

POEMS OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Until the middle of the sixteenth century, Spain was the only nation which had succeeded in establishing colonies in the New World. In 1583 Sir Humphrey Gilbert secured permission from Queen Elizabeth to set out on a voyage of discovery and colonization, for the glory of England. He landed at St. John's, Newfoundland, August 5, and established there the first English colony in North America. Then he sailed away to explore further, and met the fate described in the poem. The colony proved a failure.

SIR HUMPHREY GILBERT

[1583]

SOUTHWARD with fleet of ice
Sailed the corsair Death;
Wild and fast blew the blast,
And the east-wind was his breath.

His lordly ships of ice
Glisten in the sun;
On each side, like pennons wide,
Flashing crystal streamlets run.

His sails of white sea-mist
Dripped with silver rain;

But where he passed there were cast
Lead'n shadows o'er the main.

Eastward from Campobello
Sir Humphrey Gilbert sailed;
Three days or more seaward he bore,
Then, alas! the land-wind failed.

Alas! the land-wind failed,
And ice-cold grew the night;
And nevermore, on sea or shore,
Should Sir Humphrey see the light.

He sat upon the deck,
The Book was in his hand;
"Do not fear! Heaven is as near,"
He said, "by water as by land!"

In the first watch of the night,
Without a signal's sound,
Out of the sea, mysteriously,
The fleet of Death rose all around.

The moon and the evening star
Were hanging in the shrouds;
Every mast, as it passed,
Seemed to rake the passing clouds.

They grappled with their prize,
At midnight black and cold!
As of a rock was the shock;
Heavily the ground-swell rolled.

Southward through day and dark,
They drift in close embrace,
With mist and rain, o'er the open main;
Yet there seems no change of place.

Southward, forever southward,
They drift through dark and day;
And like a dream, in the Gulf-Stream
Sinking, vanish all away.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

With the destruction of the Armada in 1588, Spain's sea power was so shattered that the Atlantic ceased to be a battleground, English sailors could come and go with a fair degree of safety, and before long the American coast was alive with these daring and adventurous voyagers.

THE FIRST AMERICAN SAILORS

*Five fearless knights of the first renown
In Elizabeth's great array,*

*From Plymouth in Devon sailed up and down—
American sailors they;
Who went to the West,
For they all knew best
Where the silver was gray
As a moonlit night,
And the gold as bright
As a midsummer day—
A-sailing away
Through the salt sea spray,
The first American sailors.*

Sir HUMPHREY GILBERT, he was ONE
And Devon was heaven to him,
He loved the sea as he loved the sun
*And hated the Don as the Devil's limb—
Hated him up to the brim:*
In Holland the Spanish hide he tanned,
And God was with him on sea and land;
Newfoundland knew him, and all that coast
For he was one of America's host—
And now there is nothing but English speech
For leagues and leagues, and reach on reach,
From near the Equator away to the Pole;
While the billows beat and the oceans roll
On the Three Americas.

Sir FRANCIS DRAKE, and he was TWO
And Devon was heaven to him,
He loved in his heart the waters blue
*And hated the Don as the Devil's limb—
Hated him up to the brim!*
At Cadiz he singed the King's black beard,
The Armada met him and fled a-ward,
Great Philip's golden fleece he sheared;
Oregon knew him, and all that coast,
For he was one of America's host—
And now there is nothing but English speech
For leagues and leagues, and reach on reach,
From California away to the Pole;
While the billows beat and the oceans roll
On the Three Americas.

Sir WALTER RALEIGH, he was THREE
And Devon was heaven to him,
There was nothing he loved so well as the sea—
*He hated the Don as the Devil's limb—
Hated him up to the brim!*
He settled full many a Spanish score,
Full many's the banner his bullets tore
On English, American, Spanish shore;
Guiana knew him, and all that coast,
For he was one of America's host—

And now there is nothing but English speech
For leagues and leagues, and reach on reach,
From Guiana northward to the Pole;
While the billows beat and the oceans roll
On the Three Americas.

Sir RICHARD GRENVILLE, he was FOUR
And Devon was heaven to him,
He loved the waves and their windy roar
*And hated the Don as the Devil's limb—
Hated him up to the brim!*
He whipped him on land and mocked him at sea,
He laughed to scorn his sovereignty,
And with the Revenge beat his fifty-three;
Virginia knew him, and all that coast,
For he was one of America's host—
And now there is nothing but English speech
For leagues and leagues, and reach on reach,
From the Old Dominion away to the Pole;
While the billows beat and the oceans roll
On the Three Americas.

And Sir JOHN HAWKINS, he was FIVE
And Devon was heaven to him,
He worshipped the water while he was alive
*And hated the Don as the Devil's limb—
Hated him up to the brim!*
He chased him over the Spanish Main,
He scoffed and defied the navies of Spain—
His cities he ravished again and again;
The Gulf it knew him, and all that coast,
For he was one of America's host—
And now there is nothing but English speech
For leagues and leagues, and reach on reach,
From the Rio Grande away to the Pole;
While the billows beat and the oceans roll
On the Three Americas.

*Five fearless knights have filled gallant graves
This many and many a day,
Some under the willows, some under the
waves—*

*American sailors they;
And still in the West
Is their valor blest,
Where a banner bright
With the ocean's blue
And the red wrack's hue
And the sponddrift's white
Is smiling to-day
Through the salt sea spray
Upon American sailors.*

WALLACE RICE

