



Aquinas Memorial Lecture 1985

Delivered at the Aquinas Lecture Rooms, The Catholic Centre,
143 Edward Street, Brisbane, Queensland
25th October 1985

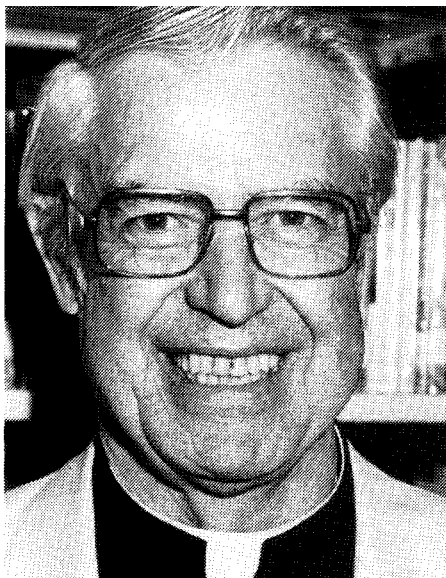
Boree Log:

Early Australian History

In the Poems of

“John O’Brien”

Frank Meham



Rev. Frank Mecham. M.A.. S.T.L.. P.P.

Father Frank Mecham, nephew of "John O'Brien" (Monsignor Patrick Joseph Hartigan), was born at Dulwich Hill, Sydney. He was educated by the Presentation Sisters at St. Joan of Arc, Haberfield, and by the De La Salle Brothers at Ashfield. His studies for the priesthood were done at St. Columba's College, Springwood, and St. Patrick's College, Manly. Later he took a B.A. degree in classics and an M.A. degree in philosophy at the University of London. He is also a graduate in theology from the Gregorian University, Rome.

For many years Father Mecham lectured in Philosophy and Greek in the seminaries at Springwood and Manly and for ten years was Catholic Chaplain at Sydney University and Rector of St. Michael's College within the University. After six years as Parish Priest of Lindfield, he is currently Parish Priest of St. Joan of Arc, Haberfield.

Father Mecham is chairman of directors of "The Catholic Weekly", Sydney, and a member of the editorial board and manager of "The Australasian Catholic Record".

In 1981, Father Mecham's biography of his uncle, "John O'Brien' and the Boree Log", was published by Angus & Robertson Publishers, who had published "Around the Boree log" in 1921.



"John O'Brien " as seen by Heth of the BULLETIN
(Reproduced by courtesy of the BULLETIN)

Let me take you first to the Australia of the last decades of last century. Young Patrick Hartigan loved poetry. He had the vision of a poet, the power of expressing the beauty around us - so many of us feel it, but cannot put it into words. He also had a facility for verse - he often quoted Alexander Pope's words, "I lisp'd in numbers and the numbers came" - and these words were true of himself too. He was to become a master of the art of telling a short tale in verse with a swinging a rhythm.

His first experience of Australian poetry was disappointing. As he said, "I loved poetry, but I loved my country more", and he did not find his country in the first Australian poets. In early Australian literature generally there is a sad note - "the clank of chains of the convict gangs drowned the sounds of revelry". The early settler, transplanted from green fields and cosy hamlets, saw the Australian bush as melancholy. Miles and miles of waving tree tops, sombre hues unrelieved by any bright colours, spelt nothing but mystery and loneliness. Early poets, Kendall and Gordon for instance, had this air of melancholy in their writings. What is more, Kendall seldom saw with Australian eyes. He would have written better poetry had he been born in the old world.

The concluding poem of *Around the Boree Log*, namely, "Come, sing Australian songs to me!" epitomizes "John O'Brien's" feelings of those early years, his yearnings for joyous verse and joyous song. "The Libel" rejects very strongly the melancholy view of Australia.

COME, SING AUSTRALIAN SONGS TO ME!

.....

*What, no Australian song, my child,
No lay of love, no hymn of praise?
And yet no mother ever smiled
With our dear country's winsome ways:*

*You sing the songs of all the earth,
Of bower and bloom and bird and bee;
And has the land that gave you birth
No haunting, native melody?*

*Your poets' eager pens awake
The world-old themes of love and youth,
The pulse of life, the joy, the ache,
The pregnant line of earnest truth;*

*They dress you these in native guise,
And interweave with loving hand*

*The freshness of your rain-washed skies,
The colours of your sunlit land.*

*What, no Australian song, my dear?
And yet I've heard the cottage ring
With notes the world would pause to hear,
When at their work your sisters sing.*

*They sing the songs of all the earth,
Of tender sky, and dimpling sea,
But all their strains have not the worth
Of one Australian song, for me.*

*I've heard the harp the breezes play
Among the wilding wilga-trees;
I've swept my world of care away
When bush birds lift their melodies;*

*I've seen the paddocks all ablaze
When spring in golden glory comes,
The purple hills of summer days,
The autumn ochres through the gums;*

*I've seen the bright folk riding in
O'er blooms that deck the clovered plain,
And neath the trees, when moonbeams spin
Their silver-dappled counterpane.*

*What, no Australian song, my pet?
No patriot note on native horn,
To bind the hearts in kindness met,
And link the leal Australian-born?*

*Yet every exile, wandering lone
Our happy careless homes among,
May live the best his heart has known
Whene'er his country's songs are sung.*

*You sing the songs of all the earth,
Of alien flower and alien tree:
But no one, in my grief or mirth,
Will sing Australian songs to me.*

.....

