

Classic Poetry Series

Harry Kemp
- poems -

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Harry Kemp(15 December 1883 – 8 August 1960)

Harry Hibbard Kemp was an American poet and prose writer of the twentieth century. He was known as (and promoted himself as) "the "Vagabond Poet, the Villon of America, the Hobo Poet, or the Tramp Poet," and was a well-known popular literary figure of his era, the "hero of adolescent Americans."

Life and Work

Kemp was born in Youngstown, Ohio, the only son of a candymaker. He was raised by his grandmother, in a house by the local train yards. At the age of seventeen he left home to become a common seaman; after returning to the United States he traveled across the country by riding the rails as a hobo. He later attended the University of Kansas, and while a student he began publishing verse in newspapers and magazines. He spent much of his maturity traveling; he stayed in a number of planned communities for varying lengths of time, then wrote autobiographical novels about his experiences. Kemp's *Tramping on Life: An Autobiographical Narrative* (1922) was one of the best selling "tramp autobiographies" of the 1900-1939 period. When not traveling he was a regular denizen of Greenwich Village in New York City and Provincetown on Cape Cod in Massachusetts, where he was associated with the Provincetown Players. There is a street named for him, Harry Kemp Way, in Provincetown, MA. Harry Kemp was also known as the "poet of the dunes." Kemp lived on and off in a shack in the dunes of Provincetown, Cape Cod for a period of about 40 years, and he died there in 1960. A 1934 Kemp poem titled, "The Last Return," was written for the Coast Guard men who have steadfastly worked to save the lives of those shipwrecked on Cape Cod's coast.

Kemp had a knack for self-promotion, what he called "the Art of Spectacularism," and early learned to collaborate with and manipulate journalists to attract attention to his work. He spent time in Paris in the early 1920s, along with the more famous members of the Lost Generation.

Kemp knew many of the bohemian and progressive literary and cultural figures of his generation, including [Elbert Hubbard](http://www.poemhunter.com/elbert-hubbard/), Upton Sinclair, [Ida Tarbell](http://www.poemhunter.com/ida-m-tarbell/), Bernarr MacFadden, [Sinclair Lewis](http://www.poemhunter.com/sinclair-lewis/), [Max Eastman](http://www.poemhunter.com/max-eastman/), Eugene O'Neill, Edmund Wilson, John Dos Passos, [E. E.](http://www.poemhunter.com/edward-estlin-cummings/)

Cummings, and many others. Kemp played a role in the first stage production of O'Neill's earliest play. Kemp was physically imposing, "Tall, broad-shouldered, and robust," and gained a reputation as a lover, sometimes of other men's wives; he was involved in various scandals throughout his career. His part in Upton Sinclair's divorce was especially notorious in its day.

In addition to his original books, Kemp translated a play by Tirso de Molina as *The Love-Rogue* (1923), and edited *The Bronze Treasury* (1927), "an anthology of 81 obscure English poets." Kemp's views turned somewhat more conservative with age; he rejected leftist and anarchist sympathies and wrote approvingly of Jesus as the "divine hobo" and the "super tramp."

Kemp's reputation had declined into obscurity by the time of his death in 1960; but his role in the history of modern American literature and the American left has brought renewed interest and further publication of his work.

Critical Opinion

According to Louis Untermeyer (editor of *Modern American Poetry*), Kemp's early collections (*The Cry of Youth*, *The Passing God*) are "full of every kind of poetry except the kind one might imagine Kemp would write. Instead of crude and boisterous verse, here is precise and over-polished poetry." Untermeyer's opinion was that *Chanteys and Ballads* is "riper," with "the sense of personality more pronounced."

A Poet's Room (Greenwich Village 1912)

I have a table, cot and chair
And nothing more. The walls are bare
Yet I confess that in my room
Lie Syrian rugs rich from the loom,
Stand statues poised on flying toe,
Hang tapestries with folk a-flow
As the wind takes them to and fro,
And workman fancy has inlaid
My walls with ivory and jade.

Though opening on a New York street
Full of cries and hurrying feet
My window is a faery space
That gives on each imagined place;
Old ruins lost in a desert peace;
The broken fanes and shrines of Greece;
Aegean islands fringed with foam;
The everlasting tops of Rome;
Troy flowing red with skyward flame,
And every spot of hallowed fame.

