

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **George Essex Evans**

**- poems -**

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## **A Nocturne**

Like weary sea-birds spent with flight  
And faltering,  
The slow hours beat across the night  
On leaden wing.  
The wild bird knows where rest shall be  
Soe'er he roam.  
Heart of my heart! apart from thee  
I have no home.

Afar from thee, yet not alone,  
Heart of my heart!  
Like some soft haunting whisper blown  
From Heaven thou art.  
I hear the magic music roll  
Its waves divine;  
The subtle fragrance of thy soul  
Has passed to mine.

Nor dawn nor Heaven my heart can know  
Save that which lies  
In lights and shades that come and go  
In thy soft eyes.  
Here in the night I dream the day,  
By love upborne,  
When thy sweet eyes shall shine and say  
"It is the morn!"

George Essex Evans

## A Pastoral

Nature feels the touch of noon;  
Not a rustle stirs the grass;  
Not a shadow flecks the sky,  
Save the brown hawk hovering nigh;  
Not a ripple dims the glass  
Of the wide lagoon.

Darkly, like an armed host  
Seen afar against the blue,  
Rise the hills, and yellow-grey  
Sleeps the plain in cove and bay,  
Like a shining sea that dreams  
Round a silent coast.

From the heart of these blue hills,  
Like the joy that flows from peace,  
Creeps the river far below  
Fringed with willow, sinuous, slow.  
Surely here there seems surcease  
From the care that kills.

Surely here might radiant Love  
Fill with happiness his cup,  
Where the purple lucerne-bloom  
Floods the air with sweet perfume,  
Nature's incense floating up  
To the Gods above.

'Neath the gnarled-boughed apple trees  
Motionless the cattle stand;  
Chequered cornfield, homestead white,  
Sleeping in the streaming light,  
For deep trance is o'er the land,  
And the wings of peace.

Here, O Power that moves the heart,  
Thou art in the quiet air;  
Here, unvexed of code or creed,  
Man may breathe his bitter need;  
Nor with impious lips declare  
What Thou wert and art.

All the strong souls of the race  
Thro' the aeons that have run,  
They have cried aloud to Thee --  
"Thou art that which stirs in me!"  
As the flame leaps towards the sun  
They have sought Thy face.

But the faiths have flowered and flown,  
And the truth is but in part;  
Many a creed and many a grade

For Thy purpose Thou hast made.  
None can know Thee what Thou art,  
Fathomless! Unknown!

George Essex Evans

## **An Australian Symphony**

Not as the songs of other lands  
Her song shall be  
Where dim Her purple shore-line stands  
Above the sea!  
As erst she stood, she stands alone;  
Her inspiration is her own.  
From sunlit plains to mangrove strands  
Not as the songs of other lands  
Her song shall be.

O Southern Singers! Rich and sweet,  
Like chimes of bells,  
The cadence swings with rhythmic beat  
The music swells;  
But undertones, weird, mournful, strong,  
Sweep like swift currents thro' the song.  
In deepest chords, with passion fraught,  
In softest notes of sweetest thought,  
This sadness dwells.

Is this her song, so weirdly strange,  
So mixed with pain,  
That whereso'er her poets range  
Is heard the strain?  
Broods there no spell upon the air  
But desolation and despair?  
No voice, save Sorrow's, to intrude  
Upon her mountain solitude  
Or sun-kissed plain?

The silence and the sunshine creep  
With soft caress  
O'er billowy plain and mountain steep  
And wilderness --  
A velvet touch, a subtle breath,  
As sweet as love, as calm as death,  
On earth, on air, so soft, so fine,  
Till all the soul a spell divine  
O'ershadoweth.

The gray gums by the lonely creek,  
The star-crowned height,  
The wind-swept plain, the dim blue peak,  
The cold white light,  
The solitude spread near and far  
Around the camp-fire's tiny star,  
The horse-bell's melody remote,  
The curlew's melancholy note  
Across the night.

These have their message; yet from these  
Our songs have thrown

O'er all our Austral hills and leas  
One sombre tone.  
Whence doth the mournful keynote start?  
From the pure depths of Nature's heart?  
Or from the heart of him who sings  
And deems his hand upon the strings  
Is Nature's own?

Could tints be deeper, skies less dim,  
More soft and fair,  
Dappled with milk-white clouds that swim  
In faintest air?  
The soft moss sleeps upon the stone,  
Green scrub-vine tracteries enthrone  
The dead gray trunks, and boulders red,  
Roofed by the pine and carpeted  
With maidenhair.

But far and near, o'er each, o'er all,  
Above, below,  
Hangs the great silence like a pall  
Softer than snow.  
Not sorrow is the spell it brings,  
But thoughts of calmer, purer things,  
Like the sweet touch of hands we love,  
A woman's tenderness above  
A fevered brow.

