

C. T. Dennis

S·E·N·T·I·M·E·N·T·A·L·B·L·O·K·E

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A N D · O T H E R · V E R S E S

ANGUS & ROBERTSON PUBLISHERS

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North Ryde, NSW, Australia 2113, and
16 Golden Square, London W1R 4BN,
United Kingdom*

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*First published in Australia
by Angus & Robertson Publishers in 1950
as Selected Verse of C. J. Dennis
Reprinted 1951, 1953, 1955, 1956, 1958,
1961, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1968,
1971, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1980
This edition 1988*

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*National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-publication data.*

*Dennis, C. J. (Clarence James), 1876-1938.
The sentimental bloke and other verses.*

ISBN 0 207 15907 6.

I. Title. II. Title: Selected verse of C. J. Dennis.

A821'.2

Printed in Australia by Griffin Press

INTRODUCTION

WAS there ever an autobiography, in fact or fiction, prose or verse, that opened in more forthright fashion than does the tale of Australia's Sentimental Bloke, as presented by C. J. Dennis:

The world 'as got me snouted jist a treat;
Crool Forchin's dirty left 'as smote me soul;
An' all them joys o' life I 'eld so sweet
Is up the pole!

The Bloke—known also as the Kid and Bill—was obviously at odds with the whole universe when he made that poignant complaint. But, of course, his condition was no novelty. Many a man before him had developed a fervent grouch against the world at large. Similar feelings had been expressed, for example, by another "Bill" of a much earlier day—one surnamed Shakespeare:

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate.

If the language of the Shakespearian sonnet is rather more chaste than that of the Dennis song, the two expressions are impressively alike in substance. (They bear in fact the same relationship as do Hamlet's claim, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends", and the Bloke's crisp remark, "It's 'ow Gawd builds a bloke".) They are, moreover, alike in having a flavour of factual autobiography. That is to say, Dennis himself was in trouble with "Forchin's dirty left" just as often as Shakespeare was "in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes", and, no doubt, he found relief at times, as Shakespeare apparently did, in causing his spirit to "rail on Lady Fortune in good terms"—if only to prove that the clouds were usually followed by sunshine.

The career of C. J. Dennis was in fact quite extraordinary, even fantastic, in its varying facets. Necessarily, then, it needs to be considered, at least in outline, when the man's work is being assessed; and in presenting such an outline we may, with mild

apologies, take the Shakespeare parallel just a little further. How remarkable it was, in the major case, that a youth from quiet Stratford-on-Avon became in time a profound student of life at Court, a skilled poetic weaver in many shades of language, and the greatest of all limners of the tempestuous drama of humanity! And how remarkable it was, in the minor case, that a youth from an Australian village, whose work during many years made no impression, leaped from obscurity in middle age, through the medium of one small book of verse, and attained national fame as Australia's Laureate of the Larrikin!

Clarence Michael James Dennis was born at Auburn, a village in the lower north of South Australia, on 7th September 1876. His father, James Dennis, a former master mariner, of Irish birth or extraction, had arrived in Auburn in the early eighteen-sixties and become licensee of an inn. He lost two children in infancy and his wife died soon afterwards (1874). Little more than a year later, at the age of 47, he married Catherine (Kate) Tobin, aged 24, member of an Irish family in the district that contained five daughters and one son. C. J. Dennis was the eldest of three sons of this union.

When the boy Clarrie was about seven years of age the family moved to Gladstone, fifty miles northward, and a few years later another transfer was made to a hotel at Laura, seven miles farther north again. Some of the boy's early schooling was gained at Gladstone, but most, it would appear, was acquired under the eyes of his four maiden aunts at the village of Mintaro. Prim and pious little women, those aunts seem to have believed their duty to lie in developing a rural edition of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. They dressed the boy in a starched suit, with Eton collar, peaked cap, and patent leather shoes, rounded off with brown gloves and a cane, and they trained him to raise that cap to every woman about the place. Consequently, the unfortunate "Clarence" became a favourite target for ribald lads of the village and so was forced to play mainly with girls.

