

Classic Poetry Series

Edward Lear

- poems -

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Edward Lear (1812 - 1888)

Edward Lear was born in Holloway, London. His father was a stockbroker and he was brought up largely by his sister Ann. He spent his early years first as a draughtsman for the Zoological Society, then as an artist for the British Museum.

In 1832 he was employed by the Earl of Derby to make coloured drawings of the rare birds and animals in the menagerie at Knowsley Hall. The Earl also allowed Lear the means to travel widely. He published accounts of his trips to Italy (1846), Albania and Illyria (1851), Calabria (1852), and Corsica (1870). He also visited the Holy Land and Greece.

He is chiefly remembered for his nonsense poetry, the first volume of which was written for his patron's grandchildren in 1846 and was simply entitled *A Book of Nonsense*. It contained Lear's favourite poetic format, the limerick, and was illustrated throughout. His poetry was henceforth marked by an air of ludicrous fantasy, as well as a unique inventiveness.

A deep sense of sadness can also be traced in his nonsense verse. This melancholy was a reflection of the life of the writer, who, despite the support of friends such as Tennyson's wife Emily, suffered from depression and loneliness.

Since his death, appreciation of his artistic work, the water-colours in particular, has risen. His real fame, however, was secured by poems from *Nonsense Songs* (1871) such as 'The Owl and the Pussycat'.

How pleasant to know Mr. Lear

How pleasant to know Mr. Lear,
Who has written such volumes of stuff.
Some think him ill-tempered and queer,
But a few find him pleasant enough.

His mind is concrete and fastidious,
His nose is remarkably big;
His visage is more or less hideous,
His beard it resembles a wig.

He has ears, and two eyes, and ten fingers,
(Leastways if you reckon two thumbs);
He used to be one of the singers,
But now he is one of the dumbs.

He sits in a beautiful parlour,
With hundreds of books on the wall;
He drinks a great deal of marsala,
But never gets tipsy at all.

He has many friends, laymen and clerical,
Old Foss is the name of his cat;
His body is perfectly spherical,
He wareth a runcible hat.

When he walks in waterproof white,
The children run after him so!
Calling out, "He's gone out in his night-
Gown, that crazy old Englishman, oh!"

He weeps by the side of the ocean,
He weeps on the top of the hill;
He purchases pancakes and lotion,
And chocolate shrimps from the mill.

He reads, but he does not speak, Spanish,
He cannot abide ginger beer;
Ere the days of his pilgrimage vanish,
How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!

Edward Lear

The Akond of Swat

Who, or why, or which, or what, Is the Akond of SWAT?

Is he tall or short, or dark or fair?
Does he sit on a stool or a sofa or a chair,
or SQUAT,
The Akond of Swat?

Is he wise or foolish, young or old?
Does he drink his soup and his coffee cold,
or HOT,
The Akond of Swat?

Does he sing or whistle, jabber or talk,
And when riding abroad does he gallop or walk
or TROT,
The Akond of Swat?

Does he wear a turban, a fez, or a hat?
Does he sleep on a mattress, a bed, or a mat,
or COT,
The Akond of Swat?

When he writes a copy in round-hand size,
Does he cross his T's and finish his I's
with a DOT,
The Akond of Swat?

Can he write a letter concisely clear
Without a speck or a smudge or smear
or BLOT,
The Akond of Swat?

Do his people like him extremely well?
Or do they, whenever they can, rebel,
or PLOT,
At the Akond of Swat?

If he catches them then, either old or young,
Does he have them chopped in pieces or hung,
or SHOT,
The Akond of Swat?

Do his people prig in the lanes or park?
Or even at times, when days are dark,
GAROTTE,
The Akond of Swat?

Does he study the wants of his own dominion?
Or doesn't he care for public opinion
a JOT,
The Akond of Swat?

To amuse his mind do his people show him
Pictures, or any one's last new poem,
or WHAT,
For the Akond of Swat?

At night if he suddenly screams and wakes,
Do they bring him only a few small cakes,
or a LOT,
For the Akond of Swat?

Does he live on turnips, tea, or tripe?
Does he like his shawl to be marked with a stripe,
or a DOT,
The Akond of Swat?

