

**Classic Poetry Series**

**David Bates**  
**- poems -**

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## David Bates(6 March 1809 – 25 January 1870)

Born at Indian Hill, Ohio, March 6, 1809, David Bates was educated as a clerk in Buffalo and then in a mercantile house in Indianapolis, Indiana. Eventually he rose in the company to be a full member and its buyer, and he and his family settled in Philadelphia. He contributed as a man of letters to journals and published a volume of poetry, *Eolian*, in 1849. His son Stockton, who published his collected works after his father's death on January 25, 1870, wrote that "Two of his poems, `Speak Gently,' and `Childhood,' have attained a world-wide reputation; while the former of these, by translation into other languages, has become almost a universal hymn" (*Poetical Works* [Philadelphia, 1870]: vii). The former was made even more famous by Lewis Carroll's parody of it in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1866): 84-85 ... "Speak roughly to your little boy, / And beat him when he sneezes; / He only does it to annoy, / Because he knows it teases."

# Chiding

Reproach will seldom mend the young,  
If they are left to need it;  
The breath of love must stir the tongue,  
If you would have them heed it.

How oft we see a child caressed  
For little faults and failings,  
Which should have been at first suppressed  
To save the after railings!

If, when the heart would go astray,  
You would the passion smother,  
You must not tear the charm away,  
But substitute another.

Thus it is pleasant to be led,  
If he who leads will measure  
The heart's affection by the head,  
And make pursuit a pleasure.

David Bates

# Childhood

Childhood, sweet and sunny childhood,  
With its careless, thoughtless air,  
Like the verdant, tangled wildwood,  
Wants the training hand of care.

See it springing all around us --  
Glad to know, and quick to learn;  
Asking questions that confound us;  
Teaching lessons in its turn.

Who loves not its joyous revel,  
Leaping lightly on the lawn,  
Up the knoll, along the level,  
Free and graceful as a fawn?

Let it revel; it is nature  
Giving to the little dears  
Strength of limb, and healthful features,  
For the toil of coming years.

He who checks a child with terror,  
Stops its play, and stills its song,  
Not alone commits an error,  
But a great and moral wrong.

Give it play, and never fear it --  
Active life is no defect;  
Never, never break its spirit --  
Curb it only to direct.

Would you dam the flowing river,  
Thinking it would cease to flow?  
Onward it must go forever --  
Better teach it where to go.

Childhood is a fountain welling,  
Trace its channel in the sand,  
And its currents, spreading, swelling,  
Will revive the withered land.

Childhood is the vernal season;  
Trim and train the tender shoot;  
Love is to the coming reason,  
As the blossom to the fruit.

Tender twigs are bent and folded --  
Art to nature beauty lends;  
Childhood easily is moulded;  
Manhood breaks, but seldom bends.

David Bates

# Speak Gently

Speak gently! -- It is better far  
To rule by love, than fear --  
Speak gently -- let not harsh words mar  
The good we might do here!

Speak gently! -- Love doth whisper low  
The vows that true hearts bind;  
And gently Friendship's accents flow;  
Affection's voice is kind.

Speak gently to the little child!  
Its love be sure to gain;  
Teach it in accents soft and mild: --  
It may not long remain.

Speak gently to the young, for they  
Will have enough to bear --  
Pass through this life as best they may,  
'T is full of anxious care!

Speak gently to the aged one,  
Grieve not the care-worn heart;  
The sands of life are nearly run,  
Let such in peace depart!

Speak gently, kindly, to the poor;  
Let no harsh tone be heard;  
They have enough they must endure,  
Without an unkind word!

Speak gently to the erring -- know,  
They may have toiled in vain;  
Perchance unkindness made them so;  
Oh, win them back again!

Speak gently! -- He who gave his life  
To bend man's stubborn will,  
When elements were in fierce strife,  
Said to them, 'Peace, be still.'

Speak gently! -- 't is a little thing  
Dropped in the heart's deep well;  
The good, the joy, which it may bring,  
Eternity shall tell.

David Bates