

THE COLUMBIA DEMOCRAT.

"I have sworn upon the Altar of God, eternal hostility to every form of Tyranny over the Mind of Man."—Thomas Jefferson.

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MISCELLANEOUS.

From the Gentlemen's Magazine for May.

THE PIRATE LAW.

BY WILDER LANN, PHILADELPHIA.

The morning wind had sunk to sleep on its ocean bed, and left a small foretop-sail schooner rocking on the long, smooth swells away westward of the coast of Peru. She was a gay and gallant model of naval beauty. Light as the frightened sea-gull, she rose on the clear, deep wave, showing a long, low, shining black hull of faultless mould. The tall, elegant masts stood proudly up with that graceful rake peculiar to this class of vessels; the clean polished yards were hung with the nicest accuracy, tapering from the middle with the rounded symmetry of a lady's finger; the spotless canvas hung in airy folds amid the trim, taut rigging, like the floating dress of a fairy queen. The figure-head of a dark-haired Moorish girl, leaned in laughing loveliness from the sharp, rising bow, as if to kiss the glad waters beneath; with one hand she held the wild lily of the Pacific Isles, while the other playfully grasped a scarf, on which was written "The Flower of the Sea." A single flag dropped above the narrow stern; as it flapped aside with the rolling of the waves, it revealed the bright blazonry of the Spanish arms.

To one untaught in sea lore, the vessel might have passed for a peaceful carrier of trade, but a seaman would have remarked that she was built for surpassing swiftness, without regard to burthen. He would have told you that she was too pretty to be anything else than a smuggler or pirate, such gentry always displaying a more classic taste than their less romantic brethren of the salt water. His keen eye, too, would have detected the dark mouth of a cannon, known to the craft by the name of "Long Tom," lurking mysteriously under a heap of canvas and coiled rope, just aft the foremast. All doubts as to character were put to rest by the motley crew of whiskered desperadoes that covered the deck. Some slept half-naked in the hot sun, some were gambling and quarrelling, and others, with a spice of poetic feeling not uncommon to the cloth were leaning over the side to watch the frolicsome porpoises splashing on the sunny sea. It seemed, from the confusion of tongues, that the mob of every nation had met together, and sent each an envoy to this "Assembly of Free Agency." Among them especially were to be seen the dark, devil-eyed Mexican, and the brawny, scowling mulatto.

Such was the pirate. The wars of Spain and her American colonies had given a new and dangerous impulse to lawless adventure. The "profession" of piracy rose to a fatal rank, and, among the rest, "The Flower of the Sea" became known as the "Scourge of the Southern Wave." Her name carried terror far among the islands and the very ports of the Pacific. Swift and daring, she set capture at defiance, and laughed at pursuit. Many a boastful cruiser had felt her powers in the running fight, before she left him "hull down" astern. Many an honest mariner had espied at dusk a speck of a sail prowling on the red edge of the horizon, and ere the evening star had set, with

a blaze and hurrah! the pirate was upon him!

Beneath an awning on the quarter deck, reclined a fierce man, under the common height, but of powerful frame. Full white trowsers, girded smooth and close around the waist with a crimson belt, scarcely hid the outline of a leg too large to be called handsome. A pair of Morocco slippers completed his dress, leaving bare a broad shaggy chest, and muscular arms of Herculean size. Two large pistols and a long, glittering knife, which weapons he never laid aside, were stuck into his belt. His face, almost covered by whiskers and mustaches of enormous growth, was terrible as the storm of the desert. An eye that would scare a murderer's ghost back to his sheetless gibbet glared intensely under a bushy mass of hair that overhung his brows: Such was Bernardo, the pirate chief. He commenced his villainy in early youth, by murdering an aged and only relative in Jamaica, his native land; he fled, and became a freebooter. Growing more daring and desperate as blood thickened on his hands, he now acknowledged no superior in crime but his great master, the devil, and was often heard in his drunken revelry, to vow a hard fight for empire with that potentate on the sulphurous Styx!

