

# Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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## The Common Sailor

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I am a man before the mast, I plough the trackless sea  
And on this simple subject, won't you please enlighten me?  
Common sailors we are called, pray tell me the reason why  
This sneering adjective unto us which you so often reply

#### Chorus:

Don't call us common sailors any more, any more  
Don't call us common sailors any more  
Good things to you we bring, why call us common men?  
We're as good as any lubber on the shore

When speaking of a man on shore I never hear you say  
He is a common this or that, be his calling what it may  
Be he a travelling tinker, a scavenger or sweep  
Then why term common unto those who travel on the deep?

For is it not your proudest boast that England rules the waves?  
But could you say as much if none its dangers brave?  
Among the nations of the world what would old England be  
But for those battles dearly won by her children on the sea

How would you get your luxuries, will you just tell to me  
Unless these men from foreign lands brought you sugar, coffee and tea?  
And when the merry Christmas comes how would your pudding taste  
Unless these men from foreign lands brought you spices, fruits and grapes?

Say you are invited to the boons and many more  
To the common British sailor that seeks the foreign shore  
Young ladies of our country too you should our calling bless  
For the foreign silks and satins of which you make your dress

To be admired by gentlemen undoubtedly you do  
Then don't despise such gallant men that bring such dainties to you  
And lads that like the fragrant weed, while smoking at your ease  
Just think upon those sleepless nights we spend upon the seas

And all of you that slight us so I'd have you go and try  
One night upon the stormy sea when raging winds are high  
Amidst the driving, blinding snow, the pelting hail and rain  
It would be a tempting circumstance if they caught you there again

But we ask not for you pity, but give to us our due

Respect us in proportion for the good things that we do  
And the good things that you ask us for we will faithfully procure  
It shall be brought without delay unto your very door

Excuse our little awkwardness, we are not perfect, quite  
Our heads, I own, are sometimes wrong, but I hope our hearts are right  
I hope the time will soon be past  
When folks on shore despise a man who sails before the mast

And lastly this wholesome track by nobody be forgot  
With lords and dukes and all the highest folds must share our common lot

from The Oxford Book of Sea Songs, Roy Palmer, ed.

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