

Bells and Bees

Esson, Louis (1878-1943)

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Thomas C. Lothian

1910

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Bush Impressions

The Splitter

BACK in the bush
Unbroken, the splitter
Hews stroke on stark stroke
Thro' blackbutts and blue gums.

Man, the Destroyer!
Man, Master-Builder!
The axe flashes.
Savage blows shatter
The dawn world enchanted.
The axe sings.
Cradles rock,
New generations
Build cities whose spires
Seek stars of the future.
Each stroke of the axe
Unleashes fresh forces,
Drives multitudes marching
Onward, aye, whither?

Prophetic, the splitter
Grows large in the sunrise,
Like Adam, the First Man.

The Shearer's Wife

BEFORE the glare o' dawn I rise
To milk the sleepy cows, an' shake
The droving dust from tired eyes.
I set the rabbit traps, then bake
 The children's bread.

There's hay to stook, an' beans to hoe,
Ferns to cut i' th' scrub below;
Women must work, when men must go
 Shearing from shed to shed.

I patch an' darn, now evening comes,
An' tired I am with labour sore,
Tired o' the bush, the cows, the gums,
Tired, but must dree for long months more
 What no tongue tells.
The moon is lonely in the sky,
The bush is lonely, an' lonely I
Stare down the track no horse draws nigh
 An' start . . . at the cattle bells.

Golden Gully

ONE gleaming sheet the town of tents
Across the gully spread.
With axe and pick the ranges rang,
Wild earth was torn and bled.

From far strange lands the diggers swarmed,
Chinese and Yanks and Poles,—
To seek their fortune, and all flags
Flew o'er the lucky holes.

We pegged in claims, and gold was crushed
As we heard the cradles sway;
We shook our dish till set o' sun
We drank till break o' day.

The Roaring Days are memories,
Good times will never last;
Green saplings thicken, and the grass
Trails o'er the golden past.

Holes lie agape; and far and wide
Old mates are blown like chaff;
While perched on rotting poppet-head
The kookaburras laugh.

The Old Black Billy An' Me

THE sheep are yarded, an' I sit
Beside the fire an' poke at it.
Far from talk an' booze o' men
Glad, I'm glad I'm back agen
On the station, wi' me traps
An' fencin' wire, an' tanks an' taps,
Back to salt-bush plains, an' flocks,
An' old bark hut be th' apple-box.
I turn the slipjack, make the tea.
All's as still as still can be—
An' the old black billy winks at me.

Spring Cattle

WITH bells the bush tinkles,
Men shout, hard hoofs rattle.
Spring sharpens the nostrils
Of winter-wild cattle.

(O the Spring-quicken'd earth
Warm breaths, and birds' caw-caws;
And sunshine that splashes
Snow streaked on the Baw-Baws!)

For wild oats they foraged,
Turned out till the seed-time
In the blanket-wood scrub,
Waiting milk-time and feed-time.

Now back to the bails
Over creeks and round cutting,
Proud mothers bring calves
All roaring and butting.

And shouts, and bells clanging
Break louder and clearer
Down bush tracks to Neerim;
And bells clatter nearer.

Till roads ring and rattle
As home the mob passes
To the milk-pails, warm sheds,
And the sweet springing grasses.

The Mother

THE late Spring blooms. The teeming earth
 Yields fruits and flowers on hill and plain.
Along the myrtle track I wait
 To watch the drovers pass again.
Love, once he said, made all things grow
 As innocent as sun and rain.

The season's ripe. And rain and sun
 Like wedded wife and husband came.
The fruit hangs heavy on the tree,
 And rich increase the creatures claim.
But baby, baby, at my breast
 Your birth alone brings sin and shame.

Sunset-Track

I HATE cramped streets and factory smoke
In towns where man but buys and sells,
The piston's thud, the engine's croak,
And sweated labor's heavy stroke
That beats to clang of clocks and bells.
We scorn to work by wage and shift,
Like thistledown we drift and drift.

