



THIS SINGING WORLD

FOR CHILDREN

MODERN POEMS
SELECTED BY
LOUIS UNTERMAYER

*Favorites from the
Century Edition
Pete Matthews Jr*

This Singing World

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CENTURY EDITION
PETE MATTHEWS JR

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Favorites

Dear Sam, Ben, and Mateo,

*Your great-grandfather used to read many of these poems
to Great-Uncle Dan and me at bedtime.
Poems marked ☺ should make you smile.
I hope you love them as much as we did!*

Love – Pop



SEA-FEVER

Sea-Fever *

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's
 shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a
 whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's ¹ over.

John Masefield

* See Note 3.

¹ trick: a watch (turn on duty) at sea.

Fog

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

Carl Sandburg



FWI

The Song of the Ungirt Runners * ¹

We swing ungirded hips,
 And lightened are our eyes;
The rain is on our lips,
 We do not run for prize.
We know not whom we trust
 Nor whitherward we fare,
But we run because we must
 Through the great wide air.

The waters of the seas
 Are troubled as by storm.
The tempest strips the trees
 And does not leave them warm.
Does the tearing tempest pause?
 Do the tree-tops ask it why?
So we run without a cause
 'Neath the big bare sky.

The rain is on our lips,
 We do not run for prize.
But the storm the water whips
 And the wave howls to the skies.
The winds arise and strike it
 And scatter it like sand,
And we run because we like it
 Through the broad bright land.

Charles Hamilton Sorley

* See [Note 7](#).

¹ ungirt: having the belt or restricting garments removed or loosened.



FWI

The Pasture

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I sha'n't be gone long. – You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young,
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I sha'n't be gone long. – *You come too.*

Robert Frost

Afternoon on a Hill

I will be the gladdest thing
Under the sun!
I will touch a hundred flowers
And not pick one.

I will look at cliffs and clouds
With quiet eyes,
Watch the wind bow down the grass,
And the grass rise.

And when lights begin to show
Up from the town,
I will mark which must be mine,
And then start down!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Robert Frost

Pedigree

The pedigree of honey
Does not concern the bee;
A clover, any time, to him
Is aristocracy.

Emily Dickinson

The Rabbit

When they said the time to hide was mine,
I hid back under a thick grape vine.
And while I was still for the time to pass,
A little gray thing came out of the grass.

He hopped his way through the melon bed
And sat down close by a cabbage head.
He sat down close where I could see,
And his big still eyes looked hard at me,

His big eyes bursting out of the rim,
And I looked back very hard at him.

Elizabeth Madox Roberts

The Young Mystic

We sat together close and warm,
My little tired boy and I –
Watching across the evening sky
The coming of the storm.

No rumblings rose, no thunders crashed,
The west-wind scarcely sang aloud;
But from a huge and solid cloud
The summer lightnings flashed.

And then he whispered, “Father, watch;
I think God’s going to light His moon –”
“And when, my boy” . . . “Oh, very soon.
I saw Him strike a match!”

Louis Untermeyer

The Last Leaf *

I saw him once before,
As he passed by the door,
 And again
The pavement stones resound,
As he totters o'er the ground
 With his cane.

They say that in his prime,
Ere the pruning-knife of Time
 Cut him down,
Not a better man was found
By the Crier on his round
 Through the town.

But now he walks the streets,
And he looks at all he meets
 Sad and wan,
And he shakes his feeble head,
That it seems as if he said,
 “They are gone.”

The mossy marbles rest
On the lips that he has prest
 In their bloom,
And the names he loved to hear
Have been carved for many a year
 On the tomb.

* See Note 11.

Favorites

My grandmamma has said –
Poor old lady, she is dead
 Long ago –
That he had a Roman nose,
And his cheek was like a rose
 In the snow.

But now his nose is thin,
And it rests upon his chin
 Like a staff,
And a crook is in his back,
And a melancholy crack
 In his laugh.

I know it is a sin
For me to sit and grin
 At him here;
But the old three-cornered hat,
And the breeches, and all that,
 Are so queer!

And if I should live to be
The last leaf upon the tree
 In the spring,
Let them smile, as I do now,
At the old forsaken bough
 Where I cling.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

Father William ☺

“You are old, Father William,” the young man said,

“And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head –
Do you think, at your age, it is right?”

“In my youth,” Father William replied to his son,

“I feared it might injure the brain;
But now that I’m perfectly sure I have none,
Why, I do it again and again.”

“You are old,” said the youth, “as I mentioned before,

And have grown most uncommonly fat;
Yet you turned a back-somersault in at the door –
Pray, what is the reason for that?”

“In my youth,” said the sage, as he shook his gray locks,

“I kept all my limbs very supple
By the use of this ointment – one shilling the box –
Allow me to sell you a couple.”

“You are old,” said the youth, “and your jaws are too weak

For anything tougher than suet;
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak;
Pray, how did you manage to do it?”

“In my youth,” said his father, “I took to the law,

And argued each case with my wife;
And the muscular strength which it gave to my jaw,
Has lasted the rest of my life.”

“You are old,” said the youth, “one would hardly suppose

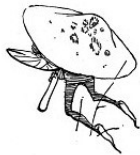
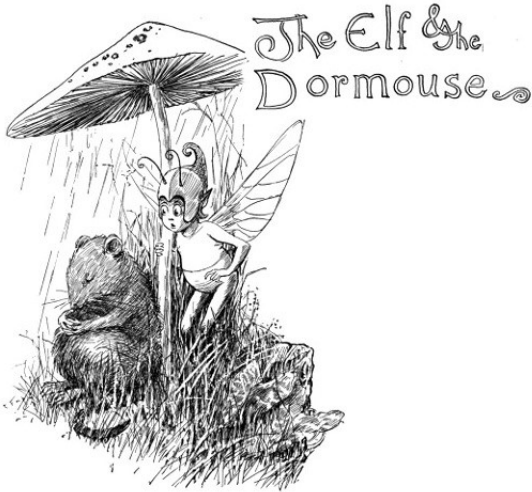
That your eye was as steady as ever;
Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose –
What made you so awfully clever? “

“I have answered three questions and that is enough,”

Said his father; “don’t give yourself airs!
Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?
Be off, or I’ll kick you downstairs!”

