

Classic Poetry Series

# **George Gordon McCrae**

## **- poems -**

**Publication Date:**  
2012

**Publisher:**  
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

# George Gordon McCrae(9 May 1833 – 15 August 1927)

George Gordon McCrae was an Australian poet.

## <b>Early life</b>

McCrae was born in Leith, Scotland; his father was Andrew Murison McCrae, a writer; his mother was Georgiana McCrae, a painter. George attended a preparatory school in London, and later received lessons from his mother. Georgiana and her four sons emigrated to Melbourne in 1841 following her husband who emigrated in 1839.

## <b>Career</b>

After a few years as a surveyor, McCrae joined the Victorian Government service, eventually becoming Deputy Registrar-General, and also a prominent figure in literary circles. Most of his leisure time was spent in writing. His first published work was *Two Old Men's Tales of Love and War* (London, 1865).

His son <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/hugh-mccrae/">Hugh McCrae</a> also a poet, produced a volume of memoirs (*My Father and My Father's Friends*) about George and his association with such literary figures as <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/henry-kendall/">Henry Kendall</a>, <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/adam-lindsay-gordon/">Adam Lindsay Gordon</a>, <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/richard-henry-horne/">Richard Henry Horne</a> and <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/marcus-clarke/">Marcus Clarke</a>.

George McCrae wrote novels, stories, poetry, and travel sketches, and illustrated books. After his retirement, unpublished manuscripts entitled 'Reminiscences—Experiences not Exploits' contain detailed descriptions of events from his youth and present a record of the early European part of Melbourne country-side.

## <b>Late life</b>

McCrae died 15 August 1927 at Hawthorn in Melbourne, survived by four of his six children, including Dorothy Frances Perry, also an author.

# Forby Sutherland

A LANE of elms in June;—the air  
Of eve is cool and calm and sweet.  
See! straying here a youthful pair,  
With sad and slowly moving feet,

On hand in hand to yon gray gate,  
O'er which the rosy apples swing;  
And there they vow a mingled fate,  
One day when George the Third is king.

The ring scarce clasped her finger fair,  
When, tossing in their ivied tower,  
The distant bells made all the air  
Melodious with that golden hour.

Then sank the sun out o'er the sea,  
Sweet day of courtship fond,... the last!  
The holy hours of twilight flee  
And speed to join the sacred Past.

The house-dove on the moss-grown thatch  
Is murmuring love-songs to his mate,  
As lovely Nell now lifts the latch  
Beneath the apples at the gate.

A plighted maid she nears her home,  
Those gentle eyes with weeping red;  
Too soon her swain must breast the foam,  
Alas! with that last hour he fled.

And, ah! that dust-cloud on the road,  
Yon heartless coach-guard's blaring horn;  
But naught beside, that spoke or showed  
Her sailor to poor Nell forlorn.

She dreams; and lo! a ship that ploughs  
A foamy furrow through the seas,  
As, plunging gaily, from her bows  
She scatters diamonds on the breeze.

Swift, homeward bound, with flags displayed  
In pennoned pomp, with drum and fife,  
And all the proud old-world parade  
That marks the man-o'-war man's life.

She dreams and dreams; her heart's at sea;  
Dreams while she wears the golden ring;  
Her spirit follows lovingly  
One humble servant of the king.

And thus for years, since Hope survives  
To cheer the maid and nerve the youth.  
"Forget-me-not!"—how fair it thrives  
Where planted in the soil of Truth!

The skies are changed; and o'er the sea,  
Within a calm, sequestered nook,  
Rests at her anchor thankfully  
The tall-sterned ship of gallant Cook.

The emerald shores ablaze with flowers,  
The sea reflects the smiling sky,  
Soft breathes the air of perfumed bowers—  
How sad to leave it all, and die!

To die, when all around is fair  
And steeped in beauty;—ah! 't is hard  
When ease and joy succeed to care,  
And rest, to "watch" and "mounted guard."

But harder still, when one dear plan,  
The end of all his life and cares,  
Hangs by a thread; the dying man  
Most needs our sympathy and prayers!

'T was thus with Forby as he lay  
Wan in his narrow canvas cot;  
Sole tenant of the lone "sick bay,"  
Though "mates" came round, he heard them not.

For days his spirit strove and fought,

But, ah! the frame was all too weak.  
Some phantom strange it seemed he sought,  
And vainly tried to rise and speak.

