

Is the ballad you're writing about a sea-bird?"
"Not at all; why should it be? Don't be absurd,
Little brother.
(*O Mother Carey, mother!*
Thy brood flies lower as lowers the heaven.)" 35

(*A big brother speaketh:*)

"The refrain you've studied a meaning had,
Sister Helen!
It gave strange force to a weird ballad.
But refrains have become a ridiculous 'fad'
Little brother. 40
And *Mother Carey, mother,*
Has a bearing on nothing in earth or heaven.

"But the finical fashion has had its day,
Sister Helen.
And let's try in the style of a different lay 45
To bid it adieu in poetical way,
Little brother.
So, *Mother Carey, mother!*
Collect your chickens and go to — heaven."

(*A pause. Then the big brother singeth, accompanying
himself in a plaintive wise on the triangle:*)

"Look in my face. My name is Used-to-was; 50
I am also called Played-out and Done-to-death,
And It-will-wash-no-more. Awakeneth
Slowly, but sure awakening it has,
The common-sense of man; and I, alas!
The ballad-burden trick, now known too well, 55
Am turned to scorn, and grown contemptible —
A too transparent artifice to pass.

"What a cheap dodge I am! The cats who dart
Tin-kettled through the streets in wild surprise
Assail judicious ears not otherwise; 60

And yet no critics praise the urchin's 'art,'
Who to the wretched creature's caudal part
Its foolish empty-jingling 'burden' ties."

1882

(From *Recaptured Rhymes*. Edinburgh: William Blackwood
and Sons, 1882)