

THE ROOSEVELT  
AND THE ANTINOE

E. J. Pratt

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*From the painting by Charles Dixon R. I.*

THE ROOSEVELT STANDING BY THE ANTINOE IN THE JANUARY STORM OF 1926

The Roosevelt Standing by the Antinoe in the January Storm  
of 1926.

*From the painting by Charles Dixon, R.I.*

# THE ROOSEVELT AND THE ANTINOE

BY E. J. PRATT

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TO MY BROTHERS  
JIM, ART AND CAL

"Antinoe" is pronounced here An'-tī-no,  
as in popular usage

**THE ROOSEVELT AND THE ANTINOE**

Her high freeboard towering above the pier,  
She lay beneath the lift of spars and blocks:  
Her port life month by month and year by year  
Knew nothing but the humdrum of the docks;—  
The rumble of trucks along the warehouse floors,  
The blare of sirens, shout of stevedores,  
The play of tackle under the gruff mood  
Of winches, clatter of hooks and booms, subdued  
To the credit balance that must never fail  
The ledgers of Hoboken Lines—so she,  
Built for the tides of commerce on the sea,  
Was under schedule in an hour to sail.

In the Commissioner's room it was agreed  
*Between the Master and the mariners,*  
That as the men received per month or run  
Their wage in dollars and were guaranteed  
By statutes of the State that they might draw  
Their scale of rations—*bread and meat and water,*  
*Lemon and lime* and such *prescribed by law,*  
With *means of warmth in weather;* they, the crew,  
Should pledge themselves to conduct, *faithful, true,*  
*And orderly, in honest, sober manner;*  
*At all times in their duties diligent;*  
*To the Master's lawful word obedient,*  
*In everything relating to the vessel—*  
*Safety of passengers, cargo and store,*  
*Whether on board, in boats, or on the shore.*

And with the reading thus concluded, both  
The parties to the contract gave their oath  
Of signature. Items of birthplace, age,  
Height and description then were written in,  
Each sailor's time of service with his wage—  
Allotment, and address of Next-of-Kin.  
So, with their sea-bags on their backs, the crew  
Went up the gangway to the foc's'le; threw  
Their dunnage on the bunks; soon to be lined,  
Two hundred of them, on the deck; assigned  
Stations and duties, as the bosun drew  
The *likeliest* man, his mate the next; and then,  
Alternately the Watches claimed the men,  
In that renowned and tacit lottery  
Full of the hoary savour of the sea.

The mooring cables splashing from the bollards,  
Three stern and bow tugs moved her to the stream,  
And slowly swung her head round with the ebb-tide;  
Were cast off; when the liner on her steam  
Proceeded down the channels of the Hudson,  
Into the outer harbour, to the sea,  
And on past Sandy Hook where finally  
She set her course which led her to the *Great  
Circle Track* for Queenstown, Plymouth, Cherbourg  
(Service of passenger and mail), thence straight  
To Bremen with the body of her freight.

Thursday morning rose without a sun,  
Sleet in the air: the wind was westerly:  
The River breeze of Wednesday had begun  
To stiffen to a whole gale on the sea.  
By noon the stations at the coast were flashing  
Warnings, making smaller ships delay  
Their date of sailing. Vessels under canvas,  
Attempting shorter trips in gulf or bay,  
Crawled back to harbour double-reefed, while others,  
Still further to the east, that could not make  
Return,—sails blown to ribbons from the gaskets—  
Were forced to scud under bare poles to take  
The luck ahead. Long threat lay in the signals.  
The charts traced not a cyclone's come-and-go,—  
The fury soon begun and as soon ended—  
But those broad areas on which storms grow,  
Northern and Oceanic, where each hour,  
Feeding on the one before, transmits  
In turn its own inheritance of power  
Unto the next until the hammer hits

A hemisphere.

Along the eastern seaboard,  
And inland to one-half the continent,  
Thousands of dials in studio and station  
Were "off the air" by an ungrudged consent—  
That the six-hundred-metre-wave might keep  
Upon the sea that night its high command,  
For the great business that was nigh at hand,  
With deep already calling unto deep.

Friday evening, with Cape Race reporting  
Big seas with thickening fog followed by snow,  
Barometer still falling, very low.

Morning of Saturday! the gale now rising  
To the dimensions of a hurricane,  
With gusts that boxed the compass of a vane,  
Sweeping around the headlands to contest  
The arrogated highway from the West.

Evening again, and in its power to smite  
The snowy cordon with its warning light,  
The Cape's revolving beacon was as sick  
As the guttering limit of a candle-wick.  
And never—it was claimed—had tides so climbed  
A slope of shoal from such a depth to feed  
The tumult of the upper waves; so timed  
Direction with their volume and their speed,  
To meet both wave and wind that all might lock  
In foam above so high a line of rock.



South of this Cape within these hours, the Roosevelt  
Was driving East by North, with her decks stripped;  
Her lower ventilator cowls unshipped,  
The shafts plugged; battened and wedged the hatches;  
Bell-mouths full-bore discharging from the bilge-pumps  
Under the straining hull; thirty degrees  
Measuring her roll within the heavier seas.  
The facing of the 'midship house was spattered  
At seventy feet. Captain and quarter-master  
Saw nothing legible upon the face  
Of day or night: the sextant in its case,  
The navigators guessed the ship's position.

