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Central Australian

Exploring Rhymes

AND

Camel-Back Jingles.

BY

D. LANDALE BEETSON,

(ONE OF THE PARTY.)

ADELAIDE :

FREARSON & BROTHER, PRINTERS, NORTH TERRACE.

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*Frearsen & Brother,
Printers,
North Terrace, Adelaide.*



Dedication.

[BY PERMISSION.]

TO THE
HONOURABLE JOHN HOWARD ANGAS, M.L.C.,
ONE OF THE DIRECTORS OF
THE CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN EXPLORING AND PROSPECTING
ASSOCIATION, WHICH ORGANIZED
AND DISPATCHED THE TWO EXPLORING EXPEDITIONS
INTO CENTRAL AND WESTERN AUSTRALIA,
OF WHICH
THE AUTHOR WAS A MEMBER—
THESE RHYMES ARE RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
AS A SLIGHT TOKEN OF GRATITUDE.

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LAURA VALE

PREFACE.

IN laying myself open to criticism in the publication of these rhymes and jingles, I would ask a generous public to bear in mind that I claim no merit whatever for them beyond the fact that the theme is original, and they are simply descriptive rhymes and jingles (especially jingles) on a subject of which I have had many years' experience.

They were written simply for the amusement of my wife and her friends, and to assist in whiling away an hour or two of my weary monotonous travelling. It has amused and interested them, and I have been persuaded to publish this portion, in hope that it may meet with your approval.

To my bush friends (I mean those who have had experience of life beyond the wire fences) I would say—If I should succeed in taking you with me in my travels I trust you will feel interested, and I shall be


Ever yours gratefully,

THE AUTHOR.

NOTE.—“Glen Edith” and the “Tarn of Auber,” the most westerly water discovered by Ernest Giles in his endeavour to explore the country to the westward, in which he was defeated, owing to the terribly dry nature of the country.

*The Author purposes publishing “Rhymes on Lake Amadeus,”
together with “Out-Station Reminiscences.”*

EXPLORING RHYMES
AND CAMEL-BACK JINGLES.



FAREWELL to thee "Glen Edith,"
Thou hast been a haven of rest
To us in our weary journeying
Away to the distant west.
Farewell to thy "Tarn of Auber,"
That dark, dank, mystical pool ;
Farewell to thy rocks and caverns,
And waters so wonderfully cool.
Thanks to the man that found thee—
That bold explorer, Giles.

We have rested, and now we are ready
To face the innumerable trials
Of long and patient endurance,
Of danger, hunger, and thirst,—
And of all the body can suffer,
The want of water is worst.
A thousand miles we have travelled
Under the burning sun,
Into the heart of Australia ;—
And yet we have only begun
The work we have come to accomplish—
I mean to accomplish, or try ;
For we are determined to do it—
Determined to do it, or die.
Others have tried before us,
But they have been beaten back ;
And the horrible words—"No water !"
Is written across their track.

'Tis supposed that the Lake is extending
Some hundreds of miles to the west,—

How far? is the difficult problem
 We have been sent out to test.
 Geographical knowledge is wanted,
 The world grows so wonderfully small,
 That the time is not very far distant,
 When there won't be room for us all ;
 But out to the westward there may be
 A country where white men can live,—
 With mountains, rivers, and pastures,
 The best that nature can give.
 Geological knowledge may help us
 The glorious news to unfold,
 Of a country abounding in minerals—
 Copper, silver, and gold.

So, steadily facing to westward,
 Over the hills of sand ;
 Winding about like a serpent,
 Moves forward our little band.
 Three of us only—the leader,
 Teitkins, Warman, myself,
 Besides the black boy, Billy,
 Who must not be left on the shelf.
 He's a capital hand at tracking,—
 The signs of water can tell,—
 And is up to the ways of the niggers,
 And a very good shot, as well.
 And no doubt we shall have trouble,
 If it be as we are told,
 That the natives out there are numerous,
 Stalwart, treacherous, bold.

