moaning on like
pain—

Life's music, exiled to the past, returneth home again.

I hear Time's dream-latch softly lift, and o'er the sleeping
lake—

Of all the years—comes sad the sound, deep moving waters
make.

In dream perspective far at sea the old wind-jammer flies,
And o'er my weary heart to-night—as soft as moonlight lies
The memory of days that are the saddest of all to-night—
They'll only come back again—I know—on the wings of a
dream's quiet flight.

I hear the wild night cry aloft, the passion note of seas ;
The middle-watch tramp overhead, and wild sung sea-
chanties.

Sails softly singing 'neath the stars are swaying fast along,
Like grey dead dreams blown out of the soul of the sea's
sad song

As a grey old skipper tramps the poop—swaying from left
to right

126 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

On the phantom ship that rolls the deep of my dreaming
heart to-night.

And the whistling wild night winds blown on are slashing
the beating rain

Beating—beating memories old, tap, tap on the window-
pane.

I sometimes think I yet may sail, far-off space-anchor'd
seas—

Ay—'neath strange moon jewelled skies explore those far-
world mysteries ;

With wild song homeward bound rejoice ! gaze in old
friendly eyes,

And so thro' ages heavenward voyage to God across the
skies.

As swallows lost 'mong rigging blown, of ships far out at
sea,

My thoughts are clinging to the stars across Infinity.

So let the storms blow all away, and in the sea's dark bed
The off-watch sailors weary eyes, sleep on—they are not
dead.

I have believed when sunset lies, wet tremulous on the wave,
It sinks—to light dead sailors from the darkness of the grave
Aloft to God. And with such faith have watched my eyes
—that I

Have seen their shadows thro' the dusk steal up the sea-
line sky,

And with such faith to-night I wait, the time when I em-
bark—

On what great voyage—? away to sea alone—dead, in the
dark.

LIFE

CREATION's mystic beam am I.
My home moves o'er the hills on feet,
While sacred in its small one room
My heart—its warm hearthfire, doth beat.
Two windows has this shaky hut,
Soft-lit, with special thinking light,
I often pull both blinds right down
And peer across the Infinite.

Beneath this scanty grey old thatch
Doth shine a mystic telescope,
And fixed behind in magic dusk,
The worried small bright eyes of hope.
Out to the last sun's dying beam
I speed thought's silent thinking fires,
Like falling star, in God's vast void
Pale intellect in dark expires.

Yet conscious universe am I,
Eternity shut in with sight !
Since I do know I nothing am
To God's own strange unerring might.
Death from the woods will creep one day,
Relentless, deal one Fate-swung stroke,
Then puff,—my hearthfire will away
All vanish in a little smoke !

128 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

The swallows will come back again ;
My hut be dark, drawn down each blind,
And o'er its roof the wind and rain
Will beat, and I not there confined.
But, oh ! to rent that little house
Again, and at its windows sit
To watch birds wing where waves carouse
The sun, the moon o'er Heaven flit,
And o'er its threshold—Paradise
Step in—love's own sweet anxious eyes.

A DREAM

A SWALLOW from a distant land
Tired, fluttered thro' a mossy wood.
I saw a baby's small white hand,
Whereon—it just a moment stood.
I turned my eyes—the bird had flown ;
A tiny grave stood there alone.

The sleeping oaks o'er faintly swayed,
Bright stars flashed thro' their branches high ;
Like wild bird eyes on nest betrayed
By upblown leaves, when passes by
A little wind, swift came to me
One glimpse of far Eternity.

GABRIEL

Do you remember, dear, where the calm night waters lay
 At the still feet of the sleeping city dim?
 While anchor'd near the wild scrub slopes of silent Sydney
 Bay,

We watched the moon heave up her swollen rim,
 Like ghostly tunnel rise o'er the far dark hill,
 As I kissed your lovely warm white throat, Gabriel?
 Do you remember, dear, how the canvas grey sails flopped
 As the empty deck-chairs creaked in gloom around,
 And the wandering sea-bird cried, o'er the moonlit waters
 dropped

As my arms held tenderly my heaven found,
 And the moon's white flame your dark eyes did reveal
 As I kissed them wildly long ago, Gabriel.

The bush flowers in the hollows have oped their eyes and
 died

For many years, and yet as yesterday,
 I kiss the eyes of heaven, warm uplifted, at my side,
 And hear across the midnight silent bay
 The ferry's rolling wash, ebb, softly die—
 Then silence in the bay—with you and I.

