

Richard Garnett (1835-1906)

2 *The Mermaid of Padstow*

It is long Tom Yeo of the town of Padstow,
And he is a ne'er-do-weel:
'Ho, mates,' cries he, 'rejoice with me,
For I have shot a seal.'

Nay, Tom, by the mass thou art but an ass, 5
No seal bestains this foam;
But the long wave rolls up a Mermaid's glass
And a young Mermaiden's comb.

The sun has set, the night-clouds throng,
The sea is steely grey. 10
They hear the dying Mermaid's song
Peal from the outer bay.

'A curse with you go, ye men of Padstow!
Ye shall not thrive or win,
Ye have seen the last ship from your haven slip, 15
And the last ship enter in.

'For this deed I devote you to dwell without boat
By the skirt of the oarèd blue,
And ever be passed by sail and by mast,
And none with an errand for you.' 20

And scarce had she spoke when the black storm broke
With thunder and levin's might:
Three days did it blow, and none in Padstow
Could tell the day from night.

Joy! the far thunder mutters soft, 25
The wild clouds whirl o'erhead,
And from a ragged rift aloft
A shaft of light is sped.

Now ho for him that waits to send
The storm-bound bark to sea! 30
And ho for them that hither bend
To crowd our busy quay!

Hath Ocean, think ye then, not heard
His dying child deplore?
Are not his sandy deeps upstirred, 35
And thrust against the shore?

Doth anot a mighty ramp of sand
Beleaguer all the bay,
Mocking the strength of mortal hand
To pierce or sweep away? 40

The white-winged traders, all about,
Fare o'er that bar to win:
But this one cries, I cannot out,
And that, I may not in.

For thy dire woe, forlorn Padstow, 45
What remedy may be?
Not all the brine of thy sad eyne
Will float thy ships to sea.

The sighs that from thy seamen pass
Might set a fleet a-sail, 50
And the faces that look in the Mermaid's glass
Are as long as the Mermaid's tail.

(From *Poems*. London, 1893)