

Classic Poetry Series

Sir Henry Parkes
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Sir Henry Parkes(1815 - 1896)

Henry Parkes was born to a family of yeoman stock in Warwickshire, England in 1815. Unfortunately, falling wheat prices forced the family to leave the land and seek employment in Birmingham. In 1836 Parkes married Clarinda Varney and they applied for assisted passage to Australia, the death of two of their infant children and a failed business venture influencing their decision.

Arriving in Australia, he found work as a farm labourer, but low wages did not appeal! Renewing his old interest in politics, he went to work for the Customs Department in Sydney. Over the next few years he went into business for himself and at one stage owned the Empire newspaper. Through this period he became very influential and played a major role in the cessation of transportation of convicts to Australia. Going bankrupt he retired from the political arena, narrowly escaping fraud charges as his debts exceeded 48 500 pounds (approx. \$100 000). He turned to his old friends and with their support was re-elected, becoming a strong supporter of land and educational reform, free trade and immigration. It needs to be pointed out that politicians were not paid for their role in this era of time in Australia.

All this time, Parkes left his wife and five children at Werrington (near Penrith). Mrs Parkes was often short of money and constantly besieged by creditors. The property was managed by an insolent and disobedient man and the property went down hill. She indicated her loneliness in a letter to her husband after the birth of their sixth child when she wrote, "I have received no congratulations". Parkes had ventured upon another business and once more shown his lack of acumen by going bankrupt again, this time losing his property lease.

Parkes introduced the Public Schools Act in 1866, giving power to train, appoint and dismiss teachers, the Hospital Act providing Government inspection, supervision and appointment of trained nurses to Hospitals. He was forced to resign because of insolvency. In 1871 he returned as the Member for Mudgee and so began the golden age of his political career. He was an able speaker, somewhat of an actor and his long white hair and flowing beard gave him an apostolic look. Parkes believed the voters should feel that you are the "Man of the Hour". During this period, he introduced the Public Instruction Act which abolished state aid for denominational schools (as a result NSW has been plagued by a two school system ever since).

Parkes' Ministry is best remembered for his fiery and impassioned support for the Federation of Australian Colonies, making his famous speech at the School of

Arts, Tenterfield on 24 October 1889.

Parkes faced personal tragedy and more criticism after marrying Eleanor Dixon about a year (6 Feb 1889) after the death of Clarinda (2 Feb 1888). This marriage was never recognised by his family. Eleanor died in 1895, leaving Parkes with young children and in a declining mental and physical health. He then married Julia Lynch who nursed the old warrior until his death on 27 April 1896 at the age of 80 years and 11 months.

Sir Henry was a typical of a wide range of 19th century politicians, but his very special ability to appreciate the importance of the action he was taking and his vision of a strong and united Australia certainly made the people believe that he was, indeed, "THE MAN OF THE HOUR".

Fatherland

THE BRAVE old land of deed and song,
Of gentle hearts and spirits strong,
Of queenly maids and heroes grand,
Of equal laws,—our Fatherland!

Though born beneath a brighter sun,
Shall we forget the marvels done,
By soul outspoken, blood outpoured,
By bard and patriot, song and sword?

Forget how firm and true our sires,
Still lighted by their battle-fires,
'Gainst kingly power and kingly crime,
Long struggled in the darkened time?

How in a rolling sea they stood,
Where every wave was freemen's blood,—
Shall we forget the time of strife,
When freedom's only price was life?

Shall Cromwell's memory, Milton's lyre,
Not kindle 'mong us souls of fire,
Not raise in us a spirit strong—
High scorn of shams, quick hate of wrong?
Shall we not learn, Australians born!
To smile on tinselled power our scorn,—
At least, a freeman's pride to try,
When tinselled power would bend or buy?

The brave old land of deed and song,
We ne'er will do her memories wrong!
For freedom here we'll firmly stand,
As stood our sires for Fatherland!

Sir Henry Parkes

Four Score

I count the mercifullest part of all
God's mercies, in this coil of eighty years,
Is that no sense of being disappears
Or fails; I see the signal, hear the call,
Can calmly estimate the rise and fall
Of moth-like mortals in this "vale of tears";
And all His glorious works--the heavenly spheres,
The ocean, and the earth's unending wall--
Remain, for thought and wonder! Marvellous
Is God's creation, with its endless space
And those inhabited bright worlds by law
Divinely governed, as they shine on us,
Still keeping through all time their ordered place;
I bow my head in rapture and in awe.

