

Classic Poetry Series

Mark Twain

- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

A Sweltering Day In Australia

The Bombola faints in the hot Bowral tree,
Where fierce Mullengudgery's smothering fires
Far from the breezes of Coolgardie
Burn ghastly and blue as the day expires;

And Murriwillumba complaineth in song
For the garlanded bowers of Woolloomooloo,
And the Ballarat Fly and the lone Wollongong
They dream of the gardens of Jamberoo;

The wallabi sighs for the Murrubidgee,
For the velvety sod of the Munno Parah,
Where the waters of healing from Muloowurtie
Flow dim in the gloaming by Yaranyackah;

The Koppio sorrows for lost Wolloway,
And sigheth in secret for Murrurundi,
The Whangeroo wombat lamenteth the day
That made him an exile from Jerrilderie;

The Teawamute Tumut from Wirrega's glade,
The Nangkita swallow, the Wallaroo swan,
They long for the peace of the Timaru shade
And thy balmy soft airs, O sweet Mittagong!

The Kooringa buffalo pants in the sun,
The Kondoparinga lies gaping for breath,
The Kongorong Camaum to the shadow has won,
But the Goomeroo sinks in the slumber of death;

In the weltering hell of the Moorooroo plain
The Yatala Wangary withers and dies,
And the Worrow Wanilla, demented with pain,
To the Woolgoolga woodlands despairingly flies;

Sweet Nangwarry's desolate, Coonamble wails,
And Tungkillo Kuito in sables is drest,
For the Whangerei winds fall asleep in the sails
And the Booleroo life-breeze is dead in the west.

Mypongo, Kapunda, O slumber no more
Yankalilla, Parawirra, be warned
There's death in the air!
Killanoola, wherefore
Shall the prayer of Penola be scorned?

Cootamundra, and Takee, and Wakatipu,
Toowoomba, Kaikoura are lost
From Onkaparinga to far Oamaru
All burn in this hell's holocaust!

Paramatta and Binnun are gone to their rest

In the vale of Tapanni Taroom,
Kawakawa, Deniliquin - all that was best
In the earth are but graves and a tomb!

Narrandera mourns, Cameron answers not
When the roll of the scathless we cry
Tongariro, Goondiwindi, Woolundunga, the spot
Is mute and forlorn where ye lie.

Mark Twain

Genius

Genius, like gold and precious stones,
is chiefly prized because of its rarity.

Geniuses are people who dash of weird, wild,
incomprehensible poems with astonishing facility,
and get booming drunk and sleep in the gutter.

Genius elevates its possessor to ineffable spheres
far above the vulgar world and fills his soul
with regal contempt for the gross and sordid things of earth.

It is probably on account of this
that people who have genius
do not pay their board, as a general thing.

Geniuses are very singular.

If you see a young man who has frowsy hair
and distraught look, and affects eccentricity in dress,
you may set him down for a genius.

If he sings about the degeneracy of a world
which courts vulgar opulence
and neglects brains,
he is undoubtedly a genius.

If he is too proud to accept assistance,
and spurns it with a lordly air
at the very same time
that he knows he can't make a living to save his life,
he is most certainly a genius.

If he hangs on and sticks to poetry,
notwithstanding sawing wood comes handier to him,
he is a true genius.

If he throws away every opportunity in life
and crushes the affection and the patience of his friends
and then protests in sickly rhymes of his hard lot,
and finally persists,
in spite of the sound advice of persons who have got sense
but not any genius,
persists in going up some infamous back alley
dying in rags and dirt,
he is beyond all question a genius.

But above all things,
to deftly throw the incoherent ravings of insanity into verse
and then rush off and get booming drunk,
is the surest of all the different signs
of genius.

Mark Twain

Ode to Stephen Bowling Dots, Dec'd

And did young Stephen sicken,
And did young Stephen die?
And did the sad hearts thicken,
And did the mourners cry?

No; such was not the fate of
Young Stephen Dowling Bots;
Though sad hearts round him thickened,
'Twas not from sickness' shots.

No whooping-cough did rack his frame,
Nor measles drear, with spots;
Not these impaired the sacred name
Of Stephen Dowling Bots.

Despised love struck not with woe
That head of curly knots,
Nor stomach troubles laid him low,
Young Stephen Dowling Bots.

O no. Then list with tearful eye,
Whilst I his fate do tell.
His soul did from this cold world fly,
By falling down a well.

They got him out and emptied him;
Alas it was too late;
His spirit was gone for to sport aloft
In the realms of the good and great.

Mark Twain

The Aged Pilot Man

On the Erie Canal, it was,
All on a summer's day,
I sailed forth with my parents
Far away to Albany.

From out the clouds at noon that day
There came a dreadful storm,
That piled the billows high about,
And filled us with alarm.

A man came rushing from a house,
Saying, "Snub up your boat I pray,
Snub up your boat, snub up, alas,
Snub up while yet you may."

