

Classic Poetry Series

Ernest G Moll
- poems -

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Ernest G Moll(25 August 1900 - 15 May 1997)

Ernest Moll was born in Murtoa, Victoria, on 25 August 1900 and moved to Strathdown, Gerogery, New South Wales in 1909. From 1913-18 he attended Concordia College, Adelaide and at the age of 20 moved to the United States for study, graduating Bachelor of Arts, Lawrence College in 1922 and Master of Arts, Harvard University in 1923.

Having lectured at Colorado College from 1923 to 1925, Moll returned to Australia 1925 to 1926 where he collected and imported 3 000 Australian native birds to the United States. In 1927 he again took up his teaching position at Colorado College wher he also published his his first book of verse, *Sedge fire*. In the same year (on 24 September) he married Nieva Remington with whom he had two children, Richard and Carolyn. A year later Moll was appointed Assistant Professor of English at the University of Oregon, an institution where he remained until his retirement in 1966.

From 1931 onwards Moll published fourteen poetry collections, one book of history and two books on poetry appreciation. His 1940 collection of poetry, *Cut from mulga*, was chosen by the Commonwealth Literary Committee as best book of the year. In 1966 Moll etired from the University of Oregon, and was awarded the University Medal for Distinguished Academic Service. Having moved to Oroville, California in 1972, Moll continued writing until his death there on 15 May 1997.

Moll maintained his connections with Australia, lecturing on exchange at Sydney Teachers' College 1939 to 1940, and returning frequently to the border region, particularly Yackandah.

Farm Scene

They come each morning to the gate,
are milked and wander off to feed;
six cows, a calf and in the lead
a brindled bull, old, fat sedate.

And every evening they are back,
loafing along the quarter-mile
of dusty lane in single file,
the old bull trailing up the track.

I would not load with thought that brings
meanings deep-conjured in the mind
this quiet scene-but here I find
the rhythm of eternal things.

And envy him who takes his pail
jingling to met them at the gate;
sun-up, sun-down, that constant date
which neither he nor they will fail.

I envy him whose life allows
him the cool blessedness; to stand
and simply watch the coming and
later the going of the cows.

Ernest G Moll

Sheep-Killer

I should have known, when I undid his chain,
That darkness had been busy at his brain
As at an anvil, sharpening a fang.
I should have known it by the glint that sprang
Into his eyes when the chain fell and he
Stood stiffly there, as though to let me see
That he had all the time in the world to spare,
If I so felt, to match me stare for stare,
His heart being innocent.

I watched him go
Out through the gate with just the slightest show
Of hurry in his trot, as though he kept
His body back from where his thoughts leapt
Ahead to the red kill; that holding back
A dog will never show unless the track
He follows is a secret he would keep
From men whose fingers smell of lambs and sheep.

I should have known, had I but had the eye,
That strain in hip and curving flank and thigh
For what must happen in a hawk's neck when
He spots the quail way down there, but with men
Too near in yard or paddock to make safe
The whistling lunge; the tension of that chafe
That is when lust has the red tongue on fire
But cunning is the muzzle on desire.

So he went slowly till I lost him quite
In the thick fog that made another night
Over the paddocks where beneath the trees
The lambs would be hard at it on their knees
Draining the heavy udders. In that fog
A lamb would learn the coming of a dog
Too late even to get upon its feet,
Or in one wild and lost and desperate bleat
To say that death was hard and life was sweet.

He got his fifty in a mile that day,

Crunched through the shoulders in the killer's way,
Ribs broken in to crush the leaping heart.
Though great my loss, I recognized the art
With which the thing was done. What speed, what power,
He must have known for that one breathless hour,
When long restraint was straw before the urge
Of instinct, the red longing, the hot surge
That leapt and thundered and would not be still
Till fifty lambs lay dead about the hill!

He always liked to work the sheep close in,
Sniffing the blood, no doubt, beneath the skin
He dared not tear because of watching eyes.
Why did I trust that shifty compromise!
Why must sheep stand, by fear together drifted,
Helpless as flowers when the scythe is lifted!
Who was at fault, the dog, or I, or the sheep?

But since a farmer needs must have his sleep,
That night I put a bullet in his head,
Gave the world back to God, and went to bed.

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