SOUTH AFRICAN NURSERY RHYMES

BY

MARGARET WHITING SPILHAUS

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Pat
from
Jim.

By the same Author :

The Limber Elf : Studies of Child Life.

The Children's Map of Africa.

To "Elizabeth and Co."

Rhona – Elizabeth – Betty – John
Diana – Pat – Phillida – Hal
Mariota – Derek – Vivien – Rose
The two Jeans
and
Marion – Joy

Millers Point

Summer Holidays 1924

PUBLISHED BY
JUTA & CO. LTD.
CAPE TOWN AND JOHANNESBURG.

The Author acknowledges the courtesy of the Editors of "The Cape," "The Cape Times," "The Old Cambridge," &c., in allowing her to reprint some of these verses.

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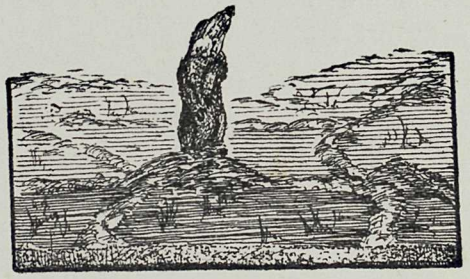
The Mole

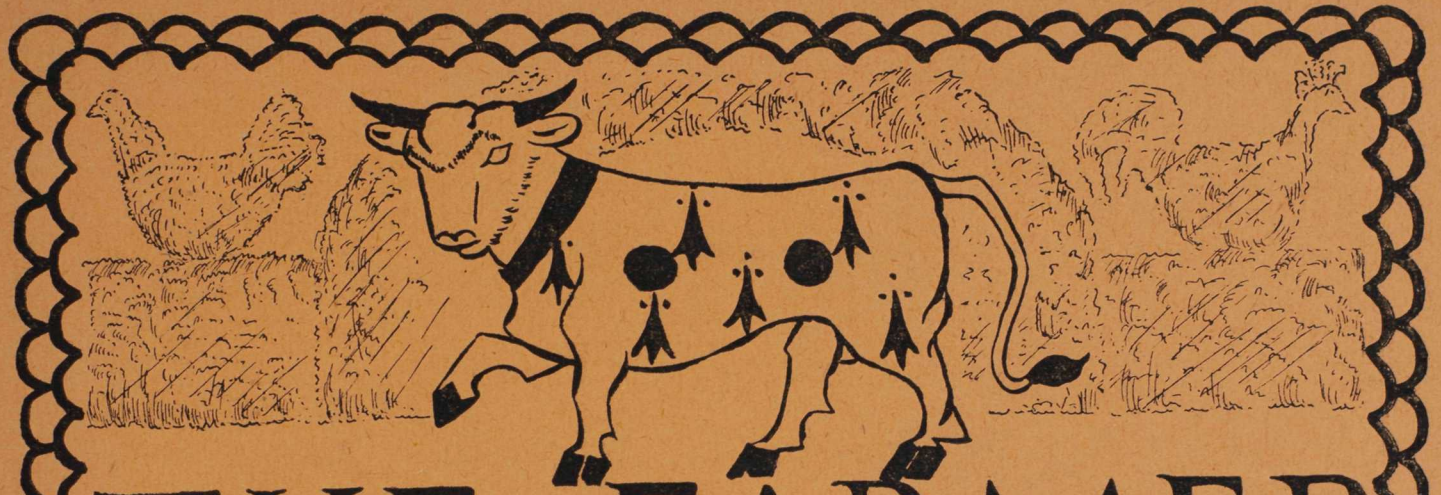
I planted my dilly bulbs out to grow,
Golden jonquils all in a row,
Hyacinths crimson and lavender-blue,
Quoth I to myself, as I raked the soil through :
Such a Spring there will be !
Such a garden to see !
And I shall be King of the Castle !

And Spring came rollicking out of the West,
And I looked for the fragrance that I loved best,
And not a sign came, not one small green sheath,
And I tremblingly lifted the soil underneath,
And nothing was left in each little round hole,
Nothing was left there but Old Man Mole,
And *he* was King of the Castle !



The Farmer

The farmer—he's always in sorrowful plight,
The locusts are swarming, there's drought, and there's blight,
There's rain, and there's not enough rain, and there's quite
An appalling procession of insects that bite,
And worms that eat apples ; and sheep die on sight,
And there's tsetse fly, mealie bug, glanders, and blight,
And again blight, and rust in the wheat, and the flight
Of pedigree cattle which die in the night.
There's a bug called a Middleman squeezing him tight,
And there's bad labour, no labour, and the Poor White,
There's the sins of the Government still to requite,
And he can't make a fortune, which doesn't seem right ;
And his grievance would take a decade to indite . . . .
The farmer—he's never released from alarms,
And everyone wonders why anyone farms.

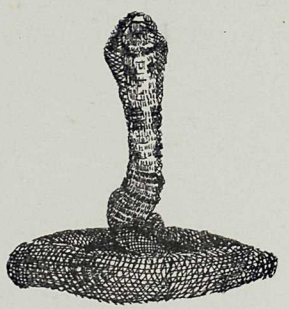


THE FARMER

The Snake

I do not wish to undertake
To prod the Muse and rhyme the snake,
The bare suggestion makes me quake,
    I can't abide him.
The snake is beautiful, we bring
Praise to his patterned scale and ring,
But who would touch this jewelled thing,
    Woe betide him !

The heedless young are often told
Alarming tales by heedful old
Of how some man was overbold
    And got him smitten.
But if you will obedient be,
And when the sinuous snake you see
You run away or climb a tree,
    You'll not be bitten.



The Locust

Among our very firm dislikes
  We all know what the locusts are.
Their legs are jagged with horny spikes,
  Their livery is quite bizarre.

