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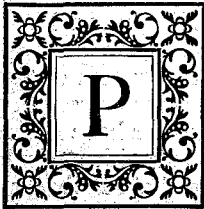
Crossing the Line with Pershing

BY JOHN W. THOMASON, JR.

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

"On crossing the equator, Neptune came aboard. General Pershing and his party were amused spectators of the antics which followed. . . ."—*Press Report*.



PAILED-UP cloud masses trailed a rain-squall across the red west, and there was dark on the face of the waters. The bugles went for movies, and the cruiser's people laid aft to dispose themselves across the quarter-deck, according to rank and custom. Numerous seamen and marines perched like gulls on the sides of a certain lofty affair of spars and canvas, built during the day at the starboard quarter by the shell-back bo's'n and his gang. The bo's'n had been very mysterious about it.—"Well, it's a tank, my sons, you might say. What for? You'll see what for, my sons, when Neptunus Rex comes aboard us in the mornin'. Yeh—when we cross the line!"— All hands burned tobacco, and a soft, sweet wind from across the world carried the incense off to port.—"The Commander in his seat?"—"Commander's on the bridge. Start the movies—"

All hands gave over to be edified. And a hoarse and salty voice with the boom of the deep sea in it came up from the darkling Pacific—"Ship ahoy! What ship is that?"—"United States ship *Rochester*, proceeding South America on affairs of state"—the Commander's high, clear hail answered into the night. "What ship is that?"

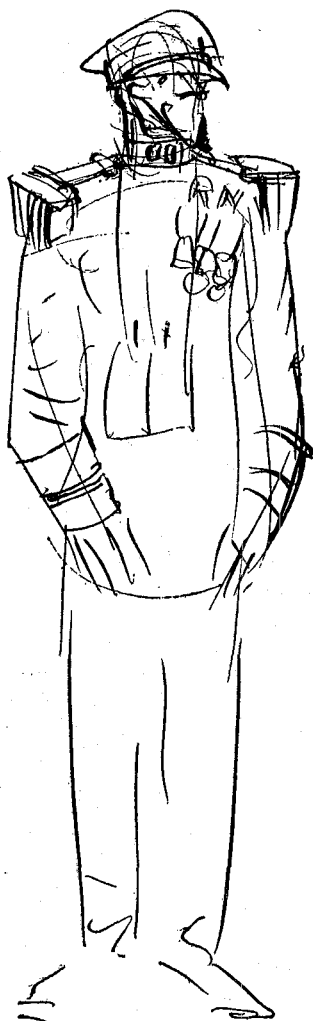
"This is Davy Jones, royal scribe, representin' His Royal Majesty Neptunus Rex! By whose authority do you come bustin' into His Majesty's seas? Lay to, U. S. S. *Rochester*, 'til Davy Jones comes aboard!"

A rocket soared from the bridge, red and green. The bugles went for the guard of the day and the band—"for'ard on the double—form on the fo'c'stle—" The engines stopped, the cruiser lost way and courtesied to the swells. The bugles blared "Attention!" The sergeant of the guard and the band-leader rendered military honors. Voices cried orders. Then the cruiser throbbed again to the beat of her engines, and "carry on" sounded. From aft, stretching your neck, you could hear the Commander: "Welcome aboard U. S. S. *Rochester*, Davy Jones and party! What commands have you from His Majesty?"

"Thanky, sir, in the name of His Royal Majesty Neptunus Rex! His Majesty has reports—" (Davy Jones, scribe, ever speaks in a formal way, as befits the representative of so great a king—all seamen attest it)—"that you are enterin' his royal domains with certain unauthorized landlubbers aboard. His Majesty sends me to see about it. Davy Jones an' his party of sculpins, grampuses, pollywogs, royal bears, and royal police. His Majesty will be aboard at nine sharp to-morrow. An' I have here summonses an'

subpœneys and such to deliver to all land-lubbers who have never crossed the line before. By order of the ruler of the raging main. Aye, aye, sir!"

"Lay aft, sir. Lay aft and meet the



Royal navigator.

captain—the captain will be pleased to give the necessary orders, I'm sure. Gangway, there! Gangway for Davy Jones and party!" bawled the Commander, and led the way.

