Classic Poetry Series

Arthur Patchett Martin
- poems -

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Arthur Patchett Martin(18 February 1851 – 15 February 1902)

Arthur Patchett Martin, writer, was born on 18 February 1851 at Woolwich, Kent, England, son of George Martin and his wife Eleanor, née Hill. In December 1852 the family arrived at Melbourne where Martin was educated at St Mark's School, Fitzroy, and matriculated at the University of Melbourne in February 1868. He worked in the post office from November 1865 to 1883, but for most of these years was a casual writer, prominent in giving papers and debating in the Eclectic Society where he succeeded H. K. Rusden as secretary. For six years Martin edited the Melbourne Review, which he and H. G. Turner established in 1876. Martin's lifelong belief was that Australian literature could best develop with an Australian school of criticism beside it; only then would it adjust its perspectives. He published Sweet Girl Graduate (1876), which included short poems and a sentimental novelette. More verses followed: Lays of To-day: Verses in Jest and Earnest (1878), and Fernshawe: Sketches in Prose and Verse (1882), collected from the Melbourne Review and other journals. He was closely associated with the theatre through his brother-in-law, Arthur Garner. A. D. Mickle describes Martin as a 'born Bohemian', and recalls the regular walks his father took with the 'brilliant talkers' Patchett Martin and Alfred Deakin. Walter Murdoch refers to Martin's light mockery, wit and indolence.

In 1883 Martin left Australia under a cloud, as co-respondent in a divorce case, and remained embittered by friends shunning him. However, he soon became established in London journalism, writing regularly for the Pall Mall Gazette. He was the satirist of the 'Australasian Group' who regarded themselves as exiles but retained a keen interest in Australian affairs, particularly literature. He wrote an introduction to the 18th edition of the poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon and was his advocate in many articles. In The Beginnings of an Australian Literature (London, 1898) he hailed the first volumes of Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson with pride and triumph, avowing that 'the un-English, thorough Australian style and character of these new bush bards' appealed to 'the rising native population'. In 1889 he published Australia and the Empire, a patchwork of essays on Australian affairs and prominent men, and in 1893 True Stories from Australasian History. His major work, Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Robert Lowe, Viscount Sherbrooke (1893), was a clearly-structured, dignified work and generally accurate, with information from Lowe's friends and relations. He also wrote the entries on Sir Henry Parkes, William Charles Wentworth and Sir William Windeyer in the Dictionary of National Biography.

On 11 January 1886 in London Martin had married a widow, Harriette Anne Bullen, daughter of Dr John Moore Cookesley. Together they wrote verse and arranged the publications of expatriate Australians in various periodicals. The Bulletin, 7 March 1896, described his talent as rather thin, claiming that his verse was 'deficient in wit and poignancy, but with sufficient fluency and sentiment to be readable'. He was a minor poet, at best remembered for his literary criticism and journalism. Though reputedly influential in promoting Australia's broader interests, he was, according to Deakin in May 1889, 'ill-informed on public affairs' and 'did not pretend to follow them' before leaving Australia. His influence in Britain seems illusory despite his activities in Liberal Union politics. His health collapsed and his wife sought help from friends in Britain and Australia. By their aid he went to Tenerife where he died on 15 February 1902.

A Bush Study, A La Watteau

HE.
See the smoke-wreaths how they curl so lightly skyward
From the ivied cottage nestled in the trees:
Such a lovely spot—I really feel that I would
Be happy there with children on my knees.

SHE.
No, you wouldn’t. These are merely idle fancies
Of a gentleman much given to day-dreams.
These chimneys always smoke, and, then the chance is
You would have a scolding wife and babe that screams.

HE.
Ah! but look! just there, above that lowly cottage,
Birds are flitting in the sunlight clear and pure;
And the three-score years and ten—man’s poor allottage—
Might be passed away with pleasure there, I’m sure.

SHE.
Now, pray listen, oh, vain wanderer from the city,
And look bravely up and meet my searching eyes:
Would you give up all your town life, bright and witty,
Just because the cottage smoke curls to the skies?

HE.
I regret to find you’re one of those young ladies—
Pet productions of this artificial age:
Rural solitude to you is simply Hades,
And your paradise the ballroom or the stage.

