

Classic Poetry Series

William Baylebridge

- 10 poems -

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William Baylebridge (1883 - 1942)

William Baylebridge was the pseudonym of Charles William Blocksidge (12 December 1883 – 7 May 1942), an Australian poet and short-story writer.

Blocksidge was born in Brisbane, Queensland, the son of George Henry Blocksidge, an auctioneer and estate agent. He was educated at Brisbane Grammar School and by a private tutor David Owen, M.A., a classical scholar who became a close friend.

In 1908 Blocksidge travelled to London with his friend Robert Graham Brown. He travelled the Continent and published ten books including two of prose, beginning with *Songs of the South*, which was followed a year later by *Australia to England and other Verses*. Both of these books were suppressed shortly after their publication. In 1910 no fewer than four volumes were privately printed, *Moreton Miles*, *Southern Songs*, *A Northern Trail*, and *The New Life*, of which copies were sent to the principal public libraries, but few, if any, were sold to the public. There was no publisher's name on any of the volumes, and nothing to suggest where they had been printed. One of these books, however, *The New Life*, was reviewed in *The Bulletin* on 14 March 1912, and the anonymous reviewer, most likely Arthur Henry Adams, pronounced it "an astonishing thing to have come from Australia--astonishing in its crudeness and occasional strength, equally astonishing in its gassy rhetoric and its foolishness". In another place he suggested that here was "a new prophet, a new poet--or a new lunatic". But evidently the effects of the volume's strength were greater than those of its weakness, for the book was referred to several times in later issues. *Life's Testament*, c. 1914, *A Wreath*, c. 1916, and *Seven Tales*, 1916, were also privately printed, and attracted no notice, but in 1919 a volume of *Selected Poems* was published by Gordon and Gotch in Brisbane which slowly made its way, helped by a literary group at Melbourne of whom Vance and Nettie Palmer and Frank Wilmot were the leaders. Baylebridge had returned to Queensland in 1919, but soon moved to Sydney. He had travelled extensively in Europe, Egypt and the East, and is stated to have done "special literary work" during World War I. His familiarity with the subjects of the stories in his *An Anzac Muster*, privately printed in 1921, suggests that he had personal experience at the front, but there appears to be no evidence to show that he belonged to any of the fighting forces.

As Baylebridge, he was considered by some as a one of the leading Australian poets in his day, but modern critics have a higher view of his short stories than his poetry, which has been called "unwieldy" (cf Roberts). Historians and literary historians today condemn Baylebridge's political agenda of populist nationalism (cf Jupp), as well as his interest in vitalism. During his time in London, he developed Nietzschean ideas about Australia's

future, which prefigure interwar fascism (cf Davison). Baylebridge died on 7 May 1942, he was unmarried.

Works:

Moreton Miles (1910)
The New Life (1910)
Life's Testament (1914)
Seven Tales (1916)
A Wreath (1916)
Selected Poems (1919)
Love Redeemed (1934)
Sextains (1939)
This Vital Flesh (1939)

After the Storm

The storm is done--the lightning with its lust
To rend the unhallowed dome in ruin dire;
The purple heaps, from the rank chaos thrust
On sheets of fell and inauspicious fire;
The thunder bellowing loud on every bound;
The hissing bolt, so tossed as to complete
All permutations of Satanic sound;
The flood that opened heaven and ransomed it.
Benign now is that beatific blue.
The flame that fires the hill is now remote
From aught in evil. Clemency anew
--Crowns every leaf, and sings in every throat.
Shall, then, the rage of earth and heaven depart,
And not the rancour of the unsensing heart?

William Baylebridge

Flesh and Spirit

No! 'twas the questing dream that first achieved her--
More sensed for knowing no material part,
More real that no false outward eye perceived her,
Too gross, but that pure eye within my heart.
Nor feigned I, as my spirit so embraced her,
These arms encumbered might; ah! could they too,
Would she not fade as vision e'er effaced her,
As loves in this weak flesh so often do?
In flesh she might escape me, might expire
In the vicissitudes through flesh that range;
But, being the shadow of my heart's desire,
She could not pass beyond me, could not change.
O paradox! Want food--you are richer fed!
Lack the coarse crumbs--you find diviner bread!

William Baylebridge

II from Life's Testament

The brain, the blood, the busy thews
That quickened in the primal ooze
Support me yet; till ice shall grip
The heart of Earth, no strength they'll lose.

They take my thought, they laugh, they run—
Ere megatherial moons, begun;
And shall, till they shall drop within
The shattering whirlwinds of the sun.

In subtle and essential ways,
Rich with innumerable days,
To mould, to charge, to impel me still,
Each through my broadest being plays.

They surged to this hour, this transfuse—
The brain, the blood, the busy thews;
That act of mine the ultimate stars
Shall look on sprang in primal ooze.