Spotlights from the wing bridge attended the procession. You saw Davy Jones, scribe, walking on the right of the Commander—a thing never heard of—

only captains and admirals walk on our Commander's right hand! Davy Jones, scribe, was a man of medium height, for all his fog-horn voice, and in appearance similar to the gunnery sergeant of marines. He wore unusual epaulettes and a cocked hat with a two-foot plume. He wore a swallow-tailed blue coat all plastered with medals and orders, white trousers, and pirate boots, with spurs of brass. His long, straight sword hung in a crimson baldric. His whiskers were tow-colored and surprising, his eyebrows fiercely black, and his face implacably vermillion. Behind him, two by two, capered and gibbered the royal police and other satellites, creatures such as reasonable men never imagine. You sensed a strong shudder go through the gaping ship's company, who now for the first time ventured those perilous seas around the line, where Neptuneus Rex has residence.

For to this day it is the custom of the sea that, when a man-of-war crosses the equator, such of her people as have never crossed before be initiated with ancient ritual into the Brotherhood of Shellbacks, who are Neptune's children and under his especial protection. The ritual is violent; it is something to understate when you write home; and you are given an impressive certificate which sets forth that you have undergone it, so that it never can happen again. Neptune, escorted according to tradition, comes aboard the morning you reach latitude 0°. The night before Davy Jones, his scribe and, as it were, executive officer, has boarded you and made all things ready. Crossing the line on a merchantman does not count, I suppose because on a merchantman those merry mayhems that occur upon a war-ship, to the delight of all, would not be possible. And in the navy no person is exempt—least of all the officers, who are for this day given up to the mercies of their men. Senior officers may for dignity's sake get off with light treatment and a fine of cigars or pop (it was beer in the good old days), but it is our juniors' pride that they go all the way.

"Davy Jones," said the Commander, very ceremonious by the after eight-inch turret, when the admiral and the captain had uttered the usual gracious words, "al-

low me to present certain distinguished persons whom we are taking south on government affairs—the General of The Armies”—and the tall, gray general stood forward. “General, in the name of His Majesty Neptunus Rex, Davy Jones, scribe, makes you welcome to his domains. And he is honored to receive you as a guest. You ain’t any landlubber—His Majesty remembers when you crossed on the *Utah* last year!”

“Davy Jones, this is the governor-general——”

“Aha! A landlubber, hey? A landlubber! His Majesty’s compliments, you landlubber, and here’s a subpoena for you. At two bells of the fore—you don’t know what that means, though—at nine sharp in the mornin’ fer yours— Who’s this here——?”

“Davy Jones, I present the doctor—legal doctor, you know—legal expert of this commission—and he was heard to say that he doubted the legality of His Majesty’s authority—so to speak, he doubts the jurisdiction!”— “Oh, no, Commander! No! Oh, not at all! On the contrary, Mr. Davy Jones, I am convinced of the legality, and the jurisdiction is unquestioned, I assure you—” Davy Jones cut short his fluent periods. “Well, sir, you’ll have to tell His Majesty about that to-morrow. Very grave charge, sir—mighty grave, indeed! At nine sharp——”

All the commission—a most exalted bunch of passengers now abroad on Neptune’s ocean like any common men, were presented, examined as to credentials, and dealt with. Followed the ship’s officers, landlubbers marshalled together. Davy Jones called them off himself. “The gunnery officer! Where’s that there gun’ry officer—aha, you gun’ry officer—very serious charges against you—time you got us up at three bells, bore-sightin’, and run pore young Mark Vertical overboard!—tell it to His Majesty—now!—captain of marines—marine captain, front and centre, an’ put your heels together!” The voice of Davy Jones was savage, so that a music-boy and a very new private in the huddle of the crew fainted. “The doctor—you medico, you! The royal doctor’s gonna tend to you, he is! Chief engineer—here’s yours—” And he went

terribly down the roster, delivering also to each division officer proper summonses for the landlubbers under them.

“Now, sir,” when all the papers were distributed, “you have got aboard some miserable landlubbers who are guilty of terrible crimes. They have been makin’ wise-cracks about His Majesty, and His Majesty’s orders are: we run ’em down and properly soften ’em to-night so they will be fit for His Majesty to look at in



The royal doctor.

the mornin’ when His Majesty comes aboard——”

“Go to it, Davy Jones,” said the Commander heartily, and the royal police

were loosed to their trade. There is no sin so great as making wise-cracks.

