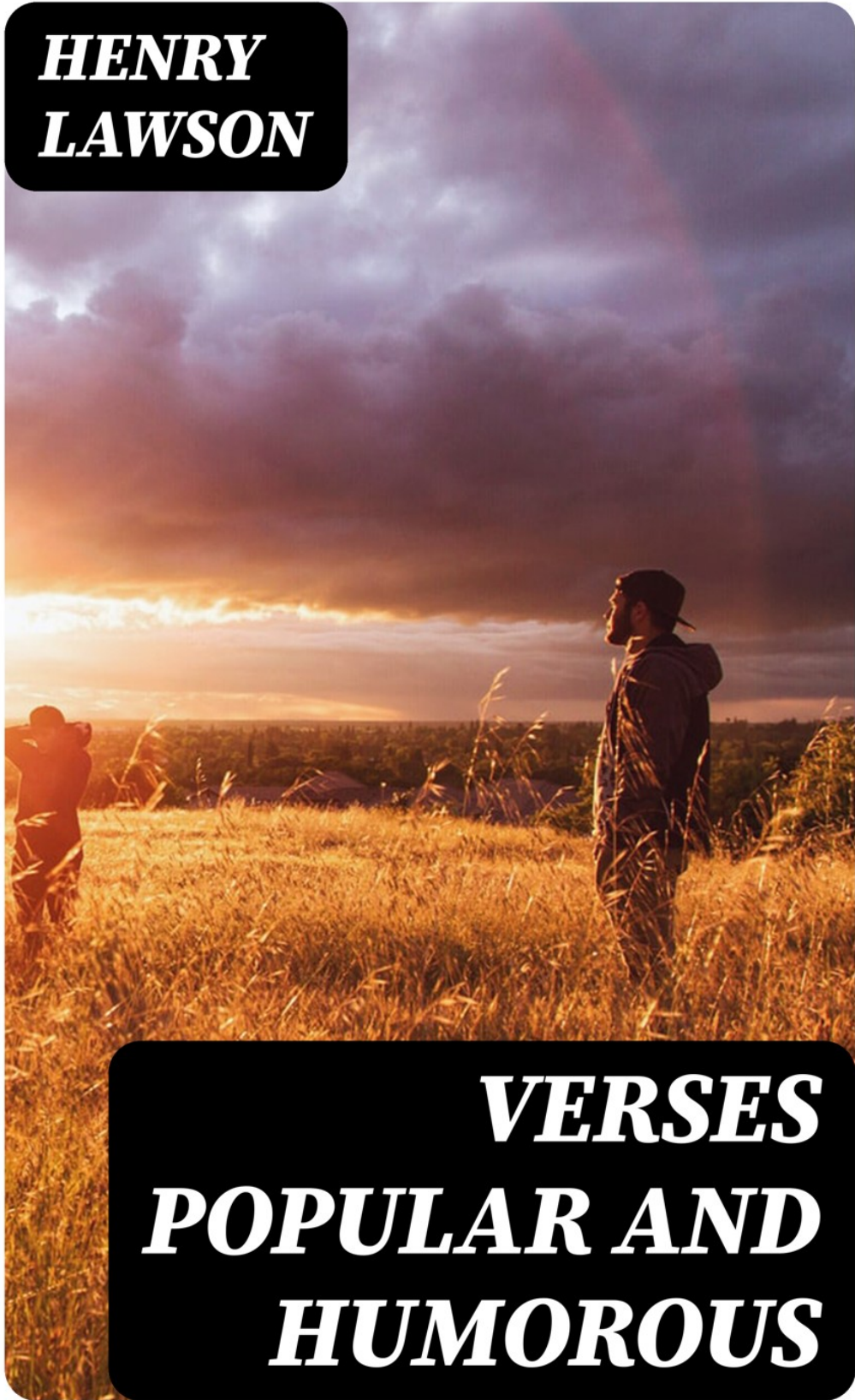


A photograph of a man in a dark jacket standing in a field of tall, golden grass at sunset. The sky is filled with dramatic, dark clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. Another person is visible in the distance on the left, also looking towards the horizon.

***HENRY
LAWSON***

***VERSES
POPULAR AND
HUMOROUS***

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Henry Lawson

Verses popular and humorous

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BUT WHAT'S THE USE

PREFACE

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My acknowledgments of the courtesy of the editors and proprietors of the newspapers in which most of these verses were first published are due and are gratefully discharged on the eve of my departure for England. Chief among them is the *Sydney Bulletin*; others are the *Sydney Town and Country Journal*, *Freeman's Journal*, and *Truth*, and the *New Zealand Mail*.

A few new pieces are included in the collection.

H. L.

Sydney, March 17th, 1900.

VIGNETTES BY FRANK P. MAHONY

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PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR	facing title page
THE LIGHTS OF COBB AND Co.	title page
MY LITERARY FRIEND	page xvi.