William Baylebridge

Life and death

This world is driven by two contending powers--
Love, that coerceth Heaven to dwell with dust,
And that dire pledge of Hell's self-perjured Lust--
And as we list must Heaven and Hell be ours.
Not light the election runs: lo, each devours
That savour set in each, while equal gust
Each uses; yet our choice support we must--
Blest wine or, this rejected, sweat that sours.
Love, oft through Hell that seems, acclaims what Heaven!
But Lust, through seeming Heaven, with easy breath
Slides on to Hell, how soon, how richly given!
If Love to heavenly state so quickeneth,
While Lust must e'er in cheating Hell be shriven,
They sponsor what, these powers, but Life and Death?

William Baylebridge

Love's Saint

Some lip will use her name--a rapt surprise,
Passing the heart's set ward, upon me steals.
One word, to me, doth one saint canonize;
And all the acquiescence of earth and heaven it seals.
I name that name, and doubt for me has ending,
And Sorrow, strong of old, forgets her part;
The battle-cry it is, to God ascending,
For all the triumphs of my labouring heart.
Ah, what is beauty's charge, what true, what dearest,
But that one lovely word will speak it home?
To splendour, to humility, 'tis nearest;
And the last depths of longing it can plumb.
The plaudit of all joy, all good it bears;
I breathe it, and a breath completes my prayers.

William Baylebridge

Number And Nationality

Since number needs, let our convention be
More large and simple here, more profitably free.

William Baylebridge

Proverbs

One continent, one creed, one skin -
Our health and savour lie therein.
From wars and heavy things this grace is won -
They urge our pulse to unison.
Shall this remoteness hinder thee?
Pluck thence a call to sovereignty -
Thou centre of the world to be!
The servile State is what? a prison - one
For superseded life or, strictly, none.
Where the ignoble State is sanctified
See universal suicide.
Not numbers shall the State exalt
If civic virtue be at fault.
If virtue grounds but on negation,
Seek other ground on which to build a nation.
The larger good, supplanting this, is gall -
How else? - to the overreaching of the small.
A "fortune" won: a speciousness the State
Will blot as illegitimate.
National growth how presses! Shall it be
For creed or caste put off whose prophets see
No virtue in the essential unity?
That knife for thee - thou help'st them sharpen it.
Where is thy spirit? where thy wit?
'Tis better, much! But who has felt and proved,
Till hate the foe hath grappled, how he loved?
What takes its stature, whole, erect,
Till measured in the opposed effect?
Too much we can respect the fence
Of aptness and expedience.
Why, pledged there, of the sepulchre complain?
Earth shall fling out its flower again.
Creation, life's one satisfaction,
Stumbles first in the abstraction.
Who move not to a goal defined
Will speed as do their next of kin, the blind.
What makes the compromising bosom sure
Hath the ordained investiture.
What here is visioned, fact will prove -
As we put on the means, and move.

William Baylebridge

To winter in the Midst of his Reign

Thou grim physician, armed with septic shears,
Thou that dissemblest even in death's repose
Earth's quiet pulse and her remedial throes,
How dull thy visage on this day appears!
Let now the dismal heaven give vent, its tears
Come frozen ever; no gale coeval blows
Filled with the ravaged perfume of the rose;
And keep not all fair things forsaken biers?
O haste, then, spiritless minister, thy pains
To charge the sources of the unfruitful earth
For harvests blest in wood, in plot and lawn!
O laggard, on! till fire re-flood the veins
Of Spring here, ay, to trip the vales with Mirth,
As, long night over, does the exulting dawn!

William Baylebridge

True Being

True Being

Rich hour! is not thy gift a radiant thing?
The truth here blazoned in this marble and gold,
Here writ in this refulgence manifold,
Hath sunned my groped redemption: lo, I fling--
How lightly!--off ungraced desire; I cling
To that faith firm this splendour hath retold:
My spirit, towered, doth its sheer track behold,
And shakes the dust of chaos from its wing.
Life that is death, riches named with a lie,
This fane would, that the sum of both employs,
Your tears unseal if ignorance could weep.
Is not true being locked in tombs? and die
Must not we in death ere life's innater joys
We may, as I now, clasp as in a sleep?

William Baylebridge

XXXII from Love Redeemed

Love feeds, like Intellect, his lamp with truth;
In the clear truths he finds its flame is measured.
And is not flesh, there, verity? In sooth!
So Love not by this fantasy is pleased
That slurs the fact in flesh. Its atmosphere,
Too rare and nebulous, no fusing shows;
Its manna too ambrosial is and sheer:
Love craves that union, earthly hunger knows.
O sage is Love—he seeks the living line,
The miracles in breathing flesh explores,
The riches in the depth of sense, divine,
The veiled things only eternal longing pours
Light unobscured on—yes, his doubting done,
With flesh the imminent two converts to one.

William Baylebridge