Outside my window I can see
The sweet blue lake of Galilee,
And Carmel's purple-regioned height
And Sinai clothed with stars and night.
But this is told in confidence,
So not a word when you go hence,
For if my landlord once but knew
My attic fetched so large a view,
The churl would never rest content
Till he had raised the monthly rent.

Harry Kemp

A Sailor's Life

Oh, a sailor hasn't much to brag -
An oilskin suit and a dunnage bag.
But, howsoever humble he be,
By the Living God, he has the sea!

The long, white leagues and the foam of it,
And the heart to make a home of it,
On a ship that kicks up waves behind
Through the blazing days and tempests blind.

Oh, a sailor hasn't much to love -
But he has the huge, blue sky above
The everlasting waves around,
That wash with an eternal sound.

So bury me, when I come to die,
Where the full-sailed, heeling clippers ply;
Give up the last cold body of me,
To the only home that I have - the sea!

Harry Kemp

A Seaman's Confession Of Faith

As long as I go forth on ships that sail
The mighty seas, my faith, O Lord, won't fail;
And while the stars march onward mightily
In white, great hosts, I shall remember Thee;
I have seen men one moment all alive,
The next, gone out with none to bless or shrive
Into the unseen place where all must go, -
So, Lord, thy mercy and thy gifts I know . . .
They think me Godless, maybe, but indeed
They do not see how I have read thy creed
In flowing tides and waves that heave and run
Beyond the endless west where sinks the sun;
In the long, long night-watches I have thought
On things that neither can be sold nor bought,
Rare, priceless things; nor have I scorned nor scoffed
At thy sure might, when lost in storms aloft:
The prayer and faith of seamen will not fail
O God, my God, as long as ships do sail.

Harry Kemp

A Shining Ship

Have you ever seen a shining ship
Riding the broad-backed wave,
While the sailors pull the ropes and sing
The chantey's lusty stave?

Have you ever gazed from the headland's reach
Far out, into the blue,
To glimpse, at first a flashing mote
That to a tall ship grew,

A full-sailed ship on the great, broad sea
Heel-down and bearing home
All the romance from Homer's days
To now, across the foam?

For, purple-white in rippling dusks,
Or edged with sunset's fire, -
Behold, each ship is a phantom ship
That bears the World's Desire! . . .

O merchant, merchant seeking wares
That tip full-laden beams,
The Living God has made your fleets
His argosies for dreams,

Far-riding argosies that go
With bearded men and strong
To the world's ends for merchandise
And come back - bearing Song!

Legends and songs of Happy Isles
And fairy realms a-far
Beyond the windless gates of dawn
And the white morning star!

Harry Kemp

A Whaler's Confession

Three long years a-sailing, three long years a-whaling,
Kicking through the ice floes, caught in calm or gale,
Lost in flat Sargasso seas, cursing at the prickly heat,
Going months without a sight of another sail.

I've learned to hate the Mate, and I've always cursed the Captain.
I hate the bally Bo'sun, and all the bally crew, -
And, sometimes, in the night-watch, the long and starry night-watch,
Queer thoughts have run wild in my head - I've even hated you!

You, that have been my shipmate for fifteen years of sailing,
From Peru to Vladivostock, from England to Japan . . .
Which shows how months of sailing, when even pals go whaling,
Can get upon the bally nerves of any bally man.

I'm glad our nose points homeward, points home again to Bristol, -
I'm glad for Kate who's waiting, far down a little lane:
I'll sign her for a long cruise, a longer cruise than this one,
And seal the bargain like a man, before I sail again.

Yes, I will still go sailing; yes, I will still go whaling:
I've done a lot of thinking along of love and hate . . .
For signing on a woman's a cruise that lasts a lifetime -
And I'd rather hate a hundred crews than take on hating Kate!

Three long years of whaling . . . yes, a lifetime sailing,
Kicking through the ice floes, caught in calm or gale,
Lost in flat Sargasso seas, cursing at the prickly heat,
Going months without a sight of another sail!

