

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Edward Dyson**

**- poems -**

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## Cleaning Up

When the horse has been unharnessed and we've flushed the old machine,  
And the water o'er the sluice is running evenly and clean;  
When there's thirty load before us, and the sun is high and bright,  
And we've worked from early morning and shall have to work till night,  
Not a man of us is weary, though the graft is pretty rough,  
If we see the proper colour showing freely through the stuff.  
With a dandy head of water and a youngster at the rear  
To hand along the billy, boys, and keep the tail race clear,  
We lift the wash and flash the fork and make the gravel fly.  
The shovelling is heavy and we're soaked from heel to thigh;  
But it makes a fellow tireless and his thews and sinews tough  
If the colour's showing freely as he gaily shifts the stuff.  
When Geordie Best is pumping to a rollicking refrain,  
And Sandy wipes his streaming brow and shakes the fork again,  
The pebbles dance and rattle and the water seems to laugh -  
Good luck is half the battle and good will's the other half;  
And no day's too long and trying and no toil is hard enough,  
When we see the colour showing in each shovelful of stuff.  
Can the mining speculator with a pile of golden serip,  
Or the plunger who has laid his all upon a winning tip,  
Or the city man who's hit upon a profitable deal,  
Know the wonderful elation that the lucky diggers feel  
When fortune's smiled but grimly and the storeman's looking gruff,  
And at last they see the colour showing freely in the stuff?  
Never, mates! It is a feeling that no other winner knows -  
Not the soldier marching homeward from the conquest of his foes,  
Nor the scholar who's successful in his searching of the skies,  
Nor the squalid miser groveling where his secret treasure lies.  
'Tis a keener, wilder rapture in the digger bold and bluff  
Who feeds the sluice and sees the colour shining in the stuff.  
Then lift the wash, and flash the fork, and make the gravel fly!  
We can laugh at all the pleasures on which other men rely,  
When the water o'er the sluice is running evenly and clean,  
And the loaded ripples glitter with a lively golden sheen.  
No day's too long and trying, and no toil is hard enough,  
When we wash her down and see the colour freely through the stuff.

Edward Dyson

## Men of Australia

Men of all the lands Australian from the Gulf to Derwent River,  
From the Heads of Sydney Harbour to the waters of the West,  
There's a spirit loudly calling where the saplings dip and quiver,  
Where the city crowds are thronging, and the range uplifts its crest!  
Do ye feel the holy fervour of a new-born exultation?  
For the task the Lord has set us is a trust of noblest pride—  
We are named to march unblooded to the winning of a nation,  
And to crown her with a glory that may evermore abide.  
Have ye looked to great old nations, have ye wondered at their making,  
Seen their fair and gracious cities, gemmed with palaces of light,  
Felt the pulse of mighty engines beating ever, never slaking,  
Like the sandalled feet of Progress moving onward in the night?  
Can ye stand on some high headland when the drowsy day is fading,  
And in dreamlike fancy see a merchant fleet upon the seas,  
See the pinioned ships majestic 'gainst the purple even sailing  
And the busy steamers racing down to half a thousand quays?

Have ye dreamed of this or seen of this, and feel ye no elation  
O'er the most heroic duty that a free-born people knows?  
To the chain of kindred nations ours to link another nation,  
Ours to stay and build and bless her for a future great as those!  
Cold and sordid hearts may linger still to bargain over trifles,  
But the big-souled men have only hate for huckstering and sloth;  
These would batter down division, tear away the bonds that stifle,  
And would free our dear Australia for the larger, nobler growth.

Bushmen, roaming on the ridges, tracking "colours" to their sources,  
Swinging axes by the rivers where the millsaws rend and shriek  
Smoking thoughtful pipes, or dreaming on your slow, untroubled horses,  
While the lazy cattle feed along the track or ford the creek,  
Ye have known our country's moods in all her wild and desert places,  
Ye have felt the sweet, strange promptings that her solitudes inspire;  
To have breathed the spirit of her is to love her—turn your faces,  
Ride like lovers when the day dawns, ride to serve her, son and sire!

Miners in the dripping workings, farmers, pioneers who settle  
On the bush lands, city workers of the benches and the marts,  
Swart mechanics at the forges, beating out the glowing metal,  
Thinkers, planners, if ye feel the love of country stir your hearts,  
Help to write the bravest chapter of a fair young nation's story  
Great she'll be as Europe's greatest, more magnificent in truth!  
That our children's children standing in the rose light of her glory  
May all honour us who loved her, and who crowned her in her youth!