Those experiences, in the case of a sensitive lad, may well have been soul-searing. And, by the same token, they may explain in some degree why Dennis later discarded the stately name of "Clarence" in favour of "Den", why he became at times quite unsocial, and why he made his chief literary occupation the production of "tough guys". Ginger Mick and the Bloke were well

suited, no doubt, by Spadger's Lane and other dingy parts of Melbourne, but they appear to have had their origins, their "ancestry" as it were, in a quiet village in South Australia!

Kate Dennis died in 1890—in the same month, August, and at the same age, 39, as had the first Mrs Dennis. Loss of their mother was a heavy blow to Clarrie, scarcely 14, and the two younger boys, for the father, then aged 62, could not well control three young sons while coping with the trials of inn-keeping in a frontier town. The emergency was met by two of the faithful aunts; they removed from little Mintaro to a much less congenial spot, the Beetaloo Hotel at Laura, and there they did their best, if not always successfully, to guide their three nephews in the paths of dignity and piety.

Imagine, if possible, what those worthy little women—"Pansy" and "Buttercup" to Laura people—would have said if they could have foreseen certain startling developments that were to arise, partly perhaps through their own fond ministrations. Imagine their feelings had it been revealed that their eldest nephew, their cherished Clarence, had even then developed a furtive admiration for larrikins, and that in later years he would capture a continent with books of verse containing lines such as these:

Me, that 'as done me stretch fer stoushin' Johns,
An' spen's me leisure gettin' on the shick,
An' 'arf me nights down there, in Little Lons.,
Wiv Ginger Mick,
Jist 'eadin' 'em, an' doin' in me gilt.
Tough luck! I s'pose it's 'ow a man is built!

As C. J. Dennis grew to adulthood he shook off, outwardly at least, the inhibitions of earlier days. He became, indeed, something of a man-about-town in little Laura. He developed a fondness for cricket, a tendency to declaim to the girls about the need for reforming the world, and a marked taste for producing stage quips and for playing parts in light opera. Also, and rather more significantly, he acquired in odd moments a useful acquaintance with good verse and prose and revealed something of his own gift for rhyme in skits on local men and events.

Den's first occupation, aside from assisting his father, was as a junior clerk in the office of a Laura solicitor. Experience in Adelaide subsequently included a term on the staff of the *Critic*, a sedate little social weekly. Before reaching 21 he was back in the hotel

at Laura. Local reports agree that he was not meant by Nature to be a barman. His father shared that view. Consequently, at the age of 22 or 23 the ex-clerk, ex-journalist, ex-barman found himself upon the road, bound for Broken Hill. He arrived in the isolated mining centre in a forlorn condition, wearing clothes that were virtually shreds and patches, plus tattered canvas shoes, and having a working capital of precisely one shilling and ninepence.

For several months then he struggled through a variety of profitless occupations, every one of which was too strenuous for a man of his modest physique. He used to say later that the experience nearly killed him; but in general he preferred not to talk of that chaotic portion of his career.

Early in the present century the wanderer found his way back to Adelaide and rejoined the staff of the *Critic*. This time he stayed longer—long enough to become editor of the little journal. Then, late in 1905, he joined several others—notably a lad named A. E. Martin, later a well-known novelist—in launching the *Gadfly*, a weekly journal devoted to cheerfully malicious comment on the Australian scene, and in particular to light satirical verse by its editor, C. J. Dennis.

When, after a couple of years, the wings of the *Gadfly* began to wilt through heavy financial weather, Dennis handed over to Martin and wandered away to Melbourne. Here he eked out an existence as a freelance journalist and in any other way that became available. With the possible exception of the period spent at Broken Hill, this appears to have been the most drab period of his life. He worked as well as may be, but he expended his slight funds and slight physique much too carelessly, and soon his appearance fell far below the dapper standard of *Gadfly* days.

He was rescued by an artist, Hal Waugh, who carried him off to a camp he had established at Toolangi, a picturesque highland settlement some forty miles east of Melbourne.