Our captain cast one glance astern,
Then forward glanced he,
And said, "My wife and little ones
I never more shall see."

Said Dollinger the pilot man,
In noble words, but few,--
"Fear not, but lean on Dollinger,
And he will fetch you through."

The boat drove on, the frightened mules
Tore through the rain and wind,
And bravely still, in danger's post,
The whip-boy strode behind.

"Come 'board, come 'board," the captain cried,
"Nor tempt so wild a storm;"
But still the raging mules advanced,
And still the boy strode on.

Then said the captain to us all,
"Alas, 'tis plain to me,
The greater danger is not there,
But here upon the sea.

So let us strive, while life remains,
To save all souls on board,
And then if die at last we must,
Let I cannot speak the word!"

Said Dollinger the pilot man,
Tow'ring above the crew,
"Fear not, but trust in Dollinger,
And he will fetch you through."

"Low bridge! low bridge!" all heads went down,
The laboring bark sped on;

A mill we passed, we passed church,
Hamlets, and fields of corn;
And all the world came out to see,
And chased along the shore
Crying, "Alas, alas, the sheeted rain,
The wind, the tempest's roar!
Alas, the gallant ship and crew,
Can nothing help them more?"

And from our deck sad eyes looked out
Across the stormy scene:
The tossing wake of billows aft,
The bending forests green,
The chickens sheltered under carts
In lee of barn the cows,
The skurrying swine with straw in mouth,
The wild spray from our bows!

"She balances!
She wavers!
Now let her go about!
If she misses stays and broaches to,
We're all"--then with a shout,]
"Huray! huray!
Avast! belay!
Take in more sail!
Lord, what a gale!
Ho, boy, haul taut on the hind mule's tail!"
"Ho! lighten ship! ho! man the pump!
Ho, hostler, heave the lead!

"A quarter-three!--'tis shoaling fast!
Three feet large!--t-h-r-e-e feet!--
Three feet scant!" I cried in fright
"Oh, is there no retreat?"

Said Dollinger, the pilot man,
As on the vessel flew,
"Fear not, but trust in Dollinger,
And he will fetch you through."

A panic struck the bravest hearts,
The boldest cheek turned pale;
For plain to all, this shoaling said
A leak had burst the ditch's bed!
And, straight as bolt from crossbow sped,
Our ship swept on, with shoaling lead,
Before the fearful gale!

"Sever the tow-line! Cripple the mules!"
Too late! There comes a shock!
Another length, and the fated craft

Would have swum in the saving lock!

Then gathered together the shipwrecked crew
And took one last embrace,
While sorrowful tears from despairing eyes
Ran down each hopeless face;
And some did think of their little ones
Whom they never more might see,
And others of waiting wives at home,
And mothers that grieved would be.

But of all the children of misery there
On that poor sinking frame,
But one spake words of hope and faith,
And I worshipped as they came:
Said Dollinger the pilot man,--
(O brave heart, strong and true!)--
"Fear not, but trust in Dollinger,
For he will fetch you through."

Lo! scarce the words have passed his lips
The dauntless prophet say'th,
When every soul about him seeth
A wonder crown his faith!

And count ye all, both great and small,
As numbered with the dead:
For mariner for forty year,
On Erie, boy and man,
I never yet saw such a storm,
Or one't with it began!"

So overboard a keg of nails
And anvils three we threw,
Likewise four bales of gunny-sacks,
Two hundred pounds of glue,
Two sacks of corn, four ditto wheat,
A box of books, a cow,
A violin, Lord Byron's works,
A rip-saw and a sow.

A curve! a curve! the dangers grow!
"Labbord!--stabbord!--s-t-e-a-d-y!--so!--
Hard-a-port, Dol!--hellum-a-lee!
Haw the head mule!--the aft one gee!
Luff!--bring her to the wind!"

For straight a farmer brought a plank,--
(Mysteriously inspired)--
And laying it unto the ship,
In silent awe retired.

Then every sufferer stood amazed
That pilot man before;
A moment stood. Then wondering turned,
And speechless walked ashore.

Mark Twain

Those Annual Bills

These annual bills! these annual bills!
How many a song their discord trills
Of "truck" consumed, enjoyed, forgot,
Since I was skinned by last year's lot!

Those joyous beans are passed away;
Those onions blithe, O where are they?
Once loved, lost, mourned--now vexing ILLS
Your shades troop back in annual bills!

And so 'twill be when I'm aground
These yearly duns will still go round,
While other bards, with frantic quills,
Shall damn and damn these annual bills!

Mark Twain

To Jennie

Good-bye! a kind good-bye,
I bid you now, my friend,
And though 'tis sad to speak the word,
To destiny I bend

And though it be decreed by Fate
That we ne'er meet again,
Your image, graven on my heart,
Forever shall remain.

Aye, in my heart thoult have a place,
Among the friends held dear,-
Nor shall the hand of Time efface
The memories written there.
Goodbye,
S.L.C.

Mark Twain