SHE.
Yes, forsooth! and why? Because, my airy dreamer,
I can use my eyes as well as gaily dance—
See the Husband, Wife, the Lover, Dupe and Schemer,
All whirling past and weaving a romance.

HE.
You think, then, Miss, such dreadful social questions
Are like cards, designed to pass away the time;

Do you not perceive that all these pseudo-Christians
Are but moths that flutter round the candle Crime?

SHE.
At the play, too, where I oft with dear mamma go,
There's the drama being acted in the boards;
And Othello, Desdemona, and Iago
In the boxes, p'raps, without the paint and swords.

HE.
Well, that may be, but the life of show and fashion
You so prize above the simple joys around,
Is all false; more noble manhood and true passion
In the daily lives of rustics may be found.

SHE.
Think you then that those who dwell in rural places
Are quite free from every evil thought and deed?
Pray speak unto the swain who hither paces
With slow steps, as though in pain, across the mead.

HE.
If you will not sneer, I'll ask him for his story;
But expect not that his daily life shall be
Full of famous deeds; he careth not for glory,
But lived by honest labour, pure and free.

SHE.
Speak on; speak! and let me hear this modern idyll
From the lips of yonder heavy-footed swain;—
By-the-bye, his wild, erratic sort of sidle
Seems to indicate that he the bowl doth drain.

HE.
Hush—he'll overhear….O tell me, gentle cottar,
Dwellest thou here remote from carking care and strife?

SUNDOWNER.
What's that to you? Are you a bloated squatter?
Better clear, old man [hic] 'companied by your wife.

HE.

Thou mistakest me, thou toil-worn man and humble;
I own no lands where graze the peaceful sheep.
Thou art stirred with deep emotion, and dost mumble—
Speak up bravely, brother man, and do not weep.

SUNDOWNER.
Hot to-day, guv’nor; let’s go and have a liquor;
Lady take anything?—Bless you I can pay—
Haven’t had one yet, and nothing makes me sicker
Than abstaining altogether such a day.

Sings
Shearing sheep is dry work,
Kissing girls is sly work;
But drinking deep is my work;
So, let’s drink, boys, drink!

HE.
Come, Mabel, come. He is worse than Turk or Bulgar,
And his presence doth the very air pollute.

SHE.
Well, I must confess he is a trifle vulgar;
But what you say now, my dreamer?

HE.
I am mute.

Arthur Patchett Martin

A Romance In The Rough

A sturdy fellow, with a sunburnt face,
And thews and sinews of a giant mould;
A genial mind, that harboured nothing base,—
A pocket void of gold.

The rival's years were fifty at the least—
Withered his skin, and wrinkled as a crone;
But day by day his worldly goods increased,
Till great his wealth had grown.

And she, the lady of this simple tale,
Was tall and straight, and beautiful to view;
Even a poet's burning words would fail
To paint her roseate hue.

The suitors came, the old one and the young,
Each with fond words her fancy to allure.
For which of them should marriage bells be rung,
The rich one or the poor?

She liked the young one with his winning ways,
He seemed designed to be her future mate—
Besides, in novels and romantic plays
Love has a youthful gait.

But well she knew that poverty was hard,
And humble household cares not meant for her;
Nor cared she what the sentimental bard
Might warble or infer.

She made her choice, the wedding bells rang clear;
The aged bridegroom figured in the Times.
The young man, after some superfluous beer,
Went forth to foreign climes.

And this is all I ever chanced to know,
Told by my mate while digging on the Creek,
Who ended with his handsome face aglow,
And with a verse in Greek.

Arthur Patchett Martin

Bushland

Not sweeter to the storm-tossed mariner
   Is glimpse of home, where wife and children wait
   To welcome him with kisses at the gate,
Than to the town-worn man the breezy stir
   Of mountain winds on rugged pathless heights:
   His long-pent soul drinks in the deep delights
That Nature hath in store. The sun-kissed bay
   Gleams thro' the grand old gnarled gum-tree boughs
Like burnished brass; the strong-winged bird of prey
Sweeps by, upon his lonely vengeful way --
   While over all, like breath of holy vows,
   The sweet airs blow, and the high-vaulted sky
Looks down in pity this fair Summer day
   On all poor earth-born creatures doomed to die.

