

THE  
STATION  
BALLADS

and Other Verses

DAVID McKEE WRIGHT

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1945



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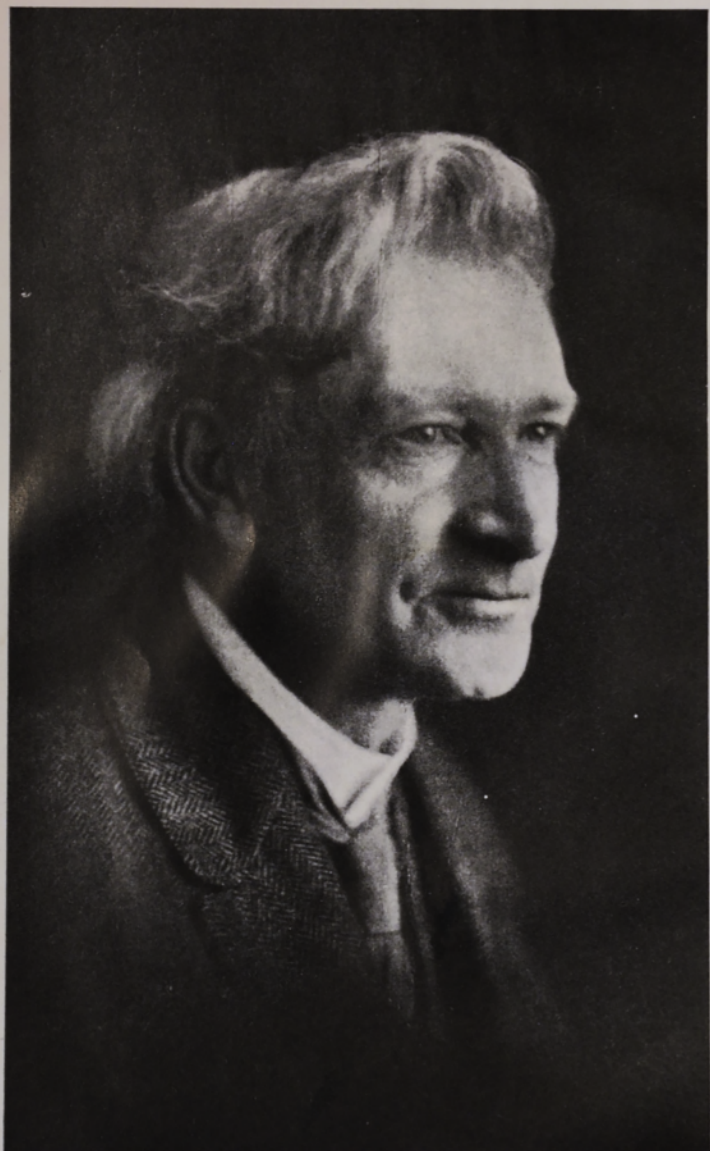
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David McKee Wright  
1869-1928

—May Moore (Sydney)

*The Station Ballads*  
*and Other Verses*

OF

David McKee Wright

•

SELECTED *and* ARRANGED *by*

Robert Solway

*Author of*

"A MEMORY OF THE LATE PRIME MINISTER"

"WARTIME JOURNEY"

ETC.

•

JOHN A. LEE

AUCKLAND :: NEW ZEALAND



The Station Ballads  
and Other Songs

By James MacGillivray

Robert Burns

- 4 MAR 1987

First published, August, 1945

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To  
John Masfield, O.M.  
in remembrance  
of a happy visit

## NOTE

*The publication of "Station Ballads and Other Verses" has been guaranteed by Mr. Sydney Spencer, farmer and one time shearer, a contemporary of David McKee Wright, who recognises in the verse the authentic ring of a colourful yesterday in New Zealand's life. Not for the first time is McKee Wright sponsored by a working contemporary.*

*Robert Solway, to whose tireless industry this publication owes its inspiration, deserves to see his selected edition successful.*

—JOHN A. LEE



# David McKee Wright

NEW ZEALAND has had many writers. Even in the hey-day of the diggings, when gold was discovered, our poets were workers and pioneers themselves, singing and cheering-on the men and women who laid the foundations of the nation. In this they were successful. One has only to read some early colonial paper to see the type of poem then in vogue. To-day some of those poems make strange reading. While many of the pieces express lofty sentiment most of them are doggerel. But men and women gained inspiration from such poems as these. They were struggling, often unsuccessfully, against the Maori, or else against the material facts of life and the wiles of nature. Indeed they sorely needed such inspiration. In those early days our people, who were isolated in the back-blocks of the country away from civilisation, had to find or make their own entertainment: in fact, it was imperative that they should if they were to escape the monotony of everyday life. New Zealand's rise to nationhood was witnessed by many poets and written of in many ways, though mostly it was done in the style of the classical school. What a host of poets loom from the past! Alfred Domett (who became Premier of New Zealand), Arthur H. Adams, Thomas Bracken and Jessie Mackay. New Zealand, however, had one poet who sang better, yet more musically too, than did the others, but there is a robust touch in his work. He was David McKee Wright.

Like that of any artist, his life is difficult to trace, but the known biographical facts are these. He was born on the 6th of August, 1869, at Ballynaskeagh, in County Down, Ireland. In an autobiographical note which forms an extended appendix he describes his childhood. His mother died when he was seven. His father was the Rev. William Wright, D.D., a Presbyterian minister and in his day a well-known author. His best-known book was *The Brontes In Ireland*, but he wrote, too, a number of works on Oriental subjects.

David McKee Wright went to a private school in Upper Norwood, London. Later he attended Dulwich College, but for health reasons he came to Australia, and from Sydney to New Zealand in 1887. He spent some years on stations in the Otago back country, and about 1890, while working there, he began writing verses about the local life and characters. Acting on the advice of a friend, Robert McSkimming, he submitted them to the *Otago Witness*, and they were accepted and published. In 1896 his first work, *Aorangi and Other Verses*, appeared. It was a slim little volume and the critics ignored it. Within the next twelve months, while a student at the Otago University attending classes in Junior English and English Composition and Rhetoric, he was awarded the Stuart Memorial Prize\* for a poem *Queen Victoria, 1837-1897*, and then was given financial aid by his friend to publish *Station Ballads*. The edition soon sold out.

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\* Although this was not the first award of the Stuart Prize it was the first award for English. The prize was founded in 1894, and was awarded in 1895 in Mental Science and in 1896 in Natural Philosophy.

Deciding to follow his father he began to study for the Presbyterian ministry, but as he wanted to get married he found the course too long so he joined the Congregational Church. *The Dunstan Times* of December 3rd, 1897, said: "We hear that it is probable that David McKee Wright, a well-known contributor to the press and of considerable literary talent, may be located in the district as assistant to the Rev. Mr. John Lothian for the summer." For the Presbyterians he preached for a few months in Alexandra and Clyde, Central Otago. On March 20th, 1898, in the Presbyterian Church, Alexandra, he gave an address in commemoration of the Jubilee of the Otago Presbyterian Church. He also wrote a Jubilee Hymn for the occasion. The pastorate of the Emmanuel Church, Oamaru, through the resignation of the Rev. E. Eldridge, had been vacant for sometime, so in April of the same year he was appointed temporarily to take charge of it; but because of the continued drift of residents to other districts the church suffered. Although he laboured faithfully his attempt to re-establish it failed. Toward the end of 1899 the church was closed. He resigned. Later he was asked to take charge of the church in Newtown, Wellington. In the meantime his friendship with Andrew Fraser, a bookseller in Oamaru, enabled him to publish his next work, *Wisps of Tussock*. This was in 1900. There is evidence that in May of the same year he was at the Newtown Congregational Church, South Wellington, where he occupied the pulpit under the superintendency of the Rev. Reed Glasson until the following February. While he was stationed in Wellington he published *New Zealand Chimes*. It was issued by W. J. Langshear as a Christmas booklet and had a ready sale. Some copies were printed on large paper and were signed by the author. It contained the well-known poem *Wellington*. In April, 1901, he was in Nelson, but his ministry began officially in May. At the 1905 Annual Meeting held in Christchurch of the Congregational Union of New Zealand he recommended State Control in the Liquor Trade. His motion was lost by 28 votes to 8. Forty years ago a minister of religion who advocated State Control or No License was bound to become unpopular with his parishioners. Nor did association with publicans and sinners help him; indeed his position became intolerable. Retiring from the Nelson Church in June, 1905, he devoted himself to literary work. Like other gifted writers, he became a journalist, editing his own weekly, *Te Rauparaha*, to which he gave the alternative title *The Nelson Times*. It had a useful but brief existence. That he loved Nelson is shown by the fact that it inspired one of his finest poems. As a pen-picture of the city it is unsurpassed.

In 1908 he was on the staff of the *New Zealand Mail*, an old-established Wellington weekly journal then in the last year of its existence. It had long been published by the "New Zealand Times" Company, but at the end was owned by the firm of Wardell & Rayner. He contributed several articles and poems to it.

Anxious to find a wider field for his versatile pen he returned in 1910 to Australia where, after a short battle as a free lance, he joined the *Sydney Bulletin*. He afterwards succeeded Arthur H. Adams as editor of the *Red Page*. His contributions are still remembered. They will bear reading again as some of his best work was done in prose. Before joining the



*Bulletin* he wrote leading articles for the *Sydney Sun* and, with Ernest McCulloch ("O. C. Cabot") and Harold Mercer, did most of the same paper's "Moving Picture Show." But it was into the *Bulletin* that he put all his talent.

Always a student, he delved deeply into early Irish folk-lore and brought out in 1918, *An Irish Heart*, a collection of simple, sensuous, and sweet poems which show him at the height of his creative power. He wrote many short plays on Irish themes, as well as several short stories. He was represented by a play (in prose) in the *Australian Soldiers' Gift Book*, 1918, and he gained fame as a critic for his able prefaces to Henry Lawson's *Selected Poems*, 1918, and *Poetical Works*, 1925. An unusual contribution he wrote for the *Bulletin* was fifteen interlocked sonnets, in the form known as the Sonnet Crown. They are a notable achievement. He won many prizes for poems, among which were the Australian Women's National Prize for a poem \* in commemoration of the visit of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, 1920, and the Rupert Brooke Memorial Prize in the same year, with a long poem, *Callipoli*.

His interests were wide. He was a collector of coins, china, gems and stamps, but his main joy, apart from writing, was gardening. He loved flowers and took pride in growing roses. These exhibited successfully in shows. Unlike most poets he was practical. Two years before his death he built his own house. He died suddenly at his home in the Blue Mountains, near Glenbrook, New South Wales, on the 5th of February, 1928, and was buried in the Church of England Cemetery at Emu Plains.

Although he is dead, his work lives. With the passing of the years he will reach that place which is his right in Australian and New Zealand literature. Some critics have said that, because David McKee Wright was nearly contemporary with Brunton Stephens and contemporary with Paterson and Lawson, he was an imitator of their work. But that is not true. What they did so excellently for Australia he did admirably for New Zealand. He has brought back for our pleasure the life of the camps and shearing-sheds. He has made captive in his song the spirit of those pioneer days when men and manners both were free. He has written of the tussock-country when poisoning and trapping rabbits for the skins was the occupation of many. He has felt the glow of the camp-fire on his face, and heard the rude talk of rough men. He has seen the tuis in the kowhai trees, the swift-flowing streams, alive with trout, and the lonely grandeur of our mountain glens. The beauty of the New Zealand bush and countryside in all its moods lives in these pages: in short the essence of McKee Wright is that he is a poet with something to say, something that tells the history of his time, too.

His poetry, which is full of homely sentiment, appeals both to the heart and to the head. He wrote songs in a day when poetry such as his readily found an audience. As I write, I can see clearly in my mind a motley group of station hands round a camp-fire listening spellbound to someone reciting

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\* This poem, a sonnet, was the first Australian poem to be cabled home to papers in London.

his racy verse. Now and again the atmosphere is broken by the raucous laughter of the men. New Zealand is enjoying the work of her outdoor laureate.

