

THE HARVEST OF THE SEA

BY CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

The jealous Sea moaned in the April night:
"Lo! there are comrades hidden in my heart,
Unfortunates who sought me, sick of life.
But I am hungry for brave souls; I crave
Their warmth and passion through my chilling tides;
Their heads upon my bosom, and their hands,
Like children's hands, about me in the dark.
I need their blood in my cold loneliness."

A Titan sailed her weary leagues of foam,
Unknowing her strange wish, her mad desire.
But there was menace in the startlit night,
And sudden doom upon deceiving paths,
And a wild horror on the mighty deep.

The grey Sea laughed—and drew those brave men down,
And braver women who but mocked at Death,
Seeing that Love went with them. These the souls
The awful Sea desired! These the hearts
She waited for in that stupendous hour!
They were enough to warm the Arctic wastes,
To fill with furnace heat the frozen zones,
And fire the very Sea that was their grave.

But dream not, mighty Ocean, they are yours!
We have them still, those high and valiant men
Who died that others might reach ports of peace.
Not in your jealous depths their spirits roam,
But through the world to-day, and up to heaven!

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WITHIN the dungeon of the deep
 There sleeps the queen of all the seas,
 Who swung assurance at the sweep
 Of ghostly peril on the breeze,
 And dared the elements to ply
 Their angered forces at her head
 That she might battle and defy—
 And lo! *one* battle left her dead!

With all the graces of a court
 She slipped the tethers of the tide
 And glided far from out the port
 That bound her power and her pride,
 And with the promise of her youth
 And all the future in her sway,
 She strode in triumph over truth
 And tossed the danger with the spray!

Within, her heart was great and gay,
 Without, her sinews stretched in length,
 The very heavens seemed to play
 Beside the pulses of her strength!
 And through the day and through the night
 Of billowed pleasure undismayed,
 Her throb of fervor set to flight
 The toll of fear, and fear obeyed.

Peace! While the even waters glide
 By quiet stars from night to day;
 Peace! While the measured hours stride
 In swift descent upon their prey;
 And there in shrouded silence steals
 The stealthy espion of the sea,
 Whose frozen mask afar conceals
 The dark decree of destiny.

Peace! While the miracle of man
 Yet flies her flag in majesty;
 Peace! While she breathes her final span
 Serene unto eternity;
 And then—the muffled knell of doom,

The flash of fate, the riven rod,
 The plunge into the gulf of gloom,
 And last—the very touch of God!

A thousand lives embosomed are
 Beneath the wonders of the wave,
 A thousand spirits vanished far
 Beyond the waters of the grave;
 And sunken in that solemn keep,
 The carcass of a vessel vast,
 Where only weeds and fishes creep
 Among the port-holes of the past!

No marble monolith may mark,
 Brave sons! the traces of your doom,
 Where but the caverns of the shark
 Return the echoes of the tomb,
 And but a broken bulk of steel
 Crushed in the sea's eternal bed,
 Shall tell the distant ages still
 Where tender homage may be led.

And yet, about that shattered shell
 Whose glory crumbled in an hour,
 The waves may wind a coral spell
 And weave a poem into power,
 Until the heaving depths of slime
 And clinging beauties of the deep
 Shall mold a monument sublime
 Unto your ceremented sleep.

And here, since every sorrow swings
 Some note of beauty on the tide,
 And not a dark despair but brings
 A feeble glimmer to abide,
 Bereaved, benumbed, all hearts may fold
 About the courage of the dead,
 And honor strength that died enrolled
 To yield the weaker, life instead.

And while the winds and waters merge
 In mournful requiem of sighs,
 And chant a great eternal dirge
 Of far regret unto the skies,
 The wave of all the ages still
 Shall sweep the reef of memory,
 And yearning breakers curve and thrill
 In music of your eulogy!

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