

4

AN ELEGY ON THE DEATH
OF A MAD DOG



Good people all, of every sort,
Give ear unto my song ;
And if you find it **wondrous** short,
It cannot hold you long.

4

In **Islington** there was a Man
Of whom the world might say,
That still a **godly race** he ran,
Whene'er he went to pray.

8

A kind and gentle heart he had,
To **comfort** friends and **foes** ;
The naked every day he **clad**,
When he put on his clothes.

12

And in that town a Dog was found,
As many dogs there be,
Both **mongrel, puppy, whelp**, and **hound**,
And curs of low degree.

16

This Dog and Man at first were friends;
But when a **pique** began,
The Dog, to gain his private ends,
Went mad, and bit the Man.

20

Around from all the neighboring streets
The wondering neighbors ran,
And swore the Dog had lost his **wits**,
To bite so good Man.

24

The wound it seem's both **sore** and sad
To every Christian eye ;
And while they swore the Dog was mad.
They swore the Man would die. 28

But soon **a wonder** came to light,
That show'd **the rogues** they **lied** ;
The man recover'd of the bite,
The Dog it was that died. 32

Oliver Goldsmith

About the Poet :

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774), one of the most popular 18th century English writers, lived a fascinating life of contradiction between his unquestionable brilliance and self destructive tendencies. His plays, poems and essays have been very popular.

About the Poem :

The present poem is an extract from Oliver Goldsmith novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*. It mourns the death of a mad dog and is called an “Elegy” in a satirical way. An elegy is a poem which expresses sad feelings over the death of a friend or of an important person.

The poet describes friendship between a man and a dog. At first they get along well, but after some time they begin to quarrel and become enemies. The dog goes mad and bites the man. The towns people lament that this good man must die a wretched death, betrayed by the ungrateful cur that he had trusted. Contrary to the prediction of the townspeople, the man has recovered and the dog has died. Thus something unusual happened.

The poem is a good example of satire on human behaviour. The sudden reversal of situations in the end of the poem makes the satire bitter : the man believed to die recovers and the dog cursed for deceit dies. The man, under the mask of innocence, proves fatal to the innocent animal.

GLOSSARY

wondrous (adj)	:	unusual and surprising
Islington (n)	:	a town where Goldsmith lived for sometime
godly race (n)	:	a moral life based on religious principles
comfort (v)	:	to give relief to a worried person
foes (n)	:	enemies
clad (adj.)	:	clothed
mongrel (n)	:	a dog that is a mixture of different breeds
puppy (n)	:	a young dog, less than a year old
whelp (n)	:	a young dog, usually rash
hound (n)	:	a hunting dog
cur (n)	:	an aggressive mongrel dog
pique (n)	:	bitterness in relation
wits (n)	:	mind's capacity to take quick and good decisions
sore (adj.)	:	showing pain and inflammation
Christian eye	:	a person who follows Christianity, a good or religious person
a wonder	:	a surprise
the rogues	:	the unprincipled and immoral men. (here it refers to the people who said that the man would die, as they talked nonsense)

ACTIVITY 1 : COMPREHENSION

A. Tick the correct alternative :

- The present poem is extracted from
 - The Vicar of Wakefield
 - The Good Natured Man
 - The Deserted Village
 - She Stoops of Conquer
- What is 'a cur' ?
 - a hunting dog
 - an aggressive dog
 - a family dog
 - a young dog

B. Answer the following questions each in 30-40 words each :

1. What is an elegy ?
2. What does the poet urge to people ?
3. Where did the poet live for some time ?
4. What kinds of dogs have been described in the poem ?
5. What wonderful event does happen at the end of the poem ?

C. Answer the following questions each in 60 words each :

1. What are the qualities of the good Man ?
2. What does the poet think about a pious man ?
3. Why did an ordinary dog bite his friend ?
4. What did the neighbours think about the dog ?
5. Point out the element of satire in the poem.

ACTIVITY 2 : REFERENCE TO CONTEXT

Explain the following lines with reference to context :

1. A Kind and _____ on his clothes.
2. This dog _____ bit the man.
3. The wound _____ man would die.
4. But soon _____ was that died.