In dreams I watch the calm night of moonlit waters clear,
 The mirrored rigging, with you by my side,
 As o'er the bulwark's rail we both would bend and peer
 And watch our shadows in pure water glide.
 Which was the dream, the water dark and still,
 Or you and I above? Alas! Gabriel.

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 131

The winds awake and sleep dear, for years into the bay
The ships have brought bright laughter and fond eyes ;
Have spread aloft their grey wings and flown like birds
away,

To fade in dusk where sea-washed sunset dies.
My dreams dear, as the sunsets sink in night,
Are searching through the world with morning light.

The river in the wild hills still toils to meet the sea ;
And still the sea beats up the lone shore side,
And deep sea ships come down the great bay silently
To rest from flight o'er far world waters wide ;
But where are you ? I love you wildly still,
As when a boy—I love you, O Gabriel.

ABSENT

(IN EXILE)

THE sea-bird to the sea and I—to you !
 My love ! my love, night's wings are spread
 Broad in the western sky, and piercing thro'
 The bronz-ed shade, a streak of red
 Lies shadowed o'er the lone lake's silent bed.
 My Beautiful ! love's pure reflected light
 Soft-touches every sparkling flower to-night ;
 Since every thing around on earth and sea
 Is tempered with my dreams, my dreams of thee !
 Girl, can'st thou hear me ? Dear, 'tis I who calls
 Across the sleeping world as breathe my lips
 Into the silence. As the white mists fall
 Out o'er the hollow wilds the starr'd night dips,
 And up away ! a lone bird seaward goes,
 Oh, were a message crumpled 'neath its wing
 To tell the love, the wish my being knows,
 That it might trembling to your sweet ears bring,
 As pure as where the scented lily blows,
 The song, the song my heart doth sing.
 The rigging flies of some lone beating barque ;
 Stars gleam o'er roaming waters far ;
 Away I fade, a world of ocean dark
 I wing with thought—am where you are !
 Bend your white throat, there—now I kiss
 In dreams your lovely lips, and in your eyes
 I see the heights, the peaks of earthly bliss

Where passion like an onward eagle flies
Above the dross, the dark of earthly things,
With sunset on its outstretched brightening wings!
Good-night, Beloved, heaven above will keep
You safe, I know, while in the arms of sleep
I deeply dream of you with closed eyes,
And thro' the night your image folded lies
Framed sweetly as the sunset's glimmering hour
Within my dreaming heart—a spirit flower.

PAT MCPHIZZ

BILLY BOYD was my chum on the Wallaby.
 For hours we'd sit by the camp fire unsleeping
 As up the gums, ghost-like, ran shadows creeping,
 Climbed to tree-tops and vanished in the sky,
 We'd nodding, watch the camp fires flickering die.

Before proceeding I must tell you we
 Had both been robbed of all our hard-earned gold,
 Our partner, Pat McPhizz, of crimes untold,
 With all our fortune sloped, left Bill and me
 To starve, but here's the sequel—wait and see!

We'd had no luck, our boots were minus soles;
 We both looked awful scarecrows by daylight,
 And like dilapidated ghosts when thro' the night,
 We tramped moonlit forests our clothes full of holes;
 That thin, our legs looked like rags round bean poles.

We schemed o'er many things in our sad plight;
 Got tick at all the shanties by the track
 At sunset stole away, upon our back
 Our swag, weighted with conscience infinite—
 A virtue of swag—men hid from daylight.

Well, one still night when all the woods were sleeping
 We sat whispering, when something cried just by—
 An old man stood there! didn't we jump—my eye!
 To see moonlight right thro' his rib-bones creeping;
 And thro' his eye-brow sockets twin-stars peeping.

We stood up astonished, our tongues went dry,
 Both swayed with terror, were so overwrought
 We leaned against each other for support,
 The old ghost shook his beard, said, with a sigh,
 "Follow me, there's gold where I unsleeping lie."

Thro' the moonlit forest with grey beard streaming
 He ran, we followed on with wondering fear,
 Then standing by a hole, he said, "'Tis here."
 There were our long lost nuggets glittering gleaming
 As in moonlight we stood in hot sweat steaming!