Harry Kemp

A Wheat-Field Fantasy

As I sat on a Kansas hilltop,
While, far away from my,
Rippled the lights and shadows
Dancing across acres of wheat,

The sound of the grain as it murmured
Wrought a wonder with me___.
It turned from the voice of the Prairie
Into the roar of the sea.

And I saw not the running wind-waves,
But an ocean that washed below
In ridging and crumbling breakers
And ceaseless motion and flow;

Then, as a valley is flooded
With opaline mists at morn
Which momentarily flow asunder
And leave green spaces of corn___

There strangest vision
Up from that'ancient sea.___
'Twas not the pearl-white Venus
Anadyomene,

'Twas the bobbing ears of horses
And a head with a great hat crowned
And a binder that burst upon me i
Sudden, as from the ground

And the waves gave place to the wheatlands
Myriad-touched 'with gold___
Then my soul felt century-weary
And untold aeons old;

For a rock-ledge sloped beside me
And the lime-traced shells it bore
Had plied that ancient ocean
Each with a sentient oar.

Harry Kemp

At Sea I Learned The Weather

At sea I learned the weather,
At sea I learned to know
That waves raged not forever,
Winds did not ever blow.

I learned that, 'mid the thunder,
Was nothing might avail
But lying to and riding
The storm with scanted sail,
Knowing that calm would follow
Filled full of golden light
Though hail and thunder deafened
The watches of the night.

And, now today I'm sailing
The changing seas no more,
But tied up to a woman
And snug and safe ashore,
With pipe and 'baccy handy
And Sal still loving me -
I tell you that I'm thankful
For things I learned at sea!

Harry Kemp

Blind

The Spring blew trumpets of color;
Her Green sang in my brain --
I heard a blind man groping
"Tap -- tap" with his cane;

I pitied him in his blindness;
But can I boast, "I see"?
Perhaps there walks a spirit
Close by, who pities me, --

A spirit who hears me tapping
The five-sensed cane of mind
Amid such unguessed glories --
That I am worse than blind.

Harry Kemp

Chanteys

These are the songs that we sing with crowding feet,
Heaving up the anchor chain,
Or walking down the deck in the wind and sleet
And in the drizzle and rain.

These are the songs that we sing beneath the sun,
Or under the stars of night,
And they help us through with the work to be done
When the moon climbs into sight.

These are the songs that tell our inmost hopes
While we pull and haul a-main,
The bo'sun booming as we lean with the ropes,
And we, bringing in the refrain.

Harry Kemp

Clipper Days (A Song From Snug Harbor)

I am eighty years old and somewhat,
But I give to God the praise
That they made a sailor of me
In the good old Clipper Days

When men loved ships like women,
And going to sea was more
Than signing on as a deckhand
And scrubbing a cabin floor,

Or chipping rust from iron
And painting . . . and chipping again . . .
In the days of Clipper Sailing
The sea was the place for
men
:

You could spy our great ships running
White-clouded, tier on tier;
You could hear their trampling thunder
As they leaned to, racing near;

And it was 'heigh and ho, my lad,'
And 'we are outward bound,' -
And we sang full many a chantey
As we walked the capstan round,

And we sang full many a chantey
As we drove through wind and wet
To the music of Five Oceans
Ringing in my memory yet . . .

Go drive your dirty freighters
That fill the sky with reek, -
But we - we took in sky-sails
High as mountain peaks;

Go, fire your sweaty engines
And watch your pistons run, -

We had the wind to serve us,
The living wind, my son,

And we didn't need propellers
That kicked a mess about,
But we hauled away with chanteys
Or we let the great sails out . . .

And I'm eighty year old and somewhat -
And I give to God the praise
That they made a sailor of me
In the good old Clipper Days!

Harry Kemp

Farewell

Tell them, O Sky-born, when I die
With high romance to wife,
That I went out as I had lived,
Drunk with the joy of life.

Yea, say that I went to death
Serene and unafraid,
Still loving Song, but loving more
Life, of which Song is made!

Harry Kemp

Fo'C'sle Comradeship

There's not much in the fo'c'sle of a ship
But old sea boots and chests that stand in rows
While up above a smoky lantern glows,
And hanging from a peg the oilskins drip,

Sometimes in storms the water rushes in;
Sometimes we stifle for a breath of air;
Yet somehow comradeship gets being there
And common hardship makes the stranger kin . . .