For those who wish to discover the real man, I say: Read first of all his poems. You will find him there. But there are some characteristics of him that cannot be found in his writings; for instance, his kindness to other writers. He was more than a spirit which spurred them on the road to success: his pen was always at their service. Often, as it worked, a halting line in some contributor's otherwise excellent poem was enriched by its friendly touch. Many a poem, because of such an act as this, soon went into print. His poetic sense could easily detect flaws in a writer's work. He was a born critic, with a mind intensely alive to the magic of words. Small wonder, then, that he became literary judge for the *Sydney Bulletin*. A kindlier man of letters did not live.

His was a gentle soul which learnt in suffering what it taught in song. In a foreword to Henry Lawson's *Poetical Works* he wrote: "Little things will be dragged from their hiding, big things warped from their setting, and made to subserve the meaner issue of some controversy about his doings and his ways. To this the memory of all great men is subject; too often the prophet's ragged robe is more interesting to slight minds than the message he spoke. But Lawson will outlive it all." And so will David McKee Wright.

Before I conclude this essay, I must answer the people who have asked me for the names of the writers who most influenced his style. The first literary influence on his life and thought was the *Bible*. He read, as a child, *Robinson Crusoe* and, according to his own words, "once knew whole pages by heart." Sir Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* he discovered during an illness in childhood. He found Shakespeare when he was about fifteen, and *Macbeth* was his favourite play.

His reading among the English poets was extensive, ranging from Chaucer to Rossetti. He read widely in other fields, too, and has recorded his debt to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In New Zealand he re-discovered Tennyson, coming greatly under his spell, though, as he says, "his magic yielded at last to the stronger wizardry of Keats." His two favourite authors were Milton and Keats. Kipling, Masfield, Newbolt and Henry Lawson considerably influenced him, though in his latter years he came more and more under the spell of Yeats and others of the Irish School. With books he was careful and disliked any markings on them.

I have appended a short glossary, which I trust will help the reader to understand some of the words which McKee Wright used.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am grateful to the General Assembly Library, the Hocken Library, Dunedin, and especially to the Alexander Turnbull Library, for placing at my disposal their editions of McKee Wright's work. I realise the debt owed by me, as by most students of our literature, to that valuable work, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, edited by Dr. Guy H. Scholefield. For assistance given in various ways I am indebted to Miss Ida E. Leeson, Librarian of the Mitchell Library, Sydney; Zora Cross, Sydney; Miss Jessie McIver, of Highfield, Timaru; Mr. Harry Atmore, M.P. for Nelson; the Very Rev. Professor J. C. Collie; Mr. A. M. Lewis, late Wellington District Secretary of the Congregational Union of New Zealand; Mr. Tom L. Mills, and Mr. John A. Lee. To these and to any friend whose name I have by mischance omitted, I tender my thanks.

I find it difficult to express adequately my gratitude to Mrs. Elizabeth McKee Wright, widow of the poet. She, with the assistance of her friend, Miss Olava England, was always ready to supply the answers to my questions concerning her husband and his work. Without her co-operation and goodwill this book could not have appeared.

ROBERT SOLWAY

*Wellington, November 28, 1944*

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## Dedication

*Sweetheart, sweetheart, this wreath of song for you:  
Wisps of mountain tussock and ferns washed in dew—  
Neither rich camelia nor sweet garden rose,  
But plain things that blossom best where God's wind blows.  
Mine are the mountains, mine the yellow plain,  
Mine are my brothers toiling with the wool and grain,  
Mine the dancing sunshine and the long breaker's roll,  
Mine the winter, creeping from the lands of the pole,  
Mine the toil and laughter of the days that are no more,  
And mine the golden promise that the years have in store;  
But of all I know and love in the lands of the sea,  
Of all that I have sung in the isles of the free,  
    There's nothing half so sweet,  
    Though the world were at my feet,  
As the one dear thought that YOU LOVE ME.*



## THE OLD STATION DAYS

They tell me that Harry's up-country, at work on the station again,  
Where the sun still remembers to shine, and the mornings are crisp on the  
plain.

There's a dull, heavy sky overhead, and I look through the smoke to the bay,  
Where a corner of water is framed by the houses and roofs in the way.  
The lexicon frowns on my left, and the grammar has taken to sneer,  
When I let my thoughts wander away to the places that Harry is near.  
They haven't got classical names—"Goat Creek" and "Jocks' Gully"  
and all—

And the old chimneys dotting the flat, undermined by the rats for a fall.  
But I think of the days when a tent made a home here and there in the  
scrub—

A little world all of our own—eight miles from a church or a "pub."  
And the men—oh, the men that were there!—big hearts and strong hands,  
that we knew:

Heathens all, but they somehow did things that would honour a Christian  
to do.

The summers of heat and of wind, and the changes that made the long day,  
The dew in the early dawn, on the river flats misty and grey,  
The cobwebs, like trappings of pearl, that jewelled the scrub-bushes over,  
The toi-toi that slept by the stream, and the hoggets down-stringing through  
clover,

The crack of a whip on the hills that told of a mustering morn,  
And the settlement far on the plain, with the green of its paddocks of corn:  
It all comes back to me now, like a dream of an older time—

A break in the stream of life that belonged to the old world's prime.

For the waves of progress rolled around like a swelling sea,  
And we lived the hunter life of the days when the world was free.

The throb of the great world's heart we felt to be far away  
As we watched the deeds of the world like men and nations at play.

Those days are gone and forever, and over all is a change—

New methods, new manners, new men, in hut and on mountain range;

But the chimneys dotting the flat will tell their story for long.

Of a life that was fresh and fair, and of men that were true and strong.



## IN THE COACH

The mails are on, and the luggage stowed, and the passengers climb on board,  
And the coach is away on the long, straight road that leads to Patterson's  
ford.

There are three on the box, and two inside, and the houses are flying by,  
And all is sunshine and hazy light under the speckless sky;  
The road is as hard as an asphalt track, and as smooth as a bowling-green,  
And away in the west are the snowy heights, with the rolling hills between.

It's westward, westward, westward many a mile,  
Over the tussocky flat, and down  
By overgrown station and little dull town,

The coach goes swinging along in style—  
Horses the pride of the mountain land,  
A champion whip with the ribbons in hand;  
Life is a jest and the world a smile  
While we're rolling westward mile by mile.

There's a girl inside with a weary eye, and a cheek the colour of tow:  
She lost the roses she used to wear down in the town below.  
She's going away to a station home by the side of the Lawson Creek,  
And she'll laugh, and talk, and sleep, and eat before she's there a week;  
For the coach is raising the rolling dust, as hot as Sahara sand,  
And the ford is wide, and the steep hill-track is the gate of the western land.

It's onward, onward, onward and westward still,  
By the ferny gully and hanging cliff,  
Where the turns are short, and the climbing stiff,

And the horses pull and sweat with a will—  
Horses the pride of the western land,  
A champion whip with the ribbons in hand;  
Life is a jest from the top of the hill,  
For the brakes are on, and it's westward still.

There's a man on the box on the road for home, come back from across the  
sea,

He draws the scent of the tussocks in, and it sets him talking free;  
He's been among hot Coolgardie sand, and he's been in the Sydney street,  
But he swears by the land of the mountains yet, and says it can't be beat;  
He looks away to the mountain peaks, and the ragged line of the sky,  
And down at the foot is the only home where he'd care to live and die.  
For it's westward, westward, westward many a mile,

Over the tussocky flat, and down  
By overgrown station, and dull little town,

The coach goes swinging along in style—  
Horses the pride of the mountain land,  
A champion whip with the ribbons in hand;  
Life is a jest and the world a smile  
While we're rolling westward mile by mile.

## MARY

Flash Jim Taylor from the Blackburn Creek  
Came to the station on Sunday week,  
I saw him ride by the stockyard gate,  
And I said, "Old man, you come too late—  
Come too late for Mary."

Oh, Mary, with the flush of the rose on her cheek,  
Went riding with me on Sunday week,  
The glint of the gold was bright on her hair.  
I said, "Old man, you needn't care—  
Care for me and Mary;  
And it's best to know that your own cake's dough,  
Your potato's cooked with Mary."

When first she came to Barravale the summer skies were blue,  
The critics of the station hut pronounced the girl would do,  
And in the evenings after hours they used to hang about  
To get a yarn with Mary, or a chance to take her out;  
And Tom had on a smarter tie, and Bill a smarter grin,  
And I myself among the rest shaved clean and went to win.  
It was Mary, pretty Mary, I love you, can't you see?  
And Mary, Mary, Mary, won't you smile on me?

She smiled on Bill, she smiled on Tom, she smiled on me as well;  
And in the dance at Blackburn Creek they made our Mary belle;  
She laughed so light, she danced so well, she looked so blooming sweet,  
I'd have rolled along the gutter for a carpet for her feet.  
She danced with Bill, she danced with Tom, and half-a-dozen more,  
And she took me straight to heaven as we skimmed along the floor.  
It was Mary, pretty Mary, I love you, can't you see?  
And Mary, Mary, Mary, won't you smile on me?

The beauties of the Blackburn Creek were getting mad with spite,  
For flash Jim Taylor hung around our Mary all the night,  
And Jim has got a fairish farm, and stuff his father saved,  
So Blackburn thought it scandalous the way that he behaved.  
She smiled on Jim till Bill got mad, and Tom in whispers swore,  
And, "Can't she flirt?" said every miss that whisked along the floor.  
It was Mary, pretty Mary, I love you, can't you see?  
And Mary, Mary, Mary, won't you smile on me?

Inside the gate a biggish tree hangs right across the walk  
Where Mary came along with me to have a parting talk.  
I had my arm about her waist, her breath was on my face  
(It's mostly quickest legs that win in any sort of race)—  
The other chaps had gone to bed, and we were all alone—  
I took my Mary in my arms, and claimed her for my own.  
    It was Mary, pretty Mary, I love you, can't you see?  
    And Mary, Mary, Mary, won't you smile on me?

Flash Jim Taylor from Blackburn Creek  
Came to the station on Sunday week,  
I saw him ride by the stockyard gate,  
And I said, "Old man, you come too late—  
    Come too late for Mary."  
Oh, Mary, with the flush of the rose on her cheek,  
Went riding with me on Sunday week,  
The glint of the gold was bright on her hair.  
I said, "Old man, you needn't care—  
    Care for me and Mary;  
And it's best to know that your own cake's dough,  
    Your potato's cooked with Mary."



## SUMMER IN CENTRAL OTAGO

Warm summer sleeps around me, droning bees  
Suck the dry flowers, and not a whispering breeze  
Moves in the languid, dusty poplar trees.

Hoarsely the river murmurs on its way  
Between hot banks of shingle; far away  
The rugged mountain sides are hazy grey.

There is a listlessness in all around;  
Low voices speak with slumber in the sound;  
The dry fruit falls unripened to the ground.

No waggon o'er the dust-white road comes down;  
There is no stir within the sleepy town;  
No sign of life; the plain is still and brown.

About the wall the passion-flower twines,  
And, bending in and out the trellis lines,  
In dusty greenness sleep the leafy vines.

And this is Dunstan—this the golden land,  
Where came the earliest of the digger band,  
Winning a treasure from the river sand.

Times change. The tumult of those days of old  
Grows but the memory of a story told  
By some hoar patriarch of the age of gold.



## AMELIA JANE

In the lands away beyond the sea, where Khan and Sultan rule,  
Where they drink their coffee thick and black, and sip the sherbert cool,  
They have white Circassian girls for slaves, as well as the nigger black;  
And it seems to me in our own free land that slavery's coming back:  
It's fenced about with custom and law, and they give it a prettier name.  
But, spite of the paltry wage that's paid, it's slavery all the same.

