

Classic Poetry Series

Charles Thatcher

- poems -

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Charles Thatcher (1852 - 1878)

Charles Thatcher was the eldest son of a Bristol curio dealer.

Arriving in Melbourne in November 1852 in the *Isabella*, Charles tried the Bendigo diggings but soon became an entertainer. He joined the orchestra at the Royal Victoria Theatre, Sandhurst, and filled in between plays by singing new words to popular tunes. In these songs he described the troubles of the new chums, the excitement of rushes, fisticuffs, horse-racing, cricket, the nuisance of dogs around the township and other topical events. He soon attracted large audiences and in May 1854 was given top billing at the Shamrock Hotel, which remained his base for several years; he also toured other goldfields. Big, broad-shouldered and weighing some fourteen stone, he was considered handsome with his well-cut hair, clean-shaven face and drooping moustache. With a pleasant but slight voice, he sang 'in that jolly off-handed style that suits so well a rattling, rollicking bit of comicality'. Other singers were vocally superior but none could match his ability to write catchy local songs.

Aged 30, on 8 February 1861 at Geelong, Thatcher married a widow Annie Vitelli, née Day, a singer. In December they left via Hobart Town for Dunedin, New Zealand. They stayed in various parts of New Zealand until the latter half of 1866. Back in Victoria Thatcher performed on his own, appearing at the Polytechnic in Melbourne in November-December 1867. In June 1869 he returned to New Zealand, but about May next year rejoined his wife and two daughters in Melbourne and from there they went to England. He settled in London, collecting and selling curios from Europe and Asia. He died of cholera in Shanghai, China, in September 1878.

Fourteen of Thatcher's songs were sold as broadsides, many appeared in newspapers, but most were published as collections, including the *Victoria Songster* (1855), *Thatcher's Colonial Songster* (1857) and *Thatcher's Colonial Minstrel* (1859). Booklets of his New Zealand songs appeared after 1862 and his *Adelaide Songster* was issued in 1866. A few have been collected as Australian folk songs, others have appeared in books of reminiscence; he himself wished them to be 'regarded as a popular history of the time'. Recent historians have spoken of Thatcher as the vocal equivalent of the artist S. T. Gill.

Eserleri:

Dunedin Songster (1862)
Auckland Vocalist (1862)
Songs of War (1864)

Chinese Immigration

You doubtless read the papers,
And as men of observation,
Of course you watch the progress
Of Chinese immigration--
For thousands of these pigtail chaps
In Adelaide are landing;
And why they let such numbers come
Exceeds my understanding.

On Emerald Hill it now appears
A Joss House they've erected;
And they've got an ugly idol there--
It's just what I expected;
And they offer nice young chickens
Unto this wooden log;
And sometimes with a sucking pig
They go the entire hog.

Now some of you, perhaps, may laugh,
But 'tis my firm opinion,
This colony some day will be
Under Chinese dominion.
They'll upset the Australian government,
The place will be their own;
And an Emperor with a long pigtail,
Will sit upon the throne.

Melbourne will be the seat of power,
And then 'tis my impression,
Of the stations up the country
They'll quickly take possession.
The squatters will be used as slaves,
By the Celestial nation;
And growing tea or rice will be
Their only compensation.

The mandarins will seize for wives
The fair Australian girls;
And from Melbourne to the diggings
They'll cut lots of canals.
And for fear the coves of New South Wales
Should pay a hostile call;
Between this colony and that
No doubt they'll build a wall.

The customs of their country
Of course will then prevail;
And every English slave will have
To wear a long pigtail.
We'll all of us be fed on rice,
As true as I'm a sinner;
And 'stead of spoons we'll have to use

Those chopsticks for our dinner.

This picture, perhaps, is overdrawn;
But, however, who can say,
That all these things will not take place,
If we let them have their way.
If it comes to pass, these English songs
Away I'll quick be flinging,
And learn their language; and come out
In Chinese comic singing.

Charles Thatcher

The New-Chum Swell

I'll sing just now a little song,
For you must understand,
'Tis of a fine young gentleman,
That left his native land—
That bid his ma and pa farewell,
And started brave and bold,
In a ship of fourteen hundred tons,
To come and dig for gold.

He dress was spicy as could be,
His fingers hung with rings,
White waistcoats, black silk pantaloons,
And other stylish things.
His berth was in the cuddy,
Which is on deck, you know,
And all the intermediates
He voted 'deuced low.'

When the vessel left the London Docks,
Most jovial did he seem;
But in the Downs, a change came o'er
The spirit of his dream.
His ruddy cheeks turned very pale,
His countenance looked rum,
And with a mournful sigh, said he,
'I wish I'd never come.'

The ship at length cast anchor,
And he was glad once more;
Six large trunks he then packed up,
And started for the shore—
His traps quite filled a whale-boat,
So of course I needn't say,
That for the freight thereof, he had
A tidy sum to pay.

He came to town, and then put up
At the Criterion Hotel
If you've been there, you know the place,
And the charges pretty well.
He played at billiards half the day,
And smoked and lounged about,
Until the hundred pounds he'd brought,
Had precious near run out.

With five pounds in his pocket,
He went to Bendigo;
And when he saw the diggings,
They filled his heart with woe—
'What! must I venture down a hole,
and throw up filthy clay?
If my mother could but see me now,

Whatever would she say?’

