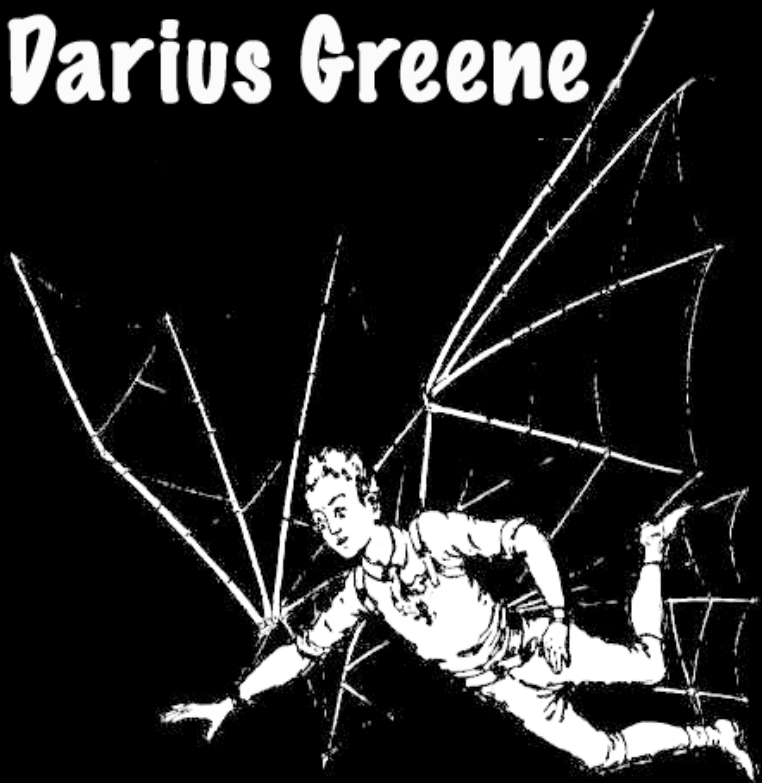


Varius Greene



and his Flying Machine

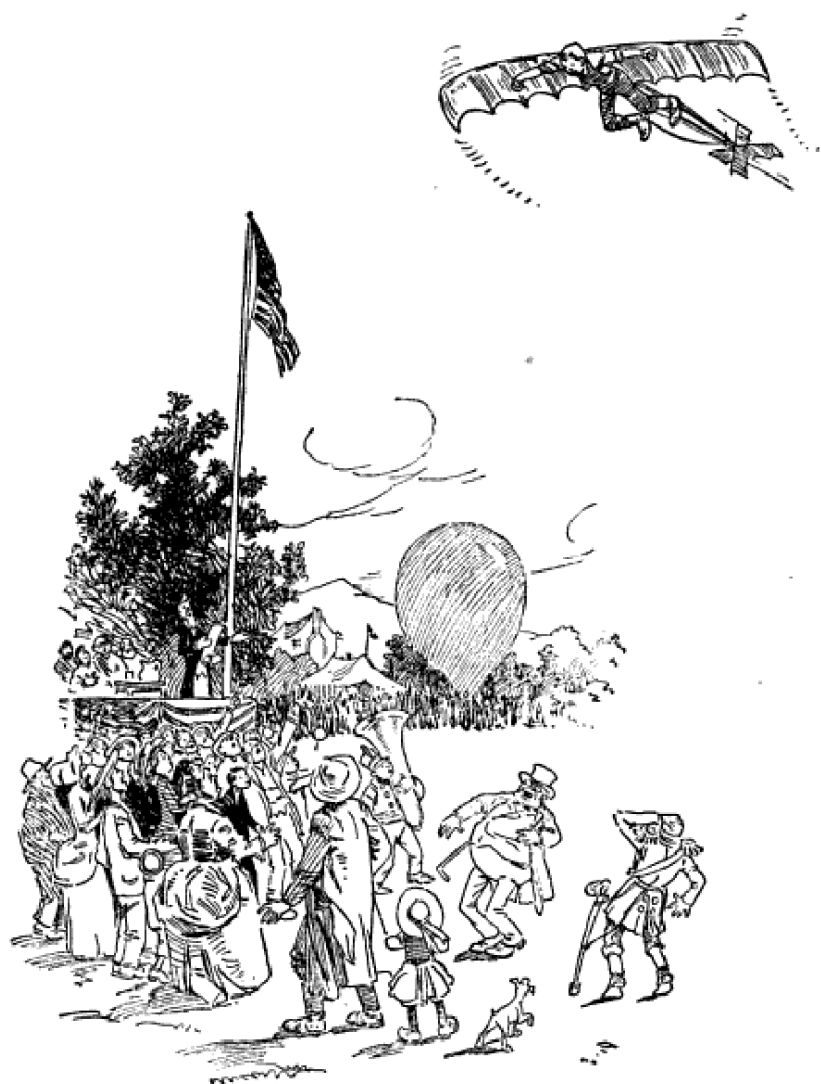
John Townsend Trowbridge

Darius Green And His Flying Machine

A Poem By
John Townsend Trowbridge

With Illustrations By
Wallace Goldsmith

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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John T. Crowbridge

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PREFACE:

This poem, written more than forty years ago, is now published for the first time in book form, with illustrations by Wallace Goldsmith.

The present intense and widespread interest in aviation promises a ready audience among the new generation for Mr. Trowbridge's very amusing account of the first American flying-machine. This poem immediately attained popularity on its first appearance and has been recited and read in public from one end of the country to the other. Its hero was a youth born ahead of his time.

"Darius was clearly of the opinion,
That the air is also man's dominion,
And that, with paddle or fin or pinion,
We soon or late
Shall navigate
The azure as now we sail the sea."

When Mr. Trowbridge wrote the poem he little dreamed that he himself would ever see men fly successfully. Yet from his description of this flying-machine and in Mr. Goldsmith's clever drawings we see an embryonic monoplane, which is not unlike Mr. Grahame-White's Bleriot. The greatest difference is in the result, for with Darius

"Wal, I like flyin' well enough,"
He said; "but the' ain't sich a thunderin' sight
O' fun in't when ye come to light."

R. L. S.

DARIUS GREEN AND HIS FLYING-MACHINE

If ever there lived a Yankee lad,
Wise or otherwise, good or bad,
Who, seeing the birds fly, did n't jump
With flapping arms from stake or stump,
Or, spreading the tail
Of his coat for a sail,
Take a soaring leap from post or rail,
And wonder why
He could n't fly,
And flap and flutter and wish and try,—