In a handsome home, in stately town, is worthy Mrs. MacFee,  
Chairwoman known of a Christian guild, for a noble dame is she:  
Her doors are open to strangers all, who call and leave their card;  
But Amelia Jane, who left last week, declares the place was hard.  
Surely Amelia Jane was wrong: she should have been happy to stay,  
For she's only hanging around the town looking for work to-day.

Such a good woman is Mrs. MacFee, toiling with voice and hand,  
In the cause of the poor little Indian girls away in a distant land;  
Such a good woman is Mrs. MacFee, for hers is an open door,  
And her name's at the top of the charity list for the wives of the drunken  
poor.

But Amelia Jane has a hungry look, with hollows under the eyes:  
She says she was starved, but everyone knows that Amelia Jane tells lies.

Such a good woman is Mrs. MacFee, she has family prayers at night,  
And she loves, she says, to make the lives of her poorer sisters bright.  
Amelia Jane has a hardened heart: she talks of her weary feet,  
And says that, in spite of all the prayers, she had never enough to eat.  
It was hard to join in the chorused words of "Give us our daily bread,"  
And, after washing the dishes up, to stagger hungry to bed.

Once in the week Amelia Jane got out for an hour or two,  
Once in a fortnight went to church with another slave she knew.  
She never had time to read a book, and the changeless mill went round,  
And nobody knew how she ached at night while body and soul were ground.  
But these are the lies of Amelia Jane, and it's wrong to set them down,  
For everyone knows that Mrs. MacFee is the kindest woman in town.

Silly and light is Amelia Jane: she has no ideas of her own;  
You never would think her the bright little girl that you once on a time had  
known.  
She was clever enough when she went to school; she was pretty enough in  
her way;  
She hasn't improved, her schoolmates think, when they met her in town to-day:  
And it's all her fault, for, whatever the cause, I am sure that Mrs. MacFee  
Is a model mistress in every way, and with that you will all agree.

In the lands away beyond the sea, where Khan and Sultan rule,  
Where they drink their coffee thick and black, and sip the sherbert cool,  
They have white Circassian girls for slaves, as well as the nigger black;  
And it seems to me in our own free land that slavery's coming back:  
It's fenced about with custom and law, and they give it a prettier name,  
But, spite of the paltry wage that's paid, it's slavery all the same.

## IN TOWN

We came from the hills where the hot winds blow  
And the yellow tussocks wave,  
From the long, bright plain where the titris grow,  
From the land of the sun, and the frost, and snow,  
Where the hearts are strong and brave.

We had kept the lines in the winter time  
On the wing of the poisoning gang.  
From rock to rock in the mountain climb,  
When the frosts were keen and the air like wine,  
And the shingle faces rang.

When the speargrass fire was burning bright,  
We had sat in the magic ring—  
When the knives were swift and the hearts were light,  
With a thousand skins to clean at night.  
And one had a song to sing.

We're in town, and we met in the noisy street,  
And the old strong days came back—  
The wind in the tussocks waving sweet,  
The mountain ridge, and the plain at our feet,  
And the winding rocky track.

The bustling town, with its pink and green,  
And its hoardings of red and blue,  
To our open eyes was poor and mean  
As we thought of the long, bright days that had been  
In the old fair world we knew.

The church spires climb to the dreary sky,  
And the bells ring peace from Heaven;  
But the joy of God's rich fields that lie  
Wide to the winds and the wild bird's cry  
May never again be given.

Yet here in the clasp of a friendly hand  
That wrought with me side by side,  
I feel the thrill of the mountain land,  
The life of toil that was strong and grand,  
Old Memory's rich flood tide.



## THE PROSPECTOR

He was working like a nigger, sinking duffers here and there,  
And sticking up his tucker at the store;  
And for long the joker stood him, but at last he told him fair  
That he couldn't give him credit any more.

He was young and smart to look at, but his clothes were pretty tough,  
And he used to wait for letters by the mail;  
That was all we knew about him, but the gossips had enough  
To furnish out a good three-volume tale.

He had a little tucker, and he lingered on on that:  
He deserved to strike it rich for all his pluck.  
In among the heavy boulders, where the terrace met the flat,  
At last he thought he saw a turn of luck.

Then he followed up the glimmers, late and early, wet and dry,  
But it somehow didn't pan out as he thought:  
They're the makings of the diggings—blokes like him that try and try,  
Though they haven't always got the luck they ought.

The days were getting coldish, but he battled bravely on,  
Ever looking for his letters by the mail;  
He was getting wild and haggard, but his blue eyes always shone  
With a sort of pluck that doesn't know to fail.

Bill and I were making little, and the chap was proud and shy,  
And we couldn't give him any sort of lift;  
But I said, "The joker's starving." Says the storeman, "Let him die,  
If he hasn't sense enough to make a shift."

Then the winter came a buster, with its wind and drifting snow,  
And we didn't see him passing for a spell;  
And the storeman laughed, "I told you he was pretty sure to go,  
And I reckon that it's just about as well."

But he changed his way of talking before all was said and done,  
For on Sunday, Bill and I went up the race,  
And we found a dead man lying, staring blank against the sun:  
It was terrible to look upon his face.

We told them at the township, and the story flew around,  
Swelled by telling till a nine-days' wonder grew,  
And everyone was ready to have helped him with a pound;  
But it mattered little then what they would do.



They laid him in the graveyard up upon the bleak hillside,  
With never cross or stone to mark his rest;  
And the yarn is not forgotten how he battled and he died—  
He'll be as well remembered as the best.

And the friend that never wrote him? Well, at last we found her name;  
He had starved and toiled and perished for her sake—  
His wife—his children's mother—had sold herself to shame  
Ere the day his own big heart began to break.

And perhaps—ah! who shall judge her?—in the gay and crowded street  
It is harder for the lonely and the poor;  
And perhaps she did but sell her soul for bread enough to eat  
When the heart of love was feeble to endure.

It was strange how it all happened: someone went to where he died,  
And bottomed the old shaft he had begun.  
There was gold to pay for working in the first dish that they tried—  
He had fallen when the bitter fight was won.

And still they tell the story—it has ripened well with years—  
And show his grave upon the bleak hillside.  
It is but an idle wonder, yet I think that angel tears  
Must have fallen fast around him when he died.

## IN THE OLD MAN'S HOME

*Sitting out on a bench in the sun,  
Three old men whose work is done,  
Dreaming of dreams that have passed away  
And the hopes of a buried yesterday.*

They came at first from distant lands, and strong life beat in every vein,  
And golden hopes lay on before within the islands of the main.  
When Ballarat was in its prime, and Bendigo was thronged with men,  
And ships were idle in the bay, with none to take them home again,  
Their arms were strong, their eyes were bright, and all the world was at their feet;  
And now they're in the Old Man's Home—dead beat.

There's one that struck on gold enough to lift him far from any need;  
There's one that heard the pistol speak, and saw the grim bushranger bleed;  
And one had been to far-off wilds with stock, where none had been before,  
And lingered in the painful heat until the deadly drought was o'er.  
They slung the stockwhip or the pick, and all the world was at their feet;  
And now they're in the Old Man's Home—dead beat.

When first Otago's valleys woke to greater wealth than sheep or grain,  
And creek and gully showed at last a promise of their golden gain,  
They joined the hardy digger band that faced the mountains and the snow,  
And gave their manhood to the land where tussocks wave and breezes blow.  
They climbed the hills where none had been, and saw new realms about their feet;  
And now they're in the Old Man's Home—dead beat.

They saw the town of tents spring up and melt away to other ground—  
No height or torrent stayed their steps to rushes where new gold was found;  
They saw the dance-room throng at night, when men and manners both were free;  
And still they weren't far behind when all their mates were on the spree.  
They did as others used to do, and drank while they could keep their feet;  
And now they're in the Old Man's Home—dead beat.

The spirit of the country changed; they drifted, drifted slowly down,  
And life grew harder as they saw the growth of settlement and town;  
And working here and tramping there, they fought the battle to the end,  
Until the hair was grey enough, and the strong back began to bend;  
And, as the evening darkened down, they had to turn their weary feet  
To the last refuge of the poor—dead beat.

*Sitting out on a bench in the sun,  
Three old men whose work is done,  
Dreaming of dreams that have passed away  
And the hopes of a buried yesterday.*

## THE HARD CASE

He was big, and as rough as they make them, and shabby and dirty as well,  
And his boots, that were odd ones and bu'sted, had tales of old battles to  
tell.

He bailed me up straight for a shilling with a yarn that I knew was a lie;  
But I thought of old places and faces, and I couldn't refuse and go by.

I thought of old tramps in the summer to stations far out at the back,  
When I met with the hardest of cases that live on the wallaby track—  
Men, like him, full of tricks and devices, who knew their way round pretty  
fair:

All light-hearted fools, who had nothing—not even a trouble or care.

Where the long line of hedges were blooming, or cracking their dry summer  
pods,

Or out where wide sheep runs were bounded by still wider runs that were  
God's,

Where the station trees rose in the distance, a haven of rest for the night,  
And the sunset was painting the mountains with splendour of colour and  
light.

Out there in the loneliest places I met with the waifs and the strays,  
And found them not always the worst underneath the strange mask of their  
ways;

And the wonderful tales that they told of the world that had left them behind  
Rise up with strange shadows and lights when the men have passed far out  
of mind.

And so when he asked for a shilling, with a yarn that I knew was a lie,  
I thought of old places and faces, and I couldn't refuse and go by,  
For the strange gipsy fancy came on me—I longed for the mountain and  
plain;

My passport the drum of the whaler, and the old savage freedom again.



## PUKETOI

Farewell, old hills of golden grey!  
Farewell, old plain, burnt brown and sere!  
The greetings of the glad New Year  
I send you back from far away.

About me now the people throng  
Beneath a sad and weeping sky;  
I watch the stream of life go by,  
And hear its pulses beating strong.

And while I hear, my fancies go  
Away to where the skies are blue,  
With clear lark-voices falling through,  
While silence listens far below.

The old white whare standing clear,  
The old friends gathered in its shade,  
The warmth of friendship's light that played  
About my steps for many a year.

I know the fever and the fret  
Of reaching out to something more:  
A glory leading on before  
That ever grows and is not yet.

But somewhere in my heart I feel  
A longing for the days we knew—  
The friends so kind, the friends so true—  
Calm joys the future cannot steal.

And so, farewell! Old comrades part,  
Old joys give slowly place to new;  
It seems as if each tussock grew  
From roots deep planted in my heart.

When David McKee Wright was working as a rabbitier and rouse-about on Puketoi Station in 1895, he made an unusual but notable discovery. According to Robert Gilkison's *Early Days in Central Otago* he found "a Maori woman's complete kit or flax bag, containing bundles of tomemtum stripped from the back of the large Alpine *Celmisia* and ready to be worked into a large handsome cloak for a chief. Other articles in the kit were a pawa shell full of red paint, pieces of dogskin (one cut into strips for a chief's mat), some dyed flax, packets of sweet smelling leaves, small bags, tapa cloth of ribbonwood bark, sandals and other interesting material."



## IN THE MOONLIGHT

The moon is bright, and the winds are laid, and the river is roaring by;  
Orion swings, with his belted lights low down in the western sky;  
North and south from the mountain gorge to the heart of the silver plain  
There's many an eye will see no sleep till the east grows bright again;  
There's many a hand will toil to-night, from the centre down to the sea;  
And I'm far from the men I used to know—and my love is far from me.

Where the broad flood eddies the dredge is moored to the beach of shingle  
white,  
And the straining cable whips the stream in a spray of silver light;  
The groaning buckets bear their load, and the engine throbs away,  
And the wash pours red on the turning screen that knows not night or day;  
For there's many an ounce of gold to save, from the gorge to the shining sea—  
And there's many a league of the bare brown hills between my love and me.

Where the lines of gorse are parched and dry, and the sheaves are small and  
thin,  
The engine beats and the combine sings to the drays that are leading in,  
For they're thrashing out of the stook to-night, and the plain is as bright as  
day,  
And the fork-tines flash as the sheaves are turned on the frame of the one-  
horse dray;  
For many a hand will toil to-night, from the mountains down to the sea;  
But I'm far from the lips of the girl I love, and the heart that beats for me.

