

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **David McKee Wright**

**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

## Amelia Jane

In the lands away beyond the sea, where Khan and Sultan rule,  
Where they drink their coffee thick and black, and sip the sherbet cool,  
They have white Circassian girls for slaves, as well as the Negro black;  
And it seems to me in our free land that slavery's coming back:  
It's fenced about with custom and law, and they give it a prettier name.  
But, spite of the paltry wage that's paid, it's slavery all the same.

In a handsome home in a stately town is worthy Mrs MacFee,  
Chairwoman known of a Christian guild, for a noble dame is she:  
Her doors are open to strangers all who call and leave their card;  
But Amelia Jane, who left last week, declares the place was hard.  
Surely Amelia Jane was wrong: she should have been happy to stay,  
For she's only hanging around the town looking for work today.

Such a good woman is Mrs MacFee, toiling with voice and hand  
In the cause of the poor little Indian girls away in a distant land;  
Such a good woman is Mrs MacFee, for hers is an open door,  
And her name's at the top of the charity list for the wives of the drunken poor.  
But Amelia Jane has a hungry look, with hollows under the eyes:  
She says she was starved, but everyone knows that Amelia Jane tells lies.

Such a good woman is Mrs MacFee, she has family prayers at night,  
And she loves, she says, to make the lives of her poorer sisters bright.  
Amelia Jane has a hardened heart: she talks of her weary feet,  
And says that, in spite of all the prayers, she had never enough to eat.  
It was hard to join the chorused words of 'Give us our daily bread',  
And, after washing the dishes up, to stagger hungry to bed.

Once in the week Amelia Jane got out for an hour or two,  
Once in a fortnight went to church with another slave she knew.  
She never had time to read a book, and the changeless mill went round,  
And nobody knew how she ached at night while body and soul were ground.  
But these are the lies of Amelia Jane, and it's wrong to set them down,  
For everyone knows that Mrs MacFee is the kindest woman in town.

Silly and light is Amelia Jane: she has no ideas of her own;  
You never would think her the bright little girl that you once on a time had known.  
She was clever enough when she went to school; she was pretty enough in her way;  
She hasn't improved, her schoolmates think, when they met her in town today:  
And it's all her fault, for, whatever the cause, I am sure that Mrs MacFee  
Is a model mistress in every way, and with that you will all agree.

In the lands away beyond the sea, where Khan and Sultan rule,  
Where they drink their coffee thick and black, and sip the sherbet cool,  
They have white Circassian girls for slaves, as well as the Negro black;  
And it seems to me in our free land that slavery's coming back:  
It's fenced about with custom and law, and they give it a prettier name.  
But, spite of the paltry wage that's paid, it's slavery all the same.

David McKee Wright

## **An Old Colonists Reverie**

Dustily over the highway pipes the loud nor'-wester at morn,  
Wind and the rising sun, and waving tussock and corn;  
It brings to me days gone by when first in my ears it rang,  
The wind is the voice of my home, and I think of the songs it sang  
When, fresh from the desk and ledger, I crossed the long leagues of sea --  
"The old worn world is gone and the new bright world is free."

The wide, wild pastures of old are fading and passing away,  
All over the plain are the homes of the men who have come to stay --  
I sigh for the good old days in the station whare again;  
But the good new days are better -- I would not be heard to complain;  
It is only the wind that cries with tears in its voice to me  
Of the dead men low in the mould who came with me over the sea.

Some of them down in the city under the marble are laid,  
Some on the bare hillside in the mound by the lone tree shade,  
And some in the forest deeps of the west in their silence lie,  
With the dark pine curtain above shutting out the blue of the sky.

And many have passed from my sight, whither I never shall know,  
Swept away in the rushing river or caught in the mountain snow;  
All the old hands are gone who came with me over the sea,  
But the land that we made our own is the same bright land to me.

There are dreams in the gold of the kowhai, and when ratas are breaking  
in bloom  
I can hear the rich murmur of voices in the deeps of the fern-shadowed gloom.  
Old memory may bring me her treasures from the land of the blossoms of May,  
But to me the hill daisies are dearer and the gorse on the river bed grey;  
While the mists on the high hilltops curling, the dawn-haunted  
haze of the sea,  
To my fancy are bridal veils lifting from the face of the land of the free.

