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THE WRECK
OF THE
HOMEWARD-BOUND;
OR
THE BOAT OF MERCY.

BY
NICHOLAS MICHELL,
AUTHOR OF "RUINS OF MANY LANDS," "PLEASURE," ETC.

WITH AN ILLUSTRATION.

Second Edition.

LONDON:
WILLIAM TEGG, PANCRAS LANE.

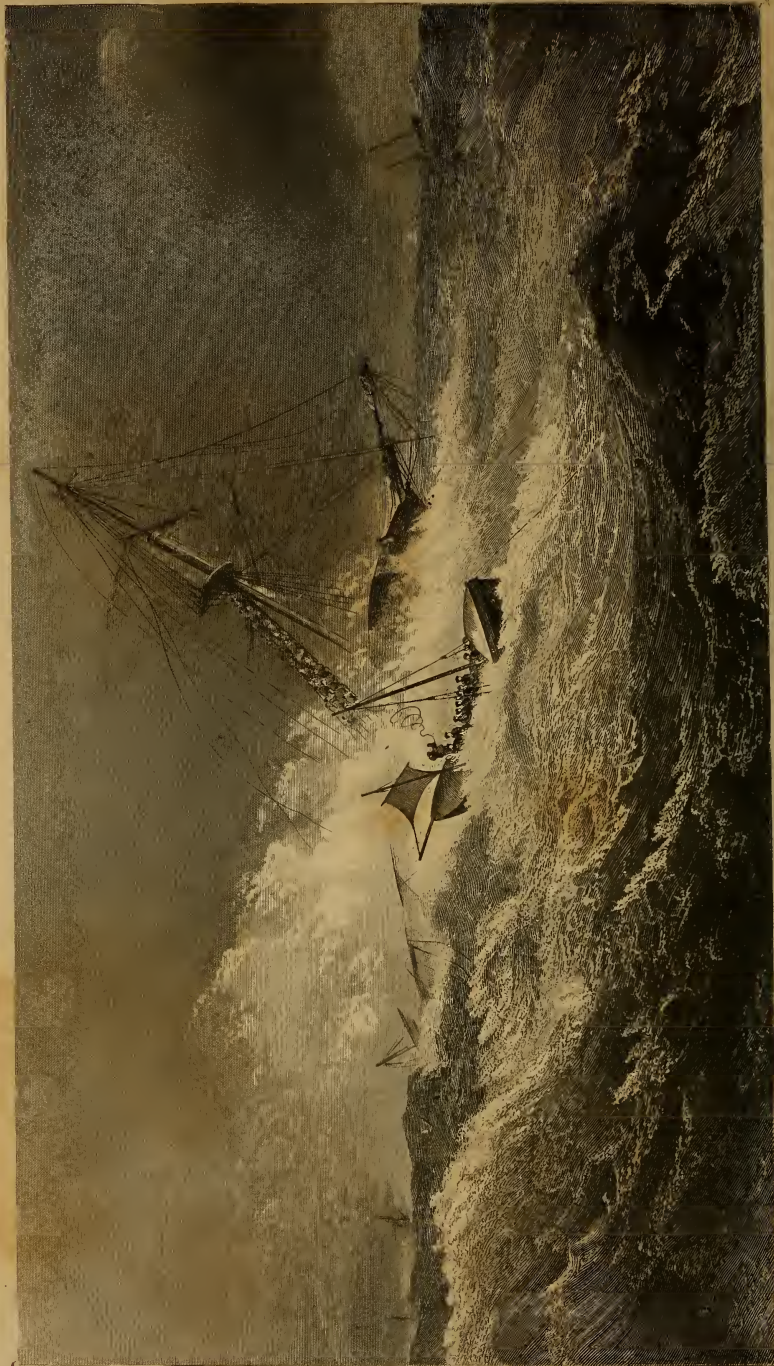
1862.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

** Any profit arising from this little publication will be given to the
NATIONAL LIFE-BOAT INSTITUTION.







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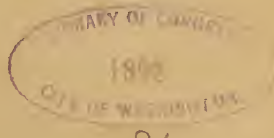
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TO
VICE-ADMIRAL,
HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND,
K.G., F.R.S., &c.,
PRESIDENT
OF
The Royal National Life-Boat Institution;
THE FOLLOWING LITTLE POEM
IS,
WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF RESPECT,
INSCRIBED,
BY
HIS GRACE'S HUMBLE, OBEDIENT SERVANT,
THE AUTHOR.

PREFATORY REMARKS.

WHEN we reflect how many thousands of vessels annually leave our ports, and return from distant countries, while thousands more, engaged in home trade, are continually sweeping around our shores, we must feel it a matter of no surprise that shipwrecks occur so frequently; but, at the same time, it is a matter of extreme regret that the results are oftentimes so deplorable.

The loss of life last season, though not unusually large, was very considerable, and some of the details given us were of a heart-rending description.