The trappers are out on the hills to-night, and the sickly lantern-shine  
Is mocking the gleam of the silver moon in the scrub on the long trap-line;  
The tallies are big on the rock-strewn spur, and the rattling clink of the chain  
Comes wierdly mixed from the moon-bright hill with the whistling shriek of  
pain;  
For many a hand will toil to-night where the tussocks are waving free;  
But it's over the hills and over the plain to the heart that beats for me.

The stars are bright, and the night is still, and the river is singing by,  
And many a face is upward turned to gaze at the moon's bright eye.  
North and south, from the forest deeps to the heart of the silver plain,  
There's many an eye will see no sleep till the east grows bright again;  
There's many a hand will toil to-night by shining land and sea.  
O moonlight, bear my message of love to the heart that beats for me.

## WELLINGTON

Rugged she stands, no garlands of bright flowers  
Bind her swart brows, no pleasant forest shades  
Mantle with twining branches her high hills,  
No leaping brooks fall singing to her sea.  
Hers are no meadows green, nor ordered parks;  
Not hers the gladness nor the light of song,  
Nor cares she for my singing.

Rudely scarred

Her guardian hills encircle her pent streets,  
Loud with the voices and the steps of trade;  
And in her bay the ships of east and west  
Meet and cast anchor.

Hers the pride of place

In shop and mart, no languid beauty she  
Spreading her soft limbs amid dreaming flowers,  
But rough and strenuous, red with rudest health,  
Tossing her blown hair from her eager eyes  
That look afar, filled with the gleam of power,  
She stands the strong queen city of the south.

The version here given of this well known poem accords with the text as it was originally published. Alexander and Currie in *New Zealand Verse* (Walter Scott Ltd., 1906) printed it with one alteration. In the fifteenth line 'amid' became 'among'. The poem appears on the door of a tram in Wellington.

## NELSON

Blue foamy sea, high circling hills,  
With dreaming garden squares between,  
An old-world fragrance breathing soft  
Amid the waving green.

Here trade's loud wheels but slowly turn,  
Here men may pause and joy to live,  
And take the seasons as they change  
With all they have to give.

Here there is room to breathe and think,  
Here there is space for souls to grow,  
And life may run as pleasantly  
As Maitai's waters flow.



## THE RABBITER

You say that killing rabbits is not a manly game;  
It's honest work, it seems to me—there's little in a name.  
Your hands are whiter far than mine, your clothes are better too,  
In the store, behind the counter, is the place for chaps like you.  
But as sure as summer's coming and nor-wester winds will blow,  
The people working in the towns have something still to know.

To measure yards of calico may be a noble thing—  
I'd rather face the mountain side and hear the skylark sing.  
If tailors' shops are far away it's little odds to me,  
When blood and fur are flying round you can't lick dungaree.  
It isn't heavy boots that make a fellow mean and low—  
The people working in the towns have plenty still to know.

If you could come along with me some morning when I start,  
You'd feel the brightness of the air go stealing to your heart;  
You'd reckon you were twice the man, and be so too perhaps,  
While dew beads hang on all the grass along the line of traps.  
You'd tell your mates when you went home that work in town was slow—  
There's something up the country that some other fellows know.

There's pleasure working in the sun and frost and wind and rain,  
There's glory on the mountain top and on the shining plain,  
There's fragrance in the spear-grass fire, there's music in the creek,  
And duff on Sunday at the hut that's eaten once a week;  
Good healthy work for simple men, an honest wage to earn—  
The people living down below have something still to learn.

And you who say that rabbiting is not a manly game—  
There's better men than you and I who do it all the same.  
The fishermen on Galilee were pretty lowly chaps  
(There isn't such a mighty odds in fishing nets and traps);  
The Pharisees were better dressed and did the talk and blow,  
But there was something after all they didn't get to know.

So you can do the talk and sneer—"a dirty savage life"—  
There's clean-lived chaps among the men who wield the rabbit knife;  
It isn't sun and mountain air that lead to sin and crime,  
There's blackness in the city night, but not in morning rime;  
And if you take them as a class the rabbiters will show  
There's better feeling on the hills than in the town below.



## THE DUFF (A TRAGEDY)

It was on a Sunday morning, the church was far away,  
They used to keep the Sabbath in their own up-country way—  
They washed their clothes and darned their socks and smoked a lot all day.  
Says Jack M'Kay to Billy Barnes: "Look here, old mate," says he,  
"I'll cook the spuds and roast the meat and make a drink of tea,  
And you can build a duff!"  
"All right, old mate," says he,  
"And good enough."

It was a warmish kind of day, the fire was brightish too;  
He minced the suet very fine and shoved the currants through  
According to a recipe that told him what to do.  
Says Billy Barnes to Jack M'Kay: "Look here, old mate," says he,  
"This'll be something like a feed, and you can trust to me  
For something like a duff!"  
"All right, old mate," says he,  
"And good enough."

The spuds and meat were nicely done, the billy tea was made,  
With plates and bright tin pannikins the whisky-case was laid—  
They should have left that duff alone to them that's learned their trade.  
Says Jack M'Kay to Billy Barnes: "Look here, old mate," says he,  
"That pot's been boiling long enough, just hook him off and see  
How goes the blooming duff!"  
"All right, old mate," says he,  
"And good enough."

They got the pot hooked off the fire, they looked with curious eyes  
As from the vessel's sooty rim they saw the monster rise—  
Whatever else was wrong with it they must respect its size.  
Says Billy Barnes to Jack M'Kay: "Look here, old mate," says he,  
"It's pretty heavy on my arm, but just you wait and see—  
It's me can build a duff!"  
"All right, old mate," says he,  
"And good enough."

They cut the string that bound the cloth and let the wonder go;  
It didn't jump about like mad, nor yet begin to flow,  
As other duffs are known to do, but just lay smiling low.  
Says Jack M'Kay to Billy Barnes: "Look here, old mate," says he,  
"It looks about as rum a thing as ever yet I see;  
Still—I suppose it's duff!"  
"You bet, old mate," says he,  
"And good enough."

They let it stand a little while and tackled on the meat,  
With just a stray look now and then to see it kept its seat—  
They both were half afraid of it, but neither would be beat.  
Says Jack M'Kay to Billy Barnes: "Look here, old mate," says he,  
"Let's cut the rummy thing in half and tackle some and see  
If it is blooming duff."  
"All right, old mate," says he,  
"And good enough."

It tasted something like a stew of sweepings of a store—  
Tobacco, nutmeg, candles, glue, and flavourings galore—  
So wonderful a kind of taste was never known before!  
Says Jack M'Kay to Billy Barnes: "Look here, old mate," says he,  
"The flavour of this blooming thing can't well be drowned in tea—  
Let's leave the blooming duff!"  
"All right, old mate," says he,  
"And good enough."

That evening from the lonely pub the two mates started back,  
The creeks were roaring pretty high along the barren track,  
They'd had a lot of whisky hot, the night was pretty black!  
Says Billy Barnes to Jack M'Kay: "Look here, old mate," says he,  
"The creek and river's up a bit and hanged if I can see—  
It's all that blooming duff."  
"Hold up, old mate," says he,  
"You're right enough."

They reached the river rolling wide, they had to wade the stream,  
And spite of all the whisky it was colder than ice cream;  
And Bill was thinking as he went the duff would make him dream.  
Says Jack M'Kay to Billy Barnes: "Look here, old mate," says he,  
"I'm sinking in a blooming hole, you'd best let go of me—  
It's all that cursed duff!"  
"I'm sinking too," says he,  
"And fast enough."

## THE SWAGGER

The winter ain't been bad as yet, though frost was pretty keen,  
But there's one thing that I'll tell you, mate, *the country's getting mean!*  
The price of wool is lookin' up, the harvest ain't been bad,  
But for them that's on the wallaby there's little to be had.  
The country's lookin' not so bad, the prospect's pretty fair,  
But for coves that's out of collar, mate, there's hunger in the air.

I mind the time when men was pinched and things was pretty blue  
For the mortgage-burdened station and the struggling cockatoo,  
But if work was hard of getting and a fellow had to tramp  
He was pretty sure of tucker and a decent place to camp.  
But it's when God's hand is open most with plenty and to spare  
That the swagger feels it roughish when there's hunger in the air.

It isn't fallin' wages that makes a fellow sick,  
We had our turn of fairish times, there ain't no cause to kick;  
And drink, that cursed the most of us, helped pay the country's way,  
But there's thousand's trampin' on the roads that do no work to-day.  
And when skies are grey above us it seems middlin' hard to bear  
The feelin' that the swagger has of hunger in the air.

A rabbit or digger cove will stand a chap a feed—  
The poor man helps the poorer best in any time of need—  
But cockatoos with decent homes and firesides warm and bright  
Will send a starving fellow-man to sleep outside at night.  
With stations mostly busted up that once was pretty fair  
It's little wonder there's a feel of hunger in the air.

I don't count much on parson-talk, I ain't an Army cove,  
And blest if I can understand *some people's* God of Love;  
They didn't used to go to church so much a few years back,  
And they hadn't such a derry on the bloke upon the track;  
They weren't mean and graspin' and they had a feed to spare,  
And fellows wasn't made to feel the hunger in the air.

I used to read the Bible once, and thought it pretty clear  
That Christ was on the wallaby that time that He was here;  
And when He looked around about some likely mates to choose  
He didn't pick on squatter swells or well-off cockatoos;  
And I used to sometimes fancy with their trampin' here and there,  
The Lord and His disciples felt the hunger in the air.

Well, there ain't much use in talking—I'd best hump my bluey on,  
There'll be goodish men and meanish men when we'll be dead and gone;  
I'd be happy as a skylark if I dropped across a job,  
And as for saving money—well, you know at fifteen bob,  
With clo'es and his tobacco, a chap won't have much to spare,  
But it's something that he'll miss awhile the hunger in the air!



## THE HAWKER'S CART

(*Affectionately dedicated to Crockery Bob*)

There is an institution that is called a hawker's van,  
That might have been a fairish cart the time when carts began,  
But, although its ancient body wears a coat of shiny white,  
It has got a list to starboard that would give a cove a fright;  
And its understanding's shaky, and its wheels are all askew,  
And its face is like its owner's, which is bashed and battered too;  
But, my blooming straight Colonial! there are two things in that cart  
That its owner carries also, and them things is *grit and heart*.

It's been moving round the country for a pretty fairish time  
Since it carried plates and dishes in its flush of youthful prime;  
It's had lots of neat capsizes and a heap of nasty jars,  
Like its owner it can battle, and it's often in the wars.  
It's been sailing on the river, it's been rolling down the hills,  
It has twice the lives of pussy, and can laugh at minor ills;  
But beneath its shiny cover there is hidden in that cart  
What its owner always carries—a good stout, Colonial heart.

There are coves about the country that can second what I say,—  
It's been known to help the swagger on his pretty hungry way;  
It's been known to clothe the carcass of a joker stony broke,  
It has even saved the weary *sole* of some bare-footed bloke.  
A good Samaritan upon the road's that smashed and battered van,  
I don't care where the second is, its driver is a *man*;  
And though it's old and shabby, and a played-out hawker's cart,  
To its honour it's recorded that the *fakement has a heart*.

There'll be jokers heavy-hearted when it takes its well-earned rest  
(Though its owner won't be sorry, I should say, to give it best),  
But around about the stations blokes will miss its cheery roll  
As it lurches round the corner with its spliced and twisted pole.  
Still this ain't the time for crying, for it's not laid up and yet,  
If it will be twenty years from now I wouldn't like to bet;  
But here's its monument in ink, and till it does depart  
Good luck be with the owner of that ancient hawker's cart!