Lewis Carroll

The Elf and the Dormouse



Under a toadstool
Crept a wee Elf,
Out of the rain
To shelter himself.

Under the toadstool,
Sound asleep,
Sat a big Dormouse
All in a heap.

Trembled the wee Elf,
Frightened, and yet
Fearing to fly away
Lest he got wet.

To the next shelter –
Maybe a mile!
Sudden the wee Elf
Smiled a wee smile.

Tugged till the toadstool
Topped in two.
Holding it over him,
Gaily he flew.

Soon he was safe home,
Dry as could be.
Soon woke the Dormouse –
“Good gracious me!

“Where is my toadstool?”
Loud he lamented.
– And that’s how umbrellas
First were invented.

Oliver Herford

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LITTLE ORPHANT ANNIE

Little Orphant Annie

Little Orphant Annie's come to our house to stay,
An' wash the cups and saucers up, an' brush the crumbs away,
An' shoo the chickens off the porch, an' dust the hearth, an' sweep,
An' make the fire, an' bake the bread, an' earn her board-an'-keep;
An' all us other children, when the supper things is done,
We set around the kitchen fire an' has the mostest fun
A-lis'nin' to the witch-tales 'at Annie tells about,
An' the Gobble-uns 'at gits you
 Ef you
 Don't
 Watch
 Out!

Onc't they was a little boy wouldn't say his pray'rs –
An' when he went to bed at night, away up stairs,
His mammy heerd him holler, an' his daddy heerd him bawl,
An' when they turn't the kivvers down, he wasn't there at all!
An' they seeked him in the rafter-room, an' cubby-hole, an' press,
An' seeked him up the chimney-flue, an' ever'wheres, I guess;
But all they ever found was thist his pants an' round-about! ¹
An' the Gobble-uns 'll git you
 Ef you
 Don't
 Watch
 Out!

¹ roundabout: a short coat or jacket worn by men or boys, especially in the nineteenth century.

This Singing World

An' one time a little girl 'ud allus laugh an' grin,
An' make fun of ever'one, an' all her blood-an'-kin;
An' onc't when they was "company," an' ole folks was there,
She mocked 'em an' shocked 'em, an' said she didn't care!
An' thist as she kicked her heels, an' turn't to run an' hide,
They was two great big Black Things a-standin' by her side,
An' they snatched her through the ceilin' 'fore she knowed what
she's about!

An' the Gobble-uns 'll git you
Ef you
Don't
Watch
Out!

An' little Orphant Annie says, when the blaze is blue,
An' the lampwick sputters, an' the wind goes woo-oo!
An' you hear the crickets quit, an' the moon is gray,
An' the lightnin'-bugs in dew is all squenched away, -
You better mind yer parents, and yer teachers fond and dear,
An' cherish them 'at loves you, an' dry the orphant's tear,
An' he'p the pore an' needy ones 'at clusters all about,
Er the Gobble-uns 'll git you

Ef you
Don't
Watch
Out!

James Whitcomb Riley

A Hillside Thaw

To think to know the country and not know
The hillside on the day the sun lets go
Ten million silver lizards out of snow.
As often as I've seen it done before
I can't pretend to tell the way it's done.
It looks as if some magic of the sun
Lifted the rug that bred them on the floor
And the light breaking on them made them run.
But if I thought to stop the wet stampede,
And caught one silver lizard by the tail,
And put my foot on one without avail,
And threw myself wet-elbowed and wet-kneed
In front of twenty others' wriggling speed, –
In the confusion of them all aglitter
And birds that joined in the excited fun
By doubling and redoubling song and twitter,
I have no doubt I'd end by holding none.

It takes the moon for this. The sun's a wizard
By all I tell; but so's the moon a witch.
From the high west she makes a gentle cast
And suddenly without a jerk or twitch
She has her spell on every single lizard.
I fancied when I looked at eight o'clock
The swarm still ran and scuttled just as fast.
The moon was waiting for her chill effect.
I looked at ten: the swarm was turned to rock
In every life-like posture of the swarm,
Transfixed on mountain slopes almost erect.
Across each other and side by side they lay.
Was wrought through trees without a breath of storm
To make a leaf, if there had been one, stir.
It was the moon's. She held them until day,
One lizard at the end of every ray.
The thought of my attempting such a stay!

Robert Frost

In the Bath *

Look at my knees,
That island rising from the steamy seas!
The candle's a tall lightship; my two hands
Are boats and barges anchored to the sands,
With mighty cliffs all round;
They're full of wine and riches from far lands. . . .

I can make caves,
By lifting up the island and huge waves
And storms, and then with head and ears well under
Blow bubbles with a monstrous roar like thunder,
A bull-of-Bashan sound.
The seas run high and the boats split asunder. . . .

The thin soap slips
And slithers like a shark under the ships.
My toes are on the soap-dish – that's the effect
Of my huge storms; an iron steamer's wrecked!
The soap slides round and round;
He's biting the old sailors, I expect. . . .

Robert Graves



FWI

* See [Note 19](#).

Drake's Drum *

Drake he's in his hammock an' a thousand mile away,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?)