By this time, at the age of 31, Dennis had lived in five settlements and three cities, and never more than a few years at most in each. He himself would have been astonished, no doubt, if he could have foreseen that the latest place of residence was to be his home, more or less continuously, from 1908 until his death thirty years later.

At the beginning of his Toolangi citizenship he lived in Hal Waugh's tent. Later his gaze fell upon a small weatherboard house, formerly the home of a timberman; and as no one seemed either to

own or to want the place he moved his few possessions into it and set himself up as a householder. There, of course, he continued to be his own cook, launderer, pants-patcher, and general house-keeper; and he supported himself by writing verse for various journals.

It was a lonely life. As the months and the years rolled on the one-time well-dressed editor came "mighty near to vegetating" and had to "work like blazes to fend off the blues". He was, indeed, experiencing personally the plight of the "bloke" whom he brought into being in this period, the fellow who complained of the impact of "Forchin's dirty left", and who declared roundly:

I'm crook; me name is Mud; I've done me dash;
Me flamin' spirit's got the flamin' 'ump!

Relief came in 1913. In that year R. H. Croll, an officer of the Victorian Education Department, who had chanced to drop in upon Dennis during a walking tour, introduced him to John Garibaldi Roberts, a genial, book-loving official of the Melbourne Tramways Company. In that year, too, Dennis got together a selection from the verses he had published in various journals and had it issued in book form, by E. W. Cole of Melbourne, under the title of *Backblock Ballads and Other Verses*.

Roberts was impressed by Dennis's work. So were the men and women of art and letters who gathered about him, at week-ends, at his hospitable home, "Sunnyside", set among the hills at South Sassafras (now Kallista), some twenty-five miles east of Melbourne. The Sunnyside company appreciated in particular a challenging oddity that its author had termed "A Real Australian Austra—laise", and which had first appeared in November of 1908 as the winner of a special prize in a competition conducted by the *Sydney Bulletin* for a National Song.

Most of all, though, the "Sunnysiders" were attracted to the book by four sets of verses bearing the generic title, "The Sentimental Bloke", together with an extensive glossary designed for the guidance of "the Thoroughly Genteel". The humour, the sentiment, the decorative language, and the rhyming dexterity manifest in these verses went to the making of a joyous novelty, and it was received with acclaim in many another spot besides Sassafras. Indeed, Dennis himself realized that he had hit upon something with distinct possibilities in the Bloke sequence, and even before

meeting Roberts and the others (October 1913) he had produced several additional instalments of the quaint verse-tales.

The fact that *Backblock Ballads and Other Verses* met with only modest success did not matter very much. The important thing for Dennis was that his newly-found friends stimulated a mentality that was in danger of becoming sluggish, together with the fact that Roberts and his wife, both essentially warm-hearted, gave him a home at Sunnyside and made him a financial allowance conditional upon a certain amount of work being produced each week. Garry Roberts and his wife and their friends were, indeed, a decisive influence in the life of C. J. Dennis.

Nevertheless, after fluctuating for a few months between his shack at Toolangi and a home in an old tramcar at Sunnyside, Dennis suddenly conceived the idea of going off to Sydney. That was about the middle of 1914. His spirits then were so low that he felt, so he said, "just like flat soda-water", and he surmised the condition to be due to his "poor old abused system fretting for a little drug-produced excitement". Inevitably, therefore, while working for a few weeks in Sydney on a union journal he strayed from the straight path frequently, so that when he returned to Melbourne in August he had to be nursed at the Roberts suburban home and then sent to Sunnyside to recuperate.

Who was to suppose that within a year this frayed little wanderer, battered by hard adventure in bush and city of various States, would hold first place among Australian writers in public esteem?

Most of the Sentimental Bloke series had been written at Toolangi before the end of 1913, but its author's intention to try to have it published in book form was suspended while the later verses were running through the *Bulletin*. Moreover, when he did seek a publisher in 1914 it was only to meet with a prompt rejection from a Melbourne firm—which thus provided Australia's most eloquent example of a publisher's indiscretion. Trying again in March of 1915, Dennis wrote to Angus and Robertson of Sydney, enclosing the manuscript and suggesting that a subscription edition be published at five shillings a copy and a cheaper edition at a shilling. He was "pretty confident", he said, that he could get about three hundred subscribers for the five-shilling edition, and he offered to pay for circulars advertising the project!