Obedient as two children on our knees,
 We gathered up the gold, then in he lies
 Flat on his back, says, "Now I'll close my eyes,
 In my grave fall asleep, thank God for peace."
 'Twas our lost partner, derved old Pat McPhizz!

We both felt awfully sorry—till our fright!
 We saw his eyes by moonlight ope and wink!
 As, crumbling in his shroud, right up did shrink,
 His form to dust, and from his grave, pure white,
 A bird, his soul I'll swear, flew in the night.

It flutter'd 'neath the moon right overhead
 Then on a bough, it sat and sweetly sang
 And from that bough a lynching noose did hang!
 Doubtless, McPhizz had from that bough dropped dead,
 And we near too, we ran that fast with dread.

BUSH MEMORIES

(QUEENSLAND)

My hearts goes southward on the winds
 Of thought—far seaward steals.
 Out o'er remember'd sleeping years
 The light of love reveals
 In dream perspective silently,
 Wild woods, swamps, slope and sea ;
 And our old cabin on the hill,
 Below the dead gum-tree.

O'er dark Pacific curling waves,
 The snow-winged seagulls fly ;
 Wild-blown white sails of long ago
 Like flowers of sunset die.
 With night dusk, stars creep overhead,
 My old chum dreaming stands
 By our small hut's sack-door, where gleams
 The camp fire's dying brands.

Within our huddl'd bunks once more,
 We go to dream and sleep ;
 Our brave dog—bright eyes sentinel'd—
 The all-night watch doth keep.
 The bending gums are moaning where
 Night-winds are singing high ;
 Thro' chinks I watch the wet stars flash
 Across the windy sky.

Wild-thundering waves are beating
 Down on the lonely beach ;
 As when a boy, again I dream
 Our hut they try to reach.

* * * * *

With wild vines, summer's brooding
 Has closed our hut's small door ;
 The stream that sang to thirsty lips,
 Flows lonely to the shore :
 Our old dog—deep in forest gloom
 Where o'er the 'possums leap—
 Brave sentinel of other days,
 Has been for years asleep.
 Where winter wild with windy voice
 Roams starless forest night,
 Doth search and shout in vain, to find
 A camp-fire's long dead light,
 Bush flowers have burst thro' dead fire ash,
 Where burning logs once gleamed :
 I could believe earth sorrows so
 Where years ago boys dreamed.

Down in the wild wet dark he sleeps,
 Below the deep Horn wave
 Where o'er the moonlight rigging flies—
 Brief flowers his storm-tossed grave ;
 Right over-head the sailors singing
 As flies the full-rigged barque,
 Fast-thrashing o'er his shroud world wide—
 A thousand fathoms dark :
 The earnestness of one sad truth
 Writ over him, so high,
 The stars in sorrow stealing o'er
 His monument—the sky.

138 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

And now my very soul might prize
 Such thoughts of slumber deep,
Like some tired child to close my eyes
 And fold my hands asleep,
Just overhead the roaming herds ;
 Till sunset fires the west,
My songs adrift with all the birds,
 My heart 'neath flowers at rest.

THE CABIN BOY

I LOVED the little cabin boy ;
 We scrubbed the decks together ;
We watch'd the seas rise round the poop
 Thro' all the wild night weather.
We climbed the rattlings, he and I,
 Along the yards we crept ;
And there—homesick, seasick, and cold—
 We both together wept !

Loudly the canvas grey sails flopped,
 And 'cross our snake-shaped wake
We wallowed round a knot a day,
 Till, like a mighty lake,
Old ocean mirrored all the stars !
 While fo'c's'le song, sweet sound,
The silence broke, we whispered on,
 That full-rigged ship outbound.

Wind-hush'd across the moaning swell
 I watched him as he listened
Of wonder-lands away ahead,
 Sweetly his blue eyes glistened
While, boyish way, his hand gripped mine,
 Both firmly swore to stand
Together—when we cleared the ship
 In far Australia land.

We caught the trade winds far to South,
 Like waves of ruby wine—
 While passed the night-cry "All aloft!"
 Seas splashed the sunset line.
 A white mist stole across the waves,
 Doom, rumbled far, faint sounds,
 As though death rode the wild sea-moors
 With phantom-baying hounds.
 Like muffled tones of destiny
 Tolled out the eight-bell chime;
 The watch, the moonlit rigging high
 All silently did climb.