If ever you knew a country dunce
Who did n't try that as often as once,
All I can say is, that's a sign
He never would do for a hero of mine.

An aspiring genius was D. Green:
The son of a farmer, — age fourteen;
His body was long and lank and lean, —
Just right for flying, as will be seen;
He had two eyes, each bright as a bean,



And a freckled nose that grew between,
A little awry, — for I must mention
That he had riveted his attention
Upon his wonderful invention,
Twisting his tongue as he twisted the
strings,

Working his face as he worked the wings,
And with every turn of gimlet and screw
Turning and screwing his mouth round too,
Till his nose seemed bent
To catch the scent,
Around some corner, of new-baked pies,
And his wrinkled cheeks and his squinting
eyes
Grew puckered into a queer grimace,
That made him look very droll in the face,
And also very wise.

And wise he must have been, to do more
Than ever a genius did before,
Excepting Daedalus of yore
And his son Icarus, who wore

Upon their backs

Those wings of wax

He had read of in the old almanacs.

Darius was clearly of the opinion,

That the air is also man's dominion,

And that, with paddle or fin or pinion,

We soon or late

Shall navigate

The azure as now we sail the sea.

The thing looks simple enough to me;

And if you doubt it,

Hear how Darius reasoned about it.

"Birds can fly,
An' why can't I?
Must we give in,"
Says he with a grin,
"'T the bluebird an' phoebe
Are smarter'n we be?"



Jest fold our hands an' see the swaller,
An' blackbird an' catbird beat us holler?
Doos the leetle chatterin', sassy wren,
No bigger'n my thumb, know more than men?

Jest show me that!

Er prove't the bat

Hez got more brains than's in my hat,
An' I'll back down, an' not till then!"

He argued further: "Ner I can't see
What's th' use o' wings to a bumble-bee,
Fer to git a livin' with, more'n to me; —

Ain't my business

Important's his'n is?