Davy Jones and retinue clanked purposefully forward, and the movies resumed, uninterrupted except by the horrid squalls of a wretch who was treed up the mainmast, and hauled down with violence from the fighting-top. Certain mysteries went on forward, and there were lamentable cries from amidships on the port side; but no unauthorized person felt any urge to go and see. There was a smell of tar. . . .

The July morning came gray and mizzling, with a wet head wind. Morning orders called for this and that, but nobody paid any attention. The royal police, unwearied by their labors of the night, overran everything forward of the wardroom country, and shaken landlubbers hid unavailingly. It would be about two bells of the forenoon watch, or, as they say, 9:00, when there were shouts and blowing of bugles, and stately music, and the engines stopped, and the cruiser lay to on the line.

No landlubber saw Neptunus Rex, Lord of the Ultimate Seas, come over the side, for the decks were cleared; but one heard, through the gun-ports, a tumult, and the Commander's voice, in words of welcome, rang aft, and there was the clamant thunder of conchs in Neptune's train. Thereafter "Quarters" was sounded, and all hands mustered, and men saw a marvel: while the band played and the marines of the guard presented arms, a black and grisly flag mounted to the fore-truck of United States ship *Rochester*, and blew out sable folds, overlooking the admiral's flag at the main—"Say—say, sailor! ain't that there the Jolly Roger?—Seen it in the pirate book in the ship's libr'ry! How come—" "Belay that, you poor fish! That's Neptune's flag—skull an' crossbones! It's always broke out when he comes aboard—you ain't under Uncle Sam now, you ain't—" The band discoursed music, and the great king, gloriously attended by his ministers as anciently prescribed, paraded aft.

A green man with lobsters painted on him went before, bearing the royal standard. Davy Jones, scribe, adjutant, and executive to the crown, cleared the way. Then Neptunus Rex, his sweet consort on

his arm, their trains upheld by elegant page boys. It was noted that the royal nose was like the nose of the senior gunner's mate, a scarlet nose and imposing; otherwise, there were whiskers and an appalling mat of hair, regally red and abundant. The royal robes were green, curiously jewelled, and the royal hand elevated the trident. Queen Amphitrite, a lady of robust build, particularly about the shoulders, was of pale-green complexion, with a red and vivid mouth. A tasteful coronet, surmounted by the star of the sea, topped her profusion of oakum-colored hair, and her queenly stride threatened the integrity of her tight garments. Cheers greeted the august pair.

"Th' queen is some sheba—but her legs is crooked—hey?—" "Arrest that man, royal police—that fireman second there! T'run 'im in irons, you!—" Hard behind strutted the royal judge, in a mortar-board a yard square, attired right legally in black, picked out with red. Only the chief machinist's mate had such a belly, you reflected. The royal prosecutor flanked him, in a wig after the best English tradition, a man lean, dry, and without bowels. Then came the royal doctor, frock-coated, high-hatted, meanly bearded, with feet like a sea-horse. Sweating pollywogs toted the tools of his mystery: the medicine-bag, the pill-pounder, the saw, the pump, the squirt. The royal baby was trundled along, cutely turned out, with hirsute legs, dandling the royal cat. The royal friar, cowed and severe, ambled in his place—"That's Riley—sure! That's th' Jimmy Legs!—hey, Jimmy Legs—" "Grab that man! Confine 'im! iron him!—Just wait, you—" And the royal wild man, fearsome to uphold—sometime that mild and genial darky of the ship's scullery, now restrained in chains, to the relief of all. And the royal bears, with great, naked limbs covered to the edge of decency in sacking—here the paymaster burst into violent perspiration—coal-sacks, borrowed from the P. R. R. for the deck-load of coal we started with: two-bits each if not returned. But the paymaster was hoping for a favorable consideration of his credentials as a shellback—that matter being in dispute—and he did not let on.



The captain of marines instructed the doctor in the manual of arms.—Page 120.

They all passed, capering, clowning, half a hundred or so, and the tail of the column was a gang of misers, chained two and two, painted, tarred, and piebald, the wise-crackers of the night before, scoffers at Neptune's majesty, now herded to final correction. Stately on the quarter-deck, withdrawn from common men, Neptune held high converse with the captain and the admiral of the squadron, and received the compliments of the General of The Armies. Both he and his consort accepted cigars from the flag-lieutenant, and the retinue mounted to the boat-deck, where, under an awning abaft the spud-locker, court was opened.

