

The Golden Era

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The Golden era spoken of even before the famous discussions in various Greek gardens seems to recur more or less generationally throughout the intervening millennia. That time in one's own life or the prime time of one's generation, when all things were perceived, especially in retrospect, to have been ideal or at least more appealing than the present. One could almost say that before things became mundane and insipid life was, indeed, almost euphoric, certainly more joyous, rewarding and positive. This condition is most often related to one's own age at the time or is "romantically" associated to someone who is close or respected or much loved, who nostalgically reminisces of a past in which only the good or happier times are recalled.

There are, as well, those Golden Years which existed in the before Era; before the War (which one?), before the Gold, before the auto, before the advent of Electronics etc.

One particular aspect of the before series is Boldrewood's depiction of "before the Gold". One vehicle which is more closely related to this thesis is before the Cotton, especially in the Northwest and or Border country in N.S.W. This particular era is depicted by much of Keith Garvey's and to a lesser extent Col Newsome's contemporary, literary and life's work. Of course both men dwelt in the past for most of their literary contributions to a period when they were not even born and their ancestors were toiling and grafting to create a life from a harsh wilderness. Col Newsome proceeded to work towards making a better world with better conditions for the folk who peopled the now developing nation. Keith Garvey recorded the earlier tribulations of the people who lived there and their aspirations, doubts and fears along with their courage, convictions and indeed, their more human frailties.

History, especially that of a social community, can often be better recorded through the fictional presentation of historical and socially significant facts, than through the presentation of the records, statements and documents from the day. Garvey recorded the attitudes (religious, political and social) of an introduced people to a strange, hostile new land in which the tension between the old mores and the demands of a new environment collided, often spectacularly. He explored nationalistic (Celtic and Anglo Saxon) and religious biases and bigotries along with the class distinction and privileges which were trying to be maintained in

the face of opposition from the migrant, Aboriginal and environmental conditions which forced variation and change.

As an observer of the area (Moree) before cotton when there existed twenty two separate shearing contractors in Moree alone and the entire area was assumed to be a 'Squatocracy' by the Capitalists and a brave new world by the Bourgeoisie or working community. Conflicting opinions, attitudes and desires were rife and volatile in communities of often widely varied socio/cultural backgrounds. Deeply embedded in this world and social environment were the widely differing personages of Garvey and Newsome. Both battlers and champions of the underdog they never-the-less held vastly differing moral and social views. Garvey saw himself and his ancestral roots (bog Irish, Catholic) as heroic victims of social bias and authoritarian misconduct whereas Newsome saw the world as subject to change by applied industrial determination and selfless dedication for the betterment of all those who were in need of help.

In this world, as has been the case throughout the history, of human society, the storyteller, Jester, Rhymer Muse has figured prominently in the method of information education and change. Whether by Epic poem, parable, dissertation or song the story of the people or folk has been transmitted, glorified and recorded by the common folk through spoken, written and/or acted storytelling. Those who had the power wrote the history, those who lived the lives tended to create and perpetuate an often very different more enduring history or it could be said culture. Much of the recording of this latter form of history was presented in the form of fiction or exaggerated, factual personification of the social behaviour of the people.

The story of Black Jack Carmody (J.C.) as told episodically by Garvey is a reproduction of the personification and attitude of a Christian Jesus as perceived by a people to whom action and a life-led meant more than readings from a tome to which they were forever barred by illiteracy.

These stories of one who selflessly lived by the example of the Golden Rule and the Good Samaritan resonated within a community with no literacy but high moral fibre.

Hundreds of Rural workers in the Northwest toiled endlessly at lowly paid jobs while the graziers and high born 'Squatocracy' acted the part of the Laird or to the Manor born endorsed and encouraged by the bureaucratic toady who wished to curry favour. The economy rested very firmly on the sheep's back but wresting the Golden Fleece from the sheep's back relied on the shearers, roustabouts, wool washers and bullockys who did all the manual work for small reward and even littler respect. The reliance on mateship and the unity of the bush workers was

the treacle which held the bush community together and brought what little sweetness into their hard won existence.

Needless-to-say the storyteller or raconteur was how each anecdote was passed around and magnified among the bush folk. If a small victory over authority or meanness of the ruling class was achieved it served no real purpose if no one got to know about it. Not that bragging was applauded but good deeds did not go unnoticed and courage and integrity were highlighted and admired by all the common people whether in the poorer or upper class.

Col Newsome, highly respected as a man and as a union representative, was natural born leader and mover within the community whereas Keith Garvey with his stories and verse had the ability to bring to the fore the human qualities of courage, stoicism, doggedness, love, mateship and a readiness of the common bush folk to get the job done without fuss or flamboyance.

This world having survived two wars, the coming of the train and automobile and general progress could not survive the coming of the Cotton. In a few short years (early sixties to late seventies) the community changed, along with commercialism came a dreadful degradation of the environment which to any observer, even those in favour of progress, was and still is devastating. Gone were the last vestiges of mateship and trust and care for each other exhibited so recently as the Midkin Strike to be replaced by the mad commercial rush to tear up the country and destroy the magnificent ecology of the Northwest. Both Garvey and Newsome witnessed this commercial vandalism first hand and one can understand how they would want to venture via literary means into a more admirably remembered Golden yesteryear of Bullockys and Aboriginal outlaws.

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