

WHITNEY

ADELINE TRAIN

MOTHER GOOSE FOR
GROWN FOLKS

Adeline Whitney

Mother Goose for Grown Folks

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Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| INTRODUCTORY | 5 |
| BRAHMIC | 7 |
| LITTLE BOY BLUE | 8 |
| HICCOKY, DICCORY, DOCK | 10 |
| BO-PEEP | 12 |
| SOLOMON GRUNDY | 14 |
| BOWLS | 15 |
| CRADLED IN GREEN | 17 |
| "SIMILIA SIMILIBUS." | 19 |
| HOBBY-HORSES | 21 |
| MISSIONS | 22 |
| GOING BACK TO OUR MUTTONS | 24 |
| GOING TO DOVER | 26 |
| RAGS AND ROBES | 28 |
| BLACKBIRDS | 30 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 31 |

A. D. T. Whitney

Mother Goose for Grown Folks

INTRODUCTORY

Somewhere in that uncertain "long ago,"
Whose dim and vague chronology is all
That elfin tales or nursery fables know,
Rose a rare spirit,—keen, and quick, and quaint,—
Whom by the title, whether fact or feint,
Mythic or real, Mother Goose we call.

Of Momus and Minerva sprang the birth
That gave the laughing oracle to earth:
A brimming bowl she bears, that, frothing
high
With sparkling nonsense, seemeth non-
sense all;
Till, the bright, floating syllabub blown by,
Lo, in its ruby splendor doth upshine
The crimson radiance of Olympian wine
By Pallas poured, in Jove's own banquet-
hall.

The world was but a baby when she came;
So to her songs it listened, and her name
Grew to a word of power, her voice a spell
With charm to soothe its infant wearying
well.

But, in a later and maturer age,
Developed to a dignity more sage,
Having its Shakspeares and its Words-
worths now,
Its Southey's and its Tennysons, to wear
A halo on the high and lordly brow,
Or poet-laurels in the waving hair;
Its Lowells, Whittiers, Longfellows, to sing
Ballads of beauty, like the notes of spring,
The wise and prudent ones to nursery use
Leave the dear lyrics of old Mother Goose.

Wisdom of babes,—the nursery Shak-
speare stilly—
Cackles she ever with the same good-will:
Uttering deep counsels in a foolish guise,

That come as warnings, even to the wise;
As when, of old, the martial city slept,
Unconscious of the wily foe that crept
Under the midnight, till the alarm was heard
Out from the mouth of Rome's plebeian
bird.

Full many a rare and subtile thing hath
she,
Undreamed of in the world's philosophy:
Toss-balls for children hath she humbly
rolled,
That shining jewels secretly enfold;
Sibylline leaves she casteth on the air,
Twisted in fool's-caps, blown unheeded by,
That, in their lines grotesque, albeit, bear
Words of grave truth, and signal prophecy;
And lurking satire, whose sharp lashes hit
A world of follies with their homely writ;
With here and there a roughly uttered hint,
That makes you wonder at the beauty
in't;
As if, along the wayside's dusty edge,
A hot-house flower had blossomed in a
hedge.

So, like brave Layard in old Nineveh,
Among the memories of ancient song,
As curious relics, I would fain bestir;
And gather, if it might be, into strong
And shapely show, some wealth of its
lost lore;
Fragments of Truth's own architecture,
strewed
In forms disjointed, whimsical, and rude,
That yet, to simpler vision, grandly stood
Complete, beneath the golden light of

BRAHMIC

If a great poet think he sings,
Or if the poem think it's sung,
They do but sport the scattered plumes
That Mother Goose aside hath flung.

Far or forgot to me is near:
Shakspeare and Punch are all the same;
The vanished thoughts do reappear,
And shape themselves to fun or fame.

They use my *quills*, and leave me out,
Oblivious that I wear the *wings*;
Or that a Goose has been about,
When every little gosling sings.

Strong men may strive for grander thought,
But, six times out of every seven,
My old philosophy hath taught
All they can master this side heaven.

LITTLE BOY BLUE

"Little boy blue! come blow your horn!
The sheep in the meadow, the cows in the corn!
Where's little boy blue, that looks after the sheep?
He's under the hay-mow, fast asleep!"

Of morals in novels, we've had not a few;
With now and then novel moralities too;
And we 've weekly exhortings from pulpit
to pew;
But it strikes me,—and so it may chance
to strike you,—

Scarce any are better than "Little Boy
Blue."
For the veteran dame knows her business:
right well,
And her quaint admonitions unerringly
tell:
She strings a few odd, careless words in a
jingle,
And the sharp, latent truth fairly makes
your ears tingle.