Brushing aside Den's ideas about methods of publication, Angus

and Robertson issued the book on the basis of their own judgment—with an introduction by Henry Lawson and illustrations by Hal Gye—and within three months of publication two editions, numbering rather more than 7000 copies, had been sold. Within the next three months *The Bloke* was in a fifth edition and sales were still sound. Later Dennis was given the information that 66,148 copies had been sold in rather less than eighteen months, that is, between the first date of publication, 16th October 1915, and 31st March 1917. The figure related only to Australia and New Zealand and did not include editions published in Britain, Canada, and the United States.

Obviously there was fairly sound reason for a somewhat bewildered author to readjust his earlier ambition—the quaint idea that it might be possible to sell three hundred copies! Here, in fact, was the most remarkable success-story in the history of Australian authorship, and its central figure was a middle-aged man who, beginning life as a molly-coddled country boy, and being himself only of slight physique, had risen suddenly from penury to affluence through the medium of city “he-men” born of his own imagination.

Nor did the success of the little book end there. It became in 1916 the subject of professional recitals in various cities, and later its story was both filmed and dramatized. It aroused, too, appreciation from men of literary eminence as well as the general public. H. G. Wells, E. V. Lucas, and W. J. Locke joined in the applause. So did parliaments and pulpits. A parson in Canada declared the book to be “fragrant with spiritual truths from the Hills of God”.

If the transformed author was somewhat staggered by all this—if he marvelled at what the fairies had done for him, a fate-buffed man of forty years, through the medium of one small book of verse—he did not allow either his creative or practical impulses to be subdued. Realizing that the emotions of wartime may have been a factor in the success of the book, he isolated one of the Bloke’s cobbles, Ginger Mick, sent him “off to the flamin’ war to stoush the foe”, and followed his career along to his death at Gallipoli. Again using robust vernacular, he told the tale with salty humour and the same remarkable rhyming skill that animated *The Bloke*, and again, almost inevitably, the public response was prompt and thorough. In less than six months—to 31st March 1917—sales in Australia and New Zealand alone had reached the healthy total of 42,349 copies. The authentic flavour of the story was established

by the cordial reception it received from men on active service, to whom it was introduced by a "pocket edition for the trenches".

Now the chequered career of C. J. Dennis had reached its climax. He could scarcely be expected to go on repeating the striking successes of *The Bloke* and *Ginger Mick*. Nor, on the other hand, was it at all likely that he would ever again be in need of succour—ever again find himself, as the Bloke had it:

Jist moochin' round like some pore, barmy coot,
Uv 'ope, an' joy, an' forchin destichoot.

The only question was, Would he be able to keep his head in the altered circumstances? None of Den's associates was at all sure how that question would be answered. Each of them had always found him to be an unpredictable little fellow. He was, they knew, fraternal enough at times, able and willing to play a part, sing, use a musical instrument, produce clever quips in prose or verse, and, with quite unpoetlike skill, manufacture almost anything from a banjo to a billiard-table. But they knew, too, that the Touchstone was apt at other times to turn into a Jaques—that he had a strong strain of reserve, amounting almost to shyness, could be cold to the point of arrogance for no particular reason, and in general was much less sentimental than his own Sentimental Bloke. Also, coupled with the physical contrast between the man himself and the "tough guys" of his imagination, there was the fact that, unlike his chief characters, he had little knowledge of the arts of "'eadin' browns" (at two-up) and "chuckin' off chiack" (at girls); the sole indulgence he discussed from personal experience was what the Bloke described as "pourin' snake-juice in yer face", and the curious thing was that in all such outbreaks he was usually quite unsocial.

How, then, was anyone to predict with assurance what the future held for this man of contrasts who had sprung suddenly from obscurity to fame?

