

Samuel Ferguson (1810-86)

3 *The Forging of the Anchor*

Come, see the Dolphin's anchor forged — 'tis at a white heat now:  
The bellows ceased, the flames decreased though on the forge's brow  
The little flames still fitfully play through the sable mound,  
And fitfully you still may see the grim smiths ranking round,  
All clad in leathern panoply, their broad hands only bare: 5  
Some rest upon their sledges here, some work the windlass there.

The windlass strains the tackle chains, the black mound heaves below,  
And red and deep a hundred veins burst out at every throe:  
It rises, roars, rends all outright — O, Vulcan, what a glow!  
'Tis blinding white, 'tis blasting bright — the high sun shines not so! 10  
The high sun sees not, on the earth, such fiery fearful show,  
The roof-ribs swarth, the candent hearth, the ruddy lurid row  
Of smiths that stand, an ardent band, like men before the foe,  
As, quivering through his fleece of flame, the sailing monster, slow  
Sinks on the anvil: — all about the faces fiery grow; 15  
“Hurrah!” they shout, “leap out — leap out:” bang, bang the sledges go:  
Hurrah! the jetted lightnings are hissing high and low —  
A hailing fount of fire is struck at every squashing blow;  
The leathern mail rebounds the hail, the rattling cinders strow  
The ground around; at every bound the sweltering fountains flow, 20  
And thick and loud the swinking crowd at every stroke pant “ho!”  
Leap out, leap out, my masters; leap out and lay on load!  
Let's forge a goodly anchor — a bower thick and broad;  
For a heart of oak is hanging on every blow, I bode:  
I see the good ship riding all in a perilous road — 25  
The low reef roaring on her lee — the roll of ocean pour'd  
From stem to stern, sea after sea, the mainmast by the board,  
The bulwarks down, the rudder gone, the boats stove at the chains!  
But courage still, brave mariners — the bower yet remains,  
And not an inch to flinch he deigns, save when ye pitch sky high; 30  
Then moves his head, as though he said, “Fear nothing — here am I.”  
Swing in your strokes in order, let foot and hand keep time;  
Your blows make music sweeter far than any steeple's chime:  
But, while you sling your sledges, sing — and let the burthen be,

The anchor is the anvil-king, and royal craftsmen we! 35  
Strike in, strike in — the sparks begin to dull their rustling red;  
Our hammers ring with sharper din, our work will soon be sped.  
Our anchor soon must change his bed of fiery rich array,  
For a hammock at the roaring bows, or an oozy couch of clay;  
Our anchor soon must change the lay of merry craftsmen here, 40  
For the yeo-heave-o', and the heave-away, and the sighing seaman's cheer;  
When, weighing slow, at eve they go — far, far from love and home;  
And sobbing sweethearts, in a row, wail o'er the ocean foam.

In livid and obdurate gloom he darkens down at last:  
A shapely one he is, and strong, as e'er from cat was cast: 45  
O trusted and trustworthy guard, if thou hadst life like me,  
What pleasures would thy toils reward beneath the deep green sea!  
O deep-Sea-diver, who might then behold such sights as thou?  
The hoary monster's palaces! methinks what joy 'twere now  
To go plumb plunging down amid the assembly of the whales, 50  
And feel the churn'd sea round me boil beneath their scourging tails!  
Then deep in tangle-woods to fight the fierce sea unicorn,  
And send him foil'd and bellowing back, for all his ivory horn:  
To leave the subtle sworder-fish of bony blade forlorn;  
And for the ghastly-grinning shark, to laugh his jaws to scorn: 55  
To leap down on the kraken's back, where 'mid Norwegian isles  
He lies, a lubber anchorage for sudden shallow'd miles;  
Till snorting, like an under-sea volcano, off he rolls;  
Meanwhile to swing, a-buffeting the far astonished shoals  
Of his back-browsing ocean-calves; or, haply, in a cove, 60  
Shell-strown, and consecrate of old to some Undiné's love,  
To find the long-hair'd mermaidens; or, hard by icy lands,  
To wrestle with the Sea-serpent, upon cerulean sands.

O broad-arm'd Fisher of the deep, whose sports can equal thine?  
The Dolphin weighs a thousand tons, that tugs thy cable line; 65  
And night by night, 'tis thy delight, thy glory day by day,  
Through sable sea and breaker white the giant game to play —  
But shamer of our little sports! forgive the name I gave —  
A fisher's joy is to destroy — thine office is to save.  
O lodger in the sea-kings' halls, couldst thou but understand 70  
Whose be the white bones by thy side, or who that dripping band,  
Slow swaying in the heaving wave, that round about thee bend,  
With sounds like breakers in a dream blessing their ancient friend —

Oh, couldst thou know what heroes glide with larger steps round thee,  
Thine iron side would swell with pride; thou'dst leap within the sea! 75  
Give honour to their memories who left te pleasant strand,  
To shed their blood so freely for the love of Fatherland —  
Who left their chance of quiet age and grassy churchyard grave,  
So freely, for a restless bed amid the tossing wave —  
Oh, though our anchor may not be all I have fondly sung, 80  
Honour him for their memory, whose bones he goes among!

(From *Poems of Sir Samuel Ferguson*. With an Introduction by Alfred Perceval  
Graves. Dublin: The Talbot Press, n. d.)