Still over the spinifex sandhills,
 Across the spinifex plain,
 Dotted with oak and acacia,
 Then over the sandhills again.
 Not a sign of anything living,
 Not a sound of life is heard ;
 Not even the track of a lizard,
 Or note of a passing bird.

From dawn of day till sunset,
 Over these seas of sand ;
 Under the burning tropical sun,
 Scarce man or beast can stand.

The camels begin to feel it,
 And the pace is getting slow ;
 Seven days they have been without water,
 And our casks are getting low.
 But away in the distant horizon,
 A little northward of west,
 We see some low stony rises,
 That may give us water, and rest.
 We reach them, much disappointed,
 For useless our journey has been ;
 Not a sign of the presence of water,
 Not a vestige of anything green.

Still skirting the hills to the westward,
 We mount a low, stony rise,
 And there, immediately under us,
 Is a great and welcome surprise :
 An oasis—truly as beautiful
 As any that ever was seen ;
 Blossoming trees and bushes,
 And everything bright and green ;
 A stream of the purest water,
 Overshadowed by stately trees,
 And the scent of a thousand blossoms and flowers
 Is wafted along by the breeze.

Upon the bank of the streamlet,
 Under a beantree's shade,
 With the tall, white gumtrees towering above,
 A neat little camp is made ;
 And stretching ourselves on the bright green
 grass,

We fill up our pipes, and smoke ;
 And once more we join in a hearty laugh,
 At some innocent, practical joke ;
 And faces that were hard, and set,
 And stern but an hour before,

Relax into a pleasant smile
Of quiet content once more.

And then, the pannicans of tea,
Made in the old quart pot ;
The juicy steaks of a kangaroo,—
Grilled on the coals, and hot ;—
No epicure at kingly board,
No gourmand at his feast,
Ever enjoyed a meal as we
Off that marsupial beast.
No condiments do we require,
Nor dainty sauces there,
But an honest appetite and thirst,
Hard earnt in God's pure air.

And as the evening shadows fall,
And night resumes her sway,
We talk of various incidents
That happened in the day ;—
Of the bitter disappointment
When we reached the biggest hill,
And found there was no water,
And we'd have to travel still.

We never could have reached the Tarn,*
'Twas useless, quite, to try ;
In a day or two, or three, at most,
The whole of us must die.
Though of our silent, inner thoughts,
When first we saw the creek,
And knew that we were safe once more,—
Of these we do not speak.
Yet, in the silence of the night,
When the moon has climbed the hill,
Shedding around its silvery light,
And all is calm and still,
Gazing up at the glorious lights
In the great blue dome above,

*The Tarn of Auber, the waterhole at Glen Edith.

The soul draws near with a thankful prayer,
To the one great God of Love.

Three days, and then with hope renewed,
And strengthened by our rest,
Again we face the waste of sand
Stretching away to the west.

The desert-oaks are thicker now,
The sandhills not so high ;
And many places that we pass
Are pleasing to the eye.

The trees are thirty feet in height,
And uniform in size ;

With a rounded top and tall straight trunk,
That a forester would prize.

The bark is rough and almost black,
The string-like leaves hang down
In clusters of a dark grey green,
Almost approaching brown.

The yellow stalks of the porcupine,*
Growing amongst the trees,
In the distance, looks like a field of corn,
Waving about in the breeze.

We know, however, that it is
A desert waste at least,
Without a particle of food
For either bird or beast.

Day after day we travel west,
Till the camels want a spell ;
When again kind fortune favours us,
And we find a native well.

We had seen no signs of water near,
At least, none that we knew,
When just at dusk, from north to south,
A bronzewing past us flew.

Next day we travel south till noon,
To see what that brings forth ;
But as we find no signs about,
We think it must be north.

*Spinifex, commonly called porcupine grass.

Billy, however, has gone off,
 And soon returns to tell
 The welcome news, that he has found
 A little native well.
 Yes, there it is, a good one, too,
 Quite hidden by the grass ;
 And one, not knowing of the signs,
 Within ten yards might pass.

