



ON A BAT'S BACK

A POETRY ANTHOLOGY FOR CHILDREN

EDITED BY

MIRABEL GUINNESS



Illustrated by Roland Pym



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Introduction

MY AIM in collecting these poems was to create a nursery anthology for my children. It was to include as many of my childhood favourites as possible. I started the collection when my daughters Alice and Tyga were little and before Toby or Lily were born; this was also before my father died in 1992. My father was delighted at the idea and gave me lots of very good advice—I still have all his notes about how to do it. Roland Pym too was very helpful and it is a great sadness that he didn't see this anthology published before he died.

I have included as many poems as possible, and there are all sorts: humour, fun, mystery, as well as action poems, romance, songs and ballads... Some might seem not important enough or too common and others too obscure; but they all have a reason for being included.

Our Nanny was responsible for much of my education in poetry; it was with her that I first learned poems by heart. She taught me the Lord's Prayer and *Little Lamb who Made Thee?* by Blake as well as many carols at Christmas. It was from her that I have my earliest memories of Wordsworth, Yeats, Thomas Hood and many more. As I am the youngest of a large family I'm sure I found it easier to persuade her to read to me when actually I was meant to be reading to her. Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* was an old favourite.

As children we also had to learn Latin and French and read to my parents before breakfast. My older brothers and sisters had to do this in preparation for boarding school with my father while he was shaving; however I got off lightly and managed to read and learn poems in bed with my mother. A first compromise to the language lessons was learning the French poem *La Cigale et La Fourmi* (by Jean de La Fontaine) without understanding what it meant at all.

Other favourites included *Meg Merrilies* which I remember

Oh! Dear!

O H! DEAR! what can the matter be?
Dear! dear! what can the matter be?
Oh! dear! what can the matter be ?
Johnny's so long at the fair.

He promised he'd buy me a fairing should please me,
And then for a kiss, oh! he vowed he would tease me,
He promised he'd bring me a bunch of blue ribbons
To tie up my bonny brown hair.

And it's oh! dear! what can the matter be?
Dear! dear! what can the matter be?
Oh! dear! what can the matter be?
Johnny's so long at the fair.

He promised he'd bring me a basket of posies,
A garland of lilies, a garland of roses,
A little straw hat, to set off the blue ribbons
That tie up my bonny brown hair.

And it's oh! dear I what can the matter be?
Dear! dear! what can the matter be?
Oh! dear! what can the matter be?
Johnny's so long at the fair.

Anon





Two Nut Trees

I HAD A little nut tree,
Nothing would it bear,
But a silver nutmeg,
And a golden pear.
The King of Spain's daughter
Came to visit me,
And all for the sake
Of my little nut tree.
I skipped over water,
I danced over sea,
And all the birds in the air,
Couldn't catch me.

Anon

THE KING of China's daughter
 So beautiful to see
 With her face like yellow water, left
 Her nutmeg tree.
 Her little rope for skipping
 She kissed and gave to me—
 Made of painted notes of singing-birds
 Among the fields of tea.
 I skipped across the nutmeg grove,—
 I skipped across the sea;
 But neither sun nor moon, my dear,
 Has yet caught me.

Edith Sitwell
 1887-1964

Boy Blue

LITTLE BOY BLUE,
 Come blow your horn,
 The sheep's in the meadow,
 The cow's in the corn.
 Where is the boy
 Who looks after the sheep?
 He's under a haycock
 Fast asleep.
 Will you wake him?
 No, not I,
 For if I do,
 He's sure to cry.

Anon

How get her home? says Robin to Bobbin,
How get her home? says Richard to Robin,
How get her home? says John all alone,
How get her home? says everyone.

In a cart with six horses, says Robin to Bobbin,
In a cart with six horses, says Richard to Robin,
In a cart with six horses, says John all alone,
In a cart with six horses, says everyone.

Then hoist, boys, hoist, says Robin to Bobbin,
Then hoist, boys, hoist, says Richard to Robin,
Then hoist, boys, hoist, says John all alone,
Then hoist, boys, hoist, says everyone.

How shall we dress her? says Robin to Bobbin,
How shall we dress her? says Richard to Robin,
How shall we dress her? says John all alone,
How shall we dress her? says everyone.

We'll hire seven cooks, says Robin to Bobbin,
We'll hire seven cooks, says Richard to Robin,
We'll hire seven cooks, says John all alone,
We'll hire seven cooks, says everyone.

