

Doreen

Dennis, C. J. (Clarence Michael James) (1876-1936)

A digital text sponsored by
Australian Literature Electronic Gateway

University of Sydney Library

Sydney

2001



<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/ozlit>

© University of Sydney Library.

The texts and Images are not to be used for commercial purposes without permission

Source Text:

Prepared against the print edition published by Angus and Robertson
Sydney, 1917

All quotation marks are retained as data.

First Published: 1917

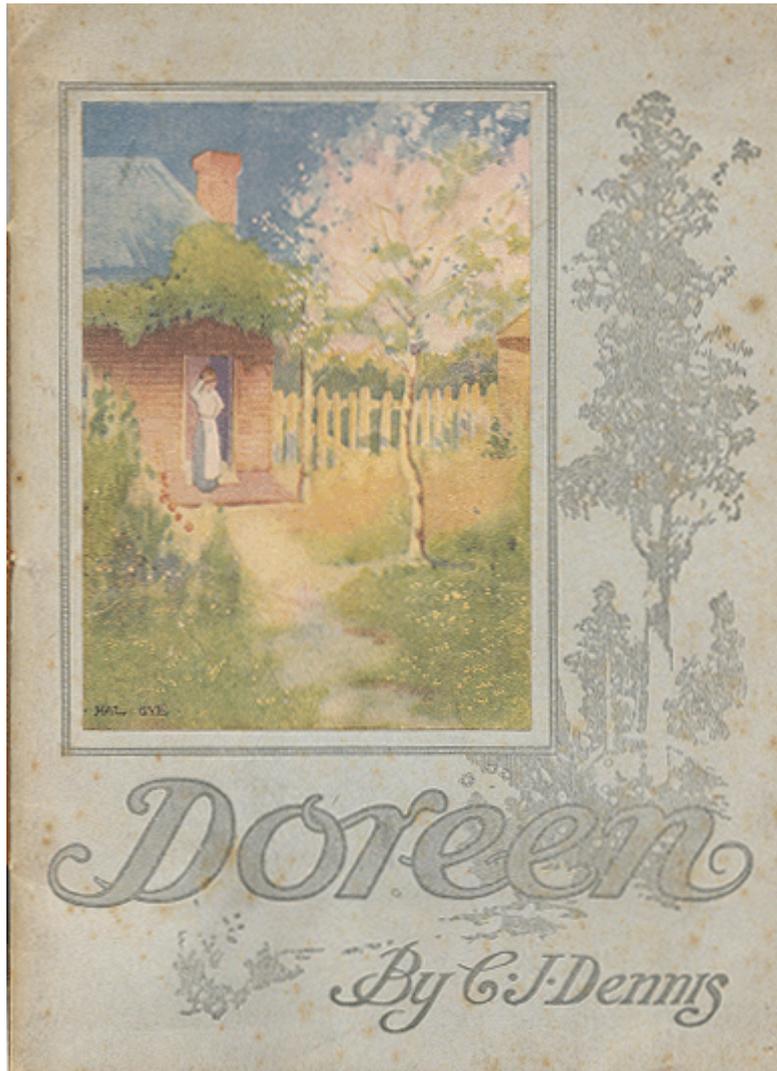
setis australian e-texts poetry

Doreen

Sydney

Angus and Robertson

1917



Front Cover



*As she come walkin' in the grass,
me little wife, Doreen.*

Illustration by Hal Gye of Doreen at washing line with caption: "As she come walkin' in the grass, me little wife, Doreen."

Doreen

Washing Day

The little gipsy vi'lits, they wus peepin' thro' the green
As she come walkin' in the grass, me little wife, Doreen.

The sun shone on the sassafras, where thrushes sung a bar.
- The 'ope an' worry uv our lives wus yellin' fer 'is Mar. -
I watched 'er comin' down the green; the sun wus on 'er 'air -
Jist the woman that I marri'd, when me luck wus 'eadin' fair.