Slung atween the round shot in Nombre Dios Bay,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.

Yarnder lumes the island, yarnder lie the ships,
Wi' sailor lads a-dancin' heel-an'-toe,

An' the shore-lights flashin', an' the night-tide dashin'
He sees et arl so plainly as he saw et long ago.

Drake he was a Devon man, an' ruled the Devon seas,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?)

Rovin' tho' his death fell, he went wi' heart at ease,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe,

“Take my drum to England, hang et by the shore,
Strike et when your powder's runnin' low;

If the Dons sight Devon, I'll quit the port o' Heaven,
An' drum them up the Channel as we drummed them
long ago.”

Drake he's in his hammock till the great Armadas come,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?)

Slung atween the round shot, listen' for the drum,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.

Call him on the deep sea, call him up the Sound,
Call him when ye sail to meet the foe;

Where the old trade's plyin' an' the old flag's flyin',
They shall find him, ware an' wakin', as they found him
long ago.

Henry Newbolt

* See [Note 21](#).

How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix * ¹

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
“Good speed!” cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
“Speed!” echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique ² right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

’Twas moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
At Düffeld, ’twas morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
So Joris broke silence with, “Yet there is time!”

At Aerschot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare thro’ the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray.

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;
And one eye’s black intelligence, – ever that glance
O’er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

* See Note 25. ¹ Aix is pronounced “ex,” like the letter x.

² The pique (peak) of a saddle seems to now be called the pommel.

Favorites

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, "Stay spur!
"Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault's not in her,
"We'll remember at Aix" – for one heard the quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

So we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is in sight!

"How they'll greet us!" and all in a moment his roan
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

And all I remember is, friends flocking round
As I sate with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground,
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.

Robert Browning

The Charge of the Light Brigade *

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.
“Forward the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!” he said,
Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.

“Forward, the Light Brigade!”
Was there a man dismay’d?
Not tho’ the soldier knew
 Some one had blunder’d.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.
Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
 Volley’d and thunder’d;
Storm’d at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of hell
 Rode the six hundred.

* See Note 26.

Favorites

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turned in air
Sabring the gunners there.
Charging an army, while
 All the world wonder'd.
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke.
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not,
 Not the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
 Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of hell,
All that was left of them,
 Left of six hundred.

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honor the charge they made!
Honor the Light Brigade,
 Noble six hundred!

Alfred Tennyson

The Twins ☺

In form and feature, face and limb,
I grew so like my brother,
That folks got taking me for him,
And each for one another.
It puzzled all our kith and kin,
It reached an awful pitch;
For one of us was born a twin,
Yet not a soul knew which.

One day (to make the matter worse),
Before our names were fixed,
As we were being washed by nurse
We got completely mixed;
And thus, you see, by Fate's decree,
(Or rather nurse's whim),
My brother John got christened *me*,
And I got christened *him*.

This fatal likeness even dogg'd
My footsteps when at school,
And I was always getting flogg'd,
For John turned out a fool.
I put this question hopelessly
To every one I knew –
What *would* you do, if you were me,
To prove that you were *you*?

Our close resemblance turned the tide
Of my domestic life;
For somehow my intended bride
Became my brother's wife.
In short, year after year the same
Absurd mistake went on;
And when I died – the neighbors came
And buried brother John!

Henry S. Leigh

The Yarn of the Nancy Bell * ☺

'Twas on the shores that round our coast
From Deal to Ramsgate span
That I found alone, on a piece of stone,
An elderly naval man.

His hair was weedy, his beard was long,
And weedy and long was he,
And I heard this wight on the shore recite,
In a singular minor key:

“Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And a bo’sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain’s gig.”

And he shook his fists and he tore his hair,
Till I really felt afraid;
For I couldn’t help thinking the man had been drinking,
And so I simply said:

“Oh, elderly man, it’s little I know
Of the duties of men of the sea,
And I’ll eat my hand if I understand
How you can possibly be

“At once a cook, and a captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And a bo’sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain’s gig.”

Then he gave a hitch to his trousers, which
Is a trick all seamen l’arn,
And having got rid of a thumping quid,
He spun this painful yarn:

* See [Note 31](#). This was Dan and my favorite poem. - Pop

This Singing World

“ ’Twas in the good ship Nancy Bell,
That we sailed to the Indian sea,
And there on a reef we come to grief,
Which has often occurred to me.

“And pretty nigh all o’ the crew was drowned
(There was seventy-seven o’ soul),
And only ten of the *Nancy’s* men
Said ’Here!’ to the muster roll.

“There was me and the cook and the captain bold,
And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And the bo’sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain’s gig.

“For a month we’d neither wittles nor drink,
Till a-hungry we did feel,
So, we drewed a lot, and, accordin’, shot
The captain for our meal.

“The next lot fell to the *Nancy’s* mate,
And a delicate dish he made;
Then our appetite with the midshipmite
We seven survivors stayed.

“And then we murdered the bo’sun tight,
And he much resembled pig;
Then we wittled free, did the cook and me,
On the crew of the captain’s gig.

“Then only the cook and me was left,
And the delicate question, ’Which
Of us two goes to the kettle?’ arose,
And we argued it out as sich.

(’For I loved that cook as a brother, I did,
And the cook he worshiped me;
But we’d both be blowed if we’d either be stowed
In the other chap’s hold, you see.

Favorites

“ ‘I’ll be eat if you dines off me,’ says Tom,
 ‘Yes, that,’ says I, ‘you’ll be’ –
‘I’m boiled if I die, my friend,’ quoth I,
 And ‘Exactly so,’ quoth he.