THE LIBEL

*"The flowers have no scent, and the birds have no
song,
We read in the lesson before us,
While carols enchanted came floating along,
And lifted our hearts in the chorus.*

*"The landscape is sombre, and dreary, and gray,
No colour its mantle adorning".
O'er carpets spread far in a golden array,
We tramped it to school in the morning.*

*"The flowers have no scent," but the wattle we
brought*

*From hill-sides and glens where we found it
Was filling the room with its glory, we thought,
And wafting its sweetness around it.*

*And fragrant the greeting the eucalypts threw
From branches of amber and sorrel;
While hard by the door a pittosporum grew -
We called it "The Japanese Laurel."*

*"The birds have no song," so they told us at
school;
But sweet in our souls was the ringing
Of notes soft and clear from the edge of the
pool,
Where dainty gay thrushes were singing.*

*The magpie, the spink, and the pretty blue
wren,
The butcher-bird up in his eyrie,
The trills! Oh, I wish I could hear you again,
My dear little Chocolate Wiree!*

*To the ears of a stranger our birds may lack
song,
Our flowers have no scent for the alien;
But we, who have rambled the gullies along
Bedecked in soft colours Australian,*

*We laugh them to scorn as we read the old
phrase -
We've laughed, since, at many another -
And bless in our hearts in a chorus of praise
The face of our happy young mother.*

Patrick Hartigan began his secondary studies at St Patrick's College, Manly, at the age of thirteen. He was with New Zealanders there and was introduced to their poet, Thomas Bracken. While not admitting to it openly because of the rivalry of those days, he secretly placed this poet in the niche of the Beautiful while waiting for the right Australian claimant.

In 1895, he was transferred to St Patrick's College, Goulburn, where one day a master varied the monotonous round by reading to the class selections from "Banjo" Paterson's book just published, *The Man from Snowy River*. "Nothing in literature," said Father Hartigan afterwards, "had ever affected me more". He committed his only successful burglary - creeping up to the good master's room when the lights were low, he "pinched" the book, read and re-read it from cover to cover, without effort committed the whole of it to memory and then quietly replaced it where he had found it. Paterson and his contemporary, the other Bulletin bard Henry Lawson, corrected the gloomy picture of Australia given by early poets. They wrote mainly about country life and painted a brighter and truer picture of Australia.

Here "John O'Brien" was at home in the tradition of the best of Australian ballad poetry. His own special niche is as the Poet Laureate of the Irish-Australians. His poetry reminds us of the ballad poetry of Ireland. He has humour, deep sentiment, and the homely phrase, and he draws characters so well - Hanrahan, Josephine, the Careys and the Caseys, noble white-haired Father Pat. But it is Ireland transplanted to Australia - the flowers, the trees, the birds, the bush, the whole surroundings are Australian.

Recently I visited Ireland and called at Cashel in County Tipperary. There in the main street was a prominent notice reading "Car Park Pedestrians Only". I was reminded of "The Road to Danahey's", with its Irishness transplanted to Australia.

THE ROAD TO DANAHEY'S

*The rambling road to Danahey's it goes by hill and plain,
It wanders in among the trees and wanders out again.
It does a lap around the map just as it feels inclined,
And through the West they all confessed that road was
hard to find.*

.....

*So when the man himself I met enthroned upon his dray,
I sought the salient facts to get about that winding way.
"Now briefly show me where to go, " said I to Danahey,
He waved a hand around the land and thus directed me..*

*"You go down past the Catholic church and round be
Mrs Flynn's,
Then keep on straight for twenty perch to where the road
begins".
And lest I might not grasp aright the landmarks thus
discussed
He did a reel across the wheel and drew it in the dust.*

*"This here," said he, "'s the Catholic church, that there is
Mrs Flynn's,
Down here along, say forty perch, is where the road begins.
Ye folly that, 'twill land you at Mrs Brady's little store,
You'll know it be a pepper-tree she have outside the door.*

*"Now carry her upon your right and go on straight along,
Keep goin' till at last you sight a milepost pointin' wrong;
The peg has been uprooted clean, it's leanin' be a tree
Two miles from there, but this is where the beggarin'
thing should be.*

.....

*"Then make for old MacPherson's pub; there's no pub
there, you know,
But Mac he had one in the scrub some twenty year ago.*

*Now run a line to where the pine is growin' pretty dense,
Go straight along, you can't go wrong, until you hit a fence.*

*"Now run that fence down twenty chain to where the wires
is cut,
'Twill let you out in Kelly's lane not four mile from me hut.
At any rate you'll strike the gate; the house is pretty poor -
You'll know it be a pepper-tree that grows outside the door.*

*And then my noble Danahey rose slowly to his feet,
He lit his pipe triumphantly - the lesson was complete:
A maze of lines and cryptic signs and leads and runner-ups,
Like visions high imagined by a spider in his cups.*

*He gripped me warmly by the hand and friendship lit
his eye.
Said he, 'I hope you'll understand, before I say good-bye,
That when you stray along that way, you're always welcome
quite
If bushed ye be, five miles from me, to stop there for the
night.*