Fearing and hated by his gang, the tenure of his authority was the sabre's point; yet he maintained his sway by that consummate boldness and cunning, which men of his rank and calling never want. The glance of the chief darted restlessly from time to time among his tameless crew, and then, like the panther in ambush, travelled keenly around the horizon.

High amid the angry oaths of a knot of gamblers at the fore-castle, arose the gruff voice of Antonio, a gigantic mulatto, of a most villainous aspect. Inferior to none but Bernardo in piratical accomplishments, he was acknowledged second in power, and no one dared to dispute his claim. Opposite him sat a wild-looking, long-haired youth, of slender but active form. His features were once singularly handsome, but a companionship of vice, and his own untamed passions, had lent him the reckless bearing of the outlaw. His losses were rapid and heavy: with an impatient curse he threw down his last stake; the cards were played; the mulatto won, and swept the gold into his pocket with a fiend's laugh.

"Antonio, you are a base cheat," muttered the youth, grinding his teeth with passion.

"I a cheat?" returned Antonio, rising wrathfully. "Look you, Arnold Kell, when a man calls me so,—a man, mind you,—this is my answer," touching the handle of his knife; "but when a cross boy, I correct him, as would his mother, thus," and with his open hand sent the youth reeling backwards.

With a scream like the wild-cat in her rage, the young man flashed his knife in the sun and bounded at his huge antagonist. In an instant his uplifted arm was stilled, and his naked throat clutched in the vice-like grasp of Antonio. "Die like a puppy as you are; unworthy of bullet or steel," growled the ruthless negro, and he laughed hideously at the starting eyes and hanging tongue of the gasping Arnold. The crew rushed towards them, and Antonio, bent on the death of his victim, stepped back. The strangling boy in his last throes, tripped his foe dexterously as he retreated. Antonio loosed his hold and caught vainly at the shrouds; wildly, triumphantly did Arnold send home his knife in rapid succession, and ere the mulatto fell, his heart's blood was smoking on the deck. The maniac yell of the victor was followed by the curse, the death-rattle of the fallen!

"Hell and furies!" thundered Bernardo, throwing aside the crowd, "who dares my authority on this deck? who has done this deed?"

"I," said the youth, holding up his reeking blade, "I, Arnold Kell, sent the devil to his home."

"Then after him with this message from me," and Bernardo's pistol glittered at his head.

"He was right," muttered twenty voices, and as many knives started from their sheaths.

As the crippled snake in its angry pain, so did Bernardo turn on his rebellious gang. His eye flashed fierce as the lightning's blaze on eyes as fierce as his. Mad with rage, yet fully aware of the spirits over whom he held his wavering ascendancy, the wily chief searched for an instant the dark faces around.

"Is there a man," said he, with lofty vehemence, "who has joined this daring mutiny, that will say when your chief forgot his duty? When has the sweeping storm burst over us that I guided not the helm? When has the lightning lit upon the midnight surge, that I trembled at its glare? When has the fight dyed the sea with blood that my sabre was not there? And who was at my side in all this? There he lies; the murdered Antonio. Who so fearlessly sprung aloft when the hurricane rent the fluttering canvas? Who so true to cripple the flying prize? Who was before him to leap on the streaming deck? Who, when the kneeling coward prayed for his trembling life, so quick to stop his tongue as Antonio? "Dead men tell no tales."

A murmur of approbation was heard. Bernardo eyed Arnold with hellish joy. "And who," continued he "is his murderer? A stray cur that has swam off to us with a rope about his neck. A weak fool, who sleeps on his watch, and starts and mutters of his father and his home, whose woman's tongue preached pity to men like you, when your knives are cutting the way to victory. He has basely killed your brave companion, whose life was worth a hundred such cowards as he! What says our law? "Life for life; blood for blood."

The stern words of the law were repeated by all in a tone that silenced mercy.

Arnold heard his doom with scorn. "Coward as I have been called," said he haughtily, "I will not ask dogs for a life worth less than this dead jackal," spurning the huge corpse of Antonio. "I ask for death, but let it be on the decks of the enemy."

