

The Spirit of Democracy.

"PRINCIPLES AND MEASURES, AND MEN THAT WILL CARRY THOSE PRINCIPLES AND MEASURES INTO EFFECT."

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From the New York Mirror. THE WRECKERS.

BY JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

It was a March morning—dark, yet without a drop of rain or breath of wind—that kind of marbly-black, compact sky, which is the sure forerunner of a storm. The night had been a raw and cold one—too cold to sleep with comfort in the open air; yet such was the chamber which a peasant girl, a native of a little fishing-village upon the coast of Cornwall, had chosen for repose. Her couch was a hard and fearful one! the verge of a cliff that rose nearly a hundred feet perpendicular from the sea-shore, and yet not the softest couch that ever was spread in hamlet, town or city, contained a tenant, in form, for symmetry—in feature, for beauty—the mistress of her who occupied that strange, appalling place of rest! Her slumbers were disturbed, yet deep. Neither the full dawn could break them; nor the tears that fell upon her face from the eyes of one who was hanging over her—a young man about her own age, or a little older, and who seemed to belong to the profession of the sea.

"And hast thou slept out again all night!" he murmured—his tears still flowing. And does it grow worse with thy poor wits! and shall I never see the day when I can make thee my wife! They will not let me marry thee, because, as they say, thou art mad and knowst not what thou dost; but when thy mind was sound, I was loved by thee! Had I married thee then, thou still hadst been cherished and loved! Why must I not marry thee now? I could watch thee then, at night!—My arms would enfold thee, then, and prevent thee from stealing from thy bed to sleep in such a place as this!"

The attachment which united this young man to the being whom he so pathetically apostrophized, was of that pure and steadfast nature, which can never take root, except in the unsophisticated heart. She had lost her reason in consequence of having been witness to a transaction of blood, which made her an orphan. She was to have been married to him; but in the unfortunate state of her intellects, no clergyman would celebrate the rites. But she did not the less enjoy his protection. Beneath his mother's roof she lived as sacred as a sister—the object of a passion in which frustration, and almost hopelessness, had only produced increase of strength.

"Kate! Kate!" he called. "Rouse thee Kate—rouse thee! Don't be frightened! 'Tis only William! Get up, and come home!"

He offered to raise her, but she checked him—looked round and fixed her eyes, inquiringly, upon the sea.

"Where is it?" she exclaimed—her voice tremulous with intense emotion! "Where is the storm! I see the black sky! but I want the thunder and the wind! the white, white sea, and the big ship, driving upon the reef! or is it all over? No," she added; "tis coming—'twill be here! I see it!"

She rose, and passively accompanied her watchful lover to his mother's cottage; where, leaving her under the custody of his mistress, the young man repaired, on urgent business, to a town at some distance from the hamlet. That morning the storm came on; three days it continued—it was now the third day. A lee shore, a boiling sea, and on the coast of Cornwall! A wild and fearful offing! Foam! foam! foam! which way soever you looked—nothing but foam. Black reefs of rocks, that even in the highest spring tides were never completely covered, discernable now only by a spot here and there; so quick the breakers fell upon them! The spray flying over the cliffs—fifty, sixty, at a hundred feet and more, above the level of the sea, and spreading over the land for acres! And all above pitch black, though at noon-day! Every thing seemed to cower before the spirit of the storm—every thing except man. The shore—which consisted partly of huge masses of rock, partly of shingle—was lined with human beings—some in groups—some alone; promiscuously furnished with boat-hooks, gaffs, grapples, hatchets, and knives; ready to dispute with the waves the plunder of the fated ship that might be driven within the jaws of that inhospitable bay! Expectation glistened in their eyes, that kept eagerly prowling backward and forward, far and near, over the waste of waters—they were wreckers. Not a few women, as well as children were among them; nor were these unprovided against the approach of the wished-for prey; all seemed to have their appropriated places; from which, if they started it was only a step or two to be the

next minute retraced. Little was heard.

At one and the same moment almost every head was turned towards the cliff, at a wild and shrill holló that rung from it.

"'Tis only Kate," cried one, here and there, as the maniac rapidly descended by a crevice, which few of the lookers-on would have attempted, and that with wary feet.

"The crazy slut will break her neck," carelessly remarked one to another. But she was safe in her recklessness or unconsciousness of danger, and in a second or two stood among them.