“Says he, ‘Dear James, to murder me
 Were a foolish thing to do,
For don’t you see that you can’t cook *me*,
 While I can – and will – cook you!’

“So, he boils the water, and takes the salt
 And the pepper in portions true
(Which he never forgot), and some chopped shallot,
 And some sage and parsley too.

“ ‘Come here,’ says he, with a proper pride,
 Which his smiling features tell,
‘ ’Twill soothing be if I let you see
 How extremely nice you’ll smell.’

“And he stirred it round and round and round,
 And he sniffed at the foaming froth;
When I ups with his heels, and smothers his squeals
 In the scum of the boiling broth.

“And I eat that cook in a week or less,
 And – as I eating be
The last of his chops, why I almost drops,
 For a vessel in sight I see.

* * * * *

“And I never larf, and I never smile,
 And I never lark nor play,
But I sit and croak, and a single joke
 I have – which is to say:

“Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,
 And the mate of the *Nancy* brig,
And a bo’sun tight, and a midshipmite,
 And the crew of the captain’s gig!”

W. S. Gilbert

The Embarrassing Episode of Little Miss Muffet ☺

Little Miss Muffet discovered a tuffet,
 (Which never occurred to the rest of us)
And, as 'twas a June day, and just about noonday,
 She wanted to eat – like the best of us:
Her diet was whey, and I hasten to say
 It is wholesome and people grow fat on it.
The spot being lonely, the lady not only
 Discovered the tuffet, but sat on it.

A rivulet gabbled beside her and babbled,
 As rivulets always are thought to do,
And dragon-flies sported around and cavorted,
 As poets say dragon-flies ought to do;
When, glancing aside for a moment, she spied
 A horrible sight that brought fear to her,
A hideous spider was sitting beside her,
 And most unavoidably near to her!

Albeit unsightly, this creature politely
 Said: “Madam, I earnestly vow to you,
I’m penitent that I did not bring my hat. I
 Should otherwise certainly bow to you.”
Though anxious to please, he was so ill at ease
 That he lost all his sense of propriety,
And grew so inept that he clumsily stepped
 In her plate – which is barred in Society.

This curious error completed her terror;
 She shuddered, and growing much paler, not
Only left tuffet, but dealt him a buffet
 Which doubled him up in a sailor-knot.
It should be explained that at this he was pained:
 He cried: “I have vexed you, no doubt of it!
Your fist’s like a truncheon.” “You’re still in my luncheon,”
 Was all that she answered. “Get out of it!”

Favorites

And *The Moral* is this: Be it madam or miss
To whom you have something to say,
You are only absurd when you get in the curd
But you're rude when you get in the whey!

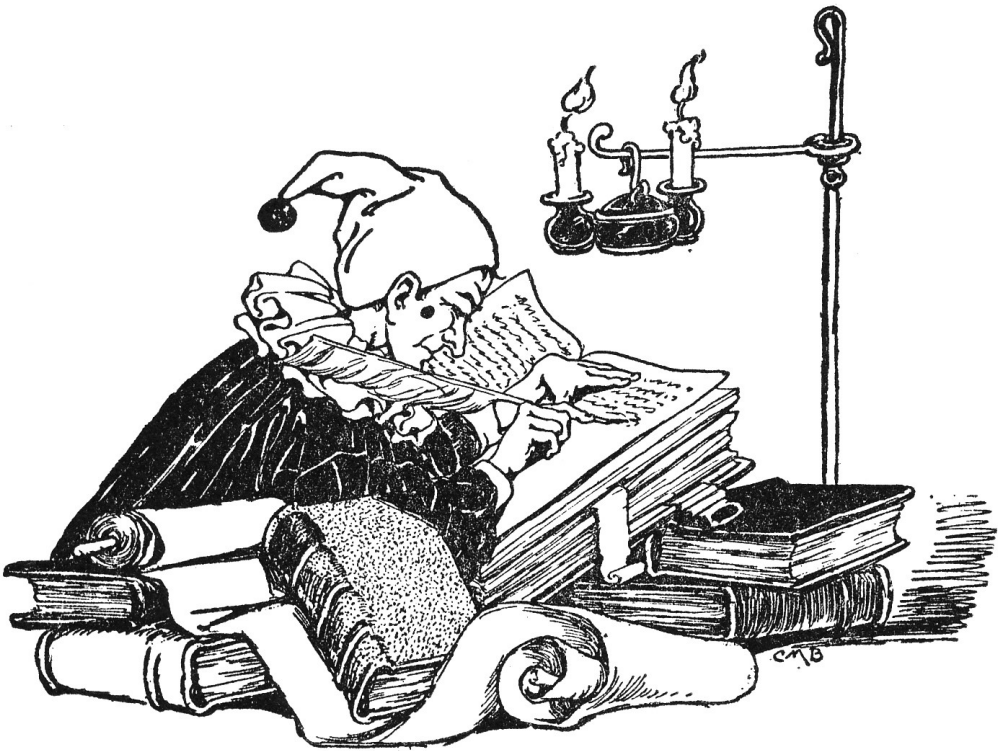
Guy Wetmore Carryl



Little Miss Muffet

Little Miss Muffet
Sat on a tuffet,
Eating her curds and whey;
Along came a spider,
Who sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away.

This is the nursery rhyme that I learned – did you? Cottage cheese consists of curds (the chunky bits) and whey (the milky part). – Pop



The Owl and the Pussy-Cat * ☺

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar,
“O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!”

Pussy said to the Owl, “You elegant fowl!
How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married! too long we have tarried:
But what shall we do for a ring?”
They sailed away for a year and a day,
To the land where the Bong-tree grows,
And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood,
With a ring at the end of his nose,
His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.

“Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
Your ring?” Said the Piggy, “I will.”
So they took it away, and were married next day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

Edward Lear

* See Note 36.

Words * ☺

Now, speech is very curious:
You never know what minute
A word will show a brand-new side,
With brand-new meaning in it.
This world could hardly turn around,
If some things acted like they sound.

Suppose the April flower-beds,
Down in the garden spaces,
Were made with green frog-blanket spreads
And caterpillar-cases;
Or oak trees locked their trunks to hide
The countless rings they keep inside!

Suppose from every pitcher-plant
The milk-weed came a-pouring;
That tiger-lilies could be heard
With dandelions roaring,
Till all the cat-tails, far and near,
Began to bristle up in fear!

What if the old cow blew her horn
Some peaceful evening hour,
And suddenly a blast replied
From every trumpet-flower,
While people's ears beat noisy drums
To "Hail, the Conquering Hero Comes!"

If barn-yard fowls had honey-combs,
What should we think, I wonder?
If lightning-bugs should swiftly strike,
Then peal with awful thunder?
And would it turn our pink cheeks pale
To see a comet switch its tail?

Nancy Byrd Turner

* See Note 38.

How to Tell the Wild Animals ☺

If ever you should go by chance
 To jungles in the East;
And if there should to you advance
 A large and tawny beast,
If he roars at you as you're dyin'
You'll know it is the Asian Lion.

Or if some time when roaming round,
 A noble wild beast greets you,
With black stripes on a yellow ground,
 Just notice if he eats you.
This simple rule may help you learn
The Bengal Tiger to discern.

If strolling forth, a beast you view,
 Whose hide with spots is peppered,
As soon as he has lept on you,
 You'll know it is the leopard.
'Twill do no good to roar with pain,
He'll only lep and lep again.

If when you're walking round your yard,
 You meet a creature there,
Who hugs you very, very hard,
 Be sure it is the Bear.
If you have any doubt, I guess
He'll give you just one more caress.

Though to distinguish beasts of prey
 A novice might nonplus,
The Crocodiles you always may
 Tell from Hyenas thus:
Hyenas come with merry smiles;
But if they weep, they're Crocodiles.

This Singing World

The true Chameleon is small,
A lizard sort of thing;
He hasn't any ears at all,
And not a single wing.
If there is nothing on the tree,
'Tis the Chameleon you see.

Carolyn Wells



Four Limericks by Famous Writers ☺

IN QUEBEC

There was once a small boy in Quebec
Stood buried in snow to his neck.
When asked: “Are you friz?”
He said: “Yes, I is,
But we don’t call this cold in Quebec.”

Rudyard Kipling

AN EXTRAVAGANCE

The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher
Called a hen a most elegant creature.
The hen, pleased with that,
Laid an egg in his hat, –
And thus did the hen reward Beecher!

Oliver Wendell Holmes

THE VICAR OF BRAY

An indolent vicar of Bray
His roses allowed to decay;
His wife, more alert,
Bought a powerful squirt,
And said to her spouse, “Let us spray!”

Langford Reed

AN UNRHYMED LIMERICK

There was an old man of St. Bees,
Who was stung in the arm by a wasp,
When asked, “Does it hurt?”
He replied, “No, it doesn’t,
I’m so glad it wasn’t a hornet.”

W. S. Gilbert

Nonsense Rhymes ☺

I

*ON DIGITAL EXTREMITIES:
A Poem, and a Gem It Is!*

I'd Rather have Fingers than Toes;
I'd Rather have Ears than a Nose;
 And As for my Hair,
 I'm Glad it's All There;
I'll be Awfully Sad, when it Goes!

II

*THE FLOORLESS ROOM: A Novel Sort
Of Argument Without Support.*

I Wish that my Room had a Floor!
I don't so Much Care for a Door,
 But this Crawling Around
 Without Touching the Ground
Is getting to be Quite a Bore!

III

*THE SUNSET: Picturing the Glow
It Casts upon a Dish of Dough.*

The Sun is Low, to Say the Least,
 Although it is Well-Red;
Yet, Since it Rises in the Yeast,
 It Should be Better Bred!

Favorites

IV

*THE WINDOW PAIN: a Theme Symbolic,
Pertaining to the Melon Colic.*

The Window has Four Little Panes;
 But One have I –
The Window Pains are in its Sash;
 I Wonder Why!

V

*THE PURPLE COW'S Projected Feast:
Reflections on a Mythic Beast,
Who's quite Remarkable, at Least.*

I never saw a Purple Cow,
 I never hope to see one;
But I can tell you, anyhow,
 I'd rather see than be one!
Gelett Burgess

Suffering

I sat down on a bumble bee
 In Mrs. Jackson's yard.
I sat down on a bumble bee:
 The bee stung good and hard.

I sat down on a bumble bee
 For just the briefest spell,
And I had only muslin on,
 As anyone could tell.

I sat down on a bumble bee,
 But I arose again;
And now I know the tenseness of
 Humiliating pain.

Nathalia Crane

Four Tricky Limericks ☺

I

A tutor who tooted the flute
Tried to tutor two tooters to toot.
Said the two to the tutor,
“Is it harder to toot or
To tutor two tooters to toot?”

II

A canner, exceedingly canny,
One morning remarked to his granny,
“A canner can can
Anything that he can,
But a canner can’t can a can, can-he?”

III

There was a young fellow named Tait,
Who dined with his girl at 8.08;
But I’d hate to relate
What that fellow named Tait
And his tete-a-tete ate at 8.08. ¹

IV

Said a bad little youngster named Beauchamp: ²
“Those jelly-tarts, how shall I reauchamp?
To my parents I’d go,
But they always say ‘No,’
No matter how much I beseauchamp.”

