

## Literature, &amp;c.

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THE SHRIFT ON THE RAFT.

BY CHARLES W. BROOKS.

The terrible storm which ravaged the coast of Norway on the 12th October, 1715, was remembered in that country long after the hand of time and the industry of man had obliterated the marks of its fury. As sudden as it was tremendous, it arose after several weeks of settled weather, and having wrought more havoc in a few hours than ordinary tempests effect in days, it subsided with corresponding rapidity, leaving upon the minds of the peasants who witnessed its terrors a singular impression with regard to its origin. For years the herdsman of that rugged land, and the sailor of that dangerous sea, believed that the dreadful storm, which had swept away sheep and shepherd amid the ruin of house and fold, and dashed the largest craft upon the rocks that received the scattered fishing boats, was caused by a sudden exertion among the demons of the Pole, who, forbidden by the mandate of Heaven to enter earth while it shall move in its appointed orbit, are perpetually laboring to disturb its charmed circle, that they may rush in to havoc by land and wave.

Strange tales are told of the events of that fatal day, and of the night which ensued; and the following legend relating to one of the voyagers who suffered in the storm, bears some evidence of the feelings with which the Norwegians regarded so terrible a visitation; a feeling in which is mingled some vague recollection of the time when Norway itself was one of the most unfortunate of the stakes in the game played by the great Continental powers.

The tempest was rapidly subsiding as dusk drew on, but the cessation of the violent turmoil brought no comfort to the scanty crew of the ill-fated ship *Drontheim*, which had sailed from the port of that name on the preceding day, and had met the wrath of the storm in full career. She had been bound for France; but at the time we speak of, she was a helpless and naked hull, drifting whither the caprice of the wind, which seemed to blow from all points of the compass at once, chose to hurry her. She was now making her rapid but involuntary course northward; but to the few human beings who yet clung to her decks, the state of her shattered sides, through which the water was forcing its way at twenty wounds, left it a matter of hideous unconcern whether they might meet the certain fate which awaited them. It was obvious that many minutes could not elapse before the vessel and all she contained should be sucked into the troubled abyss on which she yet floated. Her smaller boats had long since been carried away by a burst of the storm, which hurling three or four monster waves across her deck, had swept away every moveable thing from its surface, including more than a third of the wretched crew. In the next moment, one of terrible madness, the survivors crowded the long boat, which had scarcely touched the foaming billows ere it was swamped, and went down with every soul it bore. Not a dozen men remained on the fated vessel, when the sudden and horrible change in motion which announces the foundering of a ship, took place. She ceased to make way; the violent agitation which had for hours rendered it nearly impossible to stand upon her deck, was exchanged for a sudden lurch, followed by a second and third; and then the hideous roar of the waters rushing in on every hand, to the frantic crew that all was over. Amid the loud and agonized prayers of a few, and the blasphemous ravings of the rest, the waves of the Northern Sea closed over the *Drontheim* for ever.

As the vortex caused by the sinking of the vessel disappeared, one man alone was struggling in the water in the energy of despair. His rich dress rather encumbered his movements, but he was in the prime of manhood, and a practised swimmer, and was putting forth his full strength in the hope of finding some relic of the ship on which to float for the chance of life. But his hope waxed fainter with his limbs, for the gathering dusk was rapidly reducing his chance of discovering any object around him, and the waves still ran too high and angrily to allow him a chance of endurance much longer. He still swam, but his despair was almost total when he discerned a dark body at a few yards' distance. He struck vigorously forward, and to his inexpressible relief, discovered that it was a small raft, on which a human

body was lying. A succession of violent strokes, now animated by renewed hope, brought him to its side, and in a moment or two, the Count de Burigny was clinging to the buoyant mass.

When he had somewhat recovered breath, his next effort was to mount upon the raft itself; but as he made the attempt, the figure which already occupied it arose to a sitting posture, and gently repulsed him. Before he could speak, it addressed him in a pleasing voice, which, however, was piercing enough to make itself distinctly heard amid the dashing waters:

'Stay, my son, you are welcome to all the support my raft will afford you, but for both of us to mount would entail destruction on both.'

'Father,' gasped the Count, 'whoever you may be, you will surely assist me in saving my life.'

'Truly, son,' returned the other voice, 'I apply for help at a most unseasonable time. But I am bound at least to succor you with my advice; and I therefore advise you to swim for some rocks, which are distant about a quarter of a league, in the direction in which I am pointing. They are always above water, and in the morning you will certainly be discovered by some vessel.'

'Thanks, father,' replied the Count; 'but I would rather cling here with the certainty of being safe for the moment than again risk my life in a struggle with the waves, for a chance of reaching some rocks I may not be able to climb.' 'Such is the wisdom of man!' said the other, 'ever confident in the present, ever distrustful of the future. But I tell you, my son, that you rocks are easily accessible, and that if you strike away now, you are safe.'

