

The Curlew

The curlew is a handsome bird;
a shame its beak is so absurd.
It is so strangely long and bent, you
wouldn't think that it was meant to
eat and drink, far less to sing
and warble in the flush of spring.

Although it bubbles very sweetly,
its bill is bent so indiscreetly
that when it tries to preen its tail
it's rather likely to impale
itself upon its 'Parson's Nose'.
This keeps the curlew on its toes
(though better for its balance that
it keeps them relatively flat).

So, curlews, you must never tweak
your tail with that preposterous beak.
Remember too your toes are long
and you can put a foot all wrong,
as did the first primaeval whaup
in far off days when Dr Thorpe
was still a schoolboy listening
to the sweet songs of birds in spring.

Behold the bird, with lordly gait,
struts, head erect, and bill still straight,
then tries to reach its long neck down
to scratch the feathers on its crown.
It stretches out too far, which calls
for balancing control. It falls,
and trying to save its neck, no doubt,
lands heavily upon its snout.

And thus that early curlew went
and got its mandibles all bent,
a quite remarkable condition
that put it in a new position
both literally, from its point of view,
and philosophically too -
a new advantage over worms
in evolutionary terms.

Such subtlety is all it takes
to win in the survival stakes;
a first for science, here was born a
means of eating round a corner!