In 1915 Dennis had obtained somehow a job in the Commonwealth Public Service, but he gave that up in the following year and proceeded to become, like his own regenerated Bloke, an Established Citizen. He built a charming home, complete with garden, on the site of the old shack at Toolangi, got himself married in 1917 (to Olive, daughter of John Herron of Melbourne), and settled down to the production of a steady stream of books. The new house, "Arden", was his first real home: practically all of his earlier

years had been spent in hotels (one had been his birthplace), in city lodgings, and in bush camps.

Six books and a booklet were issued during the first seven years spent at Arden. Most were sequels of *The Bloke* and *Ginger Mick* themes, but none attained the success of the parental volumes. The odd thing was the relative failure of the two non-vernacular books, *The Glugs of Gosh*, an extremely clever and diverting satire, and *A Book for Kids* (later re-issued with the title changed to *Round-about*), a thoroughly engaging volume of verse and prose for youth. Both Dennis and his publisher were disappointed by the lukewarm attitude of the public to these books.

Possibly, however, there was some balm for the poet in the assurance given him publicly by the Lord Mayor of Sydney—the city in which he had been a derelict a few years previously—that he stood on the same plane of popularity with Australians as did Robert Burns with Scottish people the world over. (Had the Lord Mayor, one wonders, been setting “Scots Wha Hae” alongside “Fellers of Australier, blokes an’ coves an’ coots”?)

In 1922 Dennis became associated with the *Melbourne Herald*, and for that paper he poured out, during sixteen years, a spate of topical and semi-topical verse. The product of an extraordinarily facile mind, much of this verse was very diverting and all was shot through with verbal dexterity. It included a number of Rain Songs (for Dennis always remembered the blessing of rain in the “strange, shadeless land” of his youth); it included many clever parodies, and it included as well a number of the patriotic poems that caused their author to be regarded as a kind of unofficial Australian laureate. On at least thirty occasions he engaged in the melodious trumpeting of national observances such as Anzac Day and Armistice Day, and sometimes he brought the Sentimental Bloke to his aid in the tasks.

It may be added that at one stage, when Osbert Sitwell in England was charging 100 guineas each for “poem-portraits”, the nimble-witted Dennis conceived the bright idea of executing “verse-photos”, or “jingle-snapshots”, on the mass-production principle. “The writer,” he declared solemnly, “is prepared to supply these at 2/3 a dozen. Special marked-down price during our Winter Sale, 1/11½.” After which he proceeded to submit samples of the “jingle-snapshots”, beginning with a flapper and a politician, extending to various other oddities, and ending with an electric tram.

A considerable body of prose, too, was contributed by Dennis to the *Herald* during this period. It included "Epistles to Ab" (letters from a farmer to his son in the city), and a fantastic sequence, with almost every word mis-spelled, purporting to be written by Ben Bowyang of Gunn's Gully, a "character" who, with his friend and foil Bill Smith, has since become the subject of a popular comic strip. Although amusing enough, and interesting when given a flavour of autobiography, the prose generally was not distinguished. The verse, however—as may be gathered from quotations cited in the present writer's biography of Dennis—was often distinctly impressive, and doubtless a judicious selection of it would make a very agreeable book.

One of the various verse-series published in the *Herald* was, in fact, announced for publication in book form in 1927. Entitled "Just Miss Mix: the Chronicles of a Little Town", it rendered in rhyme, with characteristic humour and pathos, the reflections and the gossip of a country seamstress, and incidentally introduced many types familiar in every Australian country town. Oddly, however, the projected book did not emerge—and that in spite of the fact that Percy Leason, a skilled sketcher of rural "characters", had been engaged as illustrator.

Another enterprise that fell by the wayside was a series bearing the tentative title, "The Bloke Shakespeare", apparently an elaboration of the general scheme of the verses describing Bill and Doreen at "The Play". In this instance, perhaps, the reason of the failure was that Den had fallen from grace again. "My head is in the dust and my hand as I write trembles with guilty shame," he confessed to his publisher. He added, however, that his work as a book-producer had been chiefly affected by his "very unwise excursion into daily journalism", and possibly there was some substance to that claim. The extraordinary thing, indeed, is that he was able to achieve so much worthy verse while working against the clock each day—and it is not surprising that his work sometimes had to be done by other staff-men.