We let the camels rest three days,
 And then our course we change,
 And bear up to the north a bit,
 For a very distant range
 Of hills, now known as Beetson's Range ;—
 And again the Fates are kind,
 For running to waste in the desert sand,
 Another stream we find.

A pretty place—a little vale—
 About a half-mile wide,
 With lofty, rugged, pine-clad rocks,
 Rising on either side.
 In the centre—like a pedestal—
 A small hill stands alone,
 And, on top of this, a monument—
 A towering mass of stone.
 The leader called it Laura Vale—
 After a daughter dear,
 I lost but eighteen months ago,
 Just in her thirteenth year.

No costly stone, with inscription,
 Over her little grave stands ;
 But here is a monument priceless,
 And one not made by hands.
 My heart, though calloused and hardened,
 Grows soft, when I think of that day,
 When the Lord in His infinite wisdom,
 Thought fit to take her away.
 On a sultry Sabbath evening,
 As the sun was sinking to rest,

And a halo of golden glory
 Shone in the crimson west ;—
 Just as the bells ceased their tolling,
 With a sigh, her sweet life passed away ;—
 He had taken my jewel and treasure,
 And left me a casket of clay.
 As the angels from Heaven were descending,
 To take up acceptable prayer,
 They met the pure soul of my darling,
 Taking its flight through the air.
 Oh, how they shouted in triumph,
 As they bore her above to her rest ;
 In the arms of her dear, loving Saviour,—
 In the home of the holy and blest.
 “ Away with such thoughts, ’ they unman me,
 And are only fit for a girl,
 Whilst I am a hard-hearted sinner,
 With the manner and speech of a churl.
 As soon as the camels are rested,
 We start on our journey again ;
 And day after day we travel
 Over a desolate plain.
 To the northward, the southward, or westward,
 No matter which way we turned ;
 For sixty or seventy miles or more,
 The whole of the country is burned.
 The plain is as flat as a table,
 The sand is a yellowish red ;
 And the grass, the trees, and the bushes
 Are burnt up, blackened and dead.
 We travel along until sunset,
 To-morrow we’ll have to go back ;
 ’Tis useless to go any further,
 We must try a more southerly track.
 In the morning, whilst after the camels,
 One of us climb up a tree ;
 And far away to the westward,
 The top of a mountain we see.
 This causes a little excitement,
 It may be the long-promised land ;

And it's pleasant to know, at any rate,
 There's a break in this terrible sand.
 The question is gravely considered,
 Shall we go back on our track ?
 It will take us three days to the ranges,
 And two-and-a-half to go back.
 There has been a shower here lately,
 No later than two or three weeks ;
 Are we sure to find water
 In some of the gullies or creeks ?
 The camels can stand about three days,—
 We have enough water for four,
 And if we shorten the ration,
 It may last a day or so more.

To return, we know, is the safest,
 And calmly we reckon the cost ;
 If there is no water ahead of us,
 The whole of the party is lost.
 To be beaten is terribly galling,
 They will say we were wanting in pluck,
 So we'll make a bold dash for the ranges,
 And trust to our fortune or luck.
 No, we'll trust in the power above us,
 Who is watching us, even out here ;
 So westward, steadily westward,
 We advance without shadow of fear.
 We leave the burnt country at mid-day,
 When the range looms up, rugged and black,
 We are sure to find water in this place,—
 We are glad that we did not turn back.
 We camp at some green cotton bushes ;—
 To the camels, this should be a treat,
 But they, like ourselves, although hungry,
 Are far too thirsty to eat.

Again and again they make eastward,
 It is really a pitiful sight ;
 As they will make back to the water,
 We must tie them down for the night.