Great Britain has ever been regarded as a maritime power, and her wealth is drawn, not from internal resources, but from her foreign commerce. To say nothing of our naval armaments, the men engaged on the high seas for commercial purposes must be regarded as the most valuable of England's labouring population. They carry on, at the peril of their lives, her great "sea-business," bringing to her ports the luxuries as well as the essentials of life, from every distant corner of the globe. In a word, to the activity and boldness of her seamen, England, it is patent to all, mainly owes her present exalted position among the nations of the earth.

Nothing is more admirable than the spirit now abroad, which, in a miraculously short period, has called up, as by the wave of a necromancer's wand, an army of Volunteers, ready to defend our household gods and our hearthstones from foreign aggression; but while we contemplate thus taking the lives of each and all who, in hostile spirit, dare approach our dearly-beloved shores, oh! let us think also how we shall *save* lives! Let us devote at least some of our energies to the support of a peaceful and an efficient fleet, in order to do battle with those elements which every winter send to untimely graves so many of our "wealth-makers"—brave patriots of the seas—the thews and sinews of this land.

As a means, then, of lessening the great annual loss of life by shipwreck, the Life-boat must be maintained. We do not here enter into a description of this interesting defier of the wave and storm, or attempt to narrate its history. Suffice it to say, that, prior to the year 1780, no boat, constructed for the purpose of saving life, appears to have been known in our islands. In 1785, a patent was granted to Mr. Lukin, for a life-boat of a peculiar construction; but shortly afterwards a very superior boat was built at South Shields, by Mr. Greathead. It was lined throughout with cork, and would float when loaded with men and filled with water. This boat is said to have saved, in fourteen seasons, three hundred lives from ships wrecked near Tynemouth Haven.

Since the above period, many improvements have been made by scientific men, so that the Life-boat may now be considered as most efficient for the purpose designed.

The average length of the crafts built for the National Life-boat Institution,

is about thirty feet, and, with the crew, each will carry from thirty to forty men. The buoyancy is principally obtained by air-tight compartments along the sides, and air-boxes in the bow and stern. The cost of each boat, exclusive of its carriage, is about £180.

The National Life-boat Institution needs nothing but its humane purpose to recommend it. It appeals to the sympathies of every British heart, and calls on a great maritime nation for support.

Its object is to place and maintain a Life-boat at every port and exposed part of our coast where its services may be required. The number of valuable lives which this truly philanthropic Society has been instrumental in saving, can be accurately shown. In 1860, and during the succeeding year, no less than 500 lives were saved by its boats, under circumstances when no other means would have availed in rescuing the shipwrecked men from watery graves. Since the Society's establishment in 1824, to the close of 1861, the total number saved from shipwreck, either by its boats, or for which it has granted rewards, amounts to 12,293.

The Institution has now a fleet of 121 Life-boats, stationed on the coasts of Great Britain and Ireland; and, numerous as these appear to be, many more in reality are needed.

A native of Cornwall, where, on the rock-bound northern shores, from Bude Haven to the Land's End, shipwrecks so frequently occur, the author of this little Poem may be permitted, perhaps, to take a peculiar interest in the subject of Life-boats, and the objects of the National Life-boat Institution. If by his imperfect description of a scene which, some time since, took place on a

dangerous part of our coast, he succeeds in raising a little sympathy in the bosoms of any on behalf of those whose lives are passed on the mighty waters, his narrative will not have been vainly written.

* * * Any profit arising from this slight publication will be placed at the service of the National Life-boat Institution. In the new Edition now called for, it may be proper to observe that the little Poem has been carefully revised, and some additions have been made to the text.



THE WRECK
 OF THE
 HOMEWARD-BOUND.



How beautiful is night at sea !
 When not a cloud the eye can trace,
 Staining Heaven's blue immensity,
 Or shading Ocean's glittering face;
 When from the sapphire-terraced skies,
 Peace, like an angel, downward flies,
 And spreads her pinions o'er the deep,
 Whose mighty heart is stilly lying,
 Like a wild infant rocked to sleep,
 Or as some secret it would keep,
 And now is gently dreaming, sighing ;
 For sorrow seems in ocean's breast,
 Which e'en in hours of deepest rest
 Is sadly heaving, heaving ever,
 And cannot, spite of each endeavour,
 Cast off that weight of inward woe,
 Still moaning, heaving to and fro ;

Yet in its sadness, solemn, calm,
 As the pure bosom of a nun,
 Whose melancholy-chanted psalm
 Ascends on evening's breath of balm,
 Her weary tasks of penance done.

How beautiful is night at sea !
 No garish beams, but all around
 A crystal plain without a bound,
 Awing us like eternity.
 Darkness his banner hath unfurled,
 But, like a spirit, each fair star
 Doth sit upon its throne afar,
 And shine, and watch our quiet world—
 Watch ancient ocean at his slumbers,
 And sure we hear celestial numbers
 Down pealing from those silvery spheres;
 Or more—the starr'd, harmonious sky
 Seems God's grand jewel'd harp on high,
 Sounding through everlasting years.
 Gazing upon the watery waste,
 So deep the sunless gulfs below,
 Never by mortal daring traced,
 So high the heavens that arch and glow,
 The soul at that wide scene expands,
 And wonder lifts her trembling hands;
 Our thoughts sink humbled, yet aspire,
 Fancy o'erwhelmed, yet touched with fire;
 We seem scarce linked to this frail clay
 Which moves, feels, sorrows for a day,
 Left with great Nature more alone,
 Raised nearer the Eternal's throne.

