

Classic Poetry Series

Arthur Bayldon
- poems -

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Arthur Bayldon(20 March 1865 - 26 September 1958)

Arthur Albert Dawson Bayldon, poet, was born on 20 March 1865 at Leeds, Yorkshire, England, son of Charles Henry Bayldon, solicitor, and Matilda Maria, née Dawson. As a student at Leeds Grammar School, he won prizes for swimming, and developed an appreciation of poetry through the scholar J. R. Tutin. His parents having died while he was young, he travelled widely in Europe and, he claimed, in the United States of America and India. In his early twenties he published two volumes of verse which, in their conventional evocation of delight and despair, display a bookish regard for nineteenth-century English poets and an attraction towards Victorian Romantic diction.

Bayldon arrived in Brisbane in 1889, practised freelance journalism, and lost his possessions and money in a flood. In the 1890s he became a prominent Bulletin poet and 'Red Page' critic who embodied many of that paper's characteristics and myths. Independent, egalitarian, egotistic, ostentatious and convivial, he confessed, however, to 'desolate brooding', restlessness and a stoicism relieved by religious faith. His occupations between 1890 and 1930 included those of swagman, rouseabout, phrenologist, full-time motto-writer, lighter-owner, salesman of his own books, insurance agent, picture dealer, clothier's agent, teacher of English composition, literary lecturer, editor of and canvasser for a comic monthly, tea-merchant, private secretary, and advertisement-writer. In cities and towns in Queensland and New South Wales, he recited his verse and, like the poet R. H. Horne, performed 'fancy swimming strokes' for a fee.

Bayldon's poetry was dominated in these years by melancholy realism in depicting the swagman's life, drought, sordid aspects of cities, and the bush as 'hell'. But he wrote in a happier and occasionally more 'majestic' tone on themes of liberty, egalitarianism, his personal philosophy, and his experience of a more Arcadian Australian landscape. His frequently derivative and tritely aphoristic style is interesting as the product of an educated Englishman's adaptation to a nationalistic Australian environment. Bayldon was modest about his poetry, but sensitive about the 'little encouragement ... shown to an Author in Australia'. Less distinguished than his contemporaries [A. G. Stephens](http://www.poemhunter.com/alfred-george-stephens/) and [Christopher Brennan](http://www.poemhunter.com/christopher-john-brennan/), like them he extended the scope of the Bulletin's literary criticism beyond national subject-matter; he wrote brightly and frankly on Byron, Tennyson, Longfellow and Browning as well as on local authors.

Bayldon was in Brisbane in 1897, and published his Poems there that year; in

1900 he moved to Orange, New South Wales, where he married Maude Bernard Leighton on 16 June 1902; they had no children. A collection of short stories, *The Tragedy Behind the Curtain*, was published in Sydney in 1910, but a novel and various other works remained unpublished. His verse included *Collected Poems* (Sydney, 1932) and four other volumes.

During and after World War I Bayldon turned more to patriotic, democratic and optimistic themes. He had settled in Sydney in the 1920s or earlier. In 1930 he suffered 'another breakdown', which he attributed to overwork as a canvasser; though he kept his job he was granted a Commonwealth literary pension of £52 a year. When he died at the Home of the Little Sisters of the Poor, Randwick, on 26 September 1958, he had outlived his wife and all the *Bulletin* poets of the 1890s except [Will Ogilvie](http://www.poemhunter.com/william-henry-ogilvie/) and his friend [Dame Mary Gilmore](http://www.poemhunter.com/dame-mary-gilmore/). He was buried in the Roman Catholic section of Botany cemetery.

A Woman's Mood

I think to-night I could bear it all,
 Even the arrow that cleft the core, --
Could I wait again for your swift footfall,
 And your sunny face coming in at the door.
With the old frank look and the gay young smile,
 And the ring of the words you used to say;
I could almost deem the pain worth while,
 To greet you again in the olden way!

But you stand without in the dark and cold,
 And I may not open the long closed door,
Nor call thro' the night, with the love of old, --
 "Come into the warmth, as in nights of yore!"
I kneel alone in the red fire-glow,
 And hear the wings of the wind sweep by;
You are out afar in the night, I know,
 And the sough of the wind is like a cry.