I seen 'er walkin' in the sun that lit our little farm.
She 'ad three clothes-peg in 'er mouth, an' washin' on 'er arm -
Three clothes-pegs, fer I counted 'em, an' watched 'er as she come.
"The stove-wood's low," she mumbles, "an' young Bill 'as cut 'is thumb,
Now, it weren't no giddy love-speech, but it seemed to take me straight
Back to the time I kissed 'er first beside 'er mother's gate.

Six years uv wedded life we've 'ad, an' still me dreams is sweet ...
Aw, them bonzer little vi'lits, they wus smilin' round me feet.
An' wot's a bit uv stove-wood count, wiv paddicks grinnin' green,
When a bloke gits on to dreamin' uv the old days an' Doreen -
The days I thort I snared a saint; but since I've understood
I 'ave wed a dinkum woman, which is fifty times as good.

I 'ave wed a dinkum woman, an' she's give me eyes to see.
Oh, I ain't been mollycoddled, an' there ain't no fluff on me!
But days when I wus down an' out she seemed so 'igh above;
An' a saint is made fer worship, but a woman's made fer love.
An' a bloke is growin' richer as sich things 'e comes to know ...
(She pegs another sheet an' sez, "The stove-wood's gittin' low.")

A bloke 'e learns a lot uv things in six years wiv a tart;
But thrushes in the sassafras ain't singin' like me 'eart.
'Tis the thrushes 'oo 'ave tort me in their choonful sort o' way
That it's best to take things singin' as yeh meet 'em day be day.
Fer I wed a reel, live woman, wiv a woman's 'appy knack
Uv torkin' reason inside out an' logic front to back.

An' I like it. 'Struth I like it! Fer a wax doll in a 'ome,
She'd give a man the flamin' pip an' longin's fer to roam.
Aw, I ain't no silk-sock sonkie 'oo ab'ors the rood an' rough;
Fer, city-born an' gutter-bred, me schoolin' it wus tough.
An' I like the dinkum woman 'oo ... (She jerks the clothes-prop, so,
An' sez, so sweet an' dangerous, "The stove-wood's gittin' low.")

See, I've studied men in cities, an' I've studied 'em out 'ere;
I've seen 'em 'ard thro' piety an' seen 'em kind thro' beer.
I've seen the meanest doin' deeds to make the angels smile,
An' watched the proudest playin' games that crooks 'ud reckon vile.

I 'ave studied 'em in bunches an' I've read 'em one be one,
An' there isn't much between 'em when the 'ole thing's said an' done.

An' I've sort o' studied wimmin - fer I've met a tidy few -
An' there's times, when I was younger, when I kids meself I knew.

But 'im 'oo 'opes to count the stars or measure up the sea,
'E kin 'ave a shot at woman, fer she's fairly flummoxed me ...
("I'll 'ave to 'ave *some* wood," she sez, an' sez it most perlite
An' secret to a pair uv socks; an' jams a peg in, tight.)

Now, a woman, she's a woman. I 'ave fixed that fer a cert.
They're jist as like as rows uv peas from 'at to 'em uv skirt.
An' then, they're all so different, yeh find, before yeh've done,
The more yeh know uv all uv 'em the less yeh know uv one.
An' then, the more yeh know uv one ... (She gives 'er 'air a touch:
"The stove-wood's nearly done," she sez. "Not that it matters *much*.")

The little gipsy vi'lits, they wus smilin' round me feet.
An' this dreamin' dilly day-dreams on a Summer day wus sweet.
I 'eaves me frame frum orf the fence, an' grabs me little axe;
But, when I'm 'arf way to the shed, she stops me in me tracks.
"Yer lunch is ready. That ole wood kin easy wait a while."
Strike! I'm marri'd to a woman ... But she never seen me smile.



Pen sketch on page 7 by Hal Gye: man sitting on fence, smiling, with axe resting against post

Logic and Spotted Dog

"Unless you *'ide* that axe," she sez, "'E'll 'urt 'imself reel bad.
An' after all - Now, Bill, don't cry! - the trouble that I've 'ad
 Wiv 'im thro' croop an' whoopin' corf, 'e goes an' cuts 'imself!
 Why don't you 'ang it on the wall, or 'ide it on a shelf?
But there it wus, jist thrown about. You *ort* to take more care!
 You left it there!

