

# The City Bushman

Henry Lawson

It was pleasant up the country, City Bushman, where you went,  
For you sought the greener patches and you travelled like a gent;  
And you curse the trams and buses and the turmoil and the push,  
Though you know the squalid city needn't keep you from the bush;  
But we lately heard you singing of the 'plains where shade is not',  
And you mentioned it was dusty—'all was dry and all was hot'.

True, the bush 'hath moods and changes'—and the bushman hath 'em, too,  
For he's not a poet's dummy—he's a man, the same as you;  
But his back is growing rounder—slaving for the absentee—  
And his toiling wife is thinner than a country wife should be.  
For we noticed that the faces of the folks we chanced to meet  
Should have made a greater contrast to the faces in the street;  
And, in short, we think the bushman's being driven to the wall,  
And it's doubtful if his spirit will be 'loyal thro' it all'.

Though the bush has been romantic and it's nice to sing about,  
There's a lot of patriotism that the land could do without—  
Sort of british workman nonsense that shall perish in the scorn

Of the drover who is driven and the shearer who is shorn,  
Of the struggling western farmers who have little time for rest,  
And are ruined on selections in the sheep-infested West;  
Droving songs are very pretty, but they merit little thanks  
From the people of a country in possession of the Banks.

And the 'rise and fall of seasons' suits the rise and fall of rhyme,  
But we know that western seasons do not run on schedule time;  
For the drought will go on drying while there's anything to dry,  
Then it rains until you'd fancy it would bleach the sunny sky—  
Then it pelts out of reason, for the downpour day and night  
Nearly sweeps the population to the Great Australian Bight.  
It is up in Northern Queensland that the seasons do their best,  
But it's doubtful if you ever saw a season in the West;  
There are years without an autumn or a winter or a spring,  
There are broiling Junes, and summers when it rains like anything.

In the bush my ears were opened to the singing of the bird,  
But the 'carol of the magpie' was a thing I never heard.  
Once the beggar roused my slumbers in a shanty, it is true,  
But I only heard him asking, 'Who the blanky blank are you?'

And the bell-bird in the ranges—but his ‘silver chime’ is harsh  
When it’s heard beside the solo of the curlew in the marsh.

Yes, I heard the shearers singing ‘William Riley’, out of tune,  
Saw ’em fighting round a shanty on a Sunday afternoon,  
But the bushman isn’t always ‘trapping brumbies in the night’,  
Nor is he for ever riding when ‘the morn is fresh and bright’,  
And he isn’t always singing in the humpies on the run—  
And the camp-fire’s ‘cheery blazes’ are a trifle overdone;  
We have grumbled with the bushmen round the fire on rainy days,  
When the smoke would blind a bullock and there wasn’t any blaze,  
Save the blazes of our language, for we cursed the fire in turn  
Till the atmosphere was heated and the wood began to burn.  
Then we had to wring our blueys which were rotting in the swags,  
And we saw the sugar leaking through the bottoms of the bags,  
And we couldn’t raise a chorus, for the toothache and the cramp,  
While we spent the hours of darkness draining puddles round the camp.

Would you like to change with Clancy—go a-droving? tell us true,  
For we rather think that Clancy would be glad to change with you,  
And be something in the city; but ’twould give your muse a shock

To be losing time and money through the foot-rot in the flock,  
And you wouldn't mind the beauties underneath the starry dome  
If you had a wife and children and a lot of bills at home.

Did you ever guard the cattle when the night was inky-black,  
And it rained, and icy water trickled gently down your back  
Till your saddle-weary backbone fell a-aching to the roots  
And you almost felt the croaking of the bull-frog in your boots—  
Sit and shiver in the saddle, curse the restless stock and cough  
Till a squatter's irate dummy cantered up to warn you off?  
Did you fight the drought and pleuro when the 'seasons' were asleep,  
Felling sheoaks all the morning for a flock of starving sheep,  
Drinking mud instead of water—climbing trees and lopping boughs  
For the broken-hearted bullocks and the dry and dusty cows?

Do you think the bush was better in the 'good old droving days',  
When the squatter ruled supremely as the king of western ways,  
When you got a slip of paper for the little you could earn,  
But were forced to take provisions from the station in return—  
When you couldn't keep a chicken at your humpy on the run,  
For the squatter wouldn't let you—and your work was never done;

When you had to leave the missus in a lonely hut forlorn  
While you 'rose up Willy Riley'—in the days ere you were born?

Ah! we read about the drovers and the shearers and the like  
Till we wonder why such happy and romantic fellows strike.  
Don't you fancy that the poets ought to give the bush a rest  
Ere they raise a just rebellion in the over-written West?  
Where the simple-minded bushman gets a meal and bed and rum  
Just by riding round reporting phantom flocks that never come;  
Where the scalper—never troubled by the 'war-whoop of the push'—  
Has a quiet little billet—breeding rabbits in the bush;  
Where the idle shanty-keeper never fails to make a draw,  
And the dummy gets his tucker through provisions in the law;  
Where the labour-agitator—when the shearers rise in might—  
Makes his money sacrificing all his substance for The Right;  
Where the squatter makes his fortune, and 'the seasons rise and fall',  
And the poor and honest bushman has to suffer for it all;  
Where the drovers and the shearers and the bushmen and the rest  
Never reach the Eldorado of the poets of the West.

And you think the bush is purer and that life is better there,

But it doesn't seem to pay you like the 'squalid street and square'.

Pray inform us, City Bushman, where you read, in prose or verse,

Of the awful 'city urchin who would greet you with a curse'.

There are golden hearts in gutters, though their owners lack the fat,

And we'll back a teamster's offspring to outswear a city brat.

Do you think we're never jolly where the trams and buses rage?

Did you hear the gods in chorus when 'Ri-tooral' held the stage?

Did you catch a ring of sorrow in the city urchin's voice

When he yelled for Billy Elton, when he thumped the floor for Royce?

Do the bushmen, down on pleasure, miss the everlasting stars

When they drink and flirt and so on in the glow of private bars?

You've a down on 'trams and buses', or the 'roar' of 'em, you said,

And the 'filthy, dirty attic', where you never toiled for bread.

(And about that self-same attic—Lord! wherever have you been?

For the struggling needlewoman mostly keeps her attic clean.)

But you'll find it very jolly with the cuff-and-collar push,

And the city seems to suit you, while you rave about the bush.

You'll admit that Up-the Country, more especially in drought,

Isn't quite the Eldorado that the poets rave about,

Yet at times we long to gallop where the reckless bushman rides  
In the wake of startled brumbies that are flying for their hides;  
Long to feel the saddle tremble once again between our knees  
And to hear the stockwhips rattle just like rifles in the trees!  
Long to feel the bridle-leather tugging strongly in the hand  
And to feel once more a little like a native of the land.  
And the ring of bitter feeling in the jingling of our rhymes  
Isn't suited to the country nor the spirit of the times.  
Let us go together droving, and returning, if we live,  
Try to understand each other while we reckon up the div.

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