"John O'Brien" is the witness to the Irish-Australian, in whom the power, energy and initiative of the youthful Australian spirit is combined with the age-old traditions of the Irish. Central to that tradition is Catholic piety and it is interesting that no church in the world outside of Ireland was ever as Irish as the Australian Catholic Church of "John O'Brien's" time. Even as late as the 1930s, 90 per cent of Australian Catholics were of Irish descent. No comparable poet in America has done a similar work for the Irish-Americans, which is perhaps why "John O'Brien" has been so popular in America and why the Columban Fathers produced an American edition of *Around the Boree Log*. At a conference of Mercy Sisters at Philadelphia some years ago, one of the Australian representatives, Mother Cyril of Bathurst, recited some of "John O'Brien's" poems and for every one she recited, the American Cardinal Wright matched her with another from *Around the Boree Log*.

The wonderful blending of Irish and Australian patriotism is beautifully expressed in another well-known poem of "John O'Brien."

ST. PATRICK'S DAY

*'Tis the greatest splash of sunshine right through
all my retrospection
On the days when fairies brought me golden
dreams without alloy,
When I gazed across the gum-trees round about
the old selection
To the big things far beyond them, with the
yearning of a boy.*

*Drab the little world we lived in; like the sheep,
in slow procession
Down the track along the mountain, went the
hours upon their way,
Bringing hopes and idle longings that could only
find expression
In the riot of our bounding hearts upon St.
Patrick's Day.*

*There were sports in Casey's paddock, and the
neighbours would assemble
On the flat below the homestead, where the
Timber fringed the creek;
With Australian skies above them, and Australian
trees a-tremble
And the colours of the autumn set in hat and
hair and cheek.*

*Mighty things were done at Casey's; mighty bouts
anticipated
Made the Sunday church-door topic for a month
ahead at least;
On the cheerless Sundays after, with misguided
hope deflated,
We explained away our failures as we waited for
the priest.*

.....

*Mighty things were done at Casey's; Mighty
impulse was behind them,
'Twas the sacred spark enkindled that was
burning to the bone;
Never yet were men more loyal to the holy ties
that bind them,
And the love they gave their country made me
conscious of my own.*

.....

*Thrills a leaping thought within me, when I see a
land around me
That has never seen the foeman's steel, nor heard
the foeman's shot,
At whose shrine I lit the tapers, when her witching
sweetness bound me
With an iron vow of service of a pulsing pride
begot;*

*To that big free land I've given all the love that
courses through me;
That her hands have rocked my cradle stirs my
heart in every beat.
An Australian, ay, Australian - oh, the word is
music to me,
And the craven who'd deny her would I spurn
beneath my feet.*

*Thrills the thought that, did the traitor stretch a
tainted hand to foil her,*

*Did I see her flag of silver stars a tattered thing
and torn,
Did I see her trampled, breathless, neath the shod
heel of the spoiler,
And her bleeding wounds a byword, and her
name a thing of scorn,*

*There would flash the living bayonets in the strong
hands of my brothers,
And in the blood that coursed for nationhood,
through all the years of pain,
In the veins of patriot fathers and of Little Irish
Mothers
Would be hot as hissing lava streams to thrill the
world again.*

As though conscious of his role of picturing the life of the Irish in Australia, "John O'Brien" decided his book of verse would be called *The Little Irish Mother and Other Verses*. It was 1921, with troubles in Ireland very much alive. Angus and Robertson's reader sent back the proofs with the incredible change of the title poem to *The Little British Mother*. There was no way in which "John O'Brien" was going to publish under that title. George Robertson saved the day by suggesting a neutral title and "John O'Brien" came up with *Around The Boree Log*. In 1983, more than sixty years after this rejection, Angus and Robertson made amends and published a book under the title of *The Little Irish Mother* containing the poems referring to her.

"John O'Brien" was in a unique position to chronicle the story of the Irish-Australians. He knew personally those we might call the second wave of pioneers and one he met once and wrote about beautifully was Father Patrick Dunne who did so much to bring Irish settlers to Queensland in the sixties of the last century. Men like Father Dunne were themselves in contact with the originators of the Irish Catholic tradition in Australia. Professor Patrick O'Farrell, in his recent book *Letters from Irish Australia*, reminds us that not all the early Irish-Australians were Catholics, but it remains true that the Irish who came to Australia were overwhelmingly Catholic and it is of these that "John O'Brien" is the bard. We do well to recall too how comparatively short is that span of the Catholic Irish-Australians and how homogeneous a society it represented. As a young priest I brought Holy Communion to an old lady in the Sydney suburb of Redfern. She had been baptized in Balmain by Father Therry, the first of the Irish priests to make Australia his lasting mission. The three of us, Father Therry, that old lady and myself span what is virtually the Catholic history of Australia. Another reminder of the strength of the Irish tradition is the sprinkling of Celtic words throughout the poems of *Around the Boree Log* and, to a lesser extent, *The Parish of St Mel's*.