Out in the wind-lashed gloom we watched
 The mammoth seas arise
 From sleep to shake their huddled backs,
 Lift white heads to the skies!
 Wild, mighty monsters lashing mains,
 By strength eternal hurl'd,
 They rose on thundering, shrieking race
 With winds across the world!
 A world of dark and wind—all save
 The albatross behind—
 Winged-loneliness—bright travelling eyes
 Flitting the restless wind!

Like some frail, frightened, hunted thing,
 The old windjammer stopped;
 Climbed up the hollows, shivering,
 Crouched, wailing, dipp'd and dropped,
 Ten thousand jagged shining teeth,
 Fate-like, snapp'd Heaven's soft track,
 The sapphire lightning, wriggling split
 Thro' night's roof, ebon-black.

As though boom'd Fate's unchanging clock
 As hush'd the night's wild cry,
The thunder broke, crashed overhead,
 Died down the leeward sky.
Seas jump'd the poop, the jibboom dived,
 We heard her shivering moan,
From far away, passed on the wind,
 A tiny cry faint-blown.

As though a door in Heaven did ope
 And shut—out o'er the wave
Moonrise revealed, touched silently
 A hand tossed from a grave.
We hove her to, she rolled and reared,
 And every man that night
Quiet held in flinchless sailor-eyes
 The soul of English might.
They manned the boat, but cruel the seas,
 Wild rush'd the midnight main :
I never saw my little mate,
 The Cabin Boy, again.

THE OLD RUSTIC'S REQUEST

GIVE me your hand—turn my face to the west,
 Don't grieve—there, I've had my day,
 It's only an end to the fight—and rest
 After the drama mortals play.
 You'll lay me there—when I fall asleep—
 Near where the river flows?
 Just cover me over—not too deep—
 Down where the marsh flower blows ;

And I'll hear the wind and the wild bird sing
 Low in the rustling wheat,
 When swallows come back again in the spring,
 And the young lambs play and bleat,
 As I lay alone in my evening rest
 Away from the din and strife,
 Back again in the old earth's breast,
 Far out of the night of life.

I may hear the high rooks calling
 When tired they cease to roam,
 Idly flapping across the sky
 All slowly going home :
 And the moan of the old firs bending
 Wild on the windy hill,
 While the robin is piping its lonely song
 Where the winds are still.

In the hollow by the river,
 Up in the leafless tree—
When the last wild flowers are dying
 As the grass grows over me.
So lay me there—when I fall asleep,
 Near where the river flows ;
Just cover me over—not too deep—
 Down where the marsh flower blows.

THE WILD COMPOSER

(LONG AGO)

A LOVELY wild musician came
And by my window sang
A melody, and all his own,
Along warm June winds rang
Clear sparkling tones like heaven-touched bells
In some ethereal chime,
Glad-ringing in the sweet wild birth
Of one more day to Time !

And while I listen'd —half asleep,
It seemed some Angel trills—
Small bugles blown—went echoing
O'er silent dream-wrapt hills.
And England with her wealth of song,
No music ever heard
More beautiful than those love-notes
From her own wild blackbird.

A VOICE FROM THE STOKEHOLD

(THE SCAPEGRACE HOMEWARD BOUND)

POM-PE-TE, pom-pe-te, pom, pom,
All thro' the burning night
Shovelling coal for the engine's heart
Down in the blinding light.
Working my passage, penniless,
Over the western main,
And I know they'll all be sorry
To see me home again.

Pom-pe-te, pom-pe-te, pom, pom,
Shiver and shake and bang ;
Thundering seas lifting us up,
Making the screw-shaft clang.
Unshaven faces thrust to the flame,
Washed by the furnace bright,
And England thousands of miles away
In the middle watch to-night.

Oh ! what would they say could they see me
Mask'd thick with oil and dirt,
Shovelling deep down under the sea ?
This sweater for a shirt,
With the funnels red flame blowing
Out in the windy sky,
And the family pride perspiring
To keep the steam-gauge high !

I can hear the wild green chargers
 Pounding the boat's iron side—
 Old Death, impatient, knocking away
 All night to get inside !
 Where haggard men like shadows move,
 Toil in the flame-lit gloom.
 Oh, it's just the whole world over
 Sailing the wave of doom ;

For the aristocrats are sleeping
 Snug in their bunks, I know,
 All on the upper deck, while we,
 Are sweating away below,
 Hard-feeding the white heat's fury,
 Piling the wake with foam,
 Unravelling all the knots that wind
 The way that takes them home.