Abaft—the smoke came out, to be driven back  
In eddies low and fierce against the white  
Salt crust upon the surface of the stack,  
Then, split in billows to the left and right,  
Dispersed before it found a line of flight.  
The double lines of lifeboats lay like rows  
Of mastodons asleep in polar snows.  
Ahead—appeared under the steamer's light  
Truncated day between two walls of night.  
Sometimes the for'ard derrick-posts were blotted  
Out; the hooded shapes of winches squatted  
Upon the deck; and with each long roll, patches  
Of white laggin' from the steampipes swirled  
And blended with the foam around the hatches.  
The sea itself was gone save when it hurled  
The body of a wave across the bow;  
Soon even this was lost to the bridge, and now  
Behind the weather-cloth it seemed the world  
Was carried with the last gust to the void.

Fried stepped inside the Pilot House to get  
Another reading from the aneroid.  
An hour ago the adjusting hand was set  
At twenty-nine—the low foul weather mark,  
And the indicator for that hour had stood  
Directly underneath as though it were glued  
To the card. He came nearer full of dark  
Conjecture, tapped the glass, and the hand fell,  
The barest fraction but perceptible,  
Entering by slow, inexorable rate,  
The tragic ranges of the *twenty-eight*.  
Later he returned; the oracle  
Yielded this time a record to appall  
The heart. Muttering "twenty-eight (point) three,"  
He shot a glance to the right where on the wall  
He found, in confirmation, the line drawn  
To the same level on the mercury.  
'Twas four o'clock on a North Atlantic sea,  
Three hours before a January dawn.  
The wind having slipped the gale's leash was soon  
To match the wing-shod speed of a typhoon:  
The storm of nineteen twenty-six was on.

Somewhere far-off in that unwavering gloom,  
Cramped in the quarters of a wireless room,  
A boy was seated, tapping at a key  
Water ran along the floor: his knee  
Was braced against a table to resist  
The dangerous angle of a starboard list.  
Upon his right a wireless log-chart lay  
With many entries for so young a day.  
He reached and pushed a button and the drone

Of a generator started. A switch thrown,  
He rapped the key, then instantly transferred  
To the receiving set; listened with keen  
Thrust of his face; and with no answer heard,  
Changed over, going through the same routine.  
But once when on the panel a blue flame,  
Crackling like tearing linen at the gap,  
Responded to a more than hectic tap  
Of the finger, dumb and drowsy symbols came  
To life. Through aërials screaming like curlews,  
Magnetic messengers carried the name  
Of a disabled vessel with the news  
Of water in the stokehold and a crew's  
Vigil upon a flooded deck. Legions  
Unnumbered moving at the rate of light,  
Pushed out beyond all navigated regions,  
Exploring every cranny of the night,  
Reaching out through dusky corridors  
Above the sea to uninhabited shores,  
Or taking undecoded human cries  
Below the keel to the Atlantic crypts.  
And millions undulated to the skies,  
Through snow and vapour and the cloud eclipse,  
Past day and night and the terrestrial air,  
To add their wasted sum to a plethora  
Of speed and power in those void spaces where  
Light-years go drifting by Andromeda.  
And yet in all that sterile plenitude  
A few were harnessed to a human mood.

The cabin of the Roosevelt radio!  
Three dots, three dashes, and the dots again—

(The call sign) *British freighter, Antinoe.*  
*Don't know position. Sixteen hours ago,*  
*Rough latitude—North forty-six and ten,*  
*Rough longitude—thirty-nine, five-eight.*  
*Been hove-to ever since; the present rate*  
*Of drift to East, two knots (approximate).*

Fried took the message, reading nothing more  
Than that a ship was sending out a call  
For help, and that since noon the day before  
She had not known her bearings. This was all  
The cryptogram surrendered for a clue.  
A fresh despatch was brought two minutes later,  
The Aquitania calling—"Which of two  
Should undertake location of the freighter?"  
Their own positions given, 'twas agreed—  
Cunarder further off by hours, pressed  
To the muzzle of the storm and moving West,—  
The job might therefore be assigned to Fried.

Orders were given to the wireless chief  
To bring the direction-finder into play,  
Capture the signals and report at brief  
Periods—and the ship was on her way.  
Taking his station at the binnacle,  
The head-phones on, he listened while he swung  
The handwheel slowly to the right until  
The loop above the Pilot House that hung  
The wires came broadside to the signal cry.  
The sounds grew fainter, faded out, came back  
With further revolution but to die  
Again with the reversal of the track.

Underneath, the hair-line on the face  
Of the dummy compass card had kept its pace  
With every move, faithful to every trial,  
And like a dogma that might take denial  
From neither sense nor reason, pointed *There*,  
At a figure stamped in black upon the dial:  
For when it moved to either side with the wheel,  
It came back ever with the aerial square  
To the source of the signal like a steadying keel  
Demanding its position. How far? Where,  
Along this line, now tossing like a chip  
Upon those crests and hollows, lay the ship,  
It could not tell—one hundred miles or two  
It might have been for all the seamen knew.

