

John Masefield (1878-1967)

3 *Cape Horn Gospel I*

“I was in a hooker once,” said Karlssen,
“And Bill, as was a seaman, died,
So we lashed him in an old tarpaulin
And tumbled him across the side;
And the fun of it was that all his gear was 5
Divided up among the crew
Before that blushing human error,
Our crawling little captain, knew.

“On the passage home one morning
(As certain as I prays for grace) 10
There was old Bill’s shadder a-hauling
At the weather mizzen-topsail brace.
He was all grown green with sea-weed,
He was all lashed up and shored;
So I says to him, I says, ‘Why, Billy! 15
What ’s a-bringin’ of you back aboard?’”

“I’m a-weary of them there mermaids,’
Says old Bill’s ghost to me;
‘It ain’t no place for a Christian
Below there — under sea. 20
For it ’s all blown sand and shipwrecks,
And old bones eaten bare,
And them cold fishy females
With long green weeds for hair.

“And there ain’t no dances shuffled, 25
And no old yarns is spun,
And there ain’t no stars but starfish,
And never any moon or sun.
I heard your keel a-passing
And the running rattle of the brace,’ 30
And he says ‘Stand by,’ says William,
‘For a shift towards a better place.’

“Well, he sogered about decks till sunrise,
When a rooster in the hen-coop crowed,
And as so much smoke he faded 35
And as so much smoke he goed;
And I’ve often wondered since, Jan,
How his old ghost stands to fare
Long o’ them cold fishy females
With long green weeds for hair.” 40

1902

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