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THE SONS OF MARTHA

RUDYARD KIPLING

The Sons of Mary seldom bother,
 For they have inherited that good part,
 But the Sons of Martha favor their mother
 Of the careful soul and the troubled heart;
 And because she lost her temper once,
 And because she was rude to the Lord, her
 Guest,
 Her sons must wait upon Mary's sons—
 World without end, reprieve, or rest.

It is their care in all the ages
 To take the buffet and cushion the shock;
 It is their care that the gear engages;
 It is their care that the switches lock;
 It is their care that the wheels run truly;
 It is their care to embark and entrain,
 Tally, transport, and deliver duly
 The Sons of Mary by land and main.

They say to the mountains, "Be ye removed!"
 They say to the lesser floods, "Run dry!"
 Under their rods are the rocks reprov'd—
 They are not afraid of that which is high.
 Then do the hilltops shape to the summit;
 Then is the bed of the deep laid bare,
 That the Sons of Mary may overcome it,
 Pleasantly sleeping and unaware.

They finger Death at their glove's end
 When they piece and repiece the living wires.
 He rears against the gates they tend;
 They feed him hungry behind their fires.
 Early at dawn, ere men see clear,
 They stumble into this terrible stall,
 And hale him forth like a haltered steer,
 And goad and turn him till evenfall.

To these from birth is Belief forbidden;
 From these till death is relief afar;—
 They are concerned with matters hidden—
 Under the earth line their alters are.
 The secret fountains to follow up,
 Waters withdrawn to restore to the mouth.
 Yea, and gather the floods as in a cup,
 And pour them again at a city's drouth.

They do not preach that their God will rouse them
 A little before the nuts work loose;
 They do not teach that His Pity allows them
 To leave their work whenever they choose.
 As in the thronged and the lightened ways,
 So in the dark and the desert they stand,
 Wary and watchful all their days,
 That their brethren's days may be long in the
 land.

Lift ye the stone, or cleave the wood,
 To make a path more fair or flat—
 Lo! it is black already with blood
 Some Sons of Martha spilled for that.
 Not as a ladder from Earth to Heaven,
 Not as an alter to any creed,
 But simple service simply given
 To his own kind, in their common need.

And the Sons of Mary smile and are blessed—
 They know the angels are on their side.
 They know that in them is the Grace confessed,
 And for them are the Mercies multiplied.
 They sit at the Feet and they hear the Word—
 They know how truly the Promise runs.
 They have cast their burden upon the Lord,
 And—the Lord He lays it on Martha's Sons.