## NOTE

When Robert McSkimming, of Patearoa (then known as "Crockery Bob," because of his sale of crockery, etc.), arrived at Puketoi Station with his hawker's van, he learned that the poet had announced his attention of writing no more verse on account of lack of subject matter. McSkimming felt that this would never do, so when McKee Wright later appeared he said to him:

"Surely you're not stuck for subjects, Davy. Why, rather than stop writing, make up something about me and my van here."

"The subject would be difficult," was the reply.

One morning later, when McSkimming was having breakfast, his attention was drawn to the poetry column in the *Otago Witness*. Then he saw that one of the poems was called *The Hawker's Van*, and respectfully dedicated to "Crockery Bob."

"I had asked for it," McSkimming said, "and I got it!" This was the first step on a road that eventually led to success.

McSkimming then suggested to McKee Wright that he should publish his poems in book form, but the poet confessed that he was too poor to pay the publishing expenses. So McSkimming gave a publisher a promissory note for three months and a letter to his banker in Naseby on the understanding that the edition would be at Patearoa on or before the annual race-meeting day. All went well and, on November 6th, 1897, half the edition was sold at once, the rest being completely disposed of within the month. So, thanks to Robert McSkimming, did *Station Ballads* find its way into the world.

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

There's a cove as writes about the things as happens up our way,  
A cove that's never stuck for gas, with always lots to say,  
A cove as keeps a boundary out somewhere at the back,  
A cove as knows to soap the boss—he'll never get the sack.  
If there's a fairish crop of lambs, he'll put the thing this way:—  
“ Most pleasing to relate,  
A vast percentage of increase was brought to light to-day  
On Mr. Scott's estate.”

There was a row at shearing time between the boss and men,  
Some shearer coves has thickish heads, and shows it now and then.  
Of course the fakement fizzled out, they had to knuckle down,  
They ain't the blokes to manage things the way they do in town.  
And this is how Tom fixed it up—he couldn't cut it fatter:—  
“ This year at Oakburn Plain  
A labour trouble has occurred, a most displeasing matter;  
Peace is restored again.”

There used to be a sort of dance as happened once a year,  
A kind of quiet station spree with just a drop of beer;  
The woolshed floor was polished up, the walls was hung with boughs,  
There used to be a fairish feed, and sometimes fairish rows.  
And this is what Tom made of it—Lord, how that bloke can write:—  
“ A most delightful ball  
Rich viands graced the groaning board and decorations bright  
Festooned the lofty wall.”

There was a joker died last year of too much whisky neat,  
He'd pulled through many a heavy spree, but in the end got beat;  
We knowed him pretty well; of course, we couldn't help but do,  
Still he was not the sort of bloke to make you proud you knew.  
But Tom was short of news that week, and fixed it up this way:—  
“ I grieve to have to state  
An old and honoured resident has lately passed away  
Through death's sepulchral gate.”



## THE BLOKE THAT RAN ACROSS A SNAG

They were big rough sheep on Maimai, fit to make a shearer's heart  
Settle down about his boot-tops on the morning of the start.  
Brice—the boss—was hard to shear for, we that knew him told the chaps,  
Though the ringer muttered, "Likely;" and Dick Mason sneered,  
"Perhaps!"

Then Dick winked at Billy Myers, chucked his thumb towards the boss,  
And the other joker sniggered, and then winked again across;  
So that some of us that knew them reckoned there were storms in store,  
And that something might get broken long before that shed was shore.

Mr. Brice ain't much to look at—narrow-chested, small, and spare,  
Eyes that don't seem much like fighting, freckled face and sandy hair.  
Dick said: "He's had coves to deal with that was frightened of a look,  
Reckon with a bit of bouncing we can work him like a book."  
Dick was something of a fighter—he had sparred with Billy King,  
And at Orakai last winter knocked Sam Smith about the ring.  
All the sports had got his measure, reckoned him a coming man;  
"Blokes," said he, "I'll give him shearing!" It was then the fun began.

Dick could shear if he was willing, pink 'em if he wanted to.  
But he wouldn't shear at Maimai, started in to rough them through.  
Brice looked at him—"Shear them better," that was all he had to say;  
Dick was eager for the racket, and he started it this way:—  
"What's the blooming use of talking!—ain't that sheep as good as most?  
Trimmings! What's the good of trimmings?

Mighty lot of wool you've lost!

Second cuts? Well, that ain't my fault, you've his wrinkled hide to thank;  
Who the h——I can shear them better?"—and the rest was blanky blank.

"That will do," said Brice, quite quiet; "close your shears and leave the  
shed."

Dick stopped swearing, took to sneering—"You don't mean it now!" he  
said.

"I came here to get a tally, not to knuckle down to you;  
You may take it how you fancy, but I mean to see them through;  
If you want more satisfaction you can take it from my hide."

"Very well," the other answered, soft as silk, "then come outside."

"What? A decent clout would kill you; I can't fight a weed like you."

"I'm afraid," Brice said, "you'll have to, no amount of talk will do."

So they went, and all the shed hands crowded to the open door,  
Half-shorn sheep were finished faster than was ever known before.  
All the yardmen heard the racket, and came running in a string,  
While we blokes rushed in around them, held their coats, and formed a ring.  
When the men were stripped and ready, somone said: "The thing's a shame;  
If he stands one round with Mason I'll give in he's true and game."  
And it didn't look too pleasant, though I knew the boss's strength,  
Dick had science, weight, and muscle, pluck, endurance, reach, and length.

Then says big M'Fee, the shepherd: " Dick, you'd better tackle me."  
Dick was savage—" Keep your coat on till I've done this bloke," says he.  
" Yes, you'd better wait," the boss says; " give us fair play, boys, awhile!"  
Then he put his freckled hands up, with an easy kind of smile.  
So they started in, or Dick did, Brice had work to dodge his blows;  
But he dodged them—how he done it not a bloke as seen it knows!  
And the other joker maddened when he couldn't touch his man,  
While we coves all laughed and shouted, and the barracking began.

So they sparred for full ten minutes, it was good enough to watch,  
Till Dick got a strong left-hander home that nearly fixed the match.  
Brice went down, but in a moment he was on his feet again,  
With his cheek all red and swollen and his lips drawn in with pain.  
And us chaps about the ring-side cheered him on for all we knew,  
Though we thought we had the measure of the best that he could do.  
But he rallied, and we wondered at the gameness that he showed;  
Dick was getting far too savage for the clever things he knowed.

He was hitting all at random as the other dodged about,  
When his mate sings out sarcastic, " Go in, Dick, and knock him out!"  
But he didn't, for such shouting as was never heard arose  
When Brice dashed, as quick as lightning, right and left on Mason's nose,  
Mason reeled, then tried to rush him; Brice ducked, dodged, and got away,  
Fainted quickly at his body, brought his right hand into play.  
Though the weight was small behind it, yet I'd take my dying oath  
You'd have thought a red-hot boulder landed on the big 'un's mouth!

Now the game had got exciting, such a show ain't every day;  
Both the men were breathing loudly, and the little one could stay.  
Things were getting rough for Mason; we were taken so with Brice  
I believe that if he'd asked us we'd have shore for half the price.  
But the other bloke was fagging with the running to and fro  
And the blows he hit at nothing, and his feet was getting slow,  
Till the boss just caught him napping, landed in upon his neck,  
And the scrapping-match was over—Dick was sleeping on his back!

With a bucketful of water soon we got him on his feet,  
And he looked a trifle sheepish, said: " I own I'm fairly beat."  
" You *can* fight, sir; it's a lesson not to blow what I can do  
When an amateurish light-weight takes me out and puts me through."  
Then Brice laughed, and said: " Come, Mason, you can shear as you can  
fight;  
Take the pen again, and welcome, knuckle down and do them right.  
You can shear them if you're willing; see, I read you like a book,  
But in future judge of people *anyhow but by their look.*"

Then we blokes all took our places, Mason wouldn't have a spell,  
Said his head would soon be better, but the sheep he shore looked well;  
And if any other joker seems inclined for bluff or brag  
Dick will tell the cove the story how he run across a snag.

## THE REMEDY

There's many blokes that goes at large that didn't ought to go,  
There's some that wants to have a nurse to lead 'em nice and slow,  
There's other blokes that know too much, and some that want a gag  
To put a kind of stopper on their everlasting mag.  
But there's a remedy at hand to make 'em pretty meek—  
Just dip 'em in the creek, chaps, dip 'em in the creek!

I've seen the lively kind of chap that knows to tell a yarn,  
He don't expect to be believed, and makes it nice and warm;  
I've known the weary kind of bloke that swore his pitch was true,  
And always gave you day and date for things in '62.  
And that's the kind of cove to take before he's time to squeak—  
Just dip him in the creek, chaps, dip him in the creek!

Then there's the other kind of bloke that always wants to fight,  
Who pulls his coat off to his mates a dozen times a night;  
And there's the everlasting growl, a blanket nice and damp  
To smother any kind of luck and keep a lively camp.  
But there's a remedy at hand far damper, so to speak—  
Just dip him in the creek, boys, dip him in the creek!

The good old times is over now when things was fixed that way,  
There's slower methods got in use—give every dog his day;  
They don't seem quite to act so well, for any bloke that's straight  
Has surely got a perfect right to civilise his mate,  
And talk of missionary men or powder for a week—  
It don't give satisfaction like a dipping in the creek!



## UNLUCKY HARRY

The township ain't a busy place, it's quiet and it's slow  
Till Harry gets across the creek and things begin to go.  
He ain't a rowdy kind of bloke, he's liked by everyone—  
The sort to take a woman's eye, and always on for fun;  
But facts is facts, and it's a fact that almost every week  
The things begin to hum a bit when he's across the creek.

It isn't beer, for he's a cove that knows the time to stop,  
He doesn't greatly love the bloke that keeps the whisky shop;  
He hasn't got insulting ways, he's quiet and he's straight,  
You wouldn't ask a better chap to work with for a mate;  
But someone gets a painted face as surely week by week  
As Harry gets upon his horse and goes across the creek.

It isn't talking politics or arguing the point—  
He ain't a chap that thinks the world is getting out of joint.  
He likes a horse, a pretty face, a clever working dog,  
And don't give tuppence for the fun that comes from drinking grog;  
But somehow it's a blooming fact that almost every week  
The women have a yarn to spin when he's across the creek.

It ain't his fault, and that's as plain as anything need be,  
There's mostly one or two about that's getting on the spree;  
He isn't always in the row, but still the row comes on,  
And mostly happens just about to last until he's gone:  
I don't know what some blokes would do from weary week to week  
If Harry didn't catch his horse and go across the creek.

## WHILE THE BILLY BOILS

The speargrass crackles under the billy and overhead is the winter sun;  
There's snow on the hills, there's frost in the gully, that minds me of things  
that I've seen and done,  
Of blokes that I knew, and mates that I've worked with, and the sprees we  
had in the days gone by;  
And a mist comes up from my heart to my eyelids, I feel fair sick and I  
wonder why.

There is coves and coves! Some I liked partic'lar, and some I would sooner  
I never knowed,  
But a bloke can't choose the chaps that he's thrown with in the harvest  
paddock or here on the road.  
There was chaps from the other side that I shore with that I'd like to have  
taken along for mates,  
But we said, "So long!" and we laughed and parted for good and all at  
the station gates.

I mind the time when the snow was drifting and Billy and me was out for  
the night,  
We lay in the lee of a rock, and waited, hungry and cold, for the morning  
light.  
Then he went one way and I the other—we'd been like brothers for half a  
year;  
He said: "I'll see you again in town, mate, and we'll blow the froth off a  
pint of beer."

He went to a job on the plain he knowed of and I went poisoning out at the  
back,  
And I missed him somehow—for all my looking I never could knock across  
his track.  
The same with Harry, the bloke I worked with the time I was over upon the  
Coast,  
He went for a fly-round over to Sydney, to stay for a fortnight—a month  
at most!