"A lovely day! a fair, lovely day!" she exclaimed to the first she came up to. "Good luck to you! Any thing yet? No, no," she continued, replying to herself; "white to the north! white to the west! white to the south! all white! not a speck upon the water! But 'tis coming! 'tis coming!" she reiterated, dropping her voice to its lowest pitch; "I saw it here last night! a big, black hull! one mast standing out of three! cannons and stores overboard rising! sinking! rocking and reeling! driving full bump upon the reef where the William and Mary was wrecked seven cursed years ago! I saw it," she repeated, eyeing the standers-by with a look that dared incredulity; then all at once, her voice sinking into a whisper, "Hist! hist!" she added; "'twill be a handful or two for you, and a load for you; and more than you can carry for you;" addressing this person and that successively; "casks, cases, chests, gear and gold! but what will it be for Black Norris? It will be a brighter day for him than for any of you. When do they say his time is out?"

"Whose time is out?" inquired one of the group she was addressing.

"One—two—three;" she went on without noticing the question, until she had counted seven; "his seven years were out last May; he was transported three years before his hopeful son murdered my father."

"Hu-h, you crazy wench," exclaimed those around her; "if Norris hears you, you may chance to take a swim in the creek where he is standing!"

"Crazy!" she echoed. "Yes; bless heaven that made me so! It knows best what it does! I saw my father murdered, though his murderer saw not me! they were struggling which should keep possession of the prey. Old Norris' knife soon decided it! I was powerless with fright! I could not stir! I became mad and the judge would not believe me! I could tell my story better now, but it will be no use; for they say I am crazy still. There she is!" vociferated she, pointing toward the offing at the southern extremity of the bay.

"Where—where—where?" inquired the auditors.

"No, no!" she resumed, after a minute or two of silence, during which her eyeballs kept straining in the direction toward which she had pointed. "No," she resumed, dropping her hand; "she is coming, and Black Norris will neither want roof nor board, gold nor gear to welcome back the father that bred him up to his own trade. But, where is he?" inquired she; "where, but upon the long reef where I saw him!" saying this she proceeded to the southern extremity of the bay.

A stalwart figure, in advance of the regular line, sat stationed upon the landward-end of a huge reef of rocks, that gradually dipped into the sea. His hair, black and lank, thrown back from a swarthy, ill-favored visage, hung half-way down his shoulders; his eye, dark, small and glistening bright, directed towards the sea, in quick and restless motion, was every where at once. A long boat hook, clenched tight with both his hands, rested across his knees; and in a belt which encircled his waist, were stuck a clasp-knife of more than ordinary size and a hatchet. The waves repeatedly washed more than half way up his lower extremities but he paid no more heed than if he were a part of the rock that scattered it into mist.

"A lovely day—a fair lovely day!" cried the maniac, approaching him. "How best thou, Black Norris? Nay, I am good now," continued she in a depreciating tone; don't look angry,—I'll never say again that it was you."

The wrecker moved his hand towards his knife.

"Stop, stop, Black Norris," cried she coaxingly & hurriedly laying her hand upon his shoulder, "keep it for other work! You'll want it to-day! before night there will be a hull ashore. There will be need of knife, axe, hook and all for the storm is lively yet—the sea shows not signs of going down—the

breakers keep tumbling upon the shore! Mark how they sweep the shingles up, and back again. By-and-by they will have something else to roll. 'Tis coming! Black Norris, 'tis coming! A huge black hull—one mast standing out of three; cannons and stores overboard; rising and sinking; rocking and reeling driving full bump upon the reef where the William and Mary was wrecked; the very reef on which you stand Black Norris; ay and the very spot!"

"Silence jade!" exclaimed the wrecker, looking from beneath his hand, which, with the rapidity of lightning was raised to his brow and placed there horizontally, and leaning eagerly forward.

"In the south!"

"Yes."

"Just clear of the point?"

"Yes; the looming of smóthing! 'tis a sloop! I see but one mast."

"'Tis a ship! Black Norris. The other two have been cut away."

"Peace jade, what know'st thou of the matter?"

"'Tis a ship," she continued. "I told you so! There is the huge black hull!"

"'Tis there, indeed," exclaimed the wrecker. "Art thou a witch, as well as crazed. 'Tis there indeed she is driving right into the bay coming broadside on."

A huge black hull it was, high out of the water, as if every article of freight that could be spared had been thrown overboard. Reeling and pitching she came on, staggering every now and then at the stroke of some wave that broke over her. Fast was she nearing the shore.