They swept upon the blossoming plain,
  Plagueing old Egypt's lands and byres,
And now we drive them from *our* grain
  By banging tins and blazing fires.

With locusts in the mealie crops,
  With locusts in the standing wheat,
The Kafir starves unless it stops,
  The white man has no bread to eat.

THE LOCUST

ROBIN CHAT

High upon the oak-tree bough
Mourns the lonely Piet-myn-vrouw,
High and clear his echoing plaint
Mourns his late espouséd saint.

Trills his sweet untiring throat,
Calling Piet in liquid note,
" Piet—myn—vrouw ! Whose bullet flew
Hot to her breast and my love slew ? "

But Piet is dead, he hears no call,
The leaves of many winters fall
Fast on his grave ; he sleeps unstirred
By sorrow of a soft-eyed bird.

The Cicada

Cicada, cicada, cic-cic-cicada,
Singing in the woods
While the summer's humming by.

Shrill little minstrel, sawing on his violin,
Singing for his lady-love
All the shimmering summer noon.

Up and down, and up and down, click, clack unceasingly,
In his green pavilion
Singing for the joy of life.

Deep down the hungry earth, dark, black, viewless ground,
Underneath the loamy earth,
Soundless all his cradle years,
Lay he in a lightless bed.

BANTU WOMAN POUNDING MEALIES

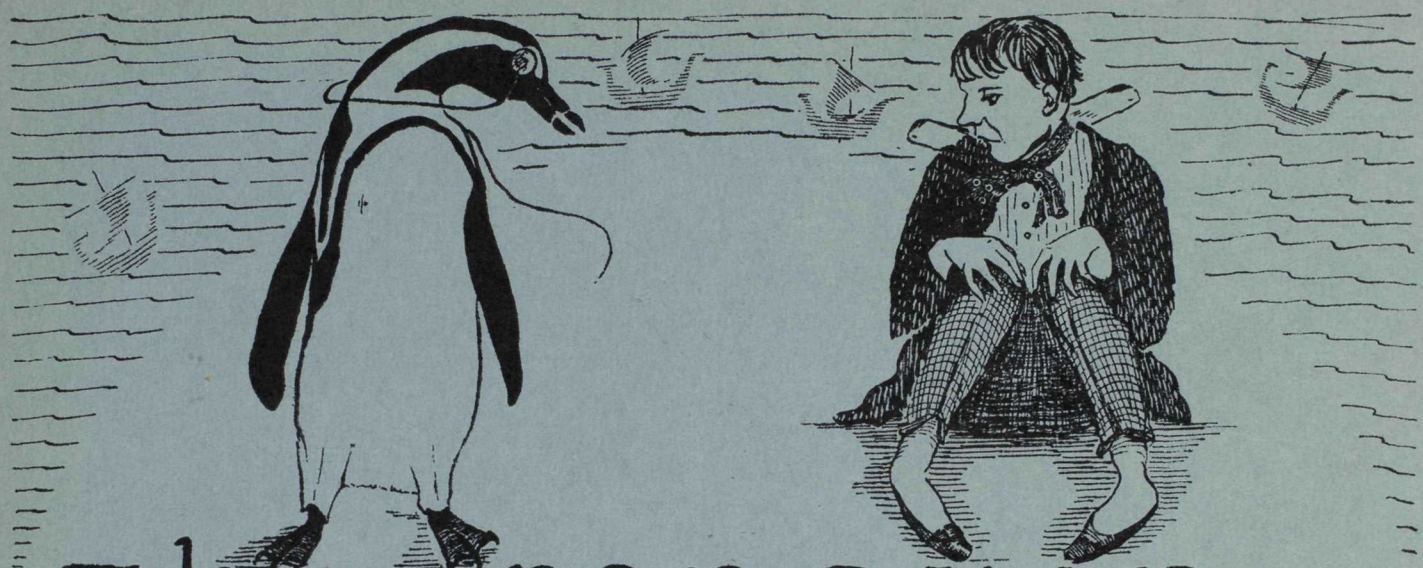
Now he sings, now he sings,
cic-cic-cicada,
Singing in the sun,
In the blessed light of day.

Ho, my love! Ho, my love!
Come! Come! Come, my love!
Shrilling through the glades
While the summer's humming by.

The Penguin

Your father hates his collar stiff,
There happens such a dreadful tiff
When Mummy says that he must wear it.
His wide expanse of white shirt-front
He views with loathing, grunts a grunt,
And vows he *simply cannot bear it.*

The penguin, on the other hand,
Awaits no diffident command,
He wears his evening suit all day ;
He needs no coaxing, off he struts,
No " oh, my dears," and " poohs," and
" buts "—
His is the far politer way.



the penguin

KOCHELMANNETJE

BUSH BOY-HUNTING

Wouldn't it be nice,
Instead of bidding twice,
If children moved obediently
As swift as Kochelmannetje,
Wouldn't it be nice?

the Ant

If we watch every insect at work
There is none which so amply repays
Our vigilant searching for fact
As the ant. In a million ways
She surpasses the rest. Not the bee
Is more bright and industrious than she.

Supposing some magic might spell
Our dimensions to fairylike size
And we walked in the long colonnades
Of the ants' royal palace, how wise
We should find the arrangements to be,
We should think them made magically.

As we wound our adventurous way,
Into nurseries tiny we'd peep,
So tiny we scarcely could see
The tiny ant babies asleep.
So many to feed and keep clean,
How busy the nurses have been!

We shall find that their delicate limbs,
When to the store-rooms we pass,
Have made them a granary full
Of harvested seed from the grass.
And soldiers are guarding the door,
No marauder may pillage the store.

Philosophers study them well,
And say that the sluggard should go
To the ant to be taught to take pains.
To the ant but one drawback I know,
Of the ant I say nothing but good,
Except when she swarms in my food.