Drought there is, and fever is there,
Parched throats, wild eyes, and scraggy hair;
But there's liquor to drown the dust and care.
His aches and woes a man can forget,
His dreams look small in the big sunset;
And a man may rise, or a man may fall,
But these silent sands have room for us all.
The weird grey mulga calls me back
To leave my bones on Sunset-Track.

Wild Bees

AT peep o' dawn, when the world is still,

Hear the magpies calling!

We leave our hut upon the hill,

Hear the magpies calling!

The soil's unbroken by the plough

From gully deeps to ranges' brow;

Primeval peace enfolds us now,

Hear the magpies calling!

We wander, in the morning's hush,

Hear the magpies calling!

Thro' flowery tracks and golden bush,

Hear the magpies calling!

The yellow box is blossoming,

Round the blossoms greedy parrots cling,

And reiving bees are on the wing,

Hear the magpies calling!

Yon dip, like a reed, in the Cherry Pool,

Hear the magpies calling!

Your body is bronzed and beautiful,

Hear the magpies calling!

The wind breathes manna-dew and honey,

And rich we are without mint o' money

With love unhived, and wild, and sunny,

Hear the magpies calling!

A Camel Driver

WHERE the Never Never
Sands of Fate unroll
Phantom lake and river,
Mirage of the soul,
There a camel driver gropes in vain endeavour.

Mecca-ward he sets
Swart face, travel smeared,
Gripping amulets.
By the Prophet's Beard!
Golden mosques are lifting sapphire minarets.

(No more willy-willies
Flee the mad monsoon;
And no more red lilies
Flush the lone lagoon.
Water-bags are empty, and the desert still is.)

Hark! the bulbul sings
From the poplar tree
Of enchanted things
When the soul breaks free.
Black tents, desert driven, fold their weary wings.

There strut peacocks bright,
Roses shed perfume;
Marble steps, snow white,
Lead to bowers of bloom.
O Imtiaz Mahal, Garden of Delight!

And his hot eyes trace
'Neath green tamarisks,
Like gazelles for grace,
Unveiled odalisques.
Sweet rose-water fountains spray his burning face.

Allah judges best.
Holy wells and palms
Soothe and shade the Blest.
Pains are mixed with balms:
In the desert, fountains; after travel, rest.

In the Never Never
Dervish-dancing sands,
Lord of Fate, forever
Freed from fleshly bands

Soul released, an Afghan leaves the world's endeavour.

Whalin' Up The Lachlan

A Landowner's Song

I'VE eaten bitter bread
In sweat wrung from my brow;
And earth-bent, hunger-gripped
Scarred hands on axe and plough.
Now, when the sun is shining,
With swag slung on my back,
I laugh at soured selectors
When I pass down the track.

*Whalin' up the Lachlan
By the waters grey,
Whalin' up the Lachlan
All a summer's day,—
We'll drop a line to tickle
The black fish and the cod,
Whalin' up the Lachlan
Beside a lazy rod.*

Some choose to crack the greenhide,
And some to sow and reap,
And some to pink with B-bows
A-shearin' greasy sheep.
But some there are, sundowners,
Who take the easy way,
Nor think of lean to-morrow
If they fare fat to-day.

*Whalin' up the Lachlan,
Done with axe and plough,
Whalin' up the Lachlan,
The billy's boilin' now.
We'll fill our pipes, an' yarn there,
And watch the world roll by,
Whalin' up the Lachlan
Under a starry sky.*

Cradle Song

BABY, O baby, fain you are for bed,
Magpie to mopoke busy as the bee;
The little red calf's in the snug cow-shed,
An' the little brown bird's in the tree.

Daddy's gone a-shearin', down the Castlereagh,
So we're all alone now, only you an' me.
All among the wool-O, keep your wide blades full-O!
Daddy loves his baby, parted tho' he be.

Baby, my baby, rest your drowsy head,
The one man that works here, tired you must be.
The little red calf's in the snug cow-shed,
An' the little brown bird's in the tree.

