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Tupper, Martin Farquhar, 1810-1889
Papers
Poet, Playwright

Martin Farquhar Tupper papers

Includes twelve signed holograph letters and notes, approximately 1848-1886. Martin Tupper is the author of several plays and hundreds of poems.

Biographical entry on Martin Farquhar Tupper from the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography online, www.oxforddnb.com:

Tupper, Martin Farquhar (1810-1889), poet and writer, was born at 20 Devonshire Place, Marylebone, Middlesex, on 17 July 1810, the eldest of five sons of Dr. Martin Tupper FRS (1780-1844), a successful London physician, and his wife, Ellin Devis Marris (d. 1847), daughter of the Lincolnshire landscape painter Robert Marris. At the age of seven Tupper was sent to school at Eggesfield House, Brentford Butts, but he was removed after less than a year and transferred to Eagle House, Brook Green, where he remained until 1821, when he entered Charterhouse. Already afflicted with a bad stammer (the result, perhaps of mistreatment at Eggesfield House), he was ill-suited for life at a large public school and at about the age of sixteen he was withdrawn from Charterhouse and sent to a succession of private tutors until his matriculation from Christ Church, Oxford on 21 May 1828. At Oxford, although his stammer precluded him from honours, Tupper read assiduously and formed what became a lifelong, if sometimes strained, friendship with W.E. Gladstone, whom in 1830 he beat for a theological prize offered by the regius professor of divinity. Following his graduation in 1832 (he proceeded MA in 1835 and DCL in 1847), Tupper's preference would have been to take orders (he had been a fervent evangelical since childhood), but his halting speech once again proved an impediment and he decided instead to enter Lincoln's Inn. On 26 November 1835, the day after he was called to the bar, Tupper married his cousin Isabelle Devis (1811-1885), the younger of two daughters of the historical painter Arthur William Devis (1762-1822).

Although he shared chambers with a friend for some years, Tupper never practiced, depending instead on his father's generosity and passing his time in desultory and initially unremunerative authorship. His first book, *Sacra poesis* (1832), had attracted little notice, but in 1837, at the urging of Henry Stebbing, Tupper polished up and extended a series of loosely rhythmical aphorisms on such subjects as marriage, friendship, and humility, which he had presented to his fiancée some years before, and offered them to the publisher Joseph Rickerby. The volume appeared in January 1838 with the title *Proverbial Philosophy: a Book of Thoughts and Arguments* and elicited generally positive reviews. A second edition was immediately undertaken and the book embarked on a quarter of a century of phenomenal popular success. A second series followed in 1842 and by 1860 there had been thirty-eight editions. Translations appeared in most European languages and, for many years, the poet's annual income from the book fluctuated between £500 and £800.

Literary earnings, together with the patrimony he inherited in 1844, enabled Tupper to lead the life of a country gentleman at Albury House in Surrey (which had come to him through his mother's Devis connection) and to support a steadily increasing family. Three

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daughters – Ellin Isabelle (1836-1924), Mary Frances (1838-1920), and Margaret Eleonora (1840-1894) – were followed by four sons – Martin Charles Selwyn (1841-1879), William Knighton (1844-1930), Henry de Beauvoir (1847-1871), and Walter Farquhar (1848-1905); an eighth child, Alice, was born in 1851 but died in 1853.

The responsibilities of family and social life, however, did nothing to check Tupper's literary productivity. Shortly after the appearance of *Proverbial Philosophy* he published *Geraldine* (1838), a continuation of Coleridge's unfinished *Christabel*, for which he was excoriated by John Wilson in *Blackwood's: A Modern Pyramid* appeared in 1839 and in 1841 Tupper produced *An Author's Mind*, consisting of outlines for thirty-four projected books (among them a tragedy on Nero and an epic poem to be entitled 'Home'). This was followed by three novels, one of which, *The Crock of Gold* (1844), went through five editions; *A Thousand Lines* (1845), which included the popular and inspiring 'Never Give Up'; *Probabilities* (1847), in which Tupper tackled religious doubt with more conviction than subtlety; and by more than thirty later publications of widely various length and content. Public events, especially those involving royalty, seldom took place without eliciting at least one metrical effusion, and even the most fugitive of Tupper's enthusiasms generally found expression in print. His interest in excavation issued in a report (1850) on the Roman remains at Farley Heath (it was, indeed, for services to archaeology that he was elected to the Royal Society in 1845); his veneration for Alfred the Great led him not only to organize an Alfred jubilee at Wantage in 1849, but to translate Alfred's poems (1850); his suspicion of the French resulted in fervent championship of the volunteer rifle corps, whom he encouraged with a sheaf of verses and articles (1859).