The Mule

You know the mule,
A useful beast,
Its character is much maligned.
They say it kicks, and bites, and jibs,
I tell you they are telling fibs.

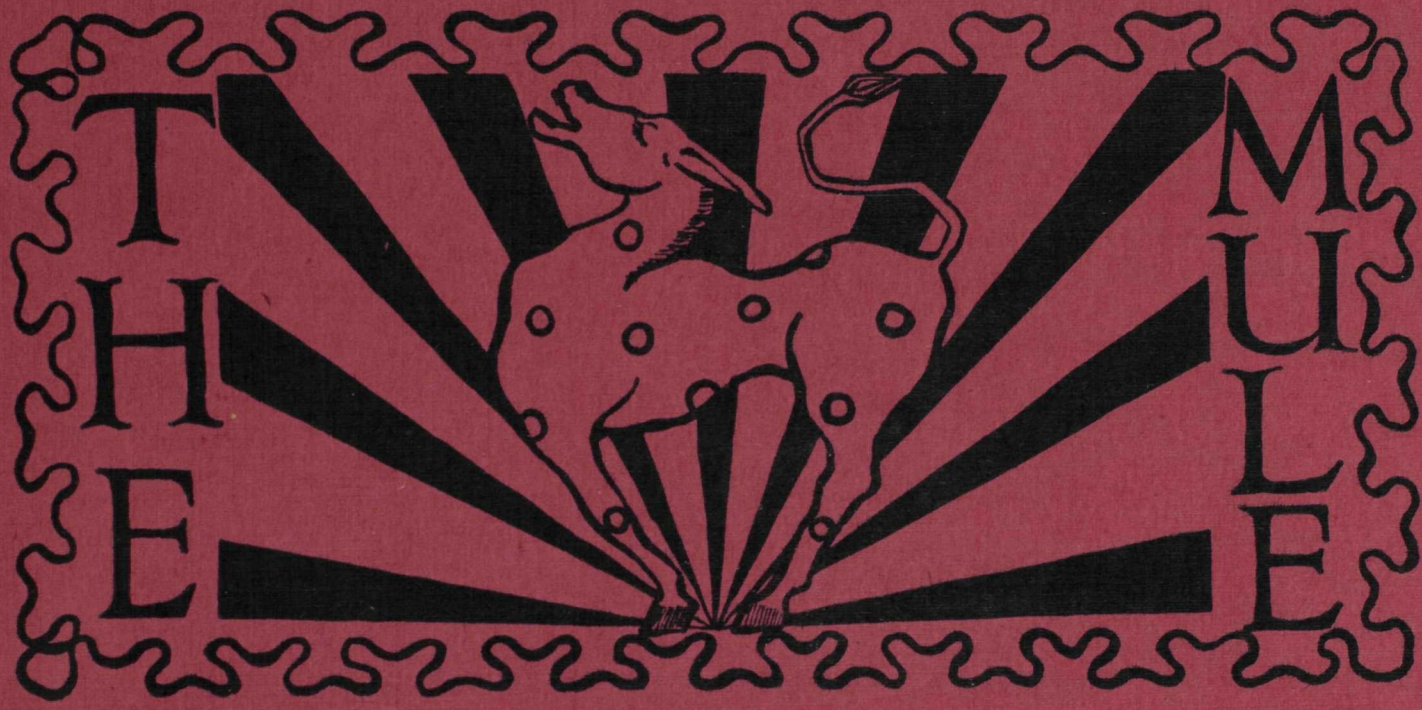
His nature is all kindliness,
He only is misunderstood,
He likes a life of quiet ease,
Retirement and broken knees,
Grazing grass and stripping trees.
It's when he cannot get all these
He lamentably fails to please.

You should not drive him in a cart,
Undignified and over-heated,
But since you do he does his best,
Is wayward, wicked, for the rest
Obeys your every hard behest.

In England he's an alien,
His woggly ear,
Suspicious eye,
His meagre tail, and mouth of stone,
In London Town are all unknown.

You do not see a team of mules,
A whooping Kaffir man in charge,
Rattling a-tilt down Regent Street.
They'd hesitate at such a treat,
Pedestrians would swear in heat,
The constable upon the beat
Would raise his hand and vainly bleat.

Nevertheless, though England doubt him,
Here we could not do without him.


