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Ambrose Bierce - Technology

'Twas a serious person with locks of gray
And a figure like a crescent;
His gravity, clearly, had come to stay,
But his smile was evanescent.

He stood and conversed with a neighbor, and
With (likewise) a high falsetto;
And he stabbed his forefinger into his hand
As if it had been a stiletto.

His words, like the notes of a tenor drum,
Came out of his head unblended,
And the wonderful altitude of some
Was exceptionally splendid.

While executing a shake of the head,
With the hand, as it were, of a master,
This agonizing old gentleman said:
"Twas a truly sad disaster!

'Four hundred and ten longs and shorts in all,
Went down'-he paused and snuffled.
A single tear was observed to fall,
And the old man's drum was muffled.

'A very calamitous year,' he said.
And again his head-piece hoary
He shook, and another pearl he shed,
As if he wept _con amore.

'O lacrymose person,' I cried, 'pray why
Should these failures so affect you?
With speculators in stocks no eye
That's normal would ever connect you.'

He focused his orbs upon mine and smiled
In a sinister sort of manner.
'Young man,' he said, 'your words are wild:
I spoke of the steamship 'Hanner.'

'For she has went down in a howlin' squall,
And my heart is nigh to breakin'
Four hundred and ten longs and shorts in all
Will never need undertakin'!

'I'm in the business myself,' said he,
'And you've mistook my expression;
For I uses the technical terms, you see,
Employed in my perfession.'

That old undertaker has joined the throng
On the other side of the River,
But I'm still unhappy to think I'm a 'long,'
And a tape-line makes me shiver.