

The Song That Men Should Sing

Kenneth Mackay

1899

The cohorts who fought when the world was young
Have their blood-red legends told,
For a hundred poets have bravely sung
The deeds of the days of old.

The story is writ of the men who fell
In desert and sun-scorched track:
The legions who served their country well -
The heroes who marched 'Out Back' ...

But they tell us now, in their lifeless lays,
These knights of the stool and pen,
We must boast no more of the stirring days
When they fought and fell like men ...

But the tale is best that has oft been told,
If it love of birthland bring;
And the song they sang in days of old
Is the song that I will sing ...

We won the land from a nerveless race,
Too mean for their land to fight;
If we mean to hold it we too must face
The adage that 'might is right'.

It matters nothing what dreamers say,
When they prate that wars must cease,
For the lustful war-god holds his sway
In these piping days of peace ...

So our lads must learn there's a sterner task
Than playing a well-pitched ball;
That the land we love may some day ask
For a team when the trumpets call.

A team that is ready to take the field
To bowling with balls of lead,
In a test match grim, where if one appealed,
The umpire might answer 'dead'!

Note: Kenneth Mackay, was born on 5 June 1859 at Wallendbeen in New South Wales, the son of a wealthy grazier; he became a successful amateur jockey, and - after moving to Victoria - wrote articles, reviews, short stories, and poetry. He was Lieutenant Colonel in command of the NSW Imperial Bushmen's Contingent to the Boer War, and then chief staff officer for the Australian contingents at the British Army Headquarters in South Africa. He founded the Australian Army Reserve in 1916, and retired as a Major-General. He was the author of the novel *The Yellow Wave: A Romance of the Asiatic Invasion of Australia*, first published in 1895. From: *The New Australian School Series Fourth Reader*, Sydney, 1899.