Blood-brothers we become, but not in peace, -
Still ready to exchange the lie and blow;
Just like the sea our quarrels rise and cease:
We've never a dull moment down below . . .

But set upon us in a tavern brawl
You'll find that you will have to fight us all.

Harry Kemp

Going Down In Ships

Going down to sea in ships
Is a glorious thing,
Where up and over the rolling waves
The seabirds wing;

Oh, there's nothing more to my heart's desire
Than a ship that goes
Head-on through marching seas
With streaming bows:

Would you hear the song of the viewless winds
As they walk the sky?
Come down to sea when the storm is on
And the men stand by.

Would you see the sun as it walked abroad
On God's First Day?
Then come where dawn makes sea and sky
A gold causeway.

Oh, it's bend the sails on the black cross-yards
For the day dies far
And up a windless space of dusk
Climbs the evening star . . .

Now there's gulf on foaming gulf of stars
That lean so clear
That it seems the bastions of heaven
Are bright and near

And that, any moment, the topmost sky
May froth and swim
With an incredible bivouac
Of seraphim . . .

O wide-flung dawn, O mighty day
And set of sun! . . .
O all you climbing stars of God,
Oh, lead me on!

Oh, it's heave the anchor, walk and walk
The capstan 'round -
Far out I hear the giant sea's
World-murmuring sound!

Harry Kemp

Good-Bye! (A Chantey To Be Sung At The Capstan)

Good-bye to Dirty Kate's saloon -
Walk 'er round!
As we slither past the last sand dune -
Walk 'er round!
We're outward bound!

Good-bye to all our friends in town -
Walk 'er round!
Our friends - while we had half a crown -
Walk 'er round!
We're outward bound!

Good-bye to the rum that scrapes like wire -
Walk 'er round!
And whiskey with its claws of fire -
Walk 'er round!
We're outward bound!

Good-bye to the gravestones on the hill -
Walk 'er round!
Above the town where we got our fill -
Walk 'er round!
We're outward bound!

Our fill of the kind that cry 'Give, give!' -
Walk 'er round!
Of the people that say 'We've got to live!' -
Walk 'er round!
We're outward bound!

Good-bye, till we come to get trimmed again -
Walk 'er round!
For it's always the way with sailormen -
Walk 'er round!
We're outward bound!
For there's something about this going to sea -
Walk 'er round!

That makes a fellow big and free -

Walk 'er round!
We're outward bound!
So lean on your bars and walk 'er round -
Walk 'er round!

There's a good stiff wind, and we're outward bound! . . .
Thank God, boys, we're outward bound! -
Walk 'er round!
We're outward bound!

Harry Kemp

Hesperides

Beyond the blue rim of the world,
Washed round with languid-lapsing seas,
Where the Wind's wings were ever furled
The Ancients dreamed Hesperides.

Ship after ship each age sent forth
To find the Islands of the Blest;
The loosed winds drove them south and north,
But west they weathered, ever west.

Sky after sky they dropped behind,
These mighty-handed, bearded men,
Till, seeking what they could not find,
They rounded upward, home again.

A desultory waif of time
Flying adventure from my mast,
'Twas thus I voyaged every clime
To come back to myself at last!

Harry Kemp

Jim

We couldn't make him out; he seldom spoke;
We never caught him smiling at a joke -
And yet he was a decent lad at work:
On watch or off, he was the last to shirk -
So that, among ourselves, we came to say,
'Jim, he's alright, he's only got his way.'
Yet, somehow, in each storm he didn't care.
His life or death seemed only God's affair -
So when the cry came, in Nor'west Blow,
'Man overboard!' we each one seemed to
know
;
From the main topsail yardarm he had gone
Into the boiling seas . . . the ship held on;
There was no saving him in such a gale.
Then, when the dawn came, wide, and grey, and pale,
We brought his sea-chest aft with all it stored
(The custom when a man goes overboard).
It held the usual things that sailors own;
But at the bottom, in a box, alone,
We found a woman's picture - and we knew,
Now, why he'd been so offish with the crew -
He'd written it as plain as plain could be -
'She went and married HIM instead of me!'