I've clung on an old wind-jammer,
 I've done things—best untold :
 Hump'd the swag on many a rush,
 Found everything—but gold !
 But oh ! for the flashlight homeward !
 The anchor's running chain,
 And the sight of their dear old faces—
 To see me home again !

SUNDOWNERS

Up on our fast brown mares we jump'd, our swags heaped
up behind,
And every man on "Dead crow claim" sent out along the
wind
Three ringing cheers, their big slouch'd hats wild waving
to and fro,
Cheer followed cheer, they were so pleased at last to see us
go!
The scent of the scrub came dreamy, the tree-frogs chanted
their song,
Chanting a tune to the flying hoofs thumping the slopes
along.
Away to the Southward racing, wild parrots rose from
trees,
Fading away in tiny fleets adrift o'er sunset seas,
Where the dark gums rose like huddled masts, as the
boiling hot sun sank,
And the white mists o'er the swamp-oaks crept from the
weedy marshes rank.
As we felt the fire of youth awake, and burst to wild
rollicking song
To the swish of the mains, the romping hoofs as we rode
the night along.
And the scent of the wattles blowing, in the gullies on each
side,
Came sweet on the breath of God's cool wine in whiffs
from the blue Heavens wide.

148 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

The old bush town, left miles behind, seemed some wild
dream afar,

Where fearless men told wondrous tales and drank beer at
the bar.

* * * * *

Walled up by all the skies we camped, the flame lit billy
sang

As joyous with the voice of youth the hills with echoes
rang.

Like spectral batter'd hulks, clouds crept across the starlit
sky,

Colliding one by one soft-smashed the moon's face
silently !

Their shadows o'er the slopes soft dropped thro' ghostly
straggling light

Like silent phantoms fled o'er hills, then jump'd the forest
height !

As in the dead swamp-oaks hard by, the night-bird did
express

Thro' sweet-souled tiny magic flute, its tuneful
consciousness.

* * * * *

Brushwood flung on the camp-fire blazed, crackled, and
fizzled and flared

Outside like giants the hills arose with monstrous grim
breasts bared

For the touch of the moon's white silent flame, while far in
the dark woods seemed

Spectral forms were stalking around where the wind-blown
shadows gleamed.

My chum's wild dancing scattered the leaves, as fast I
rattled a jig !

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 149

And the jackass nearly burst its throat, as it laughed on its
skyward twig.

As the fiddle played in silence to a phantom of delight.

As his wild careering shadow jumped o'er the gullies in
moonlight.

* * * * *

The Jackass long has ceased to laugh
Those heaven-turned goggling eyes
Have perished to a pinch of dust.
Still deep the forest sighs
All thro' the mystic moonlit night.
The flowers that we saw blow
Along the wild hillside are dead
These many years ago.

Yet often in the night I hear,
Above the wind and rain,
My old chum singing in the hills
Our wild sea-songs again.
And when the silent city sleeps,
And climbs the winter moon,
I half asleep in bed can hear
A sad familiar tune
Drift o'er the dead years fitfully—
The waving lyric trees
Wild moaning o'er the monotone
Of moonlit angry seas.

While in the hollow of the hills,
Stands hushed our old log hut,
Wherein we huddled curled for sleep,
Its tiny door half shut.

The whinnying wild horse cries along
The Inland Mountain range,
While from the forest-deep and still,
Comes oft, with dismal change
The Warrigal's wild wailing cry,
Then hush'd 'tis still as death,
All save, God's music beautiful
My sleeping comrade's breath.
Till I awake, cramp'd, ill and old,
Near withered up—all save
These memories, that are pale flowers
Upon life's living grave,
For am I not of all my wealth
Of youth to-night bereft,
Since on my wretched, worried head
Three friendly hairs are left?
My bright-eyed children wondering,
Know not why in the fire
With vacant staring eyes I stare—
Their stern, respected sire.
Who for their sakes eternally,
Rides up to London Town,
Each morning pulled up in the train
And each night pulled back down.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN

IN Sydney Bay we stowed away,
Down in the hot stokehole.
They made us feed that fearful fiend,
The engine's glowing soul !
The Southern stars astern did fade,
The thumping engines cried,
All through the toiling, sweating nights
Across the whole world wide.

