

Poetry of Convictism and Exile

Australasia

by I.R.M. 1824,
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author unknown)

Land of the Exile—tomb of living crime,
Awful to view—yet lovely and sublime;
To thee and thine my untried harp I string,
The Exile's misery—and thyselves I sing!

Far from the Isle—the cradle of my birth,
The best beloved—the dearest upon earth,
On thy green shore unnoticed and unknown,
I feed my sorrows, sacred, and mine own.

What, though I leave behind me on that shore
A heart half-broken—friend to peace no more;
What, though no friend upon thy shores I meet,
To soothe my sorrows with his converse sweet;

What, though the smile of beauty and its fear,
To every man and every virtue dear,
From me are barred—compared my woe is small,
I gaze around—and should forget it all!

Man, prone to error—agent of his acts,
Swerves from Virtue's safely-beaten tracks;
Crime leads him on, from sin to sin he flies,
His home he forfeits, and in exile dies!

Where are the friends should weep unto the grave,
The wretched outcast from the wise and brave?
Where is the mother of the banish'd child,
Who watch'd the sallies of his boyhood wild?

Far from his side—unconscious of his fate,
Parental tears bedew the crimes they hate;
They weep condemning—to sad misery's fill,
Strive to forget, yet hold the memory still;
For hearts of parents, by no lesson yet,
Have learn'd the art their offspring to forget:
Coiled in their breasts the memory will live,
Nor can forget—whom law could not forgive.

The tall bark glittering through the ocean's spray,
Bears hearts of sin and wretchedness away.
Deep-rooted vice of every shade and hue,
Looks its last gaze—and sighs its last adieu!
While some few tears, saved from Virtue's wreck,
Steal from their cells, and glisten on the deck!
But these are few—the mariners, hard of heart,
Shed not a tear, have not a sigh to part,
From kindred nearest—Virtue cast from view,
Love—friendship—heart—have left their station too.

Land of the Exile—penitential bourne,
On thy sweet shore let sin recorded, mourn;
By upright conduct let the banished learn
The road to pardon—and the way to earn.
What though for life—the human laws decree,
A banish'd sentence to thy crimes, and thee;
“Life's but a stage,”—above thee is the goal,
The Land of Grace—the haven of the soul;—
There turn thy heart—with pure contrition hem'd
Thy GOD may pardon—what thy kind condemn'd,
But, upon earth, upon “this shoal of time,”
E'en those who pity must condemn thy crime.

The palm of friendship never shalt thou grasp;
Thy kin may die—thou may'st not view them gasp;
Thine aged mother thou may'st see no more,
Whose heart thy crime hath blighted at the core!
Thine aged sire—pale misery's eldest token,
Aching at heart, which thy default hath broken,
May sigh his soul out on woe's tear-built billow,
Thou can'st not see, thou may'st not smooth his pillow!

And she, the dark-eyed maiden, who had stored
Her every hope on him whom she adored,
Sleeps in the tomb—Virtue's fair boast and pride,
She saw thee exiled—pray'd for thee—and died!

Sweet AUSTRALASIA! haven of the wrecked,
With every charm and every beauty decked;
How long shall thou, the land of slavery be,
A land, like thine, was grafted for the free.
Time must roll on, and younger heads than mine,
Look in the arms of certain death, recline,
Lo! Heav'n-borne liberty shall thy shore proclaim
The land of freedom, and the nest of fame.

Yet as thou art the prison-house of crime,
Still art thou fair—the fairest of thy time;
And young hope beckons at thy harbour's mouth,
Welcome to thee—sweet Eden of the South!

When time shall pass—and other shores shall bear
The chains and fetters which thy culters wear;
The chains which shackle, and the crimes which gall,
Then shalt thou rise superior to them all;
Like some bright gem upon the green wave's breast,
The proudest—fairest—richest—and the best.
Then Freedom's Flag triumphantly shall wave,
Proudly flinging upon Slavery's grave;
Long ruined shackles sink beneath the sea,
AND AUSTRALASIA—BOAST AUSTRALIANS FREE!

Epitaph Written at a Convict's Solitary Grave

by P.S.K., 1846,
(published in the *Launceston Examiner*,
7 October 1846, author unknown)

Here silently rests, in his lone narrow bed,
The ashes of one who was nurtured in crime;
From its clay-moulded mansion the spirit has fled,
And left its abode for a time.