"Azure-robed Youth!" she cries, "up to
thy post!
And watch, lest thy wealth be all scattered
and lost:
Silly thoughts are astray, beyond call of
the horn,
And passion breaks loose, and gets into the
corn!"

Is this the way Conscience looks after her
sheep?
In the world's soothing shadow, gone sound-
ly asleep?"

Is n't *that*, now, a sermon? No lengthened
vexation
Of heads, and divisions, and argumenta-
tion,
But a straightforward leap to the sure ap-
plication;
And, though many a longer harangue is
forgot,

Of which careful reporters take notes on
the spot,
I think,—as the "Deacon" declared of his
"shay,"
Put together for lasting for ever and aye,—
A like immortality holding in view,
The old lady's discourse will undoubtedly
"dew"!

HICCOKY, DICCORY, DOCK

"Hicory, dicory, dock!
The mouse ran up the clock.
The clock struck one, and down she run:
Hicory, dicory, dock!"

She had her simple nest in a safe and cunning place,
Away down in the quiet of the deep, old-fashioned case.
A little crevice nibbled out led forth into the world,
And overhead, on busy wheels, the hours and minutes whirled.

High up in mystic glooms of space was awful scenery
Of wires, and weights, and springs, and all great Time's machinery;
But she had nought to do with these; a blessed little mouse,
Whose only care beneath the sun was just to keep her house.

For this was all she knew, or could; without her, just the same
The earth's great centre drew the weight; the pendulum went and came;
And days were born, and grew, and died; and stroke by stroke were told
The hours by which the world and men are ever growing old.

It suddenly occurred to her,—it struck her all at once,—
That living among things of power, herself had been a dunce.
"Somebody winds the clock!" she cried
"Somebody comes and brings
An iron finger that feels through and fumbles at the springs;

"And then it happens; then the buzz is stirred afar and near,
And the hour sounds, and everywhere the great world stops to hear.

I don't think, after all, it seems so hard a
thing to do.
I know the way—I might run up and
make folks listen too."

She sprang upon the leaden weight; but
not the merest whit
Did all her added gravity avail to hurry it.
She clambered up the steady cord; it wav-
ered not a hair.
She got among the earnest wheels; they
knew not she was there.

She sat beside the silent bell; the patient
hammer lay
Waiting an unseen bidding for the word
that it should say.
Only a solemn whisper thrilled the cham-
bers of the clock,
And the mouse listened: "Hiccory! hie—
diccory! die—dock!"

Something was coming. She had hit the
ripeness of the time;
No tiny second was outreached by that ex-
ultant climb;
In no wise did the planet turn the faster to
the sun;
She only met the instant, but the great
clock sounded—"One!"
What then? Did she stand gloriously
among those central things,
Her eye upon the vibrant bell, her heel
upon the springs?
Was her soul grand in unison with that
resounding chime,
And her pulse-beat identical with the high
pulse of Time?

Ah, she was little! When the air first
shattered with that shock,
Down ran the mouse into her hole. "Hic,
diccory! die—dock!"
Too plain to be translated is the truth the
tale would show,
Small souls, in solemn upshot, had better
wait below.

BO-PEEP

"Little Bo-Peep
Has lost her sheep,
And does n't know where to find 'em;
Let 'em alone,
And they 'll come home,
And bring their tails behind 'em."

Hope beckoned Youth, and bade him keep,
On Life's broad plain, his shining sheep,
And while along the sward they came,
He called them over, each by name;
This one was Friendship,—that was Health;
Another Love,—another Wealth;
One, fat, full-fleeced, was Social Station;
Another, stainless, Reputation;
In truth, a goodly flock of sheep,—
A goodly flock, but hard to keep.

Youth laid him down beside a fountain;
Hope spread his wings to scale a mountain;
And, somehow, Youth fell fast asleep,
And left his crook to tend the sheep:
No wonder, as the legend says,
They took to very crooked ways.

He woke—to hear a distant bleating,—
The faithless quadrupeds were fleeing!

Wealth vanished first, with stealthy tread,
Then Friendship followed—to be fed,—
And foolish Love was after led;
Fair Fame,—alas! some thievish scamp
Had marked him with his own black stamp!
And he, with Honor at his heels,
Was out of sight across the fields.

Health just hangs doubtful,—distant Hope
Looks backward from the mountain slope,—
And Youth himself—no longer Youth—
Stands face to face with bitter Truth.