Old Dover's white cliffs gray did loom,
In London Town we stood,
And found far deeper loneliness
Than wild bush solitude.
Down fog-bound, flame-lit streets we plunged,
Our sun-tanned faces cold.
Pale gutter-merchants sentineled
The world's dark, grim stronghold.
Our thoughts swept out across the world,
Like frightened birds did fly
Before those dreadful pistol-shots
The cold commercial eye !
Our toiling feet the mud-miles splash'd,
The front door loud we knocked,
And there, with eager, awestruck eyes,
Our sisters round us flocked !

Back in our old ancestral halls—
 Crash on the floor it laid
 One faithful friend, my portmanteau—
 Crammed up with bills unpaid !
 And by the hearth-fire warm, that night,
 Their mouths did open wide,
 We told such things, they were so proud,
 We swelled ourselves with pride !

We told them of big fortunes made,
 And how we thought of them
 Dressed up in silk and satins soft,
 Lit up with flashing gem !
 And how the ship went down at sea
 With all our wealth inside !
 Then round the hearth-fire beautiful,
 They sighed—nor dreamed we lied.

We showed the stokehole shovel-corns
 Upon our hands so sore ;
 The windy chimney's hollow throat
 Moaned with suspicious roar.
 Aye, years ago, and when I hear
 Brave deeds of travelling youth,
 I listening blow my nose, for oh !
 Too well I know the truth !

ON THE ROCKS!

(SYDNEY)

OUT on the wide domain we slept, as independents do!

Beneath a big-leafed tree, all in a row!

Penniless seafaring men, the tigers in the Zoo

At midnight roared, oft woke the sleeping show.

We'd hear the ferry siren's hoot, out o'er the silent bay.

My pillow was an old cheese-cutter hat.

The baronets and M.B.A.'s in rags beside us lay,

With hungry, dreaming eyes in moonlight sat!

On windy, starlit nights the waves curled round the rocky
shore,

Whiffs to our nostrils crept from Woolloomooloo!

We saw the sailing-ships creep by—from our big bedroom
floor!

Glide by in moonlight with their home-bound crew

While Sydney slept. And on cold nights we'd sneak down
on the quay—

Curl round the big warm funnel of some tramp!

We'd hear the friendly sailor's voice, when dawn crept in
from sea,

Breathe in our dreaming ears—"Now lads—decamp!"

Once in a liner's stokehold deep, like mice we stole below.

I woke: there stood the second engineer!

I saw him peep where three boys slept! He crept off on
tip-toe.

A Scotchman never splits that way—no fear!

154 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

Next morning with full steam she sailed, swung round upon
the tide,

We heard the passengers all say " Good-bye !"
With wistful eyes we watched her go, slow, down the great
bay glide.

A thousand white hands waved, our hearts did sigh,
As underneath the tropic sun away my thoughts did roam
When round the point her stern passed out of sight,
I heard her thundering screw in dreams, I saw her rolling
home

At sea—and cried myself to sleep that night !

Mail-day arrived, the one great day! Up George Street
from the Quay,

We'd go to where the great Post Office stands,
And at a little hole enquire, " Please anything for me ?"
Great Scott ! a five pound note lay in my hands !
Old sailors smacked me on the back ; o'erjoyed, I lost my
head ;

They drank " deep seas," winked, as with pride I paid !
That night my room whirled round and round, and fathoms
deep my bed

Sank thro' the floor as there I helpless laid.

From that time forth I went alone. Soft, on the window
pane

I'd tap, look round before I did inquire,
And those old sailor men, my friends, for months watched
on in vain.

One real great virtue is to be a liar !

I emigrated to the Bush, God only knows where to ;

My shipmate humped the swag, oft cursed and swore !
Right to the skyline gum trees rose, we camped, made our
tea-stew !

Bush Songs and Oversea Voices 155

No sleep that night ! we fought, we heard them roar !
As down the regiments wildly charged, beneath the stars
we'd see

The glittering spears that stabbed us 'tween the toes ;
Their bodies hung fat with our blood ; they danced, they
sang with glee,
Those d—d mosquitoes where the wattle blows.

Since Eve and Adam humped the swag, exiled from their
first home,

On God's own wilds ne'er was seen such a sight ;
For weeks knee deep in hot, soft sand, our staggering legs
did roam,

Near trouserless, blind-drunk with hot sunlight ;
The spinifex soft-stabbed our flesh, we still had on our
boots.

