

Classic Poetry Series

Owen Suffolk

- poems -

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Owen Suffolk(Born: 1829)

Owen Suffolk born in England in 1829 he was a clerk by profession, but was transported to Australia, for a 7 year term when he was just 18 years old.

Upon his release, in 1848 he was convicted of horse stealing being jailed for the second time. Only a few weeks after his release from that jail term he and a friend, Christopher Farrell held up a mail coach.

He was captured and returned to prison for a 3rd term, where he worked as a clerk.

The authorities were very pleased with his work, and he obtained an early release. After his release it was discovered that he had been 'doctoring' prisoners records.

He had ample opportunity to earn a living in his chosen profession, but he chose once again turned to crime, and was again sentenced for horse stealing shortly afterwards.

During his fifth prison term he earned the title of 'The Convict Poet'.

After released from prison this time, he returned to England.

He had not learnt form his mistakes and found himself in trouble with the law there for 'confidence tricks'. He faked his drowning and escaped to America with the proceeds of a wealthy widows money.

In 1868 he was reported to be alive and well and enjoying himself in New York.

For Frank Gardiner

It is not in a prison drear
Where all around is gloom,
That I would end life's wild career,
And sink into the tomb,
For though my spirit's ever bold
Each tyrant to defy;
Still, still, within a dungeon cold,
I could not calmly die.

It is not that my cheek would pale
Within a lonely cell;
It is not that my heart would quail
To bid this world farewell.
For if oppressed by tyrant foe
I'd freely be the first
To give my life, and strike the blow
To lay him in the dust.

But place me in a forest glen
Unfettered, wild and free,
With fifty tried and chosen men
A bandit chief to be.
'Tis there, when fighting with my foes
Amid my trusty band,
I'd freely leave this world of woes,
And die with sword in hand.

Owen Suffolk

I Feel That I Am Free

To me the sky looks bluer,
And the green grass greener still,
And earth's flowers seem more lovely
As they bloom on heath and hill.
There's a beauty breathing round me
Like a newborn Eden now,
And forgotten are the furrows
Grief has graven on my brow.
There is gladness in the sunshine,
As its gold light gilds the trees,
And I hear a voice of music
Singing to me in the breeze.
There is in my heart a lightness
That seemeth not of me,
For today I've burst from bondage,
And I feel that I am free.

Free in the golden sunshine,
Free in the fresh pure air,
Where the flowers of the forest
In their wild homes flourish fair.
Free to thought to give expression,
To sing, to dance, and show
That the stern world has not crushed me
With its weary weight of woe.
Are the years of care and sorrow
But a dark dream of the past,
Or this new life but a vision
That is all too bright to last?
How exaltingly my spirit
Flashes forth its newborn glee,
As amid rejoicing nature
I can feel that I am free.

I have neither friend nor loved one
To welcome me, nor home;
And lonely through the wide world
As a stranger I must roam;
I know not where tomorrow

To procure my daily bread,
And tonight the waving branches
Must canopy my head.
But if I had a palace,
If of friends a gladsome throng,
If some darling one were near me
To cheer with love and song,
If I'd riches which were boundless,
No more joyous could I be
Than what I am, exulting
In the thought that I am free.

Free in the bright glad sunshine,
Free in the fresh pure air,
My heart with gladness throbbing,
And on my brow no care.
There's the blue sky all above me -
Not a prison roof between -
And at my feet the flowers
Nestle in the verdure green.

Hark! I hear the breezes singing -
'Lift thy heart to God on high,
Who hath brought thee back from sorrow
To this world of hope and joy.'
And the little nodding flowers
In a chorus sing to me -
'If God from sin shall free thee,
Then thou shalt indeed be free!'

Owen Suffolk

My Memory's Care

Sing not to me a song of beauty bright,
Nor festive scenes of dazzling light;
Nor of gorgeous pageant in palace hall
Begemmed with many a coronal;
But sing to me my memory's care -
The misspent hours fled where - oh where?

Sing not to me of the battlefield,
Nor splintered lance nor of broken shield,
Not of gory plumes once freshly fair,
Not of banners rent nor pennon bare;
But sing to me my memory's care -
The misspent hours fled where - oh where?

Sing not to me of the sea-fight won,
By daring hearts and by flashing gun,
Not how o'er the deep in exultant glee
The victor's ship speeds gallantly;
But sing to me my memory's care -
The misspent hours fled where - oh where?

