

TH' NIPPERWOMAN

I SEE her black shawl mid th' butts
Clutched tight erpon her breast,
I see her black cloud full uv ruts
Er shamin' off its best,
I see her pinched an' wrinkled face
Er quizzing uv th' crew,
An' this ter-nigh is ole Mart Place,
That once wuz Marthay True.

I see her lookin' down th' deck
Ter git some welcome nod,
Or still perchance th' courage beck
Ter put her feet erboard.
I know her arms are tired out
Er holdin' uv th' string,
Fer ev'ry one is knitted stought
Ter pace th' haddickin'.

Oh, Marthay True uv long ergo,
Could you have looked ter see
Yer rosy cheeks an' eyes erglow
Come cryin' back ter thee,
Could you have looked ter see each braid
Thin twisted stran's uv snow,
I know yer would ter God have prayed
Fer ankrige long ergo.

Oh, Marthay True that bird-like sang,
An' twined th' red rose high,
An bade my boyhood's heart ter hang
Er love-light in thine eye,
Could you have known th' years would
fling
Yer, stranded wreck uv Time,
Ter sell with ev'ry knitted ring
Er dead heart's silent chime,

Er Nipper woman in th' cold,
Unnoticed an' forlorn,
Mid fisher faces sad an' bold,
With hearts bruised like yer own,
I know yer would ter God have prayed
Fer ankrige long ere this,
Than rather been by Fate errayed
Er thing fer chance ter kiss.

O, Marthay True, we laugh an' woo,
An' twine th' red rose high,
An prate, an' tell what we will do,
With laughter in our eye;
But way down in our hearts we know
Time's but er fickle thing,
An' ere life's winds begin ter blow
Come grief an' sufferein'.

Oh, Marthay True, we laugh an' woo,
An' twine th' red rose high,
An prate, an' tell what we will do,
With laughter in our eye;
But soon, too soon, our castles fall,
Our gay ships drink th' sea,
An' what should been joy's merry call
Jest tears fer memory.

Oh, Marthay True, God wot that thou
Meet luck with all th' fleet,
An if er kind word will endow
I'll speak it quick an' neat.
I know er fisher's tender spot
Is ankered in his heart,
Fer once with Christ they threw th' lot,
An' hauled er goodly part.

Oh, Marthay True, yer tale is told.
Th' hearts are tried an' staunch,
An, they have trawled er sum uv gold
Ter speed yer in joy's launch.
God wot that thou mayst happy be.
Jest keep yer sad heart bright,
An' He will steer yer down Life's sea
Ter find Hope's port erlight.

Nipper woman: one of a class of women who knit and sell to the crews of the fleet the woolen nippers worn to prevent chafing of the fishing lines. It is an industry pursued in the winter and sold to the firms and the crews in the early spring, at the fitting out or in the fall at the "shifting of voyages."

Nippers: when the trawl gets caught, --"hung up," in fishing vernacular,--mittens are removed and the trawls are hauled in with a pair of nippers, bracelets of knitted wool or cloth held in the palm of the hand, creased to allow of a better hold of the line.

Clarence Manning Falt,
Wharf and Fleet, Th' Nipper woman,
p. 37-38, 1902