He never came back, and he never wrote me—I wonder how blokes like him  
forget;  
We had been where no one had been before us, we had starved for days in  
the cold and wet;  
We had sunk a hundred holes that was duffers, till at last we came on a  
fairish patch,  
And we worked in rags in the dead of winter while the ice bars hung from  
the frozen thatch.

Yes, them was two, and I can't help mind them—good mates as ever a joker  
had;  
But there's plenty more as I'd like to be with, for half of the blokes on the  
road is bad.  
It sets me a-thinking the world seems wider, for all we fancy it's middling  
small,  
When a chap like me makes friends in plenty and they slip away and he  
loses them all.

The speargrass crackles under the billy and overhead is the winter sun,  
There's snow on the hills, there's frost in the gully, and, Oh, the things that  
I've seen and done,  
The blokes that I knowed and the mates I've worked with and the sprees we  
had in the days gone by;  
But I somehow fancy we'll all be pen-mates on the day when they call the  
Roll of the Sky.



## OLD MATES

I came up to-night to the station, the tramp had been longish and cold,  
My swag ain't too heavy to carry, but then I begin to get old.  
I came through this way to the diggings—how long will that be ago now?  
Thirty years! how the country has altered, and miles of it under the plough,  
And Jack was my mate on the journey—we both run away from the sea;  
He's got on in the world and I haven't, and now he looks sideways on me.

We were mates, and that didn't mean jokers who meets for a year or a day,  
We meant to go jogging together the whole of the blooming long way.  
We slept with one blanket between us the night that we run from the port,  
There was nothing above us but heaven, yet we took it as jolly good sport.  
And now he's the boss of a station, and I'm—well, the bloke that you see;  
For he had the luck and I hadn't, and now he looks sideways on me.

We pegged out a claim on the Dunstan, there used to be gold in them days,  
There's blokes that still sticks to the diggings, but Lord only knows how it  
pays;  
For the country as far as I've seen it's as chock full of holes as a sieve  
With the Chinkies amullocking through it, and yet them coves manage to live.  
But when Jack took me to the cradle, the place was a wonder to see,  
We washed out a fortune between us, and now he looks sideways on me.

We both fell in love with one woman—she worked in a pub for a spell;  
It ain't the best place for an angel, but angels ain't better than Nell;  
For she was as good as they make 'em and hadn't a notion of ill—  
It's long years and years since we parted, and seems I'm in love with her  
still!  
But Jack was the handsomest fellow—I saw how the thing had to be;  
He got the best wife on the diggings, and now he looks sideways on me.

I left him, I just couldn't stand it—I knew it was better to part;  
I couldn't look on at the wedding with a pain like a knife at my heart!  
I never said nothing to no one—we didn't whack out all the gold;  
I wanted my mate to be happy without my own yarn being told.  
So I went to the coast by the steamer, and now I'm the bloke that you see;  
He told me to go to the whare, it seems he looks sideways on me.

There's steps coming down to the whare—some other poor bloke on the road;  
'Taint nothing to him to get growled at, the boss ain't a bloke that *he* knowed.  
Too dark to make out who's a-coming—he's crossing the plank at the creek;  
The years and the whisky are telling, my eyesight begins to get weak.  
What's the odds? it ain't like me to whimper, and all that's gone by had  
to be,  
But the old times came crowding around me to see him look sideways on me.

What, Jack! Why, old man, you don't mean it? You didn't right know  
it was me?  
Well I'm altered—it ain't for the better—never mind, never mind, let it be.  
O mate, the long years since we parted—there's a blooming great lump in  
my throat—  
I ain't been as glad, mate, I tell you, since the time that we run from the  
boat.  
You ain't a bit altered—you're crying—why, Jack, don't be sorry for me,  
I'm that glad that I think I'll go cranky—and I thought you looked sideways  
on me.

## AT THE FOOT OF THE OLD DUNSTAN TRACK

There's a green grassy slope by the boundary fence with the scrub bushes  
sheltering round,  
A hollow that shows where a building has been, and there broken black  
bottles are found.  
A water race, too, that's been dry for long years coming out of the creek  
at the back—  
It's all that remains of the shanty that stood at the foot of the old Dunstan  
track.

Oh, the days when the track was a road, boys,  
The rollicking days of old,  
When the bullockies came with their load, boys,  
The days of the first of the gold!

There the teams double-banked when they tackled the hill—few drivers  
would tackle it now;  
They never had dreamt that the heavy black scrub to the right would be  
under the plough.  
And the digger came here in misfortune or luck with his tent and his swag  
on his back,  
But his bottle is all that is left of him now at the foot of the old Dunstan  
track.

Oh, the days when the shanty was here, boys,  
The rollicking days of old,  
The days when the luck was near, boys,  
The days of the first of the gold!

Then the loud, hearty voices of men came and went in the rude iron walls  
that are gone,  
And the crack of the whip was the music to hear on the steeps where the  
waggons were drawn.  
Now the sheep bleat around, and the larks sing above, and the creek ripples  
down at the back,  
But the loud peal of laughter will never be heard at the foot of the old  
Dunstan track.

Oh, the days when the country was young, boys,  
The rollicking days of old,  
The days that have never been sung, boys,  
The days of the first of the gold!



## FLASH JOE

There's a wonderful bloke that lives next door—that's three good miles away—

He ain't so young as he used to be, and his hair has a touch of grey;  
But his looking-glass is his favourite toy, and whenever a bloke comes by  
He'll ask him: "Ain't I a good-looking chap?" without a word of a lie.

Have you seen the bloke with the  
big moustache? He's a bloke  
that you ought to know.

Oh, ain't he a toff  
With his whiskers off  
The bloke that they call Flash Joe.

He ain't quite built on the Venus lines, but a cove is apt to say:  
"You're the handsomest chap I've chanced to meet if your whiskers were  
shaved away."

And he'll start to work and shave them clean and put on his smartest grin,  
And he'll look in the glass and ask what you think of his beautiful double  
chin.

Have you seen the bloke, etc.

Oh, you ought to have heard him start to sing in the old hut down by the  
creek,

He'd put on "gyver" enough to last a full-bred actor a week;  
And the dogs outside began to howl, but we praised him and yelled  
"Encore!"

Till he bellowed "Kathleen" in a kind of a way that she was never sung  
before.

Have you seen the bloke, etc.

He's got a wonderful kind of mare that would breed a Carbine straight,  
If she didn't run all so much to legs that mare of Joe's would be great.  
When you see him togged in a style to kill and up on the long-legg'd bay—  
Why, a cove like me is apt to remark: "You'll fetch the widow to-day."

Have you seen the bloke, etc.

There is men that say that the chap ain't straight, but a smart contractor bloke  
Must do as a big bug always does if he don't want to get stone broke.  
And this I will say: that, for all their talk, and I think before I speak,  
He never paid anyone off at less than an *honest shilling a week!*

Do you know the bloke with the big  
moustache? He's a bloke that  
you *ought* to know.

Oh, ain't he a toff  
With his whiskers off  
The bloke that they call Flash Joe?

## ARLINGTON

The sun shines bright on Arlington, the drowsy sheep creep by,  
The water races seam the hills, cloud shadows line the sky,  
New fences climb the warm brown spurs to guard the scrubber ewes,  
Because the run is broken up for hungry cockatoos.  
The township sleeps below the hill, the homestead on the plain,  
But the lost days of Arlington will never come again.

The working men are seen no more in hut or rabbit camp,  
The stockwhip never will be heard about the river swamp,  
No more the mighty fleeces crown the bins like drifted snow,  
No more the princely rams go down, the wonder of the show;  
The swagger on the weary tramp comes o'er the summer plain,  
And sighs for rest at Arlington, yet knows he sighs in vain.

There's little work on Arlington since the old station days,  
The hawk-faced owners groan to tell sheep-farming never pays,  
They build no homesteads on the runs, they pay no wages out;  
The station style was different when money flew about.  
The rabbits flourish on the hills and burrow all the plain,  
The stock that ran on Arlington will never run again.

The good old boss of Arlington was everybody's friend,  
He liked to keep the wages up right to the very end;  
If diggers' horses went astray they always could be found,  
The cow that roamed across the run was never in the pound.  
He was a white man through and through, cheery and fair and plain,  
And now he'll never ride the rounds of Arlington again!

And yet the talk is evermore, "The people want the land!"  
I tell you that the workers' cry is, "Let the stations stand."  
The greedy few will clamour loud and clamour to the end;  
A dummy grabbing what he can is not the people's friend.  
And Heaven's curse is on him still in all his schemes for gain;  
He falls—and yet old Arlington will never rise again!

## OVER THE RANGES

Says Allan MacHardy: "Beyond the high ranges there's land for the men that first track their way through—

Sheep-country in plenty: Ben Pemberton told me of miles of the good open tussocks he knew.

I'm on for venture—say, Jack, you'll be with me! we stockmen should go where a digger has been!

A run like a county, a lease for the asking, and Scott and MacHardy can laugh at the Queen."

I looked at the ranges, the white snowy ranges, all faint in the sunshine and backed by the blue;

No white man had crossed them but one blow-hard digger, and all that he told us might not be too true.

I saw the black gorges, the grey shingle faces, the river with death in its blue foamy track,

And I said: "I'll be with you—we'll face it to-morrow, though it's odds on it, Allan, we never come back."

He laughed. "Well, we'll chance it! We've chanced it too often to show the white feather and sit here and rot!

There's only one dying, and if it must happen, I'd as soon have a grave on the mountains as not."

I looked at him speaking, the tall, active figure, the heavy brown hair and the dare-devil eyes,

And I thought, "It's a rough kind, of course, that will stay him when he's once in the saddle and goes for the prize!"

At daybreak we started; he rode the big chestnut—old Taipo we called him—and I rode the bay!

Through the deep scrubby gullies we pushed to the open and out on the desert of river-bed grey;

Then into the gorge of the wild Makaruru, where the hills were like walls climbing up to the sky,

And the flax bushes bloomed on the points of the ledges, and a ribbon of blue was the stream rushing by.

All day we rode onward—slow work on the boulders, and rough on the horses, and worse on the men;

The shrill keas cried from the rocks high above us and the wild echoes answered again and again.

The night came on stealing, black shadows grew round us, the river roared louder, the ducks whistled by,

And the starlight came brightening the crest of the mountain far on to the westward against the pale sky.



We tethered the horses where stray tussocks whitened, boiled the billy and feasted on damper and tea,  
Then rolled in our blankets, where shingle seemed softer, and slept the good sleep of the tired and the free.  
We were up with the light and once more in the saddle; the valley grew rougher each mile that we rode;  
The walls shut in darker and higher and wilder, and nearer and nearer the mountain peak showed.

We left the two horses, they couldn't go farther—we knew we could trust them to find their way back;  
Before was the peak and a wild rocky saddle, and over the saddle we knew was our track.  
The hot sun above us, the glare of the snow drifts, the toil and the thirst of the long weary climb!  
It was no picnic party—far rougher, I fancy, than what it appears in the swing of a rhyme!

But we got there by evening—MacHardy was leader—I followed him blindly the best way I could;  
It's long since it happened, but still I could shudder to think of the neck-breaking places we stood.  
We crossed the rough ice, and we clung to the faces of rocks that would crumble away in your hand,  
But before it was dark we were safe on the saddle, and saw the dim hills of the fair promised land.

We lay in the lee of a rock that had fallen far down from a cliff that ran up out of sight;  
It was colder than winter, the wind whistled through us, and sleep didn't give us a visit that night.  
But the dawn came in splendour, the snow peaks were flaming, the mist was below like a great rolling sea,  
Till it lifted and showed us the land we were seeking, the broad smiling waste where our station would be!

It was rough climbing down, but we laughed at the danger, with luck on our side we would keep our necks sound,  
And we talked on the edge of a hundred-foot chasm of the name we should give to the run we had found.  
Then we reached the safe level, the bush and the tussocks, the broad rolling slopes where our flocks would be fed;  
It was Paradise—"Paradise Peaks" we had named it—and we shouted the name to the rocks overhead!

