

SINGABOUT

SEPTEMBER 2018

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

***Under Wide Skies* by Jim Grahame (J W Gordon)**

Jim Grahame (pen name for Jim Gordon, 1874 - 1949) “has written for the world at large and especially for bush folk.... He writes of simple things and simple joys, themes that enter into the everyday life of the outback Australian” - so writes J K Moir, President of the Bread and Cheese Club in the Foreword to *Under Wide Skies* in 1947. Grahame’s poems (numbering about 200 in this volume) are organised under headings such as Bush Songs, People of the Bush, Bugle Calls, Tributes to Lawson and Other Tributes. When reading the selection of poems in the section ‘Bush Songs’, it doesn’t take long to realise we have a craftsman who can paint wonderful images in our minds:

We breakfast, then start on a rollicking jaunt
Through ti-tree and bracken that wallabies haunt,
By wheat fields a-waving and emerald green
Low hills in the distance, enhancing the scene.
A track leads us down to a broad billabong
Where sentinel gum trees have guarded it long. (from *Arcadia*)

In *The Call of the Bush*, Grahame urges city folk, especially “youths that are dole-faced”, to venture into the bush “Blazing new tracks through my forests, scaling my ruggedest peaks, carving out homes in the valleys, skirting my rivers and creeks” and although he acknowledges that the bush has its challenges, he seems to remain upbeat about the healing powers of nature “Bushfires here their toll have taken, but their work is partly hidden by a kurrajong that’s growing, green and glowing, at the gate”(taken

from *Vanished Homesteads*).

Grahame also writes of the many characters of the bush he met as he trekked through the outback or settled in various townships. We learn about *The Bushman's Wife* ("The children's clothes are all in rags, I'm sick an' tired of patchin'"), *Concertina Jack* ("He played while they danced till the sun went down and the west was arched with a golden glow) and *The Old Bush Hawker* ("The children stand and gaze and gaze and peep beneath the fly, and whisper of the treasures there that mother "oughter" buy").

As a travelling companion and friend of Henry Lawson, Grahame has a number of poems in *Under Wide Skies* dedicated to his mate. In *When Lawson Walked With Me*, we learn of their pleasure in each other's company ("As we passed by a little church we glimpsed within the door, where people sat with bowing heads and some knelt on the floor; but we heard not the preacher's voice nor listened to the bell; we were content to hear the tales each other had to tell."). Mary Gilmore was also a friend of both Lawson and Grahame and in *Mary Gilmore*, Grahame writes "The women of hut and tent and camp are in Mary Gilmore's ken; for she knows the lives of the bushmen's wives as our Lawson knew the men."

My only small beef with Jim Grahame's work is that in the first poem of the book *The Men that Understand*, he states that

Shed-hand, jackeroo, boss and teamster –
They are the men that can understand!
Self-taught scholars and baffled dreamers,
Bronzed barge-hands of the river steamers –
They are the men I love to heed me
(Let furious critics reprimand) –
They are the men that clothe and feed me;
And I'll sing the tune that their ears demand.

I would suggest that both women and men can enjoy Grahame's poetry. Towards the end of his life, Grahame was awarded a Commonwealth Literary Pension with Prime Minister Ben Chifley deciding "it was due recognition of his contribution to Australian literature as a poet and balladeer over 50 years" (from the book *Mates: The Friendship that Sustained Henry Lawson* by Gregory Bryan, New Holland Publishers 2016 p. 402). Jim Grahame deserves to be more widely read and *Under Wide Skies* is a great place to start.

Copies of the book can be purchased by contacting:
Phillipa Hollenkamp, 0409 564 100, cost \$30 + postage & packing \$12.50

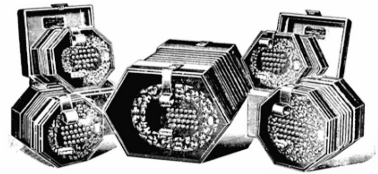
Karen Fong, 22 July 2018

The Good Old Concertina

Words: Henry Lawson
Tune: Bob Bolton

'Twas mer - ry when the hut was full of jol - ly girls and fel - lows,
We danced and sang un - til we burst the con - cert - i - na's bel - lows
From dis - tant Dar - ling to the sea, from the Downs to the Riv - er - in - a,
Has e'er a gum in all the West not heard the con - cer - tin - a.

'Twas merry when the hut was full
Of jolly girls and fellows,
We danced and sang until we burst
The concertina's bellows.
From distant Darling to the sea;
From the Downs to the Riverina,
Has e'er a gum in all the West
Not heard the concertina?



'Twas peaceful round the campfires blaze,
The long white branches o'er us;
We'd play the tunes of bygone days,
To some good old bush chorus.
Old Erin's harp may sweeter be,
The Scottish pipes blow keener;
But sing an old bush song for me
To the good old concertina.

'Twas cosy by the hut-fire bright
When the pint pot passed between us;
We drowned the voice of the stormy night
With the good old concertina's.
Though trouble drifts along the years,
And the pangs of care grow keener,
My heart is gladdened when I hear
That good old concertina.



Now for some more poetry, this time from Trove (trove.nla.gov.au). Papa's Poem was published in the Maitland Daily Mercury, Tuesday 16 October 1900. All about the joys of a new addition to the family that was easily satisfied in the Good Old Days with some simple fare.

Papa's Poem.

We need not the fiddle, we want not the drum,
Since the new little screecher to daddy has come;
When the morning is fresh, and the evening is stale,
We'll get music enough from it's infantile wail !

When the work of the city or toil of the farm
Is ended, that infant our leisure will charm ;
And peaceful and sweet will indeed be our rest
When 'tis lulled by the bagpipes which blow from its breast !

But, no! precious infant, we'll stay your sweet cries,
So that fresh from their slumbers your parents may rise ;
We'll get Arnott's Milk Arrowroot Biscuits, so sweet,
And your mummy shall give them to baby to eat !

She will roll them to powder and soak in hot milk,
They will make baby's skin just as glossy as silk ;
Or with water that's boiling poured over them whole,
She will comfort its stomach and gladden its soul !

Then the infant will chirrup and chuckle and crow,
And no longer its temper and fretfulness show ;
'Twill be restful and happy, and life will be sweet
When the baby has Arnott's nice biscuits to eat!

We need not the fiddle, we want not the drum,
The piano, or organ, since baby has come ;
Its voice is like music, so tender and sweet,
Now it Arnott's Milk Arrowroot Biscuits doth eat !