Fantasies

The Kookaburra

WHEN Time first opened her dim eyelids
 Before the Age of Joy,
Before the Sphinx or the Pyramids,
 Before the Siege of Troy,

And before the Alcheringa sighed,
 In Australia desolate
The kookaburra, agog, descried
 The tangled threads of Fate.

Scornful he glowered at the strange first dawn,
 At the strange first stars he scoffed;
And he laughed, when the Veil of Life was drawn
 On his bough i' th' blue aloft.

At Man and Evil and Destiny
 Loud pealed his mocking laughter,
Because high perched on his gaunt gum-tree
 He peered before and after.

Tho' world on wonder world is shuffled
 Thro' fingers of Fate forever,
Unmoved he squats, this wise unruffled
 Droll bird of the Never Never.

And moons and moons slip between each rime,
 But perched on the same gum-tree,
He is waiting to laugh at the death of Time,
 To mock Eternity.

Silenus To A Young Satyr

(Suggested by a Picture of Botticelli)

FIRST, you will tread ripe grapes which bursting gleam
And bubble, oozing in pale purple stream.

Huge flagons you will quaff, wanton, carouse,
But nothing lose save sorrow; you will drowse

In amorous nook, and dream, tasting divine
Indolence, sleepy with the fumes of wine.

Then you will be a hunter, keen to snare
Squirrel and deer, brown nymph in liliated lair,

And twitch a maenad's robe where graces glow
Like cherries peeping from a nest of snow.

The flute you'll play, and make mad cymbals' din,
Leap, riot, and dance, till stars no more can spin,

For you will follow Bacchus ever young
Aegean Isles and Indian Vales among,

And goat-hooved, twain-horned Pan; in wanderings
You'll learn the causes and the trend of things.

Sturdy and joyous, earth-born, but no smart
Of mortal pain can pierce your gladsome heart.

Snub-nosed, tub-bellied, goat-like eared, with small
Stiff tail and bristly hair, though Hesiod call

Us ugly, good for nothing, poets know
We cracked the nuts of knowledge long ago,

And old Silenus, spite red bleary eyes,
Knows more of wisdom than the seeming wise.

Head over heels you tumble, just like that
I romped with Gods and Men ere I grew fat.

Bring wine, a gushing horn of wine, your master
Loves quick-wit youth; run fast, you rogue, fast . . . faster!

London.

An Assyrian Cast

A VASE, a verse, a plaster cast
Preserves an empire of the past.

The palace falls; a graven stone
Rebuilds the walls of Babylon.

A wingèd bull-god's mystery
Enwraps the might of Nineveh.

An epigram embalms, I wis,
Sennacherib, Semiramis.

Evening Hymn To Krishna

CALL on the Lord! Cows leave the byre
And milk pails foam. The sunset's fire
Kindles the gopis' wild desire
To feel they kiss, and thrum
Cymbals, and clash their bracelets bright,
Breaking the still air of the night
With lilting lyrics of delight,
Lord of the Milkmaids, come!

Come as of old, a laughing boy
To steal the butter or destroy
Demons! Now moans shriek for joy,
The monkeys play and prance.
Cows call; our sleek calves moo for thee,
Krishna! Round thy Kadumbra tree
Maids, sick for love, are circling free
In mazy rasa dance.

Call on the Lord! In shouting bands
By Jumna stream we lift our hands.
May clouds rain flowers on the lands
Where once thy feet have trod!
Thy brides are yearning. Frolicsome,
Dancing, with beating on the drum,
And milkmaid songs, Shri Krishna! come
To flute gay souls to God.

Jaipur.

The Travail of Nature

THE thunder storm's drums and trumpets, the champing of surging seas,
The rustle of reeds at twilight, the sobbing plaint of the rain,
Wild winds that shriek in the heart o' the bush, the falling of mighty trees,
Cry to me, out of the darkness, a lament of life's unrest and pain.

