

Stevenson Robert Louis

# A Child's Garden of Verses



**Robert Stevenson**  
**A Child's Garden of Verses**

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## A Child's Garden of Verses

### TO ALISON CUNNINGHAM FROM HER BOY

*For the long nights you lay awake  
And watched for my unworthy sake:  
For your most comfortable hand  
That led me through the uneven land:  
For all the story-books you read:  
For all the pains you comforted:  
For all you pitied, all you bore,  
In sad and happy days of yore: —  
My second Mother, my first Wife,  
The angel of my infant life —  
From the sick child, now well and old,  
Take, nurse, the little book you hold!*

*And grant it, Heaven, that all who read  
May find as dear a nurse at need,  
And every child who lists my rhyme,  
In the bright, fireside, nursery clime,  
May hear it in as kind a voice*

*As made my childish days rejoice!*

*R. L. S.*

# I BED IN SUMMER

IN winter I get up at night  
And dress by yellow candle-light.  
In summer, quite the other way,  
I have to go to bed by day.

I have to go to bed and see  
The birds still hopping on the tree,  
Or hear the grown-up people's feet  
Still going past me in the street.

And does it not seem hard to you,  
When all the sky is clear and blue,  
And I should like so much to play,  
To have to go to bed by day?

# II

## A THOUGHT

IT is very nice to think  
The world is full of meat and drink,  
With little children saying grace  
In every Christian kind of place.

# III

## AT THE SEASIDE

WHEN I was down beside the sea  
A wooden spade they gave to me  
To dig the sandy shore.  
My holes were empty like a cup,  
In every hole the sea came up,  
Till it could come no more.

# IV

## YOUNG NIGHT THOUGHT

ALL night long and every night,  
When my mamma puts out the light,  
I see the people marching by,  
As plain as day, before my eye.

Armies and emperors and kings,  
All carrying different kinds of things,  
And marching in so grand a way,  
You never saw the like by day.

So fine a show was never seen,  
At the great circus on the green;  
For every kind of beast and man  
Is marching in that caravan.

At first they move a little slow,  
But still the faster on they go,  
And still beside them close I keep  
Until we reach the town of Sleep.

## V

# WHOLE DUTY OF CHILDREN

A CHILD should always say what's true  
And speak when he is spoken to,  
And behave mannerly at table;  
At least as far as he is able.

# VI RAIN

THE rain is raining all around,  
It falls on field and tree,  
It rains on the umbrellas here,  
And on the ships at sea.

# VII

## PIRATE STORY

THREE of us afloat in the meadow by the swing,  
Three of us aboard in the basket on the lea.  
Winds are in the air, they are blowing in the spring,  
And waves are on the meadow like the waves there are at sea.

Where shall we adventure, to-day that we're afloat,  
Wary of the weather and steering by a star?  
Shall it be to Africa, a-steering of the boat,  
To Providence, or Babylon, or off to Malabar?

Hi! but here's a squadron a-rowing on the sea —  
Cattle on the meadow a-charging with a roar!  
Quick, and we'll escape them, they're as mad as they can be,  
The wicket is the harbour and the garden is the shore.

## VIII

# FOREIGN LANDS

UP into the cherry tree  
Who should climb but little me?  
I held the trunk with both my hands  
And looked abroad on foreign lands.

I saw the next door garden lie,  
Adorned with flowers, before my eye,  
And many pleasant places more  
That I had never seen before.

I saw the dimpling river pass  
And be the sky's blue looking-glass;  
The dusty roads go up and down  
With people tramping in to town.

If I could find a higher tree  
Farther and farther I should see,  
To where the grown-up river slips  
Into the sea among the ships,  
To where the roads on either hand  
Lead onward into fairy land,  
Where all the children dine at five,  
And all the playthings come alive.



# IX

## WINDY NIGHTS

WHENEVER the moon and stars are set,  
Whenever the wind is high,  
All night long in the dark and wet,  
A man goes riding by.  
Late in the night when the fires are out,  
Why does he gallop and gallop about?

Whenever the trees are crying aloud,  
And ships are tossed at sea,  
By, on the highway, low and loud,  
By at the gallop goes he.  
By at the gallop he goes, and then  
By he comes back at the gallop again.

# X

## TRAVEL

I SHOULD like to rise and go  
Where the golden apples grow; —  
Where below another sky  
Parrot islands anchored lie,  
And, watched by cockatoos and goats,  
Lonely Crusoes building boats; —  
Where in sunshine reaching out  
Eastern cities, miles about,  
Are with mosque and minaret  
Among sandy gardens set,  
And the rich goods from near and far  
Hang for sale in the bazaar;  
Where the Great Wall round China goes,  
And on one side the desert blows,  
And with bell and voice and drum,  
Cities on the other hum; —  
Where are forests, hot as fire,  
Wide as England, tall as a spire,  
Full of apes and cocoa-nuts  
And the negro hunters' huts; —  
Where the knotty crocodile  
Lies and blinks in the Nile,  
And the red flamingo flies

Hunting fish before his eyes; —  
Where in jungles, near and far,  
Man-devouring tigers are,  
Lying close and giving ear  
Lest the hunt be drawing near,  
Or a comer-by be seen  
Swinging in a palanquin; —  
Where among the desert sands  
Some deserted city stands,  
All its children, sweep and prince,  
Grown to manhood ages since,  
Not a foot in street or house,  
Not a stir of child or mouse,  
And when kindly falls the night,  
In all the town no spark of light.  
There I'll come when I'm a man  
With a camel caravan;  
Light a fire in the gloom  
Of some dusty dining room;  
See the pictures on the walls,  
Heroes, fights and festivals;  
And in a corner find the toys  
Of the old Egyptian boys.