"The law, the law!—Blood for blood!" interrupted Bernardo.

The ominous sentence was whispered again, like the hollow threat of the midnight wind.

A shudder thrilled the frame of the doomed; for an instant in that dread moment, his eye sought the bright, still sky—one bitter tear stole down and trembled on his lip; he thought of his far home, his childhood's song, his mother's smile—but again defiance mantled on his brow; dark and fearless he looked on the seekers of his blood.

"I must die; but ere I go, I'll hurl the lie back to the teeth of the damned one that spoke it," said he, bending a hateful glance at the chief. "It becomes him well to call me cur and coward, who came from the womb squeaking a curse on men; who grew and fattened on his kindred's blood."

"Fool! do you beard me here!" cried the furious Bernardo, flashing a pistol in the face of the youth. The excited crew closed between them, when Arnold drew his bloodstained knife, and sprang up the mainmast. "Whoever follows," shouted he "shall leap with me from the mast-head."

The fearful brawl was arrested by the hurried cry of "a sail, a sail, on the larboard bow." In an instant, all was bustle. Away to the west, a dark streak on the sea marked the coming wind. Just within its edge, a large brig was seen bearing due south under full sail.

"She will escape us by this cursed calm!" growled Bernardo. "What colors?"

"American," returned the lookout.

"A prize, but not for us."

The dead Antonio was hastily thrown overboard, with a shot fastened to his heels, and his blood carefully washed off the deck. It was no time to resume the quarrel, and

Arnold remained sullen and unmolested. Bernardo strode the deck impatiently, watching the distant sail, like the shark when he sees his prey sporting in the shoal water. "Ha!" said he, stopping short, "perhaps they have Christian charity; up with a signal of distress! Down below, all, and be ready."

The orders were promptly obeyed. True to the appeal of humanity, the devoted brig wore round, and steered directly for the pirate. It was a moment of intense anxiety. The brig held her course for half an hour, when suddenly there was a confusion on board; she hauled off and crowded sail! With a stamp of rage the chief ordered his men on deck. The dreaded black flag was run up, and the long gun cleared away for the chase. Presently the approaching wind played and whirled capriciously on the billows; the first light puff awoke the sleeping sails, and the pirate schooner slipped noiselessly along. As the young breeze grew into a steady wind, the accursed black banner unwrapped its gloomy field, and streamed alee; the foam parted wide from the bow, and it was soon evident that she gained rapidly on the brig.

"Give them the hot iron," shouted the chief. "But where is Antonio? where is your gunner now? shall his murderer escape?"

Curses, deep and angry, were heard, and many vengeful looks were fastened on the condemned youth, perched in the rigging. The polite Bernardo stepped forward to try his skill; he sighted carefully along the piece as the schooner yawed, and gave the order to fire. The light craft trembled under the bellowing discharge, but the brig kept on unharmed. A broadside of oaths followed the gun's discharge. After a hot chase of an hour, the figure of a man was distinctly seen at the helm of the flying vessel; he stood fearless and alone. Again the long gun blazed away; as the smoke swept astern, the pirates shouted to see the foretopmast falling to the leeward. A few more rapid and well aimed shots, and the ill-fated brig was crippled and unmanageable. The pirate hove to, within pistol shot. Two boats were lowered, and instantly filled with whooping, ferocious wretches. Into the foremost sprang Bernardo; he stood eagerly in the bow; with a pistol cocked in one hand, and a heavy sabre in the other. With a howl like hungry wolves they pulled for the prize. A silence, dread as the famished lion before he wakes, reigned aboard her. A small crew stood around their captain on the quarter deck; a single swivel, a few old muskets, and a sabre or two, with the usual sailor knife, were their only arms. A powerful emotion agitated their leader; he trembled, but it was not the coward's quail; his face was deadly pale, but fear blanced it not; his words quivered through bloodless lips, but they breathed not of terror or dismay. It was the energy of a dauntless soul mastering its physical tenement. He looked on his faithful crew with thoughts that pen cannot portray.