Yet let them go! 'T were all in vain
To linger here in faith to find 'em;
Forward!—nor pause to think of pain,—
Till somewhere, on a nobler plain,

A surer Hope shall lead the train
Of joys withheld to come again
With golden fleeces trailed behind 'em!

SOLOMON GRUNDY

"Solomon Grundy
Born on Monday,
Christened on Tuesday,
Married on Wednesday,
Sick on Thursday,
Worse on Friday,
Dead on Saturday,
Buried on Sunday:
This was the end
Of Solomon Grundy."

So sings the unpretentious Muse
That guides the quill of Mother Goose,
And in one week of mortal strife
Presents the epitome of Life:
But down sits Billy Shakspeare next,
And, coolly taking up the text,
His thought pursues the trail of mine,
And, lo! the "Seven Ages" shine!
O world! O critics! *can't* you see
How Shakspeare plagiarizes me?

And other bards will after come,
To echo in a later age,
"He lived,—he died: behold the sum,
The abstract of the historian's page"
Yet once for all the thing was done,
Complete in Grundy's pilgrimage.

For not a child upon the knee
But hath the moral learned of me;
And measured, in a seven days' span,
The whole experience of man.

BOWLS

"Three wise men of Gotham
Went to sea in a bowl:
If the bowl had been stronger,
My song had been longer."

Mysteriously suggestive! A vague hint,
Yet a rare touch of most effective art,
That of the bowl, and all the voyagers in't,
Tells nothing, save the fact that they did
start.

There ending suddenly, with subtle craft,
The story stands—as 'twere a broken
shafts—'
More eloquent in mute signification,
Than lengthened detail, or precise relation.
So perfect in its very non-achieving,
That, of a truth, I cannot help believing
A rash attempt at paraphrasing it
May prove a blunder, rather than a hit.

Still, I must wish the venerable soul
Had been explicit as regards the bowl
Was it, perhaps, a railroad speculation?
Or a big ship to carry all creation,
That, by some kink of its machinery,
Failed, in the end, to carry even three?
Or other fond, erroneous calculation
Of splendid schemes that died disastrously?

It must have been of Gotham manufacture;
Though strangely weak, and liable to frac-
ture.

Yet—pause a moment—strangely, did I
say?
Scarcely, since, after all, it was but clay;—
The stuff Hope takes to build her brittle
boat,
And therein sets the wisest men afloat.
Truly, a bark would need be somewhat
stronger,
To make the halting history much longer.

Doubtless, the good Dame did but gener-

alize,—
Took a broad glance at human enterprise,
And earthly expectation, and so drew,
In pithy lines, a parable most true,—
Kindly to warn us ere we sail away,
With life's great venture, in an ark of
clay,
Where shivered fragments all around be-
token,
How even the "golden bowl" at last lies
broken!

CRADLED IN GREEN

"Rockaby, baby,
Your cradle is green;
Father's a nobleman,
Mother's a queen;
And Betty's a lady,
And wears a gold ring,
And Johnny's a drummer,
And drums for the king!"

O golden gift of childhood!
That, with its kingly touch,
Transforms to more than royalty
The thing it loveth much!

O second sight, bestowed alone
Upon the baby seer,
That the glory held in Heaven's reserve
Discerneth even here!

Though he be the humblest craftsman,
No silk nor ermine piled
Could make the father seem a whit
More noble to the child;
And the mother,—ah, what queenlier crown
Could rest upon her brow,
Than the fair and gentle dignity
It weareth to him now?

E'en the gilded ring that Michael
For a penny fairing bought,
Is the seal of Betty's ladyhood
To his untutored thought;
And the darling drum about his neck,—
His very newest toy,—
A bandsman unto Majesty
Hath straightway made the boy!

O golden gift of childhood!
If the talisman might last,
How the dull Present still should gleam
With the glory of the Past!
But the things of earth about us
Fade and dwindle as we go,
And the long perspective of our life
Is truth, and not a show!

"SIMILIA SIMILIBUS."

"There was a man in our town,
And he was wondrous wise:
He jumped into a bramble-bush,
And scratched out both his eyes.
But when he saw his eyes were out,
With all his might and main
He jumped into another bush,
And scratched them in again!"

Old Dr. Hahnemann read the tale,
(And he was wondrous wise,)
Of the man who, in the bramble-bush,
Had scratched out both his eyes.

And the fancy tickled mightily
His misty German brain,
That, by jumping in another bush,
He got them back again.

So he called it "homo-hop-athy".
And soon it came about,
That a curious crowd among the thorns
Was hopping in and out.
Yet, disguise it by the longest name
They may, it is no use;
For the world knows the discovery
Was made by Mother Goose!

