

Classic Poetry Series

Thomas Augustine Daly
- poems -

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Thomas Augustine Daly(28 May 1871 - 4 October 1948)

best known for his humorous verses in mock Italian-American and Irish American dialect.

Thomas Augustine Daly is best known for his humorous verse primarily in Italian or Irish-American dialect. Although popular for forty years as a poet, he was a versatile writer, and he built an international reputation as an author, columnist, and lecturer. His dialectal humor continued the tradition of native American humor, but without its rougher or more vulgar traits. Like his contemporaries, the "Colymnists," who wrote humorous daily columns, his method was polished, though often their bite was sharper than Daly's sentimental verses.

Born in Philadelphia, T. A. Daly lived his entire life in that area. His parents, John Anthony and Anne Victoria Duckett Daly established the first Catholic bookstore in Philadelphia. The Irish boy "Tom" attended public schools and Catholic boarding schools until age fourteen, when he enrolled in Villanova College where he began his literary efforts in college notebooks. Daly transferred to Fordham University but quit at the end of his sophomore year, claiming that he tried to major in baseball and cigarette smoking.

Working as a grocery clerk, Daly acquired an accurate ear for immigrant dialects. As a cub reporter for the Philadelphia Record in 1891, he built on that knowledge covering the Italian-American sections of the city. He declared that he earned his eight dollars a week not only as a thorough reporter but as an entertainer who "tossed off a batch of side-splitting jests" for the enjoyment of the Record staff. Later, as an editorial writer for the Record, Daly was one of the first "new journalists," aiming for a popular audience--the average person. He witnessed the advent of cheaper newspapers with better worldwide communications by wire. Hired as general manager for the Catholic Standard and Times in 1898, Daly also wrote a "clipping column" which further popularized his humorous light verse. As a member of the American Press Humorists, Daly attended their 1904 convention. At the convention when he was commanded to "tell a joke, sing a song or act," Daly, with a serious visage, delivered a heavily accented anecdote to the delight of his audience. In 1905 Daly began lectures and after-dinner talks, often reciting his verses throughout the United States, Canada, and England.

Besides being credited for making the Catholic Standard the most successful Catholic weekly newspaper in the United States, Daly was acknowledged for his reviews, editorials, and travel notes. His columns of jokes and verses ran daily in the Philadelphia Evening Ledger from 1915 to 1918 and the Record from 1918 to 1924. Further recognition was bestowed on him in the form of honorary degrees. Fordham University granted Daly an honorary M.A. in 1901 and a Litt.D. in 1910. Two institutions conferred upon him the degree of LL.D.: the University of Notre Dame in 1917 and Boston College in 1921.

Canzoni, illustrated by acclaimed artist John Sloan, was published in 1906 when Daly was thirty-five. The book of poems, mainly in dialect, sold about fifty thousand copies in twelve editions. Daly divided the humorous and patriotic verses into Italian, Irish, and Negro dialect categories then added a final section of more serious love poems in standard English, a format he continued in several later volumes. His organ-grinders, fruit peddlers, and barbers cunningly coped with the joys and sorrows of homely incidents in large cities. Three years later Carmina resumed the pattern of benevolence and wit in both the new poems and those from clipping columns and magazines. The theme--Italian and Irish immigrants' aspirations of becoming good Americans--was displayed in rhymed verse, sometimes sonnets, and often with a surprise ending.

Little Pollys Pomes (1913) and Songs of Wedlock (1916) illustrated Daly's devotion to his own family. He had married Ann Barrett in 1896, and they established a home in suburban Germantown where they reared seven children. The verses in Little Pollys Pomes, written in a child's voice about children's concerns, encouraged other children to "add to our literature." The more personal lyric poems in Songs of Wedlock praised marriage and the joys of home in Daly's own voice. This volume also contained "To a Thrush," chosen by Ferdinand Earle in The Lyric Year as second-prize winner over ten thousand others in a contest to determine poems representative "of the work done to-day in America."

Continuing his journalism career as associate editor of the Philadelphia Record in 1918 and as author of the column "Rymes & Ripples" at the Evening Bulletin in 1929, Daly also returned primarily to dialect in his books McAroni Ballads and Other Verses (1919) and McAroni Medleys (1932). With humor and pathos, the fruit peddler Tony McAroni tells stories of his Italian friends. Selected Poems of T. A. Daly (1936) added "A La Francaise" to the Italian, Irish, and straight English, but still aimed for the large reading audience. This volume and Late Lark Singing (1946), published ten years later when Daly was seventy-five, collected some of his most popular verses from newspaper columns and evoked for him the

accuracy of the title "Daly the Troubadour."

Thomas A. Daly's prose mirrors the same themes and occasionally the dialect of his verse. The subject and length of one of his book titles indicates his warm, humorous treatment of his large family: *Herself and the Houseful; Being the Middling-Mirthful Story of a Middle-Class American Family of More Than Middle Size* (1924). Appropriately, Daly's son John illustrated the book. Daly wrote with Christopher Morley the prose story *The House of Dooner: The Last of the Friendly Inns* (1928). In another prose selection, "I See Be th' Pa-apers," he praised with fitting gentle wit his fellow humorist Finley Peter Dunne, recently deceased. Other subjects for prose included a sketch of male members of the successful, Irish O'Malley family in the "Interesting People" column of *American Magazine* and a whimsical thrust at the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, "A Fling at the Unfair," in *Commonweal*.

