



In the Twinkling of an Eye

The Cheshire Cat, editor

Trivial Pursuit (being an investigation into the word "Trivia")

Claire MacKay

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Oh, the Romans were slick with marble and brick,
With granite, with all things lapideous;
They built bulwarks and bridges with curlicued ridges,
And bathtubs quite frequently hideous.

They built villas in valleys and pillars in alleys
And utterly splendid abodes,
And great promenades with grand colonnades--
But mostly they just kept building roads.

They built tunnels through mountains and funnels for fountains,
And cages for Christians God-fearing;
For Emperor Otto they built a blue grotto
And a circus for charioteering.

Then they went slumming and built all the plumbing
In countries that still worshipped toads,
But being the kind with a one-track mind
They never stopped building those roads.

As Rome's flag unfurled over more of the world,
More worried the government grew:
Would people stay loyal, on near and far soil?
Even those with their skin painted blue?

To keep folks connected, not to mention subjected,
And to make sure they all paid their taxes,
The Imperial word must be quickly transferred--
And there weren't any cell phones or faxes.

Then a clever young chap took a look at the map
With its highway fine-patterned as lace,
And he pointed with glee to each junction where three
Major roads made a gathering-place.

And he shouted, "Hey guys! It's in front of our eyes!
It's a super idea! It's a winner!
It's a wow! It's a beaut! It's a trivial pursuit,
And we'll get it all done before dinner!

"We can nail up the news and the Emperor's views
On the signposts where three roads converge,
Then let the folks know there's a place they can go
To meet and to mingle and merge.

"We'll write up each rumor, the best bits of humor,
What's hot and what's not, and what's arty,
The prices of sandals, the vices of Vandals,
And the annual Ides of March party."



The die was thus cast and picked up pretty fast
By each Julius and every Olivia:
For a late-breaking scoop, or to stay in the loop,
They'd go truckin' on down to the trivia.

Have you now figured out how the word came about
From that clever young fellow's idea?
In Latin, you see, three's tri (pronounced "tree")
And a road is - you guessed it! - a via.

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