And not alone in medicine
Doth the theory hold good;
In Life and in Philosophy,
The maxim still hath stood:
A morsel more of anything,
When one has got enough,
And Nature's energy disowns
The whole unkindly stuff.

A second negative affirms;
And two magnetic poles
Of charge identical, repel,—
As sameness sunders souls.
Touched with a first, fresh suffering,
All solace is despised;
But gathered sorrows grow serene,
And grief is neutralized.

And he who, in the world's *mêlée*,
Hath chanced the worse to catch,
May mend the matter, if he come
Back, boldly, to the scratch;
Minding the lesson he received
In boyhood, from his mother.
Whose cheery word, for many a bump,
Was, Up and take another!

HOBBY-HORSES

"I had a little pony,
His name was Dapple Gray:
I lent him to a lady
To ride a mile away.
She whipped him,
She lashed him,
She rode him through the mire;
I would n't lend my pony now,
For all the lady's hire."

Our hobbies, of whatever sort
They be, mine honest friend,
Of fancy, enterprise, or thought,
'T is hardly wise to lend.

Some fair imagination, shrined
In form poetic, maybe,
You fondly trusted to the World,—
That most capricious Lady.

Or a high, romantic theory,
Magnificently planned,
In flush of eager confidence
You bade her take in hand.

But she whipped it, and she lashed it,
And bespattered it with mire,
Till your very soul felt stained within,
And scourged with stripes of fire.

Yet take this thought, and hold it fast,
Ye Martyrs of To-day!
That same great World, with all its scorn,
You 've lifted on its way!

MISSIONS

"Hogs in the garden,—
Catch 'em, Towser!
Cows in the cornfield,—
Run, boys, run!
Fire on the mountains,—
Run, boys, run boys!
Cats in the cream-pot,—
Run, girls, run!"

I don't stand up for Woman's Right
Not I,—no, no!
The real lionesses fight,—
I let it go.

Yet, somehow, as I catch the call
Of the world's voice,
That speaks a summons unto all
Its girls and boys;

In such strange contrast still it rings
As church-bells' bome
To the pert sound of tinkling things
One hears at home;

And wakes an impulse, not germane
Perhaps, to woman,
Yet with a thrill that makes it plain
'T is truly human;—

A sudden tingle at the springs
Of noble feeling,
The spirit-power for valiant things
Clearly revealing.

But Eden's curse doth daily deal
Its certain dole,—
And the old grasp upon the heel
Holds back the soul!

So, when some rousing deed's to do,
To save a nation,
Or, on the mountains, to subdue
A conflagration,
Woman! the work is not for you;
Mind your vocation!

Out from the cream-pot comes a mew
Of tribulation!

Meekly the world's great exploits leave
Unto your betters;
So bear the punishment of Eve,
Spirit in fetters!

Only, the hidden fires will glow,
And, now and then,
A beacon blazeth out below
That startles men!

Some Joan, through battle-field to stake,
Danger embracing;
Some Florence, for sweet mercy's sake
Pestilence facing;
Whose holy valor vindicates
The royal birth
That, for its crowning, only waits
The end of earth;
And, haply, when we all stand freed,
In strength immortal,
Such virgin-lamps the host shall lead
Through heaven's portal!

GOING BACK TO OUR MUTTONS

"There was an old man of Tobago,
Who lived on rice, gruel, and sago,
Till, much to his bliss,
His physician said this:
To a leg, sir, of mutton, you may go.
He set a monkey to baste the mutton,
And ten pounds of butter he put on."

Chain up a child, and away he will go";
I have heard of the proverb interpreted so;
The spendthrift is son to the miser,—and
still,

When the Devil would work his most piti-
less will,
He sends forth the seven, for such embas-
sies kept,
To the house that is empty and garnished
and swept:
For poor human nature a pendulum seems.,
That must constantly vibrate between two
extremes.

The closer the arrow is drawn to the
bow,
Once slipped from the string, all the further
't will go:
Let a panic arise in the world of finance,
And the mad flight of Fashion be checked
by the chance,
It certainly seems a most wonderful thing,
When the ropes are let go again, how it
will swing!

And even the decent observance of Lent,
Stirs sometimes a doubt how the time has
been spent,
When Easter brings out the new bonnets
and gowns,
And a flood of gay colors o'erflows in the
towns.