Does he like to lie on his back in a boat
Like the lady who lived in that isle remote,
SHALLOTT,
The Akond of Swat?

Is he quiet, or always making a fuss?
Is his steward a Swiss or a Swede or Russ,
or a SCOT,
The Akond of Swat?

Does like to sit by the calm blue wave?
Or to sleep and snore in a dark green cave,
or a GROTT,
The Akond of Swat?

Does he drink small beer from a silver jug?
Or a bowl? or a glass? or a cup? or a mug?
or a POT,
The Akond of Swat?

Does he beat his wife with a gold-topped pipe,
When she let the gooseberries grow too ripe,
or ROT,
The Akond of Swat?

Does he wear a white tie when he dines with friends,
And tie it neat in a bow with ends,
or a KNOT.
The Akond of Swat?

Does he like new cream, and hate mince-pies?
When he looks at the sun does he wink his eyes,
or NOT,
The Akond of Swat?

Does he teach his subjects to roast and bake?
Does he sail about on an inland lake

in a YACHT,
The Akond of Swat?

Some one, or nobody, knows I wot
Who or which or why or what
Is the Akond of Swat?

Edward Lear

The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo

I

On the Coast of Coromandel
Where the early pumpkins blow,
In the middle of the woods
Lived the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.
Two old chairs, and half a candle,--
One old jug without a handle,--
These were all his worldly goods:
In the middle of the woods,
These were all the worldly goods,
Of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò,
Of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.

II

Once, among the Bong-trees walking
Where the early pumpkins blow,
To a little heap of stones
Came the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.
There he heard a Lady talking,
To some milk-white Hens of Dorking,--
'Tis the lady Jingly Jones!
'On that little heap of stones
'Sits the Lady Jingly Jones!'
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò,
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.

III

'Lady Jingly! Lady Jingly!
'Sitting where the pumpkins blow,
'Will you come and be my wife?'
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.
'I am tired of living singly,--
'On this coast so wild and shingly,--
'I'm a-weary of my life:
'If you'll come and be my wife,
'Quite serene would be my life!'
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò,
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.

IV

'On this Coast of Coromandel,
'Shrimps and watercresses grow,
'Prawns are plentiful and cheap,'
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.
'You shall have my chairs and candle,
'And my jug without a handle!--
'Gaze upon the rolling deep
(Fish is plentiful and cheap)

'As the sea, my love is deep!'
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò,
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.

V

Lady Jingly answered sadly,
And her tears began to flow,--
'Your proposal comes too late,
'Mr. Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò!
'I would be your wife most gladly!
(Here she twirled her fingers madly,)
'But in England I've a mate!
'Yes! you've asked me far too late,
'For in England I've a mate,
'Mr. Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò!
'Mr. Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò!'

VI

'Mr. Jones -- (his name is Handel,--
'Handel Jones, Esquire, & Co.)
'Dorking fowls delights to send,
'Mr. Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò!
'Keep, oh! keep your chairs and candle,
'And your jug without a handle,--
'I can merely be your friend!
'-- Should my Jones more Dorkings send,
'I will give you three, my friend!
'Mr. Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò!
'Mr. Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò!'

VII

'Though you've such a tiny body,
'And your head so large doth grow,--
'Though your hat may blow away,
'Mr. Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò!
'Though you're such a Hoddy Doddy--
'Yet a wish that I could modi-
'fy the words I needs must say!
'Will you please to go away?
'That is all I have to say--
'Mr. Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò!
'Mr. Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò!'

VIII

Down the slippery slopes of Myrtle,
Where the early pumpkins blow,
To the calm and silent sea
Fled the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.

There, beyond the Bay of Gurtle,
Lay a large and lively Turtle,--
'You're the Cove,' he said, 'for me
'On your back beyond the sea,
'Turtle, you shall carry me!'
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò,
Said the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.

IX

Through the silent-roaring ocean
Did the Turtle swiftly go;
Holding fast upon his shell
Rode the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.
With a sad primæval motion
Towards the sunset isles of Boshen
Still the Turtle bore him well.
Holding fast upon his shell,
'Lady Jingly Jones, farewell!'
Sang the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò,
Sang the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.