The speargrass and cabbage trees yonder, the honey-belled flax in its bloom,  
The dark of the bush on the sidings, the snow-crested mountains that loom  
Golden and grey in the sunlight, far up in the cloud-fringed blue,  
Are the threads with old memory weaving and the line of my life  
running through;  
And the wind of the morning calling has ever a song for me  
Of hope for the land of the dawning in the golden years to be.

David McKee Wright

## **An Old Colonist's Reverie**

Dustily over the highway pipes the loud nor'-wester at morn,  
Wind and the rising sun, and waving tussock and corn;  
It brings to me days gone by when first in my ears it rang,  
The wind is the voice of my home, and I think of the songs it sang  
When, fresh from the desk and ledger, I crossed the long leagues of sea --  
"The old worn world is gone and the new bright world is free."

The wide, wild pastures of old are fading and passing away,  
All over the plain are the homes of the men who have come to stay --  
I sigh for the good old days in the station whare again;  
But the good new days are better -- I would not be heard to complain;  
It is only the wind that cries with tears in its voice to me  
Of the dead men low in the mould who came with me over the sea.

Some of them down in the city under the marble are laid,  
Some on the bare hillside in the mound by the lone tree shade,  
And some in the forest deeps of the west in their silence lie,  
With the dark pine curtain above shutting out the blue of the sky.

And many have passed from my sight, whither I never shall know,  
Swept away in the rushing river or caught in the mountain snow;  
All the old hands are gone who came with me over the sea,  
But the land that we made our own is the same bright land to me.

There are dreams in the gold of the kowhai, and when ratas are breaking  
    in bloom  
I can hear the rich murmur of voices in the deeps of the fern-shadowed gloom.  
Old memory may bring me her treasures from the land of the blossoms of May,  
But to me the hill daisies are dearer and the gorse on the river bed grey;  
While the mists on the high hilltops curling, the dawn-haunted  
    haze of the sea,  
To my fancy are bridal veils lifting from the face of the land of the free.

The speargrass and cabbage trees yonder, the honey-belled flax in its bloom,  
The dark of the bush on the sidings, the snow-crested mountains that loom  
Golden and grey in the sunlight, far up in the cloud-fringed blue,  
Are the threads with old memory weaving and the line of my life  
    running through;  
And the wind of the morning calling has ever a song for me  
Of hope for the land of the dawning in the golden years to be.

David McKee Wright

## In the Moonlight

The moon is bright, and the winds are laid, and the river is roaring by;  
Orion swings, with his belted lights low down in the western sky;  
North and south from the mountain gorge to the heart of the silver plain  
There's many an eye will see no sleep till the east grows bright again;  
There's many a hand will toil to-night, from the centre down to the sea;  
And I'm far from the men I used to know—and my love is far from me.

Where the broad flood eddies the dredge is moored to the beach of shingle white,  
And the straining cable whips the stream in a spray of silver light;  
The groaning buckets bear their load, and the engine throbs away,  
And the wash pours red on the turning screen that knows not night or day;  
For there's many an ounce of gold to save, from the gorge to the shining sea—  
And there's many a league of the bare brown hills between my love and me.

Where the lines of gorse are parched and dry, and the sheaves are small and thin,  
The engine beats and the combine sings to the drays that are leading in,  
For they're thrashing out of the stook to-night, and the plain is as bright as day,  
And the fork-tines flash as the sheaves are turned on the frame of the one-horse dray;  
For many a hand will toil to-night, from the mountains down to the sea;—  
But I'm far from the lips of the girl I love, and the heart that beats for me.

The trappers are out on the hills to-night, and the sickly lantern-shine  
Is mocking the gleam of the silver moon in the scrub on the long trap-line;  
The tallies are big on the rock-strewn spur, and the rattling clink of the chain  
Comes weirdly mixed from the moon-bright hill with the whistling shriek of pain;  
For many a hand will toil to-night where the tussocks are waving free;—  
But it's over the hills and over the plain to the heart that beats for me.

The stars are bright, and the night is still, and the river is singing by,  
And many a face is upward turned to gaze at the moon's bright eye.  
North and south, from the forest deeps to the heart of the silver plain,  
There's many an eye will see no sleep till the east grows bright again;  
There's many a hand will toil to-night by shining land and sea.  
O moonlight, bear my message of love to the heart that beats for me.