"Now, now, now," ever and anon exclaimed the wreckers; but she was floating still, so much had those on board lightened her. At length she was fairly among the breakers. She touched, and touched; yet went on—at last she struck, and a long continued crash came undulating upon the ears of the lookers-on, accompanied with hallooos and shrieks. The shore was now all astir.

"That does for her," exclaimed several voices all at once, as an enormous wave towering, as if charged with her doom, came foaming toward her. In another minute it broke upon her with a fury that sent the spray to the clouds, and totally hid her from the shore.—When she became visible again, the whole of her larboard broadside was stove in. In a moment, men, women, and children, were up to their middle in the surf. Another billow—she was gone. Planks, polleys, spars, and cordage, now came floating in, and every one went to work—every one but Black Norris.

He kept his station upon the reef—a post which common consent seemed to have yielded up to him. No one ventured to dispute his right to it. In advance of him stood the maniac, constantly looking in one direction, a kind of cove produced by a forking in the reef. Thence she never took her eye, except to throw a glance at Black Norris whenever he made a movement, as if about to quit the stand which she had chosen.

"'Twill be here," she kept repeating; 'twill be here, that which will be worth the hull to thee, were it high and dry, and all thine own! wait for it, 'tis sent to thee, 'twill be here. Did I not tell you of the huge black hull, and came it not? As surely that will come, which in that hull was sent to thee. Be ready with thy boat hook. The minutes are counted. The wave that is to bring it is rolling in. There it is. I know it. Here, take my place and be ready. Here it is—a body—hook it by the clothes; keep it clear of the rocks. Round—round—round here into this nook. Look if it does not lie there as if it were made for it. What think you now, Black Norris? What think you of crazy Kate? Softly; softly," she continued, as the wrecker, substituting his hands for the instrument, began to draw the body up to the beach. Softly; the pockets are full. Softly, lest any thing should drop from them. That will do; that will do."

Scarcely was the body clear of the surf when the wrecker began to rifle it. The pockets were full; one of them was speedily emptied, when a laugh from the maniac, who, squatting, sat gibbering at the head, arrested Black Norris in the act of examining the contents.

"What laugh'st thou at, jade?" he inquired.

"Go on," she replied, "tis a fair, lovely day, as I told thee; it is not, Black Norris!"

"Peace jade!" exclaimed the wrecker. "Jewels!" he ejaculated, closing a small case which he had opened.

The maniac laughed.

"Wit thou stop thy cursed mouth," ejaculated the wrecker.

"Go on," murmured the maniac. "Go on, Black Norris. You should not be angry with me. Did I not tell you it was coming? Go on: 'Tis a fair, lovely day, is't it, Black Norris?"

"Silence again!" cried the wrecker. "Gold," exclaimed he to himself, as he emptied into his hand a portion of the contents of a purse, which he had taken from the other pocket—"broad, heavy, yellow pieces."

Another laugh, from the maniac.

"I tell you what, mad Kate," roared out the wrecker, "take to thy heels, or abide the consequence, if thou utterest that sound again!"

"Softly; softly," whispered Kate, "he hears you."

"Who, jade?" cried the wrecker starting from his knees.

The owner of the Diamonds and the gold. His lids have been moving for the last minute, and now they are wide open."

The wrecker just glanced at the face of the shipwrecked man.

"Get thee away, good Kate," said he in a conciliatory tone. "Go, Kate leave me by myself, and I'll never be angry with you again. Go good Kate; go."

The maniac looked at the wrecker for a moment; smiled; nodded her head significantly, and rose.

"I am gone, Black Norris she cried, a good day to you, and a good fair day it is, & a lovely day, isn't it Black Norris? I'll leave you by yourself; I'll not stay; I am gone." And starting toward a pathway that led up the cliff, and the commencement of which was sheltered by a screen of rocks, she was quickly out of sight.

The wrecker now began to reconnoitre all around him. Every one was engrossed with his own occupation, securing such portions of the wreck or such articles of property as were bro't within his reach. His hand approached his knife—grasped it—half drew the weapon from his belt, but suddenly replaced it, and now fastened on the axe; the counterpoise to the blade of which was a wedge-like piece of iron, broad and flattened at the end. In a second the instrument swung by his side. Once again he reconnoitred towards the beach; then turned towards the prostrate man. He thought the body moved, he trembled from head to foot. He advanced a single step, but stopped; the fingers were in motion. A low sound; half voice, half breath; issued from the throat; which now evidently began to work. He advanced another step; though a tottering one another. He was now within a foot or two of the head; he sank or rather dropped upon one knee. The eyes of the seaman moved, they turned to the right and to the left, and at last glared back upon the wrecker. Both hands had now clenched the axe. Slowly 'twas lifted, the edge averted, and the blunt end suspended over the forehead of him that lay. 'Twas raised; it hovered a moment or two, then fell with a short, dull crash; a pause for a moment or two more; limb, eye, every thing were still; the wrecker threw his weapon behind him, and wiped from his brow the drops that stood upon it.