Despite this prolific output, Tupper's international celebrity continued to rest chiefly on *Proverbial Philosophy*, which, by the mid-1840s, had achieved the status of a runaway best-seller in the United States. In 1851 Tupper, who had long been interested in Angli-American relations (*A Loving Ballad to Brother Jonathan* appeared in 1848), embarked on a wildly successful tour of the eastern States and eastern Canada, fêted wherever he went and dining informally at the White House with President Fillmore. The extent of his prestige can be gauged from the appearance in Philadelphia of a compilation by James Orton entitled *The Proverbialist and Poet* (1852), which consisted almost exclusively of elevating quotations from Tupper, Solomon, and Shakespeare.

Although the first American tour perhaps marked the high point of his reputation, Tupper's popularity remained largely intact until the early 1860s, when his buoyant optimism about things in general began to seem both naïve and outdated. Increasingly he became the butt, not only of serious critics, but also of the comic press: his stately platitudes were remorselessly parodied and his name became a byword for banality. *Proverbial Philosophy* still found a market (in 1867 and 1869 Tupper produced two new series), but editions grew smaller and less frequent. In addition to declining popularity, moreover, Tupper began to experience domestic and financial misfortune. His surviving daughters were a source of comfort (in 1864 they published *Poems by Three Sisters*), but his eldest son became a chronic gambler and alcoholic, whose large debts imposed a serious drain on Tupper's income, already diminished by a series of poor investments.

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Attempts to recoup his position by writing plays failed dismally (*Alfred* was briefly staged at Manchester in 1861, but *Raleigh* and *Washington* found no backers); public readings (the stammer had been overcome long since) produced only marginal profits; and even a second American tour in 1876-7 proved a pale shadow of the first. The civil-list pension of £120 which Gladstone procured for him in 1873 (and which he had first urged on Queen Victoria in 1869) was not only welcome but essential. Albury House was heavily mortgaged and permanently let, and in 1880 the Tupperes moved to a modest semi-detached house at 13 Cintra Park, Upper Norwood, London. Here Tupper passed his final years, still turning out verses on topical subjects which were either geyed or ignored, and working on his rambling, self-congratulatory autobiography, which appeared in 1886, shortly before he suffered a disabling stroke. He lingered on for three more years and died peacefully at his home at Cintra Park on 29 November 1889. He was buried in Albury church, Surrey.

For all his vanity, Tupper emerges as a likeable figure, courageous in adversity, generous, firm in his Christian faith, and industriously dedicated to the pursuit of literary immortality. Of the myriad works on which he based his hope of enduring fame, however, only *Proverbial Philosophy* still occupies even a marginal place in cultural history. Tupper's *magnum opus* enshrined the moral commonplaces of early Victorian bourgeois ideology in a sonorous, pseudo-scriptural language which enhanced their dignity and seemed to guarantee their permanence. He presented as vatic wisdom the established convictions of his readership, which responded by venerating him as a sage. But as those convictions themselves began to crumble in the 1860s, under the pressure of scientific advance and social change, so Tupper's status declined and he came to seem an embarrassing survival from a superseded past, a victim of the progress he had so earnestly celebrated.

ROBERT DINGLEY

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Extent: 1 box (6.5 centimetres)

Box 1 12 folders	Martin Tupper correspondence, 1848-1886 and some undated [18--?]
Folder 1	To My Dear Sir ALS with mourning border Wednesday January 3, 1848
Folder 2	Partial ANS, October 6, 1852
Folder 3	To Mrs. Flower ALS Albury, November 16, 1858
Folder 4	To Mr. Blackett ANS Albury, September 20, 1863
Folder 5	To Dear Sir ANS Averley, November 16, 1875
Folder 6	To Lady Emilie Gray ALS Underhill, Cintra Park, April 25, 1883
Folder 7	To Miss C.F. Bates ALS Underhill, Cintra Park, March 5, 1885
Folder 8	To W. Davenport Adams ANS Cintra Park, June 17, 1886
Folder 9	To Mr. Latter ANS pasted to card [18--?]
Folder 10	To Mr. Napper ALS Albury, June 15 [18--?]