"You left it there," she sez, "an' now ..." I sez, "'Old on a jiff.
Let's git the fac's all sorted out before we 'as a tiff.
 I'm mighty careful wiv that axe, an' never leaves it out.
 An' I'd be mad if that young imp got knockin' it about."
"Ole axe!" she sez. "Look at 'is *thumb!* A precious lot *you* care!
 You left it there!

I am marri'd to a woman; which is nacheral an' right.
I sez that over to meself, fer safety, day an' night.
 Most times I sez it fond an' proud wiv gladness in me mind;
 But sometimes philosophic-like an' wot yeh'd call resigned.
"An axe as sharp as *that,*" she sez. "It reely isn't fair!
 You left it there!

"The way you pet that axe," she sez - "the way it's ground an' filed,
The way you fairly fondle it, you'd think it wus a child!
 An' when I pick the ole thing up to cut a bit uv string
 Yeh rave an' shout ..." "Wait on," I sez. "But ir'n's a different thing.
An' you wus choppin' fencin' wire!" She sez, "Well, I don't care.
 You *left* it there!"

I 'elps meself to spotted dog, an' chews, an' thinks a while.
"I'm reely sorry," I begins. Then, as I seen 'er smile,
 I plays 'er fer the fun uv it, an' sez, "But, all the same,
 If he gits foolin' wiv that axe 'e's got 'imself to blame."
'Er eyes spark up. "A child like that! Now, Bill, it isn't fair!
 You left it there!"

I cuts another slice an' sez, "This spotted dog's a treat.
Uv course, 'oever left it there," I sez, "wus - indiscreet."
 "Careless!" she sez. "You *know* you are! 'E might 'a' cut 'is face!
 An axe as sharp as that," she sez, "should be kep' in its place."
"Quite right," I sez. "An' not," she sez, "jist thrown round anywhere.
 You left it *there!*"

An' then I lets 'er 'ave it, an' I sez, "Now, think a bit.
I put that axe away last night when all the wood wus split."
 "Well, that's enough about it now," she sez. I seen 'er wince,
 An' sez, "I put that axe way, *an' 'aven't used it since;*

But someone else wus usin' it this mornin', I kin swear,
An' left it there."

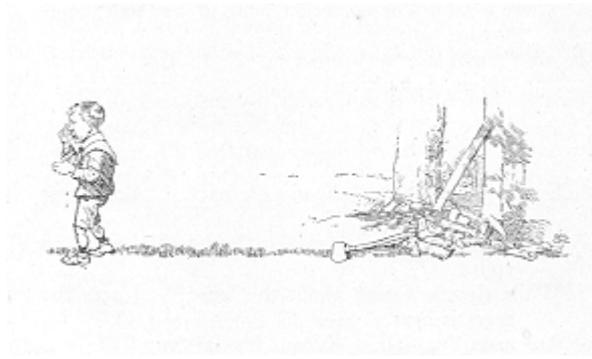
"Well, never mind ... Poor Bill!" she sez. "Was 'is poor thumb all 'urt?"
(Oh, it's entertainin' sometimes fer to argue wiv a skirt.)

"There's someone else," I sez, an' grins, an' kids I'm doin' fine,
"Wus usin' it this mornin' fer to cut a bit uv pine.
So now," I sez, "apolergise! I've beat you fair an' square!
You left it there!"

Fer 'arf a mo she pets young Bill, an' wouldn't meet me eye.
Thinkin' she wus - I knew she wus. An' then she lets it fly:
"If you 'ad cut that wood," she sez, an I implored you to,
There wouldn't be no need fer me to 'ave sich things to do!
It ain't right fer a woman ..." "Ere!" I sez, "Now, I don't care
'Oo left it there!"

"Uv course you don't!" she gits me back. "You never care a bit!
An' it ain't right fer a woman to 'ave kin'lin' wood to split;
While there's a man about the 'ouse!" I sees the tears is near,
An' pats 'er 'air. "Now, let it drop," I sez, "Don't worry, dear."
"Ow can I let it drop?" she sobs. "You said you didn't care
'Oo left it there!"

