



THE POEMS OF
SAMUEL JASON MARLES

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Cover photo is of Florence Marles Kelly,
daughter of Samuel Jason Marles, c. 1903

Introduction

My great-grandfather was born around 1830, the son of Samuel Marles and Mary Brewer, of Sandford in Devon. He was named Samuel for his father and Jason for his paternal grandmother, Mary Jason. He lived as a young man in Manchester, and, according to the very few family traditions I heard as I was growing up, mostly in Bristol, where one of his poems was signed. He was, by the same tradition, said to be an artisan skilled in japan work, painting fine images on tables and cabinets. But he was a poet too; the few poems left are certainly competent enough to earn him that title.

He seems to have emigrated to New York around 1848 — he speaks, in one of the few notes in his hand that survive, of having “lived in the country thirteen years at peace.” Nonetheless, two of the poems are dated in England during the decade preceding. I don’t know what to make of that apparent discrepancy. He wrote that explanatory note in 1861, as he was about to leave for the War—he went as a sharpshooter in Col. Berdan’s company — a group I later discovered was made up largely of English immigrants. Marles had been living in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, when he felt obligated to go to the aid of his new country. His neighborhood, Northside, was heavily British, and in fact developed an accent of its own, by which I (a hundred years later) was identified by a Harvard linguist. It somehow stayed with my grandmother, my father, and me.

I have his naturalization papers, which includes his required abjuration of fealty to the British crown, specifically Queen Victoria. As a child in love with things English I read those lines with sorrow, and reflected that when his grandson, my father, Samuel Jason Kelly, was born, Queen Victoria was still on the throne.

The family knew not much more. He went off to war, was wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg, was invalided out of the army. And then, with no explanation that survives, he left America, never to return. He went as far as I can find out first to the Raj: to Karachi in what

was then called the Sind in British India, and is now Pakistan. There he lived evidently for some time — a few letters survive, promising his wife Jane (Jane Brasse, daughter of the Rev. John Brasse of Bedfordshire), that she would “ride in a carriage” and be prosperous.

Then nothing. The letters and their envelopes, with their quaint stamps (Queen Victoria again) and postmarks are indeed from Karachi. But family tradition spoke of how Marles went to Australia in search of gold. Gold rush, Australia, silence. There was some dark talk about gold indeed, being sent back to my great-grandmother Jane, but gold that was somehow stolen or appropriated by a wicked Uncle John — of whom nothing was known, or at least nothing was told. I do know that there are people in Australia who bear that very unusual name, Marles, and they may be the only evidence of his later life.

But there are poems. My father remembers when he was a child being shown a journal or diary of many pages, he recalls, of all different colors, written by Marles in England and America, poems among them. But the book had been used by two generations of children to play with, who scribbled and wrote over and tore. Only a few pages survived with text intact. The present little book is the first publication of the surviving poems of Samuel Jason Marles.

What is immediately striking is the level of literacy, the accuracy of spelling, from a time when many poets were slacker in their obedience to the rules. Marles must have been an ardent reader, a believer in the worth and dignity of language, and of poetry.

I have thought of him all my life, and feel that it’s time and maybe long past time, for me to honor his memory by letting the few words of his that survive speak aloud again.

Marles’s daughter was Florence Marles, born around 1860, who married James Kelly (a detective in the New York Police and friend of the mayor). Florence and James had thirteen children, the youngest of whom was my father, born in 1900. James died in 1906, Florence in

1933, two years before I was born. (In fact I knew none of my grandparents; my mother was Margaret Rose Kane, and her mother Mary Farley died in the 1918 flu epidemic, and my mother's father, Thomas Albert Kane, died in 1935, on the very day I was born.)

All this to say how deeply felt these poems are for me as things in themselves, and as the only palpable evidence of all those years.

—Robert Kelly

We Praise Thee O God

Deep sea reflects Heavens glory back
Calmly reveals her sunlit smiling track
Though shattered oft its polished face
Conglomerates the starry space
Present returns to duty smooth and bright
Paints the vast footsteps of th' Eternal Light
Swelling Hallelujah's greet
Heaven's All beauteous mercy Seat
Glorious Hosts the Lyric string
Touch and joyous endless sing
While tis night on earthly plains
Th' Glowing moon wafts gentle strains
O'er silent firmament while play
Gladdened stars their milky way
Mysterious Echo o'er the sod
Whispers the wonders of its God!!

