

A NET NEEDLE

T. B. A. ALLISON

Reinhardt made it, old Jim Reinhardt,
Made it for me, just to keep;
Still, I use it, when my thoughts start
Seaward with the ebb-tide's sweep,

Till I hear the ebb-tide mingle
With the flood along the Bay,
Pounding on each ledge and shingle
From Hell Point to Port Medway.

Yes, Jim made it,—not that other
Reinhardt, in that village store,
Safe above the farthest smother
Of the surf on Dublin Shore.

Nothing kin to him, this sea dog,
Born and bred at Cape La Have,
Cured in salt and drenched in sea fog,
Seamed and tanned by wind and wave.

Nothing like to him in calling
Would you think this friend of mine,
Should you meet him, in from trawling,
With his flag set for high line.

You might take him for a pirate,
Standing there beside his wheel,
And that sheen beneath his hatch-grate
For the flash and glint of steel;

Or for peaceful smuggler, steering
Close hauled underneath the land;
Near the decks his catch appearing,
Down below his contraband.

What's he bringing? Gin, or Cognac?
Well—that's neither here nor there;
"Off the Banks" he hails, though come back
By the way of French St. Pierre.

Let it go at that, for surely
This, his needle, must not weave
Net of rumor too securely
Round his name, so, by your leave,

I'll make use of it for mending
Rents in nets of memory,
Set to catch those visions wending
Down those byways of the sea.

I can see him now, shore-fishing,
Leaning on an old man's oar;
See in his blue eyes the wishing
He were on the Labrador;

Or once more the old deck pacing,
Homeward bound with topsails bent,
Frozen-herring laden, racing
All the way from Hearts Content.

But his deep-sea days are over,
No more Georges Banks for him;
Now, with Simon Publicover,
His old dory-mate, old Jim

Does his fishing off the Islands,
Never far from home again;
Just so he can keep those highlands
Sighted over on the Main;

Those green hilltops, ever present
Landmarks for ships great and small,
Fronting seaward from Mt. Pleasant
And the heights of Conquerall.

Then, if fog be thick, or snowfall
On his fish-flakes, out he gets
Gauge and needle, seine and twine-ball,
Well content to mend his nets.

There he goes with Steevie Carson,
I can tell his oar's short reach;
It's his turn to fetch the Parson
From the end of Romkey's Beach

To St. Peter's cliff-perched, lonely
House of Prayer,—Jim prayed there too
Of a Sunday morning, only—
Jim would sleep the sermon through;

Waking though in time to gather
Up those copper offerings, whence
One penurious curate rather
Thought they favoured Peter's Pence.

Years have gone since our leave-taking,
Gone Jim's three-score years and ten;
By this time he must be making
Friends with Christ's first Fishermen.

How we parted, with what fitting
Farewell words,—well, one forgets,
Saving that I left him sitting
On his stage-head, mending nets.

And when St. James the Apostle,
James the son of Zebedee,
Sits with Jim in Jesu's Hostel,
James will talk of Galilee;

Jim will tell of his seafaring,
How his lobster traps he sets;
And I picture them comparing
Sundry ways of mending nets.