X

From the Coast of Coromandel,
Did that Lady never go;
On that heap of stones she mourns
For the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.
On that Coast of Coromandel,
In his jug without a handle
Still she weeps, and daily moans;
On that little hep of stones
To her Dorking Hens she moans,
For the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò,
For the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.

Edward Lear

The Dong with a Luminous Nose

When awful darkness and silence reign
Over the great Gromboolian plain,
Through the long, long wintry nights; --
When the angry breakers roar
As they beat on the rocky shore; --
When Storm-clouds brood on the towering heights
Of the Hills of the Chankly Bore: --

Then, through the vast and gloomy dark,
There moves what seems a fiery spark,
A lonely spark with silvery rays
Piercing the coal-black night, --
A Meteor strange and bright: --
Hither and thither the vision strays,
A single lurid light.

Slowly it wander, -- pauses, -- creeps, --
Anon it sparkles, -- flashes and leaps;
And ever as onward it gleaming goes
A light on the Bong-tree stems it throws.
And those who watch at that midnight hour
From Hall or Terrace, or lofty Tower,
Cry, as the wild light passes along, --
"The Dong! -- the Dong!
"The wandering Dong through the forest goes!
"The Dong! the Dong!
"The Dong with a luminous Nose!"

Long years ago
The Dong was happy and gay,
Till he fell in love with a Jumbly Girl
Who came to those shores one day.
For the Jumblies came in a sieve, they did, --
Landing at eve near the Zemmery Fidd
Where the Oblong Oysters grow,
And the rocks are smooth and gray.
And all the woods and the valleys rang
With the Chorus they daily and nightly sang, --
"Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and the hands are blue
And they went to sea in a sieve.

Happily, happily passed those days!
While the cheerful Jumblies staid;
They danced in circlets all night long,
To the plaintive pipe of the lively Dong,
In moonlight, shine, or shade.
For day and night he was always there
By the side of the Jumbly Girl so fair,
With her sky-blue hands, and her sea-green hair.
Till the morning came of that hateful day

When the Jumblies sailed in their sieve away,
And the Dong was left on the cruel shore
Gazing -- gazing for evermore, --
Ever keeping his weary eyes on
That pea-green sail on the far horizon, --
Singing the Jumbly Chorus still
As he sate all day on the grassy hill, --
"Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and the hands are blue
And they went to sea in a sieve.

But when the sun was low in the West,
The Dong arose and said;
-- "What little sense I once possessed
Has quite gone out of my head!" --
And since that day he wanders still
By lake and dorest, marsh and hills,
Singing -- "O somewhere, in valley or plain
"Might I find my Jumbly Girl again!
"For ever I'll seek by lake and shore
"Till I find my Jumbly Girl once more!"

Playing a pipe with silvery squeaks,
Since then his Jumbly Girl he seeks,
And because by night he could not see,
He gathered the bark of the Twangum Tree
On the flowery plain that grows.
And he wove him a wondrous Nose, --
A Nose as strange as a Nose could be!
Of vast proportions and painted red,
And tied with cords to the back of his head.
-- In a hollow rounded space it ended
With a luminous Lamp within suspended,
All fenced about
With a bandage stout
To prevent the wind from blowing it out; --
And with holes all round to send the light,
In gleaming rays on the dismal night.

And now each night, and all night long,
Over those plains still roams the Dong;
And above the wail of the Chimp and Snipe
You may hear the squeak of his plaintive pipe
While ever he seeks, but seeks in vain
To meet with his Jumbly Girl again;
Lonely and wild -- all night he goes, --
The Dong with a luminous Nose!
And all who watch at the midnight hour,
From Hall or Terrace, or lofty Tower,
Cry, as they trace the Meteor bright,
Moving along through the dreary night, --

"This is the hour when forth he goes,
"The Dong with a luminous Nose!
"Yonder -- over the plain he goes;
"He goes!
"He goes;
"The Dong with a luminous Nose!"