Back in the wireless room the call came in  
With the staccato of a bulletin;  
Triads of notes spare and reiterant,  
A whistle shot with burr and sibilant—  
The international prelude which the sea  
Beats out in storm from human veins to express  
The fever pulses of its own distress.  
Whether it was the sharp economy  
Of pauses in the breaks, or some known trick  
Of the ear to catch the timbre of a click,  
A pressure or a crotchet in the tapping,  
The operator felt some one was rapping  
A message out with white intensity,  
In life-death finger action on a key,  
Within the cabin of the Antinoe.  
*Tarpaulins ripped. Another hatch let go.  
Bad list. Grain swelling fast. Seams loosening now.*

*All lifeboats gone from starboard davits. How  
Many knots are you making? How far away  
Do you reckon you are?*

*Ten knots: now eight:  
Now ten—top speed allowed by sea.*

*You say  
That we sound nearer to you? Cannot wait  
Much longer.*

*Twelve.  
Find it hard to steer,  
Ice-chest has crashed into the steering gear.  
Coming.*

Six o'clock. Now seven. The dots  
Of the freighter answered by the liner's knots,  
Followed by danger when the sea would turn  
And test the rivets from the stem to stern  
With longitudinal blows, hurling cascades  
Upon the bow, till with a burial wave  
The engines instantly would stop to save  
The tail-shaft from the racing of the blades.

A longer silence; and a deep suspicion.  
Destruction of the ship? or loss of power?  
Blindness was coming with the light of morning,  
Ten minutes, twenty, now a half-an-hour.  
Where are you, Antinoe?—The keys kept rapping,  
But the receiving phones were dumb to space,  
And in the Pilot House there came no signal,  
The hand lay palsied on the compass face.

The operator meantime on the wreck

Had left his room and crossed a slushing deck,  
Reporting to his captain. When he tried  
Return, a wave upon the weather side  
Reached and caught the last port lifeboat; smashed  
It from the davits down the incline; crashed  
The forward wall of the wireless cabin; sheared  
It clean. Matching death with strategy,  
The sailors took their chance with each spent sea;  
The fragments were removed; the way was cleared;  
The set put in emergency repair;  
And human speech again was on the air.

Eleven o'clock. Fried knowing that he neared  
The ship's position by the growing power  
Of the signals slowed the Roosevelt down to scour  
The closer plotted area, fighting squall  
On top of storm, boring through a pall  
Of snow, till at the heart of the wave-zone,  
With Jack reversed, the freighter like a lone  
Sea-mallard with a broken wing was seen  
Ahead, lee-rail awash, taking it green  
At the bow.

*Do you wish to abandon?*

*Not just*

*yet;*

*Endeavouring to fix steering gear and get  
Hatches secured. Water in stokehold. Grain  
Cargo shifted. Trying to maintain  
Sufficient steam to heave-to and survive  
Till weather moderate. Crew twenty-five.  
Can you spread oil to windward? Please stand-by.*

But hard as the three engineers might try,  
The leaks outraced the pumps. The daylight grew  
To dusk, the hatches opened and the crew  
Signalled for rescue. Fried a quarter mile  
To windward poured his fuel oil on the sea,  
Giving, that distance, what the Roosevelt lee  
Afforded, edging in and backing while  
He waited for a sign of the wind's subsiding,  
Watching the scud of the waves, the darkening sky,  
The drifting snow and the freighter heavily riding.

Then suddenly at nine as the squall increased,  
With a smother of black hail the Roosevelt's light  
Could not pierce through, the bridge look-out lost sight  
Of the Antioe and the wireless contact ceased.

*Dead Slow!* The Roosevelt took a risk as great  
As if the air shook with the roar of reefs.  
The wireless and the navigating chiefs  
Fried summoned to the flying bridge to debate  
The course. What with the hammer of the sea  
To windward, and that anvil on the lee,  
Judgment and will were warped by doubt. Suspend  
Pursuit? Keep steerage-way and just hold on?  
For at this hour with sight and hearing gone,  
All felt within their blood they could depend  
On nothing but an elemental trust  
In bulkheads; in the physics of a dark  
Equation, where with each remorseless thrust  
Down to the starboard limits of the arc,  
The ship should take under unheard commands  
The port recoil, a pivoted keel, and then,



At the crux of the port roll find again  
The firm up-heave of Atlantean hands.  
On such a faith, borne in by night and snow,  
Rested the riddle of the Antinoe.

Was she beyond that scurrying barricade,  
To come back on a wave-lift, as a score  
Of doubtful moments she had done before  
When gusts had passed? Or had the Roosevelt strayed  
Beyond the vernier of her calculation,  
Caught suddenly by a winter vertigo,  
After reaching the Antinoe's location  
By a straight miracle of navigation?  
But why no message? Flooded dynamo?  
Followed by exhausted batteries?  
The wireless room demolished by the seas?  
Or aerals blown off like a wind-swept kite  
From a wallowing ship beam-to and rudderless?  
Or had she foundered? This the likelier guess.

The ship with unremitting search despite  
The chances stacked against her, steamed on far  
Into the night, past midnight and the slow  
Hours, blindly heading into snow;  
Not a sextant reading off a star;  
No radio now with subtle fingering  
Untied the snarl of the freighter's wayward course.  
Nothing but log and the dead reckoning,  
And the Roosevelt's instruments stating the force  
Of wind, direction and the tidal stress,  
Nothing but these and the wheel's luck to trail her,—  
Unless there might be added to the sum

Of them an unexplored residuum—  
The bone and marrow judgment of a sailor.