These purple hills, these yellow leas,  
These forests lone,  
These mangrove shores, these shimmering seas,  
This summer zone --  
Shall they inspire no nobler strain  
Than songs of bitterness and pain?  
Strike her wild harp with firmer hand,  
And send her music thro' the land,  
With loftier tone!

Her song is silence; unto her  
Its mystery clings.  
Silence is the interpreter  
Of deeper things.  
O for sonorous voice and strong  
To change that silence into song,  
To give that melody release  
Which sleeps in the deep heart of peace  
With folded wings!

George Essex Evans

## On The Plains

Half-lost in film of faintest lawn,  
A single star in armour white  
Upon the dreamy heights of dawn  
Guards dim frontier of the night,  
Till plumed ray  
And golden spray  
Have washed its trembling light away.

The sun has peeped above the blue;  
His level lances as they pass  
Have shot the dew-drops thro' and thro',  
And dashed with rubies all the grass,  
And silver sound  
Of horse-bells round  
Floats softly o'er the jewelled ground.

The sunbeam and the wanton wind,  
Among the feathery tufts at play,  
Sing to the earth: "The night is blind,  
But we will kiss your tears away."  
With broad'ning glow  
And rippling flow  
Adown the laughing leagues they go.

The vagrant lark on wayward winds  
Is fluttering low, is floating high;  
No Northern trill of rapture rings  
Tho' the vast temple of the sky;  
But not in vain  
Thy southern strain,  
Thou brown-winged angel of the plain!

Here, where the days are dull and grey,  
And youth has stilled his joyous song,  
In fancy yet I love to stray  
By creek, and plain, and billabong,  
To the curlew's call  
And the noiseless fall  
Of the unshod hoof 'neath the gum-trees tall.

I hear one more the plovers "peet:"  
The grey hawk wheels in dizzy height,  
And swift beneath my horse's feet  
The brown quail rises in his fright,  
And the galahs fly  
With pink breasts high,  
A rosy cloud in a cloudless sky.

Afar I mark the emu's run;  
The bustard slow, in motley clad;  
And, basking in his bath of sun,  
The brown snake on the cattle-pad,

And the reddish black  
Of a dingo's back  
As he loit'ring slinks on my horse's track.

And now I watch, with slackened rein,  
The scattered cattle, hundreds strong,  
As slowly moving home again  
The lazy vanguard feeds along  
To the waters cool  
Of the tree-fringed pool  
In the distant creek when the noon is full.

Slip girth and let the old horse graze;  
The noon grows heavy on the air.  
Kindle the tiny camp-fire's blaze,  
And neath the shade, as monarch there,  
Take thou thine ease:  
For hours like these  
A king had bartered satrapies!

Here lie and watch, thro' smoke-wreaths cool,  
By yon sunk log and floating wrack,  
The emporer of the silent pool,  
The stately heron, white and black,  
Afar from heat,  
Upon his beat,  
Knee-deep in shallowy retreat.

O mellow air! O sunny light!  
O hope and youth that pass away!  
Inscribe in letters of delight  
Upon each heart one golden day -  
To be there set  
When we forget  
There is a joy in living yet!

George Essex Evans

## **The Women of the West**

They left the vine-wreathed cottage and the mansion on the hill,  
The houses in the busy streets where life is never still,  
The pleasures of the city, and the friends they cherished best:  
For love they faced the wilderness -- the Women of the West.

The roar, and rush, and fever of the city died away,  
And the old-time joys and faces -- they were gone for many a day;  
In their place the lurching coach-wheel, or the creaking bullock chains,  
O'er the everlasting sameness of the never-ending plains.

In the slab-built, zinc-roofed homestead of some lately taken run,  
In the tent beside the bankment of a railway just begun,  
In the huts on new selections, in the camps of man's unrest,  
On the frontiers of the Nation, live the Women of the West.

The red sun robs their beauty, and, in weariness and pain,  
The slow years steal the nameless grace that never comes again;  
And there are hours men cannot soothe, and words men cannot say --  
The nearest woman's face may be a hundred miles away.

The wide bush holds the secrets of their longing and desires,  
When the white stars in reverence light their holy altar fires,  
And silence, like the touch of God, sinks deep into the breast --  
Perchance He hears and understands the Women of the West.

For them no trumpet sounds the call, no poet plies his arts --  
They only hear the beating of their gallant, loving hearts.  
But they have sung with silent lives the song all songs above --  
The holiness of sacrifice, the dignity of love.

Well have we held our father's creed. No call has passed us by.  
We faced and fought the wilderness, we sent our sons to die.  
And we have hearts to do and dare, and yet, o'er all the rest,  
The hearts that made the Nation were the Women of the West.

George Essex Evans

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