

Classic Poetry Series

Marcus Clarke

- poems -

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In a Lady's Album

WHAT can I write in thee, O dainty book,
About whose daintiness faint perfume lingers—
Into whose pages dainty ladies look,
And turn thy dainty leaves with daintier fingers?

Fitter my ruder muse for ruder song,
My scrawling quill to coarser paper matches;
My voice, in laughter raised too loud and long,
Is hoarse and cracked with singing tavern catches.

No melodies have I for ladies' ear,
No roundelays for jocund lads and lasses—
But only brawlings born of bitter beer,
And chorussed with the clink and clash of glasses!

So, tell thy mistress, pretty friend, for me,
I cannot do her hest, for all her frowning,
While dust and ink are but polluting thee,
And vile tobacco-smoke thy leaves embrowning.

Thou breathest purity and humble worth—
The simple jest, the light laugh following after.
I will not jar upon thy modest mirth
With harsher jest, or with less gentle laughter.

So, some poor tavern-haunter, steeped in wine,
With staggering footsteps thro' the streets returning,
Seeing, through gathering glooms, a sweet light shine
From household lamp in happy window burning,

May pause an instant in the wind and rain
To gaze on that sweet scene of love and duty,
But turns into the wild wet night again,
Lest his sad presence mar its holy beauty.

Marcus Clarke

The Song of Tigilau

The song of Tigilau the brave,
Sina's wild lover,
Who across the heaving wave
From Samoa came over:
Came over, Sina, at the setting moon!

The moon shines round and bright;
She, with her dark-eyed maidens at her side,
Watches the rising tide.
While balmy breathes the starry southern night,
While languid heaves the lazy southern tide;
The rising tide, O Sina, and the setting moon!

The night is past, is past and gone,
The moon sinks to the West,
The sea-heart beats opprest,
And Sina's passionate breast
Heaves like the sea, when the pale moon has gone,
Heaves like the passionate sea, Sina, left by the moon alone!

Silver on silver sands, the rippling waters meet --
Will he come soon?
The rippling waters kiss her delicate feet,
The rippling waters, lispings low and sweet,
Ripple with the tide,
The rising tide,
The rising tide, O Sina, and the setting moon!

He comes! -- her lover!
Tigilau, the son of Tui Viti.
Her maidens round her hover,
The rising waves her white feet cover.
O Tigilau, son of Tui Viti,
Through the mellow dusk thy proas glide,
So soon!
So soon by the rising tide,
The rising tide, my Sina, and the setting moon!

The mooring-poles are left,
The whitening waves are cleft,
By the prows of Tui Viti!
By the sharp keels of Tui Viti!
Broad is the sea, and deep,
The yellow Samoans sleep,
But they will wake and weep --
Weep in their luxurious odorous vales,
While the land breeze swells the sails
Of Tui Viti!
Tui Viti -- far upon the rising tide,
The rising tide --
The rising tide, my Sina, beneath the setting moon!

She leaps to meet him!
Her mouth to greet him
Burns at his own.
Away! To the canoes,
To the yoked war canoes!
The sea in murmurous tone
Whispers the story of their loves,
Re-echoes the story of their loves --
The story of Tui Viti,
Of Sina and Tui Viti,
By the rising tide,
The rising tide, Sina, beneath the setting moon!

She has gone!
She has fled!
Sina!
Sina, for whom the warriors decked their shining hair,
Wreathing with pearls their bosoms brown and bare,
Flinging beneath her dainty feet
Mats crimson with the feathers of the parrakeet.
Ho, Samoans! rouse your warriors full soon,
For Sina is across the rippling wave,
With Tigilau, the bold and brave.
Far, far upon the rising tide!
Far upon the rising tide!
Far upon the rising tide, Sina, beneath the setting moon.

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