Harry Kemp

Kansas

Let other countries glory in their past,
But Kansas glories in her days to be,
In her horizons limitless and vast,
Her plains that storm the senses like
the sea;
She has no ruins gray that men revere -
Her time is 'Now,' Her heritage
is 'Here.'

Harry Kemp

Said The Captain To Me

'Nothing but damn fools sail the sea,'
Said the Captain to me.
'I have a young son,' says the Captain to me,
'I'm damned if he ever shall sail the sea!'

Harry Kemp

Sailormen

When our ship gets home again, after cruising up and down,
Where the old, familiar hills crowd above the little town,
Oh, we'll reef the weary sails in the shelter of the bay,
And we'll find it just the same as the hour we went away
With the steeple of the church through the tree tops peering out,
With same accustomed streets, and the friends we knew, about.

Oh, we'll sit before the hearth and we'll smoke a pipe or so,
And we'll have a pot of ale at the inn before we go,
And we'll kiss the prettiest girls, and we'll tell the children tales
Of the countries that we've seen, of the shipwrecks and the gales,
Till the cargo's battened down, and we're outward bound once more
While the sea goes rushing back to the far, receding shore.

Harry Kemp

Seaside Talkers (Provincetown Summer Of 1917)

They drank the bitter, salt wine of the sea,
They breathed up drowning bubbles from below
While we sat in the storm's red after-glow
Discussing Art and Love - sipping tea.
I was a poet, he, an artist; she,
A famous actress . . . lightly to and fro
We shuttled epigrams as salesmen show
Rich silks that change in colors momentarily.

And while the fishers clung to planks and spars
And rode the huge backs of waves, we sat
Beneath a young night full of summer stars:
And we discussed of life this way and that
Until we felt, when we arose for bed,
That there was nothing left had not been said.

Harry Kemp

Shanghaied

Shanghaied! . . . I swore I'd stay ashore
And sail the wide, wide seas no more! . . .
Shanghaied! Shanghaied!
Shanghaied - with pals I've never known,
And my heart's as heavy as a stone . . .
Shanghaied! . . . Shanghaied!

Yes, here's the wide, grey sea again
And the work that takes the souls from men,
Shanghaied! . . . Shanghaied!
Yes, yon's the mist they call the shore,
And here's the ropes I must haul once more -
Shanghaied! . . . Shanghaied!

Shanghaied - and on a ship I hate,
With a cur for a captain, a brute for a mate . . .
Shanghaied! . . . Shanghaied!
Oh, when I set my foot ashore
I'll drink no more . . . and I'll sail no more!
Shanghaied! . . . Shanghaied!

Harry Kemp

Ship's Glamour

When there wakes any wind to shake this place,
This wave-hemmed atom of land on which I dwell,
My fancy conquers time, condition, space, -
A trivial sound begets a miracle!

Last night there walked a wind, and, through chink,
It made one pan upon another clink
Where each hung close together on a nail -
Then fantasy put forth her fullest sail;

A dawn that never dies came back to me:
I heard two ship's bells echoing far at sea!
As perfect as a poet dreams a star
It was a full-rigged ship bore down the wind,
Piled upward with white-crowding spar on spar:
The wonder of it never leaves my mind.
We passed her moving proudly far at sea;
Night was not quite yet gone, nor day begun;
She stood, a phantom of sheer loveliness,
Against the first flush of an ocean dawn;
Then at the elevation of the sun,
Her ship's bell faintly sounded the event,
While ours with a responding tinkle went.

The beauty life evokes, outlasting men,
It fills my world from sea to sky again;
It opens on me like a shining scroll -
The ghost of God that ever haunts the soul!

Harry Kemp

The Beach Comber

I'd like to return to the world again,
To the dutiful, work-a-day world of men, -
For I'm sick of the beach-comber's lot,
Of the one volcano flaming hot,
With the snow round its edge and the fire in its throat,
And the tropical island that seems a-float
Like a world set in space all alone in the sea . . .
How I wish that a ship, it would stop for me.
I'm sick of the brown girl that loves me, I'm sick
Of the cocoanut groves, - you can't take me too quick
From this place, though it's rich in all nature can give . . .
For I want to return where it's harder to live,
Where men struggle for life, where they work and find sweet
Their rest after toil, and the food that they eat . . .
What? A ship's in the offing? . . . dear God, let me hide, -
They're in need of a sailor, are waiting for the tide
To put off? . . . I will hide where the great cliff hangs sheer -
Give 'em mangoes and goats, and don't tell 'em I'm here!