Could that be a cooee? and Allan looked startled; we gazed in the way that the shout seemed to be.

A dog and a rider—"There's someone before us!" said Allan, and turned in his wonder to me.

"Lost your road, boys?" The shepherd rode up to us smiling. "You ain't the first chaps that got lost on this run.

The homestead lies yonder, just down in the hollow—the Hazelmere Station"—we knew we were *done!*

There's smiling sheep country beyond the white ranges, the ranges that Allan and I battled through,

The white snowy ranges, all faint in the sunlight, beyond the black gorges and backed by the blue.

There's a grog-drinking digger called Pemberton somewhere—I've asked for him often of wondering men,

It's "Look out!" if I meet him; if Allan drops on him—well, all I can say is, "*May God help him then!*"

## SPEAK AS YOU FIND HIM

He isn't the chap that he once was—he's come down in the world, did you say?

Never mind; while his head's above water, he's a man while he's fighting his way.

He laughs at the fortune that spurns him, he bends his strong back to the load,

He's on foot that was once upon horseback, but he'll get to the end of the road.

He works with his hands on the station, with a crow-bar instead of a pen,

The smirks of the world are behind him, he's living a man among men,

He wears a soft shirt for a stiff one, a broad hat instead of a high—

To my fancy he's got his promotion and the yarn that he's down is a lie.

He's got friends of the steel that is tempered, mates that never would give him away;

He stands on the bare rock of manhood, high over the slips and the clay;

And the air that he breathes is a pure one, if it blows a bit hard in his face!

Let them smile in their sheltering gully—in the storm and the struggle's his place.

Too much metaphor? Well, I'd best drop it, but I always get riled when I hear

A little heart speak of a big one with something that sounds like a sneer.

Don't start on the mud-stirring racket—it's dirty whatever they say;

He may have his faults and his follies, but speak as you find him to-day.

A member of the Watson Shennan family tells me that this poem refers to Tom Adam, who was employed on Puketoi Station when McKee Wright was there.



## THE DIGGERS

There's snow on the hills and the creeks are strong, and the big dam's  
brimming full,  
And the digger's face is as broad and bright as a boy's when he comes from  
school.  
The frosts were hard in the winter time and the summer long and dry,  
But the nozzles play on the big face now and the tail-race is roaring by.  
The luck is not what it used to be and the ounces gather slow,  
But these are the men who made the land in the golden long ago.

It wasn't easy work to do, though you smile when I say it now;  
It's easy for you to ride the track that's cut to the mountain's brow;  
It's easy to stand on the iron bridge and look at the stream far down—  
It was harder to tackle it hand in hand, but easy enough to drown;  
For these were the men who led the way to the quiet valleys we know,  
The hero band of the morning land, the diggers of long ago!

You talk of the men who spoke and wrote and we give them their praises due,  
And the men of the fleece and the axe and the plough had a mighty work  
to do;  
But the silent army of claim and mine were the men who led the way—  
I tell you the might of the digger's arm is the strength of the land to-day.  
Though the gold is not what it used to be and the ounces gather slow,  
The hands are with us that fought and won in the days of long ago!

The trackless wild is a thing gone by and the roaring flood is tame,  
And the railway runs with its noise and smoke where the lonely waggon  
came;  
The conquered desert lies at our feet and we boast of a battle won,  
But the battle of Right and Wrong's to fight before the work is done.  
And these are the men to lead the way as they did in the long ago,  
Till a nation stands on her truth and right and the lies and shams are low!

## OLD NUGGET

Old Nugget! My word, he's a wonder—his skin's like a racehorse's now;  
He was buggy-horse once on the station, and he done twenty years in the  
plough.

There's blokes here that knows all about him—they tell me he's forty years  
old;

He's as sound as a bell, and his legs are as clean as the day he was foaled.

They tell me that when he was younger the old 'un was able to trot;  
He might if he wanted to now—he's too cunning for that by a lot.  
He knows how to handle his heels, I can tell you he's boss of the show;  
And, man, you should see him come home with the dray—that's the time he  
can go.

He must have seen lots in his time—he's a pioneer horse in his way—  
He can mind when there wasn't a track here unless it was made by a dray;  
It was steer where you could through the tussocks, and look out if you came  
to a swamp,

And the bosses would live in a whare 'bout as good as a rabbiter's camp.

What? You fancy he can't be so old; you think someone's made a mistake?  
Have a look at him, 'taint very often you come on a horse of his make.  
No mistake, for there's fellows that knows him for good thirty years about  
here;

He was "old Nugget" then, though I own that they can't tell his age to a  
year.

It might be he's closer on fifty, and don't look like cavin' in yet.  
Can he feed? I should smile; he's all there for as much as he ever can get.  
The old stager reminds me of Gladstone—no reason he ever should die;  
And they've both done a fairish day's work when it comes to the saying  
good-bye.

## THE NEW CHUM'S RIDE

Can I ride? It's a fact that I have done, though it might seem a little bit queer;

I can manage a turn at the wheel, chaps, but a horse is a terror to steer.

I had carried my swag to the station, the river got up in the night;

He would put me across it on horseback; he said he would fix me all right.

He did. Well it ain't no use talking to a lot of you horsey blokes here—

You think a man ain't eddicated if he can't ride buck-jumpers and shear.

He was white—well, that is, he was greyish—I won't say he wasn't a mare—

I didn't take very much notice—all I know is the beggar was there.

A bloke with squint eyes held the bridle, I climbed on his back pretty slow,  
I was frightened the thing might get started before I was ready to go.

The bloke that was going to take me—the horse he was riding was red—

Sings out, "Are you ready to go, Jack?" "You can cast her adrift,  
mate," I said.

"All right." But I wasn't too happy, though I had a good grip of the  
mane;

He was crossing our bows and I shouted, pulling hard on the starboard-side  
rein;

It wasn't my fault as I know of, but luck was against me that day.

It was port that I wanted to bring him, but he slewed round the opposite way.

There was what you might call a collision, though neither was bu'sted outright,  
He was jammed to the fence of the paddock, and the red horse was young  
and took fright.

But the white one was old, so they told me, he wouldn't get startled, not he;  
He mightn't 'a' done, there's no knowing, but the way he went on startled  
me.

He went with a rush to the open, I happened to let go the rein,

It ain't so much use to hang on by, not like a good holt of the mane.

The way that I bumped on that saddle! How blokes can like riding so  
well!

I'm a shell-back, but them that goes riding should have some other part of  
them shell.



He was getting down close to the river when he turned and he tacked up the flat,

Then round again straight for the station, I wondered what game he was at. My bones seemed all smashed into jelly, I'd 'a' sooner been drowned fair and square

Than be knocked like a bag of potatoes hanging on by a handful of hair.

The red horse was coming like fury, he couldn't go harder than mine; But the bloke that was on him was laughing, I suppose that he thought it was fine.

And I thought, " Well the sooner it's over the better for me, I suppose, I'd 'a' better been wrecked five times over in the savagest cyclone that blows."

I let go, shut my eyes for a moment, as the red horse was going to pass, And I felt myself come a wallop right fair on my head on the grass; But I wasn't as sore as I fancied, and I hadn't broke nothing inside— A shell-back takes plenty of killing—and that was the end of my ride.

## SHEARING'S COMING

There's a sound of many voices in the camp and on the track,  
And letters coming up in shoals to stations at the back;  
And every boat that crosses from the sunny "other side"  
Is bringing waves of shearers for the swelling of the tide.

For the shearing's come round, boys, the shearing's come round,  
And the stations of the mountains have begun to hear the sound.

They'll be talking up at Laghmor of the tallies that were shore,  
And the man who broke the record is remembered at Benmore;  
And the yarns of strikes and barneys will be told till all is blue,  
And the ringers and the bosses will be passed in long review.

For the shearing's coming round, etc.

The great Orari muster and the drafting of the men  
Like a mob of ewes and wethers will be surely told again;  
And a lot of heathen places that will rhyme with kangaroo  
Will be named along with ringers and the things that they can do.

For the shearing's coming round, etc.

At last the crowds will gather for the morning of the start,  
And the slowest kind of jokers will be trying to look smart;  
And a few will get the bullet, and high hopes will have a fall,  
And the bloke that talks the loudest stands a show of looking small.

For the shearing's coming round, chaps, the shearing's coming round,  
And the voices of the workers have begun to swell the sound.

## WINTER IN CENTRAL OTAGO

Wild winter on the frozen hills,  
The rocky peaks, the ice-bound rills,  
The lowering red of early morning,  
The even with its misty chills.

The feathery snowflakes earthward flying,  
The wintry sunbeams faintly dying,  
The icy fingers in the gorges,  
The harsh-voiced birds on low wing crying.

Below, the mist-enshrouded plain,  
The winds that wail like men in pain;  
Beyond, the everlasting mountains,  
The glacier and the wild moraine.

Aspiring's peak that cleaves the sky,  
The western range where sunsets die,  
The distant Clutha's shadowy valley,  
The eastward Taieri winding nigh.

Without, the stormy Winter night;  
Within, the peat-fire leaping bright,  
Tobacco incense softly curling,  
The play of wit and fancy light.

Ah! who would give such joys as these  
For sunny summer's dusty breeze!  
While loud and long the tempest thunders,  
And every pleasure knows to please.



## DOG AND MAN

Poor old Vic, my true companion, here you are so deeply sleeping  
That you cannot hear the rustle of the boughs above your grave,  
Nor see the sunbeams peeping where your friend is sitting weeping,  
While he wonders if you dwell within the heaven of the brave.

For if heaven or hell be waiting after death for man or woman,  
Should the soulful beast be held apart from entering at the gate  
Of the place of false or true men? for the line of brute and human  
Seems to me as dimly penciled as the very line of Fate.

Good old dog, if you could only wake to living now and know me,  
You would know my heart is bleeding not with sentimental woe;  
Doggy, I am very lonely, were you waking you would show me  
That rich sympathy and tender that a dog alone can show.

But you: faithful heart lies shattered by the hand of hate that hustles  
With a bluster-roll of vengeance your poor master from his gate,  
From his land of sheep and thistles, from his swamps of flaxen rustles,  
While I bow my head and curse him, with a murmur at my fate.

You did but cross his paddock where his heavy ewes were lambing,  
With an instinct more than human that forbade you still to steal;  
But your being there was damning, and the villain shot you, shamming  
You were but a common mongrel that could neither think nor feel.

You, my dog, had thoughts in plenty, and your ears were sharp for hearing,  
And your heart was big for loving, ever faithful, ever kind;  
Your brown eyes were full of cheering, nothing harming, nothing fearing,  
Surely if the two were measured yours had been the greater mind.

He the lord of sheep and oxen, who but counts a human being  
By the value that he places on his flock and on his herd,  
With an eye unfit for seeing any wisdom, but decreeing  
For his serfs of beef and mutton knife and stockwhip at his word.

He can never feel the glory of a history he knows not  
Strike along his beating pulses at a moving nation's sound,  
And for him the streamlet flows not, and the tender flower blows not  
Save as water for his cattle and a richer pasture ground.

The glory of the ages rich in music ever linking  
Day to day and son to father through the cycle of the years—  
Man advancing in his thinking, from the whole to atom shrinking—  
Is not worth to him the snipping of the money-making shears.

Yet he prides himself on being something better than his neighbour,  
Though his father was a convict and his mother was divorced;  
He can wield the plutarch's sabre through the shrinking ranks of labour  
And ride rough-shod o'er the working man, who holds his name accurs'd.

And I, too, must bend before him, stifle down my bitter feeling,  
And go hence along the highway to my weary journey's end,  
While my thought grows sick and reeling that I should be lowly kneeling  
By your grave, my murdered comrade and my dear remembered friend.

The rabbits sport at twilight, and the strong-grown lambs are bleating,  
And the cattle by the river faintly low at evenfall;  
But you cannot bark a greeting at our last sad friendly meeting,  
Or come leaping from your slumber, laughing, wagging at my call.