Edward Lear

The Jumblies

They went to sea in a Sieve, they did,
In a Sieve they went to sea:
In spite of all their friends could say,
On a winter's morn, on a stormy day,
In a Sieve they went to sea!
And when the Sieve turned round and round,
And every one cried, 'You'll all be drowned!'
They called aloud, 'Our Sieve ain't big,
But we don't care a button! we don't care a fig!
In a Sieve we'll go to sea!'
Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a Sieve.

They sailed away in a Sieve, they did,
In a Sieve they sailed so fast,
With only a beautiful pea-green veil
Tied with a riband by way of a sail,
To a small tobacco-pipe mast;
And every one said, who saw them go,
'O won't they be soon upset, you know!
For the sky is dark, and the voyage is long,
And happen what may, it's extremely wrong
In a Sieve to sail so fast!'
Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a Sieve.

The water it soon came in, it did,
The water it soon came in;
So to keep them dry, they wrapped their feet
In a pinky paper all folded neat,
And they fastened it down with a pin.
And they passed the night in a crockery-jar,
And each of them said, 'How wise we are!
Though the sky be dark, and the voyage be long,
Yet we never can think we were rash or wrong,
While round in our Sieve we spin!'
Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a Sieve.

And all night long they sailed away;
And when the sun went down,
They whistled and warbled a moony song
To the echoing sound of a coppery gong,
In the shade of the mountains brown.
'O Timballo! How happy we are,
When we live in a Sieve and a crockery-jar,

And all night long in the moonlight pale,
We sail away with a pea-green sail,
In the shade of the mountains brown!
Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a Sieve.

They sailed to the Western Sea, they did,
To a land all covered with trees,
And they bought an Owl, and a useful Cart,
And a pound of Rice, and a Cranberry Tart,
And a hive of silvery Bees.
And they bought a Pig, and some green Jack-daws,
And a lovely Monkey with lollipop paws,
And forty bottles of Ring-Bo-Ree,
And no end of Stilton Cheese.
Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a Sieve.

And in twenty years they all came back,
In twenty years or more,
And every one said, `How tall they've grown!
For they've been to the Lakes, and the Terrible Zone,
And the hills of the Chankly Bore!'
And they drank their health, and gave them a feast
Of dumplings made of beautiful yeast;
And every one said, `If we only live,
We too will go to sea in a Sieve,---
To the hills of the Chankly Bore!'
Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a Sieve.

Edward Lear

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,
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,
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,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.

Edward Lear

The Pobble Who Has No Toes

The Pobble who has no toes
Had once as many as we;
When they said "Some day you may lose them all;"
He replied "Fish, fiddle-de-dee!"
And his Aunt Jobiska made him drink
Lavender water tinged with pink,
For she said "The World in general knows
There's nothing so good for a Pobble's toes!"

The Pobble who has no toes
Swam across the Bristol Channel;
But before he set out he wrapped his nose
In a piece of scarlet flannel.
For his Aunt Jobiska said "No harm
Can come to his toes if his nose is warm;
And it's perfectly known that a Pobble's toes
Are safe, -- provided he minds his nose!"

The Pobble swam fast and well,
And when boats or ships came near him,
He tinkledy-blinkledy-winkled a bell,
So that all the world could hear him.
And all the Sailors and Admirals cried,
When they saw him nearing the further side -
"He has gone to fish for his Aunt Jobiska's
Runcible Cat with crimson whiskers!"

But before he touched the shore,
The shore of the Bristol Channel,
A sea-green porpoise carried away
His wrapper of scarlet flannel.
And when he came to observe his feet,
Formerly garnished with toes so neat,
His face at once became forlorn,
On perceiving that all his toes were gone!

And nobody ever knew,
From that dark day to the present,
Whoso had taken the Pobble's toes,
In a manner so far from pleasant.
Whether the shrimps, or crawfish grey,
Or crafty Mermaids stole them away -
Nobody knew: and nobody knows
How the Pobble was robbed of his twice five toes!

The Pobble who has no toes
Was placed in a friendly Bark,
And they rowed him back, and carried him up
To his Aunt Jobiska's Park.
And she made him a feast at his earnest wish
Of eggs and buttercups fried with fish, -
And she said "It's a fact the whole world knows,

That Pobbles are happier without their toes!"

Edward Lear

The Quangle Wangle's Hat

I.