Though generally praised during most of his lifetime, Daly was also criticized for being a versifier rather than a poet. Ironically, his writing was glowingly described as comic and clever, qualities he felt did not constitute good humorous verse. Daly's severest criticism came from England, where *Athenaeum* reviewers of *Madrigali* (1912) declared he lacked "the saving grace of humour"--that his "exotic diction tends to become wearisome." Daly was a sentimentalist during the time of acerbic wit by the *New Yorker* writers and "Columbists," several of whom were his friends. To an overwhelming extent, however, the "poet laureate of the peanut peddler" received acclaim from the *New York Times* as being "in the front rank of humorists and light versifiers" for his universal themes as shown in his deft, dramatic, and pictorial depiction of Italian-and Irish-Americans. Louis Untermeyer compared Daly to his contemporaries in 1919: "Less popular than [James Whitcomb] Riley or [Paul Laurence] Dunbar, Daly is more skillful and versatile than either; his range and quality are comparable to [Eugene] Field's." Critics claimed that during Daly's lifetime everybody read his verses. Many adults may remember reading in school:

Giuseppe, da barber, he gotta da cash,

He gotta da clo'es an' da bigga moustache,

He gotta da seely young girls for da "mash,"

But notta--

You bat my life, notta--

Carlotta.

I gotta!

By the time of Daly's last publication, Ted Robinson, writing for the Saturday Review of Literature, fondly called him an "Old Fashioned Poet" but "A Timeless Troubadour." Daly was praised for his energy and dedication when after suffering a stroke in August he dictated from his bed his last column to his sons Thomas and Leonard. In the preface to *A Little Book of American Humorous Verse* (1926), compiled by Daly, he indicated that "the best of continued popularity" is the same as "the judgment of time." Now T. A. Daly is seldom read. His reputation has suffered because of the public's change of taste and of ethnic consciousness.

Between Two Loves

I GOTTA lov' for Angela,
I lov' Carlotta, too.
I no can marry both o' dem,
So w'at I gona do?

O! Angela ees pretta girl,
She gotta hair so black, so curl,
An' teeth so white as anytheeng.
An' O! she gotta voice to seeng,
Dat mak' your hearta feel eet must
Jump up an' dance or eet weell bust.
An' alla time she seeng, her eyes
Dey smila like Italia's skies,
An' makin' flirtin' looks at you—
But dat ees all w'at she can do.

Carlotta ees no gotta song,
But she ees twice so big an' strong
As Angela, an' she no look
So beautiful—but she can cook.
You oughta see her carry wood!
I tal you w'at, eet do you good.
When she ees be som'body's wife
She worka hard, you bat my life!
She never gattin' tired, too—
But dat ees all w'at she can do.

O! my! I weesh dat Angela
Was strong for carry wood,
Or else Carlotta gotta song
An' looka pretta good.
I gotta lov' for Angela,
I lov' Carlotta, too.
I no can marry both o' dem,
So w'at I gona do?

Thomas Augustine Daly

Da Boy From Rome

To-day ees com' from Eetaly
A boy ees leeve een Rome,
An' he ees stop an' speak weeth me --
I weesh he stay at home.

He stop an' say 'Hallo,' to me.
An' w'en he standin' dere
I smal da smal of Eetaly
Steell steeckin' een hees hair,
Dat com' weeth heem across da sea,
An' een da clo'es he wear.

Da peopla bomp heem een da street,
Da noise ees scare heem, too;
He ees so clumsy een da feet
He don't know w'at to do,
Dere ees so many theeng he meet
Dat ees so strange, so new.

He sheever an' he ask eef here
Eet ees so always cold.
Den een hees eye ees com' a tear --
He ees no vera old --
An', oh, hees voice ees soun' so queer
I have no heart for scold.

He look up een da sky so gray,
But oh, hees eye ees be
So far away, so far away,
An' w'at he see I see.
Da sky eet ees no gray to-day
At home een Eetaly.

He see da glada peopla seet
Where warma shine da sky --
Oh, while he eesa look at eet
He ees baygeen to cry.
Eef I no growl an' swear a beet
So, too, my frand, would I.

Oh, why he stop an' speak weeth me,
Dees boy dat leeve een Rome,
An' com' to-day from Eetaly?
I weesh he stay at home.

Thomas Augustine Daly

Da Comica Man

Giacobbe Finelli so funny, O! My!
By tweestin' hees face an' by weenkin' hees eye
He maka you laugh teell you theenk you weell die.
He don't gotta say som'theeng; all he ees do
Ees maka da face an', how moocha you try,
You no can help laugh w'en he lookin' at you—
Giacobbe Finelli so funny, O! My!