You are out afar -- and I wait within,
 A grave-eyed woman whose pulse is slow;
The flames round the red coals softly spin,
 And the lonely room's in a rosy glow.
The firelight falls on your vacant chair,
 And the soft brown rug where you used to stand;
Dear, never again shall I see you there,
 Nor lift my head for your seeking hand.

Yet sometimes still, and in spite of all,
 I wistful look at the fastened door,
And wait again for the swift footfall,
 And the gay young voice as in hours of yore.
It still seems strange to be here alone,
 With the rising sob of the wind without;
The sound takes a deep, insisting tone,
 Where the trees are swinging their arms about.

Its moaning reaches the sheltered room,
 And thrills my heart with a sense of pain;
I walk to the window, and pierce the gloom,

An Old Bush Road

Dear old road, wheel-worn and broken,
 Winding thro' the forest green,
Barred with shadow and with sunshine,
 Misty vistas drawn between.
Grim, scarred bluegums ranged austerely,
 Lifting blackened columns each
To the large, fair fields of azure,
 Stretching ever out of reach.

See the hardy bracken growing
 Round the fallen limbs of trees;
And the sharp reeds from the marshes,
 Washed across the flooded leas;
And the olive rushes, leaning
 All their pointed spears to cast
Slender shadows on the roadway,
 While the faint, slow wind creeps past.

Ancient ruts grown round with grasses,
 Soft old hollows filled with rain;
Rough, gnarled roots all twisting queerly,
 Dark with many a weather-stain.
Lichens moist upon the fences,
 Twiners close against the logs;
Yellow fungus in the thickets,
 Vivid mosses in the bogs.

Dear old road, wheel-worn and broken,
 What delights in thee I find!
Subtle charm and tender fancy,
 Like a fragrance in the mind.
Thy old ways have set me dreaming,
 And out-lived illusions rise,
And the soft leaves of the landscape
 Open on my thoughtful eyes.

See the clump of wattles, standing
 Dead and sapless on the rise;
When their boughs were full of beauty,

Arthur Bayldon

Crabs

(Written on the Queensland Beach)

Poisonous, bloated, crab-like shapes
Crawl in gangs around these capes—
Stopping here and feeding there;
Listening, crawling everywhere;
Searching every rotten weed
With a frothing wild-eyed greed;
Fighting o'er a lump of scurf,
Or a red boil of the earth;
Thrusting up their writhing claws
To their grinning, fiend-like maws.
And these horrid creatures wet
With a thick unwholesome sweat
Have most hideous banquets here
On the poor drowned marineer.
Down they hurry eagerly,
Chittering all the way with glee;
They have smelt the tainted air
From that body festering there.
How they twitch their claws and pry
Into each distorted eye;
How they spit on him with spite
As their nippers pinch and bite;
How they strip him clean and bare,
Leaving not a morsel there,
Till they're gorged and all squat near
Fleshless remnants with a leer.
When the billows near them roll,
Each will scoop himself a hole
In the mudbank and therein
Sleep like an embodied sin.
In the world so crass and blind
Human crabs feed on their kind—
All that fall into their power;
Skulking near their dismal holes,
They sniff out poor wretched souls
Thrown by life's unpitying sea
On the beach of misery.

Arthur Bayldon

Crabs

(On a Queensland Beach)

Poisonous, bloated, crab-like shapes
Crawl in gangs around these capes-
Stopping here and feeding there,
Listening, crawling everywhere;
Searching every rotten weed
With a frothing, wild-eyed greed:
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How they strip him clean and bare,
Leaving not a morsel there,
Till they're gorged and all squat near
Fleshless remnant with a leer.
When the billows near them roll
Each will scope himself a hole
In the mud-banks, and therein
Sleep like an embodied sin.

In the world so crass and blind
Human crabs feed on their kind:
Glutted creatures that devour
All that fall within their power;
Skulking each near his own hole,

They smell out each human soul
Tossed up on Life's stony shore,
Weary, friendless, weak and poor.