"That Icarus
Was a silly cuss, —
Him an' his daddy Daedalus.
They might 'a' knowed wings made o' wax
Would n't stan' sun-heat an' hard whacks.
I'll make mine o' luther,
Er suthin' er other."
And he said to himself, as he tinkered and
planned:
"But I ain't goin' to show my hand
To nummies that never can understand
The fust idee that's big an' grand.
They'd 'a' laft an' made fun
O' Creation itself afore't was done!"
So he kept his secret from all the rest,
Safely buttoned within his vest;
And in the loft above the shed

Himself he locks with thimble and thread
And wax and hammer and buckles and screws,
And all such things as geniuses use; —
Two bats for patterns, curious fellows!
A charcoal-pot and a pair of bellows;
An old hoop-skirt or two, as well as
Some wire, and several old umbrellas;
A carriage-cover, for tail and wings;
A piece of harness; and straps and strings;
And a big strong box,
In which he locks
These and a hundred other things.



His grinning brothers, Reuben and Burke
And Nathan and Jotham and Solomon, lurk
Around the corner to see him work, —
Sitting cross-legged, like a Turk,
Drawing the waxed end through with a jerk,
And boring the holes with a comical quirk
Of his wise old head, and a knowing smirk.

But vainly they mounted each other's backs, And
poked through knot-holes and pried

through cracks;

With wood from the pile and straw from
the stacks

He plugged the knot-holes and calked the
cracks;

And a bucket of water, which one would think

He had brought up into the loft to drink

When he chanced to be dry,

Stood always nigh,

For Darius was sly!

And whenever at work he happened to

spy

At chink or crevice a blinking eye,

He let a dipper of water fly.

"Take that! an' ef ever ye git a peep,

Guess ye 'll ketch a weasel asleep!"

And he sings as he locks

His big strong box: —

SONG

"The weasel's head is small an' trim,

An' he is leetle an' long an' slim,

An' quick of motion an' nimble of limb,

An' ef yeou 'll be

Advised by me,

Keep wide awake when ye 're ketchin' him!"

So day after day

He stitched and tinkered and hammered
away,

Till at last't was done, —

The greatest invention under the sun!

"An' now," says Darius, "hooray fer some fun!"

'T was the Fourth of July,

And the weather was dry,

And not a cloud was on all the sky,

Save a few light fleeces, which here and there,

Half mist, half air,

Like foam on the ocean went floating by:

Just as lovely a morning as ever was seen

For a nice little trip in a flying-machine.

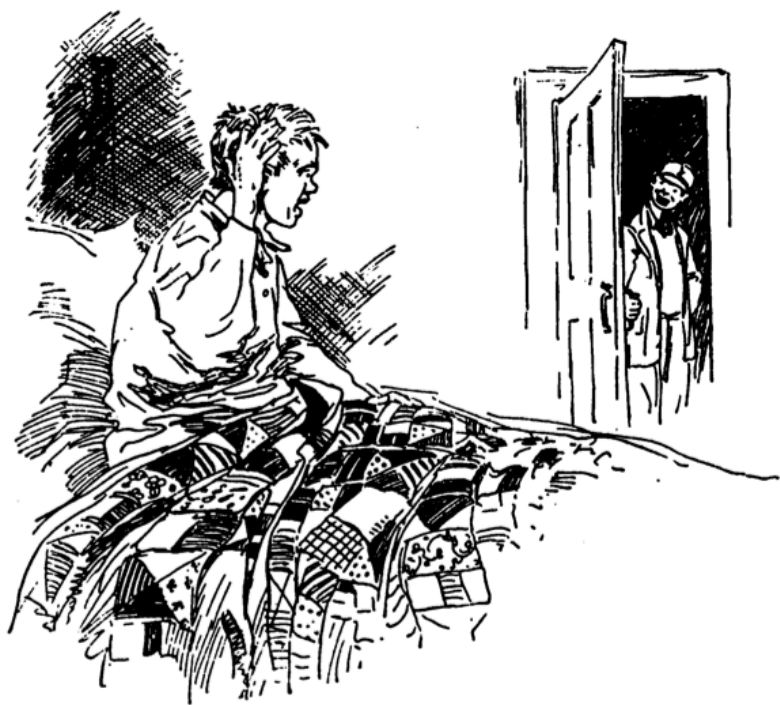
Thought cunning Darius: "Now I shan't go
Along 'ith the fellers to see the show.
I'll say I've got sich a terrible cough!
An' then, when the folks 'ave all gone off,
I'll hev full swing
Fer to try the thing
An' practyse a leetle on the wing."
"Ain't goin' to see the celebration?"
Says Brother Nate. "No; botheration!
I've got sich a cold — a toothache — I —
My gracious! — feel's though I should fly!"