After 1924, therefore, only one volume, apart from the revised *Book for Kids*, was produced for Dennis. Published in 1935 under the title of *The Singing Garden*, it was a compilation of prose and short poems, mainly about birds, that had appeared in the *Herald*, and it was illustrated with some few decorations and a photograph

of Arden. A photographic illustration in a Dennis book was a novelty, for although every one of the nine earlier works had been illustrated—a notable distinction for a writer of verse—in each instance the illustrator had been an artist—first David Low, then Hal Gye, and then (in the juvenile book) Dennis himself.

The curtain fell on 22nd June 1938. Dennis was then in the sixty-second year of his colourful life. He was buried in the suburban cemetery of Box Hill, and upon the tombstone were inscribed two lines from the last poem in his last book:

Now is the healing, quiet hour that fills
This gay, green world with peace and grateful rest.

"C. J. Dennis was the Robert Burns of Australia," said the Prime Minister of the day, J. A. Lyons, in a public tribute. "His work is animated by truth, simplicity, and very genuine feeling," said E. V. Lucas. And John Masefield, who in 1935 had paid Dennis a visit at Toolangi, declared that "poetry with such a universal appeal, reaching all classes of readers, must have great merits".

Apparently many people shared those views, for soon after the death of Dennis memorial groups in his honour were formed in both Melbourne and Sydney (the Sydney body set up a "C. J. Dennis Memorial Prize" for literature) and, later, residents of certain Victorian rural areas where the poet had lived also began to establish memorials—including a public hall. There was, too, a proposal to erect a commemorative plaque on the village hotel in South Australia that served him as a birthplace.

Obviously, the little rhymers of Toolangi and Kallista, who had been poor and practically unknown until nearly forty years of age, had made himself in his later years a distinctive figure in the literary history of Australia.

For all that, however, the enduring nature of Dennis's work still remains to be determined. Much of it, being born of World War I, was to some extent topical. Much of it, too, was rendered in language that may now have become somewhat out-moded. But, of course, other factors have to be considered. Discussing this subject in *Australian Literature* (1940) Morris Miller said it was probable that verse in the vernacular found the limit of its attraction sooner than verse in the traditional form, but, he added, the Sentimental Bloke and Doreen seemed likely to live "as long as ballad-poetry

has a hold on the literature of Australia". Similarly, an American anthologist, David McCord, wrote as recently as 1945 that in spite of its slang (which, he said, could be "taken in through the pores"), *The Sentimental Bloke* should be published again in the United States. "I am convinced," he added, "that the book has more of the eternal values, not to mention humour, than most of the protein-fed or intellectualised literature about which the critics are shouting every day."

Now, with the appearance of a collected edition, the opportunity is available for the public generally to determine the merits of Dennis's work from a modern point of view. And, of course, judgment has to be made not only on the vernacular verse-tales but on that lilting fantasy *The Glugs of Gosh*, on the bush ballads, and on the merry and melodious verses for children that the versatile poet wrote.

Nine books, a booklet and a leaflet are represented here. Obviously, selecting had to be governed by the need to get the material into one volume of reasonable size. For that reason many worthy items have been omitted and cuts have been made here and there in the ones chosen. It is believed, however, that the material now presented is fairly representative of Dennis's work and that nothing of special significance has been overlooked.

In addition to the embarrassment caused by quantity, there has been difficulty in making a selection from the work because much of it is in connected story form. The poet himself encountered that difficulty when in 1929-30 he attempted to assemble material for a collected edition; and possibly it was the cause of his project not reaching fulfilment. In the present instance care has been taken to endeavour to maintain the sequence of all the verse-tales.

First place in the collection is given to an individual "song", the famous "Austra—laise", because it has several points of distinction. The first example of its author's work to become known in various countries, it won a special prize in a National Song Competition conducted by the *Sydney Bulletin* (1908), later appeared in Dennis's first book, and later again was issued as a leaflet for the use of Australia's soldiers in World War I. Possibly we may agree that its pungent verses are still significant—no less challenging now to "blokes an' coves an' coots" than they were when bawled forth by early Diggers on the march.

