

DOWN SPIRITS



Here is the tale of a funeral knell—
Let's have a clang on the old ship's bell!—
For Admiral Blank lay on his bier,
Having struck his flag in his ninetieth year.
Normally he would be buried at sea
As all good Admirals like to be ;
But for once the Admiral had no say,
His wife had signalled: "I'll have my way
And Blank shall be buried the same as me
In the family vault for company."

The Captain called a meeting then
And gave his sorrowing staff the gen.
"How can this Ancient Mariner brave
Be conveyed home to his lubber's grave?"
The Bosun—who was Nelson's chum—
Said, "Why not pickle him in rum?"
The Captain gave this serious thought
And said, "Of course, that's what we ought
To do, for though you spoke in jest,
Old Blank would love a rum-soaked vest!"



Accordingly a tub was made ;
They dressed the Admiral for parade
Complete with baton and cocked hat
And lowered him gently in the vat.
Then whilst the crew stood looking glum
They topped him up with Neaters rum.
Just as the Admiral had his fill
The bugler sounded off the Still
Until the lid was banged down tight.
The cask was then placed out of sight.



Now all went well until the first—
The Duty Sentry had a thirst
Unquenched, so—dirty work!—
He broached the tub with Pusser's dirk.
His trust betrayed, the drunken thief
Passed on the dirk to his relief.
So all the sentries every night
Came on sober and went off tight!
And no one found it very hard
To volunteer for Admiral's Guard.

At last in port the ship made fast
Her ensign flying at half-mast
The Admiral's cask in darkened shroud
Was hidden from the gaping crowd.
The Bosun with becoming pride
Prepared to pipe him o'er the side.
He tapped the tub with practised art
And then his jaws fell wide apart—
That hollow ring!—He must forsooth
Go tell the Bloke the awful truth!



At Bosun's fears the Bloke just laughed
And to share the joke proceeded aft ;
The Captain tapped the tub as well—
And then a deadly silence fell!
The Shipwright, at the Captain's bid,
Solemnly removed the lid
And there to every sailor's eye
Stood Admiral Blank quite high and dry.
Although they knew he liked a tot
The Admiral couldn't have soaked the lot!

The Skipper's brow was black as night
As he surveyed the Admiral's plight.
The crew stood by in awful dread,
For Nelson's blood was on their head.
The Bosun was so stricken that
Salt tears fell freely in the vat—
"My oath, you're right!" the Captain said
"Next time an Admiral comes home dead
Perhaps the honour will be mine—
You mind you pickle *me* in brine!"