Edward Dyson

## Peter Simson's Farm

Simson settled in the timber when his arm was strong and true,  
And his form was straight and limber; and he wrought the long day through  
In a struggle, single-handed, and the trees fell slowly back,  
Twenty thousand giants banded 'gainst a solitary jack.

Through the fiercest days of summer you might hear his keen axe ring  
And re-echo in the ranges, hear his twanging crosscut sing;  
There the great gums swayed and whispered, and the birds were skyward blown,  
As the circling hills saluted o'er a bush king overthrown.

Clearing, grubbing, in the gloaming, strong in faith the man descried  
Heifers sleek and horses roaming in his paddocks green and wide,  
Heard a myriad corn-blades rustle in the breeze's soft caress,  
And in every thw and muscle felt a joyous mightiness.

So he felled the stubborn forest, hacked and hewed with tireless might,  
And a conqueror's peace went with him to his fern-strewn bunk at night:  
Forth he strode next morn, delighting in the duty to be done,  
Whistling shrilly to the magpies trilling carols to the sun.

Back the clustered scrub was driven, and the sun fell on the lands,  
And the mighty stumps were riven 'tween his bare, brown, corded hands.  
One time flooded, sometimes parching, still he did the work of ten,  
And his dog-leg fence went marching up the hills and down again.

By the stony creek, whose tiny streams slid o'er the sunken boles  
To their secret, silent meetings in the shaded waterholes,  
Soon a garden flourished bravely, gemmed with flowers, and cool and green,  
While about the hut a busy little wife was always seen.

Came a day at length when, gazing down the paddock from his door,  
Simson saw his horses grazing where the bush was long before,  
And he heard the joyous prattle of his children on the rocks,  
And the lowing of the cattle, and the crowing of the cocks.

There was butter for the market, there was fruit upon the trees,  
There were eggs, potatoes, bacon, and a tidy lot of cheese;  
Still the struggle was not ended with the timber and the scrub,  
For the mortgage is the toughest stump the settler has to grub.

But the boys grew big and bolder—one, a sturdy, brown-faced lad,  
With his axe upon his shoulder, loved to go to work 'like dad',  
And another in the saddle took a bush-bred native's pride,  
And he boasted he could straddle any nag his dad could ride.

Though the work went on and prospered there was still hard work to do;  
There were floods, and droughts, and bush-fires, and a touch of pleuro too;  
But they laboured, and the future held no prospect to alarm—  
All the settlers said: 'They're stickers up at Peter Simson's farm.'

One fine evening Pete was resting in the hush of coming night,  
When his boys came in from nesting with a clamorous delight;

Each displayed a tiny rabbit, and the farmer eyed them o'er,—  
Then he stamped—it was his habit—and he smote his knee and swore.

Two years later Simson's paddock showed dust-coloured, almost bare,  
And too lean for hope of profit were the cows that pastured there;  
And the man looked ten years older. Like the tracks about the place,  
Made by half a million rabbits, were the lines on Simson's face.

As he fought the bush when younger, Simson stripped and fought again,  
Fought the devastating hunger of the plague with might and main,  
Neither moping nor despairing, hoping still that times would mend,  
Stubborn-browed and sternly facing all the trouble Fate could send.

One poor chicken to the acre Simson's land will carry now.  
Starved, the locusts have departed; rust is thick upon the plough;  
It is vain to think of cattle, or to try to raise a crop,  
For the farmer has gone under, and the rabbits are on top.

So the strong, true man who wrested from the bush a homestead fair  
By the rabbits has been bested; yet he does not know despair—  
Though begirt with desolation, though in trouble and in debt,  
Though his foes pass numeration, Peter Simson's fighting yet!

He is old too soon and failing, but he's game to start anew,  
And he tells his hopeless neighbours 'what the Gov'mint's goin' to do'.  
Both his girls are in the city, seeking places with the rest,  
And his boys are tracking fortune in the melancholy West.

Edward Dyson

## The Old Whim Horse

He's an old grey horse, with his head bowed sadly,  
And with dim old eyes and a queer roll aft,  
With the off-fore sprung and the hind screwed badly,  
And he bears all over the brands of graft;  
And he lifts his head from the grass to wonder  
Why by night and day the whim is still,  
Why the silence is, and the stampers' thunder  
Sounds forth no more from the shattered mill.

In that whim he worked when the night winds bellowed  
On the riven summit of Giant's Hand,  
And by day when prodigal Spring had yellowed  
All the wide, long sweep of enchanted land;  
And he knew his shift, and the whistle's warning,  
And he knew the calls of the boys below;  
Through the years, unbidden, at night or morning,  
He had taken his stand by the old whim bow.