Sir Henry Parkes

Solitude

Where the mocking lyre-bird calls
To its mate among the falls
Of the mountain streams that play,
Each adown its tortuous way;
When the dewy-fingered even
Veils the narrowed glimpse of heaven,
Where the morning re-illumes
Gullies full of ferny plumes,
And the roof of radiance weaves
Through high-hanging vault of leaves;
There 'mid giant turpentine,
Groups of climbing, clustering vines,
Rocks that stand like sentinels
Guarding native citadels,
Lowly flowering shrubs that grace
With their beauty all the place,
There I love to wander lonely
With my dog companion only;
There, indulge unworldly moods
In the mountain solitudes;
Far from all the gilded strife
Of our boasted "social life,"
Contemplating, spirit-free,
The majestic company,
Grandly marching through the ages—
Heroes, martyrs, bards, and sages—
They who bravely suffered long,
By their struggles waxing strong,
For the freedom of the mind,
For the rights of humankind.
Oh, for some awakening cause,
Where we face eternal laws,
Where we dare not turn aside,
Where the souls of men are tried—
Something of a nobler strife,
Which consumes the dross of life,
To unite to truer aim,
To exalt to loftier fame,
Leave behind the bats and balls,

Leave the racers in the stalls,
Leave the cards for ever shuffled,
Leave the yacht on seas unruffled,
Leave the haunts of pampered ease,
Leave your dull festivities—
Better far the savage glen,
Fitter school for earnest men.

Sir Henry Parkes

Sonnet

When you arrive at Sydney, sailing up
The harbour, a small central isle you'll see;
With two or three low huts, but not a tree,
Nor blade of grass,-upon't; and, on the top,
A score of men, in coarse habiliments,
Hewing the rock away. You may remember,
Among the many evil-traced events
Of a town life, some robbery, when December
Brought on the long, dark nights-a neighbour's boy
Tried for't, and banished. He, perchance, is one,
Who yonder lift the pickaxe in the sun
To level Pinchgut Island! If e'er joy
Gladden'd your heart on England's shore, oh! Never
Forget that Englishmen are banished here for ever.

Sir Henry Parkes

Stanzas

Up go the beautiful and world-watch'd stars,
Lifting the glory of America,
'Mong the red flags which gleam through masts
and spars
Crowded in gay magnificence, to-day,
Where three score years ago, none found their way,
Of all the ships which left old England's shore:
Up goes the starry flag, on waves which lay
In undiscover'd solitude, when o'er
America those stars first glanc'd from fields of gore!

In friendly beauty floats that free-fix'd flag
'Gainst England's glowing ensign! I could dream
Of times, when the wild bush, each uncouth crag,
And precipice, beside this haven-stream,
Shall yield to one vast city; and the gleam
Of new-born banners shall illumine it;
And these alike be foreign in the beam
Of Australasia's morning. Heaven admit
One patriot spirit here, and Freedom's fires are lit!

Not ever shall the exile's toil be all
To bring the harvest of this infant land;
The children of the buried exile shall
Behold a mother's beauty, in the bland
Aspect of Nature, on their native strand:
And Freedom then shall choose a dwelling here.
Oh! Happy epoch, when the 'great and grand,'
The memory of whose deeds mankind revere,
Number a Washington, from the world's Austral sphere.

Sir Henry Parkes

The Beauteous Terrorist

Soft as the morning's pearly light,
Where yet may rise the thunder-cloud,
Her gentle face was ever bright
With noble thought and purpose proud.

Dreamt ye that those divine blue eyes,
That beauty free from pride or blame,
Were fashion'd but to terrorize
O'er Despot's power of sword and flame?

Beware! Those beauteous lineaments
Of girlhood shrine a force sublime,
Which moulds to fearful use events,
And dares arraign Imperial crime.

A fear was in the peasants' eyes,
A palsy smote both tongue and hand;
A network of police and spies
O'erspread the tyrant-tortured land.

The dungeons swallowed all our best—
Who next should perish none could say;
A thousand victims of arrest
Were torn from us one summer day.

The judges, sworn to guard the right,
Interpreted the tyrant's bent;
Though cleared by witnesses of light,
'Twas hard to save the innocent.

