

Jean Ingelow (1820-97)

2 *Winstanley*

The Apology.

Quoth the cedar to the reeds and rushes,
'Water-grass, you know not what I do;
Know not of my storms, nor of my hushes,
And — I know not you.'

Quoth the reeds and rushes, 'Wind! O waken!' 5
Breathe, O wind, and set our answer free,
For we have no voice, of you forsaken,
For the cedar tree.'

Quoth the earth at midnight to the ocean,
'Wilderness of water, lost to view, 10
Nought you are to me but sounds of motion;
I am nought to you.'

Quoth the ocean, 'Dawn! O fairest, clearest,
Touch me with thy golden fingers bland;
For I have no smile till thou appearest 15
For the lovely land.'

Quoth the hero dying, whelmed in glory,
'Many blame me, few have understood;
Ah, my folk, to you I leave a story —
Make its meaning good.' 20

Quoth the folk, 'Sing, poet! teach us, prove us;
Surely we shall learn the meaning then;
Wound us with a pain divine, O move us,
For this man of men.'

Winstanley's deed, you kindly folk, 25
With it I fill my lay,
And a nobler man ne'er walk'd the world,
Let his name be what it may.

The good ship 'Snowdrop' tarried long,
Up at the vane look'd he; 30
'Belike,' he said, for the wind had dropp'd,
'She lieth becalm'd at sea.'

The lovely ladies flock'd within,
And still would each one say,
'Good mercer, be the ships come up?' 35
But still he answered 'Nay.'

Then stepp'd two mariners down the street,
With looks of grief and fear:
'Now, if Winstanley be your name,
We bring you evil cheer! 40

'For the good ship "Snowdrop" struck — she struck
On the rock — the Eddystone,
And down she went with threescore men,
We two being left alone.

'Down in the deep, with freight and crew, 45
Past any help she lies,
And never a bale has come to shore
Of all thy merchandise.'

'For cloth o' gold and comely frieze,'
Winstanley said, and sigh'd, 50
'For velvet coif, or costly coat,
They fathoms deep may bide.

'O thou brave skipper, blithe and kind,
O mariners bold and true,
Sorry at heart, right sorry am I, 55
A-thinking of yours and you.

'Many long days Winstanley's breast

Shall feel a weight within,
For a waft of wind he shall be 'fear'd
And trading count but sin. 60

'To him no more it shall be joy
To pace the cheerful town,
And see the lovely ladies gay
Step on in velvet gown.'

The 'Snowdrop' sank at Lammas tide, 65
All under the yeasty spray;
On Christmas Eve the brig 'Content'
Was also cast away.

He little thought o' New Year's night,
So jolly as he sat then, 70
While drank the toast and praised the roast
The round-faced Aldermen, —

While serving lads ran to and fro,
Pouring the ruby wine,
And jellies trembled on the board, 75
And towering pasties fine, —

While loud huzzas ran up the roof
Till the lamps did rock o'erhead,
And holly boughs from rafters hung
Dropp'd down their berries red, — 80

He little thought on Plymouth Hoe,
With every rising tide,
How the wave wash'd in his sailor lads,
And laid them side by side.

There stepp'd a stranger to the board: 85
'Now, stranger, who be ye?'
He look'd to right, he look'd to left,
And 'Rest you merry,' quoth he;

'For you did not see the brig go down,
Or ever a storm had blown; 90

For you did not see the white wave rear
At the rock — the Eddystone.

‘She drave at the rock with sternsails set;
Crash went the masts in twain;
She stagger’d back with her mortal blow, 95
Then leap’d at it again.

‘There rose a great cry, bitter and strong,
The misty moon look’d out!
And the water swarmed with seamen’s heads,
And the wreck was strew’d about. 100

‘I saw her mainsail lash the sea
As I clung to the rock alone;
Then she heeled over, and down she went,
And sank like any stone.

‘She was a fair ship, but all ’s one! 105
For nought could bide the shock.’
‘I will take horse,’ Winstanley said,
‘And see this deadly rock.’

‘For never again shall barque o’ mine
Sail over the windy sea, 110
Unless, by the blessing of God, for this
Be found a remedy.’

Winstanley rode to Plymouth town
All in the sleet and the snow,
And he looked around on shore and sound 115
As he stood on Plymouth Hoe.

Till a pillar of spray rose far away,
And shot up its stately head,
Rear’d and fell over, and rear’d again:
“T is the rock! the rock!” he said. 120

Straight to the Mayor he took his way,
‘Good Master Mayor,’ quoth he,
‘I am a mercer of London town,

And owner of vessels three, —

‘But for your rock of dark renown, 125
I had five to track the main.’
‘You are one of many,’ the old Mayor said,
‘That on the rock complain.

‘An ill rock, mercer! your words ring right,
Well with my thoughts they chime, 130
For my two sons to the world to come
It sent before their time.’

‘Lend me a lighter, good Master Mayor,
And a score of shipwrights free,
For I think to raise a lantern tower 135
On this rock o’ destiny.’

The old Mayor laugh’d, but sigh’d also;
‘Ah, youth,’ quoth he, ‘is rash;
Sooner, young man, thou ’lt root it out
From the sea that doth it lash. 140

‘Who sails too near its jagged teeth,
He shall have evil lot;
For the calmest seas that tumble there
Froth like a boiling pot.

‘And the heavier seas few look on nigh, 145
But straight they lay him dead;
A seventy-gunship, sir! — they ’ll shoot
Higher than her mast-head.

