

"The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere"

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge

*Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and
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THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER IN SEVEN PARTS.ARGUMENT.....

THE RIME
OF THE
ANCYENT MARINERE
IN
SEVEN PARTS.

ARGUMENT.

How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by Storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country.

I.

It is an ancyent Marinere,
And he stoppeth one of three:
"By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stoppest me?"

5 "The Bridegroom's doors are open'd wide,
And I am next of kin;
The Guests are met, the Feast is set,--
May'st hear the merry din."

But still he holds the wedding-guest--
10 "There was a Ship," quoth he--
"Nay, if thou'st got a laughsome tale,
Marinere! come with me."

He holds him with his skinny hand,
Quoth he, there was a Ship--
15 "Now get thee hence, thou grey-beard Loon!
Or my Staff shall make thee skip."

He holds him with his glittering eye--
The wedding guest stood still
And listens like a three year's child:
20 The Marinere hath his will.

The wedding-guest sate on a stone:
He cannot chuse but hear;
And thus spake on that ancyent man,
The bright-eyed Marinere.

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25 The Ship was cheer'd, the Harbour clear'd--
Merrily did we drop
Below the Kirk, below the Hill,
Below the Light-house top.

The Sun came up upon the left,
30 Out of the Sea came he:
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon--
35 The wedding-guest here beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.

The Bride hath paced into the Hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
40 The merry Minstralsy.

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The wedding-guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot chuse but hear:
And thus spake on that ancyent man,
The bright-eyed Marinere.

45 Listen, Stranger! Storm and Wind,
A Wind and Tempest strong!
For days and weeks it play'd us freaks--
Like Chaff we drove along.

Listen, Stranger! Mist and Snow,
50 And it grew wond'rous cauld:
And Ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as Emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
55 Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken--
The Ice was all between.

- 9 -

The Ice was here, the Ice was there,
The Ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roar'd and howl'd--
60 Like noises of a swound.

At length did cross an Albatross:
Thorough the Fog it came;
As an it were a Christian Soul,
We hail'd it in God's name.

65 There Mariners gave it biscuit-worms,
And round and round it flew:
The Ice did split with a Thunder-fit;
The Helmsman steered us thro'.

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
70 The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the Mariners' hollo!

- 10 -

In mist or cloud on mast or shroud
It perched for vespers nine;
75 Whiles all the night thro' fog-smoke white,
Glimmer'd the white noon-shine.

"God save thee, ancyent Mariner!
From the fiends that plague thee thus!--
Why look'st thou so?"--With my cross bow
80 I shot the Albatross.

II.

The Sun came up upon the right:
Out of the Sea came he;
And broad as a weft upon the left
Went down into the sea.

85 And the good south wind still blew behind
But no sweet Bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the Mariners' hollo!

And I had done an hellish thing,
90 And it would work 'em woe:
For all averr'd, I had killed the bird
That made the Breeze to blow.

Ne dim ne red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
95 Then all averre'd, I had kill'd the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
100 The furrow follow'd free:
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent Sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the Sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
105 And we did speak only to break
The silence of the Sea

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody sun at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
110 No bigger than the moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, ne breath ne motion;
As idle as a painted Ship

Upon a painted Ocean.

115 Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Ne any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
120 That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

- 14 -

About, about, in reel and rout
The Death-fires danced at night;
125 The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green and blue and white.

And some in dreams assured were
Of the Spirit that plagued us so:
Nine fathom deep he had follo'd us
130 From the land of mist and snow.

And every tongue, thro' utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

135 Ah! wel-a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young;
Instead of the Cross the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

III.

I saw a something in the Sky
140 No bigger than my fist;
At first it seem'd a little speck,
And then it seem'd a mist:
It mov'd and move', and took at last
A certain shape, I wist.

145 A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it ner'd and ner'd:
As if it dodg'd a water-sprite,
It plung'd and tacked and veer'd.

With throats unslak'd, with black lips bak'd,
150 Ne could we laught, ne wail:
Then while thro' drouth all dumb they stood
I bit my arm and suck'd the blood,
And cry'd, A sail! a sail!

With throats unslak'd, with black lips bak'd,
155 Agape they heard me call:
Gramercy! they for joy did grin,
And all at once their breath drew in,
As they were drinking all.

She doth not tack from side to side--
160 Hither to work us weal;
Withouten wind, withouten tide,
She steddies with upright keel.

The western wave was all a flame
The day was well nigh done!
165 Almost upon the western wave
Rested the broad bright Sun;
When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was fleck'd with bars,
170 (Heaven's Mother send us grace)
As thro' a dungeon-grate he peer'd,
With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she neres and neres!
175 Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun,
Like restless gossameres?