Harry Kemp

The Chantey Of The Cook (Dithyramb Of A Discontented Crew)

The Devil take the cook, that old grey-bearded fellow,
Yo ho, haul away!
Who feeds us odds and ends and biscuits whiskered yellow,
And the home port's a thousand miles away.

The Devil take the cook, that dirty old duffer,
Yo ho, haul away!
Each day he makes the captain fatter and bluffer,
But we'll have to eat hardtack for many a day.

The ship-biscuit's moldy and the spuds we get are rotten,
Yo ho. haul away!
And the tinned goods that's dished up is seven years forgotten,
Yo ho. haul away

And each, in his heart, has marked the cook for slaughter,
And it won't do him any good to pray.
For the coffee's only chickory half-soaked in luke-warm water,
Yo ho. haul away!

It's put on your best duds and join the delegation;
Yo ho, haul away!
We're aft to ask the captain for a decent ration,
And to drop the cook at Botany Bay.

Look here, you cabin boy, what has set you laughin'?
Yo ho, haul away!
Don't tell us no lies or we'll clout your ears for chafin'
For we're not a lot of horses that can live on hay.

What's this you're tellin'! Is it plum duff and puddin'?
Yo ho, haul away!
Why not make it roast beef an' let it be a good 'un?
For plum duff and rum's not a feast for every day.

Oh, it ain't the cook's fault that we eat one day in seven.
Yo ho, haul away!

It's the owners of the ship - may they never get to heaven,
No matter how hard they pray.

It's the owners of the ship that give us meat that's yellow,
Yo ho, haul away!
And after all, the cook's a mighty decent fellow,
Though we'll have to eat rotten grub for many a day.

O Lord up in heaven, when their souls and bodies sever,
Yo ho, haul away!
May the owners squat in Hell, gnawing at salt-horse forever,
And the grub that they give us every day.

Excepting for one thing, oh Lord God in heaven,
Yo ho, haul away!
Don't let them have no plum duff one day in seven,
(all together with great vigor!)
But forever and forever and unto eternity the truck that
we're fed every day, Amen!

Harry Kemp

The Doldrums (A Still-Life Picture)

The sails hang dead, or they lift and flap like a cornfield scarecrow's coat,
And the seabirds swim abreast of us like ducks that play, a-float,
And the sea is all an endless field that heaves and falls a-far
As if the earth were taking breath on some strange, alien star,
For there are miles and miles of weed that tramp around and 'round
Till a fellow's tempted to step out and try if it's the ground.
And, sometimes when we strike a space that's clear of wild sea-grass
Our faces look up true and smooth as from a looking glass -
For unwrinkled as a baby's smile the ocean lies about
And a pin would break in ripples if we only cast one out . . .
But the skipper isn't happy for there's not a wind that blows, -
And beware the Mate's belaying pin as up the deck he goes,
For the ship, she's rolling, rolling like a nigger on a spree
And the cargo's almost shifted as we wallow in the sea
Because, out somewhere miles away a storm is waking hell . . .
And up smooth lifts of bubbling weed we ride the rolling swell . . .
Oh, each inch of us is crawling with the itch of prickly heat;
We can hear our own blood throbbing like a Chinese tom-tom's beat
And we catch a voice that's lifted, though it hardly seems in prayer -
It's the poor old cook that's cursing in the boiling galley there . . .
Oh, the region of the doldrums, for the devil it was made
And all decent seamen hate it as they pray for winds of trade
As they flounder toward the trade-winds where the sails lift full and free
And once more the prow runs onward foaming through the open sea.

Harry Kemp

The Endless Lure

When I was a lad I went to sea
And they made a cabin boy of me.

Yo ho, haul away, my bullies!

We'd hardly put out from the bay
When my knees sagged in and my face turned grey;

So I went to the captain and I implored
That he'd let the pilot take me aboard,
And fetch me back to the land again
Where the earth was sure for the feet of men . . .