Sing not of summer, sing not of spring,
For these no joy to my heart can bring;
Sing not of autumn yellow and sere
Sing not of pallid winter frosty and drear;
But sing to me my memory's care -
The misspent hours fled where - oh where?

Sing not of Love's deep tenderness
Nor its whispered words, share its sweet caress;
Sing not to me of Beauty's power,
Nor the bridal morn - Love's dearest hour!
But sing to me my memory's care
The misspent hours fled where - oh where?

Sing - sing to me with a mocking song,
Of the guilty past and its deeds of wrong;
Sing - till around me the phantoms come,
Or the broken hearts in a distant home;

These, these are my memory's care,
And shriek them forth to my soul's despair!

Owen Suffolk

The Battle Of Life

Up! and arm for life's struggle,
We shall conquer in the fight,
If we arm us for the battle
With the weapons Truth and Right;
Though the world's arrayed against us,
We will shrink not from the strife,
For invincible is duty
On the battlefield of life.

In the vanguard of the battle
Foremost comes our foeman Sin,
Like a giant in his prowess,
With an aspect stern and grim.
But, though mighty in his power
We'll preserve a dauntless air,
And we'll fight this dreaded foeman
'Neath the sturdy shield of prayer.

Next is Poverty approaching,
Weapons sure and sharp she wears,
And she's backed by thronging thousands -
By a countless host of cares.
Still, this terrible invader
We'll repel with robust health,
And with energy and labour
Soon we'll win the ally Wealth.

Every step is fraught with struggle,
Cares full armed our path oppose;
Hopes are falling fast around us;
Wounded are we, too, by woes.
Yet our courage must not falter,
We must fight Care hand to hand;
Other hopes will soon support us
If we firmly take our stand.

In the sorried ranks of batte,
With the flag of Right unfurled,
Let our well-tried virtues make us

Victors ever in the world.
Noble to the things we fight for!
Glorious be the deeds we do!
Foeman to the false and evil,
Champions of the good and true!

Fight we as God's soldiers bravely,
Let us conquer by his might;
His Almighty arms shall aid us
Ever in the cause of right,
Fight on to life's last moments,
Faith at last shall conquer death:
Dying - still we'll shout in triumph,
'Victory' with our last drawn breath.

Onward, then, to dare the struggle,
Though we fall upon the field;
Better be struck down in battle,
Than like cowards tamely yield.
Shrink not from the stern encounter,
Duty ever strength supplies;
And from every fall we meet with,
Anteus-like, we'll stronger rise.

Owen Suffolk

The Dream Of Freedom

'Twas night, and the moonbeams palely fell
On the gloomy walls of a cheerless cell,
Where a captive sought a brief repose
From the bitter pangs of his waking woes.
O'er the dark blue waves the mighty deep
His spirit roamed in the dream of sleep,
To each well-loved spot of his native shore,
Where joyous he roved in the days of yore.
But o'er each scene a shadow threw
A gloom that never used to be,

All seemed so real, yet so untrue
To things once dear to memory.
The hill-side seemed a prison wall
That, grimly frowning, pained the eye;
The old oak-tree, with branches tall,
Looked like a gibbet 'gainst the sky.
Each face familiar once seemed now
A gaoler-face with a stony stare
A mark was set on each fair brow,

And in each voice were tones of care.
Thus mingled in the dreamer's brain
The present with the olden time,
Life's pleasant things with those of pain
And guiltless days with days of crime.
On, on in dream by lofty hill,
Through forest and o'er stormy wave,
He wandered; but he only still
Beheld a world of fettered slaves.

He saw a king surnamed the Great,
Who ruled the nations by his nod;
To billions his one word was fate -
He was a kind of demi-god.
He sat upon a lofty throne
A monarch, with a monarch's mien,
Earth's fairest forms were all his own,
And untold wealth was his I ween.

In the battlefield his arm was might
And his kingly heart was firm and brave;
But he knew not the charm of freedom's light.
For he was ambition's willing slave.

Then he turned from the monarch's throne to gaze
On a lonely cot in a peaceful dell,
Which lit by the sun's departing rays,
Seemed a home of bliss where no woe could dwell.
At the cottage door, with locks of white,
An old man gazed on the western sky,
And watched the sun's declining light
As it slowly sank from his haggard eye.
Alas! His spirit even there,
Where all around was bright and fair,
Was firmly bound to each crime-stained hour
By vivid mem'ry's haunting power,
While conscience o'er the sea of time
A lurid shade of darkness cast,
And conjured up the deeds of crime
That chained him to a guilty past.