"I do!" I yells. "I mean - I don't - I ..." Oh, Gaw spare me days!
When you argue wiv a woman she 'as got you either ways!
You *'ave* to do it in the end; an' so I licks the dirt,
An' sez, "Dear, I apolergise. I'm - sorry - if I 'urt."
Yes, I'm marri'd to a woman. An' she smiles, an' strokes me 'air,
An' - leaves it there.



Pen sketch on page 12 of boy, crying as he walks away from axe and woodpile

Vi'lits

I wus pickin' gipsy vi'lits fer to try an' square Doreen.
We 'ad words ... about pianners - fer she wants one awful keen -
 'Igh words, about 'igh-toned idears - an', like a love-sick fool,
 'Ere I'm pickin' gipsy vi'lits when the kid come 'ome frum school.
'E started school a month ago, an' ain't got very far;
But, judgin' be the scraps 'e 'as, 'e's takin' after Par.

I tips there's somethin' wrong, the way 'e sneaks around the 'ouse.
An' then I seen 'is eye. Oh, strike! 'E 'ad a bonzer mouse! -
 A reel black-eye, that, in me day, I would 'a' worn wiv pride.
 But I'm a father now, an' sez, "'Ere, son, you git inside
An' show yer mother that there eye. 'Ow did it come about?"
Sez 'e, "A big bloke gimme that. I knocked the beggar out!"

I looks fer 'arf a second at the fambily disgrace,
Then I picks another vi'lit so 'e couldn't see me face.
 I wus grinnin' most unfatherlike, an' feelin' good inside.
 "You show yer Mar that eye uv yours. I'm 'shamed uv you!" I lied.
I watch 'im creep inside the 'ouse, an' 'ear 'is mother's yell.
An' then I straightens up me face an' goes inside as well.

'Twas raw beef-steak an' vinegar, an' tears, before she's done.
An' the sort uv look she gimme sez, "Yeh see 'ow 'e's begun!"
 I don't disturb the rites excep' to give some kind advice.
 In younger days I've caught black-eyes, an' give 'em once or twice.
"That big boy should be punished," sez Doreen, "'oo 'it our Bill."
I pats the 'ero's bandages, an' answers 'er, "'E will."

That ev'nin', down be'ind the shed, near where the scrub grows dense,
I gives young Bill a lesson in the art uv self-defence.
 I teaches 'im an uppercut that Ginger Mick tort me
 In ole days, down in Spadger's Lane. I gits down on me knee
To show 'im 'ow to time 'is 'it. 'E sneaks beneath me guard
Quite sudden, while I'm yappin', an' 'e cracks me one reel 'ard.

Did it please me? Wot do *you* think? Strike! That kid 'as got the knack!
An' it pleased me all to pieces 'ow the ole game all came back:
 Left-swings an' jolts an' short-arm jabs - the 'ole dash box uv tricks,
 Sich as we used down in the Lane when we wus short uv bricks.
I'm showin' 'im a fancy 'it, a reel ole ding-dong clout,
When the murderin' young savage tries to knock me front teeth out!

Uv course, 'e 'urt 'is little 'and, an' fetches out a yell
That brings Doreen down double quick. An' then - 'twus merry 'ell.
 She grabs the kid up in 'er arms, an' gives me sich a look
 As I ain't seen since years ago, when I done - somethin' crook.

"You'll 'ave 'im like *you* wus!" she cries. I'd sooner see 'im dead!
You want to make 'im ..." "Don't," I sez. "We'll take the rest as said."

It 'urt to see 'er shieldin' 'im as tho' I wus a plague.
An' ain't 'e mine as much as 'ers? Yet, I seen, sort o' vague,
The woman's way she looked at it, the picters that she 'ad
Uv young Bill goin' to the pack, an' follerin' 'is dad.
I tries me 'ardest to explain, an' made some fool ixcuse;
But I'm marri'd to a woman, an' - Aw, wot's the flamin' use?

