

# Poems Every Child Should Know



POEMS EVERY CHILD SHOULD KNOW

Selected and with Commentary by  
Joseph Pearce

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# PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Every child is called to be a poet. In fact, everyone is called to be a poet.

But how?

The role of a poet is “to glorify things just because they are.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the poet wants to see the beauty of something in the ordinary, to see the imprint of the finger of God upon every instance of creation. It is the duty of the poet to show that something’s existence gives glory to God just because He loves it. As King David writes in Psalms, “The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declares the work of his hands.”<sup>2</sup>

Poetry is man’s reflections upon life around him. Poetry is, as it were, natural revelation—revelation of man to his fellow man about his reflections on the truth of some matter. And yet, there is something supernatural in the poet’s verse. It is as if he can catch a glimmer of the divine, ever so faintly retained in this fallen world. Poetry is God’s way of reminding mankind of the world before the fall and of the world that awaits him.

The poet, the artist, is the one who gazes into the innermost being of a thing, reflects upon its truth and goodness, and sees its beauty—especially in the routine and ordinary, to the point where people stop upon seeing the poet’s verse and say, “How

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<sup>1</sup> Czeslaw Mislosz, *The Blacksmith Shop*, trans. Czesław Miłosz and Robert Hass (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 18:2.

did I miss that *this* was so beautiful?” Poetry, in short, is well-ordered, insightful, and beautiful words.

But being a poet must, like any habit, be continually nourished as one grows. Saint Thomas Aquinas, a magnificent poet in his own right, gives us a very solid principle: “A small mistake in the beginning leads to a big mistake in the end.”<sup>3</sup> We must ensure the most important of beginnings, our childhood, is nurtured so that our very person can reach, stretch, lunge for the Divine. This poetic worldview in fact is more than a habit: it is a calling. “With Christians,” Saint John Henry Newman writes, “a poetical view of things is a duty. We are bid to color all things with hues of faith, to see a divine meaning in every event.”<sup>4</sup>

Poetry is the beginning of cultivating a sacramental view of the world—each physical thing is a way of pointing to a divine thing. The Church’s theology of sacraments treats man as such—the sacrament’s matter helps us understand the inner secret workings of grace that our dear Lord chose to use as vehicles for conveying the life of God into our souls, similar to how He chose parables to convey His teachings. In sacraments and good poetry, not only does the material lead to the immaterial, but the physical reality even contains the spiritual reality.

With a bit of reflection upon the known, as the poet does, one can uncover the unknown, the hidden things of God, the “hidden God.”<sup>5</sup> God Himself is that treasure hidden in the field,

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essenti*, (Apud Claudium Bornat: Barcelona, 1562), introduction, page 8, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=vsv\\_eohnXB00C&pg=GBS.PP4&hl=en](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=vsv_eohnXB00C&pg=GBS.PP4&hl=en). Translation by TAN Books.

<sup>4</sup> John Henry Newman, *Poetry, with Reference to Aristotle’s Poetics* (Boston: Ginn, 1891), p. 25, [https://books.google.com/books?id=yDIOAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=snippet&q=all%20things%20with%20hues%20of%20faith&cf=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=yDIOAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=snippet&q=all%20things%20with%20hues%20of%20faith&cf=false).

<sup>5</sup> Is 45:5.

whom we are to find.<sup>6</sup> Our hidden God awaits us, His creation, to seek Him and to find Him.<sup>7</sup>

Poetry is a natural companion to see the deeper truth of God all around us in this sacramental world, to help us seek and find this hidden treasure and store it within our hearts, within our souls. We are called to be like Our Lady as told by Saint Luke: “And his mother kept all these words in her heart.”<sup>8</sup> We are called to be witnesses to Christ in creation. We are called to be poets. All that is good belongs to God, so poetry has been culled from all sources alike—there is no need to pull exclusively from Christian sources, but rather all creation belongs to the Lord and every type of goodness is intended to lead us to Him.