I deeg een da tranch weeth Giacobbe wan day;
Giacobbe ees toss up da spadefulla clay,
An' beeg Irish boss he ees gat een da way!
Da boss he ees look at Giacobbe an' swear
So bad as he can, but Giacobbe, so sly,
He maka pretand he no see he was dere—
Giacabbe Finelli so funny, O! My!

But w'en da boss turn an' ees starta for go,
Giacobbe look up an' he mak' da face—So!
I laugh an' I laugh lika deesa—Ho! ho!
Da boss he com' back an' he poncha my head,
He smasha my nose an' he blacka my eye—
I no can help laugh eef I gona be dead.
Giacobbe Finelli so funny, O! My!

Thomas Augustine Daly

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Da Sweeta Soil

All weenter-time I work for deeg
Da tranch een ceety street,
An' I am looka like da peeg
An' smal jus' `bout as sweet,
Baycause my han's, my face, my clo'es
Ees dirty as can be,
An' sewer-gas ees een my nose
An' steeck all ovra me.
More dirty an' more mean I feel
Dan I am look to you;
My soul eenside ees seeck, but steell,
W'at am I gona do?
Ees notheeng sweet een ceety street
For mak' me better man.
All men an' theengs dat I am meet
Mak' meanness all dey can,
An' all dey speak ees ogly words
An' do som' ogly theeng.
So even, too, dose leetla birds,
Dat ought be glad an' seeng,
Dey fight each other een da dirt
For dirty food dey eat.
Ah! so my soul eenside ees hurt
For work een ceety street.

But yestaday! oh, yestaday,
I leeve, I breathe again!
Da boss ees sand me far away
For work een countra lane.
How can I mak' you ondrastand—
You are so grand, so reech—
To know da joy I feel, my frand,
For deeg dees countra deetch?
I sweeng my peeck, an' oh! da smal,
W'en first I turn da sod!
So sweet! Escuse me eef I tal
Ees like da breath of God.
So pure da soil, like Eetaly,
I stoop an' taka piece

An' den—oh! don'ta laugh at me—
I talk to eet and kees!
An' while I do dees foola theeng
An' mak' so seelly tears,
Ees com' a pritta bird an' seeng
Hees music een my ears.
You know dees 'Mericana bird,
Weeth breast so lika flame,
So red; I do not know da word
You say for call hees name,
But w'at he seeng ees plain to me,
An' dees ees part of eet:
'Ees spreeng, ees spreeng een Eetaly,
So sweeta, sweeta, sweet!'

Oh, eef you weesh da Dagoman,
Dat corn' for leeve weeth you,
To be da gooda 'Merican
An' love dees countra, too,
I ask you tak' heem by da hand,
Away from ceety street,
An' show heem first dees granda land
Where eet ees pure an' sweet.

Thomas Augustine Daly

Mia Carlotta

GIUSEPPE, da barber, ees greata for 'mash,'
He gotta da bigga, da blacka mustache,
Good clo'es an' good styła an' playnta good cash.

W'enevra Giuseppe ees walk on da street,
Da peopla dey talka, 'how nobby! how neat!
How softa da handa, how smalla da feet.'

He raisa hees hat an' he shaka hees curls,
An' smila weeth teetha so shiny like pearls;
O! many da heart of da seelly young girls
He gotta.
Yes, playnta he gotta—
But notta
Carlotta!

Giuseppe, da barber, he maka da eye,
An' lika da steam engine puffa an' sigh,
For catcha Carlotta w'en she ees go by.

Carlotta she walka weeth nose in da air,
An' look through Giuseppe weeth far-away stare,
As eef she no see dere ees som'body dere.

Giuseppe, da barber, he gotta da cash,
He gotta da clo'es an' da bigga mustache,
He gotta da seely young girls for da 'mash,'
But notta—
You bat my life, notta—
Carlotta.
I gotta!

Thomas Augustine Daly

Two `mericana Men

Beeg Irish cop dat walk hees beat
By den peanutta stan',
First two, t'ree week w'en we are meet
Ees call me 'Dagoman.'
An' w'en he see how mad I gat,
Wheech eesa pleass heem, too,
Wan day he say: 'W'at's matter dat,
Ain't 'Dago' name for you?
Dat's `Mericana name, you know,
For man from Eetaly;
Eet ees no harm for call you so,
Den why be mad weeth me?'
First time he talka deesa way
I am too mad for speak,
But nexta time I justa say:
'All righta Meester Meeck I'

O! my, I nevva hear bayfore
Sooch langwadge like he say;
An' he don't look at me no more
For mebbe two, t'ree day.
But pretta soon agen I see
Den beeg poleecaman
Dat com' an' growl an' say to me;
'Halo, Eyetalian! Now, mebbe so you gon' deny
Dat dat'sa name for you.'
I smila back an' mak' reply:
'No, Irish, dat'sa true.'
'Ha! Joe,' be cry, 'you theenk dat we
Should call you `Merican ?'
'Dat's gooda `nough,' I say, 'for me,
Eef dat's w'at you are, Dan.'

So now all times we speaka so
Like gooda `Merican:
He say to me, 'Good morna, Joe,'
I say, 'Good morn, Dan.'