I tells 'er if we'd 'ave young Bill keep up 'is end at school
'E will 'ave to use 'is flippers; but I sez it like a fool.
I sez it like I wus ashamed to 'ave 'im learn to fight,
When all the time, down in me 'eart, I knoo that I wus right.
She just gives me another look, an' goes in wiv the kid.
An' me? I picks them vi'lits up, not knowin' *wot* I did.

I 'as them fool things in me 'and when I lobs in the 'ouse,
An' makes bets wiv meself about the chances that she'll rouse.
But 'er, she comes the calm an' cold. Think's I, "'Ere's where I fall
Fer a forty-quid pianner, if I want to square it all.
Goo'-bye to forty lovely quid - time-paymint, fifty-three -
Then all at once she smiles an' sez, "Did you pick *those* fer me?"

"Did you pick those fer *me*," she sez. "Oh, Bill!" an' then, "Oh, *Bill!*"
I 'ints I 'ad idears to leave 'em to 'er in me will.
She grabs them dilly vi'lits, an' she 'olds 'em to 'er nose.
"Oh, Bill!" she smiles, "You alwus knoo 'ow fond I wus uv those!
Oh, Bill! You *dear!*" She 'ugs me then, jist in the same ole way.
'Struth! I'm marri'd to a woman, an' ... I'll learn young Bill some day!



Pen sketch on page 17 by Hal Gye: Bill, holding bunch of violets, near fence

Poosum

Jist 'ere it gripped me, on a sudden, like a red-'ot knife.
I wus diggin' in the garden, talkin' pleasant to me wife,
 When it got me good an' solid, an' I fetches out a yell,
 An' curses soft down in me neck, an' breathes 'ard fer a spell.
Then, when I tries to straighten up, it stabs me ten times worse.
I thinks per'aps I'm dyin', an' chokes back a reel 'ot curse.

"I've worked too fast," I tells Doreen. "Me backbone's runnin 'ot.
I'm sick! I've got - Oo, 'oly wars! I dunno *wot* I've got!
 Jist 'ere - *Don't touch!* - Jist round back 'ere, a blazin' little pain
 Is clawin' up me spinal cord an' slidin' down again."
"You come inside," she sez. "Per'aps it's stoopin' in the sun.
Does it 'urt much?" I sez, "Oh, no; I'm 'avin' lots o' fun."

Then, cooin' to me, woman-like, she pilots me inside.
It stabs me every step I takes; I thort I would 'a' died.
 "There now," she sez. "Men can't stand pain, it's alwus understood."
 "Stand pain?" I 'owls. Then, Jumpin' Jakes! It gits me reely good!
So I gets to bed in sections, fer it give me beans to bend,
An' shuts me eyes, an' groans again, an' jist waits fer the end.

"Now, you lie still," she orders me, "until I think wot's best.
Per'aps 'ot bran, or poultices. You jist lie still, an' rest,
 Rest? 'Oly Gosh! I clinched me teeth, an' clawed the bloomin' bunk;
 Fer a red-'ot poker jabbed me ev'ry time I much as wunk.
I couldn't corf, I couldn't move, I couldn't git me breath.
"Look after Bill," I tells Doreen. "I feels that ... this is ... death."

"Death, fiddlesticks," she laughs at me. "You jist turn over now."
I 'owls, "'Ere! Don't you *touch* me, or there'll be a blazin' row!
 I want to die jist as I am," She sez, "Now, Bill, 'ave sense.
 This 'as to go on while it's 'ot." I groans, "I've no defence."
An' so she 'as 'er way wiv me. An', tho' I'm suffrin' bad,
I couldn't 'elp but noticin' the gentle touch she 'ad.

That evenin', when the doctor come, sez 'e, "Ah! 'Urtin'much?
Where is the trouble?" I sez, "Where you ain't allowed to touch!"
 'E mauls an' prods me while I 'owls to beat the bloomin' band.
 Gawbli'me! I'd 'a cracked 'im if I'd strength to lift me 'and.
"Discribe yer symtims now," sez 'e. I fills meself wiv wind,
An' slung 'im out a catalog while 'e jist stood an' grinned.