But all this time signals were streaming through  
The ship's antennae; *Solvang in collision,*  
*Bulkheads crushed, and sinking; the Curlew*  
*A-leak, and under jury-rig, Carlstad*  
*Searching; Carlotta helping Orebro;*  
*The Bremen hastening to the Laristan,*  
*Engine trouble, serious, twenty-two*  
*Aboard.* No record of the Antinoe.

Each hour the searchlight moving on its swivel,  
Traced but a wide circumference of yeast,  
Bounding the clash of forces on the ocean,  
With endless lorries heading for the east.  
At times the sea would snow the Roosevelt under,  
As shearing a wave, her bow came to the luff,  
Or as she turned with sharp careening angle  
To avoid a shadow, putting beam to trough.  
The scent was cold by now. Few words were spoken  
Between the officer-on-watch and captain;  
The Antinoe was sunk by every token  
And every law known to the wind and weather.

"With such a list, no shift or pumps could right her."

"A dollar flashlight! All she's got to signal."

"If she's afloat, 'twould take a hawk to sight her."

"A flash upon the weather quarter?"

"No.

Her power gone, that handlight wouldn't show  
A hundred yards."

"A dog's chance for a boat  
To get across . . . assuming she's afloat."

"What do you reckon her drift?"

"Port easy!"

Hold her!

Let her take that one on her starboard shoulder."

Feeling her shifted courses over-run,  
And yet uncertain whether she should tack  
Upon a chosen port or starboard track,  
The baffled liner like a water-dog  
Would dip her nose to the sea and then up-rear  
Her head with black hawse nostrils keen to flair  
A flying quarry covered by a fog.

Dawn and noon and now the afternoon.

"We picked her up"—so ran the captain's log—

"One point upon the starboard bow at four  
O'clock, with nineteen hours of delay,  
And sixty miles from her last known position."  
Her navigating bridge was swept away;  
Flooded, steam off, lights out, a closing day,—  
The time again awaited Fried's decision.

To pour fuel upon the sea to assuage  
Its fury; make a high-decked vessel ride  
Steady; maintain sufficient weather-gage,  
Four hundred tons of pressure at the side,  
To avoid the crisis when a wave should toss  
Her like a dinghy on the smaller ship,  
Beam against beam, or stem to rail, to rip  
The plates like cardboard to a double loss;  
And yet mindful of this first charge, to crawl

Within a narrow margin to the hulk,  
To take advantage of the liner's bulk  
As windbreak for a lifeboat, and forestall  
The second disappearance in a squall  
Of the Antinoe;—in fine, to run a race  
For a crew's life with the storm laps in advance;  
To outstare Death to his salt countenance,  
Made up the grim agenda on his face.

Fried took a turn upon the weather deck,  
Saw little of assurance in the sky,  
Came back to the lee-wing, gauging with his eye  
The span his boat must cover to the wreck;  
Made up his mind alone on the degree  
Of risk; issued a call: in such a sea  
And cause the order needed no command,  
Only the heart's assent unto the hand.

The men answering the summons with a will,  
Came aft; were picked for hardihood and skill.  
Their names as on the shipping register:—  
Robert Miller, the first officer,  
Commanding; Ernest Heitman, bosun's mate,  
No relative; Uno Wertanen,  
Master-at-arms, aged twenty-eight, a Finn,  
His mother (Helsingfors), the next of kin;  
Sam Fisher; Franelich, an Austrian;  
Bauer, a naturalised American;  
Maurice Jacobowitz of New York State;  
And a Dane named Alexander Fugelsang—  
Made up the lifeboat complement of eight.

A dozen orders from the bosun rang—  
"Stand by and clear the falls for running; man  
The cranks; let go the gripes." Winch ropes began  
To move, winding through the leading blocks;  
Slowly the boat was lifted from the chocks.  
The crew holding suspended lines that ran  
Along the spring-stay, freeboards from the stern  
To bow were jacked to gunwales; at a turn  
Of the quadrant screw both boat and davit swung  
Outboard. The oars and boat-hooks kept her free.  
With painters taut at fore and aft, she hung  
For her sixty feet of journey to the sea.

Below, like creatures of a fabled past,  
From their deep hidings in unlighted caves,  
The long processions of great-bellied waves  
Cast forth their monstrous births which with gray fang  
Appeared upon the leeward side, ran fast  
Along the broken crests, then coiled and sprang  
For the boat impatient of its slow descent  
Into their own inviolate element.

A shout or instant gesture of the hand  
Was answered by the double roar of winches.  
The ropes ran through the iron cleats by inches,  
Straining, checking, running on demand  
Of the fore-and-after levels. "Lower away!"  
A steady longer roar, then a moment clear  
Of the side. "Avast! Let go releasing gear!"  
The blocks shot from the slip-links evenly,  
And number one had settled on the sea.

