

“One of the most widespread of all the caul superstitions was that it would protect against drowning.^(19, 53, 54) Perhaps the most impressive support for this idea is a perfectly serious statement quoted in *Notes and Queries* ⁽⁵⁴⁾ regarding a baby born with a caul so effective "that when his mother tried to bathe him he sat on the surface of the water, and if forced down, came up again like a cork." McKenzie,⁽⁶⁶⁾ Fairfax-Blakeborough,⁽³⁴⁾ and others have suggested that the belief in the caul's ability to preserve its owner from drowning is assumed from the membrane's investment of the fetus while it is immersed in the amniotic fluid. Naturally the caul had a particular appeal to sailors. Thomas Hood, the humorous poet, told ⁽⁴⁹⁾ of a "jolly mariner" who defied a storm because "in his pouch, confidingly, He wore a baby's caul." However, the charm did not prevent disaster in a great storm:

"Heaven never heard his cry, nor did
The ocean heed his caul."

Cauls were formerly offered for sale near the London and Liverpool docks,⁽⁴⁾ and advertisements for this commodity appeared in British newspapers until at least the First World War ⁽⁹¹⁾ in the *Daily Advertiser* for July 1790, in the *London Times* for 20 February 1813 and 8 May 1848, in the *Bristol Times* and *Mirror* for 30 September 1874 ("TO SEA CAPTAINS: For sale, a Child's Caul in perfect condition. £5."), in the *Globe* for 24 July 1903 ("Large Male Caul for sale; no reasonable offer refused."), etc.^(48, 55, 64)

The prices asked for cauls, while perhaps little influenced by the supply, which must have been reasonably constant, certainly fluctuated with demand. The latter seems to have been regulated largely by the degree of hazard of the sailor's life and his consequent concern for his safety. Thus, one reads that in 1779 as much as 400 marks was paid for a caul. By 1799 the price paid by British sailors reached 30 guineas. (These were the days of Lord Nelson and great sea battles.) By 1815 the price was down to 12 guineas, and by 1848 a caul was advertised for sale in *The London Times* for 6 guineas. The advertisement states that the caul, "for which fifteen pounds was originally paid, was afloat with its late owner thirty years in all perils of a seaman's life, and the owner died at last in the place of his birth." In 1874 a caul was offered "TO SEA CAPTAINS" for £ 5. In 1895 a newspaper advertised a price of £5 "or offers"; a week later another advertisement (apparently by another owner) had cut the price to £1 "or offers." A still lower point was reached in the last years before the First World War, when cauls could be purchased for a few shillings. Superstition, however, had not died; when later the deadly submarine campaign was taking its toll, worried sailors and their friends paid as much as £3 to £5 for the protective membrane.^(23, 34, 64, 69, 91, 108)