To-day in Australia we live in one of the most urbanized countries of the world. When the Hartigan family began in Australia, almost three-quarters of the population lived in the country. The early Australian literature dealt mostly with the country and "John O'Brien" was very much in that tradition. He expresses it pungently in "Honeymooning from the Country":

*"Scent of gum-leaves! " 'Tis a byword in the city's
roar and push,
Where they do not know the greatness and the
kindness of the bush.
"Scent of gum-leaves," so they whisper. Oh, it
sweetens not the air
In the overcrowded city, for the spirit is not
there.
Scent of gum-leaves to be scoffed at in the land
that gave them birth!
"Scent of gum-leaves" - cease your jargon. 'Tis the
finest scent on earth.
Ay, it clung around the Anzacs when they stormed
Gallipoli;
And it steeped the nation-builders from the centre
to the sea.
Speed the day when all united, heart to heart and
hand to hand,
We'll proclaim the scent of gum-leaves to be
sacred in the land.*

*But my honeymooners leave me, and I watch them
passing through -
They are homesick for the freshness of the open
spaces, too -
So they gather up their bundles, and they wander
home again
Back to where the morning magpies lather out the
old refrain,
Back to love in fullest measure, pressed and flowing
overtop,
Through the green months and the brown months,
in the house behind the crop.
From the overcrowded city, from the bustle and
the push
Pass my sturdy, happy couples who are sticking to
the bush.*

One could enumerate a long list of the poems, both in *Around the Boree Log* and in *The Parish of St Mel's*, which have as their background country life. Indeed, with the exception of about a dozen which we might call philosophizing or moralizing poems, of which "His Father" is a good example, the rest of the eighty or so poems which we have from "John O'Brien" have a background of country life.

One of these country poems deserves a passing reference. I was recently reading the excellent history of the Presentation Sisters in Australia written by one of the Queensland members of that congregation. Speaking about their school in Chiltern in North East Victoria, she told of bush children from miles around riding horses to school and suggested it might have been a prototype for "The Old Bush School". In fact Patrick Hartigan when a student at Manly used to spend part of his holidays at Bamawatha in the parish of Chiltern. Tom Ryan was his classmate at both Goulburn and Manly and he came from a family of ten. It is possible that both "The Old Bush School" and "Ten Little Steps and Stairs" had their origins in that part of Victoria.

There are in fact only a few of "John O'Brien's" poems which are tied to definite persons and places, but it is interesting that these few cases range over a large part of Australia. When "The Old Home" was published in the Manly magazine in 1936, it was dedicated to Father (later Monsignor) J. D. Kelly of Ipswich Road, Annerley, Brisbane, who had obviously given him the story. "The Old Mass Shandrydan" came from a story from Father Paddy Moloney of his family in South Australia. The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart have in their archives Father Moloney's copy of Around the Boree Log on which is inscribed: "To the Suggestator from the Perpetrator".

The Durkins came from Tasmania. Dame Enid Lyons told "John O'Brien" of a family in Devonport and said she had the first line of a poem: "Have you seen the Durkins at the early morning Mass". She could go no further, so he took it and finished it for her. "The Parting Rosary" was written about the Powell family in Berrigan, New South Wales. "Tangmalangaloo" was inspired by a lad at Tangmangaroo, near Boorowa, New South Wales. Such a spread of stories from different parts of Australia, and equally enjoyed everywhere, emphasizes the uniformity of the society of Irish-Australians throughout the country.

While "John O'Brien" is aware of the loneliness of the bush, his greater emphasis is on the courage of those early pioneers.

THE LITTLE IRISH MOTHER

.....

*There's a Little Irish Mother that a lonely vigil
keeps
In the settler's hut where seldom stranger
comes,
Watching by the home-made cradle where one*

*more Australian sleeps
While the breezes whisper weird things to the
gums,
Where the settlers battle gamely, beaten down to
rise again,
And the brave bush wives the toil and silence
share,
Where the nation is a-building in the hearts of
splendid men -
There's a Little Irish Mother always there.*

*There's a Little Irish Mother - and her head is
bowed and gray,
And she's lonesome when the evening shadows
fall;
Near the fire she "do be thinkin'," all the "childer"
are away.
And their silent pictures watch her from the
wall.
For the world has claimed them from her; they
are men and women now,
In their thinning hair the tell-tale silver
gleams;
But she runs her fingers, dozing, o'er a tousled
baby brow -
It is "little Con" or "Bridgie" in her dreams.*

*There's a Little Irish Mother sleeping softly now
at last
Where the tangled grass is creeping all around;
And the shades of unsung heroes troop about her
from the past
While the moonlight scatters diamonds on the
mound.
And a good Australian's toiling in the world of
busy men
Where the strife and sordid grinding cramp and
kill,
But his eyes are sometimes misted, and his heart
grows brave again -
She's the Little Irish Mother to him still.*

.....

ONE BY ONE

*With trust in God and her good man
She settled neath the spur;
The old slab dwelling, spick and span,
Was world enough for her;
The lamp-light kissed her raven hair
As, when her work was done,
She lined us up beside her chair
And taught us one by one.*

*And weaving memories, haunting sweet,
With threads of weal and woe,
The years went by on velvet feet -
We did not hear them go.*

*The world was calling everywhere
Beneath the golden sun;
When silver streaked her raven hair,
We left her one by one.*

*Then, turning back on cogs of pain,
The spool that ran so fast
Unwound before her eyes again
The pictures of the past.
The shadows played around her chair,
Where fancy's web was spun;
When time had bleached her raven hair,
She called us one by one.*

.....

