

Racing Clippers AKA A Wool Fleet Memory

by Cicely Fox Smith 1927

I've not made much o' my life, Lord knows; I'm a has-been through an' through,
An' meanin' 's as far as I've mostly got with the things as I've meant to do;
Of muckin' my chances and blowin' my pay I reckon I've had my share,
But - I was one of the Clansman's crowd when she raced the Robin Adair.

There was Dan an' Clancy an' Liverpool Bill –an' they were the pick of the lot -
An' a Glasgow lad as skenned like mad, but his name I've clean forgot;
A big buck Swede an' a cross-eyed Scouse, an' a feller from County Clare -
Them was the chaps in the starboard watch when we raced the Robin Adair.

An' Dan was lost off the topsail yard o' the Pole Star years ago,
An' Clancy died with a knife in his side in a dive in Callao;
An' Bill he's married and livin' ashore, an' the rest of 'em's Lord knows where,
As I sailed with once in the Clansman's crowd when we raced the Robin Adair.

Neck an' neck to the Snares we was, an' then it started to blow,
An' soon the Clansman was reelin' 'em off a steady seventeen or so,
An' the skipper grinned as he paced the poop, for that was the weather for her,
An' "Ah 'm thenkin' we've seen the last," says he, "o' their wonderful Robin Adair!"

But there come a time as we climbed the Trade, the day was just begun
When we sighted a ship hull down astern an' comin' along like fun,
An' the Old Man clapped his glass to his eye, an' you should ha' heard him swear,
For out o' the South with a bone in her mouth up romps the Robin Adair.

We started pilin' the canvas on, and it 'ad to stop there too;
It was breezin' up when we sighted 'er first, an' afore it was dark it blew!
I've seen some carryin' on in my time But I tell you he made me stare
Crackin' it on in the Biscay gales to beat the Robin Adair.

But we made the London river at last - it was twelve by St. George's clock,
I counted the chimes as we made her fast to the buoys in the London Dock -
An' we'd won the race from the width o' the world with the tail of a tide to spare -
That was the way of it, long ago, when we raced the Robin Adair!

The grand ol' ship's have gone to chips this fourteen year and more;
They sold 'er away to a Dago bunch, an' the blighters run 'er ashore;
An' somewheres round by the Ramirees an' south o' the Straits o' Le Maire,
With the fishes cruisin' among her ribs, lies drowned the Robin Adair.

There ain't no racin' clippers now, nor never will be again,
And most o' the ships are gone by now, the same as most o' the men,
An' nobody left but a few old shells like us in the world to care
For the great ol' skippers an' the great ol' ships an' the great ol' days they were,
And the way they had in the Wool Fleet once when we raced the Robin Adair.