Said Jotham, " 'Sho!
Guess ye better go."
But Darius said, "No!
Should n't wonder'f yeou might see me,
though,

'Long 'bout noon, ef I git red
O' this jumpin', thumpin' pain 'n my head!"
For all the while to himself he said: —

"I tell ye what!
I'll fly a few times around the lot,
To see how't seems, then soon's I've got
The hang o' the thing, ez likely's not,
I'll astonish the nation,
An' all creation,
By flyin' over the celebration!
Over their heads I'll sail like an eagle;

I'll balance myself on my wings like a sea-gull; I'll
dance on the chimbleys; I'll stan' on
the steeple;
I'll flop up to winders an' scare the people!



I'll light on the libbe'ty-pole, an' crow;
An' I'll say to the gawpin' fools below,
 'What world's this 'ere
 That I've come near?'
Fer I'll make 'em b'lieve I'm a chap f'm
 the moon!
An' I'll try a race 'ith their ol' bulloon."

He crept from his bed;
And, seeing the others were gone, he said, "I'm
a gittin' over the cold 'n my head."

And away he sped,
To open the wonderful box in the shed.

His brothers had walked but a little way
When Jotham to Nathan chanced to say, "What
on airth is he up to, hey?"

"Don'o', — the' 's suthin' er other to pay,
Er he would n't 'a' stayed to hum to-day."
Says Burke, "His toothache's all in his eye!

He never'd miss a Fo'th-o'-July,
Ef he hed n't got some machine to try."

Then Sol, the little one, spoke: " By darn!
Le's hurry back an' hide 'n the barn,
An' pay him fer tellin' us that yarn!"

"Agreed!" Through the orchard they creep
back,

Along by the fences, behind the stack,
And one by one, through a hole in the wall,
In under the dusty barn they crawl,
Dressed in their Sunday garments all;
And a very astonishing sight was that,
When each in his cobwebbed coat and hat
Came up through the floor like an ancient rat.

And there they hid;

And Reuben slid

The fastenings back, and the door undid.

"Keep dark!" said he,

"While I squint an' see what the' is to see."