- 18 -

Are those *her* naked ribs which fleck'd
The sun that did behind them peer?
And are those two all, all the crew,
180 That woman and her fleshless Pheere?

His bones were black with many a crack,
All black and bare, I ween;
Jet-black and bare, save where with rust
Of mouldy damp and charnel crust
185 They're patch'd with purple and green.

Her lips were red, *her* looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin is as white as leprosy,
And she is far liker Death than he;
190 Her flesh makes the still air cold.

- 19 -

The naked Hulk alongside came,
And the Twain were playing dice;
"The Game is done! I've won! I've won!"
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

195 A gust of wind sterte up behind
And whistled thro' his bones;
Thro' the holes of his yes and the hole of his mouth.
Half-whistles and half-groans.

With never a whisper in the Sea,
200 Off darts the Spectre-ship;
While clombe above the eastern bar
The horned Moon, with one bright star
Almost atween the tips.

- 20 -

One after one, by the horned Moon
205 (Listen, O Stranger! to me)
Each turn'd his face with a ghastly pang,
And curs'd me with his ee.

Four times fifty living men,
With never a a sigh nor groan)
210 With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropp'd down one by one.

The souls did from their bodies fly,--
They fled to bliss or woe;
And every soul, it pass'd me by,
215 Like the whiz of my Cross-bow.

IV.

"I fear thee, ancyent Marinere!
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long and lank and brown,
As is the ribb'd Sea-sand.

220 "I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand so brown"--
Fear not, fear not, thou wedding-guest!
This body dropt not down.

Alone, alone, all all alone,
225 Alone on a wide wide sea!
And Christ would take no pity on
My soul in agony.

The many men, so beautiful
And they all dead did lie!
230 And a million million slimy things
Lived on--and so did I.

I look'd upon the rotting Sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the eldritch deck,
235 And there the dead men lay.

I looked to Heaven, and tryd to pray:
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came and made
My heart as dry as dust.

240 I closed my lids and kept them close,
Till the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

245 The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Ne rot, ne reek did they:
The look with which they look'd on me
Had never pass'd away.

An orphan's curse would drag to Hell

250 A spirit from on high:

But O! more horrible than that

Is the curse in a dead man's eye!

Seven days, seven nights I saw that curse,

And yet I could not die.

255 The moving Moon went up the sky,

And no where did abide:

Softly she was going up,

And a star or two beside--

- 24 -

Her beams bemock'd the sultry main,

260 Like morning frosts yspread;

But where the ship's huge shadow lay,

The charmed water burnt alway

A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship

265 I watched the water-snakes:

They moved in tracks of shining white,

And when they rear'd, the elfish light

Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship

270 I watch'd their rich attire:

Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,

They coil'd and swam; and every track

Was a flash of golden fire.

- 25 -

O happy living things! no tongue

275 Their beauty might declare:

A spring of love gusht from my heart,

And I bless'd them unaware!

Sure my kind saint took pity on me,

And I bless'd them unaware.

280 The self-same moment I could pray;

And from my neck so free

The Albatross fell off, and sank

Like lead into the sea.

V.

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing
285 Belov'd from pole to pole!
To Mary-queen the praise be yeven
She sent the gentle sleep from heaven
That slid into my soul.

The silly buckets on the deck
290 That had so long remain'd,
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;
And when I awoke, it rain'd.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
My garments all were dank;
295 Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
And still my body drank.

I mov'd, and could not feel my limbs,
I was so light, almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
300 And was a blessed Ghost.

The roaring wind! it roar'd far off,
It did not come anear;
But with its sound it shook the sails
That were so thin and sere.

305 The upper air burst into life,
And a hundred fire-flags sheen,
To and fro they were hurried about;
And to and fro, and in and out,
The stars dance on between.

310 The coming wind doth roar more loud,
And the sails do sigh, like sedge:
And the rain pours down from one black cloud;
The Moon was at its edge.

Hark! hard! the thick black cloud is cleft,
315 And he Moon is at its side:
Like waters shot from some high crag,

The lightning falls with never a jag,
A river steep and wide.

The strong wind reach'd the ship: it roar'd
320 And dropp'd down, like a stone!
Beneath the lightning and the moon
The dead men gave a groan.

They groan'd, they stirr'd, they all uprose,
Ne spake, ne moved their eyes:
325 It had been strange, even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steer'd, the ship mov'd on;
Yet never a breeze up-blew;
The Mariners all 'gan work the ropes,
330 Where they were wont to do:

- 29 -

They raised their limbs like lifeless tools--
We were a ghastly crew.