THE
MULE

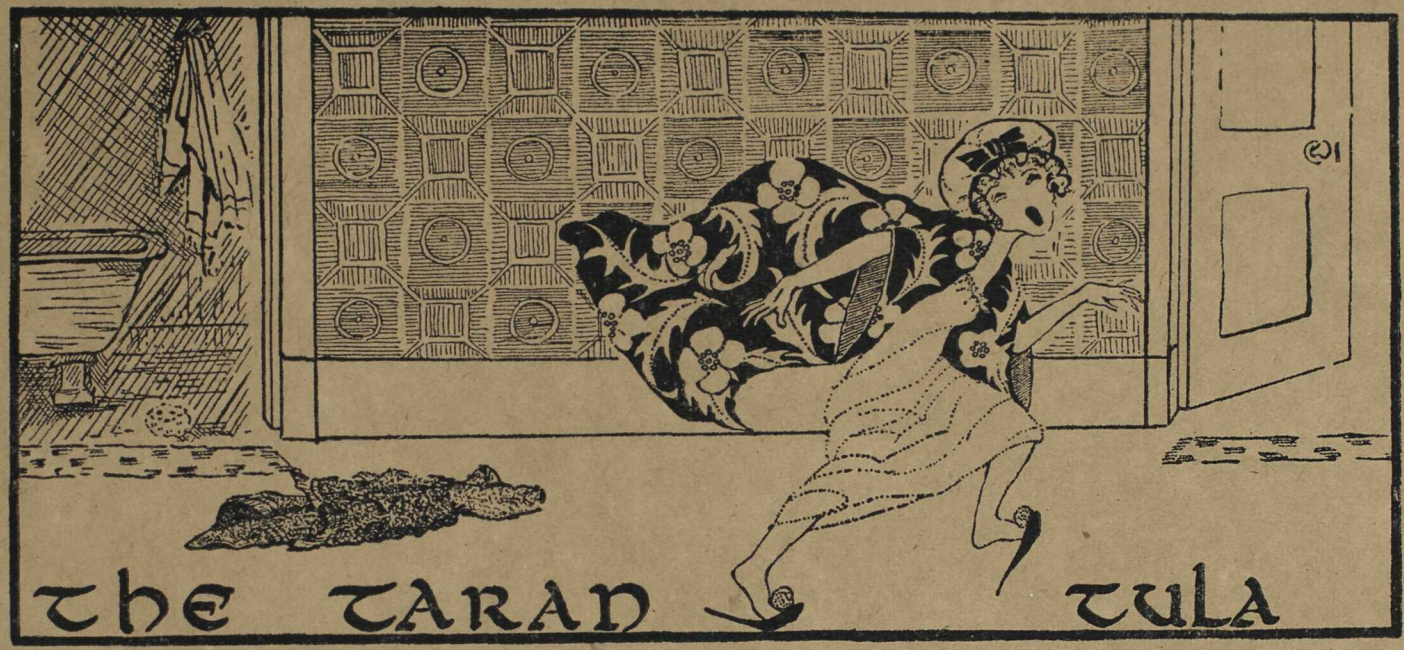
The Bombardier Beetle

Attention !
Form fours !
Listen well
While I tell.
Of a soldier tough-coated,
Of fame often quoted,
Of a leetle
Old beetle,
    The Bombardier Beetle.

He bites not,
He claws not ;
In dignified battle,
A rush and a rattle,
As he hurries for shelter
Internal distillery
Makes his artillery ;
He's off in a run
And lets go his gun.
With a puff and a leetle
Bang ! pop goes the beetle,
    The Bombardier Beetle.

The Tarantula

I do not like tarantulas,
The hairy, stripy things ;
I loathe their grisly bodies,
And I fear their noisome stings.
They live in tunnels underground,
I'm very glad to think,
Although they sometimes wander forth
Into the house, and there they slink
High in a corner.
Once I found
The creature in my bath-room towels.
I shook him down the basin plug,
And fled the room with howls.



I have not drawn this person's shadow because she ran so quickly she had not time to cast one

The Fly

OUD JAN with a fire-stick.

My child, I would not have you rough,
I hope that I have said enough
In these my rhymes for you to see
How nice and gentle you should be.
Only—I need not tell you why—
You may always *swot that fly*!

The Duck-billed Platypus

There's many a one who takes a pet
To watch its cunning ways,
To have it follow one about,
To fill a muff when one goes out,
To cuddle and to praise.

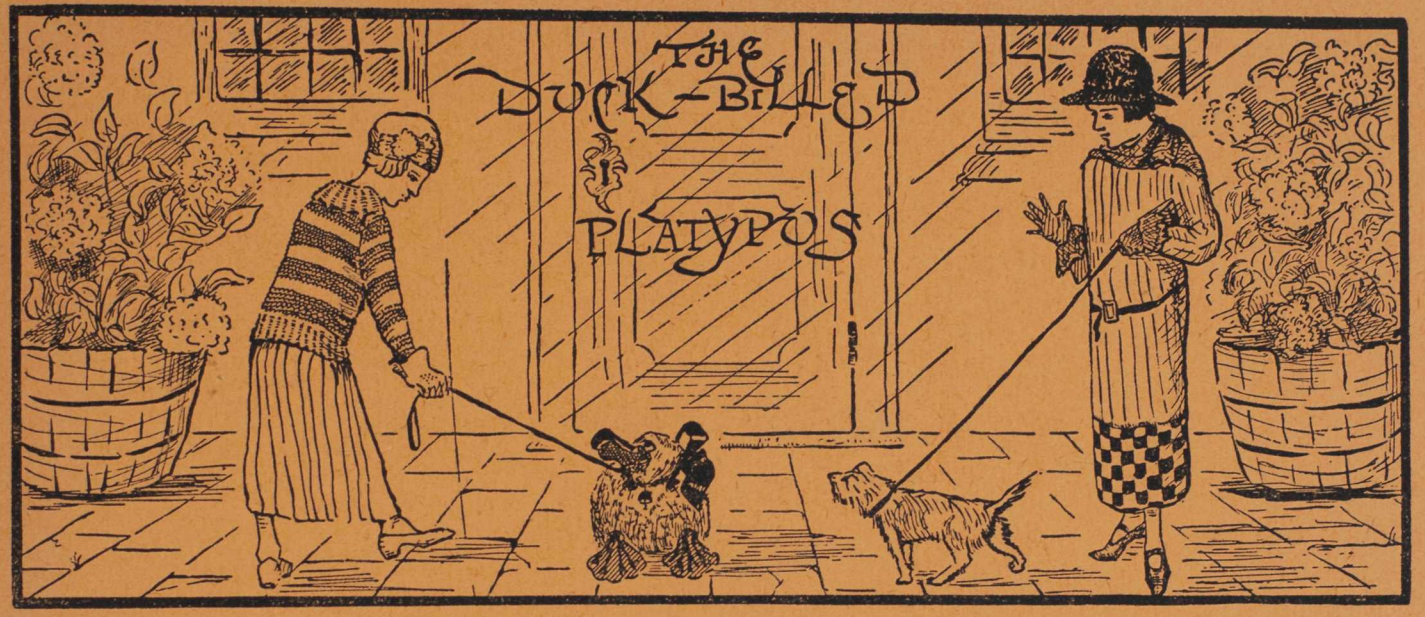
There's many a different kind of pet :
Monkeys, and baby calves, and bees,
Guinea-pigs, and mice, and rats,
Puppy-dogs, and Persian cats,
All thrive in cherished ease.