# XI

## SINGING

OF speckled eggs the birdie sings  
And nests among the trees;  
The sailor sings of ropes and things  
In ships upon the seas.

The children sing in far Japan,  
The children sing in Spain;  
The organ with the organ man  
Is singing in the rain.

## XII

# LOOKING FORWARD

WHEN I am grown to man's estate  
I shall be very proud and great.  
And tell the other girls and boys  
Not to meddle with my toys.

# XIII

## A GOOD PLAY

WE built a ship upon the stairs  
All made of the back-bedroom chairs,  
And filled it full of sofa pillows  
To go a-sailing on the billows.

We took a saw and several nails,  
And water in the nursery pails;  
And Tom said, 'Let us also take  
An apple and a slice of cake;' —  
Which was enough for Tom and me  
To go a-sailing on till tea.

We sailed along for days and days,  
And had the very best of plays;  
But Tom fell out and hurt his knee,  
So there was no one left but me.

# XIV

## WHERE GO THE BOATS?

DARK brown is the river,  
Golden is the sand.  
It flows along for ever,  
With trees on either hand.

Green leaves a-floating,  
Castles of the foam,  
Boats of mine a-boating —  
Where will all come home?

On goes the river  
And out past the mill,  
Away down the valley,  
Away down the hill.

Away down the river,  
A hundred miles or more,  
Other little children  
Shall bring my boats ashore.

# XV

## AUNTIE'S SKIRTS

WHENEVER Auntie moves around,  
Her dresses make a curious sound;  
They trail behind her up the floor,  
And trundle after through the door.

# XVI

## THE LAND OF COUNTERPANE

WHEN I was sick and lay a-bed,  
I had two pillows at my head,  
And all my toys beside me lay  
To keep me happy all the day.

And sometimes for an hour or so  
I watched my leaden soldiers go,  
With different uniforms and drills,  
Among the bed-clothes, through the hills;

And sometimes sent my ships in fleets  
All up and down among the sheets;  
Or brought my trees and houses out,  
And planted cities all about.

I was the giant great and still  
That sits upon the pillow-hill,  
And sees before him, dale and plain,  
The pleasant land of counterpane.

# XVII

## THE LAND OF NOD

FROM breakfast on through all the day  
At home among my friends I stay;  
But every night I go abroad  
Afar into the land of Nod.

All by myself I have to go,  
With none to tell me what to do —  
All alone beside the streams  
And up the mountain-sides of dreams.

The strangest things are there for me,  
Both things to eat and things to see,  
And many frightening sights abroad  
Till morning in the land of Nod.

Try as I like to find the way,  
I never can get back by day,  
Nor can remember plain and clear  
The curious music that I hear.

# XVIII

## MY SHADOW

I HAVE a little shadow that goes in and out with me,  
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.  
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;  
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.

The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow —  
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;  
For he sometimes shoots up taller like an india-rubber ball,  
And sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all.

He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,  
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.  
He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;  
I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!

One morning, very early, before the sun was up,  
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;  
But my lazy little shadow, like an arrant sleepy-head,  
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.

# XIX

## SYSTEM

EVERY night my prayers I say,  
And get my dinner every day;  
And every day that I've been good,  
I get an orange after food.

The child that is not clean and neat,  
With lots of toys and things to eat,  
He is a naughty child, I'm sure —  
Or else his dear papa is poor.

## XX

# A GOOD BOY

I WOKE before the morning, I was happy all the day,  
I never said an ugly word, but smiled and stuck to play.

And now at last the sun is going down behind the wood,  
And I am very happy, for I know that I've been good.

My bed is waiting cool and fresh, with linen smooth and fair,  
And I must off to sleeps-in-by, and not forget my prayer.

I know that, till to-morrow I shall see the sun arise,  
No ugly dream shall fright my mind, no ugly sight my eyes,

But slumber holds me tightly till I waken in the dawn,  
And hear the thrushes singing in the lilacs round the lawn.

## XXI

# ESCAPE AT BEDTIME

THE lights from the parlour and kitchen shone out  
Through the blinds and the windows and bars;  
And high overhead and all moving about,  
There were thousands of millions of stars.  
There ne'er were such thousands of leaves on a tree,  
Nor of people in church or the Park,  
As the crowds of the stars that looked down upon me,  
And that glittered and winked in the dark.  
The Dog, and the Plough, and the Hunter, and all  
And the Star of the Sailor, and Mars,  
These shone in the sky, and the pail by the wall  
Would be half full of water and stars.  
They saw me at last, and they chased me with cries,  
And they soon had me packed into bed;  
But the glory kept shining and bright in my eyes,  
And the stars going round in my head.

# XXII

## MARCHING SONG

BRING the comb and play upon it!  
Marching, here we come!  
Willie cocks his highland bonnet,  
Johnnie beats the drum.

Mary Jane commands the party,  
Peter leads the rear;  
Feet in time, alert and hearty,  
Each a Grenadier!

All in the most martial manner  
Marching double-quick;  
While the napkin like a banner  
Waves upon the stick!

Here's enough of fame and pillage,  
Great commander Jane!  
Now that we've been round the village,  
Let's go home again.

**XXIII**  
**THE COW**

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