

There were a number of counting-rhymes, some of which, I hear, are still in use. Of the respectable ones, I can remember only "Eenie-meenie". This was used when there were, say, too many boys present to share in a distribution of stolen oranges. At each syllable of the rhyme the speaker would point to a different boy:

Eenie-meenie, miney, mo,
Catch a nigger by the toe.
If he hollows let him go,
Eenie-meenie, miney, mo,
And out you go.

Whichever boy was pointed to at the word "go" would be excluded from the distribution of the treasures, and the process would be repeated until the number was reduced to the appropriate point. The counting was supposed to be done in strict rotation, but a skilful and unscrupulous reciter often managed to protect the interests of himself and his mates. There was also the unpleasant

Ink, pink, pen and ink;
I smell a great big stink,
And it comes from Y-O-U.

This was used as a sort of magical method of revealing who had produced a certain kind of unpleasantness which always raises mirth in immature minds.

Nowadays I rarely see the rhymes that we used to scribble on the walls of public lavatories.

Of course, I haven't much chance of discovering if many of the sooty rhymes of my youth are still remembered. However, when I unthinkingly quoted the first line of "Mary and the Magpie" in front of a couple of lads the other day, and their faces showed no flicker of recognition, I assumed that even that old classic has fallen out of use.

I don't know if the poem we used to attribute to Byron is still going. It began:

On Shooter's Hill so high and steep
A fair young maid lay down to sleep,
And as she lay in sweet repose
A playful breeze blew up her clothes.

I suspect that two old favorites, "Can't you see the blisters?" and "When we were boys at school," have dropped from use. However, I gather that many of the old adult limericks still circulate among schoolboys.

They may also still cherish "Our old moke is a funny old bloke."

I feel that "Fisherman, fisherman" was perhaps too long to live on through the years. It had a catchy tune, and opened with two innocuous stanzas:

Fisherman, fisherman, fishing by the
sea,
Have you any fish that you can sell to
me,
With a hi-tiddeley-hi-ti, come along o'
me,
Hi-tiddeley-hi-ti, Johnson.

He bought a fish for which he paid a
cent,
He put it in his pocket, and home he
went,
With a hi-tiddeley-hi-ti, come along o'
me,
Hi-tiddeley-hi-ti, Johnson.

There were several long ones, too, about sailors. There was "The Fair Young Maiden and Bollocky Bill," and one that described the betrayal of another maiden, whose seducer told her that if the incident led to the birth of a son she was to "dress him in bell-bottoms and a little coat of blue."



I imagine that our old secret language, "ichy-way oz-way oken-spay ike-lay iss-thay" (i.e., "which was spoken like this") has gone, and the other day I found a juvenile audience none of whom knew the formula

YYUR
YYUB
ICUR
YY4ME

which is, decoded:

Too wise you are,
Too wise you be,
I see you are
Too wise for me.

However, I hope that some of the old parodies still enliven the after-school hours of lads today. For my money the bobby-dazzler among them all was:

Oh, dear, what can the matter be,
Three old ladies locked in the lavatory
...

Ah, well - who knows - the falling out of use of these childhood rhymes may have a beneficial effect on the adult poetry of the future. At present many poets of what are thought to be mature years compose their poetry using the forms used by the schoolboy lyricists. Juvenile verse of the type we have been discussing, also, can have an effect on adult speech, perhaps even on grown-up thought-processes. About

10 years ago some latter-day lower-school Herrick composed a lyric that went almost like this:

See you later,
Chip potater.
Burn your tail on the radiator,
And freeze your nose in the Kelvinator.

A few years later the press of the world published the thrilling news that the members of an overseas smart-set were demonstrating their sophistication and originality of mind by saying to each other,

See you later,
Alligator.

Gosh, how the kids must have sneered to see a third-form expression of their obsession with rhyme being so debased! And think of the effect of the plagiarism on the juvenile author of the original! Why, it may even have caused some trauma that has stilled forever the jingling voice of one who would otherwise have developed into an A.D. Hope of years to come.

□□ Ian Mudie

The Ormond College Initiation ceremony (a mock Irish wake)

The rituals of childhood sometimes blend into those of adolescence and young adulthood.

At university residential colleges throughout the world, new students are traditionally expected to undergo some form of initiation ritual.

This is an account of such a ritual at Ormond College, the University of

Melbourne, during the late 1940s. We would be interested to hear from other readers of their initiation experiences.

This ceremony was the culmination of the initiation period, during which the Ormond freshman had to learn the history of the College, the Club rules, and details of every resident of the college, who numbered between 150 and 200 in the period I was there.

The final ceremony took place in the evening. The initiates, clad only in loin cloths and daubed with grease paint to resemble barbarians, gathered behind the main party which consisted of the Bishop, usually the tallest initiate, his acolytes and the pall bearers who carried on a bier the corpse of Mickey, usually the smallest freshman.

Carrying lighted candles, the procession made it's way round the top floor of the quadrangular building, down the stairs, round the first floor, down the stairs and round the ground floor, watched by the silent "Gentlemen", the initiated members of the Student Club. As they wended their way they sang the first three verses of The Mickey Song:

THE MICKEY SONG

Did you ever think as the hearse
 rolled by,
It won't be long before you and I
Are going along that same black track,
And won't be thinking of coming back.

Now poor Miss brown passed by last
 week,
The worms are eating her damask cheek,
And where she lifted her dimpled chin
The worms crawl out and the worms
 crawl in.

Now Mickey has gone the same sad way,
The worms are turning him fast to clay,
Though rotten he be with putrid smell,
We surely hope he's not in ----- !

(There was a firm taboo on the initiates voicing the obvious final word of this verse.)

This dirge was repeated as the procession made it's slow way round the College, and then entered the huge common room where the Bishop, acolytes and bearers of the corpse gathered and a mock funeral service in dog Latin was enacted.

The following two verses were then sung by the gathered initiates:

We're sore to lose you Mickey dear,
You sure could flick the trisk,
And now you have gone below,
Well things don't seem so brisk.

We hope to meet you Mickey dear,
Upon the other side,
And if you have a flask my lad,
We won't be sad you died.

After some more of the mock funeral service, the "corpse" rose from the bier and rushed out of the darkened room.

The initiates then sang the final verse:

Now Mickey has come to life again,
To live once more in this world of
 pain,
A touch of the spirit he loved so well
Has brought him back from the gates of

At this point the watching senior initiated members of the College shouted in unison:

"HELL"

This was the end of the ceremony; the lights were turned on and the new initiated members of the students club were congratulated by their fellow Club members and invited to supper.



Ring-a-Rosy

RING-A-ROSY: Traditional games and rhymes for children in English, Turkish and Vietnamese

This 30-minute video-tape was produced in Melbourne by Gwenda Davey and Heather Russell with financial assistance from the Music Board of the Australia Council. Copies can be purchased for \$15 from:

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(Melbourne CAE)
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From The Boy's Week-Day Book published in London by the Religious Tract Society in 1842.

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It would be difficult to say which of all boyish games affords the greatest degree of amusement, for whether boys are engaged at hop-step-and-jump, bait the bear, or drawing the oven; whether they are at full speed at hare and hounds, stag-waining, or in running races, they appear equally happy!



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