The stately ship with masts upright,
 And colors idly downward streaming,

While idly flap her sails of white,
Rides on the waters smooth and bright,
 Like some proud creature dreaming :
She just moves onward in her sleep,
Somnambulist of this still deep,
Then leans upon the shining billow,
Her soft, supporting, yielding pillow.
The moon at full, with whitest face,
Looks down in all her virgin grace ;
And as her rays aslant are cast
 On that proud ship, in lines of snow,
Hull, cordage, spars, and tapering mast,
 Far o'er the sea long shadows throw—
Shadows that tremble like deep feeling
Over the shaken spirit stealing :
And every little star doth try
To cast its beam-shaft from the sky,
And pierce with light the waves around ;
The dolphins play with merry bound,
Lifting their backs, until they gleam,
Wet gold beneath the shimmering beam.
The Nautilus, to catch the gale,
Spreads wide its silver-shining sail,
And, charmed by moonlight, seems to sweep,
A gleesome fairy, o'er the deep.
No sound the kissing billows make,
 Parting before that queenly bow ;
Gently they linger in her wake,
 And fret, and shine, and bubble now,
Leaving a track upon the sea,
 Which softly, slowly, melts away,
Like joys from human memory—
 Joys that enchant, but cannot stay.

The helmsman leans upon his wheel,
 The watch is pacing, thoughtful, slow;
 E'en the rough seamen mutely feel
 The glories that around them glow.—
 Land hath its loveliness by night,
 Hills, woods asleep, and streams of light,
 And vales where nightingales may be,
 But lovelier far is night at sea.

'Tis changed—the moon and stars are gone;
 The sun hath flashed from out the wave,
 As a bright soul may quit the grave,
 And Heaven puts robes of splendour on.
 Now the white deck a group displays
 Of happy faces, eager eyes;
 They've sailed broad ocean weary days,
 And borne the fire of tropic skies;
 But home is near, and o'er the blue,
 Soon Albion's rocks will greet their view.
 Lo! sign of land, a white sea-bird!
 Hark! from the "tops" a voice is heard—
 "Land! land!"—each tongue takes up the cry,
 And cheers are raised, and laughter rings;
 The old shout out in jollity,
 For joy the youthful maiden sings.
 See! on the deck the dancers bound,
 To sweet guitar, and pipe's blithe sound.
 Delight thrills all to view once more,
 Faint looming, England's sighed-for shore;
 Fancy already sees the flowers
 Blooming in those dear native bowers,
 And clasps the friends of by-gone hours.

'Tis changed—far south a small grey cloud
 Slow rises from the ocean's verge;

Denser it spreads, an ebon shroud

Loose waving o'er the darkened surge ;
 And other clouds are mounting high,
 Creeping and spreading o'er the sky ;
 The sun looks sicklied, glows like brass,
 And soon, behind a deepening mass
 Of sable vapours, shrinks from sight ;
 The ocean, late so blue and bright,
 Is turning to a level sheet

Of inky hue, and far off sweeping,
 Ruffling the sea, like stamping feet,
 The blast is running wild and fleet,
 Tho' here the shadow'd waves are keeping
 A gloomy hush, and deathlike sleeping.

He who commands that stately bark
 Looks thoughtful through the gathering dark,
 And, moving anxious to and fro,
 Surveys the clouds, the waves below,
 Bids the quick seamen ready stand,
 And each obeys his firm command ;
 The masts are lowered, the sails are furled,
 An ominous moan at length is heard ;
 Slow swelling, heaves the watery world,
 As all its shivering depths were stirred.

He knows an autumn storm is nigh ;
 And now, fierce opening, like an eye,
 The dense black clouds, its angry lashes,
 The lambent lightning burns and flashes ;
 It shoots quick, zigzag, down the air,
 A red, intolerable glare ;

Then, like a passion that would lave
 Its burning front—a mad despair—
 It plunges in the illumined wave.

Far off the rumbling thunder peals,
 Sullen, as if vexed nature feels
 A growing anger in her heart;
 Fiercer each moment lightnings dart,
 And louder with the quickened flash,
 Burst the reports, wild crash on crash.
 The clouds are mingling with the sea,
 The air is one continuous rattle,
 Where elements seem joined in battle,
 Or all the demons are set free,
 To vent their fury for awhile
 On scenes that wore so bright a smile—
 Scenes now, to shrinking human eye,
 All horror, yet sublimity.