So in all things the feast doth still follow
the fast,
And the force of the contrast gives zest to

the last;
And until he is tried, no frail mortal can
tell,
The inch being offered, he won't take the
ell.
We are righteously shocked at the follies
of fashion;
Nay, standing outside, may get quite in a
passion
At the prodigal flourishes other folks put
on:
But many good people this side of Tobago,
If respited once from their diet of sago,
Would outdo the monkey in basting the
mutton!

GOING TO DOVER

"Leg over leg
As the dog went to Dover;
When he came to a stile,
Jump he went over."

Perhaps you would n't see it here,
But, to my fancy, 't is quite clear
That Mother Goose just meant to show
How the dog Patience on doth go:

With steadfast nozzle, pointing low,—
Leg over leg, however slow,—
And labored breath, but naught complaining,
Still, at each footstep, somewhat gaining,—
Quietly plodding, mile on mile,
And gathering for a nervous bound
At every interposing stile,—
So traversing the tedious ground,
Till all at length, he measures over,
And walks, a victor, into Dover.

And, verily, no other way
Doth human progress win the day;
Step after step,—and o'er and o'er,—
Each seeming like the one before,
So that't is only once a while,—
When sudden Genius springs the stile
That marks a section of the plain,
Beyond whose bound fresh fields again
Their widening stretch untrodden sweep,—
The world looks round to see the leap.

Pale Science, in her laboratory,
Works on with crucible and wire
Unnoticed, till an instant glory
Crowns some high issue, as with fire,
And men, with wondering eyes awide,
Gauge great Invention's giant stride.

No age, no race, no single soul,
By lofty tumbling gains the goal.
The steady pace it keeps between,—
The little points it makes unseen,—
By these, achieved in gathering might,
It moveth on, and out of sight,

And wins, through all that's overpast,
The city of its hopes at last.

RAGS AND ROBES

"Hark, hark!
The dogs do bark;
Beggars are coming to town:
Some in rags,
Some in tags,"
And some in velvet gowns!"

Coming, coming always!
Crowding into earth;
Seizing on this human life,
Beggars from the birth.

Some in patent penury;
Some, alas! in shame;
And some in fading velvet
Of hereditary fame;

But all in deep, appeaseless want,
As mendicants to live;
And go beseeching through the world,
For what the world may give.

Beggars, beggars, all of us!
Expectants from "our youth:
With hands outstretched, and asking alms
Of Hope and Love and Truth.

Nor, verily, doth he escape
Who, wrapt in cold contempt,
Denies alike to give or take,
And dreams himself exempt;

Who never, in appeal to man,
Nor in a prayer to Heaven,
Will own that aught he doth desire,
Or ask that aught be given.

Whose human heart a stoic pride
Folds as a velvet pall;
Yet hides an eagerness within,
Worse beggary than all!

Coming, coming always!
And the bluff Apostle waits
As the throng pours upward from the earth

To Heaven's eternal gates.

In shreds of torn affection,
In passion-rended rags;
While scarcely at the portal
The great procession flags;

For the pillared doors of glory
On their hinges hang awide;
Where each asking soul may enter,
And at last be satisfied!

But a cold, calm shade arriveth,
In self-complacent trim,—
And Peter riseth up to see
Especially to him.

"Good morrow, saint! I'm going in
To take a stroll, you know;
Not that I *want* for anything,—
But just to see the show!"

"Hold!" thunders out the warden,
"Be pleased to pause a bit!
For seats celestial, let me say,
You 're not apparelled fit:
Yonder 's the brazen door that leads
Spectators to the pit!

Whatever may be thought on earth,
We've other rules in heaven;
And only poverty confessed
Finds free admittance given!"

BLACKBIRDS

"Sing a song o' sixpence, a pocket full of rye;
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie:
When the pie was opened, they all began to sing,
And was n't this a dainty dish to set before the king?
The king was in his counting-house, counting out his money;
The queen was in the parlor, eating bread and honey;
The maid was in the garden, hanging out the clothes,
And along came a blackbird, and nipt off her nose!"

It doesn't take a conjurer to see
The sort of curious pasty this might be;
A flock of flying rumors, caught alive,
And housed, like swarming bees within a
hive,—
Instead of what were far more wisely
done,
Having their worthless necks wrung, every
one;—
And so a dish of dainty gossip making,
Smooth covered with a show of secrecy,
That one but takes the pleasant pains of
breaking,
And out the wide-mouthed knaves pop,
eagerly.

Blackbirds, indeed! Each chattering on-
dit
Comes forth, full feathered, black as black
can be;
With quivering throats, all tremulous to
sing,
And please, forsooth, some little social
king;
Whose reign may last as long as he is able
To call his court around a dinner-table.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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