In the captive's dream of fancy wild,
He looked no more on the man of care;
His gaze was fixed on a beauteous child
Who knelt at its mother's feet in prayer.
Its little hands were clasped - its eyes
Uplifted were to paradise;
Its simple words of faith and love
Were registered in heaven above;
Recorded there with angels' tears
As they wept o'er the hopes the mother built,
For they looked through the vista of the coming years,
And saw it fettered to future guilt.

And next he saw a youthful pair,
A gallant youth and maiden fair,
Reclining in a vine wreathed bower
At evening's calm and gentle hour.
Their words were such as lovers speak
When none are near; and on her cheek
The blushes deepened while he knelt

And poured out all his passion felt,
And not in vain. Then surely they
Were happy as a summer-day?
Ah! No, for happiness is twin
To purity of life and soul;
And those who only love in sin
Must wander widely from the goal.
The flowers that scented the ev'ning air,
The stars that gleamed from their home above,
Shed pitying tears for the guilty pair,
For they were the slaves of unholy love.

Then he turned from the things of earth to gaze
On the regions of immortality,
Where seraphs chanted their songs of praise,
And every tongue was tuned in joy,
Where countless thousands, clothed in white,
To angel-harps sang 'We are free,
And all who enter these realms of light
From sin and sorrow shall be as we.
Here freedom's waters bright and fair,
Flow undimmed by a single care;
And all who taste of the crystal tide
Of the stream of life that for ever flows,
Can never again be to sin allied,
And is free forever from earthly woes.'

'Twas now the drear-toned prison bell
Loud-echoed through the captive's cell.
He rose - the vision of the night
Again was present to his sight.
He knelt -with fervency he prayed;
Through faith in Christ, his sins forgiven,
The narrow boundary of the grave
Should be the vestibule of Heaven,
Where, disenthralled from all below,
He'd dwell beyond the starry sky,
Free from the pains of earthly woe,
In never-ending liberty!

Owen Suffolk

The Prison Bell

Hark to the bell of sorrow! - 'tis awak'ning up again
Each broken spirit from its brief forgetfulness of pain.
Its sad sound seems to me to be a deathwail from the past,
An elegy for buried joys too pure and bright to last.
It haunts me like an echo from the dark depths of despair,
And conjures up the fiend-like forms of misery and care;
The saddest of the sorrowful, its tones bright dreams dispel,
For waking woes are summoned by the harsh-toned prison bell.

It tells me that I am not now what once I used to be,
A dearly loved and loving boy whose heart was light with glee;
It tells me that life's coming years must be long years of pain,
And that my brow with innocence can ne'er be wreathed again:
That I must wander through this world all friendless and forlorn,
Unsolaced by affection's smile, the thing of shame and scorn.
Those fearful tones, those dirge-like tones, what fearful tales they tell!
It rings the death of hope and joy, that sadly sounding bell.

How oft when some bright vision of the days of olden time
Comes o'er me like an angel dream from heaven's own hallowed clime,
And beautiful and holy things - the bright stars and the flowers,
And childhood's prayer - were dear to me as in life's sinless hours.
How oft, too, when in such dreams I wander by the side
Of one fair form whom virtue might have won me for my bride,
They come, those tones so horrible, those drear tones through my cell,
And memory shuddereth to hear the harsh-toned prison bell.

That bell! - how many hear it sound who've ceased to struggle long,
Who, reckless of crime's after doom, have linked themselves to wrong;
And heard it is with shuddering and tearful vain regret
By those who for one first bad act for years must suffer yet.
'Tis also sadly heard by some strange-struggling beings who
Cling to the false and evil while they love the good and true;
And some - a few - all innocent, who've learned, alas! Too well
That man's best judgement sometimes errs, may weep to hear that bell.

I've heard it when bright memories have crowded to my brain,
When hopes and aspirations high have whispering come again;
And it hath sought to crush each thought that fain would save from ill.

As wildly it hath chanted forth, 'Despair; be evil still.'
But no, a prison oft hath proved a holy place of yore,
And if the heart yearns for the good, God will the good restore,
Then courage soul: let faith's bright beams grief's darksome shades dispel,
And days of joy may yet be thine far from the prison bell.