*“Once I wrote a little poem which I thought was very fine,
And I showed the printer’s copy to a critic friend of mine,
First he praised the thing a little....”*

[page 125.](#)

THE PORTS OF THE OPEN SEA

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DOWN here where the ships loom large in
The gloom when the sea-storms veer,
Down here on the south-west margin
Of the western hemisphere,
Where the might of a world-wide ocean
Round the youngest land rolls free—
Storm-bound from the world’s commotion,
Lie the Ports of the Open Sea.

By the bluff where the grey sand reaches
To the kerb of the spray-swept street,
By the sweep of the black sand beaches
From the main-road travellers’ feet,
By the heights like a work Titanic,
Begun ere the gods’ work ceased,
By a bluff-lined coast volcanic
Lie the Ports of the wild South-east.

By the steeps of the snow-capped ranges,
By the scarped and terraced hills—
Far away from the swift life-changes,
From the wear of the strife that kills—
Where the land in the Spring seems younger

Than a land of the Earth might be—
Oh! the hearts of the rovers hunger
For the Ports of the Open Sea.

But the captains watch and hearken
For a sign of the South Sea wrath—
Let the face of the South-east darken,
And they turn to the ocean path.
Ay, the sea-boats dare not linger,
Whatever the cargo be;
When the South-east lifts a finger
By the Ports of the Open Sea.

South by the bleak Bluff faring,
North where the Three Kings wait,
South-east the tempest daring—
Flight through the storm-tossed strait;
Yonder a white-winged roamer
Struck where the rollers roar—
Where the great green froth-flaked comber
Breaks down on a black-ribbed shore.

For the South-east lands are dread lands
To the sailor in the shrouds,
Where the low clouds loom like headlands,
And the black bluffs blur like clouds.
When the breakers rage to windward
And the lights are masked a-lee,
And the sunken rocks run inward
To a Port of the Open Sea.

But oh! for the South-east weather—
The sweep of the three-days' gale—
When, far through the flax and heather,
The spindrift drives like hail.
Glory to man's creations
That drive where the gale grows gruff,
When the homes of the sea-coast stations
Flash white from the dark'ning bluff!

When the swell of the South-east rouses
The wrath of the Maori sprite,
And the brown folk flee their houses
And crouch in the flax by night,
And wait as they long have waited—
In fear as the brown folk be—
The wave of destruction fated
For the Ports of the Open Sea.

.

Grey cloud to the mountain bases,
Wild boughs that rush and sweep;
On the rounded hills the tussocks
Like flocks of flying sheep;
A lonely storm-bird soaring
O'er tussock, fern and tree;
And the boulder beaches roaring
The Hymn of the Open Sea.

THE THREE KINGS[A]

[A] Three sea-girt pinnacles off North Cape, New Zealand.

THE East is dead and the West is done, and again our course
lies thus:—

South-east by Fate and the Rising Sun where the Three
Kings wait for us.

*When our hearts are young and the world is wide, and the
heights seem grand to climb—*

*We are off and away to the Sydney-side; but the Three Kings
bide their time.*

‘I’ve been to the West,’ the digger said: he was bearded,
bronzed and old;

‘Ah, the smothering curse of the East is wool, and the curse
of the West is gold.

‘I went to the West in the golden boom, with Hope and a life-
long mate,

‘They sleep in the sand by the Boulder Soak, and long may
the Three Kings wait.’

‘I’ve had my fling on the Sydney-side,’ said a black-sheep to
the sea,

‘Let the young fool learn when he can’t be taught: I’ve
learnt what’s good for me.’

And he gazed ahead on the sea-line dim—grown dim in his
softened eyes—

With a pain in his heart that was good for him—as he saw
the Three Kings rise.

A pale girl sits on the foc’sle head—she is back, Three Kings!
so soon;

But it seems to her like a life-time dead since she fled with
him ‘saloon.’

There is refuge still in the old folks' arms for the child that
loved too well;
They will hide her shame on the Southern farm—and the
Three Kings will not tell.

'Twas a restless heart on the tide of life, and a false star in
the skies
That led me on to the deadly strife where the Southern
London lies;
But I dream in peace of a home for me, by a glorious
southern sound,
As the sunset fades from a moonlit sea, and the Three Kings
show us round.

*Our hearts are young and the old hearts old, and life on the
farms is slow,
And away in the world there is fame and gold—and the
Three Kings watch us go.
Our heads seem wise and the world seems wide, and its
heights are ours to climb,
So it's off and away in our youthful pride—but the Three
Kings bide our time.*

THE OUTSIDE TRACK

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THERE were ten of us there on the moonlit quay,
And one on the for'ard hatch;
No straighter mate to his mates than he
Had ever said: 'Len's a match!'
'Twill be long, old man, ere our glasses clink,

'Twill be long ere we grip your hand!—
And we dragged him ashore for a final drink
Till the whole wide world seemed grand.

For they marry and go as the world rolls back,
They marry and vanish and die;
But their spirit shall live on the Outside Track
As long as the years go by.

The port-lights glowed in the morning mist
That rolled from the waters green;
And over the railing we grasped his fist
As the dark tide came between.