Arthur Bayldon

Marlowe

With eastern banners flaunting in the breeze
Royal processions, sounding fife and gong
And showering jewels on the jostling throng,
March to the tramp of Marlowe's harmonies.
He drained life's brimming goblet to the lees;
He recked not that a peer superb and strong
Would tune great notes to his impassioned song
And top his cannonading lines with ease.
To the wild clash of cymbals we behold
The tragic ending of his youthful life;
The revelry of kisses bought with gold,
The jest and jealous rival and the strife,
A harlot weeping o'er a corpse scarce cold,
A scullion fleeing with a bloody knife.

Arthur Bayldon

Night-Silence

The patient stars are shining large and clear;
The crescent moon hangs like a tilted bowl;
So calm, so still, that I can almost hear
Thoughts stirring in the chambers of my soul.

Arthur Bayldon

Sunset

The weary wind is slumbering on the wing:
Leaping from out meek twilight's purpling blue
Burns the proud star of eve as though it knew
It was the big king jewel quivering
On the black turban of advancing night.
In the dim west the soldiers of the sun
Strike all their royal colours one by one,
Reluctantly surrender every height.

Arthur Bayldon

The Dead Poet

Never again shall he with wizard sleight
Ensare on threshold of his soul the bright
Unearthly splendors that would oft alight,
And in the magic web of melody
Display them flashing as when they were free.
Never again shall he be inflamed by Spring
Soar to the gods to hear Apollo sing
Songs ah! so sweet and with so tense a lyre
They seemed as nectar flowing through white fire.
Never again shall he fold truths in rhyme
And thrust them clinging 'neath the wings of Time,
Shape a fine fancy with unfaltering taste,
Fondling the colors that the sounds embraced;
Or with eyes dim from dreaming watch the slow
Ascending sun's plume on a fervid glow,
And pinions palely spreading far away;
Or hear at night, when on his couch he lay,
The moaning of the moonlit toiling sea
With burden of o'erwhelming memory,
Seeming to carry in an undertone
Rumors of dauntless heroes he had known,
Who bearded even gods to glut desire
And fought beneath the thunder of their ire.
Lured by the glamor of translunar dreams
He chased through mist the ever-fleeting gleams.
Aloof from wealth's red bubbled vanities,
Contented to be thought not worldly wise
Since he, when flamed the mantle of the seer,
In mood majestic trod the magian sphere
Where nature's veil at his authentic glance
Fell quivering from her fire-bright countenance,
And heard, like an abysmal heaving sea,
The movement of the Eternal Harmony.

Arthur Bayldon

The Sea

Ere Greece soared, showering sovranities of light,
Ere Rome shook earth with her tremendous tread,
Ere yon blue-feasting sun-god burst blood-red,
Beneath thee slept thy prodigy, O Night!
Aeons have ta'en like dreams their strange, slow flight,
And vastest, tiniest, creatures paved her bed,
E'en cities sapped by the usurping spread
Of her imperious waves have sunk from sight
Since she first chanted her colossal psalms
That swell and sink beneath the listening stars;
Oft, as with myriad drums beating to arms,
She thunders out the grandeur of her wars;
Then shifts through moaning moods her wizard charms
Of slow flutes and caressing, gay guitars.

Arthur Bayldon

To America In 1915

We watch your attitudes with candid eyes:
Plain men are we, not given much to prate,
Bluntly sincere, keenly compassionate
But lions in our wrath at treacheries;
Britons are we though under Austral skies
And of our lineage proud, fearless of Fate
For we have stamped our manhood with the great
Traditions – Britain's glorious legacies.

We've given ample proof we are a friend
Pledged to the truths your Pilgrim Fathers kened,
The pure ideals of a people free
Which – are you blind? – our British arms defend
From ravages of vandals that would rend
The very vitals of Democracy.

Arthur Bayldon

Why I Am Poor

Because, my friends I have a savage glee
In drinking to the dregs the draughts of life
And love to feel my spirit spreading free,
Stretching itself through every calm and strife
Or stealing through the secret souls of others;
Because, thank God! I'm made of simple stuff
And prize the friendship of my ragged brothers;
Because I love my liberty enough
To starve for it at times; because, forsooth,
I do not flout my manhood for a fee
Or care a straw for anything but Truth
And the warm pulse of human sympathy;
Because, in brief, I want no worldly wealth
But riches of the soul and buoyant health.

Arthur Bayldon