* * * * *

All things that live, and are beaten and broken, pant with desire
For a dream-isle girdled by seas beyond the suns of the West,
Far from the lightning of change, from seasons of flood and fire,
And the woeful travail of Nature where the winds o' the world will have rest.

A Spring Morning

THE sky is blue and sunny,
 Busy the wild bee thrums,
Now manna-dew and honey
 Spill o'er from old red gums.

The bush gleams fresh and dewy
 To lure her stragglers back;
A greybeard, humping bluey,
 Goes whistling down the track.

From school brown children flocking
 Rob many a woolly nest;
And the mother croons, a-rocking
 Her baby at the breast.

To earth grown old and crabby
 With lilt of youth comes Spring,
With bloom and bud and baby,
 Each tender wistful thing.

She smoothes out Winter's wrinkles;
 And from her charmed horn
With fiery dew she sprinkles
 The Resurrection Morn.

Magpies

I HEAR the cry of the magpies joyously gushing
Over the morning,
The carolling slogan of magpies, like a rill rushing,
And sorrow scorning.

Magpies, fill up my heart with the joy of exultant things
Fresh notes adorning!
Breath of the morning primeval your melody brings
To thrill my morning.

The Fisher

VATEA went fishing (he dwelt afar In the land of Aviki where marvels are.)
He baited his hook with the evening star.

The star quivered under the waves, and wrought
Magical patterns, but tempted naught.
No porpoise, no little maniki was caught.

Enraged, he baited the hook afresh,
(Brown boys, with their nets, more fish could enmesh.)
From his thigh he tore a strip of red flesh,

Then dipping his line in the deep blue calms
Hooked, A O! an island, bright with balms,
With coral, green parrots, and coco-palms.

Tongareva, this lovely prize
Bloomed like a bride in the peoples' eyes.
And the God hung his fish-hook across the skies,

So, medicine men of the tribe relate,
Who would catch fine fish from the Seas of Fate
Warm flesh, no vague star, he must pierce for bait.

Brogan's Lane

Brogan's Lane

THERE'S a crack in the city—down that sharp street
In couples, and armed, tramp rossers on beat.
Like a joss, silhouetted across the pane
A Chinese face watches down Brogan's Lane,
 Brogan's Lane, Brogan's Lane,
A reeling moon blinks over Brogan's Lane

Flash Fred, when he dives on a red lot, can choose
To moscow the swag at a Polaky Jew's.
Tho' bled by old Isaac, he needn't complain,
Rats pinch from their brothers down Brogan's Lane,
 Brogan's Lane, Brogan's Lane,
The melting pot bubbles in Brogan's Lane.

And Jenny, fresh down from the country, goes gay
And drives to the races and laughs at the play;
Till one morn, lying out in the cold and the rain,
A body is perished in Brogan's Lane.
 Brogan's Lane, Brogan's Lane,
There's only one turn to this long last lane.

With opium dens, sly cribs, bones and rags,
'Tis the haunt of thieves, wastrels, poor women and vags.
They booze to bring joy, they sin to numb pain,
But there'll come a stretch at the end of the lane,
 Brogan's Lane, Brogan's Lane,
The river and morgue shadow Brogan's Lane.

Nomad Chant

Nomad Chant

To E. J. BRADY

THE Spring wind, brother,
With marching music blows.
Calling to one another,
Children of the Mother,
We go where the wind goes.

New thoughts prick sharper
Than spears at old despair.
Who can be a carper?
The wind is a harper
Playing a lively air.

Thro' hilly lands and hollow,
From smoky towns afar,
Like our swift sister swallow
Untrodden tracks we follow
To malacoota bar.

We are Gipsy rovers,
That since the world began
Of trees and waters lovers,
Where'er the blue sky covers
Drove poaching caravan.

We are Arabs, pitching
Beneath the desert palm
A tent of peace, and stitching
Into our dreams bewitching
The starry hours of calm.

With barbaric handles
We shatter custom's domes;
We scrape rude sandals;
Eternal Goths and Vandals
We sack world-weary Romes.

