

So soon succeeding such a dark night;  
 And these dissolving snows his clear stream  
 Recov'ring fast its liquid music, prove.  
 —1785

### *The Castaway*<sup>1</sup>

Obscurest night involved the sky,  
 Th' Atlantic billows roared,  
 When such a destined wretch as I,  
 Washed headlong from on board,  
 Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,  
 His floating home forever left.

No braver chief could Albion<sup>o</sup> boast *England*  
 Than he with whom he went,  
 Nor ever ship left Albion's coast,  
 With warmer wishes sent.  
 He loved them both, but both in vain,  
 Nor him beheld, nor her again.

Nor long beneath the whelming brine,  
 Expert to swim, he lay;  
 Nor soon he felt his strength decline,  
 Or courage die away;  
 But waged with death a lasting strife,  
 Supported by despair of life.

He shouted; nor his friends had failed  
 To check the vessel's course,  
 But so the furious blast prevailed,  
 That, pitiless perforce,  
 They left their outcast mate behind,  
 And scudded still before the wind.

Some succor yet they could afford;  
 And, such as storms allow,  
 The cask, the coop,<sup>o</sup> the floated cord,<sup>o</sup> *basket / rope*  
 Delayed not to bestow.  
 But he (they knew) nor ship, nor shore,  
 Whate'er they gave, should visit more.

Nor, cruel as it seemed, could he  
 Their haste himself condemn,  
 Aware that flight, in such a sea,  
 Alone could rescue them;  
 Yet bitter felt it still to die  
 Deserted, and his friends so nigh.

He long survives, who lives an hour  
 In ocean, self-upheld;  
 And so long he, with unspent pow'r,  
 His destiny repelled;  
 And ever, as the minutes flew,  
 Entreated help, or cried, "Adieu!"

At length, his transient respite past,  
 His comrades, who before  
 Had heard his voice in every blast,  
 Could catch the sound no more.  
 For then, by toil subdued, he drank  
 The stifling wave, and then he sank.

No poet wept him; but the page  
 Of narrative sincere,  
 That tells his name, his worth, his age,  
 Is wet with Anson's tear.  
 And tears by bards or heroes shed  
 Alike immortalize the dead.

I therefore purpose not, or dream,  
 Descanting on his fate,  
 To give the melancholy theme  
 A more enduring date:  
 But misery still delights to trace  
 Its semblance in another's case.

No voice divine the storm allayed,<sup>2</sup>  
 No light propitious shone,  
 When, snatched from all effectual aid,  
 We perished, each alone;  
 But I beneath a rougher sea  
 And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.

—1803

<sup>1</sup> *The Castaway* Based upon an occurrence documented in Lord George Anson's *Voyage Round the World* (1748); in which a sailor on Anson's ship was tossed overboard in a fierce storm and could not be rescued.

<sup>2</sup> No voice ... allayed See Matthew 8.26.