Yet nobody in all the list,
Including me, not one of us
Has thought of taking to his heart
That miracle of wayward art
The Duck-billed Platypus.

'Tis not a duck for all its bill,
'Tis not a reptile, yet it lays
Eggs like a snake's. And like an otter
Lives either in or out of water.
Its foot both claw and web displays.

'Tis really like some curious beast
Upon an old-time coat of arms ;
Just think how nice to walk abroad
With such a beast upon a cord
Forever fresh in diverse charms.

Then, too, " The Duck-billed Platypus "
Has such a cheerful sound. I'll try one.
(I am allowed one if I please,)
It lives in the Antipodes.
I'll seek Australia and buy one.


THE
DUCK-BILLED
PLATYPUS

The Tadpole

The tadpole in his crystal house
A jet spark blackly glows,
He eats his way into the air,
And grows,
And grows,
And grows.

He stands upon his threshold then,
His long train folds his limbs,
He dives a dive deep down below,
And swims,
And swims,
And swims.

He grows, and swims, and doffs his train,
And from the pond-weed peeps
A teeny, greeny, slippery frog
Which leaps,
And leaps,
And leaps.

The Chameleon

(1) Among the shadowed bushes green hides
the shrewd chameleon,
In such a curious guise he goes,
And in each different colour shows
The background that he lies upon.

(2) You hesitate to wantonly furnish him
with food for rage,
So menacing his armoured form
You feel uncomfortably warm
Should you such a thought engage.

(3) Imagine, then, the insect-folk, how very
much afraid they are,
A monster they must see him plain,
As fell as that by Perseus slain
Which tried to eat Andromeda.

(4) In prehistoric days there lived, ramping
wild, the dinosaurs,
These monsters of immense design
Then occupied with all their line
This little world of ours.

(5) Yet nothing now remains to us of
dreaded beasts in days bygone
But echoes ; dwindled, guileless worms,
At peace with men on any terms,
Such as the chameleon.

THE CHAMELEON

(6) He only could go dragoning in fairyland ;
no doubt of it
The fairies still his presence rue,
He stirs their deeds of derring-do,
Or fairly frights them out of it.

(7) When Oberon goes visiting far abroad in
foreign lands,
This grisly dragon hires he
To guard his castle frumiously
From fairy robber bands.

(8) Woe betide a naughty fairy who would
go swashbuckling by,
Some marauding tiny knight
Of hearty arm and conscience light,
Who'd stand and challenge merrily.

(9) The dragon in a horrid flash shoots his
long, elastic tongue
And licks him up. His shiny sword,
His tiny steed, with one accord
Down the orange throat are flung.

Hottentot God

(1) Do you know the mantis?
Her slender form,
Her dainty waist,
The graceful curve of verdant hips,
Her blue-browed eyes, her cherry lips?

(2) Have you seen her praying?
Her yellow fingers
Side by side,
Her grass green wings all meetly folded?
How delicately is she moulded!

(3) Hush! Do not watch her very long.
For her image,
Flower-copied,
Is a snare. Now veil your eyes,
Greet not this horrible surprise.

(4) The answer to a mantis' prayer
Is not a dewdrop,
Nor a ray
Of gentle sun, or something such,
Far other comes within her clutch.

(5) Some happy wanderer going past
In search of nectar
Or a bride,
Sees not the ogress standing by,
'Tis him she seizes and sucks dry.

(6) And when a happy bride herself
Her paltry groom
A harpy weds,
No help needs she to set up house,
For wedding feast she eats her spouse.

(7) Her honey-coloured praying hands
Are traps,
A clamping vice.
The cherry lips chaw to and fro,
Nor let their living victim go.

A BUSH PRINCESS

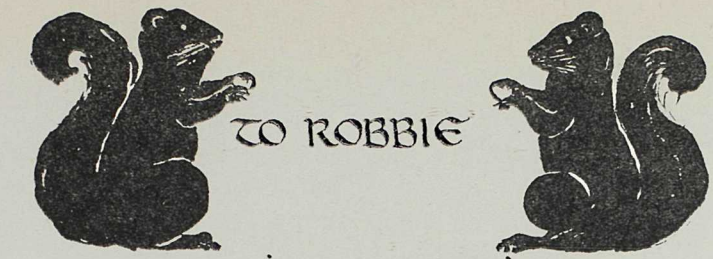
The Butcher Bird

Jacky Hangman,
Jacky Hangman,
Where do you keep your game?
Why are you so wicked, Jacky,
Where do you get your name?

In the hedges,
In the bushes,
Look well in the prickly-pear,
That is where I make my pantry,
You will find the gallows there.

Jacky, where is
My canary?
Where is hung your golden feast?
Oh, you rough and greedy butcher,
Oh, you horrid little beast!

This bird is drawn as big as a parrot because that is the size he looks when he has killed your canary



TO ROBBIE

WHO IS A NATURALIST

One thing the youthful naturalist should always bear in mind :
To fix the proper "genus," that is to say, the kind,
Of any creature he would win to be his little friend,
This matter is most delicate, so hearken and attend.

I've often seen a spider walking homeward in a huff
From some painful social gathering where a guest, not wise enough
In etiquette and lore of beasts, on being introduced
Referred to Mrs. Spider as an Insect ; this produced
A notable sensation. Now be warned by this, I begs,
When you think you have an insect, don't be sure, but COUNT HIS LEGS.