The body of my brother's son
Stood by me, knee to knee:
335 The body and I pull'd at one rope,
But he said nought to me--
And I quak'd to think of my own voice
How frightful it would be!

The day-light dawn'd--they dropp'd their arms,
340 And clustered round the mast:
Sweet sounds rose slowly thro' their mouths
And from their bodies pass'd.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the sun:
345 Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mix'd, now one by one.

- 30 -

Sometimes a dropping from the sky
I heard the Lavrock sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are
350 How they seem'd to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargonings,

And now 'twas like all instruments,

Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song,
355 That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceas'd; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
360 That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

- 31 -

Listen, O Listen, thou Wedding-guest:
"Marinere! thou hast thy will:
For that, which comes out of thine eye, doth make
365 My body and soul to be still."

Never sadder tale was told
To a man of woman born:
Sadder and wiser thou wedding-guest!
Thou'lt rise to morrow morn.

370 Never sadder tale was heard
By a man of woman born:
The Mariners all return'd to work
As silent as before.

The Mariners all 'gan pull the ropes,
375 But look at me they n'old:
Thought I, I am as thin as air--
They cannot me behold.

- 32 -

Till noon we quietly sail'd on,
Yet never a breeze did breathe:
380 Slowly and smoothly went the ship,
Mov'd onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep
From the land of mist and snow
The spirit slid: and it was He
385 That made the ship to go.
The sails at noon left off their tune,
And the Ship stood still also.

The sun, right up above the mast,
Had fix'd her to the ocean:

390 But in a minute she 'gan stir,
With a short uneasy motion--
Backwards and forwards half her length
With a short uneasy motion.

- 33 -

Then, like a pawing horse let go,
395 She made a sudden bound:
It flung the blood into my head,
And I fell down in a swoond.

How long in that same fit I lay,
I have not to declare;
400 But ere my living life return'd,
I heard and in my soul discern'd
Two voices in the air,

"Is it he?" quoth one, "Is this the man?
By him who died on cross,
405 With his cruel bow he laid full low,
The harmless Albatross.

"The spirit who 'bideth by himself
In the land of mist and snow,
He lov'd the bird that loved the man
410 Who shot him with his bow."

- 34 -

The other was a softer voice,
As soft as honey-dew:
Quoth he the man hath penance done,
And penance more will do.

- 35 -

VI.

FIRST VOICE.

415 "But tell me, tell me! speak again,
Thy soft response renewing--
What makes that ship drive on so fast?
What is the Ocean doing?"

SECOND VOICE.

"Still as a Slave before his lord,
420 The Ocean hath no blast;
His great bright eye most silently
Up to the Moon is cast--

- 36 -

If he may know which way to go;
For she guides him smooth or grim
425 See, brother, see! how graciously
She looketh down on him."

FIRST VOICE.

"But why drives on that ship so fast,
Withouten wave or wind?"

SECOND VOICE.

"The air is cut away before,
430 And closes from behind.

Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high
Or we shall be belated:
For slow and slow that ship will go,
When the Marinere's trance is abated."

- 37 -

435 I woke, and we were sailing on
As in a gentle weather:
'Twas night, calm night, the moon was high;
The dead men stood together.

All stood together on the deck,
440 For a charnel-dungeon fitter:
All fix'd on me their stony eyes,
That in the Moon did glitter.

The pang, the curse, with which they died,
Had never pass'd away:

445 I could not draw my een from theirs,
Ne turn them up to pray.

And now this spell was snapt: once more
And I could move my een.

I looked far-forth, yet little saw
450 Of what might else be seen.

- 38 -

Like one, that on a lonely road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turn'd round, walks on,
And turns no more his head:

455 Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

But soon there breath'd a wind on me,
Ne sound ne motion made:

Its path was not upon the sea,
460 In ripple or in shade.

It rais'd my hair, it fann'd my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring--
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

- 39 -

465 Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sail'd softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze--
On me alone it blew.

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed

470 The light-house top I see?
Is this the Hill? is this the Kirk?
Is this mine own countree!

We drifted o'er the Harbour-bar,
And I with sobs did pray--

475 "O let me be awake, my God!
Or let me sleep alway!"

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
So smoothly it was strewn!
And on the bay the moon light lay,

480 And the shadow of the moon.

- 40 -

The moonlight bay was white all o'er,
Till rising from the same,
Full many shapes, that shadows were,
Like as of torches came.

485 A little distance from the prow
Those dark-red shadows were:
But soon I saw that my own flesh
Was red as in a glare.

I turn'd my head in fear and dread,
490 And by the holy rood,
The bodies had advanc'dl and now
Before the mast they stood.

