

**Classic Poetry Series**

**John O'Brien**  
**- poems -**

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# John O'Brien(13 October 1878 - 27 December 1952)

Monsignor Patrick Joseph Hartigan was an Australian Roman Catholic priest, educator, author and poet.

## <b>Biography</b>

He was born at Yass, New South Wales and ordained after study at St Patrick's Seminary, Manly. Writing under the pseudonym "John O'Brien" Hartigan's verse celebrated the lives and mores of the outback pastoral folk he ministered as a peripatetic curate to the southern New South Wales and Riverina towns of Thurgoona, Berrigan and Narrandera, in the first two decades of the 20th century. His poetry was very popular in Australia and was well received in Ireland and the United States.

The refrain We'll all be rooned from his poem Said Hanrahan has entered colloquial Australian English as a jocular response to any prediction of dire consequences arising, particularly, from events outside the interlocutor's control.

Hartigan died in Lewisham, an inner suburb of Sydney in 1952.

## <b>Legacy</b>

A John O'Brien Festival is held annually in Narrandera.

# Ownerless

He comes when the gullies are wrapped in the gloaming  
And limelights are trained on the tops of the gums,  
To stand at the sliprails, awaiting the homing  
Of one who marched off to the beat of the drums.

So handsome he looked in the putties and khaki,  
Light-hearted he went like a youngster to play;  
But why comes he never to speak to his Darkie,  
Around at the rails at the close of the day?

And why have the neighbours foregathered so gently,  
Their horses a-doze at the fence in a row?  
And what are they talkin' of, softly, intently?  
And why are the women-folk lingering so?

One hand, soft and small, that so often caressed him,  
Was trembling just now as it fondled his head;  
But what was that trickling warm drop that distressed him?  
And what were those heart-broken words that she said?

Ne'er brighter the paddocks that bushmen remember  
The green and the gold and the pink have displayed,  
When Spring weaves a wreath for the brows of September,  
Enrobed like a queen, and a-blush like a maid.

The gums are a-shoot and the wattles a-cluster,  
The cattle are roaming the ranges astray;  
But why are they late with the hunt and the muster?  
And why is the black horse unsaddled to-day?

Hard by at the station the training commences,  
In circles they're schooling the hacks for the shows;  
The high-mettled hunters are sent at the fences,  
And satins and dapples the brushes disclose.

Sound-winded and fit and quite ready is Darkie,  
Impatient to strip for the sprint and the flight;  
But what can he keeping the rider in khaki?  
And why does the silence hang heavy to-night?

Ah, surely he'll come, when the waiting is ended,  
To fly the stiff fences and take him in hand,  
Blue-ribboned once more, and three-quarters extended,  
Hard-held for the cheers from the fence and the stand.

Still there can the cross-beam the saddle hangs idle.  
The cobweb around the loose stirrup is spun;  
The rust's on the spurs, and the dust on the bridle,  
And gathering mould on the badges he won.

We'll take the old horse to the paddocks tomorrow,  
Where grasses are waving breast-high on the plain;  
And there with the clean-skins we'll turn him in sorrow  
And muster him never, ah, never, again.

The bush bird will sing when the shadows are creeping  
A sweet plaintive note, soft and clear as a bell's -  
Oh, would it might ring where the bush boy is sleeping,  
And colour his dreams by the far Dardanelles.

John O'Brien