*Oh, vain the word that each could tell
With full heart brimming o'er,
That we, who ever loved her well,
Might still have loved her more!
Then back into the world of care -
To bless till life is done -
A memory crowned with milk-white hair
We carried one by one.*

One of the comments most often heard about Around the Boree Log was how joyousness, optimism and generosity appeared in its pages. "John O'Brien" caught so well the simple joys of those days.

AT CASEYS AFTER MASS

.....

*Down that sweet bush track to Casey's, o'er the
paddock down to Casey's;
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.
For, as soon as Mass was over, round the church
they swarmed like bees,
Filled their pipes and duly lit them, brushed the
dust from off their knees;
Then they'd "ready-up" for Casey's - self-invited
down to Casey's -
Harness horses for the women with a bushman's
careless ease.
With a neat spring to the saddle, soon would start
the wild skedaddle,
Passing gigs and traps and buggies packed as tight
as they could squeeze;
Hearts as buoyant as a feather in the mellow
autumn weather,
While the noisy minahs cheered to see the glad
procession pass -
All the Regans and the Ryans, and the whole mob
of O'Briens
Bringing up the rear to Casey's - in the Shandrydan
to Casey's -
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.*

*Past the kitchen door they rattled and they took
the horses out;*

While the women went inside at once, the
menfolk hung about
Round the stable down at Casey's, waiting dinner
down at Casey's;
And they talked about the Government, and
blamed it for the drought,
Sitting where the sunlight lingers, picking splinters
from their fingers,
Settling all the problems of the world beyond a
chance of doubt.
From inside there came the bustle of the cheerful
wholesome hustle,
As dear old Mrs. Casey tried all records to
surpass;
Oh, there's many a memory blesses her sweet
silver-braided tresses;
They were "lovely" down at Casey's - always
joking down at Casey's -
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

So they called us in to dinner, five-and-twenty
guests - and more -
At the longest kitchen-table ever stood upon a
floor.
There was plenty down at Casey's - ay, an open
house was Casey's,
Where the neighbour and his missus never, never
passed the door;
Where they counted kindly giving half the joy
and pride of living
And the seasons came full-handed, and the angels
blessed the store;
While the happy Laughing Mary flitted round us
like a fairy.
And the big, shy boys stopped business, and looked
up to watch her pass -
Ah, but when she caught them staring at the
ribbons she was wearing!
Well, they spilled their tea at Casey's - on the good
clean cloth at Casey's -
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.

.....

There was something in the old life which I cannot
quite forget;
There are happy golden memories that hover
round me yet -
Something special down at Casey's, in that
wonderland of Casey's,
Where the crowfoot and the clover spread a
downy coverlet,
Where the trees seemed always greener, where the
life of man was cleaner,
And the joys that grew around us shed no leaves
of brown regret.
Oh, the merry, merry party! oh, the simple folk
and hearty,
Who can fling their cares behind them, and forget
them while they pass

*Simple lives and simple pleasure never stinted in
the measure.
There was something down at Casey's, something
clean and good at Casey's -
Spending Sunday down at Casey's after Mass.*

.....

When The Parish of St Mel's appeared it was commented that its poems did not have the same optimism as those of the earlier collection. Many of those in the second book were written during the Depression, whilst World War II was threatening and during the war itself. Once again "John O'Brien" can be said to mirror the times. It is an interesting commentary on the appeal of "John O'Brien" that, after a gap of a quarter of a century, Angus and Robertson republished The Parish of St Mel's in 1980.

In World War I priests were often the means by which news of casualties were conveyed to families. It is no surprise, then, that a couple of the most poignant of the Around the Boree Log poems have war themes and these themes are absent from The Parish of St Mel's.

OWNERLESS

*He comes when the gullies are wrapped in the
gloaming
And limelights are trained on the tops of the
gums,
To stand at the sliprails, awaiting the homing
Of one who marched off to the beat of the
drums.*

.....

*The gums are a-shoot and the wattles a-cluster,
The cattle are roaming the ranges astray;
But why are they late with the hunt and the
muster?
And why is the black horse unsaddled to-day?*

*Hard by at the station the training commences,
In circles they're schooling the hacks for the
shows;
The high-mettled hunters are sent at the fences,
And satins and dapples the brushes disclose.*

*Sound-winded and fit and quite ready is Darkie,
Impatient to strip for the sprint and the flight;
But what can be keeping the rider in khaki?
And why does the silence hang heavy to-night?*

*Ah, surely he'll come, when the waiting is
ended,
To fly the stiff fences and take him in hand,
Blue-ribboned once more, and three-quarters*

*extended,
Hard-held for the cheers from the fence and the
stand.*

*Still there on the cross-beam the saddle hangs
idle,
The cobweb around the loose stirrup is spun;
The rust's on the spurs, and the dust on the
bridle,
And gathering mould on the badges he won.*

*We'll take the old horse to the paddocks
tomorrow,
Where grasses are waving breast-high on the
plain;
And there with the clean-skins we'll turn him in
sorrow
And muster him never, ah, never, again.*

*The bush bird will sing when the shadows are
creeping
A sweet plaintive note, soft and clear as a
bell's -
Oh, would it might ring where the bush boy is
sleeping,
And colour his dreams by the far Dardanelles.*

Father Hartigan, in his early years as a priest in Albury, was the proud possessor of a beautiful black horse called Swagman, "all of sixteen hands", and one of his great interests always was the history of the Australian horse. He brought it into his beautiful sermon on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese of Wagga. It is no surprise, then, to find one of the stirring poems of *Around the Boree Log* dedicated to Father Pat's Currajong.

