

# Two Centuries

*Edith Austin Holton*

*This poem was written for the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the  
First Congregational Church, Falmouth, Massachusetts, 1908.*

Two centuries' winter storms have lashed  
    The changing sands of Falmouth's shore,  
Deep-voiced, the winds, swift-wingéd, wild,  
    Have echoed there the ocean's roar.  
But though the north-east gale unleashed,  
    Rage-blind with power, relentless beat,  
The sturdy light-house sheds its beam  
    On waves churned white beneath the sleet.

And still when cold and fear are past,  
    And fields are sweet with spring-time showers,  
Mystic, the gray age-silent hills  
    Breathe out their souls in fair mayflowers.  
And where the tawny saltmarsh lies  
    Beyond the sand dunes' farthest reach,  
The undulous grass grown russet green,  
    Skirts the white crescent of the beach.

Above the tall elms' green-plumed tops,  
    Etched against low-hung, gray-hued skies,  
Straight as the heaven-kissing pine,  
    The home-bound mariner descries  
The goodly spire of the old first church,  
    Reverend, serene, with old-time grace,  
Symbol and sign of an inner life  
    Deep-sealed by time's slow carven trace.

Out of that church in days long gone  
    Went a stalwart, true-eyed sturdy band,  
Sons of the mist and the flying foam,  
    The blood and brawn of a Pilgrim land;

Down to the sea where the tall masts rose,  
Where the green-mossed black hulls rose and fell,  
And the cables strained at the call of the tide,  
For they knew and heeded its summons well.

The farewell stung in the bearded throats,  
As their wave-spurred mersteed tossed the foam,  
But they fixed their eyes on the fading spire,  
And thought of the cheering welcome home  
When the long voyage once again should end,  
For they knew, in the good, time honored way,  
Their townsmen knelt in the ancient church,  
And prayed, "God haste the returning day."

They heard the voice of the well known bell,  
Borne on the salt wind, strong and free,  
"Well guard well, O sister bell,  
My loyal sons upon the sea."  
And clearer, sweeter, mellower yet,  
Where the white-capped surge is deep and slow,  
Came the answering call from the buoy float,  
"Still, still, trust still, I know."

Such were the men of the long ago,  
Who after storm, at anchor ride,  
Safe moored by the bourn of setting sun,  
On the sky-deep sea that knows no tide.  
Whose sons though now upon the deep,  
They sail no more as their fathers sailed,  
Still keep the faith that their fathers held  
Where the light of the old shrine never failed.

And constant still, in their fathers' church,  
Say as they bow on bended knee,  
"O Pilot of our souls, guard well  
All those who drift upon the sea."  
A reverent hush, then zephyr borne,  
A message fair as the after glow,  
Like the voiceless song of the evening star,  
"Still, still, trust still, I know."