Gloomy things, the properties of the royal court: A coffin—they thrust a land-

lubber into it, and the royal police played a devil's tattoo on it with clubs, and knocked it about some, while the priest intoned. A stocks—the conspicuous wise-cracker who had criticised the queenly legs of Amphitrite was clapped into them, and a pollywog painted him blue. There were great caldrons, simmering obscenely, with a reek of tar and things unmentionable. There was obscure electrical gear. Aft, on the rail above the tank the bo's'n built, was hinged a chair of simple lines, faced inboard. The tank was full of salt water, and a sea-ladder offered egress from it. The mob of the deep howled hungrily, the bears and the pollywogs leaped into the tank, yelling, and Neptunus Rex opened his court.

Seafaring men do many things because seafaring men have always done those things. Nobody knows from what age-old tradition the Neptune ritual comes. Very anciently, it is related, the Phoenicians and the Greeks, venturing greatly in little cockle-boats south from the Pillars of Hercules, knew him. Truthful mariners attest the sight: great Poseidon, august in his car, drawn by dolphins over the wine-dark sea. In his hand the dread trident, and beside him tall Amphitrite and her girls of the ocean caves, whose white, cool arms are kind to drowning seamen. And tritons, barnacle-backed

pus, and loathly pollywogs, who look for meat to those on whom stern Neptune's anger falls——

In its modern form we have it from the British men-of-war. Davy Jones is an innovation palpably English, from buccaneer days. He was a pirate chap who sank so many ships that Lloyds or somebody like that said, when—for instance—*Bonaventura*, East Indiaman, didn't come in—"She's gone to Cap'n Davy Jones's locker!" At any rate, here we find him, ruffian Restoration English grafted on pure Greek classicism, at this moment reading from his book the misdeeds of the governor-general, international boundary expert, passenger on U. S. S. *Rochester*. A seaman rating in Neptune's livery smeared tar and valve compound on the governor-general's jowls, and the governor-general's naked feet were smitten with electricity when they stood him on a copper plate before the throne; with courtesy they excused him the extremities of the doctor, the barber, and the tank, and he descended a son of Neptune, pleased pink, and sent up cigars to the royal party.

All the commission followed. With the senior members Neptune dealt delicately, recognizing the bond of common greatness. But on the others his hand was heavy. It is not often you get a crack at a very special private secretary, or a junior diplomatic aid, or such an A. P. correspondent as the chap who came on in pale-blue pajamas. The functionaries were properly warmed up when the ship's officers were led in.

The first lieutenant, for a wonder, was a landlubber, and they almost drowned him. The gunnery officer and the chief engineer were dealt with in sorrow, not in anger. The medico and the captain of marines they judged together. Numerous witnesses cried out upon the doctor for his pills and his potions. Several there present raged all together on the marine captain, his errors—who—but nobody can catalogue the crimes of a marine afloat. It was the court's sentence that the captain of marines instruct the doctor in the manual of arms; a deck-swab was provided in the way of arms. It was done, with glad assistance, and everybody was exceedingly edified. Then the doctor was delivered to the tenderness of his



Royal barber.

and terrible, blowing on conchs. And nereids choring unearthly music. And in his train sharks and whales and gram-