As knights of old put on their mail, —

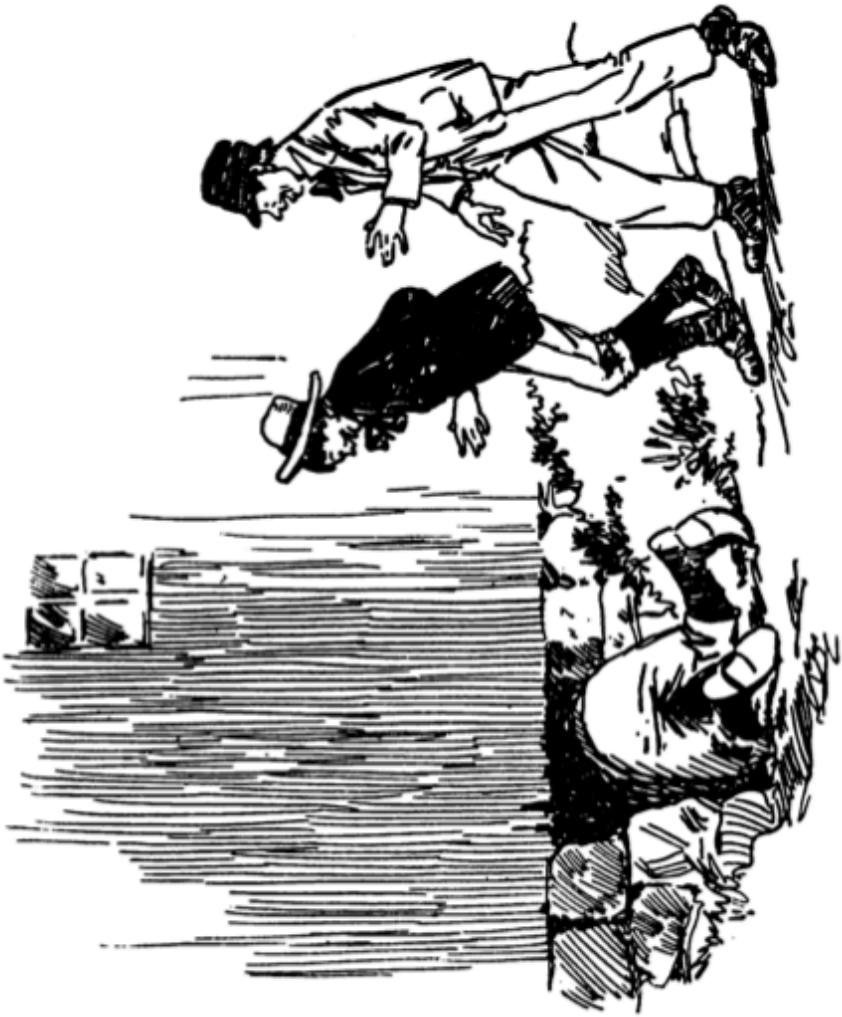
From head to foot

An iron suit,

Iron jacket and iron boot,

Iron breeches, and on the head

No hat, but an iron pot instead,



And under the chin the bail, —
I believe they called the thing a helm;
And the lid they carried they called a
shield;

And, thus accoutred, they took the field,
Sallying forth to overwhelm
The dragons and pagans that plagued the
realm: —

So this modern knight
Prepared for flight,
Put on his wings and strapped them tight;
Jointed and jaunty, strong and light;
Buckled them fast to shoulder and hip, —
Ten feet they measured from tip to tip!
And a helm had he, but that he wore,
Not on his head like those of yore, .

But more like the helm of a ship.

"Hush!" Reuben said,

"He's up in the shed!

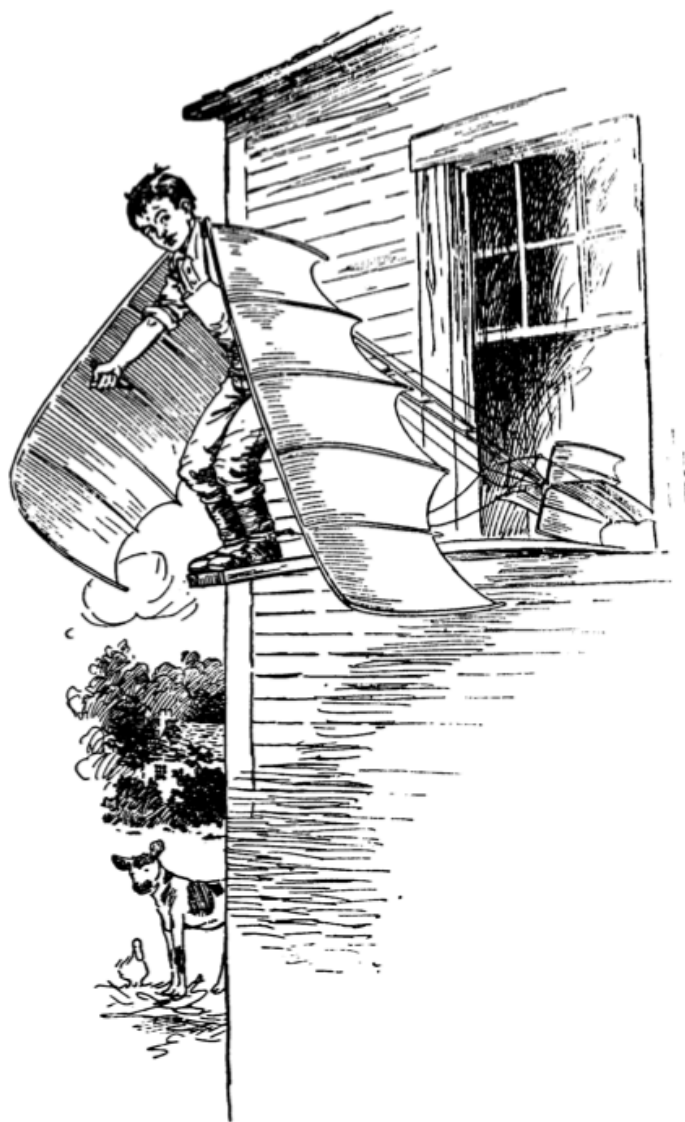
He's opened the winder, — I see his head!

He stretches it out,

An' pokes it about,

Lookin' to see 'f the coast is clear,

An' nobody near; —
Guess he don'o' who's hid in here!
He's riggin' a spring-board over the sill!
Stop laffin', Solomon! Burke, keep still!
He's a climbin' out now — Of all the things!
What's he got on? I van, it's wings!
An't' other thing? I vum, it's a tail!
An' there he sets like a hawk on a rail!
Steppin' careful, he travels the length
Of his spring-board, and teeters to try its
strength.
Now he stretches his wings, like a monstrous
bat;
Peeks over his shoulder, this way an' that,
Fer to see 'f the 's any one passin' by;
But the 's on'y a ca'f an' a goslin' nigh.
They turn up at him a wonderin' eye,
To see — The dragon! he's goin' to fly!