A spider you will find has eight, an "insect proper" six,
And Arthropod society will never intermix.
So if they haven't six their's is another family tree,
And anyone with more or less is not an insect—see ?

The Ostrich

Like our old friends the dodo and moa
The ostrich should really be dead,
For a bird that can't fly and be roasted
There's really not much to be said.

'Twould be eating our way through a
cottage
If we tackled a wing. We should feel
We were eating a thin soup for ever
With an ostrich egg cooked for a meal.

I suppose it's because of the hats,
The milliner's feelings and so on,
They feather our vanity, that's
Why the gawky great birds thrive and
go on.

THE OSTRICH

PLANS

Peter will drive an engine
When he is grown up, he's planned,
And Jerry will go for a sailor
Because of his real cap-band,
Billy will be a farmer,
Bob a museum-man,
Richard, he says, will carry a gun
And be whatever he can.

Mildred likes her dollies,
Margaret her picture-books,
Anthony's head is full as full
Of pirates and sea-cooks.
But I shall keep a tickey bazaar,
And live there every day.
That's what I'll do when *I'm* grown up,
If only I get my way.

TO MARGARET

who is a BOOKWORM

(1) Once wimbled down the world
The Dinosaur,
The lumbering leviathan
Of yore.
And although he grew so curious,
Colossal, ugly, furious,
My tale will not prove spurious,
'Tis true lore.

(2) No use for you to seek now,
Not the least,
With salt to put upon his tail,
This beast
Which history has deified
Neglected brains and therefore died,
A dismal, brainless suicide,
Poor beast.

(3) He'd overtop a house, just
Think of that!
He'd lay the length of half a street,
Quite that.
He fed on tops of trees,
He could trample them with ease,
And *you* could not touch his knees,
Think of that.

(4) 'Twas long before we lived, Man
Wasn't there.
In any case they had no room
To spare.
Now you copy out the reason
Every scientist agrees on,
Why he vanished out of season
Into air.

(5) *He never thought of anything*
But size.
He ate and ate, which wasn't
Very wise.
He turned all his attention
To his girth and his ascension,
And he grew no brains to mention,
Only size.

(6) He neglected so his brains,
Observe his state,
He could no longer study
What he ate.
Do not weep, things might be wus,
Gentle child, we do not fuss,
This was how came room for us,
Here was fate.

(7) Now the story has a moral,
Did you guess?
I know a little girl of ten
No less,
Who might reverse the warning,
For she reads from night to morning,
Any time for growing scorning,
Yes, oh yes.
And I know that in the tussle
She'll develop brains—but muscle?
. . . . . .
Can't you guess?

The Rock Scorpion

(1) I should not choose the scorpion
As fellow in my wanderings,
I should not choose the scorpion
To rescue me from solitude.
I'd rather leave him in the scrub,
And sandy wastes where he belongs.

(2) For he is black, moreover he
A horrid, grisly blackness bears,
Moreover, too, ferociously
He threatens with his poisoned tail.
Oh, yes, I'll leave him in the scrub,
And sandy wastes where he belongs.

(3) He disregards the dryness there,
His thirstiness is hardly known,
He lives until his horrid wife
Devours him. Such horrors haunt
The eerie corners of the scrub,
And sandy wastes where he belongs.

(4) The only scorpion I like,
And him I wonderfully praise,
Is he whose presence alternates
Orion's in the glittering sky.
Magnificently does he range
The glittering vastness of the sky.

(5) All other scorpions eschew,
They have no mellowed fairy-tale,
No legend of Hellenic strain
To make them picturesque and douce.
You'd better leave them in the scrub,
And sandy wastes where they belong.

THE SCORPION

The Ballad of John Bickerdyke

(1) John Bickerdyke, one summer day, went sailing to sea,
He took rod and tackle, for a fisherman was he,
And he took a man of seafaring from Scandanavie.
The wind it was low and the little boat lying
Soft on the green water, lapping and sighing,
Sighing :
"Come all you little fish of two pounds or three,
Come and be caught and go sailing with we."

(2) Down sank the silver hook, sweetly the line
Hummed from the reel, and whipped into the brine.
Waited John Bickerdyke, waited the sign
Of cold white lips nibbling in tune to his fishing,
Rocked in his cockleshell, waiting and wishing,
Wishing :
"Come all you little fish, come and be mine,
Come all you pretty fish, rise you and dine."

(3) Elf, dassie, ponga golden and rose,
Succulent aarder, and grey stump-nose,
John Brown, Red Roman, leaped in the throes.
Crystal-cold bodies in the creel lying.
Lacey fin, jewelled eye ; and still John a-crying,
Crying :
"The sun is in heaven, the salt water flows,
Come all you shining ones, come to repose."

(4) Came a late nibble, a delicate sip,
Some knight of the ocean ! John tightens his grip ;
But the fellow is off, he runs, he lets rip,
He's taken the line, and he's running and lashing,
In and out, through the water he's plunging and crashing,
Flashing
Out like an arrow, like the swerve of a whip,
Four score yards of tackle a-lag from his lip.

(5) Alas ! for John Bickerdyke, worsted is he,
And has left in the ocean a shamed enemy
Trailing eighty odd yards of twine eternally.
The knight of the ocean is sulking and hiding,
In dark, hidden caverns he's brooding and biding,
Brooding :
" Out on John Bickerdyke ! " Go, John, be wary,
You're lost an' you 've troubled the fringes of faery.

. . . .

(6) O, John has set sail, set again to the fray,
Now John tugs, the fish tugs and neither gives way,
And see, John is carried a-rush through the spray.
With the green sea a-rolling and white horses playing,
And long-haired sea-maidens are whispering, saying,
Saying :
" Where flies John Bickerdyke ? Stolen away.
The mermen shall keep him a year and a day."