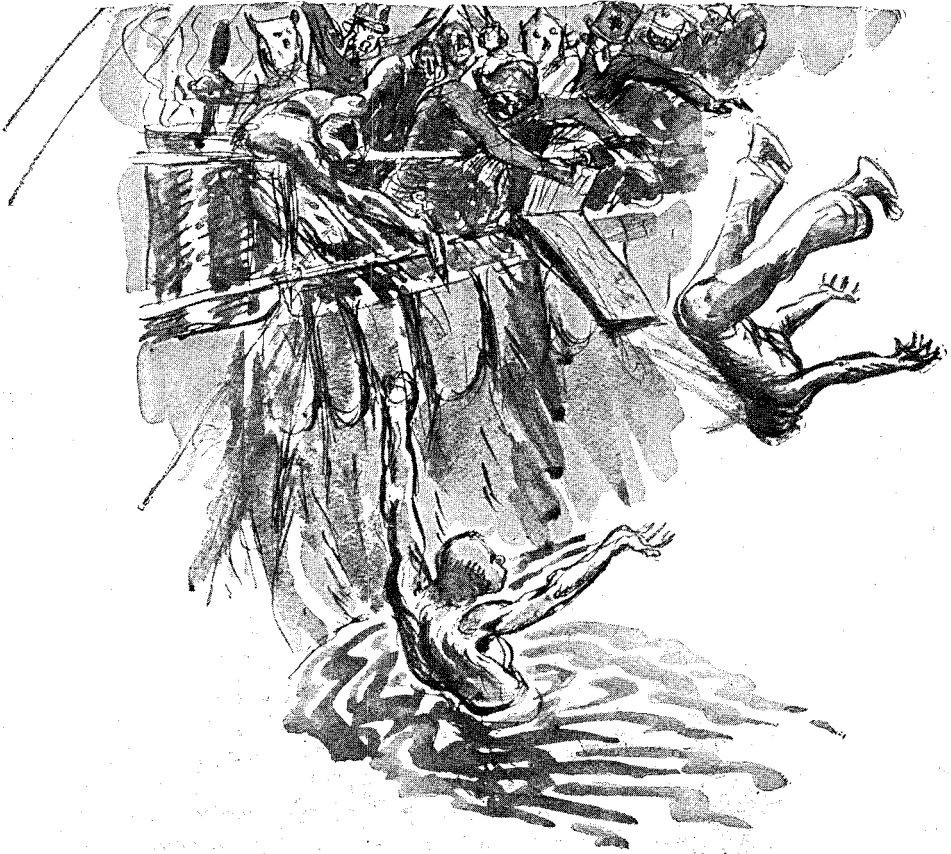


Neptuneus Rex, his sweet consort on his arm.—Page 118.

colleague, the royal physician.—“Open your hatch, doc!” (If you grab a fellow behind the jaws, he will.) “Here, take this, doc—might as well take two of it.—Go on—be a man—swallow it. Hold his nose. Now swallow it! Aw—don’t make faces—you know it ain’t bad. Fix you right up. Sure, you can go back to duty. All right! Strip! Take off your shirt. Gang, I detect a heart-murmur. The doc smokes too much. Fine ’im three boxes cigars—” “Where’s that marine? Here he is—take ’im, doc!”

“His hair’s fallin’ out! Fix ’im up—shine ’im! Polish ’im—give ’im a pill—two pills!—” Valve compound—cylinder oil—tar—molasses—red boot-topping rubbed in hard! “Hold on—don’t put ’im in the water—might swallow some—marines can stand anything but water!” —“Had a war record—fine ’im five cartoons of Camels, an’ let ’im go—hey?” This was merciful . . .

Presently it was the turn of that snappy ensign, the adjutant of the ship’s landing force—somehow, when a sailor is military,



The victim shot heels over head into the tank below.

he is more military than a Prussian.—“An’ it is Neptune’s order that this here landlubber read to the court from the Landing-force Manual—stand ’im at attention on that rug! The rug was wet and covered a copper plate. The royal electrician functioned, and the adjutant hopped like a cockroach in a hot skillet, and was rudely corrected. “Stand ’tention, you!—nobody ever teach you how? I’ll teach you!— Now—give ’im the book. Read it, you!” The adjutant read in his best parade-ground voice those passages prescribing the formation of the battalion for parades and inspections.

“He reads too fast. You read too fast! Your bearin’s are heated. Here—royal oiler—oil his bearin’s!” “Come on, sir! open your mouth once—” and they oiled his tongue with cylinder oil. “Go on—about the adjutant takin’ his

post, now—” . . . “He reads too slow. You read too slow! Give ’im an injection to speed ’im up.” “Open up—open—attaboy! Swallow! Hold his nose” —“Yeh, he swallowed it—” Then he couldn’t read at all. “Doc, you take ’im—” “Sit ’im in my chair, while I get at him—” “Barber here—royal barber—whee!” “Let him go!” The chair tilted backward, and the victim shot heels over head into the tank below, where the royal bears fell on him with uncouth cries and made sport. Presently a black and dripping thing that God once made in his image struggled out and showed white teeth in a sportsman’s grin. . . .