"Ha! ha! you have done it!"

The wrecker turned and beheld the maniac standing behind him with the hatchet in her hand, her eyes flashing.

"Nay, move not, Black Norris," she continued, "unless you would have me give the corpse a fellow. Let me get further from thee, without forcing me to thee a mischief, and I will tell thee something." She retreated about twenty paces, without turning her back; the wrecker now perfectly unnerved, not daring to move. "Black Norris," she resumed, "did I not tell you that this was a fair, lovely day?—and a fair, lovely day it is—and a bonny one, too, and know you not why, Black Norris? This day you have done—what you have done—and this day seven years was the day; the fair, lovely day, when you murdered my father, Black Norris. Now follow me not, but good-bye."

She fled. The wrecker had not power to follow.

By the fire of a miserable hut, was seated upon a stool, a female of youthful but haggard appearance. She had an infant at her breast, and was endeavouring to lull it, rocking to and fro, with a low, melancholy hum. Every now and then, she paused and listened, and after a second or two, resumed her maternal task.

"Be quiet, Shark; be quiet," she would occasionally cry, as a lean, black, rough-coated dog, between the Newfoundland and the mastiff, and which was stretched across the hearth, would raise his head, and, turning it in the di-

rection of the door, keep howling amidst the gusts of the storm, which was slowly and fitfully subsiding.

At length the infant fell asleep, and was transferred from its mother's lap to a wretched pallet in an adjoining room. Her charge being thus disposed of, she returned into the outer apartment. A cooking vessel was on the fire. She lifted the lid. The steam faintly rose from the contents.

"Will it never grow hot," she impatiently exclaimed, and resorting to a bellows, through the creviced sides of which escaped the greater portion of the wind which was intended for the proper vent, proceeded assiduously, but almost in vain, to urge the sluggish fuel.

"He'll brain me if he comes home and nothing ready," she cried to herself, in a querulous under tone. "Heaven send him luck, and I shall have peace for a day or two," continued she. "But for my baby, I wish I had never seen the face of Black Norris."

"Let me in," cried the wrecker, at the door.

"Thank heaven, he has met with luck," ejaculated the wretched wife.

She let him in. He had a trunk upon his shoulder, and under his arm he carried a bundle of clothes.

"Good luck, Norris?" tremulously and half-doubtingly, inquired she.

"Yes," was his sullen reply. "Why do you ask with such a face as that?"

"I was afraid you had not met with any."

"Why?" demanded he, sternly.

"From your looks," timidly responded she.

"Curse thee," muttered the ruffian, "what business hast thou to mind my looks? Here; Lend a hand, and help this load from my back."

The trunk was deposited upon the floor.

"What! Nothing ready? Hast thou not victuals in the house? Hast thou not fire? Hast thou not hands? and why is not my dinner ready? Bestir thee! I have something to do in the next room. On thy life let me not be interrupted till I have done. Haste; Give me the key of the big chest."

"Don't wake the baby," entreatingly enjoined the wife. "He has not slept the whole morning, and is only just now dropped off."

"Curse the child," cried the wrecker. "Thou thinkest of nothing but the child. Look to my dinner."

He went into the next apartment, shut the door after him, and bolted it. He examined the jewels again. He emptied the purse of its contents and counted them. He opened the rest of the pockets. The trousseau he had taken from the bundle, and thrown upon the floor of the other room—all contained riches. He placed them upon the ground, applied the key, and hastily began to deposit them in the bottom of the chest. In the progress of his work, he started and stopped short, at a shuffling of feet which he heard in the outer apartment, accompanied by the sound of voices, as of persons speaking in a low key. Muttering a curse he proceeded. "Norris; Norris," whispered his wife at the door.

He replied not, but went on.

"Norris," she whispered again. "You are wanted."

He answered not, but listened anxiously. All was silent.

"Norris," she repeated.

"Silence, and confound thee," was the ruffian's reply.

"I cannot help it, Norris," rejoined she, still whispering. "You are wanted, husband. O come. Do come."

