

By Cicely Fox Smith from **Punch Magazine**, Volume 186, February 28, 1934, p. 248.  
Adapted for singing by Charles Ipcar, © 2008  
Tune: for verse after *You Gave Me a Song* by Alice Gerrard, © 1975

**Key: G(2F)**

## Mobile Bay

### Chorus:

**G-----D----Am**  
*"Roll the cotton down, bullies,*  
**C-----D---G**  
*Roll the cot-ton down!"*  
**-----C---D-----Am**  
*I thought I heard the Old Man say,*  
**C-----D--G**  
*"Roll the cot-ton down!"*

I mind the feel of the noonday sun  
And them warm wet dockside smells –  
Rum and spice, and the stevedores,  
And the Cajun demoiselles;  
The shuffle and beat of the naked feet  
On the levees all around –  
How I longed to stay in Mobile Bay  
Where they roll the cotton down. (CHO)

**G-----C---D**  
There's a song I hear resounding,  
**-----C-----D----G**  
As a song will some-times do;  
**-----C-----D**  
It takes me away to my younger days  
**-----C-----D**  
And the men and the ships I knew –  
**-----G---C---G--D**  
To the men I knew in a time long gone  
**-----C-----D-G**  
And a ship of some re-nown,  
**-----C-----D-----D7**  
When I sailed away to Mobile Bay  
**-----C-----D---G**  
Where they roll the cot-ton down!  
(CHO)

It takes me away from the dingy streets  
Of this cold grey Northern town;  
I can hear the yarns my shipmates spun,  
The rum old songs we sung;  
The way of a ship at a twelve-knot clip  
When we sailed the wide world round,  
And I mind that day in Mobile Bay  
When they rolled the cotton down. (CHO)

It's the width of a world from here to there,  
It's the half of my life since then,  
And it's ill to tread, so I've heard said,  
A trail where you've lost a friend;  
So I may sail east or I may sail west,  
Far from this northern town,  
But I'll not stray to Mobile Bay  
Where they roll the cotton down. (CHO2X)

### Notes:

This poem contains phrases from the traditional stevedore/halliard shanty "Roll the Cotton Down," a version of which the poet collected and published in **A Book of Shanties**, © 1927.

# Mobile Bay

There's a song has gone through my mind all day,  
As a song will sometimes do;  
It takes me back to the years of youth  
And the men and the ways I knew –  
To the men I knew in a time that's gone  
And a ship of old renown,  
When I sailed on a day to Mobile Bay,  
Where they roll the cotton down!

I remember the feel of the noonday sun  
And the warm wet Indian smells –  
Rum and sugar, niggers and mud,  
And the dear Lord knows what else:  
The shuffle and stamp of the naked feet  
On the levees once again:  
They all come back from the years that were  
To the sound of that old refrain.  
"Roll the cotton down, bullies,  
Roll the cotton down!"  
I am far away from the dingy street  
And the drab grey Northern town:  
I remember the yarns my shipmates spun  
And the great old songs we sung,  
The way of a ship at a twelve-knot clip  
In the years when the world was young.

It's the width of a world from here, worse luck,  
It's the half of my life since then,  
And it's ill to tread, so I've heard said,  
A trail you've left again;  
And I may sail east, or I may sail west,  
Where the folks are yellow or brown,  
But I'll sail no more to Mobile Bay  
Where they roll the cotton down.

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The poem is prefaced with the note "An Old Song Re-sung."