

A Special Breed

You could tell by the easy, rolling gait,
That denotes, a deep water man,
Years of pitching, heaving decks,
Balancing with ease and élan.

You could see it stamped, into their eyes,
From Captain to ship's boy still,
The 'look' of a true 'Cape Horner',
That differed from 'run-of-the-mill.'

From snow white beard, and leathery skin,
Merry twinkling of China blue eyes,
Burnt black, by countless tropic suns,
'Neath thousands of far distant skies.

Mud dripped off the anchor flukes,
To the 'clack' of the capstan's pawls,
Bare footed "Shellbacks" leaned to, with a will,
Answering, the 'shanty man's' calls.

Every inch of the rigging, was memorised,
To be instantly found, in a trice,
As thirty two thousand square feet of sail,
Drove her South, to the fire, and the ice.

At their 'trade' they had no equal,
Just ordinary God-Fearing men,
Raised in the 'cradle', of a wild North Sea,
With the marline spike, their pen.

The sheer majestic splendour,
Of a tall ship, with wind true and fair,
Mantled by bellying, full stretched sails,
No steamship could ever compare.

In the languid heat of the 'Doldrums',
Becalmed on a sea, warm as wine,
Pitch bubbling up from the pine planked seams,
Slack sails, on the Equator's line.

Their staple diet, was simple fare,
Salt beef, pickled in brine,
Weevilly biscuits, lobsouse, cracker hash,
And for 'Scurvy', the juice of the lime.

Out on the swaying footropes,
Wishing they'd never been born,
Men and ship battled, old "Cape Stiff,
In the misery of rounding the "Horn".

Massive steel yards that crazily plunged,
As the barque 'met' each icy green crest,
 Fisting the wild frozen canvas,
Brute strength, versus nature, at best.

 Aye, they were a special breed,
 Bound together for eternity,
Those that fought the "Horn" and won,
 Joined an elite, exclusive fraternity.

by Jim Morrison
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