The blast hath come—it drives along,
 Scattering the fleecy spray on high;
 The noble ship, though firm and strong,
 Rocks as the whirlwind hurries by.
 The tall, stout masts, like reeds, are bending,
 The rolling seas their shocks are sending,
 Till every timber seems to start,
 And groans the vessel's laboring heart;
 Billows burst o'er her, bulwarks strain—
 To front the storm, 'twere mad, 'twere vain:
 Away the ship must wildly sweep,
 With the strong gale, along the deep;
 Her shivered helm can guide no more,
 She dashes on for England's shore.—
 Winds rage more fiercely, and too near
 Their course to land for safety lies;
 They spread a sail—O hour of fear!
 That sail in countless fragments flies;

The ponderous anchor now they fling,
 Hopeful into the flashing wave ;
Around the bark doth boldly swing,
 And the dread seas an instant brave ;
But heavy surges roll and sweep,
In mile-long masses, o'er the deep ;
 The trusted cable snaps in twain !
And at the mercy of the blast,
Away, careering wild and fast,
Lost, lost, to hopeless horror cast,
 She drives across the main.

Ocean, though glorious in its power,
 Grand, soul-exalting, and sublime,
In tranquil as in stormy hour,
 Mirror of God through endless time —
How terrible its wrath, when man
 Must struggle with it, helpless, frail !
How many a bark, since time began,
 Once gallant breasting Summer's gale,
Hath sunk into the swallowing wave,
Its unrecording, dreary grave,
And lieth still, with gems and gold,
Its name forgotten, fate untold,
Down in those caverns wild and deep,
Where never more the storm shall sweep !
Seaweeds of ages to it cling,
And mournful mermaids 'round it sing,
And whitened bones within it glow,
Of those who long, long years ago,
Sank in its cabins glassed and fair ;
The fish swims by, unheeding there
The long-bleached mortal relics, doomed
To shine, not moulder, thus entombed.

O Pity walks the mighty sea,
 And weeps for thousands darkly lying
 Within the gulfs,—their home to be,
 Wild winds, 'till dawns eternity,
 Sad requiems o'er them sighing.

The ship drives on, her course unstead,
 No sheltering port, no human aid.
 Now cries and prayers ascend to God
 From decks that joy so lately trod ;
 The minute-gun is heard to swell,
 Hoarse-booming, like an ocean knell ;
 The flash is seen by those on shore,
 And faint they catch the sullen roar.
 Oh ! minute-gun ! how sad to hear
 Thy voice, which tells of peril near,
 Of trembling, frail humanity,
 Of spirit's horror and distress,
 Of scene where pride and vanity
 Melt into nothingness :
 Voice calling unto man to save
 His brother, hurrying to the grave,
 Left helpless, that dark, dreadful hour,
 To elements that mock our power.
 Oh ! minute-gun ! a pang doth rend
 The heart to hear thee on the blast ;
 Most sad when aid we cannot lend,
 Knowing the doomed ones near their end,
 Listening till cease thy sounds at last.

O'er foam-topped, mountain billows bounding,
 The tempest loud his trumpet sounding,
 Like a wild race-horse to the goal,
 A passion that defies control,
 The vessel shoreward sweeps ;

The wrathful seas her sides are lashing,
 The breakers rolling, maddening, flashing,
 Then o'er the crags in thunder dashing,
 But still that course she keeps.

A ridge of rocks, a league away,
 Insidious lurks beneath the waters,
 And there, like Pluto's Fury-daughters,
 The ravening waves are all at play :
 They lift their spumy, snake-like crests,
 Against the black crags dash their breasts,
 And rage, and howl for prey.
 Danger doth know that spot full well,
 And ever there, to madness wrought,
 Their wildest horrors storms have brought,
 And rung the seaman's knell.

She comes—she comes !—white faces crowd
 The rocking deck—they hold their breath ;
 A ghastly form is walking proud
 Amid the group—'tis waiting Death !
 The surges heave her ponderous hull,
 As though it were a small sea-gull,
 Then dash it to the depths below,
 Midst whirling, seething, hissing foam ;
 Nearer the ridge, now swift, now slow,
 The bark is borne as wild winds blow—
 That ridge destruction's home.
 A pause—expecting hearts stand still ;
 Cold through each soul runs terror's thrill ;
 She strikes !—each oaken plank is quivering,
 And, like that plank, each breast is shivering ;
 She strikes !—upon the reef she's driven !
 Have mercy on them, pitying heaven !

If fiends exult in human woe,
 And heighten horror here below,
 A scene more piteous, full of dread,
 They scarce could find in this our world ;
 And here their wings they well might spread,
 To bar one beam that hope might shed,
 And laugh while man is downward hurled—
 Downward amid the boiling surge,
 The howl of blasts his awful dirge.

The winds are fiercely raging round,
 The billows o'er them breaking,
 And with an ominous, mournful sound,
 The cormorant is shrieking :
 Some wildly gaze upon the skies,
 Terror in straining, anguished eyes ;
 Some kneel in fervent, trustful prayer,
 Calling on God to save them there ;
 Others embrace, and check their fears,
 Breathing farewells with sighs and tears :
 And still the tempest-furies rave,
 The cormorant shrieks along the sea,
 And yawns the' engulfing, frenzied wave—
 Thy door, eternity !

