ABOUT THE POEM

The poem *Going Downhill on a Bicycle* was written by Henry Charles Beeching. The poem highlights the reward of hard work and encourages the reader to move forward despite the hard situations, if the outcome is worth the risk. It has six stanzas, each with the rhyme scheme of AABB.

ABOUT THE POET

Henry Charles Beeching was born in 1859 in England. He completed his education at Oxford and taught at various institutions including Trinity College, London. Beeching served as a clergyman in various parts of England. He authored works like *Pages from a Private Diary*, *A Paradise of English Poetry*. His famous collection of poems is *Love in Idleness*, which was published in 1883.

SUMMARY OF THE POEM

The speaker of the poem is a young boy who is on the top of a hill, ready to ride his bicycle downhill. As he goes down, the rush of the air and the speed of the cycle makes him excited, and he feels like he is flying in the air. As he goes down, he is careful to maintain his balance, lest he falls from it and injures himself. But as he reaches downhill, when the hill slopes into a valley, he says that if one is ready to climb up the hill, he will be rewarded with an exhilarating ride downhill. The poem throws light on the importance of hard work and its rewards.
Stanza 1

With lifted feet, hands still,
I am poised, and down the hill
Dart, with heedful mind;
The air goes by in a wind.

In the first stanza, the boy is beginning his journey downhill. He has lifted his feet from the pedal, his hands are still, and he goes down the hill. ‘Heedful mind’ indicates that though he feels like darted into the air, he is still careful of himself, and doesn’t let his guard down.

Stanza 2

Swifter and yet more swift,
Till the heart with a mighty lift
Makes the lungs laugh, the throat cry:—
"O bird, see; see, bird, I fly.

As the boy goes down the hill faster and faster, his heart is filled with joy. The ride makes him feel that he is flying and he is overjoyed at this—he is laughing as well as crying with joy.

Stanza 3

"Is this, is this your joy?
O bird, then I, though a boy,
For a golden moment share
Your feathery life in air!"

As the downhill ride makes him feel like he is flying in the air, the boy asks the bird if this is the joy that it experiences when flying in the air. The excitement he feels is so great that he says that he wishes he could fly like a bird in the air, enjoying the life in the air. The words ‘golden moment’ implies how much he enjoys the experience.
Stanza 4

Say, heart, is there aught like this
In a world that is full of bliss?
'Tis more than skating, bound
Steel-shod to the level ground.

The boy asks himself if there is anything else in the world that can give happiness and excitement like going downhill on a bicycle. He says that it is much more interesting than skating, because in skating one remains attached to the ground with the shoes of steel, and it never feels like flying.

Stanza 5

Speed slackens now, I float
Awhile in my airy boat;
Till, when the wheels scarce crawl,
My feet to the treadles fall.

Now, the boy has almost reached downhill and the speed of the bicycle slows down. After the ride downhill with a rush of air around him, now he feels like he is floating in an airy boat. The wheels have also come to a stop, and he puts his feet back on the treadles, so that he can pedal forward.

Stanza 6

Alas, that the longest hill
Must end in a vale; but still,
Who climbs with toil, wheresoe'er,
Shall find wings waiting there.

The final stanza of the poem brings out the central theme of the poem. The speaker says that even the longest (or the highest) hill will end in a valley. Every hill has a downslope and the downslope ends in a valley. However, if one is ready to climb uphill (which is hard and laborious), he will surely get the joy of an exciting ride down the hill. The poet implies that to be successful, it is necessary that we work hard towards it. The rewards can be enjoyed fully only when we truly work hard in our life.
KEYWORDS AND MEANINGS

- **poised**: to remain calm and composed
- **dart**: to move forward suddenly
- **heedful**: careful
- **swifter**: faster and in a smooth manner
- **aught**: anything
- **bliss**: joy and happiness
- **bound**: to be tied to something
- **slackens**: slow down
- **awhile**: for a while
- **scarce**: *(here)* stop
- **treadles**: the part of the bicycle where you place your feet and push downward so that the cycle moves forward
- **vale**: valley
- **toil**: hard work