"My men," said he, in a low and anxious tone, "we may soon be at anchor in a foreign port, but before we set sail, if any man has ought to say of me, let him speak his mind. When my poor, wild son left his father to go I know not where, my vessel became my home; I have tried to do my duty as an honest skipper should—I love you all, would die for you."

"We love you; will die for you," burst from the affected tates.

"My gallant boys, I thank you; fight till the last planks hold together; remember your wives and sweethearts. I am good for a dozen of the villainal!"

One full bold cheer was the answer:

"Take the foremost boat,—fire!" shouted the master of the brig, discharging his musket, which was followed by a sheet of flame from the swivel and small arms of the men.

The effect was terrible; a yell of agony arose; Bernardo tumbled heavily over the bow. The shattered boat filled and went

down, leaving a dense mass of dead, wounded, and cursing pirates on the bloody wave. But before the brave crew could reload, the other boat was alongside the brig, and a third was putting off from the schooner. The pirates poured on deck; their wild cries and horrid blasphemies rent the air, but not less terrific was the pealing hurrah! of the impetuous captain, as he whirled his sabre over his head.

"Fight for you lives, your skipper and your craft, we are one to ten my brave boys, but I am good for a dozen."

For a moment the pirates hesitated. It was a thrilling pause. It is dreadful to war against hope, but the struggle is the more terrible. Another band leaped on board and the fight closed like the meeting of whirlwinds. Then came the hot strife of life and death in its fiercest shape—the scream—the blaze—the clash—the grasp—the death hug—the jetting blood—the heavy fall—and the last groan. The sailors fought with the fierceness of revenge and the recklessness of despair. Many a foul pirate gasped his last curse on that dear-bought prize. But his courage could withstand the overwhelming numbers of the buccaneers. One by one, a deep plunge told that a son of the ocean was sinking in his ocean grave.

The pirates were masters of the brig;—the intrepid captain alone remained; yet still his sabre whirled its circle of death; still the stirring thunder of his voice cheered his men to victory. He looked around, and they were gone! A few scalding tears travelled with funeral pace over his gory cheek.

"All gone but me!—my poor boys," said he, sorrowfully, "you did your duty, and the great skipper that sails aloft won't forget you, when all hands are called on deck to report their watch." Faint and wounded, he cut his staggering way to the cabin.

"Take him alive, take him alive! he shall die by inches," shouted a husky voice, which the pirates recognized to be that of Bernardo. Pale, wet, and bleeding, he climbed on board; a ragged piece of scalp hung over his right eye and temple; his left arm fell splintered and powerless by his side. "Take him alive," again he cried, hoarse with passion, "for vengeance I must have."

After a sanguinary struggle, the heroic captain was taken and bound. The brig was plundered, and set on fire; the greedy element darted its wiry tongue up the rigging, and dressed the vessel in flame. The pirates with their prisoner and booty, put off for their schooner, heedless of the imploring cries of their wounded comrades on the burning prize.

In a few minutes more, "The Flower of the Sea" fell obediently to the wind, settling fully and gracefully to one side, and bore rapidly away.

The ill-fated prisoner was dragged with curses before the chief, on the quarter-deck; their eyes met in one long look of hate.

"What is our loss?" inquired Bernardo, turning to his men.

"Twenty-seven missing," was the answer.

"What! has a handful of villains done all this? Fool! what do you expect?" roared Bernardo, looking fury at his erect and scornful captive.

"That which you know I fear not,—death!" was the reply.

At the sound of that voice, a quick, broken cry might have been heard from aloft, but for the noise of the vessel speeding on her way.

"Yes, boasting dog, death you shall have, but it shall be with hot iron in your hissing flesh, and burning brimstone in your cursed mouth."

"Cut-throat—coward!"

"Silence! my revenge is not to be cheated by words. Look at me; do you not owe me a long debt of vengeance? Look at this damned scar!"

"I fired that ball; would it had struck your brain."