But the Captain, he laughed out strong, and said,
'You'll follow the sea, lad, till you're dead;
For it gets us all - the sky and the foam
And the waves and the wind, - till a ship seems home.'

When I shipped as an A.B. before the mast
I swore each voyage would be my last . . .
Was always vowing, and meant it too,
That I'd
never sign
with another crew . . .

You tell me 'The Castle' is outward bound,
An old sky-sailor, for Puget Sound?
'Too old!' . . . but I know the sea like a book . . .
Well, I've heard that your 'Old Man' needs a cook! . . .

Yes, I could rustle for twenty men . . .
So, God be praised, you can use me, then? . . .
Oh, there's only a few years left for me,
And I want to die, and be buried at - sea!

Harry Kemp

The Fog

The fog fell: lamps were filled and lit;
They glimmered in mid-day, -
And, step by step, men went abroad
Into a world all grey.

Harry Kemp

The Girl That Married Another Man

Oh, it's easy come and it's easy go
With most of the little girls I know,-

Haul away, my bullies!

And when you come, and when you part,
They never take it deep to heart,-

Haul away, my bullies!

Oh, there was Martha, at Liverpool,
She never heard of the golden rule,-

Haul away, my bullies!

And there was Gulla, the Temple Girl,
And Minnie, and Marie, and Pearl,-

Haul away, my bullies!

In Rotterdam, Marseilles, Orleans,-
And each of them taught me what love means;

Haul away, my bullies!

But there is a girl that stands apart,
I can never get her out of my heart,-

Haul away, my bullies!

Oh, I try to forget, but I never can,
The girl that married another man,-

Haul away, my bullies!

Harry Kemp

The Hummingbird

The sunlight speaks. And it's voice is a bird:

It glitters half-guessed half seen half-heard

Above the flower bed. Over the lawn ...

A flashing dip and it is gone.

And all it lends to the eye is this -

A sunbeam giving the air a kiss.

Harry Kemp

The Remedy

When you've failed with ordered people, when you've sunk neck-deep again
In the sluggish wash and jetsam of the slackened tides of men,
Don't get old and mean and bitter, - there's a primal remedy -
Just take a ship to sea, my lad, just take a ship to sea.

There are shipmen grey and aged but still full of ancient mirth,
And they drew their joy of living, not from rooting in the earth,
But from striking our forever with a sail that's never furled
And by seeing all the oceans and the wonder of the world;
In the dim, Phoenician days and in the wild sea-times of old
Do you think they only voyaged for the red of shining gold?
No, they slid beyond the sky-line for they felt it good to be
On a ship that tramped with thunder down the highways of the sea.

When you've drunk the lees of failure, when you've fought and never won,
When you've cursed the stale recurrence of the certain, weary sun
And the daily, fruitless struggle pledging youth for usury,
Come, and cast the world behind you, and take ship for open sea;

All you'll need will be your dunnage and your knife upon your hip,
And you'll find a bunk that waits you in the fo'c'sle of a ship,
And you'll find the wind about you and the everlasting sky
Leaning huge from four horizons as the flying scud blows by -
And you'll find the ancient healing, ever waiting, ever free,
That all men have found forever in the sailing of the sea.

Harry Kemp

The Shipwrecked Sailor

There blossomed into golden day another rosy morn:
The ship-wrecked sailor woke, and watched again, of hope forlorn,
From his high, purple-misted peak, a rag about his hip:
His only dream, his native land - his only prayer, a ship!
The fringe of surf laced in and out along the shell-strewn shore;
Beside the reef strange creatures sailed plying a sentient oar,
And, great and wide, the sea rolled far in azure distant dim
And laved the edges of the sky with its blue-washing rim.
The sailor thought of paven streets in a far smoky town
Where day and night the cable-cars went booming up and down:
Each little common thought of men smote through him like a dart,
And memories of a woman winged like white birds through his heart.

