

The Aged Pilot Man

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(Mark Twain)

On the Erie Canal, it was, all on a summer's day,
I sailed forth with my parents, far away to Albany.
From out the clouds at noon that day, there came a dreadful storm,
That piled the billows high about, and filled us with alarm.

A man came rushing from a house, saying, "Snub up your boat, I pray,
Snub up your boat, snub up, alas, Snub up while yet you may."
Our captain cast one glance astern, then forward glanced he,
And said, "My wife and little ones, I never more shall see.

"Said Dollinger the pilot man, in noble words, but few --
"Fear not, but lean on Dollinger, and he will fetch you through."
The boat drove on, the frightened mules, tore through the rain and wind,
And bravely still, in danger's post, the whip-boy strode behind.

"Come 'board, come 'board," the captain cried, "Nor tempt so wild a storm.
But still the raging mules advanced, and still the boy strode on.
Then said the captain to us all, "Alas, 'tis plain to me,
The greater danger is not there, but here upon the sea.

"So let us strive, while life remains, to save all souls on board,
And then if die at last we must, Let....I cannot speak the word."
Said Dollinger the pilot man, tow'ring above the crew,
Fear not, but trust in Dollinger, and he will fetch you through."

"Low bridge! Low bridge!" all heads went down, the laboring bark sped on,
A mill we passed, we passed a church, hamlets, and fields of corn;
And all the world came out to see, and chased along the shore,
Crying, "Alas the gallant ship and crew, can nothing help them more?"

"Ho! lighten ship! Ho! man the pump! Ho! hostler, heave the lead!
And count ye all, both great and small, as numbered with dead!
For mariner for forty year, on Erie, boy and man,
I never yet saw such a storm, or one 't with it began!

"So overboard a keg of nails, and anvils three we threw,
Likewise four bales of gunny-sacks, two hundred pounds of glue,
Two sacks of corn, four ditto wheat, a box of books, a cow,

A violin, Lord Byron's works, a rip-saw and a sow.

A quarter three, 'tis shoaling fast, three feet large, three feet,
Three feet scant, I cried in fright, Oh is there no retreat?
Said Dollinger, the pilot man, As on the vessel flew,
"Fear not, but trust in Dollinger, and he will fetch you through.

A panic struck the bravest hearts, the boldest cheek turned pale
For plain to all, this shoaling said, a leak had burst the ditch's bed.
"Sever the tow-line. Cripple the mules. Too late, there comes a shock!
Another length, and the fated craft would have swum to the savinglock.

Then gathered together the shipwrecked crew and took one last embrace
While sorrowful tears from despairing eyes ran down each hopeless face,
But of all the children of misery there on that poor sinking frame,
But one spake words of hope and faith, and I worshipped as they came.

Said Dollinger, the pilot man, O brave heart, strong and true,
"Fear not, but trust in Dollinger, for he will fetch you through!"
Lo! scarce the words had passed his lips, the dauntless prophet say'th
When every soul about him seeth a wonder crown his faith.

For straight a farmer brought a plank, mysteriously inspired,
And laying it unto the ship, in silent awe retired,
And every sufferer stood amazed, the pilot man before,
A moment stood. Then wondering turned and speechless walked ashore.

From Roughing It, Twain

Twain wrote, "probably suggested by the old song called, "The Raging Canal"