

ON MARY'S HILL

The people up on Mary's Hill
Sound much like you and me:
They sing and clang their breakfast pans,
They call their dogs and clap their hands;
But ours are ours and theirs are theirs,
Their lands shall never be our lands
Up there on Mary's Hill.

Sharp cliffs and brambles choke the way
Up there to Mary's Hill,
But from the top the cliffs aren't there,
Back yards lead off-I don't know where –
Up there on Mary's Hill.
Their sunlight slants through different leaves
On different flowers for different bees
Droning among the quiet trees
Through murmuring midsummer eves
Up there on Mary's Hill.

Their graceful women come and go –
I saw them once -I tell you so –
Through dark oak doors and leaded glass
Where you and I may never pass
Up there on Mary's Hill.

The people up on Mary's Hill
Seemed much like those we know.
I wonder if they live there still
But I don't know nor ever will
For you and I can never go
Back up to Mary's Hill.

I read this poem to the Library Club plenty of years ago. I doubt that anyone remembers it, and I suspect that most of our current members were not yet in the club that far back.

I don't know who Mary was, and at this late date we'll probably never know. The time I was writing about - the early 1920's - is so far back that it is hard to visualize, even for the people like me who were around in those days.

The hill in question ran along the south side of [Earnshaw](#) Avenue in the Cincinnati suburb of [Mt. Auburn](#). In those days, the local residents referred to it as [Mt. Arbum](#). The late George [Stimson](#) insisted that it was probably [Mt. Arbum](#), but he lived up closer to [McMillan](#) Street and what did they know about how we talked in our neighborhood? [Earnshaw](#) Avenue was what I like to call a "[cursus interruptus](#)". It started east of Highland Avenue and nosed into a hillside up past our house to the west. Nothing daunted, it popped up again at the top of the hill where it debouched into Auburn (or maybe Arbum) Avenue at the then residence of a Dr. [Heebner](#) spelled [Huebner](#), who was reputed to have been the Kaisers' doctor before [WWI](#). It may or may not interest you to know that next door to us on the down end of Earnshaw Avenue was another "Heebner" - this one the secretary of the brewery workers union. Two "[Heebners](#)" on one short street, only in Cincinnati.

But back to our subject. Mary's Hill was behind our house on Earnshaw. It started with its sharp rise at the end of our lot and plunged upward abruptly in a mass of brambles and weeds to the houses on top. To a **kindergartner**, while I then was, the top of that hill was a whole different world. There was a flight of wooden steps at the end of Earnshaw which took one up to the level of the old Southern Avenue school. By working around the old brick **schoolhouse** one arrived at guess what? - Southern Avenue. Working back east on the crest of Mary's Hill, the street ended in a **turn**around ringed with what to me then were "stately mansions" with those silent dark oak doors that seemed somehow ominous to a young intruder like me.

Well, as I said, you can't go back in Mary's Hill. I tried it recently. All the houses were gone, and in their place is a brand spanking new public grade school. For that, the past wasn't even prologue.

It's a whole new world out there and all that's left in my memory bank is a couple of doggerels that the kids kicked around on the street.

Well it ain't **gonna** rain no more no more
It ain't gonna rain no more
How in the hell can the old folks tell
That it ain't gonna rain no more.
How in the heck can I wash my neck
If it ain't gonna rain no more?

The butterfly has wings of gold
The beetle wings of flame
The bed-bug has no wings at all
But he gets there just the same.

Or

It was midnight on the ocean
Not a streetcar was in sight
So I stopped inside the drugstore
To purchase me a light

The man behind the counter
Was a woman old and gray
Who used to peddle **donuts**
On the road to **Mandalay**

Her children all were **orphans**
Except one tiny tot
Who had his home across the street
Above a vacant lot.

This one always fascinated me.

Even as a little kid, I knew that you didn't have houses located up in the air, but the concept of a little kid "hanging out" so to speak above a vacant lot was and is completely charming. And with that mental image, I leave you.