

With swift sailor feet a pine; when lo! before him the river,
The fair, lake-bosomed St. John; and he knew that the snow there was shallow,
For where the ice was packed, it peaked through the crust, and where eddies
Kept the swirled waters unfrozen, the wall of snow round the edges
Rose so low: then he clambered down, and, hailing the carters,
Asked if they dared the river with its perils of whirled currents,
Oft roofed over with snow—sure death to all whom the trap caught.
And both, with accord, cried "Yes," and the shovellers, working like firemen,
Cleft them a path to the river, and out with a cheer, half defiance,
And a cracking of whips, they leapt on the ice and swept to the seaward
Racing, over the ice, as it seemed, after battling the snowdrifts.
And on and on they dashed, the ice oft cracking beneath them,
When it arched over broken water, and the packed ice ready to fling them
Out on this side or that, as the hurrying runners struck it.
And last, when the dusk had deepened, they heard a low faraway thunder,
Like the rush of a mighty fall, and they knew they were nearing that portent,
That dragon's lair with its walls of rock and its rock-ridge threshold,
Over which twice in the day falls the flood of the sea on the river,
And twice in the day the river flings pent-up ebb on the ocean,
Leaping the sea on the river and the river back on the sea-arm
Thrice the height of a man, in a black implacable whirlpool,
With fountains of flying foam, which float down and fill up the harbour,
Where the mightiest fleet in the world could range in, engaging another.

The sailor heard it first, with his senses sharpened by danger,