

## **This is Banjo Paterson's "The Bushfire—An Allegory" written in 1886.**

'Twas on the famous Empire run,  
Whose sun does never set,  
Whose grass and water, so they say,  
Have never failed them yet --  
They carry many million sheep,  
Through seasons dry and wet.  
They call the homestead Albion House,  
And then, along with that,  
There's Welshman's Gully, Scotchman's Hill,  
And Paddymelon Flat:  
And all these places are renowned  
For making jumbucks fat.

And the out-paddocks -- holy frost!  
There wouldn't be no sense  
For me to try and tell you half --  
They really are immense;  
A man might ride for days and weeks  
And never strike a fence.

But still for years they never had  
Been known a sheep to lose;  
Old Billy Gladstone managed it,  
And you can bet your shoes  
He'd scores of supers under him,  
And droves of jackaroos.

Old Billy had an eagle eye,  
And kept his wits about --  
If any chaps got trespassing  
He quickly cleared 'em out;  
And coves that used to "work a cross",  
They hated him, no doubt.

But still he managed it in style,  
Until the times got dry,  
And Billy gave the supers word  
To see and mind their eye --  
"If any paddocks gets a-fire  
I'll know the reason why."

Now on this point old Bill was sure,

Because, for many a year,  
Whenever times got dry at all,  
As sure as you are here,  
The Paddymelon Flat got burnt  
Which Bill thought rather queer.

He sent his smartest supers there  
To try and keep things right.  
No use! The grass was always dry --  
They'd go to sleep at night,  
And when they woke they'd go and find  
The whole concern alight.

One morning it was very hot --  
The sun rose in a haze;  
Old Bill was cutting down some trees  
(One of his little ways);  
A black boy came hot-foot to say  
The Flat was in a blaze.

Old Bill he swears a fearful oath  
And lets the tommy fall --  
Says he: "I'll take this business up,  
And fix it once for all;  
If this goes on the cursed run  
Will send us to the wall."

So he withdrew his trespass suits,  
He'd one with Dutchy's boss --  
In prosecutions criminal  
He entered nolle pros.,  
But these were neither here nor there --  
They always meant a loss.

And off to Paddymelon Flat  
He started double quick  
Drayloads of men with lots of grog  
Lest heat should make them sick,  
And all the strangers came around  
To see him do the trick.

And there the fire was flaming bright,  
For miles and miles it spread,  
And many a sheep and horse and cow  
Were numbered with the dead --  
The super came to meet Old Bill,

And this is what he said:

"No use, to try to beat it out,  
'Twill dry you up like toast,  
I've done as much as man can do,  
Although I never boast;  
I think you'd better chuck it up,  
And let the jumbucks roast."

Then Bill said just two words: "You're sacked,"  
And pitches off his coat,  
And wrenches down a blue gum bough  
And clears his manly throat,  
And into it like threshing wheat  
Right sturdily he smote.

And beat the blazing grass until  
His shirt was dripping wet;  
And all the people watched him there  
To see what luck he'd get,  
"Gosh! don't he make the cinders fly,"  
And, Golly, don't he sweat!"

But though they worked like Trojans all,  
The fire still went ahead  
So far as you could see around,  
The very skies were red,  
Sometimes the flames would start afresh,  
Just where they thought it dead.

His men, too, quarreled 'mongst themselves  
And some coves gave it best  
And some said, "Light a fire in front,  
And burn from east to west" --  
But Bill he still kept sloggin' in,  
And never took no rest.

Then through the crowd a cornstalk kid  
Come ridin' to the spot  
Says he to Bill, "Now take a spell,  
You're lookin' very 'ot,  
And if you'll only listen, why,  
I'll tell you what is what.

"These coves as set your grass on fire,  
There ain't no mortal doubt,

I've seen 'em ridin' here and there,  
And pokin' round about;  
It ain't no use your workin' here,  
Until you finds them out.

"See yonder, where you beat the fire --  
It's blazin' up again,  
And fires are starting right and left  
On Tipperary Plain,  
Beating them out is useless quite,  
Unless Heaven sends the rain.

Then Bill, he turns upon the boy,  
"Oh, hold your tongue, you pup!"  
But a cinder blew across the creek  
While Bill stopped for a sup,  
And fired the Albion paddocks, too --  
It was a bitter cup;  
Old Bill's heart was broke at last,  
He had to chuck it up.

#### Moral

The run is England's Empire great,  
The fire is the distress  
That burns the stock they represent --  
Prosperity you'll guess.  
And the blue gum bough is the Home Rule Bill  
That's making such a mess.

And Ireland green, of course I mean  
By Paddymelon Flat;  
All men can see the fire, of course,  
Spreads on at such a bat,  
But who are setting it alight,  
I cannot tell you that.

But this I think all men will see,  
And hold it very true --  
"Don't quarrel with effects until  
The cause is brought to view."  
What is the cause? That cornstalk boy --  
He seemed to think he knew.