They lifted up their stiff right arms,
They held them straight and tight;
495 And each right-arm burnt like a torch,
A torch that's borne upright.
Their stony eye-balls glitter'd on
In the red and smoky light.

- 41 -

I pray'd and turn'd my head away
500 Forth looking as before.
There was no breeze upon the bay,
No wave against the shore.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,
That stands above the rock:
505 The moonlight steep'd in silentness
The steady weathercock.

And the bay was white with silent light,
Till rising from the same
Full many shapes, that shadows were,
510 In crimson colours came.

A little distance from the prow
Those crimson shadows were:
I turn'd my eyes upon the deck--
O Christ! what saw I there?

- 42 -

515 Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,
And, by the Holy rood
A man all light, a seraph-man,
On every corse there stood.

This seraph-band, each wav'd his hand:

520 It was a heavenly sight:
They stood as signals to the land,
Each one a lovely light:

This seraph-band, each wav'd his hand,
No voice did they impart--

525 No voice; but O! the silence sank
Like music on my heart.

But soon I heard the dash of oars;
I heard the pilot's cheer;
My head was turn'd perforce away,

530 And I saw a boat appear.

- 43 -

Then vanish'd all the lovely lights,
The bodies rose anew:
With silent pace, each to his place,
Came back the ghastly crew.

535 The wind, that shade nor motion made,
On me alone it blew.

The pilot, and the pilot's boy,
I heard them coming fast:
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy

540 The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third--I heard his voice:

It is the Hermit good!
He singeth loud his godly hymns
That he makes in the wood.

545 He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away
The Albatross's blood.

VII.

This Hermit good lives in that wood
Which slopes down to the Sea.
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!
550 He loves to talk with Marineres
That come from a far Contree.

He kneels at morn and noon and eve--
He hath a cushion plump:
It is the moss that wholly hides
555 The rotted old Oak-stump.

The Skiff-boat ne'rd: I heard them talk,
"Why this is strange, I trow!
Where are those lights so many and fair,
That signal made but now?"

560 "Strange, by my faith!" the Hermit said--
"And they answered not our cheer.
The planks looked warp'd, and see those sails,
How thin they are and sere!
I never saw aught like to them,
565 Unless perchance it were

"The skeletons of leaves that lag
My forest brook along;
When the Ivy-tod is heavy with snow,
And the Owlet whoops to the wolf below,
570 That eats the she-wolf's young."

"Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look--
(The Pilot made reply)
I am a-feared"--"Push on, push on!"
Said the Hermit cheerily.

575 The Boat came closer to the ship,
But I ne spake ne stirred!
The Boat came close beneath the Ship,
And straight a sound was hear!

Under the water it rumbled on,

580 Still louder and more dread:
It reach'd the ship, it split the bay;
The Ship went down like lead.

Stunn'd by that loud and dreadful sound,
Which sky and ocean smote,
585 Like one that hath been seven days drowned
My body lay afloat:

- 47 -

But swift as dreams, myself I found
Within the Pilot's boat.

Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,
590 The boat spun round and round;
And all was still, save that the hill
Was telling of the sound.

I moved my lips: the Pilot shrieked
And fell down in a fit;
595 The holy Hermit rais'd his eyes,
And prayed where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laughed loud and long, and all the while
600 His eyes went to and fro.
"Ha! ha!" quoth he--"full plain I see,
The devil knows how to row."

- 48 -

And now all in my own Countree,
I stood on the firm land!
605 The Hermit stepp'd forth from the boat,
And scarcely he could stand.

"O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!"
The Hermit cross'd his brow.
"Say quick," quoth he, "I bid thee say--
610 What manner of man art thou?"

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woeful agony,
Which forc'd me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

615 Since then at an uncertain hour,

Now oftimes and now fewer,
That anguish comes nad makes me tell
My ghastly aventure.

- 49 -

I pass, like night, from land to land;
620 I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach.

What loud uproar bursts from that door!

625 The Wedding-guests are there:
But in the Garden-bower the Bride
And Bride-maids singing are:
And hark the little Vesper-bell,
Which biddeth me to prayer.

630 O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be.

- 50 -

O sweeter than the Marriage-feast,

635 'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the Kirk
With a goodly company.

To walk together to the Kirk,
And all together pray,
640 While each to his great father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And Youths, and Maidens gay.

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou wedding-guest!
645 He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God, who loveth us
650 He made and loveth all.

- 51 -

The Marinere, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,
Is gone: and now the wedding-guest
Turn'd from the bridegroom's door.

655 He went like one that hath been stunn'd,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man,
He rose the morrow morn.

