So begins “(Cats) Cradle Song,” verse composed by James Clerk Maxwell, probably in 1877. It was Maxwell’s response to the manuscript of “On Knots,” written by his friend Peter Guthrie Tait, who had hoped for constructive criticism.

Maxwell wrote poems to amuse his friends and express personal sentiments. The purpose of “(Cats) Cradle Song” was to have a bit of good-natured fun at Tait’s expense. Between its lines, however, we find references to mathematical ideas that were novel at the time. Some of the ideas would endure and inspire succeeding generations. (Received September 01, 2013)