Next morning, long before daylight,
 We saddle them up, and away ;
 We want to get into the ranges,
 Before the great heat of the day.
 He has called it the Kintore Ranges,
 After the Earl of Kintore ;
 The highest peak is Mount Leisler,
 Seven thousand feet high, or more ;
 Looming boldly up, like a lion
 Standing on guard at his lair,
 And frowning darkly upon us,
 As though to say, " stranger, beware !"
 We approach it nearer and nearer,
 And to stifle the thought, though we try,
 There's a dread in each heart at the prospect,—
 The place looks so horribly dry.

The camels are now crawling slowly,
 Their race is just about run ;
 The thermometer one hundred and eighty,
 When fairly exposed to the sun.
 All three of us look just like mummies,—
 Our skins are like parchment that's blacked ;
 The eyes are sunk in their sockets,
 And the lips are like leather that's cracked.
 But still there's a look of defiance,
 Though our tongues are too swollen to speak,
 As we drink the last drop of water,
 When a-mile-and-a-half from the peak.
 Our feelings and thoughts as we drink it—
 I often think of it yet,
 " Is this the last drink of water ?"
 " The very last drop we shall get ?"
 We approach to solve the great question—
 Are we to live or to die ?
 Is this horrible desert to conquer us ?
 Is death then so terribly nigh ?
 At last we stop in the shadow
 Of a great perpendicular wall,
 That looks as though every moment,
 It would topple over and fall.

With a struggle, we take off the saddles,—
 We begin to get painfully weak ;
 Then together we make for a ravine—
 'Tis there we shall find what we seek.
 Yes, there is a beautiful rock-hole ;
 But each turns away with a sigh,
 And we look at each other in silence ;—
 The hole is now empty and dry.

Then two turn off to the eastward,
 The others turn off to the right,
 And search in each gully and ravine,
 Till stopped by our weakness, and night,
 'Tis vain ; of that life giving fluid
 Not a drop ; not a sign is there there ;
 And we go back to camp quite exhausted,
 With a feeling of dull, dark despair.

The last spark of hope was extinguished
 When we looked at the others, and then
 We knew that nothing was left us—
 But to face death together like men.
 And then with paper and pencil,
 We each scrawl a word of farewell ;
 Our hands are too feeble and nerveless,
 The whole of the story to tell.

Oh, ye who dwell in the city,—
 In homes of comfort and ease ;
 With every luxury round you,
 Can you picture such moments as these ?
 When men, in the prime of their manhood
 And strength, have to lay down to die,
 And feel their life's blood getting thicker
 And thicker, until it is dry.

Often you read of a hero,
 With an exquisite thrill of delight,
 Engaged in the heat of a battle,
 In a glorious hand-to-hand fight.
 'Mid the din of rifle and cannon,
 The groans of the dying are heard,

And all is intensest excitement,
 And his blood to a fury is stirred.
 Not a second he thinks of the danger,
 As he seeks the advantage to gain
 Over the man that's before him,—
 He must either slay, or be slain.

He has conquered; and now dashes forward,
 The ranks of the foremost to gain,
 And see! he is gallantly leading;—
 Ah! he's stopped by a shot through the brain.
 'Twas a brave and a glorious ending,—
 He knew not that death was at hand:
 But we perish in agony slowly,
 In this horrible desert of sand.

As we lay within the shadow,
 In the dark and silent gloom
 Of the mountain high above us,
 Waiting for our coming doom,
 Thoughts of bygone days come rushing
 On my dull and fevered brain;
 Scenes and places, long forgotten,
 I can see them all again.
 Childhood's happy home at Stradbroke,
 Where I played beside the brook,
 Listening to the bubbling waters,
 In some dark and shady nook.
 Boyhood's days at school and college,
 And at home amongst the hills;
 And waterfalls at Morialta,
 Where I roamed about at will.
 Youth's bold dreams and high ambitions,
 As I grew to manhood's years;—
 All was bright and free from shadow,
 Full of promise, without fears.
 Then the years upon the station;
 The heavy loss through want of rain;
 And at last the utter ruin,—
 Then the start in life again.