CURRAJONG

*Old Father Pat! They'll tell you still with mingled
love and pride
Of stirring deeds that live and thrill the quiet
country-side;
And when they praise his tours-de-force, be sure it
won't be long
Before they talk about his horse - the old gray
Currajong.*

*For twenty years he drove him through the bush
and round the town,
Until the old white stager knew the parish upside
down;
He'd take his time, and calculate, and have his
wilful way,
And stop at every Catholic gate to bid them all
good day.*

*But well I mind the stories told when Father Pat
was young -*

*At least, when he was not so old - his scattered flock
among;
When health and strength were on his side, you'd
see him swing along
With that clean, easy, sweeping stride that marked
old Currajong.*

*Through all the years, he ne'er was late the second
Mass to say,
And twenty miles he'd "duplicate," and pass us
on the way.
Hard-held and beating clean tattoos, the old
gray, stepping kind,
Like gravel from his twinkling shoes would fling
the miles behind.*

*And often some too daring lad, a turn of speed
to show,
Would straighten up his sleepy prad and give the
priest a "go";
But, faith, he found what others found, and held
the lesson long,
That nothing in the country round could move
with Currajong.*

.....

*But, as the good priest older grew, and aches and
troubles came,
His buggy and the white horse, too, were stricken
much the same.
The springs went down the side he sat, and
altarboys and such
Kept sliding in on Father Pat, and woke him at
the touch.*

*Then, pensioned off at last and done, a sorry thing
it stood,
With sagging cobwebs round it spun, and
nesteggs in the hood.
Just once a year it lived again, and groaned and
creaked along
To fetch the bishop from the train with limping
Currajong.*

*Ah, newer methods, younger men! the times are
moving fast,
And but in dreams we tread again the wheel-ruts
of the past;
The eyes are filmed that watched of old, the
kindly hearts are still,
And silent tombstones white and cold are
glimmering on the hill.*

*While scorching up the road, belike, with singing
gears alive
The curate on his motor-bike hits up his
forty-five;
But tender, tingling memories swell, and love will
linger long*

*In all the stirring yarns they tell about Old
Currajong.*

The next stage of transport, early in the century, was the motor-bike, and "John O'Brien" had signalled its coming in the concluding stanza of "Currajong". The Parish of St Mel's has a whole poem given to this theme, "My Curate's Motor-Bike." This appeared first in Manly of 1922, enriched by a series of pen and ink drawings by "John O'Brien" himself.

MY CURATE'S MOTOR-BIKE

*Before the lad invested we had comfort here indeed;
Our lives were as an open book, and he who ran might
read;
But now we live in other worlds, for since the motor came
My yoke-mate ne'er confides in me, or treats me quite the
same.*

*He used to be a candid man - I like him very well -
But lately I must pick the truth from what he does not tell;
The news he gives is watered, too, so when there's been
defeat
I get one version here from him - another down the street.*

.....

*He talked and talked like one possessed as on the madness
ran;
Such folly surely never gripped the mind of any man:
"Ignition this", "combustion that" - I never heard the
likes,
You'd think the world was spinning round on works of
motor-bikes.*

*I took a stand as rectors should, and fussed and fumed and
that,
And lavished pointed rhetoric and wisdom - on the cat;
But on he went from bad to worse: bedad, it shocked me
much
To hear him speak of dignitaries as cylinders and such.*

*The horsepower of the clergy, too, I heard him dwell upon,
And I'm "a last year's model", faith, "with no kick-starter
on";
Still, he laughs best who laughs the last, when all is said
and done,
For when the smelly thing arrived, 'twas then we had
the fun.*

*He donned the goggles and the coat, the cap, the gloves,
the scarf
And pushed it to the stable-yard, supported by the staff.
He jacked the wheel and kicked with fine spectacular
disdain,
It gave a sort of wheezy cough, and so he kicked again.*

.....

*The small lads gave him useful hints, he told them to be gone,
And when he chased them off the fence he turned the petrol on;
Then, man, he gave a thumping kick and swung into the seat,
And here my hero motor-man goes shooting down the street.*

*Along the king's highway he sped on what he calls "his top";
Upon his top: How are you! Heth, he found he couldn't stop,-
His tank was full of 'juice", it seems, and in his misery
He worked it out the wicked thing would wheel him to the sea.*

*But through it all the mind was clear, he dodged the straying stock,
If tour he must, 'twere wise, he thought, to tour around the block:
So round and round and round he went, the eyes fixed straight ahead,
And every time at Mrs Flynn's the congregation spread.*

It is, of course, in The Parish of St Mel's that the car really comes into its own with half a dozen poems dedicated to it. One of them expresses "John O'Brien's" own longings. In "Firin' on the Eight" he expresses his own yearnings:

*. . . and listen, boy, if I'd a singer's tongue
I'd sing the song of motor-car which no one yet has sung -
I'd pep it up a coupla thou, hone polished on the note
With orchestra of moving parts that makes the motor mote.*

When Father Hartigan bought a second-hand Renault in 1911, he was the second priest in New South Wales to own a car, being preceded by Father Patsy Kenny of Pambula. Much of what he gives us in "Ten-Twelve Shebang" is autobiographical, as indeed is true of "My Curate's Motor-Bike".