Carolyn Wells

¹ *tête-à-tête*: a private conversation between two persons, usually in an intimate setting – or here, a partner in one. Literally head-to-head to the French, they say “tett-ah-tett.” With poetic license, it’s “tate-ah-tate” here, rhyming with Tait.

² Pronounced “Beecham” !

Five Puzzlers ¹ ☺

She frowned and called him Mr.,
Because in sport he kr.;
 And so in spite
 That very night
This Mr. kr. sr.

*

When you think of the hosts without No.
Who are slain by the deadly cuco,¹
 It's quite a mistake
 Of such food to partake,
It results in a permanent slo.

*

An unpopular youth of Cologne,
With a pain in his stomach did mogne.
 He heaved a great sigh
 And said, "I would digh,"
But the loss would be only my ogne."

*

There was a young lady named Wemyss,²
Who, it semyss, was troubled with dremyss.
 She would wake in the night,
 And, in terrible fright,
Shake the bemyss of the house with her scremyss.

*

There was a young servant at Drogheda,³
Whose mistress had deeply annogheda,
 She proceeded to swear
 In language so rare
That afterwards no one emplogheda.

[Anonymous]

¹ Here is where you must use your cleverness and imagination.

² Now, if No. represents the word Number, cuco. – But this is almost too simple.

² Believe it or not, but in England the name Wemyss is pronounced "Weems"!

³ And in Ireland, Drogheda is pronounced – But no! You must guess this one without any help from me.

A Delightful Collection ☺

There once was a pious young priest
Who lived almost wholly on yeast;
 “For,” he said, “it is plain
 We must all rise again,
And I want to get started, at least.”

*

The bottle of perfume that Willie sent
Was highly displeasing to Millicent;
 Her thanks were so cold
 They quarrelled, I’m told,
Through that silly scent Willie sent Millicent.

*

A fly and a flea in a flue
Were imprisoned, so what could they do?
 Said the fly, “Let us flee!”
 “Let us fly!” said the flea,
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

*

There was a faith-healer of Deal
Who said, “Although pain isn’t real,
 If I sit on a pin
 And it punctures my skin,
I dislike what I *fancy* I feel.”

*

There was an old man of Blackheath,
Who sat on his set of false teeth.
 Said he, with a start,
 “O Lord, bless my heart!
I’ve bitten myself underneath!”

*

There was a young man of Bengal
Who went to a fancy-dress ball,
 He went, just for fun,
 Dressed up as a bun,
And a dog ate him up in the hall.

Favorites

*

There was an old man of Peru,
Who dreamt he was eating his shoe,
 He woke in the night
 In a terrible fright, -
And found it was perfectly true!

*

There was an old man of Tarentum,
Who gnashed his false teeth till he bent 'em.
 When they asked him the cost
 Of what he had lost,
He replied, "I can't say, for I rent 'em."

Anonymous



FWI

Lady of Niger ☺

There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger;
 They returned from the ride
 With the lady inside,
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

Cosmo Monkhouse



The Arrow and the Song

I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight so keen and strong,
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

O Captain! My Captain! *

(In Memory of Abraham Lincoln)

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
 But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up – for you the flag is flung – for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths – for you the shores
 acrowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
 Here Captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your head!
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
 Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
 But I with mournful tread,
 Walk the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

Walt Whitman

* See [Note 40](#).

Crossing the Bar *

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

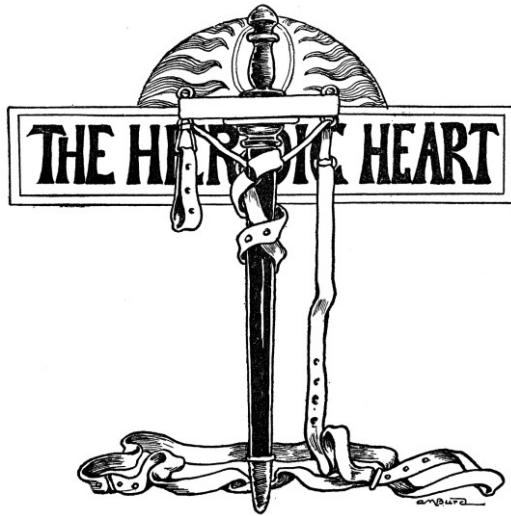
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness or farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

Alfred Tennyson

* See [Note 41](#).



Opportunity

This I beheld, or dreamed it in a dream: –
There spread a cloud of dust along a plain;
And underneath the cloud, or in it, raged
A furious battle, and men yelled; and swords
Shocked upon swords and shields. A prince's banner
Wavered, then staggered backward, hemmed by foes.
A craven hung above the battle's edge,
And thought, "Had I a sword of keener steel –
That blue blade that the king's son bears, – but this
Blunt thing – !" he snapt and flung it from his hand,
And lowering crept away and left the field.
Then came the king's son, wounded, sore bestead,¹
And weaponless, and saw the broken sword,
Hilt-buried in the dry and trodden sand,
And ran and snatched it, and with battle-shout
Lifted afresh he hewed his enemy down,
And saved a great cause that heroic day.

Edward Rowland Sill

¹ *bestead*: (pronounced bee-stedd) beset; in difficulty or distress [as in the King James Version Bible, not in the dictionary].

Invictus *

Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever Gods there be
 For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
 I have not winced or cried aloud,
Under the bludgeonings ¹ of chance
 My head is bloody but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
 Looms but the horror of the shade;
And yet the menace of the years
 Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
 How charged with punishment the scroll –
I am the master of my fate,
 I am the captain of my soul.

W. E. Henley

* See Note 48.