Here was a trial far beyond her training;

Her tests had been accorded her in weather,  
And in blue water where there was no danger,—  
Where, governed by the stroke, all pull together,  
And every rhythmic blade falls to the feather  
Against the breeze. Now like a colt untried,  
She bucked control and though she carried well  
The lop of the shorter waves, she plunged and shied  
The moment that she reached the top of a swell,  
And went down sidling to the trough and flung  
The crew in the water. Under discipline  
Of many a drill, they struggled back and clung  
To the running loops and cork-grips, clambered in,  
And started for the wreck; but with recall  
From the bridge, they brought her to the wind and tried  
Over a wave-barrel to reach the side  
Of the ship when, twenty feet away, a squall  
Combined with tide-rip caught the boat and threw  
The men back to the waves. Six of the crew  
Clutching ladders and lines which might afford  
A toe or finger hold were drawn aboard.  
Heitman, crushed between the ship and boat,  
Slipped from a life-buoy and was seen to float  
Senseless away, down by the liner's stern,  
Where he was lost under the wave and churn  
Of the propeller. Wertanen, who twice  
And willingly released his own firm grip  
To take within his teeth a rope eye-splice,  
Swam fifteen yards to leeward of the ship  
To help an exhausted mate, and paid his price  
In drifting past the adventure of return.  
By help of current and by desperate swim,  
A wave pitched him against the lifeboat stern.

He clutched the running-line and then the rim  
Of the gunwale; tried to get his weight athwart,  
But oil had greased his hands and he fell short.  
The crew could see him grab and plunge and cling,  
Using his legs as rudders so to swing  
Her head around to the wreck and with the sheer  
Abandon of his youth to try to steer  
His open, wilful, single-handed craft  
So close to the side that wind might bear it aft,  
And round the freighter's stern to where he knew  
Lifebelts and lines were waiting, with the crew  
Gathered at the lee taffrail. Jockeying the boat  
Within three fathoms length he tried to grip  
A belt, but oil had made his fingers slip,  
And oil was in his eyes and in his throat,  
And the last thing sighted from the liner's deck,  
Near to the close of an hour's futile searching,  
Were tossing oars and a frenzied lifeboat lurching  
From wave to wave, a gunshot from the wreck,  
And here and there as far as might be scanned  
Within the spindrift, a tide-revolving speck—  
A belt perhaps or human head or hand.

From every quarter came the night confounding  
The unhorizoned sea with sky and air,  
And to the crew of the Antioe—despair.  
At ten o'clock the Roosevelt bugle sounding  
From the saloon stairway a call to prayer!

With separated phrase and smothered word  
An immemorial psalm became a blurred  
Bulwark under erosion by the sea.

Beneath the maddening crashes of the wind  
Crumbled the grammar of the liturgy.

*God of all comfort . . .*

*humbly beseeching thee .*

..

*We do acknowledge . . . . . sinned . . .*

*Most merciful . . . confess . . . grievously . . .*

*Who spreadest out the heavens, crownest the years.*

*. . . . . Grant us we pray thee . . . . .*

*Who commandest the seas and they do obey thee.*

*Nigh unto all . . . . .*

*. . . . . our distresses and fears.*

*. . . . . A father to the fatherless.*

Followed the fragments of great passages:

*I am the Resurrection . . . . . We*

*. . . . . commit . . . . . bodies to the deep . . .*

*Corruptible . . . . . Of those who sleep . . .*

*. . . . . shall put on immortality.*

And then brief tributes to the seamen drowned,  
While Miller and his men were ranged around,  
Bandaged in head and wrist, with arms in sling,  
And others who had come, despite the warning,  
To take their places were envisaging  
The job that lay before them in the morning.

Meanwhile outside, echoing the ritual—

*Now unto Him who is able to do . . . . .*

*Exceeding abundantly . . . a wild antiphonal*

Of shriek and whistle from the shrouds broke through,

Blending with thuds as though some throat had laughed



In thunder down the ventilating shaft;  
And the benediction ended with the crack  
Of a stanchion on the starboard beam, the beat  
Of a loose block, with the fast run of feet,  
Where a flying guy careered about the stack;  
Then following the omen of a lull,  
The advent of a wave which like a wall  
Crashed down in volleys flush against the hull,  
Lifting its white and shafted spume to fall  
Across the higher decks; and through it all,  
As on the dial of the telegraph,  
Governed by derelict and hurricane,  
Rang *Stop, Full Speed Astern or Slow or Half,*  
The irregular pulse and cough of the engine strain,  
The quick smite of the blades against a wave,  
And always threat, escape, threat, then the brave  
Lift of the keel, and still that breathless sink,  
Dividing up the seconds, nearing the brink  
Of a gray, unplumbed precipice and grave.

Within this hour a priest clothed with the whole  
Habiliment and dignity of office—  
Black cassock, surplice white and purple stole—  
Feeling that from an older faith would come  
The virtue of a rubric yet unspoken  
For the transition of a soul, a crumb  
Of favour from a cupboard not bereft  
Of all by the night's intercessions, left  
His room; climbed up the stairs; pushed through a door  
Storm-wedged, and balancing along the floor  
Of the deck to where a davit stood, he placed  
His grip securely on a guy rope there.

Lifting up a crucifix, he faced  
The starboard quarter, looking down the waste  
Of the waters casting back the flickering light  
Of the steamer, where two bodies without wrap  
Of shroud, deprived of their deck funeral rite,  
Swung to the rune of the sea's stern foster-lap.