In his last dying moments no hand smooth'd his pillow,
No friend was there nigh to weep o'er his bier,
Or plant at his head the green drooping-willow,
As a lasting memorial of one that was dear.

An exile, an outcast, despised and unpitied,
Expelled from his country, in bondage to live,
In this far distant land he died unregretted,
Depriv'd of the pleasures that friendship can give.

A curse on his memory will the tyrant bestow
That never has felt for the woes of another;
For his sad fate the tear of compassion will flow
From him who regards fellow-man as a brother.

From Exile

Lindsay Duncan, 1887
(published in the *The Riverine Grazier*, Hay NSW,
6 September 1887; re-run by the *Adelaide
Observer* on 13 August 1887)

I stand and look across the seas,
I stand alone upon the shore,
And all the heart goes out of me
In longing for what is no more.

In vain to stretch fond foolish hands,
Or cry above the waters' moan—
The dark bar lies between the lands
Where you and I stand each alone.

Oh, love! why is the world so wide,
With all its width between us two?
Why are our hearts so closely tied
In knots that Fate would fain undo?
Why may there be no peace for me
The while I, exiled, lonely roam,
And pant and pine unendingly
For sight of your dear face—and home?

There is a faint, wild hope that wakes
The longings of my weary soul:
That with strange joy my being shakes
Beyond grim sorrow's stern control—
A hope that lives, though swathed in fears
That yet, at last, the day may come
When, after exile's yearning tears,
I still shall see your face—and home!

Australia, or The Exile

T.K., 1826

(published in *The Sydney Gazette*
and *New South Wales Advertiser*,
9 September 1826,
author unknown)

When man first launches into life, careless
And unrestrain'd, the blandishments of beauty
Meet his raptur'd eyes. Contemning controul,
He follows madly where blind passion leads,—
Caught in the vortex of dissipation
Amid the flowery labyrinths of pleasure,
When reason leaves no clue to guide his feet,
The fascinated wanderer is lost,
And falls a victim to the syren's smiles.

Folly prompts him to pursue his vices,
Crime begetting crimes still goads him onward,
'Till frowning justice checks the offender
'Mid his mad career;—when lo! he starts!
And shrinks aghast at the black gulph beneath
Which one step further would have plunged him
Down its awful precipice, to ruin,
Death, despair, and woe remediless!

Sure 'twas a kind arrest! the sternly spoken
Sentence, tho' 'twas bannishment, was bless'd.
The exile here, tho' banishment is pain,
Shall feel the blessing's influence benign
And salutary, healing every wound.
The penitential tear, when shed in secret,
Unseen by every eye, save God's omniscient,
Which the recording angel registers
In heaven, shall find a sweet reception there,—
A savour, smelling sweet as Arabia's
Mild perfumed gales, far more acceptable
Than would ten thousand penances and
Pilgrimage made to shrines of saints.

Affection, which till now lay slumbering
In his breast, awaken'd by absence,
Strongly draws him home, where thought conveys
him,
Where late he left the partner of his sorrows,
And helpless babes, to bear the frowns of fate.—
Here, by adversity severely taught,
And rigid discipline, he studies virtue,
And if he lives, returns a character
Regenerated! to bless his children.

Here Industry and Labour smile content,
Since nature yields abundance rich to man,
Whose perseverance soon might change the scene
From natural uncultivated rudeness,
To bloom a smiling paradise of sweets.

The sturdy oak, royal progenitor
Of princely forests, whose leafy foliage
Nodding in verdant pride to summer's zephyrs,
Like crested plumes on some mail'd warrior's helm
By attitude, nobility, and strength
Distinguish'd, from one poor acorn sprung!

The proudest empires once were infant states,
Acquiring glory by steps progressive.
Australia here, the nurse of science,
Her sons in arts polite improving fast;
Whose rising sun illumines her hemisphere
With rays resplendently glorious,
'Neath whose all-invigorating influence
Australia shall enjoy a long and happy day;—
She, in future times, shall boast of senators,
Wisdom, grandeur, pomp, and pageantry.
She, too, may know her Alfred and her Georges,
Whose deeds illustrious shall gild her name,
Whilst she shall proudly rise a nation
In dignity and state pre-eminently
Far above her peers—a potent rival
For a world in arms! and Commerce, busy
Speculative Commerce, shall introduce
Her beauteous offspring, smiling Plenty,
The gift of heaven to this happy isle.