David McKee Wright

## Old Mates

I came up to-night to the station, the tramp had been longish and cold,  
My swag ain't too heavy to carry, but then I begin to get old.  
I came through this way to the diggings -- how long will that be ago now?  
Thirty years! how the country has altered, and miles of it under the plough,  
And Jack was my mate on the journey -- we both run away from the sea;  
He's got on in the world and I haven't, and now he looks sideways on me.

We were mates, and that didn't mean jokers who meets for a year or a day,  
We meant to go jogging together the whole of the blooming long way.  
We slept with one blanket between us the night that we run from the port,  
There was nothing above us but heaven, yet we took it as jolly good sport.  
And now he's the boss of a station, and I'm -- well, the bloke that you see;  
For he had the luck and I hadn't, and now he looks sideways on me.

We pegged out a claim on the Dunstan, there used to be gold in them days,  
There's blokes that still sticks to the digging, but Lord only knows how it pays;  
For the country as far as I've seen it's as chock full of holes as a sieve  
With the Chinkies amullocking through it, and yet them coves manage to live.  
But when Jack took me to the cradle, the place was a wonder to see,  
We washed out a fortune between us, and now he looks sideways on me.

We both fell in love with one woman -- she worked in a pub for a spell;  
It ain't the best place for an angel, but angels ain't better than Nell;  
For she was as good as they make 'em and hadn't a notion of ill --  
It's long years and years since we parted, and seems I'm in love with her still!  
But Jack was the handsomest fellow -- I saw how the thing had to be;  
He got the best wife on the diggings, and now he looks sideways on me.

I left him, I just couldn't stand it -- I knew it was better to part;  
I couldn't look on at the wedding with a pain like a knife at my heart!  
I never said nothing to no one -- we didn't whack out all the gold;  
I wanted my mate to be happy without my own yarn being told.  
So I went to the coast by the steamer, and now I'm the bloke that you see;  
He told me to go to the wharè, it seems he looks sideways on me.

There's steps coming down to the wharè -- some other poor bloke on the road;  
'Taint nothing to him to get growled at, the boss ain't a bloke that he knowed.  
Too dark to make out who's a-coming -- he's crossing the plank at the creek;  
The years and the whisky are telling, my eyesight begins to get weak.  
What's the odds? it ain't like me to whimper, and all that's gone by had to be,  
But the old times came crowding around me to see him look sideways on me.

What, Jack! Why, old man, you don't mean it? You didn't right know it was me?  
Well I'm altered -- it ain't for the better -- never mind, never mind, let it be.  
O mate, the long years since we parted -- there's a blooming great lump in my throat  
--

I ain't been as glad, mate, I tell you, since the time that we run from the boat.  
You ain't a bit altered -- you're crying -- why, Jack, don't be sorry for me,  
I'm that glad that I think I'll go cranky -- and I thought you looked sideways on me.

David McKee Wright

## Shearing's Coming

There's a sound of many voices in the camp and on the track,  
And letters coming up in shoals to stations at the back;  
And every boat that crosses from the sunny 'other side'  
Is bringing waves of shearers for the swelling of the tide.

For the shearing's coming round, boys, the shearing's coming round,  
And the stations of the mountains have begun to hear the sound.

They'll be talking up at Laghmor of the tallies that were shore,  
And the man who broke the record is remembered at Benmore;  
And the yarns of strikes and barneys will be told till all is blue,  
And the ringers and the bosses will be passed in long review.

For the shearing's coming round, boys, the shearing's coming round,  
And the stations of the mountains have begun to hear the sound.

The great Orari muster and the drafting of the men  
Like a mob of ewes and wethers will be surely told again;  
And a lot of heathen places that will rhyme with kangaroo  
Will be named along with ringers and the things that they can do.

For the shearing's coming round, boys, the shearing's coming round,  
And the stations of the mountains have begun to hear the sound.

At last the crowds will gather for the morning of the start,  
And the slowest of the jokers will be trying to look smart;  
And a few will get the bullet, and high hopes will have a fall,  
And the bloke that talks the loudest stands a show of looking small.

For the shearing's coming round, chaps, the shearing's coming round,  
And the voices of the workers have begun to swell the sound.

David McKee Wright