They lower the boat—crowds rush to gain
 A place within ; their hope is vain ;
 Their eagerness to live doth bring
 But certain death ; they wildly cling
 To that frail boat, but, flying fate,
 Lament their madness, all too late ;
 It heels—it sinks ; then loud is heard,
 Above the wave or tempest-bird,
 The drowning wretches' cry ;

And those still left, together creep,
 Shake hands, but cannot speak or weep,
 So awful 'tis to die.

A husband clasps unto his breast
 Her who had made his manhood blest ;
 Faithful they lived, his lips had ne'er
 Breathed word unkind to cause a tear ;
 Faithful they lived, and now would be
 In love's embrace beneath the sea.
 Oh ! how she looks into his eyes,
 To read if soul is shrinking there ;
 Restrains her tears and bursting sighs,
 And struggles with her strong despair ;
 For bowing to wild grief might shake
 His spirit's bravery ; she would make
 His closing moments firm and calm,
 And not distress, but yield him balm.
 E'en while her soul is trembling, shrinking,
 And, drenched with foam, her body sinking,
 She strives composure to impart,
 And vigour give her own weak heart ;
 And while she smiles all feeling, love,
 Looks bravely, too, as martyrs die—
 An angel strengthening from above,
 A mortal who can melt and sigh.

One arm around his neck is twined,
 One hand is pointing heavenward now ;
 'Mid Nature's terrors, dread of mind,
 Glows with a smile her lovely brow ;
 So blooms the flower upon the verge
 Of some high, beetling, fearful rock ;
 It breathes perfume above the surge,
 Smiles with a grace as tempests scourge,
 And half defies the thunder's shock.

She bids him trust yon Great Supreme,
 Who walks the storm and rules the wave ;
 Behind His wrath His mercies beam,
 He, only He can save.

“ Oh, rest upon that arm of power !
 “ God will support this awful hour ;
 “ Come, firmly let us face grim death—
 “ Come, hopeful let us yield our breath :
 “ Think of our love ; it will not close
 “ With life’s brief dream and human woes ;
 “ The fire, unquenched by fate, will blaze
 “ More pure, more bright, through endless days.
 “ Reck not the body, think of soul ;
 “ That, free, immortal, mocking fears,
 “ Will mount where billows never roll,
 “ And smile through calm eternal years.”

He draws the loved, one nearer, nearer,
 Supported, solaced, yet he feels
 The dear consoler only dearer ;
 A last wild kiss affection seals—
 A long, long kiss of spirit’s love ;
 Oh, bliss ! Oh, anguish ! far above
 All we can know ere death has cast
 Our joys in shade, or hope has past—
 What all life’s kisses to our last ?
 They gaze, embrace—embrace once more ;
 Thus will they cling till life be o’er ;
 Their lips refuse to say farewell ;
 Though billows o’er them soon may roll,
 And loud-voic’d tempests sound their knell,
 God will protect, receive the soul.

A child, scarce past its infant charms,
 Is sheltering in its mother’s arms ;

And as the rude winds wave its tresses
 Of palest gold, her wild caresses
 Smother its cries, and less that hour,
 She heeds her own approaching doom,
 Than that stern death should blight her flower
 Of beauty in its opening bloom.

How lovely looks the feeble one,
 In that sad Mother's anguished sight !
 Intelligence hath just begun
 To make those baby-features bright,
 Like dawn which, flashing, sparkles first
 On dews by blithesome Morning nursed,
 And what was shadowy seems to gleam
 In answer to the living beam.
 The earth she leaves, life, death, the whole
 Are nothing to her yearning soul,
 Beside the frail, dear nestler there—
 Dearer for suffering and despair.

'Tis sad to see her stooping near,
 Bathing that cheek with love's warm tear :
 O timeless rose, whose leaves must fall
 In one brief hour ! O cherub lips,
 That wont a mother's name to call,
 Soon to be cold in death's eclipse !
 'Tis pitiful to see her kiss
 The little forehead, chill and wet,
 Then shudder at the wild abyss,
 And clasp it closer, closer yet ;
 Its tiny hands close press in hers,
 As if some warmth she would impart ;
 Oh ! what emotion in her stirs,
 To feel it pillowed on her heart !

The last, the last time, resting there,
 Half sobs, half smiles, so helpless, fair,
 Her little angel from the skies,
 That made love's garden paradise ;
 Star raised beyond dark sin's control,
 Her second life, her other soul ;
 Being where all things lovely, sweet,
 Like gathered sun-rays, seem to meet.

And must it never, never know

 The bliss that heaven for man designed ?
 All bright, all beautiful things below,
 Green woods that wave, God's flowers that blow,
 For ever left behind.

Must it descend from life and light,
 From love and joy, to horror's night,
 The sunless caves its dreary bed,
 Cold weeds around its golden head ?
 Herself can die, but thus to see

 Her tender treasure shelter crave—
 Oh, agony of agony !