It can scarcely be expected, perhaps, that this book will be received, by a public that has changed in both personnel and nature since World War I, with the rapture that greeted the first appearance of *The Sentimental Bloke* and *Ginger Mick*. But, on the other hand, it seems highly probable that through the present medium many readers who are "getting along", including Old Diggers, will recapture some of the joys of yesteryear; and, in addition, it may reasonably be supposed that a newer generation will be blithely impressed by the humour, the sentiment, the extraordinary command of "slanguage", and the remarkable rhyming skill revealed by the former bush boy who became Australia's Laureate of the Larrikin.

ALEC H. CHISHOLM

Sydney, 1950

FOOTNOTE—RETROSPECTIVE

If one cannot fairly say "I told you so", there is justification, now, for claiming that the modified prediction made above has been fulfilled. The fact is, indeed, that the public of today has given this book a cordial welcome.

Whether its readers have been, and are, for the most part "new", or in the main those who enjoyed the verse-tales of Dennis when originally published, their demand has caused this volume to be reprinted so frequently, during merely a few years, that it is now in its sixth impression, making in all approximately 45,000 copies. This figure does not rival the high and rapid sales of *The Sentimental Bloke* and *Ginger Mick* in the days of World War I, but, when set against various circumstances, it is distinctly impressive. It indicates that, as John Masefield commented years ago, the verse of Dennis exercises a wide appeal, and, also, it suggests that Morris Miller was justified in predicting that the Bloke and Doreen are by way of being literary immortals.

These points are strengthened by the fact that although the greater part of *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* is given here, when that book was republished last year, as a complete unit, it too was accorded an appreciative reception. The welcome in both instances has been extended in other countries besides Australia. People elsewhere may be daunted by Australian slang as spoken, but they appear to "get by"

quite well when it appears in print, even if, occasionally, they have to consult a glossary. Possibly sight, rather than hearing, enables slang to be “taken in through the pores”!

It should be added that Dennis “revivals” of recent years have not been restricted to the present book and *The Sentimental Bloke*. Additionally, that challenging oddity “The Austra—laise” made yet another appearance, in 1951, when it was published as an advertisement, in many Australian newspapers, by the Commonwealth Director-General of Recruiting, the idea being that its “stirring national appeal” was as effective then “as ever before”. Moreover in the following year—“Well, spare me bloomin’ days!” as the Melbourne *Argus* exclaimed—the Bloke and Doreen made their bow in a ballet. Subsequent developments have included the erection of memorials to Dennis in his birthplace (Auburn, S.A.) and in the spot where he spent his later years (Toolangi, Vic.); the issuing of a book of reminiscences, *Down the Years*, by the poet’s widow, and the publication of other reminiscences by two of Den’s illustrators, Hal Gye and David Low.

Furthermore, other developments in Dennisiana are foreshadowed. Not content with having appeared in print, in recitals, in films, in a play, in songs, and in a ballet, the Bloke and Doreen are now, it is announced, to figure in a full-scale musical presentation of their story. In the near future, too, their creator is to meet the public again (posthumously) through the republication of *A Book for Kids*, a collection of merry verses (with illustrations) which was published in 1921 and re-issued, under the title *Roundabout*, in 1935.

Certain reviewers of the present volume (on its first appearance in 1950) are largely responsible for the decision to republish the *Book for Kids*, since, through having their youthful recollections stirred by extracts given here, they urged that the complete book, with its picturesque illustrations, should be made available to the youth of today.

Reviewers generally, it may fairly be added, gave a friendly greeting to the *Selected Verse of C. J. Dennis*, including the varied illustrations within and Broadhurst’s “personality parade” on the dust-jacket. Some critics, it is true, were disposed to question Den’s status as “the Laureate of the Larrikin”, the suggestion of one being that there are really “very few pictures of larrikin-life” in the Bloke stories, and that of another being that the author leaned largely on *Jonah*, Louis Stone’s novel of Sydney’s byways published in 1911. These