'Safe or not, father I remain here; and I therefore advise you, if you have the means, to steer us in search of this same rocky platform—we shall then have the satisfaction of being saved together.'

'I am on my own course, my son, and I advise you to keep my company,' said the other voice. The words induced the Count to examine his companion as closely as possible, but the fast falling twilight only enabled him to discern a figure in a priest's robe, the hood of which completely shrouded the features of the wearer.

'You speak strangely, father,' said the Count; 'but I hold my intention, fervently wishing I had something easier to hold, for my fingers are numbed, and this wood is slippery.'

'I have warned you, my son; but if you insist on remaining, I will do what I can to aid you.'

The figure seemed engaged with its dress for a moment. The next, a small, but intensely red light appeared by its side, suddenly illuminating the raft, the two speakers, and the surrounding waters, with a lustre which seemed supernatural. As soon as the Count could recover from the effect upon his eyes, he eagerly scrutinized the face of the other who had thrown back his hood, and was fixing a little lamp containing the light into the wood of the raft. The features were calm and regular, and the tansure on the head added to their dignified character. The stranger was clearly a priest, but his dress offered no aid in the discovery of his rank or country, even to the experienced eye of the Count de Burigny.

'I repeat it, my son, I exhort you to save yourself by swimming, and you are still in time to do so. But, since you are obstinate, this cord will afford you the assistance you desire.'

'Thanks, father,' said the Count, as the Priest, gradually creeping towards him, drew the rope, which he had taken from his own waist, under the arms of the former, and attaching one end to a ring in the woodwork, passed the cord several times around the body of the Count, and at length secured him so effectually to the raft, that he floated without the least necessity for exertion. The Priest then regained his seat in the centre, and for some minutes they were silent. The Count was the first to speak.

'I did not see you, father, among us in the unfortunate *Drontheim*,' he said.

'I remained below, at prayer, my son, until tarrying became presumption; I then hurled this raft upon the billows, and departed upon my mission.'

'Again you speak mysteriously, father. Might one know what the mission may be which keeps a man on a raft, in the middle of ocean, as calm as if he were at vespers in his own church?'

The Priest smiled. 'You forget, my son, that virtue is always tranquil in the hour of trial; and you forget, too, a very important difference in our situations.'

'By no means,' said the count; 'I am aware that I am chilling in the water,

while you are apparently at ease, in a cloak against which I see the water strike in vain. I would suggest to you that the virtue you speak of could give a nobler proof of its efficacy, were we to change places for an hour.'

'Nay, my son, that is selfish and unworthy. I impose a penance upon you for having entertained it, and enjoin you to walk for one hour, fasting, upon the ensuing morning.'

'I pray that I may do so,' said De Burigny; 'and I entreat you to double the penance, if you can thereby double the chance of my performing it.'

'Jest not, my son; but remember that you are still in a situation of great danger: a wave may dash your head against this raft, or may snap the cord which holds you to it, and in either case your own is desperate. It would rather become you to make a confession, and receive absolution while you may.'

'I have no objection, father, the less that I have nothing else to do; but I give you fair warning that you will have to wait for your dues till we reach land.'

'Hard hearted, careless scoffer! what if that should not be so certain?'

'Then so much the better for the confessor, father,' said the Count, whose natural audacity did not desert him even in that hour.'

'And how much for the penitent, son?' asked the Priest, sternly. 'But proceed, and that your wretched soul may come the sooner to peace, I will save you the narration of a life of crime, by apprising you that I know you.'

'By your mode of describing my history, I think you do,' said the other. 'I need not tell you, then, that I am the Count Guillaume de Burigny, a faithful servant of his Most Christian Majesty—'

'A faithless husband to a broken hearted wife—a traitorous friend to a trusting associate—and a treacherous envoy to a betrayed people. You need not. I know the libertinism which ended in a murder committed, if not by your hand, by your orders, and the object with which you have fled the scene of your guilt. I knew that the Count de Burigny, having consummated a career of profligacy by a dasardly crime, which has banished him from France, has sought to purchase pardon for the ruin of a family, by intriguing for the ruin of a nation.'

'Ha!' exclaimed the count; 'you are aware of my errand to Norway?'

'Ay,' said the Priest, 'the sword of Sweden, whose blow already hurtles in the air, is less terrible to the Norwegians, than is the poison of France which you were sent to mix. This time however, the cup shall be dashed from your hand. You laugh.'

'I do,' said the Count; though, Heaven knows, this is no place for mirth. Yes, who have such unexceptionable information upon these matters, are doubtless aware that the cup you speak of is mixed.'

'And in a woman's hand, that it may be presented. The Count de Burigny thinks he can safely return to his master, while his beautiful daughter remains to enforce, by blandishment and smile, the dark lesson he has tried to teach. How, if she, too, have left Norway?'

A shudder ran through the Count's frame, and all the recklessness of tone had left his voice, as he replied—

'Eugenia—tell me, father, in pity—what know you of Eugenia? I left her in Bergen, in safe watching and charge, though her work was somewhat bold. Nay, speak—whatever else I am, I am her father—you do not know—you cannot have heard aught of her?'