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Folder 11	To E. LeBreton Butler Fragment of ANS pasted to card [18--?]
Folder 12	To Miss Francis ANS November 5, [18--?]

Letter excerpts:

1. M.F. Tupper, October 6, 1852
P.S. Kindly be accurate in your insertion of this. You made a terrible mess of my 'Poor Man's Sunday' ... MFT
2. (England.) Under[h]ill: Cintra Park. Norwood. SE London. March 5. 1885.
My Dear Madam, I have just received your letter of Feb. 18—I cordially thank you for your kind appreciation of the undersigned and his writings,--& I certainly should much like to see your volume of poems; & in especial what you have written about the Dignity of Patience of Genius : a splendid thesis for eloquent discourse ... Very truly your's Martin F. Tupper. Miss C.F. Bates
3. Nov. 16 1875. 5. The Villa – Averley, London. SE. (having left Albury for awhile;--thence this delay in my reply.)
Dear Sir, In answer to your request here is a short holograph, -- & my plainer autograph is overleaf. It is astonishing to me--& somewhat troublesome at times—to find so many people wanting my indifferent handwriting—due not alone to bad pens, -- but to a broken right hand, a horse having trod on it...
4. Underhill : Cintra Park. Upper Norwood. SE. April 25, 1883.
My Dear Madam, I thank you very much for your kind letter, -- one of many which I have been grateful for receiving. My hearty effort has been much blest, -- and is having great influence politically as well as religiously through a vast circulation all over the land...My dear Father died at Southwick Park immediately after Lord Limerick's own death in his arms: and I went down for the sad inquest. In the last (4th) series of my Proverbial Philosophy there is my Memory of the sorrow in an article on 'Sleep'. It will be found on p. 403 of Ward and Lock's cheap fourfold Edition ... Lady Emilie Gray [Cromwell Road].
5. Albury. Nov. 16 1858.
Dear Mrs. Flower, I am sorry you should have thought it necessary to make a special parcel of such very insignificant matters as a kitchen skewer & sundry old pens...P.S. I find the yardmeasure will not conveniently get it, --or may be

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crushed (it is a little silver thimble-thing)--& so I'll send it with the knife some early occasion.

6. Dear Mr. Latter, At almost 3 tomorrow (Friday) I shall call at 187 : so, you can get me ready any thing there may be to see in the way of proofs & so forth. Truly yrs M.F. Tupper Thursday 3rd.
7. Albury. June 15
Dear Mr. Napper, The Bearer, Mrs Ansell, has a grievance about which she wishes to have advice & get redress. Her case, as she states it to me, appears to be on the right side, & her relatives are acting in a way to require enquiry at all events as to a lost will, & property scrambled for, without letters of administration...She is a poor person, and I dare say you will know how to get her acquainted with [Drs. Commons?] at as little expence as need be. Yours faithfully Martin F. Tupper. [penciled note: Eliz Griffith Ansell. Other penciled notes on verso.]
8. Truly yours Martin F. Tupper. E. Le Breton Butler [Sgt.?] 76th Regt.
9. Also, --what do you do with the old picture plates? don't throw them away. – [Side Block seut?]
Sep. 20 1863.
Dear Mr. Blackett, If you have no further use for that beautiful side bookplate of Stephen Layton, I shd. like to possess it – or to have the loan of it—with a view to getting – for private purposes—a few copies bound as gifts to my friends. If you give it (or sell it) to me—or lend it – please to send in the same parcel one of your book lists. Truly yr M.F. Tupper.
10. Albury, Jan. 3. 1848.
My dear [hi] Sive maris ut malim friend, --I have to thank you for another hearty letter; & to tell you how entirely I sympathize --& have for years, --with your nice little green book on the Second Advent. My 'Last time' in Hactenus alludes to a similar doctrine...Martin F. Tupper. [unintelligible after signature]
11. Albury, Guildford. Nov. 5.
Dear Miss Francis, I am much obliged to you for the gift of your very pretty Astroea, this morning received: and I accept with all humility your prospective as well as retrospective gratitude. Your very faithful servant Martin F. Tupper.
12. [postcard recto] W. Davenport Adams [?] 57 Denbigh St SW
[verso] Cintra Park. Norwood SE June 17 1886.

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Dear [hi], Please—as I have no other copy & find it difficult to get one – after you have utilized for your own library [literary?] purpose my Fitzhall's Crock of Gold – let me have it back [by part] as a unique. Truly yrs M.F. Tupper.