*Ego vos absolvo . . . . . ab omnibus  
Peccatis et censuris . . . . .  
. . . . . in nomine  
Patris et Filii et Spiritus . . . . .  
Sancti . . . . . Attende Domine  
. . . . . et miserere  
Hear . . . O stella maris . . . Mary.*

But no Gennesaret of Galilee  
Conjured to its level by the sway  
Of a hand or a word's magic was this sea,  
Contesting with its iron-alien mood,  
Its pagan face, its own primordial way,  
The pale heroic suasion of a rood.  
And the absolving Father, when the ship  
Righted her keel between two giant rolls,  
Recrossed himself, and letting go his hold,  
Returned to berth, murmuring *God rest their souls*.

And now throughout the middle of the night,  
The Roosevelt took the hurricane, hove-to.  
Into her own defence the captain knew  
Must enter all the sinews of her fight—  
Her searchlight ripping fissures as through dark  
Parchment where at times the freighter, set

In a frame of tossing silver, showed the stark  
And streaming edges of her silhouette,  
Battered but yet miraculously afloat,  
Heaving, subsiding with her lathered flank,  
Like a bison smitten from the loin to shank,  
Surrendering to the wolves about her throat.

And every hour in the wireless room,  
The shards of cries, as by an incantation,  
Were joined to an Atlantic orchestration;  
Epic and drama rising to illumine  
Disaster—now the call and now reply;  
The Bremen radio—"still standing by  
The Laristan. Six rescued. Will resume  
At daylight."

"Solvang lost. All saved but two."

"Sparta reported foundering. Left no clue."  
Daylight and wreckage. Bremen calling still—  
"The Laristan gone down with rest of crew."

With every tap of key, the Roosevelt knew  
How little would the game depend on skill  
Of hand or resolution of the will,  
How much would all the morrow's gain and loss  
Turn on the unknown chances of a toss.

At four o'clock the Roosevelt moved to windward,  
And drew again upon her fuel tanks;  
Only the whitened edges left the combers,  
Like a growth of harvest stubble from the banks  
Of rolling prairies that a fire had gleaned.  
Still black and dangerous stretches intervened.

At six o'clock the flag at the mast-head  
Was lowered half-high in token of her dead,  
And the Red Ensign on the freighter went  
To the same place in mute acknowledgment.  
Then back to their full height the flags were run,  
To snap out like the folds of a toreador:  
With so much on the boards still to be done,  
'Twas fitting that they should, in that same breath  
With which the storm took the salute, restore  
The colours to their stations, baiting death.

At noon the starboard list began to assume  
The final margin for the Antinoe,  
The signal flags reporting that below  
The sea was filling up the engine room.

The next attempt was with the Lyle gun.  
Fried edged his vessel nearer to the wreck,  
Trying for the safest, shortest run  
To get a line across the after-deck.  
But once again an adverse hand conspired  
Against the chance, checkmated the design,  
For at the muzzle as the gun was fired,  
The steel projectile snapped the messenger line.  
The second did the same, the third, and so  
The fourth; the five succeeding carriers trailed  
Their lines midway; the last, the eleventh, failed;  
Only the iron passed the Antinoe.

The store of rockets next—but what availed  
Their slender shafts and powder charges scaled  
Against the weight of vapour, wind and snow?

An empty cask was lowered with the hope  
The wind might carry it to the ship's side.  
It sank beneath its sagging weight of rope.

Another stroke of rescue was devised.  
A lifeboat was trailed off without a crew;  
It climbed, zigzagged and floundered, plunging through,  
But pitched against the freighter and capsized.

Fried tried again, placing his ship to looard  
Less than a hundred yards. The next boat moored  
By a line rove through the high block of the kingpost  
On the quarter-deck, was towed close to the stern  
Of the Antinoe, but with the luff of the Roosevelt  
To the weather side, the rope sagged at the turn;  
Went underneath and fouled, and number three  
Started to drift beyond recovery.

Another night, the third, confronted Fried,  
When the last remnant of the sky was blown  
Out, with the ocean like a pampas stirred  
To the confusion of a great stampede—  
Riot of lariat and hoof, of spurred  
Horses, and the Antinoe a thrown  
Spent rider overtaken by the herd.

Wednesday morning! and the twenty-five  
Huddled on the aft deck—still alive.  
One hundred hours had passed since the men had known  
The wool-warmth of a bunk, or stood the cold  
With nourished veins; and sleep had taken hold  
Of tired bodies salt-drugged to the bone.

And in that hundred hours eternity  
Had ticked its lazy seconds on the sea,  
Timing the wind and surge and the defeat  
Of day by night; of night by day; the slow  
Unreasoned alternation of the sleet  
With hurrying phantoms of the hail and snow;  
The same rotation on the deck—the gray  
Sterility of hope with each lifeboat gone,  
Dusk followed by the night, and every dawn  
A slattern offering dust instead of day.

During the night the fact was plain the gun  
Would by such lavish firing soon outrun  
The standard stock of carriers and consume  
The packing cord; so in the engine room  
A humming lathe was making up arrears,  
In cutting blocks of steel; in fashioning  
Projectiles and their rods; and engineers,  
Following a passenger's design,  
Were busy in construction of a spring,  
A spiral coil to graduate the strain  
Of the steel rod upon the carrying line  
At the initial instant of the shots.  
And knowing how the day ahead would drain  
Resources, men began to overhaul  
The cordage, making loops for arms and knots  
For hand-grips, culling big stuff from the small  
For nets and heaving-lines and ladders,—all  
Which might be spared out of the essential store,  
From cargo-slings to the stout rope from the fall  
Of a wrecked lifeboat davit. Others toiled  
For hours, whaler-fashion, over the four

Containing tubs, undid the twists, and coiled  
The messenger line many thousand feet,  
From vertical core to the end-loop with neat  
Precision. So when morning came it seemed  
Defaulted effort now might be redeemed,  
For though the seventh shot burst free and sped  
Away beyond the wreck, it carried true,  
Trailing sufficient line to lay it dead  
On the poop deck in centre of the crew.