At last he smiled and brightened up,  
The noonday bugle went; and he  
Drained ('t was his last) the cooling cup  
A messmate offered helpfully.

His tongue was loosed—"I hear the horn!  
Ah, Nell! my number 's flying. See!—  
The horses too;—they 've had their corn.  
Alas, dear love!... I part from thee!"

He waved his wasted hand, and cried,  
"Sweet Nell! Dear maid! My own true Nell!  
The coach won't wait for me!"... and died—  
And this was Forby's strange farewell.

Next morn the barge, with muffled oars,  
Pulls slowly forth, and leaves the slip  
With flags half-mast, and gains the shores,  
While silence seals each comrade's lip.

They bury him beneath a tree,  
His treasure in his bosom hid.  
What was that treasure? Go and see!  
Long since it burst his coffin-lid!

Nell gave to Forby, once in play,  
Some hips of roses, with the seeds  
Of hedgerow plants, and flowerets gay  
(In England such might count for weeds).

"Take these," cries smiling Nell, "to sow  
In foreign lands; and when folk see  
The English roses bloom and grow,  
Some one may bless an unknown me."

The turf lies green on Forby's bed,  
A hundred years have passed, and more,  
But twining over Forby's head

Are Nell's sweet roses on that shore.

The violet and the eglantine,  
With sweet-breathed cowslips, deck the spot,  
And nestling 'mid them in the shine,  
The meek, blue-eyed "Forget-me-not!"

George Gordon McCrae

# L'Envoi From Balladeadro

See where the allied armies camped,  
Where plumed and painted dancers tramped--  
'Tis still the same, the same wild scene,  
As though the ploughshare ne'er had been.  
Grey Tomboritha still the skies  
With bold and massy front defies;  
And gorge, and chasm, and long-ledged rocks  
Echo the ever-thundering shocks  
Of waters dashed with headlong force,  
Wild cataracts leaping on their course.  
In dark Maroka's vale the stream  
Reflects the slanting solar beam;  
There the proud lyre-bird\* spreads his tail,  
And mocks the notes of hill and dale--  
Whether the wild dog's plaintive howl  
Or cry of piping waterfowl,  
Or the shrill parrot's answering scream,  
As, gem-like, dangling o'er the stream  
He hears, re-echoed from the rock  
The whirlwind whistle of the flock.  
Alas! and what a change is there!  
And yet the landscape still is fair.  
There smiled the woodland by the rill:  
'Tis gone--the waters turn a mill.  
There the Mirbango village lay:  
Mirbango maidens, where? O say,  
Where the tall braves, whose warrior songs  
Once wooed the dark-eyed Darakongs.  
Yon sheltered hollow, 'neath the steep,  
Now dotted o'er with browsing sheep,  
Holds the last graves the dark man owns--  
The treasure of his father's bones.  
All else, alas! has passed, is o'er;  
Time's wing has swept hill, vale, and shore;  
All, hence to farthest northern strand,  
Obeys the white, "the blood-stained hand;"  
And grey-beards by the fire at night,  
Warm, basking in its ruddy light,  
The young, in solemn tones, advise

To shun all stranger-women's eyes.  
"Our fathers," quoth they, "as we trace,  
Thus lost a country--doomed a race."

George Gordon McCrae



# Life's A Cigar

'Life's a cigar': the wasting body glows;  
The head turns white as Kosciusko's snows;  
And, with the last soul-fragrance still in air,  
The ashes slowly sink in soft repose.

George Gordon McCrae

# Mamba: (The Bright Eyed) An Aboriginal Reminiscence

Canto I.

XXVIII.

The day had fled, the moon arose,  
Night straight began with evening's close--  
A night whose calm and silvery sheen  
Befitted well the wild yapeen.<sup>1</sup>  
Within the circle of the camp  
Blazed the clear fire, while measured tramp  
Of dancing warriors shook the ground,  
To song and time-sticks' throbbing sound.  
There twice two hundred feet advanced,  
There twice a hundred malkas<sup>2</sup> glanced  
Bright in the moon, that silvered o'er  
The arms that all those malkas bore.  
Wild the device, and strange the sign  
That stared in many a snowy line  
From beaming face and heaving breast,  
And limbs that seldom paused to rest;  
Whilst all the rib-like lines laid on,  
Made each man seem a skeleton.  
Nodded the feathers from the red  
And netted band that bound each head,  
And hoarsely rustling leaves of trees  
Shook round dark ankles in the breeze.  
The singers with their time-sticks rang  
The cadence of the song they sang;  
And every face and limb below,  
And tree above them, caught the glow  
That spread from camp-fire's rising blaze,  
Lighting the yapeen's wond'rous maze  
Of feet and ankles in the dance  
With fitful gleam or twinkling glance.