 Within the arms that cannot save !
 One boon her misery can but give,
 Until her fondling cease to live :
 Covering it close within her breast,
 That ruthless winds may not molest,
 She'll rock it into sleep, and so
 Unconscious to those gulfs 'twill go,
 Without a pang or shrinking fear,
 Without a cry, without a tear ;
 She'll press its cheek, and catch its breath,
 A mother's love more strong than death.

With grappling hands the seamen now
 Frame a rude raft, and many a brow

Flashes with hope,—deceptive fire,
 That like the ghastly, lurid light,
 Which gleams on graves in winter's night,
 Burns, quivers, only to expire.
 That raft, committed to the wave,
 A moment floats, as though 'twould save ;
 Then mountain-billows, rolling on,
 Lift it on high—'tis lost—'tis gone,
 Dashed, shattered, hurried o'er the deep,
 Ere on the spars one wretch can leap.
 But there they stand with mournful eyes,
 And clasped, raised hands, and choking sighs,
 Watching it borne beyond the rocks ;
 The hopeless view their anguish mocks ;
 By tempests driv'n, it drifts away ;
 Now faint through breaks of snowy spray,
 Their eyes its flashing course survey ;
 E'en as the lost may gaze in woe,
 From the sad realms of pain and gloom,
 On Mercy's angel, gliding slow,
 Constrained to leave them to their doom :
 They catch the light of far-off wings,
 Glorious but vain, along the sky ;
 And every sparkle only brings
 To tortured bosoms keener stings,
 Deepening despair's last agony.

The vessel parts—with shrieks of fear
 They hang, wild-clinging, o'er the waves,
 To rocking shroud, or bulwark near ;
 That deck must be a tossing bier,
 Bearing them to their graves.
 Columns of foam are dashing o'er them,
 Ocean behind, and fate before them ;

Men's limbs are numbed, and woman's hair
 Wild in the storm around her falls;
 And many a cry of fierce despair
 Breaks through the roar of surges there,
 From those whom death appalls.
 The coast afar is dimly seen,
 But Death's pale spectre stands between,
 And veils the view of Life, who waves
 Her angel-hand from distant rocks;
 The howl of surges from the caves
 Is echoed back like thunder-shocks;
 Wild breakers sweep the broken deck,
 Uplift, then downward hurl the wreck,
 As raging only to destroy;
 O Mercy! where is now thy joy
 In saving man? thou flee'st away;
 Hope's torch hath quenched its heavenly ray,
 And fear and horror, through the gloom,
 But point them to their dreadful doom!
 The timid shriek, but shrieks are vain,
 Dying unanswered o'er the main;
 The braver spirits silence keep,
 Theirs breast-locked woe that cannot weep,
 Looking with upward anguished eye,
 Bidding farewell to earth and sky,
 Feeling one little hour, and they
 On ocean, heav'n, shall gaze no more,
 Nor heed the blast, nor hear the roar,
 Unthinking, cold, insensate clay.

That moment ere they join the dead,
 How memory wakes in many a brain!
 Scenes of the past, and pleasures fled,
 And thoughts that long have dormant lain,
 Like lightning, when all else is black,
 Flashing in startling brightness back.

The lover for an instant flies
 In soul across the awful deep,
And seems to gaze in those dear eyes,
 That still for him their sunshine keep,
And hear, despite the tempest's roar,
The voice that love may hear no more.
The father, borne in spirit, sees
His low thatched cot beneath the trees,
And, drinking but the balmy gale,
He wanders down his native vale,
Sees wild flowers bloom the stream along,
And lists the cuckoo's merry song ;
Ay, hears his children's tongues of glee,
And feels them clinging to his knee,
Crying he never more shall roam,
Hailing the happy wanderer home.

All this, one passing instant, burns,
 As a fierce meteor hurries by,
Scattering fire-sparks, but then returns
 To deeper blackness down the sky.
As if the soul, with wild endeavour,
Clung to life's scene, ere closed for ever,
They seem to catch, like music's tone,
While launching on the dread unknown,
The still, small, recollected voice
Of all that made their hearts rejoice—
What agony, mind's brief survey,
 To those about to perish here !
Their dream dispelled, far, far away,
Around but storm, and rocks, and spray,
 No fond adieu, no soothing tear.
O scene, whose horror well might thrill,
And angel hearts with pity fill,
If from the sky they stoop to see
The woes of doomed humanity ;

Mortal, immortal thus at strife,
 Flesh hanging between death and life,
 Soul praying to her God to save,
 Nature recoiling from the grave.

A cry,—a cry!—across the bay,
 What see their eager, glistening eyes?
 Through raging tempest, rising spray,
 A boat doth shape its daring way;

 His oar the bending seaman plies.
 Its course is tow'rd that ridge of rocks,
 Where fast their bark to billows' shocks
 Yields up her strength, and soon will be
 But shivered fragments on the sea.
 Now on the wave's high crest it rides,

 Like a fair gull, its form of white,*
 Now plunges where the surge divides—
 Dread valleys of the cloven tides,
 Each side a glassy, living height.