On the top of the Crumpetty Tree
The Quangle Wangle sat,
But his face you could not see,
On account of his Beaver Hat.
For his Hat was a hundred and two feet wide,
With ribbons and bibbons on every side
And bells, and buttons, and loops, and lace,
So that nobody every could see the face
Of the Quangle Wangle Quee.II.

The Quangle Wangle said
To himself on the Crumpetty Tree, --
"Jam; and jelly; and bread;
"Are the best of food for me!
"But the longer I live on this Crumpetty Tree
"The plainer than ever it seems to me
"That very few people come this way
"And that life on the whole is far from gay!"
Said the Quangle Wangle Quee.III.

But there came to the Crumpetty Tree,
Mr. and Mrs. Canary;
And they said, -- "Did every you see
"Any spot so charmingly airy?
"May we build a nest on your lovely Hat?
"Mr. Quangle Wangle, grant us that!
"O please let us come and build a nest
"Of whatever material suits you best,
"Mr. Quangle Wangle Quee!"IV.

And besides, to the Crumpetty Tree
Came the Stork, the Duck, and the Owl;
The Snail, and the Bumble-Bee,
The Frog, and the Fimble Fowl;
(The Fimble Fowl, with a corkscrew leg;)
And all of them said, -- "We humbly beg,
"We may build out homes on your lovely Hat, --
"Mr. Quangle Wangle, grant us that!
"Mr. Quangle Wangle Quee!"V.

And the Golden Grouse came there,
And the Pobble who has no toes, --
And the small Olympian bear, --
And the Dong with a luminous nose.
And the Blue Baboon, who played the Flute, --
And the Orient Calf from the Land of Tute, --
And the Attery Squash, and the Bisky Bat, --
All came and built on the lovely Hat
Of the Quangle Wangle Quee.VI.

And the Quangle Wangle said

To himself on the Crumpetty Tree, --
"When all these creatures move
"What a wonderful noise there'll be!"
And at night by the light of the Mulberry moon
They danced to the Flute of the Blue Baboon,
On the broad green leaves of the Crumpetty Tree,
And all were as happy as happy could be,
 With the Quangle Wangle Quee.

Edward Lear

There was a Young Lady Whose Eyes

There was a young lady whose eyes,
were unique as to colour and size;
When she opened them wide,
people all turned aside,
and started away in surprise.

Edward Lear

There Was an Old Lady Whose Folly

There was an Old Lady whose folly
Induced her to sit in a holly:
Whereupon by a thorn
Her dress being torn,
She quickly became melancholy.

Edward Lear

There Was an Old Man in a Tree

There was an Old Man in a tree,
Who was horribly bored by a bee.
When they said "Does it buzz?"
He replied "Yes, it does!
It's a regular brute of a bee!"

Edward Lear

There was an Old Man of Calcutta

There was an old man of Calcutta,
Who perpetually ate bread & butter;
Till a great bit of muffin on which he was stuffing,
Choked that horrid old man of Calcutta.

Edward Lear

There was an Old Man of New York

THERE WAS AN OLD MAN OF NEW YORK, WHO MURDERED HIMSELF WITH A FORK;
BUT NOBODY CRIED THOUGH HE VERY SOON DIED, --
FOR THAT SILLY OLD MAN OF NEW YORK.

Edward Lear

There was an old man of Thermopylæ

There was an old man of Thermopylæ;,
Who never did anything properly;
But they said, "If you choose, To boil eggs in your shoes,
You shall never remain in Thermopylæ."

Edward Lear

There was an Old Man of Thermopylae

There was an old man of Thermopylæ,
Who never did anything properly;
But they said, "If you choose, To boil eggs in your shoes,
You shall never remain in Thermopylæ."

Edward Lear

There was an old man on the Border

There was an old man on the Border,
Who lived in the utmost disorder;
He danced with the cat, and made tea in his hat,
Which vexed all the folks on the Border.

Edward Lear

There Was an Old Man with a Beard

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, "It is just as I feared! --
Two Owls and a Hen, four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard.

Edward Lear

There was an old person of Nice

There was an old person of Nice,
Whose associates were usually Geese.
They walked out together, in all sorts of weather.
That affable person of Nice!

Edward Lear