(7) Where he is now-a-days none has a notion,
Somewhere deep down in the green, dreary ocean,
He's drinking in silence some daft sleepy potion.
And over the waters the duikers are flying,
All on the lone waters wheeling and crying,
Crying :
" Lost is John Bickerdyke, stolen away,
The mermen will keep him a year and a day."

Note.—Now the true story of John Bickerdyke is this : He did catch a queer fish ; he wrote to the " Cape Times " about it, and if you go to the Museum, and turn to the left when you get to the top of the stairs, and look in the case immediately on your right, you will see the fish he caught. Only John Bickerdyke told the Museum people his name was Cook.

A CATALOGUE

(1) Upon your round and cheerful face
You have your features neatly ranged.
Your ears, your mouth, your questing
eyes,
Your tuppenny nose, how each one goes
Comely in its place!

(2) The insect has no plan as neat,
It takes no hint from you and me,
Its ears it carries 'neath its knee
Or on the farthest end of it,
Some beetles use their feet.

(3) A pair of eyes, a careful match,
Content you as you go your way.
The insect asks: Why not a pair
Of noses too?
He takes his cue and plans them with
despatch.
So we find this double dealer
Carries one upon its feeler.

(4) Indeed the nose idea became
Obsession, and for you and me
The competition is not fair.
With legs he smells,
And history tells
How other parts may share the game.
He smells all over I've heard tell,
No wonder that he smells so well.

His eyes I've left until the last
(Or nearly) so to serve my climax.
A pair he has, and three besides.
Eyes and eyes,
And eyes and eyes.
They leave one all aghast.
Cut like diamonds a pair
Watch the world's reflected stare,
And, in between, three lesser lights
Gather in the closer sights.

And here's an extra piece of news
Which you may swallow if you choose :
The good red blood that fills your cheeks,
And makes your mother so delighted,
Is mostly by the insect slighted.
Colourless his vital fluid,
Unless he is a dandy fellow
Who chooses green or yellow.

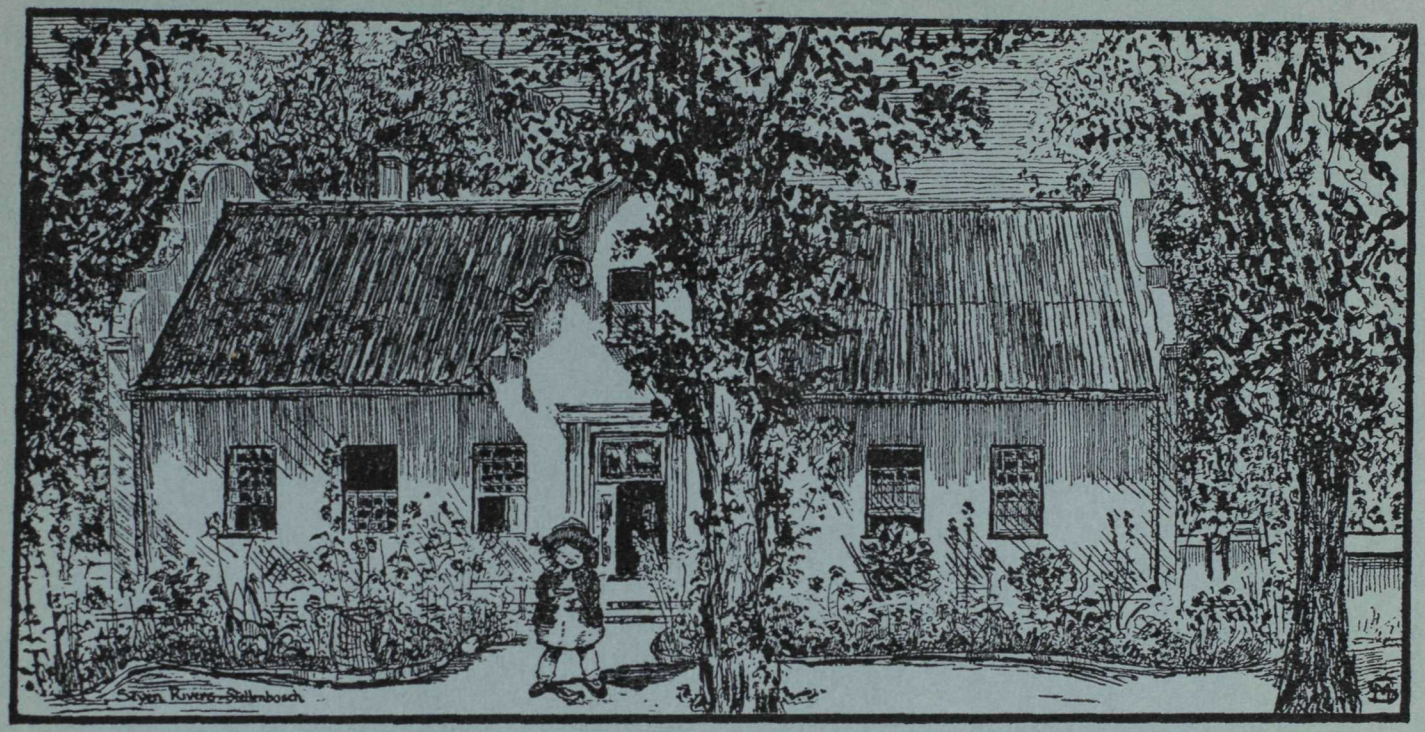
The Cape Robin

(1) I do not keep a prowling cat
With golden eyeballs glowing fierce,
With cruel, grasping claws to pierce
Jan Frederic, my guest.

(2) I do not set a bowl of cream,
But sprinkle crumbs and tiny seed,
(Jan Frederic has a tiny greed
And often is my guest).

