

# THE LAWS OF THE NAVY

(By Captain Hopwood, R. N.)

Now these are the laws of the Navy,  
Unwritten and varied they be;  
And he that is wise will observe them,  
Going down in his ship to the sea;  
As naught may outrun the destroyer,  
Even so with the law and its grip,  
For the strength of the ship is the Service,  
And the strength of the Service the ship.

Take heed what you say of your seniors,  
Be your words softly spoken or plain,  
Lest the birds of the air tell the matter  
And so ye shall hear it again.

If ye labor from morn until even'  
And meet with reproof for your toil,  
It is well — that the gun be humbled,  
The compressor must check the recoil.

On the strength of one link in the cable,  
Dependeth the might of the chain.  
Who knows when thou mayest be tested?  
So live that thou bearest the strain!

When the ship that is tired returneth,  
With signs of the sea showing plain,  
Men place her in dock for a season,  
And her speed reneweth again.  
So shalt thou, lest perchance thou grow weary  
In the uttermost parts of the sea,  
Pray for leave, for the good of the Service,  
As much and as oft as may be.

Count not upon certain promotion,  
But rather to gain it aspire;  
Though the sight-line end on the target,  
There cometh perchance a misfire.

If you win through an Arctic ice flow,  
Unmentioned at home in the press,  
Heed it not, — that man seeth the piston,  
But it driveth the ship none the less.

Canst follow the tract of the dolphin,  
Or tell where the sea swallows roam;  
Where the leviathan taketh his pastime,  
What ocean he calleth his home?  
Even so with the words of thy seniors,  
And the orders those words shall convey.  
Every law is as naught besides this one—  
"Thou shall not criticise, but obey!"  
Saith the wise, "How may I know their purpose?"  
Then acts without wherefore or why.  
Stays the fool but one moment to question,  
And the chance of his life passeth by.

Do they growl? It is well, be thou silent,  
So the work goeth forward amain;  
Lo, the gun throweth her shot to a hair's breath  
And shouteth, yet none shall complain.  
Do they growl and the work be retarded?

It is ill, speak, whatever their rank;  
The half-loaded gun also shouteth,  
But can she pierce armor with blank?

Doth the funnels make war with the paintwork?  
Do the decks to the cannon complain?  
Nay, they know that some soap or a scraper  
Unites them as brothers again.  
So ye, being Heads of Departments,  
Do your growl with a smile on your lip,  
Lest ye strive and in anger be parted,  
And lessen the might of the ship.

Dost think, in a moment of anger,  
'Tis well with thy seniors to fight?  
They prosper who burn in the morning,  
The letters they wrote overnight;

For some there be, shelved and forgotten,  
With nothing to thank for their fate,  
Save that (on a half-sheet of foolscap)  
Which a fool "Had honor to state."

Dost deem thy vessel needs gilding,  
And the dockyard forbear to supply;  
Place thy hand in thy pocket and gild her,  
There be those who have risen thereby.

If the fairway be crowded with shipping,  
Beating homeward the harbor to win,  
It is meet that, lest any should suffer,  
The steamers pass cautiously in;  
So thou, when thou nearest promotion,  
And the peak that is gilded is nigh,  
Give heed to thy words and thine actions;  
Lest others be wearied thereby.  
It is ill for the winners to worry,  
Take thy fate as it comes with a smile.  
And when thou art safe in the harbor,  
They will envy, but may not revile.

Uncharted the rocks that surround thee,  
Take heed that the channels thou learn,  
Lest thy name serve to buoy for another,  
That shoal, the Court Martial Return.  
Though Armor, the belt that protects her,  
The ship bears the scar on her side;  
It is well if the court acquit thee;  
It were best hadst thou never been tried.

Now these are the laws of the Navy,  
Unwritten and varied they be;  
And he that is wise will observe them,  
Going down in his ship to the sea.  
As the waves rise clear to the hawse pipe  
Washes aft, and is lost in the wake,  
So shall ye drop astern, all unheeded,  
Such time as the law ye forsake.

Now these are the Laws of the Navy  
And many and mighty are they.  
But the hull and the deck and the keel  
And the truck of the law is — OBEY.