Owen Suffolk

The Real And The Ideal

I feel I have - and who has not?
An inner and outer life:
The one may be a dreary lot,
With sorrow and with suff'ring rife;
While in the other may be found
A magic world of fancies fair,
Where brightest dreams of joy abound,
And never enters dark despair.

The life I live may seem to those
Who gaze upon it outwardly
A drear existence, full of woes
And never-ceasing misery;
But in the mystic life of mind,
Abstracted from earth's things of sense,
Oblivious to my grief, I find
A joy exalted and intense.

My outward life is prison-gloomed,
My life of dreams is fancy free;
The one is ever care-consumed,
The other tranquil as can be.
Existence that is sternly real
As mine would crush the heart with grief,
Were it not that the bright ideal
With visioned joy imparts relief.

There's not a joy the world can give,
There's not a bliss the heart has known,
But in the spirit life I live
I have the power to make my own.
I care not what my actual lot
While thus sustained my soul can be;
My sorrows shall be all forgot
In fairest dreams of poesy.

Owen Suffolk

Untitled 1

I gladly would sing in a joyous strain,
But my heart of its joy is bereft;
For my young life there is nought but grief and pain,
And a haunting memory left.
Look at the stars how they gleam from the skies
On me with a frosty stare;
Can it be that this world hath no pitying eyes
For the houseless child of care?
Ye that look on me have homes tonight,
And loving ones wait you there;
And the cheerful fire is burning bright,
And young faces are beaming fair.
Though a thousand homes are around I know
'Mong them all there is no home for me:
For I must sleep in the cold white snow,
And the skies must my shelter be.
My life is still in its summer years,
But its flowers can bloom no more;
I weep - and mine are the bitter tears
That are wept for the joys of yore.
Then I cannot be glad, for my heart will cling
To the grief that is all its own:
So wonder not that I only sing
A song with a mournful tone.

Owen Suffolk

Untitled 2

I'm out in the world once more,
And I mean to run the rig,
For I've learned from the prison lore
That the pauper fares worse than the prig.
I've shivered and starved in vain,
And been honest for months in rag,
So if I'm convicted again,
I think it won't be on the vag.

Owen Suffolk

Untitled 3

Nothing seems changed; here's the oaken chair,
That every night I knelt beside,
As I whispered to God the simple prayer
I learned from my mother when I was her pride.
The old familiar things of then,
Unchanged, are beautiful still to the now;
But I am transformed in heart, and when
Will guilt ever cease to shadow my brow?

Owen Suffolk

Untitled 4

Mother! Darling mother, you are seeking me I know,
And I feel thy love will follow through the world where'er I go;
But I cannot come, dear mother; I am sadly altered now:
The once fair wreath of innocence that garlanded my brow
Has faded ne'er to bloom again; and from the things of yore-
The fair, the good, the beautiful - I'm severed ever-more.
My onward way must be a path of darkness and of pain,
But I must tread it all alone - I cannot come again.

Of all the changes that have come, I know that this will be,
Where all the changes have been sad, the saddest change to thee.
I know how much thou'l weep, mother, for thy dear boy so lost,
And 'tis the sorrow thou must feel that makes me sorrow most.
I strove against this darker fate, I struggled, mother, long.
I starved and suffered months, mother, ere I was linked to wrong:
And even now good angels plead to win me - but in vain!
Once fallen is forever lost - I cannot come again.

I'm severed from thee by my sin, but cannot say 'forget,'
Thy love is such a hollowed thing, I ask it even yet;
But let it be a memory that images all fair
The child that with uplifted hands in faith knelt by thy chair.
Think of me, mother, as I was, when joy lit up my brow
And my young heart was innocent, but not as I am now.
Pray for me. This I know thou'l do; but seek me not, 'tis vain!
I'd throw a shadow on thy home - I cannot come again.

They say that in desert drear some greenness may be found,
Some oasis in contrast strange to all the waste around,
And even thus, within my heart, guilt darkened though it be,
There is a love all-beautiful, that lives and clings to thee.
I'm weeping very bitterly, I cannot help these tears,
They are the tribute memory pays to joys of fleeted years,
Goodbye! God bless thee, mother dear! I sorrow for thy pain.
Oh! If I were but innocent, I'd gladly come again.

Owen Suffolk

Untitled 5

An exile captive, severed from his home,
Torn from the friends he loved in life's sweet spring;
Heart-broken toils, while still his sad thoughts roam
Back to the past which now no joys can bring;
Vainly he seeks compassion and relief
In human hearts around, to cheer or soothe his grief.