How shall we boil her? says Robin to Bobbin,
How shall we boil her? says Richard to Robin,
How shall we boil her? says John all alone,
How shall we boil her? says everyone.

In the brewer's big pan, says Robin to Bobbin,
In the brewer's big pan, says Richard to Robin,
In the brewer's big pan, says John all alone,
In the brewer's big pan, says everyone.

Anon



My Mother Said

MY MOTHER SAID, I never should
Play with the gypsies in the wood.
If I did, she would say;
'Naughty girl to disobey!

Your hair shan't curl and your shoes shan't shine,
You gypsy girl, you shan't be mine!
And my father said that if I did,
He'd rap my head with the teapot lid.

My Mother said, I never should
Play with the gypsies in the wood.
The wood was dark, the grass was green;
In came Sally with a tambourine.

The first place he came to was a farmer's yard,
Where the ducks and the geese declared it hard
That their nerves should be shaken
and their rest so marred
By a visit from Mr Fox O!
Fox O! Fox O!
That their nerves should be shaken
and their rest so marred
By a visit from Mr Fox O!

He took the grey goose by the neck,
And swung her right across his back;
The grey goose cried out, Quack, quack, quack,
With her legs hanging dangling down O!
Down O! Down O!
The grey goose cried out, Quack, quack, quack,
With her legs hanging dangling down O!

Old Mother Slipper Sloppler jumped out of bed
Ran to the window and popped out her head,
Crying, "John, John, John! The grey goose is gone
And the fox is off to his den O!
Den O! Den O!"
Crying, "John, John, John! The grey goose is gone
And the fox is off to his den O!"

John ran up to the top of the hill,
And blew his horn both loud and shrill;
Said the fox, "I'd better flee with my kill
He'll soon be on my trail O!
Trail O! Trail O!"
Said the fox, "I'd better flee with my kill
He'll soon be on my trail O!"





The Three Jovial Welshmen

THERE WERE three jovial Welshmen,
As I have heard them say,
And they would go a-hunting
Upon St David's day.

All the day they hunted,
And nothing could they find
But a ship a-sailing,
A-sailing with the wind.

One said it was a ship;
The other he said, Nay;
The third said it was a house,
With the chimney blown away.

And all the night they hunted,
And nothing could they find
But the moon a-gliding,
A-gliding with the wind.

One said it was the moon;
The other he said, Nay;

The third said it was a cheese,
And half of it cut away.

And all the day they hunted,
And nothing could they find
But a hedgehog in a bramble-bush,
And that they left behind.

The first said it was a hedgehog;
The second he said, Nay;
The third it was a pin-cushion,
And the pins stuck in wrong way.

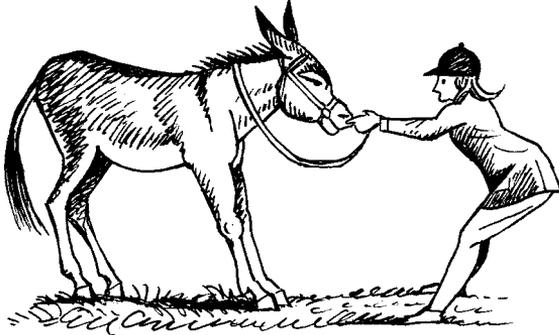
And all the night they hunted,
And nothing could they find
But a hare in a turnip field,
And that they left behind.

The first said it was a hare;
The second he said, Nay;
The third said it was a calf,
And the cow had run away.

And all the day they hunted,
And nothing could they find
But an owl in a holly-tree,
And that they left behind.

One said it was an owl;
The other he said, Nay;
The third said 'twas an old man,
And his beard growing grey.

Anon



Gee Up Neddy

GEE UP Neddy, gee oh go,
Shall we beat him? No, no, no.
I'd put him in the stable and give him some corn.
The best little donkey that ever was born.

Anon

I Love Little Pussy

I LOVE LITTLE pussy,
Her coat is so warm,
And if I don't hurt her
She'll do me no harm.
So I'll not pull her tail,
Nor drive her away,
But pussy and I
Very gently will play.
She shall sit by my side,
And I'll give her some food;
And pussy will love me
Because I am good.

Anon



I Had A Little Pony

I HAD A little pony,
They called him Dapple Gray;
I lent him to a lady
To ride a mile away.
She whipped him, she slashed him,
She rode him through the mire;
I would not lend my pony now,
For all the lady's hire.

Anon