'Nay,' said the Priest; 'I merely asked what Count de Burigny's next intrigue would be, should he hear that a noble and maidenly disposition had been revolted by the task he had given it, and that a daughter had silently left Bergen, and following the footsteps of her father, had secretly embarked—'

'Not in the *Drontheim*—not in the accursed *Drontheim*, father!' screamed, rather than exclaimed the Count.

The Priest made no reply, but pointed to the water. A sudden and wondrous change had taken place upon its surface. In lieu of the foaming and dashing billows, the sea had become calm as a mountain lake. The roar of the waves were hushed, but in its stead, had arisen a low droning, and distant sound, which brought with it a fear the mind owned, but could not explain. The raft had hitherto been carried swiftly along, but its speed was now increasing tenfold. The consternation of the Count became evident, but to all his exclamations the Priest gave no answer. That strange droning sound grew gradually louder, but the ear struggled in vain to dis-

cover how it was composed. Still the raft hurried on with lightning speed. Darkness was all around it, save the bright red gleam of the Priest's lamp.

Suddenly the thought of his daughter recrossed the Count's brain. He gasped—for the swiftness of their course now rendered speaking difficult—

'Father! I implore you, what know you of Eugenia?'

Once more the priest pointed silently to the water, and as the Count's eye followed the motion, he beheld a form whirling by his side in a current, the intense fierceness of which rendered its surface smooth as glass. There was the corpse of a pale and beautiful girl, lovely even in death. Long and golden locks clustered around her neck and shoulders, but locks were wet and tangled, and the alabaster skin was becoming blue with exposure to the water. The eyes were closed—it was well they were so. That form was following the raft, but the increasing velocity of the latter left the corpse behind in a moment: that moment had sufficed for a father to recognize his daughter. He uttered no word, but gazed steadily at the priest.

The terrible and indescribable sound had now increased to a roar, which would have rendered the voice inaudible at the shortest distance. The speed of the raft was now terrific; yet it neither swerved nor swayed, and the priest sat unmoved, returning the stupefied gaze of the Count! Suddenly one side of the raft became depressed, and in that position it continued its furious career. The roar had now become more hideous than any noise which can be conceived, and yet it was of a nature that baffled the ear. The priest rose slowly to his feet, and preserving his balance, apparently unconscious of the frightful slope of the hurrying raft, he leaned to De Burigny, and in a low tone, which in spite of the horrible noise around, carried the full meaning of its words to the Count's understanding, said—

'WE ARE IN THE MAELSTROM!'

They were indeed in that dreadful whirlpool—the most awful abyss which disfigures the face of creation. That hideous roar, so strange and so appalling, was the sound of the waters which whirl and rage in the unfathomable gulf. Louder and louder still it waxed, until the ear could bear no addition to the noise, and faster and faster flew the raft, but every instant it went deeper down the vortex. The wretched De Burigny struggled with the cord which held him to the raft, and sought to break from it in vain. The link which he had demanded when execution would have saved him, was the means of dragging him more surely to destruction. For one instant he looked upwards, and to his horror, beheld the red light of the lamp, reflected on a sloping wall of raging water, rising a hundred yards above him, down the side of which he was hurrying to an abyss on which he dared give no glance. Then his eye turned to the raft—there was no one upon it; but in the maddening agony of that moment De Burigny heard, accompanied by a hellish laugh, the words—'The priest's dues for thy shrift are paid!' The next instant, the cords gave way, the raft shot violently forwards, and De Burigny was alone—in the Maelstrom.

By T. Hood.

## AN UNDERTAKER

Is an Illwiller to the Human Race. He is by Profession an Enemy to his Species, and can no more look kindly at his Fellow than the Sheriff's Officer; for why, his Profit begins with an Arrest for the Debt of Nature. As the Bailiff looks on a failing man so doth he, and with the same Hope, namely, to take the Body.

Hence hath he little Sympathy with his Kind, small Pity for the Poor, and least of all for the Widow and the Orphan, whom he regards, Planter like, but as so many Blacks on his Estate. If he have any Community of Feeling, it is with the Sexton, has likewise a Per Centage on the Bills of Mortality, and never sees a picture of health but he longs to increase it. Both have the same quick Ear for a Churchyard Cough, and both the same Relish for the same Music, to wit, the Toll of Saint Sepulchre. Moreover both go constantly in black—howbeit 'tis no mourning suit but a Livery—for the De-funct than the Bird of the same Plumage, that is the Undertaker to a dead Horse.

As a neighbour he is to be shunned. To live opposite to him is full under the Evil Eye. Like the Witch that foretells other Cattle, he would rot you as soon as look at you, if it could be done at a Glance; but that Magic being out of Date, he contents himself with choosing the very Spot on the House Front that shall serve for a Hatchment. Thereforeward he watches your going out and your coming in; your rising