

Lewis Carroll (1832-98)

1 *The Aged Aged Man*

‘I’ll tell thee everything I can:  
There’s little to relate.  
I saw an aged aged man,  
A-sitting on a gate.  
‘Who are you, aged man?’ I said. 5  
‘And how is it you live?’  
And his answer trickled through my head,  
Like water through a sieve.

He said ‘I look for butterflies  
That sleep among the wheat: 10  
I make them into mutton-pies,  
And sell them in the street.  
I sell them unto men’, he said,  
‘Who sail on stormy seas;  
And that’s the way I get my bread — 15  
A trifle, if you please.’

But I was thinking of a plan  
To dye one’s whiskers green,  
And always use so large a fan  
That they could not be seen. 20  
So, having no reply to give  
To what the old man said,  
I cried ‘Come, tell me how you live!’  
And thumped him on the head.

His accents mild took up the tale: 25  
He said ‘I go my ways,  
And when I find a mountain-rill,  
I set it in a blaze;  
And thence they make a stuff they call  
Rowland’s Macassar-Oil — 30  
Yet twopence-halfpenny is all  
They give me for my toil.’

But I was thinking of a way  
To feed oneself on batter,  
And so go on from day to day 35  
Getting a little fatter.

I shook him well from side to side,  
Until his face was blue:  
'Come, tell me how you live,' I cried,  
'And what it is you do!' 40

He said 'I hunt for haddocks' eyes  
Among the heather bright,  
And work them into waistcoat-buttons  
In the silent night.  
And these I do not sell for gold 45  
Or coin of silvery shine,  
But for a copper halfpenny,  
And that will purchase nine.

'I sometimes dig for buttered rolls,  
Or set limed twigs for crabs: 50  
I sometimes search the grassy knolls  
For wheels of Hansom-cabs.  
And that's the way' (he gave a wink)  
'By which I get my wealth —  
And very gladly will I drink 55  
Your Honour's noble health.'

I heard him then, for I had just  
Completed my design  
To keep the Menai bridge from rust  
By boiling it in wine. 60  
I thanked him much for telling me  
The way he got his wealth,  
But chiefly for his wish that he  
Might drink my noble health.

And now, if e'er by chance I put 65  
My fingers into glue,  
Or madly squeeze a right-hand foot  
Into a left-hand shoe,

Or if I drop upon my toe  
A very heavy weight, 70  
I weep, for it reminds me so  
Of that old man I used to know —  
Whose look was mild, whose speech was slow  
Whose hair was whiter than the snow,  
Whose face was very like a crow, 75  
With eyes, like cinders, all aglow,  
Who seemed distracted with his woe,  
Who rocked his body to and fro,  
And muttered mumblingly and low,  
As if his mouth were full of dough, 80  
Who snorted like a buffalo ——  
That summer evening long ago,  
A-sitting on a gate.”

1871

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