Arthur Patchett Martin

In Memoriam Matris

IN my hot youth I rashly penned
A Sonnet of the After-life.
It was the time of stress and strife
Through which the ardent soul must wend.
It was the Spring-time of my days,
When Doubt, like an inspired sage,
With creeds did eager warfare wage,
And looked with scorn on ancient ways.
But gazing back across the years
That separate my youth from me,
These words and thoughts now seem to be
All dim, as through a mist of tears.
For then I saw, with eager eyes,
A coming world where joy would reign,
And evil pass away, and pain,
When man was rid of priestly ties.
While now I turn a backward gaze
On visions fled, and vanished hours,
On dead dry leaves and perished flow'rs,
That make the story of my days.
And midway on that dreary track
I see a grave-stone, standing white —
Far off. I see it in the night;
It says, "Thy mother comes not back."
We brought her from the Austral land,
To this the land that gave her birth;
We laid her cold, in English earth,
My sire and I — and now we stand,
Like aliens, on a dreary shore,
Though once he fondly called it "Home."
Now, old and mateless, he would roam
Back to that southern land once more.
For there her spirit seems to be,
There lie her babes beneath the sod;
And there, but for the hand of God,
Her grandchild would have climbed her knee.
* * * * *
These verses of the heedless Past,
They echo not my saddened thought,

— I held that after death came nought:
The earth was not then on her cast.
Denial now is dumb within,
Without I can but grope my way,
And trust that in some brighter day
Man's soul shall live — absolved of sin.

Arthur Patchett Martin

Love And War

THE CHANCELLOR mused as he nibbled his pen
(Sure no Minister ever looked wiser),
And said, "I can summon a million of men
To fight for their country and Kaiser;

"While that shallow charlatan ruling o'er France,
Who deems himself deeper than Merlin,
Thinks he and his soldiers have only to dance
To the tune of the Can-can to Berlin.

"But as soon as he gets to the bank of the Rhine,
He'll be met by the great German army."
Then the Chancellor laughed, and he said, "I will dine,
For I see nothing much to alarm me."

Yet still as he went out he paused by the door
(For his mind was in truth heavy laden),
And he saw a stout fellow, equipped for the war,
Embracing a fair-haired young maiden.

"Ho! ho!" said the Chancellor, "this will not do,
For Mars to be toying with Venus,
When these Frenchmen are coming—a rascally crew!—
And the Rhine only flowing between us."

So the wary old fox, just in order to hear,
Strode one or two huge paces nearer;
And he heard the youth say, "More than life art thou dear;
But, O loved one, the Fatherland's dearer."

Then the maid dried her tears and looked up in his eyes,
And she said, "Thou of loving art worthy:
When all are in danger no brave man e'er flies,
And thy love should spur on—not deter thee."

The Chancellor took a cigar, which he lit,
And he muttered, "Here 's naught to alarm me;
By Heaven! I swear they are both of them fit
To march with the great German army."

Arthur Patchett Martin

My Cousin From Pall Mall

There’s nothing so exasperates a true Australian youth,
Whatever be his rank in life, be he cultured or uncouth,
As the manner of a London swell. Now it chanced, the other day,
That one came out, consigned to me—a cousin, by the way.

As he landed from the steamer at the somewhat dirty pier,
He took my hand; and lispingly remarked, ‘How very queer!
I’m glad, of course, to see you—but you must admit this place,
With all its mixed surroundings, is a national disgrace.’

I defended not that dirty pier, not a word escaped my lips;
I pointed not—though well I might—to the huge three-masted ships;
For, although with patriotic pride my soul was all aglow,
I remembered Trollope’s parting words, ‘Victorians do not blow.’

On the morrow through the city we sauntered, arm in arm;
I strove to do the cicerone—my style was grand and calm.
I showed him all the lions—but I noted with despair
His smile, his drawl, his eye-glass, and his supercilious air.

As we strolled along that crowded street, where Fashion holds proud sway,
He deigned to glance at every thing, but not one word did say;
I really thought he was impressed by its well-deserved renown
Till he drawled, ‘Not bad—not bad at all—for a provincial town.’

Just as he spoke there chanced to pass a most bewitching girl,
And I said, ‘Dear cousin, is she not fit bride for any earl?’
He glanced, with upraised eyebrows and a patronizing smile,
Then lisped, ‘She’s pretty, not a doubt, but what a want of style!’