He went and bought a shovel
And a pick and dish as well;
But to every ten minutes’ work,
He took an hour’s spell.
The skin from off his fair, white hands
In blisters peeled away—
And thus he worked, and sunk about
Twelve inches every day.

When off the bottom just a foot,
He got quite out of heart,
And threw his pick down in a rage,
And off he did depart;
But when he’d left his hole, and gone,
A cove named Sydney Bob
Stepped into it, and soon took out
A pretty handsome ‘lob’.

With five shillings in his pocket,
He started in disgust,
And then we went upon the roads
As many a young swell must:
And if through the Black Forest
You ever chance to stray,
You may see him do the Gov’ment stroke
At eight bob every day.

Charles Thatcher

The Private Despatch of Captain Bumble of the 40th stationed at Ballarat to His Excellency Sir Charles Hotham

He writes thus to His Excellency;
Myself and Major Stiggings
Go our brave fellows all equipped
And started for the diggings.
Our band struck up God Save the Queen,
Into cheers our men were bursting,
And every gallant soldier was
For glorious action thirsting.

Our first attack was on two drays,
Which we saw in the distance,
But the enemy just surrendered,
After just a slight resistance.
We were disappointed in our search,
Of these two wretched traitors,
For instead of seizing powder,
It was loaded with potatoes.

At length into the diggings,
Footsore our men did tramp there,
And we took up our position
Within the Government Camp there.

We watched at night, but all was still,
For glory we were yearning,
And we fired upon a tent in which
A candle was seen burning
We killed a woman and a child,
Thought 'twas not our intention.
But that slight mistakes sometimes occur,
Of course I needn't mention
And so on for many verses.

Charles Thatcher

The Queer Ways Of Australia

Dick Briggs, a wealthy farmer's son,
To England lately took a run,
To see his friends, and have some fun,
For he'd been ten years in Australia.
Arrived in England, off he went
To his native village down in Kent—
'Twas there his father drew his rent,
And many happy days he'd spent.
No splendid, fine clothes on had he,
But jumper'n boots up to the knee,
With dirty Sydney 'cabbage-tree'—
The costume of Australia.

Chorus:
Now when a fellow takes a run
To England for a bit of fun,
He's sure to 'stonish everyone
With the queer ways of Australia.

Now Dick went home in this array;
His sister came out and did say,
'No, we don't want anything today,'
To her brother from Australia.
Cried he, 'Oh, don't you know poor Dick?'
They recognized him precious quick;
The 'old man' hugged him like a brick.
And there was feasting there that night,
For Richard was a welcome sight,
For each one hailed with great delight
The wanderer from Australia.

The blessed cattle on the farm
Regarded Dick with great alarm;
His swearing acted like a charm
When he gave 'em a 'touch' of Australia.
He could talk 'bullock' and 'no flies',
And when he blessed poor Strawberry's eyes,
She looked at him with great surprise
As out of her he 'took a rise'.
'Fie, fie,' his mother said one day,
'What naughty, wicked words you say.'
'Bless you, mother, that's the way
We wake 'em up in Australia.'
Dick went to London for a spree,
And got drunk there most gloriously;
He gave them a touch of 'Coo-oo-ee'
The bush cry of Australia.
He took two ladies to the play,
Both so serene, in dresses gay,
He had champagne brought on a tray
And said, 'Now girls, come fire away.'
They drank till they could drink no more,

And then they both fell on the floor.
Cried Dick, as he surveyed them o'er,
'You wouldn't do for Australia!'

Charles Thatcher

Two Years Ago

The light of other days burns dim,
And in the shade is cast,
You'll own I'm right, if you will just
Look back upon the past;
It's glories all are faded,
And each of you must know
That times ain't what they used to be
About two years ago.

Bendigo, you know, my lads,
Was just then in its prime,
And those who happened to be here
Had a most glorious time;
But now its sadly altered,
And things are precious slow,
And times ain't what they used to be
About two years ago.

They opened Golden Gully then,
And we had many a lob,
To see the place so cut up now,
It really makes me sob:
When'er I pass the fav'rite spot
It fills me full of woe,
Ah! times ain't what they used to was
About two years ago.

Just now look at the difference,
Ah! here's the dreadful rub,
They're washing for two pennyweights
To every blessed tub;
At such a paltry sum as that,
Why, all of us you know
Would have laughed and turned our noses up
About two years ago.

Two years ago, my lads, we used
To take our nuggets down,
Sell the lot, and go and have
A spree in Melbourne town;
We rode about in two-horse cabs,
And made the champagne flow,
And ate bank notes in sandwiches
About two years ago.

A sweetheart, then, on either arm
About the town we'd range,
And buy the dear things cashmere shawls,
And refuse to take the change;
Then to dancers at the theatre
Our nugget we did throw,
Those were the glorious times, no flies,

About two years ago.

And when we'd quite run out of cash
We'd tramp back every mile,
And go to work again and get
Another tidy pile;
I ask you, can we do it now?
But, echo answers no;
Ah! times ai'nt what they used to was
About two years ago.

But after all, my lads, what use
Is there in vain regret,
No doubt some stunning golden piece
Of ground may turn up yet,
Then keep up all your peckers,
And let your spirits flow,
The good time yet may come again,
Just like two years ago.

Charles Thatcher