Our intention here at TAN Books is to give our youngest minds their first taste at good, true, and beautiful poetry. Our prayer is that *Poems Every Child Should Know* can help serve as a beginning for a lifetime of wonder and poetic vision that seeks after and finds the good, the true, and the beautiful, and serves as a prelude to the Beatific Vision. May their lives be so poetic as to one day hear from our dear Lord upon finding Him, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord!”<sup>9</sup>

Conor Gallagher, Publisher  
*Feast of All Saints,*  
*November 1, 2022*

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<sup>6</sup> Mt 13:44–56.

<sup>7</sup> Mt 7:7.

<sup>8</sup> Lk 2:51.

<sup>9</sup> Mt 25:21.



# HOW TO ENJOY THIS BOOK

This volume of verse contains poems every child should know but also poems that everyone should know, irrespective of their age.

Every adult was once a child and these poetic gems should be part of the cultural treasure chest that we have inherited from our childhood. If we were deprived of such an inheritance, if we never grew up with these treasures, this book should be seen as a newly discovered treasure trove, every poem within it having the power to enrich us and lift us closer to heaven. And this is not a preposterously outlandish claim but is nothing less than the Gospel truth. The poems in this book are full of the childlike wonder which is necessary for the kingdom of heaven. Unless we can become like little children, able once again to enter into the wonder and innocence of such poetry, we will not enter into God's kingdom. We will be refusing the "happy-ever-after" to which we are called.

There is another sense in which this book is for children of all ages. Whereas the first part is particularly but not exclusively for younger children, being a collection of some of the best and best-loved nursery rhymes, the main part of the book contains poems spanning the full range of reading and comprehension skills, from simple verses that a six-year-old can read and enjoy to longer, more challenging poems that will stretch youthful readers into the adulthood to which they are called. Younger readers should feel free to pass over poems that are beyond their

ability to understand, though older readers should not pass over poems that they feel are too “easy”: verse, like virtue, is often most beautiful when it is most simple. It is for this reason that those who feel too “grown-up” for any of the poems in this volume are showing themselves to be not “grown-up” enough.

Mothers and fathers are encouraged to read all the poems to their littlest children. Even if the child does not understand the words, he or she will hear the music as the words dance with each other, tripping off their parent’s tongue.

This book will also be enjoyed most if we do not allow ourselves to become intimidated by words we don’t understand. Every word we don’t understand is a gift. It is an invitation to increase our vocabulary and therefore to increase our ability to describe reality more clearly and precisely to ourselves and to others. Each of us has our own unique individual word-hoard, which is our own personally owned treasure chest of words which we have always at our disposal. The larger our word-hoard, the wealthier and healthier we are. Words allow us to get closer to the Word Himself and to understand more clearly the world He created.

In order to make the poems easier to read, they are not burdened with a multitude of footnotes which can hinder the free flow of the reading experience. Instead, the reader should feel encouraged to look words up, treating the quest for each definition as a quest for hidden treasure.

Throughout the book, readers will find “things to think about,” inviting them to engage more deeply with individual poems. These should be seen as an invitation to an adventure into unknown territory, an opportunity to go further up and further in. Be fearless, be adventurous, and enjoy the journey into the realm of the good, the true, and the beautiful.

Joseph Pearce

PART ONE

POEMS FOR  
YOUNGER CHILDREN





# SELECTIONS FROM MOTHER GOOSE

(18TH CENTURY)

*The figure of Mother Goose as the fictional author of a collection of nursery rhymes and fairy-stories dates back to the seventeenth century and possibly earlier. Originating in France, the first English translation of nursery rhymes by “Mother Goose” was published in 1729. These became so popular that every child in the English-speaking world seems to have grown up with them, knowing many of them by heart and adopting them as the sing-song accompaniment to childhood games. As such, these classic poems have become part of the shared cultural inheritance of generations of children, necessitating their inclusion in any volume of children’s verse.*