Its hard struggle and its failures ;
 Then the one success in life,
 That has always since been brightened
 By a good and loving wife.

Then my mind begins to wander,
 As I think of those at home ;
 And the sorrow they will suffer,
 As they struggle on alone.
 I can see strange forms and figures
 Coming from the mountain top,
 And one more bold than are the others,
 Close beside me seems to stop.

'Tis the spirit of the mountain,—
 And I think I hear him say—
 “ Yes, bold stranger, thou art conquered ;—
 Thou shalt not live another day ;
 Where thou lay'st, thy bones shalt whiten,
 In the rain and burning sun.
 As a warning unto others,
 Who may in the future come,
 I have stood here countless ages,
 Guarding this, my desert home ;—
 Where my dark-skinned children only
 Are in peace allowed to roam ;
 I have heard them speak affrighted,
 Of a strange and white-skinned race,
 Who are coming from the southward,
 And would over-run the place.
 Tear me down to make their dwellings,—
 Clear my lands to grow their corn,—
 Destroying all the face of nature,—
 But I've treated it with scorn.
 And thou hast even dared defy me ;
 Treated warnings with disdain ;
 Now thou callest on another,—
 But thy calling is in vain.
 I alone am here to hear thee,—
 Other powers I do defy ;

Here I reign supreme for ever,
 To-morrow, stranger, thou shalt die!"
 "Cease, proud fool, thy silly boasting,
 Thou hast lured us on to death;
 And for this alone I curse thee,
 Curse thee with my latest breath.
 Thou hast foes that are remorseless,
 Who will conquer thee and thine,
 Brave old Pluvius, blustering Boreas,
 And that one great victor—Time.
 And there is a greater power
 Ruling o'er the other three,
 At whose will all things created—
 Even Time, shall cease to be.

Go and leave me to my anguish,—
 Thy triumphant boasting cease;
 For I know that I am dying—
 Let me die at least in peace."
 O! God above, is this thy mercy,—
 This our reward for trusting Thee;
 That Thou let'st the very devils
 Triumph o'er our agony?
 Now the darkness is departing,
 All around grows clear and bright;
 And I see two forms descending,
 Clothed in pure and spotless white.
 One, the angel called Mercy,
 Holds the other by the hand;
 And my eyes with light are blinded,
 As above my head they stand.

The one with pitying looks of sorrow,—
 The other with a heavenly smile,—
 Then I recognize the second—
 'Tis the spirit of my child!
 "Cease, poor sinner, all thy doubting,
 Canst thou alter God's decree?
 By thy sinful, vain complaining;
 What is to be, will surely be.

If He wills that thou shalt perish
 Ere another day shall dawn,
 He the wind will surely temper,
 To the lambs that He has shorn."
 Then the light fades slowly, softly,
 As from me they float away ;
 And I hear the second spirit—
 " Father, dearest father, pray."
 " Great God of love in very mercy,
 End my weak and wasted life ;
 But, as Thou art a God of mercy,
 Guard my children, bless my wife."
 Now a peace comes stealing o'er me,
 That increases with each breath ;
 Till all fear and pain has left me—
 Surely, this is never death ?
 No, my heart feels light and happy,
 As I hasten down the street,
 To my little vine-clad cottage,
 And the children run to greet.
 Here the boys come, helter, skelter,
 And my pretty dark-eyed queen,
 With her little hands extended,—
 'Tis my bonny Ioleen.
 And, beyond, I see another,
 Standing at the cottage door ;
 With a happy smile of welcome,
 That I've often seen before.
 Ah ! great God, the mount's on fire !
 See the cliffs are rent in twain !
 And the very rocks are roaring,
 As though they were in mortal pain.
 No ! flash on flash ! it is of lightning,
 And the thunder's echoing roar ;
 Then there comes a moment's silence,
 And the rain begins to pour.
 Stranger, can you guess our feelings,—
 Awakened thus from death's long sleep ;
 Life, and strength, and hoping renewing,—
 Do you smile that men should weep ?