

THE BANDIT, THE BEGGAR AND THE BLACKSMITH

Long ago in the countryside  
A beggar and bandit met;  
Each boasted of his way of life  
And forthwith made a bet.

To end dispute they thought it fair  
To ask whoe'er came nigh  
To tell which he would rather be,  
If given the choice, and why.

"I'm sure I'll win," the bandit cried;  
"I never have to whine;  
I just waylay the passers-by  
And take their wealth for mine."

"You risk your life," the beggar said;  
"I simply shed a tear,  
And then receive sweet charity  
Without a thought of fear."

Soon coming along the highway  
They spied a cavalcade  
Guarding a man on horseback  
Handsomely arrayed.

Confronting him upon the road,  
They cried from where they stood:  
"You can do us a favor, Sir,  
If you will be so good:

"For we've a wager between us,  
And while it's all in fun,  
Would you a bandit or beggar be  
If you had to be either one?"

The man at first resentment showed,  
But next he laughed instead;  
And drawing himself up proudly,  
This is what he said:

"Come now," quoth he, "I'm both you see,  
In a gentlemanly way;  
I begged the King for my estate,  
But I make my tenants pay."

"I take some part of their earnings,  
Whether they will or no;  
They have to give if they want to live,  
Or off my land they go."

So saying he smartly cracked his whip  
And soon was lost to sight,  
But neither bandit nor beggar  
Knew which of them was right.

So walking onward toward the town  
They came to a spreading tree  
Where under it a blacksmith  
Was singing lustily.

The question they then put to him  
While the golden sparks flew high;  
Striking while the iron was hot  
The blacksmith made reply:

"Why ~~neither~~ one, shame on you both,  
I would not beg nor steal;  
I bought this spot and earn my bread,  
And just contentment feel.

There may be times you're justified  
Something for nothing to get  
But this is still a frontier town,  
And that hasn't happened yet.

"Where land is cheap, as it is here,  
A lesson take from me:  
There's no excuse to rob or kill  
Or yield to poverty."

This verdict came as a surprise,  
It made them think again;  
Both of them could, if they would, it seemed,  
Turn to be honest men!