

In the Droving Days

Banjo Paterson

‘Only a pound,’ said the auctioneer,
‘Only a pound; and I’m standing here
‘Selling this animal, gain or loss.
‘Only a pound for the drover’s horse;
‘One of the sort that was never afraid,
‘One of the boys of the Old Brigade;
‘Thoroughly honest and game, I’ll swear,
‘Only a little the worse for wear;
‘Plenty as bad to be seen in town,
‘Give me a bid and I’ll knock him down;
‘Sold as he stands, and without recourse,
‘Give me a bid for the drover’s horse.’

Loitering there in an aimless way
Somehow I noticed the poor old grey,
Weary and battered and screwed, of course,
Yet when I noticed the old grey horse,
The rough bush saddle, and single rein
Of the bridle laid on his tangled mane,

Straightway the crowd and the auctioneer
Seemed on a sudden to disappear,
Melted away in a kind of haze,
For my heart went back to the droving days.

Back to the road, and I crossed again
Over the miles of the saltbush plain—
The shining plain that is said to be
The dried-up bed of an inland sea,
Where the air so dry and so clear and bright
Refracts the sun with a wondrous light,
And out in the dim horizon makes
The deep blue gleam of the phantom lakes.

At dawn of day we would feel the breeze
That stirred the boughs of the sleeping trees,
And brought a breath of the fragrance rare
That comes and goes in that scented air;
For the trees and grass and the shrubs contain
A dry sweet scent on the saltbush plain.
For those that love it and understand,

The saltbush plain is a wonderland.

A wondrous country, where Nature's ways

Were revealed to me in the droving days.

We saw the fleet wild horses pass,

And the kangaroos through the Mitchell grass,

The emu ran with her frightened brood

All unmolested and unpursued.

But there rose a shout and a wild hubbub

When the dingo raced for his native scrub,

And he paid right dear for his stolen meals

With the drover's dogs at his wretched heels.

For we ran him down at a rattling pace,

While the packhorse joined in the stirring chase.

And a wild halloo at the kill we'd raise—

We were light of heart in the droving days.

'Twas a drover's horse, and my hand again

Made a move to close on a fancied rein.

For I felt the swing and the easy stride

Of the grand old horse that I used to ride

In drought or plenty, in good or ill,

That same old steed was my comrade still;
The old grey horse with his honest ways
Was a mate to me in the droving days.

When we kept our watch in the cold and damp,
If the cattle broke from the sleeping camp,
Over the flats and across the plain,
With my head bent down on his waving mane,
Through the boughs above and the stumps below
On the darkest night I could let him go
At a racing speed; he would choose his course,
And my life was safe with the old grey horse.
But man and horse had a favourite job,
When an outlaw broke from a station mob,
With a right good will was the stockwhip plied,
As the old horse raced at the straggler's side,
And the greenhide whip such a weal would raise,
We could use the whip in the droving days.

‘Only a pound!’ and was this the end—
Only a pound for the drover's friend.

The drover's friend that had seen his day,
And now was worthless, and cast away
With a broken knee and a broken heart
To be flogged and starved in a hawker's cart.
Well, I made a bid for a sense of shame
And the memories dear of the good old game.

'Thank you? Guinea! and cheap at that!
'Against you there in the curly hat!
'Only a guinea, and one more chance,
'Down he goes if there's no advance,
'Third, and the last time, one! two! three!'
And the old grey horse was knocked down to me.
And now he's wandering, fat and sleek,
On the lucerne flats by the Homestead Creek;
I dare not ride him for fear he'd fall,
But he does a journey to beat them all,
For though he scarcely a trot can raise,
He can take me back to the droving days.

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