

THE CAMPKIN POEM

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The following excerpt has been copied from Ove Michaelsen's unpublished book of palindromes.

This poem, submitted by Henry Campkin to the March 8, 1873 British journal *Notes and Queries*, is somewhat nonsensical. It was written to please a group of youthful folk, and to show that the English tongue is as capable of being twisted into "uncouth shapes" as Latin. The terrible limp in the meter is unavoidable because one line of every couplet is largely palindromic.

One winter's eve around the fire, a cosy group we sat,
Engaged as was our custom old, in after-dinner chat.
Small talk it was, no doubt, because the smaller folk were there,
And they, the young monopolists! absorbed the lion's share.
Conundrums, riddles, rebuses, cross-questions, puns atrocious,
Taxed all their ingenuity, till Peter, the precocious—
Old head on shoulders juvenile—cried, "Now, for a new task,
Let's try our hand at palindromes!" "Agreed! But first," we ask,
"Pray, Peter, what are palindromes?" The forward imp replied,
"A palindrome's a string of words, of sense or meaning void,
Which reads both ways the same: and here, with your permission,
I'll cite some half-a-score samples, lacking all precision
(But held together by loose rhymes) to test my definition!"

A milksop, jilted by his lass, or wandering in his wits,
Might murmur **stiff, O dairyman, in a myriad of fits!**
A limner, by photography dead beat in competition,
Thus grumbled: **no, it is opposed, art sees trade's opposition!**
A nonsense-loving nephew might his soldier-uncle dun,
With **now stop, major general, are negro jam-pots won?**
A supercilious grocer, if inclined that way, might snub
A child with **but ragusa store, babe, rots a sugar tub!**
Thy sceptre, Alexander, is a fortress, cried Hephaestion;
Great A. said, **no, it's a bar of gold, a bad log for a bastion!**
A timid creature fearing rodents—mice and such small fry—
Stop Syrian, I start at rats in airy spots, might cry.
A simple soul, whose wants are few, might say, with hearty zest,
Desserts I desire not, so long no lost one rise distressed.
A stern Canadian parent might—in earnest, not in fun—
Exclaim, **no sot nor Ottawa law at Toronto, son!**
A crazy dentist might declare, as something strange or new,
That **Paget saw an Irish tooth, sir, in a waste gap!** True!
A surly student, hating sweets, might answer with élan,
Name tarts, no, medieval slave, I demonstrate man!
He who in nature's bitters, findeth sweet food every day,
Eureka! Till I pull up ill I take rue, well might say.