But the whim stands still, and the wheeling swallow  
In the silent shaft hangs her home of clay,  
And the lizards flirt and the swift snakes follow  
O'er the grass-grown brace in the summer day;  
And the corn springs high in the cracks and corners  
Of the forge, and down where the timber lies;  
And the crows are perched like a band of mourners  
On the broken hut on the Hermit's Rise.

All the hands have gone, for the rich reef paid out,  
And the company waits till the calls come in;  
But the old grey horse, like the claim, is played out,  
And no market's near for his bones and skin.  
So they let him live, and they left him grazing  
By the creek, and oft in the evening dim  
I have seen him stand on the rises, gazing  
At the ruined brace and the rotting whim.

The floods rush high in the gully under,  
And the lightnings lash at the shrinking trees,  
Or the cattle down from the ranges blunder  
As the fires drive by on the summer breeze.  
Still the feeble horse at the right hour wanders  
To the lonely ring, though the whistle's dumb,  
And with hanging head by the bow he ponders  
Where the whim boy's gone -- why the shifts don't come.

But there comes a night when he sees lights glowing  
In the roofless huts and the ravaged mill,  
When he hears again all the stampers going --  
Though the huts are dark and the stampers still:  
When he sees the steam to the black roof clinging  
As its shadows roll on the silver sands,  
And he knows the voice of his driver singing,

And the knocker's clang where the braceman stands.

See the old horse take, like a creature dreaming,  
On the ring once more his accustomed place;  
But the moonbeams full on the ruins streaming  
Show the scattered timbers and grass-grown brace.  
Yet HE hears the sled in the smithy falling,  
And the empty truck as it rattles back,  
And the boy who stands by the anvil, calling;  
And he turns and backs, and he "takes up slack".

While the old drum creaks, and the shadows shiver  
As the wind sweeps by, and the hut doors close,  
And the bats dip down in the shaft or quiver  
In the ghostly light, round the grey horse goes;  
And he feels the strain on his untouched shoulder,  
Hears again the voice that was dear to him,  
Sees the form he knew -- and his heart grows bolder  
As he works his shift by the broken whim.

He hears in the sluices the water rushing  
As the buckets drain and the doors fall back;  
When the early dawn in the east is blushing,  
He is limping still round the old, old track.  
Now he pricks his ears, with a neigh replying  
To a call unspoken, with eyes aglow,  
And he sways and sinks in the circle, dying;  
From the ring no more will the grey horse go.

In a gully green, where a dam lies gleaming,  
And the bush creeps back on a worked-out claim,  
And the sleepy crows in the sun sit dreaming  
On the timbers grey and a charred hut frame,  
Where the legs slant down, and the hare is squatting  
In the high rank grass by the dried-up course,  
Nigh a shattered drum and a king-post rotting  
Are the bleaching bones of the old grey horse.

Edward Dyson

## Worked-Out Mine

On summer nights when moonbeams flow  
And glisten o'er the high, white tips,  
And winds make lamentation low,  
As through the ribs of shattered ships,  
And steal about the broken brace  
Where pendant timbers swing and moan,  
And flitting bats give aimless chase,  
Who dares to seek the mine alone?

The shrinking bush with sable rims  
A skeleton forlorn and bowed,  
With pipe-clay white about its limbs  
And at its feet a tattered shroud;  
And ghostly figures lurk and groan,  
Shrill whispers sound from ghostly lips,  
And ghostly footsteps start the stone  
That clatters sharply down the tips.

The engine-house is dark and still,  
The life that raged within has fled;  
Like open graves the boilers chill  
That once with glowing fires were red;  
Above the shaft in measured space  
A rotted rope swings to and fro,  
Whilst o'er the plat and on the brace  
The silent shadows come and go.

And there below, in chambers dread  
Where darkness like a fungus clings,  
Are lingering still the old mine's dead—  
Bend o'er and hear their whisperings!  
Up from the blackness sobs and sighs  
Are flung with moans and muttered fears,  
A low lament that never dies,  
And ceaseless sound of falling tears.

My ears intent have heard their grief—  
The fitful tones of Carter's tongue,  
The strong man crushed beneath the reef,  
The groans of Panton, Praer, and Young,  
And 'Trucker Bill' of Number Five,  
Along the ruined workings roll;  
For deep in every shoot and drive  
This mine secretes a shackled soul.

Ah! woful mine, where wives have wept,  
And mothers prayed in anxious pain,  
And long, distracting vigil kept,  
You yawn for victims now in vain!  
Still to that god, whose shrine you were,  
Is homage done in wild device;  
Men hate you as the sepulchre

That stores their bloody sacrifice.

Edward Dyson