(3) Upon the nursery mantlepiece
He hops when Baby has her food
(Especially when she is good),
Jan F. likes bread-crumbs best.

(4) Somewhere he builds a feathery nest,
On purpose for his wee brown wife,
And babies when they come to life.
(No prowling cat may quest.)


Stryen Rivers-Stellenbosch

Her First Birthday

Past a year has,
And our Dear has
Filled beguiling
Months gone smiling.
14th dawning
Festive morning,
We caress you
As we dress you,
Bless you, bless you
Baby!

Cake and candle
Next to handle,
Babies muster
Round her cluster,
Wildernesses
Of starched dresses,
Soap and pumice,
Bringing bunnies
For she's *one* is
Baby.

THE CREEPS

I crept through the hall,
The light was not on,
I crept up the first stair,
I was alone.
Tip-toe to the second stair
I was afeard,
On the next I met the moon-man
Combing his beard,
I came to the fourth stair,
Round — I — turned,
Hair stirring, heart thump, eyes along
the ground . . .
The landing—and there
Something creaked,
I squeaked, and ran . . .
Landing—the third floor,
Still no bogey-man.
The last lap, a blind dash,
Mother's arms, and then :
"I want something, Dear," she said,
"Will you run down again ? "

"There are Notions"
Diana '24

Any Child to the Moon.

SEE you moon, you Lady Moon,
Behind that little cloud you hide,
And very soon, ah, very soon
You'll peep out on the other side.

(2) I know you think that when I blink
My eyes in just a moment's play,
That you can glide and swiftly hide,
And I'll not see you slip away.

(3) In winter when the night is fine
And all the little stars ashine,
I watch you floating out in space;
Till troublesome old Bed-time comes
And slams the shutters in your face.

(4) You always look the same each night,
Although I've tried with all my might
Just once to catch you unawares.
Oh, are you *you* to grown-ups too
(I wonder!) when I've gone upstairs?

(5) I've seen you face to face, alack
I've never seen you turn your back.
You smile, mysteriously bowed,
I cast about to find you out—
You just play peep-bo 'hind a cloud.

(6) Once long ago my mother said
You came and peeped at her in bed,
And left a little moonbeam there,
And that was me: Oh Lady free
Have you forgot, or don't you care?

(7) Sometimes I feel the quiet air
Stand waiting round me when you're there.
And then it is I make a plan
One fine bed-time to climb and climb,
And start again where I began.

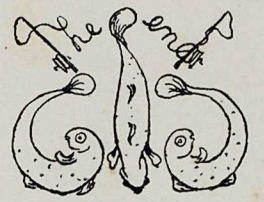
(8) I'll have a castle in a cloud,
Ten thousand castles high and proud,
Lit with lanterns all of stars.
And I shall stay up night and day
And hold a court for feasts and wars.

(9) And when we two go forth to meet
Each other in the glittering street,
As in and out the stars we thread,
We'll laugh and play along the Way
With all the world below us spread.

TO PEGGY

CONVALESCENT

When you are not quite well, in bed
They pile up pillows for your head,
And nearly all your favourite plays
Are put away for stronger days.
For how can houses made of blocks
Stand firm upon a thing that rocks,
And how can cross-stitch keep its charm
When sitting up may do you harm?
Your dolls grow dull in time, and trains
Won't run about on counterpanes;
Your paint-box stays upon the shelf—
The water *always* spills itself.
I think till you are up and drest
A picture-book is quite the best.



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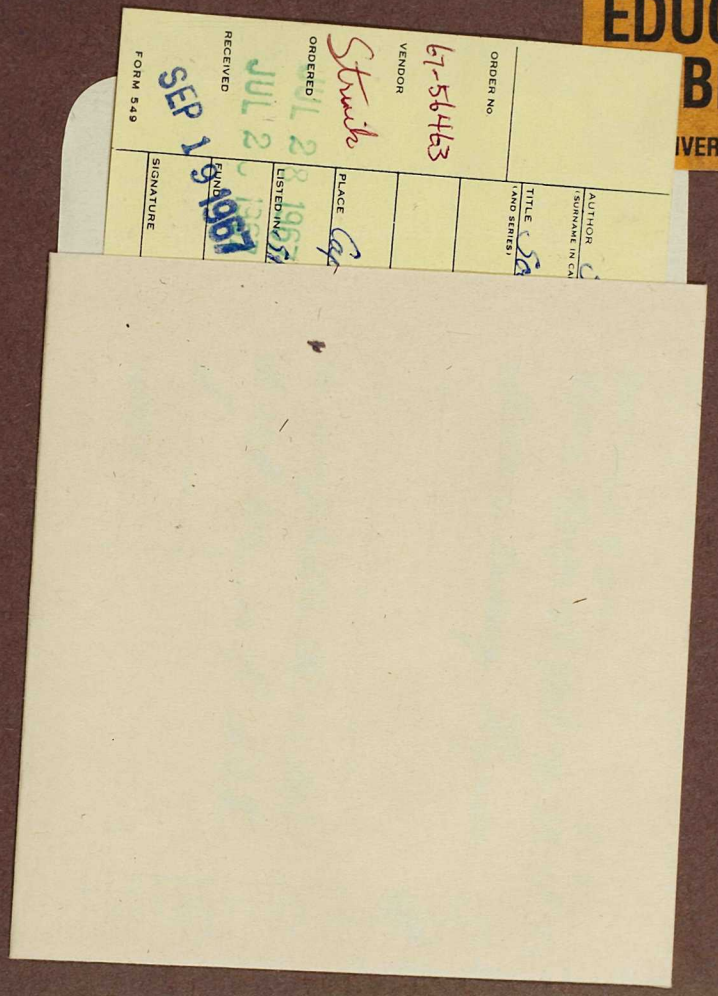
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