

# You are old, Father William



In this extract from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice has just told the caterpillar that because her adventures have been so confusing she is finding it difficult to remember things. The caterpillar responds by asking her to recite a poem – and this is the one she chooses.

“You are old, Father William,” the young man said,  
“And your hair has become very white;  
And yet you incessantly stand on your head –  
Do you think, at your age, it is right?”

- 5 “In my youth,” Father William replied to his son,  
“I feared it might injure the brain;  
But now that I’m perfectly sure I have none,  
Why, I do it again and again.”

- “You are old,” said the youth, “as I mentioned before,  
10 And have grown most uncommonly fat;  
Yet you turned a back-somersault in at the door –  
Pray, what is the reason of that?”

- “In my youth,” said the sage, as he shook his grey locks,  
“I kept all my limbs very supple  
15 By the use of this ointment – one shilling the box –  
Allow me to sell you a couple.”

- “You are old,” said the youth, “and your jaws are too weak  
For anything tougher than suet;  
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak –  
20 Pray, how did you manage to do it?”

“In my youth,” said his father, “I took to the law,  
And argued each case with my wife;  
And the muscular strength which it gave to my jaw  
Has lasted the rest of my life.”

- 25 “You are old,” said the youth; “one would hardly suppose  
That your eye was as steady as ever;  
Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose –  
What made you so awfully clever?”

- “I have answered three questions, and that is enough,”  
30 Said his father; “don’t give yourself airs!  
Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?  
Be off, or I’ll kick you down stairs!”



From *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*  
Lewis Carroll (1832–1898)