Again it rises,—seas are flashing,
 But, spite of danger, on 'tis dashing,
 Shooting across the waves' white tops;
 Then, as a diver headlong drops,
 It falls prow foremost, then regains
 Its balanced ease, and firm remains,
 Ay, nobly steady, till a surge
 Comes rolling in from outer seas;
 Fury its whelming course doth urge,
 It makes the heart's blood freeze:
 It heaves—it gathers giant strength,
 Lifts its high front, and bursts at length
 Full on the life-boat backward cast—
 Backward all quivering through the blast.

The belted seamen firmly now
 Must hold, must grasp, must strain for life,

*The hull of the Life-boat is usually painted white, so that it may be perceived more readily at a distance by those in distress.

Waves breaking o'er the life-boat's bow; *
 She fills, but floats,—O fearful strife!
 A strife between those raging waves,
 And man whose spirit all things braves.
 She fills, but floats †—she heels—she lies
 All sloping with her lifted keel;
 O'er her again the fierce wave flies,
 Eager to claim its fragile prize,
 And, toppling, down she seems to reel,
 Deeper and deeper, waters pouring
 Flood-like within, around her roaring;
 But every man, as still she rides,
 Looks unto him who boldly guides, ‡
 As though he were the tempest's child,
 And knew old Ocean fierce and wild;
 Let him rage on till rage be o'er,
 Heave his huge billows, foam and roar;
 Man can but perish once, and here
 He'll snatch yon sufferers from the wave,
 Or failing that, without a fear,
 Will find his own sea grave.

The boat triumphant may have dashed
 From out the surf that round her flashed,
 Or, whelmed and shivered by the weight
 Of surges, yielded to her fate,
 Casting the brave ones to the deep,—
 Heroes whom every heart would weep,
 As much as for the brave who yield
 Their lives on battle's proudest field.

* The life-belt used by the crews of the National Life-boat Institution, consists of two rows of cork secured below the waist, and has a buoyancy of about twenty pounds, sufficient to enable the man immersed to float himself, and support another.

† A Life-boat may be stove in, upset, or otherwise rendered unmanageable, but, though filled with water, it can never sink, the air-tight boxes and hollow compartments along the sides, giving it a buoyancy under all circumstances.

‡ Each Life-boat has a coxswain and bowman in addition to the crew who man the oars.

Anxious they watch from that far wreck,
 Clinging to stays, and parted deck,
 Foam 'round them, o'er them like a cloud—
 A drenched, a shivering, dying crowd ;
 But on the waters wild and white,
 The life-boat meets no more their sight ;
 Sunk, lost, she seems to straining eyes,
 And hope again each bosom flies ;
 They gaze and wail, then mutely sink,
 Down, slowly down, on fate's dread brink—
 O lot most cruel, thus to see

Help near, yet vain each wild endeavour,
 Doomed, like the tortured Greek, to be
 Mocked by unpitying misery,

The good just reached, then lost for ever !
 But no, they had not trusted dreams,
 Once more the white bow, flashing, gleams,
 The dipping oars' phosphoric sparkle
 Caught through the mists that round it darkle ;
 Waters shot off,* free, full of pride,
 The boat springs buoyant o'er the tide ;
 On, lightly on, she makes her way,
 A meteor darting through the spray,
 A thing of bravery battling there
 With Terror in her awful lair,
 A sea-sprite that salvation brings,
 Wafting hope,—life, upon her wings.

The shipwrecked men, half frantic, see
 The life-boat ploughing tow'rd them now ;
 Each throws the hair from off his brow,
 Flushed with delirious ecstasy :
 O blesséd, welcome, welcome sight,
 Joy's morning burst from horror's night !

* One of the chief characteristics of the Life-boat is the power it possesses, after having shipped a sea, of throwing off, by means of tubes peculiarly constructed, the water with which it has been filled.

Deliverance comes,—Ah ! who may tell
 What raptures in the bosoms glow
 Of those who late seemed doomed to dwell
 In death's dark gulfs, and bade farewell
 To all things dear below ?
 The young, the old, with eager eyes
 Watch the bold bark that tow'rd them flies ;
 Yet still with winds, and ocean's rage,
 Dire conflict must the life-boat wage ;
 She struggles strongly, like a soul
 Racing with death for life's prized goal,
 And flashes through, or stoutly throws
 The billows off, that rise like foes.
 She toils,—she strains,—she draws more near,
 Then loud the sufferers raise their cheer,
 And toss their arms, and call on heaven
 To aid the hearts who thus have striven,
 The gallant boatmen, come to save
 Wrecked strangers from an ocean-grave.

'Tis done,—despite the winds, the roll
 Of that storm-maddened, fearful sea,
 Bravery hath snatched each shivering soul,
 O greedy death ! from thee.
 Not yet the wife shall press her pillow
 Beneath the cold and dreary billow ;
 The mother and her bud of bloom
 Go down embracing into gloom :
 Earth yet its joys, its sweets will give,
 O rapture ! still to live—to live !