A heavier rope made fast was pulled aboard,  
And when the Roosevelt's boat was safely lowered,  
Another paying off through fairleads gave  
What help it could to the wavering bow control.  
The boat without a load mounted each wave,  
Righting herself from every plunge and roll,  
Covered the stretch of water like a gull,  
Until within five fathoms of the hull,  
She turned broadside in an attempt to scale  
A sea, the bow line chafed against the rail  
And snapped, the stern line gave, and number four  
Followed her sisters of the day before.

And so the latter half of the fourth day  
Came with the ocean well astride its prey:  
The storm in front like a shifty pugilist,  
Watching for some slight turn of luck to slay  
The rescuer with an iron-knuckled fist.  
'Twas useless for the Roosevelt to await  
The issue of the struggle by debate.  
For nothing in those skies favoured a sign  
That by manoeuvre could the fight be won—

By floating cask or breeches-buoy or line,  
Mere parleying with rockets and a gun.  
The hour had called for argument more rife  
With the gambler's sacrificial bids for life,  
The final manner native to the breed  
Of men forging decision into deed—  
Of getting down again into the sea,  
And testing rowlocks in an open boat,  
Of grappling with the storm-king bodily,  
And placing Northern fingers on his throat.

The call again, and number five was ready.  
The men were chosen and the davits swung;  
The boat moved outward easily and hung  
Level and snug to leeward but unsteady  
In the capricious pockets of the squall.  
Another order and the falls began  
To move—eight men inside her; Alfred Wall,  
Araneda, Diaz, Albertz, Hahn,  
Upton, Roberts, Miller in command.  
The gunwale fended off with oar and hand  
At every lurch, she managed luckily  
To clear the steamer's side, covering the steep  
Descent, and then undamaged took the sea.  
Three oars aside and with a steering sweep,  
The boat pulled out from the immediate lee  
Into the eddies where the waters met  
From stern and bow,—where the last ounces put  
On the oars, even with the wind abaft, could yet  
Advance them only by the inch and foot.  
They followed down the beam-path of the searchlight,  
The Roosevelt all the while manoeuvring,



Now drawing in, now clawing off, and now  
Dead close, beam to the wind, just shadowing  
The brute drive of the freighter, to allow  
The boat with heavy lateral drift to steer  
With wider berth into the wind and clear  
The danger of the surge around the bow.  
A swamping moment caught her, but each blade  
Flexed to the curve of snapping, Miller made  
The turn and came down sharp broadside to gain  
A point amidships that he might obtain  
Such shelter as this windbreak could afford.  
But the wells were under water and the lee  
Was like the surf of breakers, for the sea,  
Contemptuous of this man-made sunken mole,  
Threatened each time to hurl the boat aboard,  
And reach the funnel with resurgent roll.  
Escaping this disaster, Miller drew  
His boat back in the sea, and tried to creep  
Forward to higher freeboard where the crew  
Near the First Hatch might have the shortest leap.  
Backwatering and staving off the hull,  
And crawling in again with a slight lull  
Of the wind, or with recession of the surge,  
He took three men who on the perishing verge  
Of sleep fell from the rail to the thwarts and slumped  
To the floor-boards. Out and back once more  
With slow manoeuvring, and another four  
Secure. Others of tougher sinew jumped  
To the stern sheets from the rail. The task was done  
With sudden moves and checks like a strange play  
Which starts, is forced to stop, and then begun  
A fresh on unknown ground but under sway

Of old Olympian rules. So one by one  
The lives were scored, and those who missed their aim,  
And fell into the sea, were grabbed and pulled  
Over the gunwale; counted with the same  
Slow chalking up as of advances bulled  
Out of the fiery scrimmage of a game.

Miller tried to close again but failed.  
With water shipped as fast as it was bailed,  
Seams leaking, twelve half-dead men barely stowed,  
And with his crew of eight he did not dare  
To give his boat a more unstable load;  
So pushed away and with the wind and tide  
In favour, forced her water-logged to where  
The Roosevelt, now round to leeward, showed  
A maze of lines and ladders on her side.  
The first instalment of the crew too numb  
To lay their hands on heaving-lines were placed  
Within the cargo-nets and drawn up plumb;  
The others taking ropes, with their feet braced  
Against the hull went up with the sheer lift  
Of their mates, till all were safe aboard, and now  
The lifeboat number five with damaged bow  
And broken hoisting hooks was cast adrift.

The pitch of the storm, late night and still the snow,  
Two hundred yards between of yawning space,  
And thirteen sailors on the Antinoe.  
Three nights upon the bridge behind the shield  
Of the canvas dodger, his accustomed place,  
Fried doubtful, peering with his blizzard face.  
Now one o'clock, and a slight rift revealed

A spatter of light above the running seas—  
The freighter's lantern jabbing out in Morse  
That the ship's list had reached fifty degrees.  
The last hour was on with no recourse  
Except another summons to the crew.  
Miller commanding for the third time drew  
From the line-up of forty volunteers  
Of every rank,—deck-hand to passenger,  
His four uninjured veterans and five new  
Hands: Thomas Sloan, the third officer;  
Reidel; Wilke; Deck Yeoman Wilson Beers;  
And Caldwell, messman to the engineers.