Away he goes! Jimminy! what a jump!

Flop — flop — an' plump

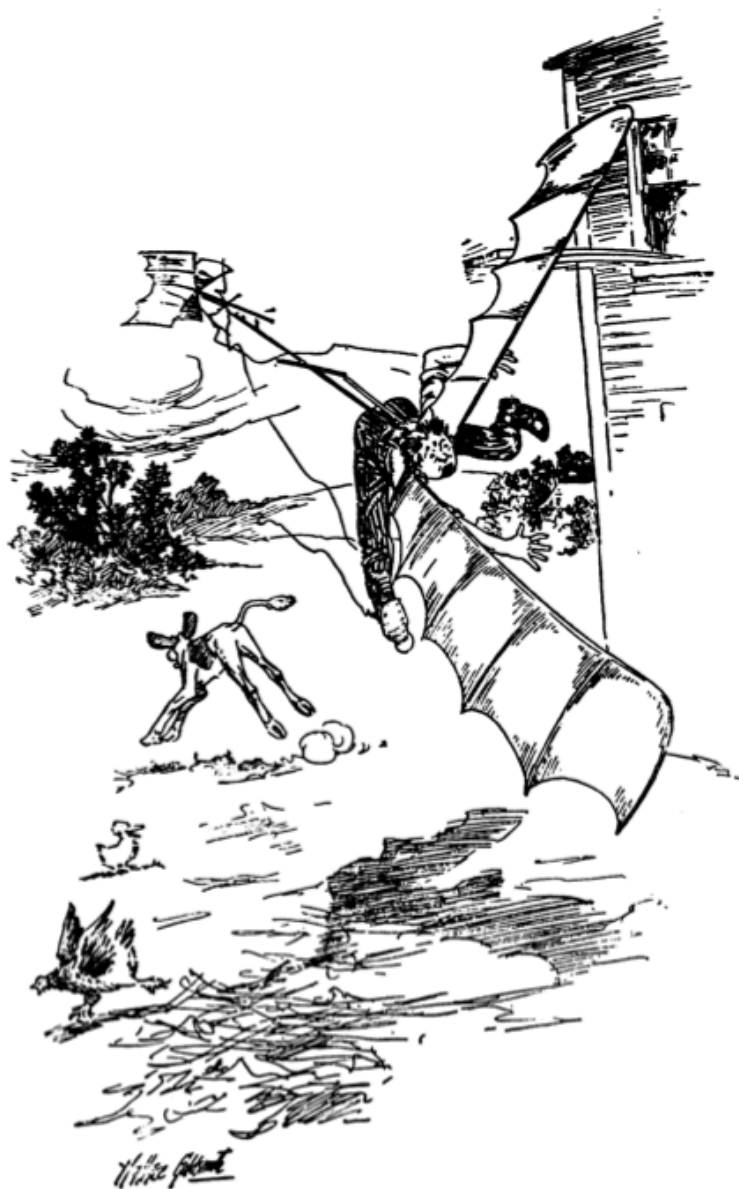
To the ground with a thump!

Flutt'rin' an' flound'rin', all 'n a lump!"

As a demon is hurled by an angel's spear, Heels
over head, to his proper sphere, — Heels over
head, and head over heels, Dizzily down the
abyss he wheels, —

So fell Darius. Upon his crown,
In the midst of the barnyard, he came
down,

In a wonderful whirl of tangled strings,
Broken braces and broken springs,
Broken tail and broken wings,
Shooting-stars, and various things!
Away with a bellow fled the calf,
And what was that? Did the gosling laugh?



'T is a merry roar

From the old barn-door,



And he hears the voice of Jotham crying,
"Say, D'rius! how de yeou like flyin'?"

Slowly, ruefully, where he lay,
Darius just turned and looked that way,
As he stanch'd his sorrowful nose with his
cuff.

"Wal, I like flyin' well enough,"
He said; "but the' ain't sich a thunderin'
sight
O' fun in't when ye come to light."

MORAL

I just have room for the moral here:
And this is the moral, — Stick to your sphere.
Or if you insist, as you have the right,
On spreading your wings for a loftier flight,
The moral is, — Take care how you light.



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