As hard the steel, so hard the flinty rock,
Whose grating echoes jest but at his woe;
The quivering iron yields but to the shock,
While down his bosom's height the cold drops flow,
His bleeding hands show many a sanguine spot,
Though seen by human eyes, by human hearts forgot.

There's not a sigh his spirit's grief hath sped,
There's not a dew-drop wrung by tyranny,
Nor yet one scorching tear his soul hath shed,
Nor bloody stain of silent agony,
But God hath seen, and hath recorded true,
To render unto man according to his due.

Owen Suffolk

Untitled 6

I am so lonely,
I am so sad,
Speak one word only
To make my heart glad,
Pass not in silence,
For silence is scorn,
I am so wretched,
Unloved, and forlorn.

In darkness sorrow
I think through the night
That each coming morrow
Brings thee to my sight
As a star sent to brighten
My gloom with a beam;
And I fall asleep ever
With these for a dream.

I know it is madness
Thus fondly for me
To cheat my life's sadness
With dreaming of thee.
Our paths through life's journey
Run widely apart,
And thou can't be only
A dream in my heart.

Then speak in thy kindness
One word to my woe,
Its music shall haunt me
Through life as I go.
I am so lonely,
I am so sad,
One kind word only
To make my heart glad.

Owen Suffolk

Untitled 7

Fame surrounds us with a glory,
Dazzling as the noon-day sun,
And upon the page of story,
Blazons deeds of greatness done.
But 'tis love that sheds a brightness
Round us that can ne'er depart,
And with its own gentle lightness,
Writes its records on the heart.

Fame may stir the soul within us,
Half with pleasure, half with pain;
And a world's applause may win us
With its many-echoed strain.
But the song of love's own singing,
Though 'tis breathed by one alone,
Ever to the heart is bringing,
New-born raptures in its tone.

Give to me one fair form near me,
And I'll sigh no more for fame;
Better one sweet voice to cheer me,
Than the heartless crowd's acclaim.
Of fame's gifts I ask not any,
Its proud temples will I shun;
For the voices of the many,
Give to me the heart of one!

Owen Suffolk

Untitled 8

Thou sinless and sweet one - thy voice is a strain
Which yields solace to sadness, and balm to my pain,
From thy unsullied spirit it comes to me here,
Like the music of Eden - soft, holy, and clear.
The storm-stirring thoughts o'er my heart holding sway,
At the charm of its gentleness vanish away!
For its melody, teeming with gladness and love,
Seems the song of the seraph to lure me above.
Beautiful prattler! - that music of mirth,
Yet unchecked by the cares and the sorrows of earth,
Mingles strangely where anguish and rretchedness reign,
With the sigh of the captive, and the clank of his chain.
Yet I love to hear it, though captive I be,
Gushing pure from thy young heart all joyous and free.
There's a siren-like sweetness pervading its song
Which can woo me to virtue, and win me from wrong.
Play on then, - play on, then - for thou dost not know
What it is to be wretched and burdened with woe:
There's the fair world around thee, and blue sky above,
Ever seeming to breathe on thee beauty and love;
And the waters that flash in the suns golden beams,
Dance beneath thee as bright as thine own fairy dreams;
Yet here, there are hearts sank in ruin and crime,
Which once was as gleesome and guiltless as thine.
Beware! then - beware! - when seductingly gay,
Vice with counterfeit smiles, would beguile thee away
From the good and the lovely, from virtue and joy,
To the pleasures of sin, which debase and destroy.
Those holy emotions and pure thoughts which dwell
In the bosom of childhood - oh, cherish them well!
For if there's a true joy this world can impart,
It surely exists in the innocent heart.
Though remorse wring my soul, and
though care clothe my brow,
I once was as sinless and joyous as thou;
And knelt, too, like thee, by a fond mother's chair
With tiny hands folded in faith-hallowed pray'r.
Play on, my sweet child! there's a penitent tear
Stealing down my wan cheek as I list to thee here:

There's a prayer in my heart to the wise one above
To be made like a child in belief and in love.
O ever when gladly this gay world would win
With its tinselled allurements thy young heart to sin,
Turn away from the light of its illusive glare,
And seek in temptation thy refuge of pray'r.
Uncorrupted in heart and a stranger to woe.
With the garland of love green and bright on thy brow,
Mayn't thou journey through life and thy voice still retain
Its heav'n-given sweetness to sooth grief and pain.

Owen Suffolk