The sixth lifeboat was ready on the lee.  
The others stood a moment in review;  
Three hundred passengers, two hundred crew;  
The cut was getting near the artery.  
The men, lowered without mishap, once more  
Brought round the boat to the lee bow of the freighter,  
And ranged her off the First Hatch as before.  
The risk this time for boat and ship was greater;  
The growing list could take no steeper verge,  
And all the boatmanship could not avail  
At first against the backwash of the surge;  
For there was peril in the sunken rail,  
When at uncertain moments the ship tried  
For balance, lifting up a wounded side  
To ease a wave that struck amidships, cleaving  
Her port; and peril in those hours of doubt  
For strengthless men that watched their comrades  
leaving,  
And long the galley fires had been out.

Fried shortened up his weather gage to try—  
To give a double shelter to the lifeboat:  
The message later read—"Had to rely  
Upon the final power of my engines,  
For had a revolution failed,—'twas either  
Roosevelt or Antinoe with odds on neither."  
The revolution did not fail, and Miller  
Secured his men, and though with cracked air-tank,  
And all the spare oars rent in hull-collision,  
The boat came down the wind to the lee flank  
Of the liner where the remnant with their clothes  
Sodden and shrunk were, like drowsed children,  
gathered  
To the cargo hammocks, twelve of them, then Tose,  
The captain, who had worn his buttons well.

His bread had now returned upon the waters,  
For ten years back, as later stories tell,  
He had while master of another vessel,  
Rescued a Philadelphian bark in seas  
And winds only less full of death than these.

Now open throttles! Now my lads, YOHO!  
The *twenty-five*, by Neptune, every one!  
Captain to deck-hand, every mother's son  
Aboard! GOOD-BYE, GOOD-BYE, The ANTINOE!  
The sea had closed on forward deck and bow;  
Let flag and mast and funnel settle now.  
Frost-bitten, thinned in blood, gnarled to the bone,  
But everyone surviving. All were brought  
Below where ocean miracles are wrought,  
Where the hearts' furnaces are stoked and blown,

Where men are shepherded in the old way  
Of the sea, where drowned men come to life, they say,  
Under such calls to breathe as never come  
To those that roam the uplands of this earth:—  
The hearty comradeship of a foc's'le berth,  
With treble-folded blankets on their numb  
Bodies, with balsam thawing out the brain,  
Hot milk and coffee piping down their dumb  
Constricted throats and mustard scattering pain,—  
When cold half-foundered bellies steam again  
Under the red authority of rum.

The siren! Never did a whistle blow  
Upon a ship at sea like this before.  
The notes came from a silver throat aglow  
With life and triumph. Steady blast to roar  
Rising to pitch and volume that would crow  
The daybreak in. A shorter blast,  
A mimic of halloo, followed by fast  
Merry little runs in tremolo,  
And then again with open throat the long  
Insistent call with pauses, thrills and strong  
Leaping crescendos.

Vital, sound and steady,  
For the first hour in days was heard to start  
The normal rhythm of the liner's heart;  
Her bearings bathed, her boilers breathed and ready  
For the ports of England. The fifth morning found her  
With high gales still and white seas all around her,  
But clean in every valve and with the main  
Play of her steam free on each turbine-vane.

Another day and the back of the storm was broken.  
The snow and hail had ceased; the clouds rode high;  
And though the wind remained, the glass gave token  
Of fairer weather. Through a rift of sky  
A level shaft, the first one for the week,  
Quivered on an edge of cloud, then struck  
A line of foam making for the grey peak  
Of a kingpost, then to waterline from truck,  
Till from the starboard taffrail up the span  
Of the hull, it reached the lettering where it ran  
In crimson coronation of her name,  
As if a god might thus salute the deed,  
And ratify the venture with the screed  
Of an aurora milled in solar flame.

The Lizard Point, and now the Eddystone!

Meanwhile a nation which was never spared  
The discipline of waters, had prepared  
Her subjects' hearts from foc's'le to throne  
With this Atlantic record to attest  
The valour of the eagle from the west,  
In bringing home her brood of castaways.  
For there had come through radiogram and wire  
As high romance as any since the days,  
When Grecian sails and the triremes of Tyre  
Hailed Carthaginian ships upon the bays  
Of the Aegean. So she entered Plymouth,  
With crusted funnel, twisted rails, scoured clean  
By salt on every deck, and overdue;  
Yet with the bearing of a Viking Queen,—  
Prerogative of life within her hand.

She anchored in the roadstead, while the crew  
Of the wrecked ship were taken to the land.  
The nation gave its thanks on board; and she,  
Soon ready for completion of her run,  
Swung out the Sound, with her day's work well done,  
And in an hour was on the Channel sea.

\* \* \* \* \*

BY E. J. PRATT

NEWFOUNDLAND VERSE  
THE WITCHES' BREW  
TITANS  
THE IRON DOOR  
VERSES OF THE SEA (Preparing)

[The end of *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe* by E. J. (Edwin John Dove) Pratt]