

5 *A Shropshire Lad*

N.B. . This should be recited with a Midland accent. Captain Webb, the swimmer and a relation of Mary Webb by marriage, was born at Dawley in an industrial district in Salop.

The gas was on in the Institute,
The flare was up in the gym,
A man was running a mineral line,
A lass was singing a hymn,
When Captain Webb the Dawley man, 5
Captain Webb from Dawley,
Came swimming along the old canal
That carried the bricks to Lawley.
Swimming along —
Swimming along — 10
Swimming along from Severn,
And paying a call at Dawley Bank while swimming along to Heaven.

The sun shone low on the railway line
And over the bricks and stacks
And in at the upstairs windows 15
Of the Dawley houses' backs
When we saw the ghost of Captain Webb,
Webb in a water sheeting,
Come dripping along in a bathing dress
To the Saturday evening meeting. 20
Dripping along —
Dripping along —
To the Congregational Hall;
Dripping and still he rose over the sill and faded away in a wall.

There wasn't a man in Oakengate 25
That hadn't got hold of the tale,
And over the valley in Ironbridge,
And round by Coalbrookdale,
How Captain Webb the Dawley man,
Captain Webb from Dawley, 30
Rose rigid and dead from the old canal

That carries the bricks to Lawley.

Rigid and dead —

Rigid and dead —

To the Saturday congregation,

35

Paying a call at Dawley Bank on the way to his destination.

1939

(From *Collected Poems*. Introduction by Andrew Motion. John Murray, 2006.)