"Presently," he vociferated. The last article was put in. He locked the chest, and unbolted the door, threw it open.

"Well. Is my dinner ready?" he noisily demanded, entering the outer apartment, and looking toward the table—which had been constructed out of the fragments of a wreck; a corpse lay stretched upon it. At the head and at the foot was a group of his neighbours. He stood for a moment or two transfixed.

"What means this?" at length he boldly inquired, with a loud voice, striving to conceal a cowering heart.

"Merciful powers," exclaimed one, lifting the rifled trousers, which the wrecker had thrown upon the floor.

"Merciful powers, if it is not your father's body, Norris, that you have been stripping."

"My father's body," echoed Black Norris; the blood utterly forsaking his cheeks.

"Yes, There it is, stretched upon the table." Black Norris did not attempt to speak. He looked at the body—at the by-standers—at his wife—at the body again—with an expression of perfect vacuity in his countenance.

He then approached the table, half seated himself on a corner of it, his back to the corpse; and with one leg upon the floor, kept swinging the other, looking wildly around him. His wife, who had dropped upon the stool on which she had been nursing her child, sat the image of horror. The rest kept silence.

"It can't be helped," at last exclaimed Black Norris. "The dead have no use for clothes. We'll bury him to-morrow and wake him to-night."

"His auditors looked at one another, but made no remark. Pipes, tobacco and spirits, were speedily procured and placed upon the same table with the corpse, which was now covered with a sheet. Black Norris seated himself at the head. His neighbours, whose numbers were now increased by occasional drappersin, accommodated themselves as they could with stools, empty kegs placed on end, and pieces of plank converted into temporary forms, sat ranged around. The room waxed merry, save where the wrecker's wife sat crouching near the fire, her head supported by the wall. At length the first supply of spirits was out.

"I'll bring you better," cried the wrecker. "What we have been drinking was watered. I'll bring it you as pure as from the still."

He disappeared; and, after the lapse of about ten or fifteen minutes, returned with a fresh supply. He opened the door unobserved, but stopped short upon remarking that the place which he had just quitted, was occupied by three or four who were intently employed in examining the head of the dead body, from which the sheet had been partially removed. The rest of the company were leaning forward, apparently absorbed in what was passing.

"'Tis an ugly mark," said one.

"No rock could do that," observed another.

"No," interposed a third; "'tis more like the blunt end of an axe head; see, here is the regular mark of the edge all around, I would not be Black Norris for all he has got by this day's work."

"Why not?" vociferated the wrecker, coming forward and confronting the speaker.

Every eye was turned toward the wrecker, in whose countenance desperation and gathering fury were fearfully depicted. No answer was returned to his question.

"Why not?" repeated he, with increased vehemence.

"Why not," echoed the young man, recovering from temporary surprise. "Why, who was it stoved your father's forehead in, Black Norris?" added he after a pause.

He had scarcely time to duck his head. The vessel which the wrecker carried, flew over it, and in the next moment, the young man's throat was in the ruffian's grasp.

"Loose your hold of him," cried several at once. Black Norris paid no heed to them. Three or four of the strongest and boldest rushed together upon him at once; overpowered him and rescued his almost suffocated victim. The wrecker drew his knife and brandished it.—They rushed upon him again before he had time to make a stroke with it and wrenched it from him. His wife, who, it appeared, had retired into the inner apartment during the interval of her husband's absence, now burst from it, ran on her knees before him, and clasping him round the legs with one arm, while with the other she supported her infant, imploring him to be calm. A single blow leveled child and mother to the earth. With horror of the savage act, the spectators stood a while, as if bereft of the power of speech or motion. For a second or two the wrecker glared around him like a fiend, then suddenly vanished into the inner room. He searched here and there, blaspheming all the time, cursing this thing and that thing, as any thing came to his hand, except what he wanted. At length, however, he succeeded in finding his pistols. Then a pouch filled with slugs; and last of all, a powder horn presented themselves. He hastily loaded and primed the weapons and proceeded to the door, with one in each hand, advanced a pace into the outer apartment.

"Now," roared the wrecker, "now, who is the man to come on?" No one stirred. "I give you just as much time" continued he, "as it will take you to clear the house. When that is expired, I fire at the man that remains."

"A wild, shrill, piercing laugh was the answer to his menace. It comes from the head of the corpse. The maniac was standing there. The wrecker's axe was in her hand; the blunt end resting on the mark in the dead man's forehead.

"Ha, ha," she cried, exultingly; "this