The station children stared when we appeared ;
Our bare legs shook ; thank heaven, our shirts hung far
below our suits !

The stockman swore, fell of his horse that reared !

They gave us food and rigged us out ; we learn't to ride
like hell !

Went back to Sydney flush and found old friends
Down on the quay all in a row, they sat, did hearken
well

To all we said, and there my story ends.

And where are they ? Some went to sea, some humped
the swag, some died ;

Dell went to 'Frisco ; John, the old sea cook,
Secured a berth, the ship went down, and he's still there
inside ;

The worst one shipped for home and wrote a book !

156 Bush Songs and Oversea Voices

I met the baronet one day ; I said, " Good God, it's you ! "
And smacked his back ; the eyeglass from his eye
Dropped as amazed, his eyebrows raised, he gasped " Can
this be true ? "

Turned white, then swayed his stick, and passed me by.
With hell behind my blazing eyes I hurried down the
Strand ;

Thought, " That's the cove that borrowed my old
shirt ! "

I yearned to meet him, as of old, in that far lone Bush-
land ;

He'd gasp ! I'd sway the stick—that's one dead cert.

A BUSH DREAM

DOWN in my heart the bush flower blows,
The sea-bird cries as it comes and goes,
Flashing away on tireless wing,
O'er the moonlit dark waves glittering.
Fast o'er the sea the cool wind goes
To kiss the hills where the wattle blows.
Far from the heat of the old Bush Town
Stars are pouring God's own wine down,
The mallee-scrub on either side,
On the long night ride! the long night ride!
Our little hut crouched in the hills,
Safe from the wild shore's thunderous thrills—
God's everlasting thrilling chime,
Where waves forever crying climb—
In moonlight coil the wild lone shore,
Like children knock each dark cave door,
Toss their white arms, and wailing flee,
Like ghosts in shrouds away to sea!

MODERN LONDON

NOT in South seas or wild Australian Bush,
 Or in dark clouds or where the bright stars soar,
 But midst the throb of wheels, the mighty rush
 Of City streets, the whistling shrieks, the roar
 Of multitudes, brave, grand, incessant strife,
 We'll find the real romance of splendid life,
 And, still embodied, ancient love and lore !

The unfledged soul of passion's fragile frame,
 The bravest deeds of Heroes ages dead.
 A girl's surrendered loveliness—the shame
 Of all upon her tired, half-Angel Head ;
 And gliding thro' the lamp-lit, dark-walled streets
 Battalions of pale eyes, and muffled beats
 Of hearts—that hold some secret fast with dread.

The whistling urchin dodging wheels fast running
 By sparks caught from what thunders of far stars !
 The Universal light ! weaved by man's cunning,
 Switched to the rushing stream of gliding cars.
 Space—blind with moving worlds, while man, a clod,
 A drama plays that murmurs out a God !
 A chord of grandeur in Time's myriad jars.

Diogenes lurks, jealous, by his 'Tub !
 Old cynics shuffle by with white-lipped sneer,
 'Gainst Croesus with his millions oft I rub
 My shabby sleeve. I sniff spiced, flowery beer

'Neath past Egyptian skies—whiffs thro' moonlight
My nostrils bathe. Brave Cyrus, with delight !
Fights half the world—a pen behind his ear !

Old Babylon's, Assyria's dust, the clang,
The chants of Pagan Temples, noise of seas,
Past moons, the sandall'd maiden as she sprang
To arms—long dead—beneath fair cedar trees.
Grand glories hid, stuffed rows in Pyramids !
Sweet-spiced old mummies and curved stiff eyelids,
Alive ! move down the Strand ! Cheapside ! Heaven
knows,
I've bargained and been done—by those Pharaohs !

I've seen Ruth, waist-deep 'mid the corn—in dreams.
Her pale-faced sister bargain, soulless stand
'Neath bright street-lamps, by moving seas of schemes
Hid 'neath top hats, fast gliding down the Strand !
I've heard dead-laughter—midst the crowd stood still
As Cleopatra passed ! as swept a thrill
Of Ages thro' my frame—she'd touched my hand !

Arabian Nights, ten thousand magic lamps
Gleam o'er the unsung heroes of my day.
The deathless regiment ever onward tramps—
Old passions born of ages far away !
From gloom to gloom, pale gliding eyes, we see
The past—the shadows of the future—We !
Behind the drama of what coming play ?

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