The Senate, in its ordered state,
Might free — its voice inspired no awe
Acquittal did not liberate —
The Autocrat annulled the law.

The tender, sweet Enthusiast,
The bright-eyed maid with hero's soul,
Had watched the thickening shadow cast
O'er all the land, in death and dole.

Her girlhood's secret studies, late
And early, in her princely home;
Her converse with the good and great,
The lessons taught by Greece and Rome,

Had nerved her heart to action strong ;
She joined the few who dared the worst,
Resolved to strike the monster Wrong —
To wrestle with the Thing accurst!

Pale Freedom's devotees, whose creed
Was vengeance, who in silent trust
Prepared themselves to bear and bleed,
And bravely die — if die they must.

What matter'd, so the Despot's doom
And Freedom's advent, nearer drew ?
Their chosen path was through the gloom —
The perils of their choice they knew.

To give their all, even life, were sweet —
Not half, as Ananias gave —
So they might see the work complete,
Or feel it finished in the grave.

The early rose of womanhood
Had scarce illumed her angel face,
When 'mongst conspirators she stood —
The bravest in the darkest place.

In danger, failure, suffering, she
Cheer'd on with her unchanging smile,
Still looking forth to victory,
As free from doubt as far from guile.

Stern men pursued the work of death —
No war-cry raised, no flag, unfurled —
They laid the mine whose nitric breath
Should blow the tyrant from the world.

Dark warfare! — oh, how pitiless!

What else for them? — no right of speech,
No right of meeting for redress,
No right the rights of man to teach:

How plead their cause in burning words?
How arm'd in just rebellion rise? —
Where gleam a million servile swords,
Where Drown for prey a million spies.

To counsel, organize, sustain,
To plan escape, to lead attack,
Her steady hand and luminous brain
Were ever Onward — never Back!

Her voice was like a holy bell,
Calling to highest sacrifice;
When black disaster heaviest fell,
She stood all smiles to pay the price!

Baffled surprise and bold escape,
Endurance long, at last are o'er;
The Monster's jaws insatiate gape,
Whose cry for blood is ever "More!"

The hunters close around her path,
Her forfeit life is in their hands;
She neither bends before their wrath,
Nor braves her captor's hireling bands.

She meets her fate serene and still,
Above all earthly hopes and fears;
If once her eyes the teardrops fill,
Her mother's grief unlocks the tears.

The mockery of trial came,
And follow'd swift the words of doom;
But ignominy, woe, and shame
Were far from her — her dungeon-tomb

Held spiritual companions; there
A light, which others could not see,
Shone in her heart, and everywhere —

To die was only to be free!

Six days no friendly face came near,
No sister's clinging arm, no word
From all the loved ones reach'd her ear —
Her mother's voice no more was heard.

Six days the weeping mother sought
To see her sentenced child in vain;
Their eyes ne'er met till she was brought
Forth in the daylight — to be slain!

She stood beneath the felon rope —
Her beauty felt the hangman's hand;
But, steadfast in her life-long hope,
She only saw "the promised land!"

The promised land of Truth and Right —
The holy cause of Freedom won!
She only saw the far-off Light,
And heard the People marching on!

She stood — her cheek rose-lighted still —
A moment, calm and iron-willed;
Then all of her which Power could kill
Was mercilessly crushed and killed.

The scaffold had its radiant prey,
The Despot's minions breathed secure —
The proud and haughty went their way,
Spurning the dead so young and pure.

But souls like her's survive the fate
Which tyrants in their might decree,
And ever live to animate
The nations struggling to be free.

Purged of the dross of earth, the fire
Of one great spirit's holocaust
Will thousands wake to patriot ire —
Will raise to life a patriot host!

Sir Henry Parkes

Weary

WEARY of the ceaseless war
Beating down the baffled soul,—
Thoughts that like a scimitar
Smite us fainting at the goal.

Weary of the joys that pain—
Dead sea fruits whose ashes fall,
Drying up the summer's rain—
Charnel dust in cups of gall!

Weary of the hopes that fail,
Leading from the narrow way,
Tempting strength to actions frail—
Hand to err, and foot to stray.

Weary of the battling throng,
False and true in mingled fight;
Weary of the wail of wrong,
And the yearning for the night!

Weary, weary, weary Heart!
Lacerated, crush'd and dumb.
None to know thee as thou art!
When will rest unbroken come?

Sir Henry Parkes