

On the windless, glassy floor?
Take back your golden fiddles and we'll beat to open sea!"

Then stooped the Lord, and He called the good sea up to Him,
And 'stablished his borders unto all eternity,
That such as have no pleasure
For to praise the Lord by measure,
They may enter into galleons and serve Him on the sea.

Sun, wind, and cloud shall fail not from the face of it,
Stinging, ringing spindrift, nor the fulmar flying free;
And the ships shall go abroad
To the glory of the Lord
Who heard the silly sailor-folk and gave them back their sea!

THE MERCHANTMEN.

King Solomon drew merchantmen,
Because of his desire
For peacocks, apes, and ivory,
From Tarshish unto Tyre:
With cedars out of Lebanon

Which Hiram rafted down,
But we be only sailormen
That use in London town.

Coastwise--cross-seas--round the world and back again--
Where the flaw shall head us or the full Trade suits--
Plain-sail--storm-sail--lay your board and tack again--
And that's the way we'll pay Paddy Doyle for his boots!

We bring no store of ingots,
Of spice or precious stones,
But that we have we gathered
With sweat and aching bones:
In flame beneath the tropics,
In frost upon the floe,
And jeopardy of every wind
That does between them go.

And some we got by purchase,
And some we had by trade,
And some we found by courtesy
Of pike and carronade,
At midnight, 'mid-sea meetings,
For charity to keep,
And light the rolling homeward-bound
That rode a foot too deep.

By sport of bitter weather
We're walty, strained, and scarred
From the kentledge on the kelson
To the slings upon the yard.
Six oceans had their will of us
To carry all away--
Our galley 's in the Baltic,
And our boom 's in Mossel Bay!

We've floundered off the Texel,
Awash with sodden deals,
We've slipped from Valparaiso
With the Norther at our heels:
We've ratched beyond the Crossets
That tusk the Southern Pole,
And dipped our gunnels under
To the dread Agulhas roll.

Beyond all outer charting
We sailed where none have sailed,
And saw the land-lights burning
On islands none have hailed;
Our hair stood up for wonder,
But, when the night was done,
There danced the deep to windward

Blue-empty 'neath the sun!

Strange consorts rode beside us

And brought us evil luck;

The witch-fire climbed our channels,

And danced on vane and truck:

Till, through the red tornado,

That lashed us nigh to blind,

We saw The Dutchman plunging,

Full canvas, head to wind!

We've heard the Midnight Leadsman

That calls the black deep down--

Ay, thrice we've heard The Swimmer,

The Thing that may not drown.

On frozen bunt and gasket

The sleet-cloud drave her hosts,

When, manned by more than signed with us,

We passed the Isle o' Ghosts!

And north, amid the hummocks,

A biscuit-toss below,

We met the silent shallop

That frightened whalers know;

For, down a cruel ice-lane,

That opened as he sped,

We saw dead Henry Hudson
Steer, North by West, his dead.

So dealt God's waters with us
Beneath the roaring skies,
So walked His signs and marvels
All naked to our eyes:
But we were heading homeward
With trade to lose or make--
Good Lord, they slipped behind us
In the tailing of our wake!

Let go, let go the anchors;
Now shamed at heart are we
To bring so poor a cargo home
That had for gift the sea!
Let go the great bow-anchors--
Ah, fools were we and blind--
The worst we baled with utter toil,
The best we left behind!

Coastwise--cross-seas--round the world and back again,
Whither the flaw shall fail us or the Trades drive down:
Plain-sail--storm-sail--lay your board and tack again--
And all to bring a cargo up to London Town!