We cheered the captain and cheered the crew,
And our mate, times out of mind;
We cheered the land he was going to
And the land he had left behind.

We roared Lang Syne as a last farewell,
But my heart seemed out of joint;
I well remember the hush that fell
When the steamer had passed the point
We drifted home through the public bars,
We were ten times less by one
Who sailed out under the morning stars,
And under the rising sun.

And one by one, and two by two,
They have sailed from the wharf since then;
I have said good-bye to the last I knew,
The last of the careless men.

And I can't but think that the times we had
Were the best times after all,
As I turn aside with a lonely glass
And drink to the bar-room wall.

But I'll try my luck for a cheque Out Back,
Then a last good-bye to the bush;
For my heart's away on the Outside Track,
On the track of the steerage push.

SYDNEY-SIDE

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WHERE'S the steward?—Bar-room steward? Berth? Oh, any berth will do—
I have left a three-pound billet just to come along with you.
Brighter shines the Star of Rovers on a world that's growing wide,
But I think I'd give a kingdom for a glimpse of Sydney-Side.

Run of rocky shelves at sunrise, with their base on ocean's bed;
Homes of Coogee, homes of Bondi, and the lighthouse on South Head;
For in loneliness and hardship—and with just a touch of pride—
Has my heart been taught to whisper, 'You belong to Sydney-Side.'

Oh, there never dawned a morning, in the long and lonely days,
But I thought I saw the ferries streaming out across the bays
—
And as fresh and fair in fancy did the picture rise again
As the sunrise flushed the city from Woollahra to Balmain.

And the sunny water frothing round the liners black and red,
And the coastal schooners working by the loom of Bradley's Head;
And the whistles and the sirens that re-echo far and wide—
All the life and light and beauty that belong to Sydney-Side.

And the dreary cloud-line never veiled the end of one day more,

But the city set in jewels rose before me from 'The Shore.'
Round the sea-world shine the beacons of a thousand ports
o' call,
But the harbour-lights of Sydney are the grandest of them
all!

Toiling out beyond Coolgardie—heart and back and spirit
broke,
Where the Rover's Star gleams redly in the desert by the
'soak'—
But says one mate to the other, 'Brace your lip and do not
fret,
We will laugh on trains and 'buses—Sydney's in the same
place yet.'

Working in the South in winter, to the waist in dripping fern,
Where the local spirit hungers for each 'saxpence' that we
earn—
We can stand it for a season, for our world is growing wide,
And they all are friends and strangers who belong to
Sydney-Side.

'T'other-siders! T'other-siders!' Yet we wake the dusty dead;
It is we that send the backward province fifty years ahead;
We it is that 'trim' Australia—making narrow country wide—
Yet we're always T'other-siders till we sail for Sydney-side.

THE ROVERS

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SOME born of homely parents
For ages settled down—
The steady generations
Of village, farm, and town:
And some of dusky fathers
Who wandered since the flood—
The fairest skin or darkest
Might hold the roving blood—

Some born of brutish peasants,
And some of dainty peers,
In poverty or plenty
They pass their early years;
But, born in pride of purple,
Or straw and squalid sin,
In all the far world corners
The wanderers are kin.

A rover or a rebel,
Conceived and born to roam,
As babies they will toddle
With faces turned from home;
They've fought beyond the vanguard
Wherever storm has raged,
And home is but a prison
They pace like lions caged.

They smile and are not happy;
They sing and are not gay;
They weary, yet they wander;
They love, and cannot stay;

They marry, and are single
Who watch the roving star,
For, by the family fireside,
Oh, lonely men *they* are!

They die of peace and quiet—
The deadly ease of life;
They die of home and comfort;
They *live* in storm and strife;
No poverty can tie them,
Nor wealth nor place restrain—
Girl, wife, or child might draw them,
But they'll be gone again!

Across the glowing desert;
Through naked trees and snow;
Across the rolling prairies
The skies have seen them go;
They fought to where the ocean
Receives the setting sun;—
But where shall fight the rovers
When all the lands are won?

They thirst on Greenland snowfields,
On Never-Never sands;
Where man is not to conquer
They conquer barren lands;
They feel that most are cowards,
That all depends on 'nerve,'
They lead who cannot follow,
They rule who cannot serve.

Across the plains and ranges,
Away across the seas,
On blue and green horizons
They camp by twos and threes;
They hold on stormy borders
Of states that trouble earth
The honour of the country
That only gave them birth.

Unlisted, uncommissioned,
Untaught of any school,
In far-away world corners
Unconquered tribes they rule;
The lone hand and revolver—
Sad eyes that never quail—
The lone hand and the rifle
That win where armies fail.

They slumber sound where murder
And treachery are bare—
The pluck of self-reliance,
The pluck of past despair;
Thin brown men in pyjamas—
The thin brown wiry men!—
The helmet and revolver
That lie beside the pen.

Through drought and desolation
They won the way Out Back;
The commonplace and selfish
Have followed on their track;