They reach the shore where waves in thunder
 Are rolling, rolling,—and the foam
 Is mounting high, while caverns under
 The beetling cliffs, the mermaid's home,
 Rebellow to the frantic blast,
 But safe that shore they tread at last.

See! beaming eyes to heaven they raise,
Pouring their souls in thanks and praise!
Then the rough seamen's hands they wring,
 And some, o'erpowered by bursting feeling,
Their arms around them wildly fling,
 While tears down many a cheek are stealing.
They bless them for their noble deed,
True saviours sent in hour of need;
If God rewards high acts below,
Their souls shall every rapture know.

But now spectators on the shore
 Shout their applause; the heart-raised cheer
Is heard above the ocean's roar;

 "The Life-boat!" thunders far and near.—
That bark of slender, fragile form,
Battles triumphant with the storm,
Lives when the ship no more can ride,
But founders in her strength and pride;
The dove sent forth, rejoiced to bear
The branch of hope to pale despair;
The rainbow in the cloud of gloom,
Deliv'rer from the threatening tomb;
Her generous mission is to save,
The guardian angel of the wave.



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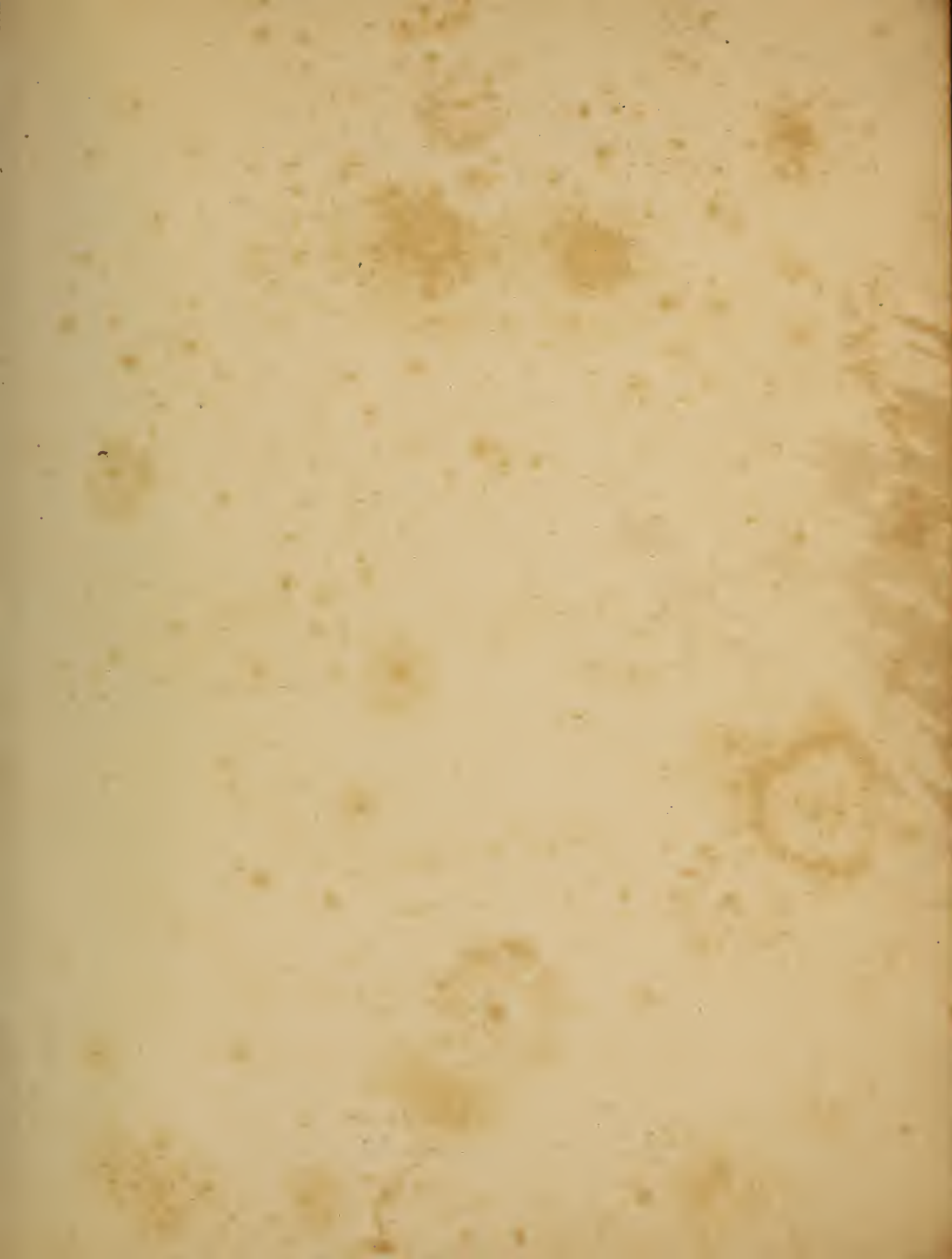
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