To fresh adventures blowing
We follow the Nomad wind.
Clouds, seas, and stars are flowing,
And with the good wind going
We leave old worlds behind.

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And he laughed, when the Veil of Life was drawn
 On his bough i' th' blue aloft.

At Man and Evil and Destiny
 Loud pealed his mocking laughter,
Because high perched on his gaunt gum-tree
 He peered before and after.

Tho' world on wonder world is shuffled
 Thro' fingers of Fate forever,
Unmoved he squats, this wise unruffled
 Droll bird of the Never Never.

And moons and moons slip between each rime,
 But perched on the same gum-tree,
He is waiting to laugh at the death of Time,
 To mock Eternity.

Silenus To A Young Satyr

(Suggested by a Picture of Botticelli)

FIRST, you will tread ripe grapes which bursting gleam
And bubble, oozing in pale purple stream.

Huge flagons you will quaff, wanton, carouse,
But nothing lose save sorrow; you will drowse

In amorous nook, and dream, tasting divine
Indolence, sleepy with the fumes of wine.

Then you will be a hunter, keen to snare
Squirrel and deer, brown nymph in liliated lair,

And twitch a maenad's robe where graces glow
Like cherries peeping from a nest of snow.

The flute you'll play, and make mad cymbals' din,
Leap, riot, and dance, till stars no more can spin,

For you will follow Bacchus ever young
Aegean Isles and Indian Vales among,

And goat-hooved, twain-horned Pan; in wanderings
You'll learn the causes and the trend of things.

Sturdy and joyous, earth-born, but no smart
Of mortal pain can pierce your gladsome heart.

Snub-nosed, tub-bellied, goat-like eared, with small
Stiff tail and bristly hair, though Hesiod call

Us ugly, good for nothing, poets know
We cracked the nuts of knowledge long ago,

And old Silenus, spite red bleary eyes,
Knows more of wisdom than the seeming wise.

Head over heels you tumble, just like that
I romped with Gods and Men ere I grew fat.

Bring wine, a gushing horn of wine, your master
Loves quick-wit youth; run fast, you rogue, fast . . . faster!

London.

An Assyrian Cast

A VASE, a verse, a plaster cast
Preserves an empire of the past.

The palace falls; a graven stone
Rebuilds the walls of Babylon.

A wingèd bull-god's mystery
Enwraps the might of Nineveh.

An epigram embalms, I wis,
Sennacherib, Semiramis.

Evening Hymn To Krishna

CALL on the Lord! Cows leave the byre
And milk pails foam. The sunset's fire
Kindles the gopis' wild desire
To feel they kiss, and thrum
Cymbals, and clash their bracelets bright,
Breaking the still air of the night
With lilting lyrics of delight,
Lord of the Milkmaids, come!

Come as of old, a laughing boy
To steal the butter or destroy
Demons! Now moans shriek for joy,
The monkeys play and prance.
Cows call; our sleek calves moo for thee,
Krishna! Round thy Kadumbra tree
Maids, sick for love, are circling free
In mazy rasa dance.

Call on the Lord! In shouting bands
By Jumna stream we lift our hands.
May clouds rain flowers on the lands
Where once thy feet have trod!
Thy brides are yearning. Frolicsome,
Dancing, with beating on the drum,
And milkmaid songs, Shri Krishna! come
To flute gay souls to God.

Jaipur.

The Travail of Nature

THE thunder storm's drums and trumpets, the champing of surging seas,
The rustle of reeds at twilight, the sobbing plaint of the rain,
Wild winds that shriek in the heart o' the bush, the falling of mighty trees,
Cry to me, out of the darkness, a lament of life's unrest and pain.

* * * * *

All things that live, and are beaten and broken, pant with desire
For a dream-isle girdled by seas beyond the suns of the West,
Far from the lightning of change, from seasons of flood and fire,
And the woeful travail of Nature where the winds o' the world will have rest.