XXIX

Conspicuous 'mid the dancing crowd,  
Whose ranks alternate swayed and bowed,  
Shone Mamba, tricked with wild design,  
And symbol traced in waving line.  
No limbs more active wore the green  
At yon great Ghim-boboke<sup>3</sup> yapeen;  
And no two arms more graceful there  
In circling motion cleft the air  
Than his--and his the eagle-eye  
Inspiring all the minstrelsy.  
The young and old in groups around  
Drank in the sight, the joy, the sound;  
And Mamba's form throughout the dance  
Attraced every wondering glance.

George Gordon McCrae

# Morning At Sea In The Tropics

NIGHT waned and wasted, and the fading stars  
Died out like lamps that long survived a feast,  
And the moon, pale with watching, sank to rest  
Behind the cloud-piled ramparts of the main.  
Young, blooming Morn, crowned with her bridal wreath,  
Bent o'er her mirror clear, the faithful sea;  
And gazing on her loveliness therein,  
Blushed to the brows, till every imaged charm  
Flung roses on the bosom of the wave,  
Then, glancing heavenward, both, they blushed again,  
As sprang the Sun to claim his radiant bride;  
And sea and sky seemed but one rose of morn,  
Which thenceforth grew in glory, and the world  
Shot back her lesser light upon the day,  
While night sped on to seek the sombre shades  
That sleep in silent caves beyond the sea.  
The day grew calmer, hotter, and our barque  
Lay like a sleeping swan upon a lake,  
And such soft airs as blew from off the land  
Brought with them fragrant odours, and we felt  
That orange groves lay blooming 'neath the sun  
Which blazed so fiercely overhead at sea.  
We heard (with Fancy's ear) a distant bell;  
And thro' the haze that simmered on the Main  
Pictured a purple shore—a convent tow'r  
And snowy cots, that from the dark hill-side  
Peeped forth 'tween plantain-patches at the sky,  
Or smiled through groves of cocos on the sea.  
Meanwhile our ship slid on, with breathing sails  
Fraught with the melody of murmured song  
Such as the zephyr chanted to the morn,  
And showers of diamonds flashed before the prow  
While sternwards whirled unstrung—pale beads of foam,  
Pearls from the loosen'd chaplet of the sea.  
'Mid these the flame-bright Nautilus, that seemed  
Itself a flow'ret cast upon the stream,  
Spread out its crimson sail and drifted on.  
Beyond arose a cloud (as 'twere) of birds,  
That leapt from out the wave to meet the sun,

Flew a short circuit, till their wings grew dry,  
And seaward fell in showers of silver rain.  
'Mid these careered the dolphin-squadrons swift,  
With mail of changeful hue, and Iris tints;  
And floating slowly on, a sea-flow'r passed,  
A living creature (none the less a flow'r)  
That lives its life in love, and dies for joy,  
Unmissed 'mid myriads in the sapphire sea.

George Gordon McCrae

# The Silence Of The Bush

There's that in our lone Bush, I know not what,  
Which 'genders silence; I've all that to learn.  
Here, there and everywhere, to loose the knot  
That binds the sheaf-band of the taciturn;  
It may be where it freezes; where 'tis hot,  
Or streams lie silent in the nymph's cool urn;  
In forest depths, or where the lone plain stretches  
Sans other roof than sky, o'er heat-worn wretches.

Or 'mid the gully's fern and sassafras,  
Where all is cool green glooms and early dusk,  
With silvern foliage in delicious mass  
As, sunwards, feel their way the spires of musk;  
Or where those solemn branches crossing, pass  
And wave o'er-head their pennon'd fragrant husk;  
Or by the river's marge or broad gumbower  
With lily-pads a-swim and floating flower.

Here might one read the Silence of Fatigue,  
And here again of Rest and Admiration.  
Where gentle hands are clasped in wordless league,  
And eyes meet eyes in eloquent oration,  
Or fingers wreathed, accomplish mute intrigue,  
Or tell by signs of ardent adoration,  
Or past all these, 'neath burning rocks and bare,  
The deep and death-like Silence of Despair.

George Gordon McCrae