‘O, beacons sighted in the dark,
They are right welcome things, 150
And pitchpots flaming on the shore
Show fair as angel wings.

‘Hast gold in hand? then light the land,
It ’longs to thee and me;
But let alone the deadly rock 155
In God Almighty’s sea.’

Yet said he, 'Nay — I must away,
On the rock to set my feet;
My debts are paid, my will I made,
Or ever I did thee greet. 160

'If I must die, then let me die
By the rock and not elsewhere;
If I may live, O let me live
To mount my lighthouse stair.'

The old Mayor look'd him in the face, 165
And answered: 'Have thy way;
Thy heart is stout, as if round about
It was braced with an iron stay:

'Have thy will, mercer! choose thy men,
Put off from the storm-rid shore; 170
God with thee be, or I shall see
Thy face and theirs no more.'

Heavily plunged the breaking wave,
And foam flew up the lea,
Morning and even the drifted snow 175
Fell into the dark grey sea.

Winstanley chose him men and gear;
He said, 'My time I waste,'
For the seas ran seething up the shore,
And the wrack drave on in haste. 180

But twenty days he waited and more,
Pacing the strand alone,
Or ever he set his manly foot
On the rock — the Eddystone.

Then he and the sea began their strife, 185
And work'd with power and might:
Whatever the man rear'd up by day
The sea broke down by night.

He wrought at ebb with bar and beam,
He sail'd to shore at flow; 190
And at his side, by that same tide,
Came bar and beam alsò.

'Give in, give in,' the old Mayor cried,
'Or thou wilt rue the day.'
'Yonder he goes,' the townsfolk sigh'd, 195
'But the rock will have its way.

'For all his looks that are so stout,
And his speeches brave and fair,
He may wait on the wind, wait on the wave,
But he 'll build no lighthouse there.' 200

In fine weather and foul weather
The rock his arts did flout,
Through the long days and the short days,
Till all that year ran out[.]

With fine weather and foul weather 205
Another year came in:
'To take his wage,' the workmen said,
'We almost count a sin.'

Now March was gone, came April in,
And a sea-fog settled down, 210
And forth sail'd he on a glassy sea,
He sail'd from Plymouth town.

With men and stores he put to sea,
As he was wont to do;
They show'd in the fog like ghosts full faint — 215
A ghostly craft and crew.

And the sea-fog lay and wax'd alway,
For a long eight days and more;
'God help our men,' quoth the women then;
'For they bide long from shore.' 220

They paced the Hoe in doubt and dread:

‘Where may our mariners be?’
But the brooding fog lay soft as down
Over the quiet sea.

A Scottish schooner made the port, 225
The thirteenth day at e’en:
‘As I am a man,’ the captain cried,
‘A strange sight I have seen:

‘And a strange sound heard, my masters all,
At sea, in the fog and the rain, 230
Like shipwrights’ hammers tapping low,
Then loud, then low again.

‘And a stately house one instant show’d,
Through a rift, on the vessel’s lee;
What manner of creatures may be those 235
That build upon the sea?’

Then sigh’d the folk, ‘The Lord be praised!’
And they flock’d to the shore amain;
All over the Hoe that livelong night,
Many stood out in the rain. 240

It ceased, and the red sun rear’d his head,
And the rolling fog did flee;
And, lo! in the offing faint and far
Winstanley’s house at sea!

In fair weather with mirth and cheer 245
The stately tower uprose;
In foul weather, with hunger and cold,
They were content to close;

Till up the stair Winstanley went,
To fire the wick afar; 250
And Plymouth in the silent night
Look’d out, and saw her star.

Winstanley set his foot ashore:
Said he, ‘My work is done;

I hold it strong to last as long 255
As aught beneath the sun.

‘But if it fail, as fail it may,
Borne down with ruin and rout,
Another than I shall rear it high,
And brace the girders stout. 260

‘A better than I shall rear it high,
For now the way is plain,
And tho’ I were dead,’ Winstanley said,
‘The light would shine again.

‘Yet, were I fain still to remain, 265
Watch in my tower to keep,
And tend my light in the stormiest night
That ever did move the deep;

‘And if it stood, why then ’t were good,
Amid their tremulous stirs, 270
To count each stroke when the mad waves broke,
For cheers of mariners.

‘But if it fell, then this were well,
That I should with it fall;
Since, for my part, I have built my heart 275
In the courses of its wall.

‘Ay! I were fain, long to remain,
Watch in my tower to keep,
And tend my light in the stormiest night
That ever did move the deep.’ 280

With that Winstanley went his way,
And left the rock renowned,
And summer and winter his pilot star
Hung bright o’er Plymouth Sound.

But it fell out, fell out at last, 285
That he would put to sea,
To scan once more his lighthouse tower

On the rock o' destiny.

And the winds woke, and the storm broke,
And wrecks came plunging in; 290
None in the town that night lay down
Or sleep or rest to win.

The great mad waves were rolling graves,
And each flung up its dead;
The seething flow was white below, 295
And black the sky o'erhead.

And when the dawn, the dull, grey dawn, —
Broke on the trembling town,
And men look'd south to the harbour mouth,
The lighthouse tower was down. 300

Down in the deep where he doth sleep,
Who made it shine afar,
And then in the night that drown'd its light,
Set, with his pilot star.

Many fair tombs in the glorious glooms 305
At Westminster they show;
The brave and the great lie there in state:
Winstanley lieth low.

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