A Spring Morning

THE sky is blue and sunny,
 Busy the wild bee thrums,
Now manna-dew and honey
 Spill o'er from old red gums.

The bush gleams fresh and dewy
 To lure her stragglers back;
A greybeard, humping bluey,
 Goes whistling down the track.

From school brown children flocking
 Rob many a woolly nest;
And the mother croons, a-rocking
 Her baby at the breast.

To earth grown old and crabby
 With lilt of youth comes Spring,
With bloom and bud and baby,
 Each tender wistful thing.

She smoothes out Winter's wrinkles;
 And from her charmed horn
With fiery dew she sprinkles
 The Resurrection Morn.

Magpies

I HEAR the cry of the magpies joyously gushing
Over the morning,
The carolling slogan of magpies, like a rill rushing,
And sorrow scorning.

Magpies, fill up my heart with the joy of exultant things
Fresh notes adorning!
Breath of the morning primeval your melody brings
To thrill my morning.

The Fisher

VATEA went fishing (he dwelt afar In the land of Aviki where marvels are.)
He baited his hook with the evening star.

The star quivered under the waves, and wrought
Magical patterns, but tempted naught.
No porpoise, no little maniki was caught.

Enraged, he baited the hook afresh,
(Brown boys, with their nets, more fish could enmesh.)
From his thigh he tore a strip of red flesh,

Then dipping his line in the deep blue calms
Hooked, A O! an island, bright with balms,
With coral, green parrots, and coco-palms.

Tongareva, this lovely prize
Bloomed like a bride in the peoples' eyes.
And the God hung his fish-hook across the skies,

So, medicine men of the tribe relate,
Who would catch fine fish from the Seas of Fate
Warm flesh, no vague star, he must pierce for bait.

Brogan's Lane

Brogan's Lane

THERE'S a crack in the city—down that sharp street
In couples, and armed, tramp rossers on beat.
Like a joss, silhouetted across the pane
A Chinese face watches down Brogan's Lane,
 Brogan's Lane, Brogan's Lane,
A reeling moon blinks over Brogan's Lane

Flash Fred, when he dives on a red lot, can choose
To moscow the swag at a Polaky Jew's.
Tho' bled by old Isaac, he needn't complain,
Rats pinch from their brothers down Brogan's Lane,
 Brogan's Lane, Brogan's Lane,
The melting pot bubbles in Brogan's Lane.

And Jenny, fresh down from the country, goes gay
And drives to the races and laughs at the play;
Till one morn, lying out in the cold and the rain,
A body is perished in Brogan's Lane.
 Brogan's Lane, Brogan's Lane,
There's only one turn to this long last lane.

With opium dens, sly cribs, bones and rags,
'Tis the haunt of thieves, wastrels, poor women and vags.
They booze to bring joy, they sin to numb pain,
But there'll come a stretch at the end of the lane,
 Brogan's Lane, Brogan's Lane,
The river and morgue shadow Brogan's Lane.

Nomad Chant

Nomad Chant

To E. J. BRADY

THE Spring wind, brother,
With marching music blows.
Calling to one another,
Children of the Mother,
We go where the wind goes.

New thoughts prick sharper
Than spears at old despair.
Who can be a carper?
The wind is a harper
Playing a lively air.

Thro' hilly lands and hollow,
From smoky towns afar,
Like our swift sister swallow
Untrodden tracks we follow
To malacoota bar.

We are Gipsy rovers,
That since the world began
Of trees and waters lovers,
Where'er the blue sky covers
Drove poaching caravan.

We are Arabs, pitching
Beneath the desert palm
A tent of peace, and stitching
Into our dreams bewitching
The starry hours of calm.

With barbaric handles
We shatter custom's domes;
We scrape rude sandals;
Eternal Goths and Vandals
We sack world-weary Romes.

To fresh adventures blowing
We follow the Nomad wind.
Clouds, seas, and stars are flowing,
And with the good wind going
We leave old worlds behind.