*A note for the Reader: Song is one of the greatest aids to memory.*

*We encourage the mothers and fathers, grandmas and grandpas, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, cousins, and friends to sing aloud these timeless classics when possible to the old familiar tunes of Mother Goose rhymes. A benefit with the rise of technology is that finding recordings of these put to song is readily available and accessible, and greatly assists young (and old!) minds in memorizing verses.*

*Music helps us learn the rising and falling of our mother tongue, and even aids in understanding the lyrics if done properly. The rhythm and melodies of the music are fitted to the language's own inherent musicality and helps with accents, stress, and where to put pauses. Those who speak English should rejoice whenever music and poetry harmonize to produce a powerful force for aiding the memory, developing the person, and bringing joy to persons no matter the age upon hearing any Mother Goose nursery rhymes.*

### **Old King Cole**

Old King Cole

Was a merry old soul,  
And a merry old soul was he;  
He called for his pipe,  
And he called for his bowl,  
And he called for his fiddlers three.

Every fiddler, he had a fiddle,  
And a very fine fiddle had he;  
Twee tweedle dee, tweedle dee, went the fiddlers.  
Oh, there's none so rare,  
As can compare  
With King Cole and his fiddlers three!

### **Itsy Bitsy Spider**

“The itsy bitsy spider crawled up the water spout.  
Down came the rain, and washed the spider out.  
Out came the sun, and dried up all the rain,  
And the itsy bitsy spider went up the spout again.”

**London Bridge Is Falling Down**

London Bridge is falling down,  
Falling down, falling down,  
London Bridge is falling down,  
My fair Lady.

Build it up with wood and clay,  
Wood and clay, wood and clay,  
Build it up with wood and clay,  
My fair Lady.

Wood and clay will wash away,  
Wash away, wash away,  
Wood and clay will wash away,  
My fair Lady.

Build it up with bricks and mortar,  
Bricks and mortar, bricks and mortar,  
Build it up with bricks and mortar,  
My fair Lady.

Bricks and mortar will not stay,  
Will not stay, will not stay,  
Bricks and mortar will not stay,  
My fair Lady.

Build it up with iron and steel,  
Iron and steel, iron and steel,  
Build it up with iron and steel,  
My fair Lady.

Iron and steel will bend and bow,  
 Bend and bow, bend and bow,  
 Iron and steel will bend and bow,  
 My fair Lady.

Build it up with silver and gold,  
 Silver and gold, silver and gold,  
 Build it up with silver and gold,  
 My fair Lady.

Silver and gold will be stolen away,  
 Stolen away, stolen away,  
 Silver and gold will be stolen away,  
 My fair Lady.

*Build It Up With Bricks of Shaw,  
 Bricks So Sure,  
 Bricks So Sure,  
 Build It Up With Bricks of Shaw,  
 My Fair Lady.*

*It Will Stand For Ever More,  
 Ever More,  
 Ever More,  
 It Will Stand For Ever More,  
 My Fair Lady.*

### **The Days of the Month**

Thirty days hath September,  
 April, June, and November;  
 February has twenty-eight alone,

All the rest have thirty-one,  
Excepting leap-year, that's the time  
When February's days are twenty-nine.

### **My Lady Wind**

My lady Wind, my lady Wind,  
Went round about the house to find  
A chink to get her foot in:  
She tried the key-hole in the door,  
She tried the crevice in the floor,  
And drove the chimney soot in.

And then one night when it was dark,  
She blew up such a tiny spark,  
That all the house was pothered:  
From it she raised up such a flame,  
As flamed away to Belting Lane,  
And White Cross folks were smothered.

And thus when once, my little dears,  
A whisper reaches itching ears,  
The same will come, you'll find:  
Take my advice, restrain the tongue,  
Remember what old nurse has sung  
Of busy Lady Wind!

### **Little Robin Redbreast**

Little Robin Redbreast sat upon a tree,  
Up went Pussy cat, and down went he;  
Down came Pussy cat, and away Robin ran;

Says little Robin Redbreast, "Catch me if you can."  
 Little Robin Redbreast jump'd upon a wall,  
 Pussy cat jump'd after him, and almost got a fall,  
 Little Robin chirp'd and sang, and what did Pussy say?  
 Pussy cat said "Mew," and Robin jump'd away.