TEN-TWELVE SHEBANG

*She never had no side-doors, and she never had no screen,
Such things were not invented when they built that old machine;
The paint is none too clever, and her lines is none too flash,
She's ugly as a bag of mice with that four-cornered dash;
Her back seat's like a pulpit, and her hood's no masterpiece,
She's knock-kneed in the hind wheels, and her diff. is leakin' grease;
And every dead-beat motor yarn, as fur as I can see,
Is trotted out by some durned goat, and tacked on her and me.*

.....

We've scoured the bush from end to end, together, her
and me,
And sampled every sort of road from Hillston to the sea.
I've filled her up with mountain snow to keep her rady cool,
And boiled her dry in black-soil mud along the Carrathool
From Bega out to Broken Hill, from Forbes to Dederang,
They've heard of Lightrnin' Charlie and the Old Ten-Twelve
Shebang.
"Lightrnin' Charlie"! Spare me days, but give a bloke his due,
For Charlie earned the monniker when that old truck was
new.
The first car in the district, lad! You should have seen the
fuss
The evenin' Charlie hit the town a-drivin' that there bus!
You should have seen the mob go mad! You should have
heard the noise:
The tootin' horn, the wild delight of all the dogs and boys!
At every window in the street you'd see a head appear,
The thirsty blokes at Mrs Flynn's ran out and left their
beer.

.....

She's noisy in the timin', and she's wobbly in the wings,
She's got a knock in every joint and songbirds in the springs;
There's no one wants to hire us now - them good old times
are dead
When every hour was paid in cash, booked up a week ahead.
To picnics at the river bend, to dances done in style,
I'd take 'em out and bring 'em home at one-and-three a
mile.
They'd start the echoes with their songs, their jokes, their
gags and such,

And here's me fig'rin' out the while a rattlin' in the clutch.
But when the bus was pullin' sweet and jugglin' with the
load,
The headlights larkin' with the moon, and pickin' out the
road,
The tree-trunks swishin' as we went, the song of steel to
steel,
A sporty, rorty party up, and Charlie at the wheel,

.....

The first car in the district, yes! and still left in the hunt,
Three figures on her number-plate and bucket-seats in front;
She rattles like a tin of bolts, but yet when all is said,
'Twas her and me that done the bit to shove the game ahead:
We paved the way for slap-up jobs like this 'ere limousine,
With gadgets round her dashboard like a blinkin' submarine.
Fool-proof with sweet-engagin' clutch, the ladies drive 'em
now,
But stuck, and findin' out mistakes, 'twas Charlie showed
'em how.
And when, at swell club-dinners met, the big guns of the
trade
Puff out their chests and speechify about the progress made,
Because some mad, well-meanin' bloke has stonked the fast
express,

*And chopped the standin' record down by half a shake
or less,
They drink his health and pull his leg, and skite of what
he done
(On metal roads, with engine faked, and gearin' three to
one).
But if they got the figures right, they'd handy them bookays
To blokes who pulled the mot'rin' on in pioneerin' days,
Before the service station came with stock of parts complete,
When George the blacksmith helped you with the job that
had you beat -
The blokes who gave to later blokes the comforts they enjoy,
And proved the car was somethin' more than just a rich
man's toy;
Then when they tumbled to themselves, they'd stow the
wild harangue,
And sling a cheer for Charlie and the Old Ten-Twelve
Shebang.*

"John O'Brien" was able to express a whole philosophy of life in terms of cars:

*Firin' on the eight again, she's only got the four,
But eight it sounds more classy when you're talking
motorlore.*

.....

*Firin' on the eight of them, hittin' on the lot,
Never let the other fellow know she's not too hot.
Don't squeal about your troubles, always keep them out
of sight
Beneath the little bonnet, son, and clip the bonnet tight.
There's no one interested, no one wants to hear you moan
About your private aches and pains - they want to tell their
own.
You got to get your ups and downs, you got to hump the
load,
The same as what you've got to face your punctures on the
road;
You've got to get your issue, and you'll get it, don't forget,
So get them all together, get it over, then you're set.
That's common sense, now ain't it? - Wipe the whole thing
off the slate,
Maintain your rubber healthy and keep firin' on the eight.*

No picture of the Australian Catholic Church would be complete without reference to Catholic Education. We tend to think of Catholic Education in terms of the struggle of the last hundred years since Henry Parkes's enactment in New South Wales and similar legislation in other States. This year the parish of Windsor in New South Wales is celebrating one hundred and fifty years of Catholic Education. The first fifty years there and elsewhere would largely have been in the hands of lay Catholic teachers in the Denominational Schools. The poems of Around the Boree Log do not mention the Religious of the Catholic schools except for a passing reference to nuns in "The Presbyt'ry Dog". It is in The Parish of St Mel's that

he pays full tribute to the Religious, first in a whimsical way in "The Day th' Inspector Comes" - he was an Inspector himself for six years - and then in a very moving manner in "Old Sister Paul".