"Ar, har!" 'e sez. "Sciatiker! Oh, we'll soon 'ave yeh well."
"Sciatiker?" sez I. "Yer sure yeh don't mean Jumpin' 'Ell?
 It ain't no privit devil wiv a little jagged knife?"
 "Tut, tut," 'e grins. "You'll soon be right. I leaves yeh to yer wife."

I looks at 'er, she smiles at me, an' when I seen that smile:
"Aw, poultices!" I groans. An' she enjoys it all the while!

But I'm marri'd to a woman; an', I gives yeh my straight tip,
It makes a man feel glad uv it when sickness gits a grip.

'Er looks is full uv tenderness, 'er ways is full uv love,
An' 'er touch is like a blessin' as she gently bends above.
'Er speech is firm, but motherin'; 'er manners strict, but mild:
Yer 'er 'usban', an' 'er patient, an' 'er little orphin child.

When yer marri'd to a woman an' yer feelin' well an' right;
When yer frame is full uv ginger an' yer mouth is full uv skite,
Then yeh tork about the "missus" in an 'orf'and sort uv way;
She's 'andy in the 'ouse if she don't 'ave too much to say.
But when Ole Man Sciatiker, 'e does yeh up reel neat,
Then she's yer own reel mate, she is, an' all yer 'ands an' feet.

An' so Doreen, she nurses me while I lie there an' grouch;
Fer I'm snarky when I tumble that it ain't me dyin' couch.
I barks at 'er, an' snarls at 'er, an' orders 'er about,
An' nearly wears the feet orf 'er wiv trottin' in an' out.
An' while Ole Man Sciatiker, 'e 'as me in 'is sway
Doreen, she jist gives in to me - an' alwus gits 'er way.

Three solid days I 'as uv it, an' then the pain lets out.
I'm feelin' fit fer graft again, an' wants to git about.
It's then she lets me see 'er 'and, an' orders, "You stay there
Until yeh gits yer 'ealth an' strength to sit up in a chair."
"But there's that stove-wood," I begins. Sez she, "Now don't you fret.
I'm very sparin' wiv it, an' there's tons an' tons there yet."

Tell yeh straight; I got to like it. It's a crook thing to confess,
But to 'ave 'er fussin' round me give me chunks uv 'appiness.
So I gits out in the garden wiv an arm-chair an' a rug,
An' I comes the floppin' invaleed, an' makes meself reel snug.
I droops me eyes an' 'angs me 'ands, an' looks dead crook an' ill;
An' wriggles ev'ry time she sez, "Wot would yeh like now, Bill?"

An' then, one day, I 'ears the axe down there be'ind the 'ouse;
An' I sees meself a loafer, an' me conscience starts to rouse.
I 'eaves me frame out uv the chair, an' wanders down the yard.
She's beltin' at a knotty log, an' beltin' good an' 'ard.
I grabs the axe. "Give up," I sez. "I ain't no shattered wreck.
This 'ere's my job." An' then, Gawstruth! I gits it in the neck!

"Am I yer wife?" she asks me straight. "Why can't yeh trust me, Bill?
Am I not fit to see to things when you are weak an' ill?"
I tries to say I'm possumin', an' reely well an' strong;
But ev'ry time I starts to tork she's got me in the wrong.
"Yeh can't deceive me, Bill," she sez. "Yer 'ealth is fur frum good.

Yeh jist can't trust yer wife to chop a little bit uv wood!

"Yeh got to come out in the cold," she sez, "wivout yer wraps.
An' now I'll 'ave yeh on me 'ands fer days wiv a relapse!"

"I been pretendin'," I iexplains. She sez, "Am I yer wife?"

Yet sooner than yeh'd trust to me yeh go an' risk yer life,
Well, I'm marri'd to a woman, an' - it might seem sort uv meek -
I goes back into bed again ... an' 'ates it ... fer a week!

THE END.



Pen-sketch on page 24 by Hal Gye of Doreen, with meal tray, in garden



*So I gits out in the garden wiv
an arm-chair an' a rug.*

Illustration by Hal Gye of Bill in arm-chair in garden; Doreen taking tray away. Caption reads "So I gits out in the garden wiv an arm-chair an' a rug."