We paused a moment just before a spacious House of Prayer;
Said he, ‘Dear me! Good gracious! What’s this ugly brick affair—
A second-rate gin-palace?’ ‘Cease, cease,’ I said; ‘you must—
O spare me,’— here my sobs burst forth, I was humbled to the dust.

But, unmindful of my agonies, in the slowest of slow drawls,
He lisped away for hours of the Abbey and St. Paul’s,
Till those grand historic names had for me a hateful sound,
And I wished the noble piles themselves were levelled to the ground,

My young bright life seemed blasted, my hopes were dead and gone,
No blighted lover ever felt so gloomy and forlorn;
I'd reached the suicidal stage—and the reason of it all,
This supercilious London swell, his eye-glass and his drawl.

But, though hidden, still there's present, in out darkest hour of woe,
A sense of respite and relief, although we may not know
The way that gracious Providence will choose to right the wrong,
So I forthwith ceased my bitter tears—I suffered and was strong.

Then we strolled into the Club, where he again commenced to speak,
But I interrupted saying, 'Let us leave town for a week.
I see that Melbourne bores you—nay, nay, I know it's true;
Let us wander 'midst the gum-trees, and observe the kangaroo.'

My words were soft and gentle, and none could have discerned
How, beneath my calm demeanour, volcanic fury burned.
And my cousin straight consented, as his wine he slowly sipped,
To see the gay Marsupial and the gloomy Eucalypt.

Ah! who has ever journeyed on a glorious summer night
Through the weird Australian bush-land without feeling of delight?
The dense untrodden forest, in the moonlight coldly pale,
Brings before our wondering eyes again the scenes of fairy tale.

No sound is heard, save where one treads upon the lonely track;
We lose our dull grey manhood, and to early youth go back—
To scenes and days long passed away, and seem again to greet
Our youthful dreams, so rudely crushed like the grass beneath our feet.

'Twas such a night we wandered forth; we never spoke a word
(I was too full of thought for speech—to him no thought occurred)
When, gazing from the silent earth to the star-lit silent sky,
My cousin in amazement dropped his eye-glass from his eye.

At last, I thought his soul was moved by the grandeur of the scene
(As the most prosaic Colonist's I'm certain would have been),
Till he replaced his eye-glass, and remarked—'This may be well,
But one who's civilized prefers the pavement of Pall Mall.'

I swerved not from that moment from my purpose foul and grim;

I never deigned to speak one word, nor even glanced at him;
But suddenly I seized his throat,…he gave one dreadful groan,
And I, who had gone forth with him, that night returned alone.

Arthur Patchett Martin

The Cynic Of The Woods

Come I from busy haunts of men,
With nature to commune,
Which you, it seems, observe, and then
Laugh out, like some buffoon.

You cease, and through the forest drear
I pace, with sense of awe;
When once again upon my ear
Breaks in your harsh guffaw.

I look aloft to yonder place,
Where placidly you sit,
And tell you to your very face,
I do not like your wit.

I'm in no mood for blatant jest,
I hate your mocking song,
My weary soul demands the rest
Denied to it so long.

Besides, there passes through my brain
The poet's love of fame—
Why should not an Australian strain
Immortalize my name?

And so I pace the forest drear,
Filled with a sense of awe,
When louder still upon my ear
Breaks in your harsh guffaw.

Yet truly, Jackass, it may be,
My words are all unjust:
You laugh at what you hear and see,
And laugh because you must.

You've seen Man civilized and rude,
Of varying race and creed,
The black-skinned savage almost nude,
The Englishman in tweed.

And here the lubra oft has strayed,
To rest beneath the boughs,
Where now, perchance, some fair-haired maid
May hear her lover’s vows;

While you from yonder lofty height
Have studied human ways,
And, with a satirist’s delight,
Dissected hidden traits.

Laugh on, laugh on! Your rapturous shout
Again on me intrudes;
But I have found your secret out,
O cynic of the woods!

Well! I confess, grim mocking elf,
Howe’er I rhapsodize,
That I am more in love with self
Than with the earth or skies.

So I will lay the epic by,
That I had just begun:
Why should I scribble? Let me lie
And bask here in the sun.

And let me own, were I endowed
With your fine humorous sense,
I, too, should laugh—ay, quite as loud,
At all Man’s vain pretence.

Arthur Patchett Martin