### **Little Boy Blue**

Little boy blue,  
 Come blow your horn,  
 The sheep's in the meadow,  
 The cow's in the corn.  
 But where is the boy  
 Who looks after the sheep?  
 He's under a haystack,  
 Fast asleep.

### **"Frère Jacques"**

#### ***French (Original):***

Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques  
 Dormez-vous? Dormez-vous?  
 Sonnez les matines! Sonnez les matines!  
 Ding, ding, dong. Ding, ding, dong.

#### ***Traditional English Lyrics:***

Are you sleeping? Are you sleeping?  
 Brother John, Brother John?  
 Morning bells are ringing, morning bells are ringing  
 Ding, dong, ding. Ding, dong, ding.

### **Pop Goes the Weasel**

All around the cobbler's bench,  
The monkey chased the weasel  
The monkey thought 'twas all in good fun  
Pop! goes the weasel.

A penny for a spool of thread  
A penny for a needle  
That's the way the money goes  
Pop! goes the weasel.

### **St. Swithin's Day**

St. Swithin's day, if thou dost rain,  
For forty days it will remain:  
St. Swithin's day, if thou be fair,  
For forty days 'twill rain na mair.

### **The Bells of London Town**

Gay go up and gay go down,  
To ring the bells of London town.

Bull's eyes and targets,  
Say the bells of St. Marg'ret's.

Brickbats and tiles,  
Say the bells of St. Giles'.

Halfpence and farthings,  
Say the bells of St. Martin's.

Oranges and lemons,  
Say the bells of St. Clement's.

Pancakes and fritters,  
Say the bells of St. Peter's.

Two sticks and an apple,  
Say the bells at Whitechapel.

Old Father Baldpate,  
Say the slow bells at Aldgate.

You owe me ten shillings,  
Say the bells at St. Helen's.

Pokers and tongs,  
Say the bells at St. John's.

Kettles and pans,  
Say the bells at St. Ann's.

When will you pay me?  
Say the bells at Old Bailey.

When I grow rich,  
Say the bells at Shoreditch.

Pray when will that be?  
Say the bells of Stepney.

I am sure I don't know,  
Says the great bell at Bow.



Here comes a candle to light you to bed,  
And here comes a chopper to chop off your head.

### **Peter Piper**

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers;  
A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked;  
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,  
Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

### **Humpty Dumpty**

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;  
All the king's horses and all the king's men  
Cannot put Humpty Dumpty together again.

### **Four Brothers Over the Sea**

I had four brothers over the sea,  
Perrie, Merrie, Dixie, Dominie.  
And they each sent a present unto me,  
Petrum, Partrum, Paradise, Temporie,  
Perrie, Merrie, Dixie, Dominie.

The first sent a chicken, without any bones;  
The second sent a cherry, without any stones.  
Petrum, Partrum, Paradise, Temporie,  
Perrie, Merrie, Dixie, Dominie.

The third sent a book, which no man could read;  
The fourth sent a blanket, without any thread.

Petrum, Partrum, Paradise, Temporie,  
Perrie, Merrie, Dixie, Dominie.

How could there be a chicken without any bones?  
How could there be a cherry without any stones?  
Petrum, Partrum, Paradise, Temporie,  
Perrie, Merrie, Dixie, Dominie.

How could there be a book which no man could read?  
How could there be a blanket without a thread?  
Petrum, Partrum, Paradise, Temporie,  
Perrie, Merrie, Dixie, Dominie.

When the chicken's in the egg-shell, there are no bones;  
When the cherry's in the blossom, there are no stones.  
Petrum, Partrum, Paradise, Temporie,  
Perrie, Merrie, Dixie, Dominie.

When the book's in ye press no man it can read;  
When the wool is on the sheep's back, there is no thread.  
Petrum, Partrum, Paradise, Temporie,  
Perrie, Merrie, Dixie, Dominie.