Bristol 1856

A Night on the Deep

Bright ruler of Day: thou hast sunk thee to rest
And left me alone ... for thy Home in the West
Bathed thee in seas of crimson dye
While the circling waves roll nimbly by
Thy Life blood hath tinged the clouds who are sweeping
[The Horizon distant — who in fancy seems weeping]
Thy glowing departure thou swift wing of time
While to thy Creator my Spirit doth climb
 But Hist thou Soarer up to Heaven th' free
 Come watch thy Maker's wonders on the Sea.

With the Sunsett hour's departing ray
Th' Calm hath vanished — Lo the white spray
Gathering is dashing 'neath the erst while becalm'd bow
Of the bright Barque whose forward watch now sings —
See her white sails are fluttering in the breeze. Now
Fill now belly forth and straining stretch their wings.

Startling's th' Captaine's shout you Helm hard up man fill away
Your Main-Fore-Mizen Royal halyard's lower I say
Up furll and snugly furll, Hurrah!!

But Hark!! ... above borne on the rushing breeze
One piercing shriek is heard enough the soul to freeze
Ere the wild Echo's spent amid the Howling din
Of these grim murderers of our kin
The Shout resounds — **"A man is overboard!!"**
The sailors Hear — repeat — the dull sea only roared

The night it gathers on apace
The tempest speeds an awful race
On the relentless foe sweeps on
Nor stops to heed the Havoc done

Down you to' galn sails flying jib run down
Quick the successive orders fly around
Scarce are they stowed its man the jib, down haul
Aft here my lads mizen reef-tackle fall
A single reef tis a Nor'western squall
March on ye Western waves deaf to the grief of all.

The clouds are gathering blackness still
The wind's in blasts are echoing shrill
The monster wave advances up
Her Jaws with terror fills the Cup
Which lately seemed the Fleur-de-lis
Of deep Intoxicating Glee —

In terror's haste the Watch is called
Main Topsail's reefed the courses furl'd
Scarce down the rigging do they glide
Ere with impetuous force and mighty stride
These ruthless scourges of the measured main
Rush madly on the gallant Craft whose heaving timbers strain

The lifts now part the sheets two shrouds
Sails torn from yards — the poles are bare
The Lightning splits the clouds
The thunder cleaves the air

The pent up fury of a Universe seemed uttering one Hoarse roar,
Heavens whole Artillery seemed centered in one mighty bore
Whence poured the sweeping flood creation groaned at sore

Upheaving toss'd and quivering on the mad cap'd wave is
borne

The noble Ship like some proud courser foaming worn
With the struggle bends him to the Blast.
One Shriek one Crash her spars too gone at Last
She writhes she wallows — trembles heaves again
The gear is cut her masts float o'er the main

As though now gluttoned with her fury wild
The storm subsides — the Sun broke forth and Smiled
Man know thyself let not thy Pride be overstrained
The night spend not “thy will” ...But what Thy God ordained.

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Composed by S.J.M.

at Sea after a Storm

on the Atlantic ... 1857

The Wanderer and His Home

I've wandered o'er the Blue girt sea
O'er oceans worn with care
Trode the ship's deck wild bounding free
My Home — it was not there

I've wandered where the burning Sun
With scorching ray did blare
This desert land I soon did shun
My Home — it was not there

I've wandered where the Iceberg bright
Reflected Light did wear,
Yet turned me from this wondrous sight
My Home — it was not there

I've wandered where the thunder rolled
Forked lightning flashed so rare
Where the tornado solemn toll'd
My Home — it was not there.

I've wandered mid the Forrest wild
And breathed its fresh'ning air
Though pluck't its flowers like a child
My Home — it was not there.

I've wandered by the Rivulet
And watched its banks so fair
Drunk music from its tones while yet
My Home — it was not there

I've wandered mid Majestic Rocks
And plains the wild beasts lair,
Witnessed fair nature's rudest shocks
My Home — it was not there.

I've wandered mid the White the Black
The savage like some bear
The civilized who much doth lack,
My Home — it was not there

I've wandered to a Foreign Clime
My heart seemed stript and bare
Thought gushing o'er my soul did chime
My Home — thou art elsewhere

I've wandered gazing on the Cloud
God's curtain shrouding where
In Love and Holiness — I'm proud
To own — My Home — is there.

Stoke St Mary 1856