“Goddammighty! Didju see what they did to Mr. —? If they do that to an officer, what they gonna do to me—Lordy!”—“Aw—what I wish, they’d take us guys first, an’ the officers after-

wards. I'd like to get a crack at an officer—I mean, I ain't got anything special against officers, but I'd just like to say I had a crack at one—you know—" "Shut up—look at him grin—some ships, they tell me, they let they officers down easy—our officers can stand anything! . . ."

In these latter days of economy and short enlistments, the navy does not cruise continually. Most ships are manned by crews largely landlubbers—in the Neptune sense. Shellbacks are not so abundant. In this crew the Neptune party had three hundred to mishandle, and, pleasantly stimulated by the commissioned personnel, they went to it. They cast off all restraint and did not weary.

The general of the armies was there, extremely happy, with his aides and his diplomats and his experts all politely amused. The admiral was augustly diverted; the

captain and the commander let joy be unconfined. Even the first lieutenant viewed with good nature the grease and corruption that fouled his fine white decks. The Neptune party, warmed up, functioned like a machine. Quivering neophyte was haled before the court: Davy Jones, scribe, read his name, rate, and sin; the royal electrician shocked him; the royal oiler lubricated him; the royal doctor dosed him; the royal barber lathered him from head to foot with deck-swabs of paint, tar, and goo, and the pollywogs held him in the chair while nameless horrors cut his hair. Then he went backward into the tank and the wet embraces of the royal bears. And on the side of the tank was an evil sprite, much shrouded about the head, armed with a rag-tipped rod. Few saw the wire that ran from the rod to the royal electrician



Davy Jones, scribe, read his name, rate, and sin.

above. Poor devils, released at the last gasp by the bears, clawing feebly up the sea-ladder, received this rod—three hundred volts at the end of it—on their sterns. When that happens you turn loose all holds and drop back. You don't know where it comes from—but you know it's there. There was the darky mess-attendant, a St. Thomas boy, fiercely modest, who came right out of his garments when it hit him. . . .

All hands grew weak with laughter and hoarse with yelling. Marines and blue-jackets embraced each other and bayed like hounds. When an official wearied, there were a dozen eager volunteers from the ranks of the new-born sons of Neptune, still damp and sticky, but burning to take out their own indignities on the next chap's hide— All day it ran—a day of the honest Anglo-Saxon joy that, quaintly enough, rises to its highest on the amusing discomforts of the other fellow. Even so, the last of the crew's sadness, and all its vague repinings swept off in gales of searching laughter, leaving the feeling that things are not nearly so bad in this best of possible navies. . . .

The royal police failed at length to smell out new material. The last man, an artful quartermaster, was lingeringly,

lovingly dealt with, to the extent that his mother wouldn't have known him. Davy Jones girded himself and reported to the Commander: "Sir: Davy Jones, scribe, has the honor to report for His Majesty Neptune Rex that you now haven't any landlubbers on board. They are all shellbacks, sir. And His Majesty is ready to leave the ship."

With ceremony the thing was done. Neptune, in winged words, took leave of his children. The sun dipped seaward; the sea, now all shimmering, was plated with bright silver; and the ruler of the raging main, with his retinue smoking wardroom cigars, disappeared forward.

"Here," said the Commander in a great voice; "bo's'n, pipe all hands. Turn to. Clean up this hell's delight, and let me have a clean ship by seven bells, or—" And aside, to the chief engineer, as the deck divisions swarmed out like little ants, well-disposed and heedful—"This'll give them something to talk about now, until the end of the cruise—fine thing for everybody——"

Which is perhaps the reason that Neptune will come over the side at latitude 0° so long as our men-of-war go down to the sea.

Wealth

BY CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

BEFORE the rich man's palace, day by day,
I saw strong guards move up and down—a band,
Watching the marble entrance and the grand,
Majestic gardens filled with hawthorn spray.
Silent, they paced the sidewalk. In dismay
I pictured one within, whose feeble hand
Fingered his treasures from an alien land,
Afraid to whisper, to his fears a prey.

Then I remembered kings who on their thrones
Shuddered from hour to hour, and in the night
Wakened from dreadful dreams of shots and stones,
Crying in terror and a dazed affright;
And I rejoiced for my life's monotones,
My simple hearth, and simpler candlelight.