¹ bludgeonings: blows.



INVICTUS

Note 3

Sea-Fever (page 7)

Sea-Fever was written at the peak of the power of the British Empire, which then included scores of possessions across the globe, prominently including Canada, India, Australia, much of Africa and all of Ireland. As an island nation, the sea has always been important to Britain, both economically and militarily – and here, nostalgically.

The “Sea-Fever” illustration opposite this poem appeared in the Revised Edition, captioned “Sea Fever” – without hyphen or poem. Apparently, John Masefield’s famous poem was intended at one time to appear, and I have added it to the Century Edition. The word “go” was originally missing from the first line of each stanza. Because Masefield himself reads “go” in each stanza in the YouTube video titled “John Masefield ‘Sea Fever’ famous poem READ BY THE POET HIMSELF,” and generations of British school children learned it that way, I have included “go.” Sometimes the hyphen is omitted from the title, but because I have seen Masefield himself use the hyphen, I titled it Sea-Fever.

Note 7

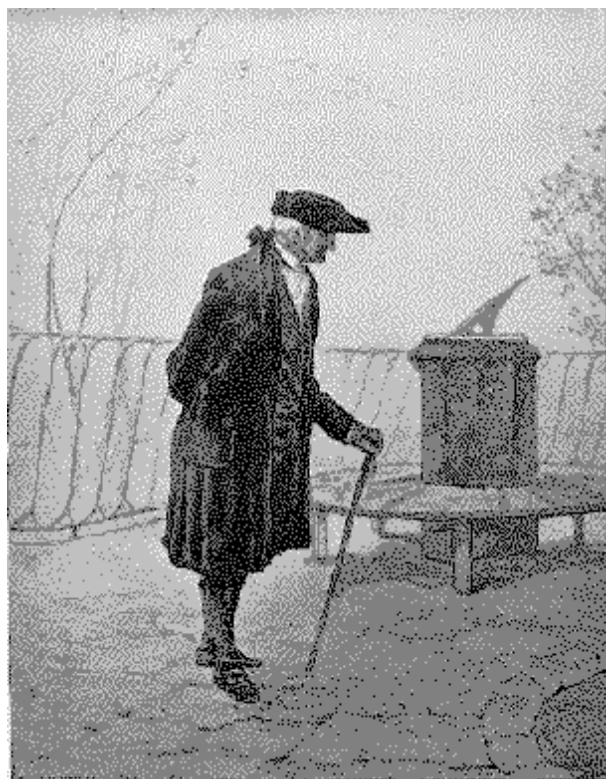
The Song of the Ungirt Runners (page 9)

Charles Hamilton Sorley, who wrote this poem, was a young English poet, born in 1895, who died when he was just twenty [a British Army officer, killed at the Battle of Loos, October 1915]. Had he lived, it seems likely that he would have been one of the most prominent of living poets; he was wise beyond his years and his serious poetry has the nobility which many older poets might envy. “The Song of the Ungirt Runners” is one of his most invigorating pieces. The very lines have a swing and stride of their own. It is no particular goal or “cause” which the poet celebrates; he delights – as we do – in the pure joy of speed and active muscles: “we run *because we like it* through the broad bright land.”

Note 11

The Last Leaf (page 14)

Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894) wrote this famous poem in 1831 or 1832, inspired by Major Thomas Melville, a participant in the Boston Tea Party. [To protest England’s imposition of a tax on tea, colonists dressed as Indians boarded ships in Boston Harbor and dumped the tea overboard, on December 16, 1773, almost 60 years earlier].



My Dad took this poem to heart, remarking on it to me as an adult, two or three times: he did not want to be the last leaf.

The author wrote “I determined to write in a measure which would at once betray any copyist.” For much more about this poem, including this image and the author’s words, see:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/owh/ll.html> – highly readable text

<http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/owh/llpix.html> – images

Note 19

In the Bath (page 22)

To make this poem worthy of inclusion in the *Favorites*, Nana (Karen) and her friend Elizabeth adapted it by removing the last line of each stanza, “I wonder what it feels like to be drowned?” That was also the original title of the poem. Here is Untermeyer’s note:

This poem, by a young English writer of great charm, may need a little explanation. Most poets get their inspiration walking along a country road, wandering in the woods, or standing silently beneath the stars. In this poem, however, Robert Graves is thinking his thoughts sitting in a bath-tub. And his bath-tub, I hasten to say, is not the long, white-enamelled, oblong trough in which we bathe. In common with most Englishmen who live in the country, – and Robert Graves lives in a fairy-like cottage in the tiny village of Islip – his bath-tub is really a tub; nothing more than a small, round, tin affair in which he must crouch in a few inches of water. That is why his knees seem like an “island rising from the steamy seas.” Instead of a modern electric light, he has a candle beside him like “a tall lightship” and the sides of the little tub seem to him like “mighty cliffs.” Although the thought of all these things makes the poet wonder “what it feels like to be drowned,” I have a notion that he is not very frightened by the idea.