Oh, curse upon the traitor to the heart of man and nature  
Who can warp the soul to hatred of the whole base race of men;  
I had rather I were lying with you, all unhonoured dying,  
Than go out into the weary world of such as he again.

## AN OLD COLONIST'S REVERIE

Dustily over the highway pipes the loud nor'-wester at morn,  
Wind and rising sun, and waving tussock and corn;  
It brings to me days gone by when first in my ears it rang,  
The wind is the voice of my home, and I think of the songs it sang  
When, fresh from the desk and ledger, I crossed the long leagues of sea—  
"The old worn world is gone and the new bright world is free."

The wide, wild pastures of old are fading and passing away,  
All over the plain are the homes of the men who have come to stay—  
I sigh for the good old days in the station whare again;  
But the good new days are better—I would not be heard to complain;  
It is only the wind that cries with tears in its voice to me  
Of the dead men low in the mould, who came with me over the sea.

Some of them down in the city under the marble are laid,  
Some on the bare hillside in the mound by the lone tree shade,  
And some in the forest deeps of the west in their silence lie,  
With the dark pine curtain above shutting out the blue of the sky.

And many have passed from my sight, whither I never shall know,  
Swept away in the rushing river or caught in the mountain snow;  
All the old hands are gone who came with me over the sea,  
But the land that we made our own is the same bright land to me.

There are dreams in the gold of the kowhai, and when ratas are breaking  
in bloom  
I can hear the rich murmur of voices in the deeps of the fern-shadowed gloom.  
Old memory may bring me her treasures from the land of the blossoms of  
May,  
But to me the hill daisies are dearer and the gorse on the river bed grey;  
While the mists on the high hilltops curling, the dawn-haunted haze of the  
sea,  
To my fancy are bridal veils lifting from the face of the land of the free.

The speargrass and cabbage trees yonder, the honey-belled flax in its bloom,  
The dark of the bush on the sidlings, the snow-crested mountains that loom  
Golden and grey in the sunlight, far up in the cloud-fringed blue,  
Are the threads with old memory weaving and the line of my life running  
through;  
And the wind of the morning calling has ever a song for me  
Of hope for the land of the dawning in the golden years to be.



## “SO LONG”

We're down to the last ballad, chaps—at least, it's the last for a while!  
I don't know if I've roused you at all or twisted your mouths to a smile:  
My songs have been most of them true, and the smell of the tussocks is  
there—

You'll admit that I've talked pretty straight if I ain't on for splitting a hair.

There's fellows that's humping the swag to-day on the long dusty track—  
I've put in a word for them here that might lighten the load on their back;  
There's the chaps in the rabbiting camps—I've hailed them as brothers and  
men;

So they are, and the grip of their hands I can feel in the turn of the pen.

There's the diggers—the best of the lot—the men of the hard honest hand;  
They've got their certificate here as the jokers who opened the land;  
And the good sort of shearers as well that keep clear of the low spieler crowd,  
They're a push—and deny it who will—that would make any young nation  
proud.

There's the cockys you think that I've wronged—as a class they ain't all  
they should be;

That's straight—but I ain't down on them if they ain't got a derry on me!

And the best of the farmers I've met I look on as kings among men—  
It's the pig-shooting dummy I've “set,” and I'm willing to say it again.

Oh, chaps, it's a wonderful land!—wild mountain-chains ringed by the sea;  
It surely was meant from the first for the home of the true and the free.  
It's the true and the free that I've sung, though I didn't go high on the wing,  
You wouldn't have listened at all if I'd set fifty sky-larks to sing.

They talk of the wickedness here! Why, of course, there's the good and  
the bad!

But there isn't a country on earth where a kindness is easier had,  
For there's hardly a man but is straight, or a woman that ain't sweet and true:  
There's exceptions, and big ones, I know, but you notice them more that  
they're few.

And because the whole country's so straight there's no reason it shouldn't be  
straighter,

If we don't keep on moving ahead we're bound to go back soon or later.  
Get a good honest down on a rogue till he alters his ways or clears out,

And don't let your feelings be soothed by a scoundrel who offers to shout.

Believe me, a small crooked act is far worse than a hot-blooded crime  
(I ain't dressing dolls for a lark just because it's the last bit of rhyme);  
The hope of the country lies there—get a down on what's mean and what's  
low;  
It's the chief of all social reform, and that's more than the Socialists know.

Oh, chaps, what a land it would be if every man's hands could be clean,  
If the truth were on every man's lips, and no one were grasping and mean,  
I fancy the sky would be bluer, and brighter the shade on the hill;  
When I look at the fellows around me, "It's coming," I say—and it will!

Though everyone has his small faults, let him show them his manhood's their  
match;  
There's a mate that will still pick you up if you come like a man to the  
scratch.  
He won't see a blow that ain't fair, but he'll claim on a foul, don't you see?  
And the God that is watching above is the greatest and best Referee.

However it be in the long run, of this you can always be sure,  
The man who is "cobbers" with Christ comes off best if he's ever so poor;  
He'll get the most fun out of living and always be found straight and true,  
While the others are crawling and growling and blowing of what they can  
do.

I don't mean go talking religion with easy catchwords in your mouth,  
But show in your lives you acknowledge that Christ is the King of the South;  
He's a King that will never oppress you, He don't go for tinsel and show,  
He ain't got a down on your pleasures, He don't want you stupid and slow.

When the horses you wanted are winning He knows what you mean when  
you shout,  
He knows just the way you're feeling when a good bit of ground duffers out,  
He's with you when laughing's in fashion and always can see through a joke,  
And I tell you there's sorrow in Heaven when any poor fellow goes broke!

Well, it's time that this song had a finish: Good night and good luck to  
you all!  
May they soon find a job that ain't got one, may the prices of wool never  
fall;  
May the tallies be bigger than ever, may the head-race keep on running  
strong—  
There, chaps, all the ballads are ended and there's nothing to say but "So  
long!"

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

"My great distinction, and that which specially qualifies me to write of simple themes, is that I was born under thatch—brown Irish thatch with sally rods for binding and deep green moss on the weatherside. The new house at Ballynaskeagh was being built; my grandfather, David McKee, had just died at the age of 92; and my mother and father were home on furlough from Syria. I was left as a squalling and delicate infant in the care of my grandfather and aunt to get strong breathing Irish air while my parents returned to Damascus. Up to the age of seven I roamed about the fields of County Down—the very district where still the Orange drum beats loudest, yet which, in spite of the noise, elects De Valera to Ulster Parliament. I loved every tree about my old home, every turn of the green roads, every cadence of the people's voices. They were all my friends—the farmers, the cotters, the very old men who talked of the Battle of Ballynahinch as a familiar memory of childhood, the beggarmen sitting eating stir-about or broth in the big Ballynaskeagh kitchen, the people under the orange banners and those who wore green sashes. On the day after my seventh birthday I was suddenly uprooted and transplanted to London. In ten or more years spent in England I doubt if I ever took root. My schooldays in Upper Norwood were cheerful enough; I have recollections of very long bright summers in a land of utter loveliness, and splendid holidays by the English Channel and the North Sea; but the two outstanding features of my life in England were my two visits to Ireland. I was still a boy when I came to Australia and passed on from Sydney to New Zealand in 1887. It was about 1890 that I began to pour out stories and verse in great quantities. The skill seldom kept pace with the ambition. I was then working on an Otago station. In the year of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee I was in Dunedin taking classes at Otago University. In 1896-97 and 1900 I published small volumes of verse which got a better hearing than they deserved. England and New Zealand played a small part in my making if there is any sense in which I can be said to be made. In Australia the ground seemed to become firmer under my feet and the whole Irish impulse returned—the rest was discipline and experimental."

## GLOSSARY.

- BENMORE.**—A sheep station in Canterbury. It lies on the south side of Porter's Pass and runs back to Lake Lyndon. It joins both Highpeak and the Black Hills of Snowden. It was owned by George Rutherford in 1884.
- BLACKBURN CREEK.**—This creek is on the Blackburn Estate in Waitahuna East Survey District, 10 miles west of township of Milton.
- CLUTHA.**—A large river in Otago. In the early days it was known as the Molyneaux. It empties more fresh water into the sea than any other river in New Zealand.
- COCKATOO.**—A farmer who farms in a small way and usually termed a "cocky." After the gold-fever in Australia the small selector swarmed over the land and ate up the substance of the squatters and so were called "cockatoos."—Morris, "*Austral English*."
- DAMPER.**—A large scone of flour and water baked in hot ashes; the bread of the bush, which is always unleavened.



- DERRY.—Another word for dislike or aversion.
- DUFFER.—Simply an unproductive mining prospect shaft.
- DUMMY.—An individual masquerading as the owner of land usually in the interest of a large run-holder.
- DUNSTAN.—The old name for the district of which Clyde is now the centre.
- KEA.—New Zealand mountain-parrot reputed to kill sheep by swooping on to their backs and pecking at the kidney fat.
- KOWHAI.—A native tree of New Zealand. Its bright yellow blossoms are well known.
- ORAKAI.—This was the name which McKee Wright gave to Linnburn Station in the Patearoa district in the County of Maniototo. It consisted of 1,400 acres of freehold and about 80,000 acres of leasehold. It was owned by Mr. Robert Turnbull, who had a fight with a shearer there in the early days.
- ORARI.—The name of a sheep farming district in South Canterbury and two sheep stations. One was owned by R. Macdonald and the other by F. Jollie.
- LAGHMOR.—This station ran from Ashburton to The Hinds and from Longbeach to Westerfield. It originally contained forty-six thousand acres. In 1898 there were 20,000 sheep on it.
- MAIMAI.—Possibly the name for an old sheep station, although I have not been able to trace one with that name. "Maimai" is, however, the name for an out of way hut; there was one on the Dunstan Range many years ago and another is on Benmore Station.
- PUKETOI.—The name of a sheep station, Upper Taieri, in the Maniototo District, Central Otago, once owned by the Watson Shennan family, for whom the poet worked. It was famous for its Merino sheep. It has since been subdivided.
- RATA.—A remarkable native New Zealand tree with crimson flowers (*Metrosideros robusta*), which sometimes starts from a seed dropped in the fork of a tree, grows downward to the earth, and, taking root there, sends out side branches round the supporting tree and eventually destroys it.
- ROUSEABOUT.—A man who does general work on a station.
- SPEARGRASS.—A plant with sharp spear-like tops. When dead it is frequently used where firewood is scarce to boil a billy.
- SQUATTER.—A run-holder on a large scale, so called because originally in Australia many of them laid the foundations of their fortunes by "squatting" on unoccupied land.
- TAIERI.—A river in Otago which rises in the Lammermoor and Lammerlaw Mountains and flows North-east and then South to the ocean at Taieri Mouth. Taieri Plains are 10 miles South-west of Dunedin.
- TITRI.—The name given in Otago for *Olearia lineata*. Not to be confused with tea-tree (manuka) or ti-tree (cabbage-tree palm).
- TOI-TOI.—A native New Zealand grass which resembles the pampas grass of South America.
- WEKA.—A flightless bird commonly called a woodhen.
- WHARE.—Maori word for house or shelter.

The following list of pen-names under which McKee Wright wrote will assist the reader who wishes to read his uncollected poetry and prose in the *Sydney Sun*, *The Lone Hand*, and the *Sydney Bulletin*:—

PAT O' MAORI	GEORGE STREET	CURSE O' MOSES
MARY COMMONWEALTH		ALASTOR

The Poet wrote for *The Australian Worker*, *The Sydney Mail*, *The Triad*, *Aussie*, and *The Freeman's Journal*. He edited the latter paper for a time. He was writing for the *Worker*, edited then by H. E. Boote, at the time of his death. He had just laid down his pen after making notes for the usual weekly articles and paragraphs when a heart seizure prevented him from completing his work. He also wrote for *Art in Australia* and the *London Mercury*.

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