

# Song of the Future

Banjo Paterson

'Tis strange that in a land so strong,  
So strong and bold in mighty youth,  
We have no poet's voice of truth  
To sing for us a wondrous song.

Our chiefest singer yet has sung  
In wild, sweet notes a passing strain,  
All carelessly and sadly flung  
To that dull world he thought so vain.

'I care for nothing, good nor bad,  
My hopes are gone, my pleasures fled,  
I am but sifting sand,' he said:  
What wonder Gordon's songs were sad!

And yet, not always sad and hard;  
In cheerful mood and light of heart  
He told the tale of Britomarte,  
And wrote the Rhyme of Joyous Guard.

And some have said that Nature's face  
To us is always sad; but these  
Have never felt the smiling grace  
Of waving grass and forest trees  
On sunlit plains as wide as seas.

'A land where dull Despair is king  
O'er scentless flower and songless bird!'  
But we have heard the bell-birds ring  
Their silver bells at eventide,  
Like fairies on the mountain side,  
The sweetest note man ever heard.

The wild thrush lifts a note of mirth;  
The bronzewing pigeons call and coo  
Beside their nests the long day through;  
The magpie warbles clear and strong  
A joyous, glad, thanksgiving song,  
For all God's mercies upon earth.

And many voices such as these  
Are joyful sounds for those to tell,  
Who know the Bush and love it well,  
With all its hidden mysteries.

We cannot love the restless sea,  
That rolls and tosses to and fro  
Like some fierce creature in its glee;  
For human weal or human woe  
It has no touch of sympathy.

For us the bush is never sad:  
Its myriad voices whisper low,  
In tones the bushmen only know,  
Its sympathy and welcome glad.

For us the roving breezes bring  
From many a blossom-tufted tree—  
Where wild bees murmur dreamily—  
The honey-laden breath of Spring.

We have no tales of other days,  
No bygone history to tell;  
Our tales are told where camp-fires blaze  
At midnight, when the solemn hush  
Of that vast wonderland, the Bush,  
Hath laid on every heart its spell.

Although we have no songs of strife,  
Of bloodshed reddening the land,  
We yet may find achievements grand  
Within the bushman's quiet life.

Lift ye your faces to the sky  
Ye far blue mountains of the West,  
Who lie so peacefully at rest  
Enshrouded in a haze of blue;  
'Tis hard to feel that years went by  
Before the pioneers broke through  
Your rocky heights and walls of stone,  
And made your secrets all their own.

For years the fertile Western plains  
Were hid behind your sullen walls,  
Your cliffs and crags and waterfalls  
All weatherworn with tropic rains.

Between the mountains and the sea,  
Like Israelites with staff in hand,  
The people waited restlessly:  
They looked towards the mountains old  
And saw the sunsets come and go  
With gorgeous golden afterglow,  
That made the West a fairyland,  
And marvelled what that West might be  
Of which such wondrous tales were told.

For tales were told of inland seas  
Like sullen oceans, salt and dead,  
And sandy deserts, white and wan,  
Where never trod the foot of man,  
Nor bird went winging overhead,

Nor ever stirred a gracious breeze  
To wake the silence with its breath—  
A land of loneliness and death.

At length the hardy pioneers  
By rock and crag found out the way,  
And woke with voices of to-day,  
A silence kept for years and years.

Upon the Western slope they stood  
And saw—a wide expanse of plain  
As far as eye could stretch or see  
Go rolling westward endlessly.  
The native grasses, tall as grain,  
Were waved and rippled in the breeze;  
From boughs of blossom-laden trees  
The parrots answered back again.  
They saw the land that it was good,  
A land of fatness all untrod,  
And gave their silent thanks to God.

The way is won! The way is won!

And straightway from the barren coast

There came a westward-marching host,

That aye and ever onward prest

With eager faces to the West,

Along the pathway of the sun.

The mountains saw them marching by:

They faced the all-consuming drought,

They would not rest in settled land:

But, taking each his life in hand,

Their faces ever westward bent

Beyond the farthest settlement,

Responding to the challenge cry

Of 'better country further out.'

And lo a miracle! the land

But yesterday was all unknown,

The wild man's boomerang was thrown

Where now great busy cities stand.

It was not much, you say, that these

Should win their way where none withstood;

In sooth there was not much of blood

No war was fought between the seas.

It was not much! but we who know

The strange capricious land they trod—

At times a stricken, parching sod,

At times with raging floods beset—

Through which they found their lonely way,

Are quite content that you should say

It was not much, while we can feel

That nothing in the ages old,

In song or story written yet

On Grecian urn or Roman arch,

Though it should ring with clash of steel,

Could braver histories unfold

Than this bush story, yet untold—

The story of their westward march.

But times are changed, and changes rung



From old to new—the olden days,  
The old bush life and all its ways  
Are passing from us all unsung.  
The freedom, and the hopeful sense  
Of toil that brought due recompense,  
Of room for all, has passed away,  
And lies forgotten with the dead.  
Within our streets men cry for bread  
In cities built but yesterday.

About us stretches wealth of land,  
A boundless wealth of virgin soil  
As yet unfruitful and untilled!  
Our willing workmen, strong and skilled  
Within our cities idle stand,  
And cry aloud for leave to toil.

The stunted children come and go  
In squalid lanes and alleys black;  
We follow but the beaten track  
Of other nations, and we grow

In wealth for some—for many, woe.

And it may be that we who live

In this new land apart, beyond

The hard old world grown fierce and fond

And bound by precedent and bond,

May read the riddle right and give

New hope to those who dimly see

That all things may be yet for good,

And teach the world at length to be

One vast united brotherhood.

So may it be, and he who sings

In accents hopeful, clear, and strong,

The glories which that future brings

Shall sing, indeed, a wond'rous song.

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