Harry Kemp

The Unknown

Here, under sacred ground,
The Unknown lies:
Dumb be the earth around
And dumb the skies
Before His laureled Fame—
Yea, let sublime
Silence conduct His Name
Unspelled, till Time,
Bowed with Eternity,
Goes back to God
Abandoning earth to be
At life's last exequy
Man's final clod....
Here, under sacred ground,
The Unknown lies:
Dim armies gather 'round
His sacrifice:
Kings, Princes, Presidents
Attest His worth:
The Generals bow before
His starry earth:
In the World's heart inscribed
His love, his fame—
He leads the Captains with
His Unknown Name!

Harry Kemp

The Wreck

Seared bone-white by the glare of summer weather,
Cast side-long, on the barren beach she lies,
She who once brought the earth's far ends together
And ransacked East and West for merchandise.

The sea-gulls cluster on her after-deck
Resting from the near seas that wash and fall . . .
But, I have heard, at night this side-cast wreck
(When all the belfry bells at midnight call)

Puts up sail and goes out past mortal seeing:
Once more the oceans break beneath her will
And she resumes the breath of her old being;
She lives the dreams that slumber in her still.

Thrilling as down the windy Dark she slopes,
Ecstatic, as her sails grow great with wind -
She feels the seamen walking with her ropes,
The harbour dropping like a star behind.

Harry Kemp

Then

When all the sea's high ships
Have dropped beyond my sky
And life's trumpet leaves my lips
And women pass me by -
Dear God, let me die!

Harry Kemp

There's Nothing Like A Ship At Sea

There's nothing like a ship at sea with all her sails full-spread
And the ocean thundering backward 'neath her mounting figurehead
And the bowsprit plunging starward and the nosing deep again.
'There's nothing like a ship at sea,' sing ho, ye sailormen.

Oh, a little wayside tavern is a jolly thing to know
Where there's mugs and waiting tables and an open fire a-glow;
And it's good to have a song to sing at work as well as play;
And it's pleasant to have memories of boyhood's yesterday;

And they say a tried companion walking down an endless road
Makes the heavy footfall lighter, shares the burden of the load . . .
And I see my sweetheart walking with her head held proud and high
And I wish that I was with her where the bells ring in the sky . . .

But there's nothing like a ship at sea with her sails full-spread
And the ocean thundering backward 'neath her mounting figurehead.
Oh, it's once you be a sailor you must go to sea again.
'There's nothing like a ship at sea,' sing ho, ye sailormen.

Harry Kemp

When Ham And Sham And Japhet: A Sailor's Song

When Ham and Shem and Japhet
They walked the capstan round
Upon the strangest vessel,
Was ever outward bound,
The music of their voices
From wave to welkin rang:
They sang the first sea-chantey
That sailors ever sang:
They sang of towns they'd been to,
Of girls that they had known,
Of what they'd done as children,
Of how the years had flown,
Of fights they'd had, and friendships,
Of many a hearty spree -
The same as every sailor
That sails upon the sea . . .

Now Noah, he was sitting
Alone and glum, below,
A-puzzling just a little
Why things were ordered so,
(For, though his soul accepted
What God commanded still,
At times he knew misgivings
As every good man will) -
When up above he heard them
A-singing, outward bound,
And walking, walking, walking,
Walking the capstan round -
Then, just as quick, his worry,
Passed like a gust of wind,
And he shinned up the ladder
And left his doubts behind,
And with his great beard flowing,
His grey robe pulled a-skew,
He walked the capstan with them:
He started singing too!

Harry Kemp

Wind-Jammer's Song (1845 Clipper Days)

All hands on deck, below there!
The storm is coming soon,
The clouds tramp on in panic
Across the swirling moon.

The wind pipes in the halyards,
We lean with scanted sail;
Now, with a leap, we're riding
The first rush of the gale;

The lubbers in their cabins
Crouch close and pray for life:
The young man free and single,
The old man, by his wife;

And one would give his fortune,
And one, his love so fair,
For solid earth to stand on
If but a furlong square.

It's up the shrouds, my hearties,
And reef the gansells tight, -
The blow that we are having
May blow the world from sight . . .

Tomorrow, lads, the landsmen,
How they will strut and lie, -
And we - we'll squirt tobacco
And wink the other eye,

Saying, as we plunge onward
With tier on tier of sail -
'I've seen worse in my time, sir, -
Yet - 'twas a proper gale!

Harry Kemp