

Goodwin Sands by William Canton

Did you ever read or hear
How the Aid—(God bless the Aid!
More earnest prayer than that was never prayed.)
How the lifeboat, Aid of Ramsgate, saved the London Fusilier?
With a hundred souls on board,
With a hundred and a score,
She was fast on Goodwin Sands.
(May the Lord
Have pity on all hands—
Crew and captain—when a ship's on Goodwin Sands!)
In the smother and the roar
Of a very hell of waters—hard and fast—
She shook beneath the stroke
Of each billow as it broke,
And the clouds of spray were mingled with the clouds of swirling smoke
As the blazing barrels bellowed in the blast!
And the women and the little ones were frozen dumb with fear;
And the strong men waited grimly for the last;
When—as clocks were striking two in Ramsgate town—
The little Aid came down,
The Aid, the plucky Aid—
The Aid flew down the gale
With the glimmer of the moon upon her sail;
And the people thronged to leeward; stared and prayed—
Prayed and stared with tearless eye and breathless lip,
While the little boat drew near.
Ay, and then there rose a shout—
A clamour, half a sob and half a cheer—
As the boatmen flung the lifeboat anchor out,
And the gallant Aid sheered in beneath the ship,
Beneath the shadow of the London Fusilier!
“We can carry may be thirty at a trip.”
(Hurrah for Ramsgate town!)
“Quick, the women and the children!”
O'er the side

Two sailors, slung in bowlines, hung to help the women down—
Poor women, shrinking back in their dismay
As they saw their ark of refuge, smothered up in spray,
Ranging wildly this and that way in the racing of the tide;
As they watched it rise and drop, with its crew of stalwart men,
When a huge sea swung it upward to the bulwarks of the ship,
And, sweeping by in thunder, sent it plunging down again.
Still they shipped them—nine-and-twenty, (God be blessed!)
When a man with glaring eyes
Rushed up frantic to the gangway with a cry choked in his throat—
Thrust a bundle in a sailor's ready hands.
Honest Jack, he understands—
Why, a blanket for a woman in the boat!
“Catch it, Bill!”
And he flung it with a will;
And the boatman turned and caught it, bless him!—caught it, tho' it slipped,
And, even as he caught it, heard an infant's cries,
While a woman shrieked, and snatched it to her breast—
“My baby!”
So the thirtieth passenger was shipped!
Twice, and thrice, and yet again
Flew the lifeboat down the gale
With the moonlight on her sail—
With the sunrise on her sail—
(God bless the lifeboat Aid and all her men!)
Brought her thirty at a trip
Thro' the hell of Goodwin waters as they raged around the ship,
Saved each soul aboard the London Fusilier!
If you live to be a hundred, you will ne'er—
You will ne'er in all your life,
Until you die, my dear,
Be nearer to your death by land or sea!
Was she there?
Who?—my wife?
Why, the baby in the blanket—that was she!