

THE LIFE-SAVER – Joseph C. Lincoln (1902)

(Dedicated to the Men in the United States Life-saving Service.)

When the Lord breathes his wrath above the bosom of the waters,
When the rollers are a-poundin' on the shore,
When the mariner's a-thinkin' of his wife and sons and daughters,
And the little home he'll, maybe, see no more;
When the bars are white and yeasty and the shoals are all a-frothin',
When the wild no'theaster's cuttin' like a knife;
Through the seethin' roar and screech he's patrollin' on the beach,—
The Gov'ment's hired man fer savin' life.

He's strugglin' with the gusts that strike and bruise him like a hammer,
He's fightin' sand that stings like swarmin' bees,
He's list'nin' through the whirlwind and the thunder and the
clamor—
A-list'nin' fer the signal from the seas;
He's breakin' ribs and muscles launchin' life-boats in the surges,
He's drippin' wet and chilled in every bone,
He's bringin' men from death back ter flesh and blood and breath,
And he never stops ter think about his own;

He's a-pullin' at an oar that is freezin' to his fingers,
He's a-clingin' in the riggin' of a wreck,
He knows destruction's nearer every minute that he lingers,
But it do'n't appear ter worry him a speck:
He's draggin' draggled corpses from the clutches of the combers—
The kind of job a common chap would shirk—
But he takes 'em from the wave and he fits 'em fer the grave,
And he thinks it's all included in his work.