Note 21

Drake's Drum (page 23)

Sir Francis Drake (c. 1540 – 28 Jan 1596) was an English explorer, sea captain, privateer, slave trader, naval officer, and politician, known best for his circumnavigation of the world in a single expedition, from 1577 to 1580. His privateering led King Philip II of Spain to brand him a pirate, El Draque, offering a reward of 20,000 ducats for his capture or death (around \$8 million in 2015). As a vice admiral, he was second-in-command of the English fleet in the victorious battle against the Spanish Armada in 1588. He was buried at sea off the coast of Portobelo; not in his hammock, but in a sealed, lead-lined coffin, dressed in his full armor. Shortly before he died, he ordered his snare drum, which had been on the circumnavigation, to be taken to Buckland Abbey; he vowed that if England were ever in danger and someone were to beat the drum, he would return to defend the country. According to legend, it can be heard to beat at times when England is at war or significant national events take place. – Wikipedia

Note 25

How they Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix (page 24)

Many people have tried to find some event in history to correspond with this poem. But there is none. No one will ever know what good news was being brought from one tiny town in the Netherlands to another. (Lokeren, Boom, Düffeld, Mecheln, Aerschot, Hasselt, Looz, and Dalhem are all towns on the ninety-mile road between Ghent [now in Belgium, its own country after 1830] and Aix [now Aachen, Germany].) Browning does not tell his readers what the city of Aix was supposed to be saved from; he was far more interested in the *effect* of his galloping lines. He wanted to make us actually hear the hoof-beats of the three horses, to feel the excitement as two of them fall dead by the way and the steed, Roland, reaches the goal alone. If there is another poem which races along at such a breakneck pace, I don't know where it is. If you find one, be sure to let me know its name.

Note 26

The Charge of the Light Brigade (page 26)

Unlike “How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix,” this poem tells an actual historic event. From 1854 to 1856 the little Greek fishing village of Balaklava was the headquarters of the British army during [the siege of Sevastopol in] the Crimean War. On October 25, 1854, 600 crack cavalry troopers went forth against a huge army. The English horsemen knew that the battle was hopeless; they were surrounded by a far greater force with “cannon to right of them and cannon to left of them.” But they

Notes

did not hesitate. “Someone had blundered,” some officer had given the wrong command or had received false information. But on they charged, “into the Valley of Death,” giving the world one of its most glorious examples of heroism in history. [This followed the similarly heroic – but successful – Charge of the Heavy Brigade, about which Tennyson also wrote, and the crucial defense of Balaklava by the “Thin Red Line” earlier on the same day of battle. Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was poet laureate to Queen Victoria from 1850 to 1892. – Wikipedia]

Note 31

The Yarn of the “Nancy Bell” (page 29)

It is, of course, wrong of me to spoil your pleasure in this beautifully bloodthirsty ballad by saying anything about it. But there is one bit of information which is not generally known. When these verses, which have become famous all over the world, were originally offered to the English humorous weekly, *Punch*, they were rejected by the Editor on the ground that they were “too cannibalistic for its readers’ tastes.” . . . Later, these lines and more than fifty other similar poems were published under the title *The Bab Ballads*, one of the most glorious mirth-provoking collections ever made [[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The Bab Ballads](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Bab_Ballads)]. *The Bab Ballads* would be sufficient to make the name of its author, W. S. Gilbert, immortal. But Gilbert has another hold on fame since he was the author of the many librettos to which Arthur Sullivan wrote his ever popular music. Among the Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas, which are as fascinating today as when they were written fifty years ago, one thinks at once of *The Mikado*, *Pinafore*, *Patience* and *The Pirates of Penzance*.

Note 36

The Owl and the Pussy-Cat (page 35)

I wish I had room to quote *all* the nonsense verses by Edward Lear. . . . as soon as you can find Lear’s own volume, enlivened with his side-splitting illustrations, give yourself a happy half-hour with “The Jumblies,” “The Pobble Who Has No Toes,” “The Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo” and more.

Note 38

Words (page 36)

Nancy Byrd Turner (1880-1971) was a descendant of both Thomas Jefferson and Pocahontas. I researched “green frog-blanket spreads / And caterpillar-cases” in the second stanza, both online and by asking friends, without turning up much. If you search the web for “frogged coat image”, you will see one kind of frogging – perhaps a blanket can be frogged

This Singing World

(although frogging while knitting means unraveling it). A caterpillar case is a cocoon, corresponding to a pillow case. Of course, there may be frogs and caterpillars in a garden bed. Keep thinking – there is a lot here. – Pop

Note 40

O Captain! My Captain! (page 47)

This has been called “one of the tenderest lyric elegies ever written.” (An elegy is a song of mourning, a poem written on the death of some friend or beloved person.) These lines show how much our greatest President meant to our greatest poet. Whitman speaks of Lincoln throughout the poem as the captain of some vessel, but it does not need much imagination to know that the ship referred to is the “Ship of State.” As the poem was written just after the assassination, we know at once that when the poet says “our fearful trip is done,” he is speaking of the end of the long and bitterly fought Civil War.... [Well over 650,000 Americans died in this war over slavery, more than 2 out of every 100 Americans at the time, and more than in all our other wars combined.] Walt Whitman, whom the entire world considers America’s “most characteristic and prophetic genius,” wrote principally in a loosely rolling measure – something between “regular” poetry and a rich, musical prose – this poem being one of the very few he ever wrote in rhyme.

Note 41

Crossing the Bar (page 48)

is an 1889 poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. It is considered that Tennyson wrote it in elegy; the narrator uses an extended metaphor to compare death with crossing the “sandbar” between the river of life, with its outgoing “flood”, and the ocean that lies beyond death, the “boundless deep”, to which we return. Shortly before he died, Tennyson told his son Hallam to “put ‘Crossing the Bar’ at the end of all editions of my poems”. – Wikipedia

The moaning of the bar would be waves crashing or rattling on it. At a receding high tide, the water might pass silently over the bar, and carry you out to sea. Of course, you know who the Pilot is.

Note 48

Invictus (page 50)

It would be an impertinence for me to say anything about these famous, stirring lines except to tell you, if you do not already know it, that “Invictus” is a Latin word, meaning “invincible.” Here we have the high courage of the “unconquerable soul,” the last two lines containing more actual “inspiration” than a hundred volumes on “How to Succeed”!