THE DAY TH'INSPECTOR COMES

*We're not supposed to know what day
It is th' Inspector comes;
But Sister gets a ring to say,
"Brown paper parcel's on the way."
Then us and her is chums -
She hunts us around to try to make
Things decent for th' Inspector's sake;
You wouldn't believe what pains we take,
Nor how excitement hums;
We work with broom and mop and rake
Before th' Inspector comes.*

*The spiders gets it in the chest
The day th' Inspector comes;
The stupid boys they graft the best,
And down comes every hornet's nest
In smither-rither-ruins;
And Sister says, "Boys, burn that mess."
There's filled-up exers. numberless,
And broken slates and canes, I guess,
What all your fingers numbs -
We jams the lot behind the press
Before th' Inspector comes.*

*.....
He'd like to nip you in the stew
The very day he comes;
He thinks he's pretty cute, he do;
But Sister knows a thing or two
Outside kirriculums.
To ketch you on the hop's his whim,
But she has everything in trim;
So when he sneaks up sour and prim
To start his tantarums,
We're sitting up expecting him,
The day th' Inspector comes.*

*She sticks in front the kids that fag,
The day th' Inspector comes;
But coves like me that loaf and lag,
And other coves that play the wag,
Or has thick craniums,
We sit along the wall all day,
And get swelled heads to hear her say,
"That lot back there would turn you grey
Just mixem-gatherums. "
The best ones always are away,
The day th' Inspector comes.*

*.....
The Sister looks a bit knocked out
The day th' Inspector comes;*

*She has a headache and a pout,
But sticks to us without a doubt,
And in his ear she drums,
That we could really do the lot
Except the little bit we got;
But, golly, don't we get it hot,
Next day about the sums.
You'd think we didn't do a jot,
The day th' Inspector comes.*

*But this is where she does him brown,
The day th' Inspector comes.
Which makes a smile replace a frown -
He holds the sewing upside down,
And haws and hems and hums;
She knows she has him beaten quite,
And crowds it on him left and right,
He handles it as if 'twould bite,
And don't we just enjoy the sight
The day th' Inspector comes.*

OLD SISTER PAUL

.....

*Tonight in her appointed place the shadows hide her weary
face
And fall across her heart;
And I have known what things, forsooth, have worn away the
bloom of youth:
The treadmill grind from day to day - the hard exacting
price they pay
Who choose the better part.
A draughty schoolhouse long ago perched somewhere near
the line of snow,
Or on the Plains where simmering heat had buckled every
desk and seat
And warped the timber wall
Through which the wind blew grit and grime on book and
slate at lesson-time -
A dreary outpost blank and bare, the only brightness smiling
there
Was Sister Paul*

.....

*Her school's dismissed for many a day, the scholars
scattered far away:
They're changed and chastened now,
With grown-up cares that warp, and wreak the tell-tale
wrinkle on the cheek
And thin the hair; but yet, to her they're still the bonny
things they were
With curls upon the brow.
Tonight with all their winsome ways they troop around her
as she prays.
'Tis hers to guide their heedless feet on open road or city
street,
So wheresoe'er they are,
Against their trespasses she pleads - defends them with her*

rosary beads,
And many a fervent Ave's said for that poor erring
touslehead
Whose steps have wandered far.
And I have seen him, at the last, redeem the squalid tragic
past
Before the curtain's fall:
He turned to pray; no prayer he had save one she taught
him when a lad
Before his head was bowed with shame; and hot tears
gathered at the name
Of Sister Paul

.....

"John O'Brien" writes of the piety of the Irish-Australians of his day. I would note especially how he highlights the key position of the priest in that society. He speaks particularly of the bush parishes and he has a humble tribute to the priestly ideal in one of his most famous poems.

MY CURATE, FATHER CON

.....

*But, faith, there was another game in which he beat me
bad -
The vital game in which I could not pace it with the lad;
"You'll teach him many things," says he; and, ah, the
soothing tongue,
"For parish priests are wise," says he, "and every curate's
young":
I made a game and gallant show, but soon I learnt in truth
And not perhaps without a pang that age can learn from
youth.
I saw in him so many things which brought again to mind
Ideals and hopes and outlooks, too, which I had left behind.*

*I saw in him the priest I was or rather wished to be,
And wondered when and where and why we parted
company.
His work was as a hymn of praise which rose before the
Throne,
The life he wished all men to lead was mirrored in his own.
His thoughts surged round the Feet of God like spring
tides at the flood,
And yet his heart at every beat was pumping human blood.
He knew, but never felt, the chains which make a man a
slave,
The heavy handicaps of life that sometimes crush the brave.
The many called, the few elect, the last who had been first,
And but the grace of God between the best man and the
worst.
He knew it all and understood, and he so pure and young;
The splendid Latin of the Mass was living on his tongue
When every morn in vestments clad he bowed his handsome
head
And prayed on Calvary's height for them for whom his
Master bled.*

*I'd seen him tender with the weak, and patient with the
rude;
I'd seen the sick, the poor, the old, shed tears of gratitude;
"You'll teach him things," the Bishop said, but soon I came
to see
I wasn't teaching him at all, but he was teaching me.*

.....