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THE

# WATER-WITCH;

OR,

## THE SKIMMER OF THE SEAS

### A Tale.

BY J. FENIMORE COOPER.

~~~~~  
Mais, qui diable alloit-il faire dans cette galère ?  
~~~~~

NOV. 1898.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

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NEW EDITION.  
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NEW YORK:  
STRINGER AND TOWNSEND

1856.

## WATER-WITCH.

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*Eastern District of Pennsylvania, to wit:*

BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the thirtieth day of October, in the fifty-third year of the Independence of the United States of America, A. D. 1830, CAREY & LEA, of the said district, have deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors in the words following, to wit:

L. S.

"The Water-Witch, or the Skimmer of the Seas. A Tale; by the author of the Pilot, Red Rover, &c. &c. &c.

' Mais, que diable alloit-il faire dans cette galère ? '

In conformity to the Act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, "An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the Authors and Proprietors of such Copies, during the times therein mentioned;" And also to an Act, entitled, "An Act supplementary to an Act, entitled, 'An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the Authors and Proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extend ing the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching-his torical and other prints."

D. CALDWELL, *Clerk of the  
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## PREFACE.

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CHRISTENDOM is gradually extricating itself from the ignorance, ferocity, and crimes of the middle ages. It is no longer subject of boast, that the hand which wields the sword, never held a pen, and men have long since ceased to be ashamed of knowledge. The multiplied means of imparting principles and facts, and a more general diffusion of intelligence, have conduced to establish sounder ethics and juster practices, throughout the whole civilized world. Thus, he who admits the conviction, as hope declines with his years, that man deteriorates, is probably as far from the truth, as the visionary who sees the dawn of a golden age, in the commencement of the nineteenth century. That we have greatly improved on the opinions and practices of our ancestors, is quite as certain as that there will be occasion to meliorate the legacy of morals which we shall transmit to posterity.

When the progress of civilization compelled Europe to correct the violence and injustice which were so openly practised, until the art of printing became known, the other hemisphere made America the scene of those acts, which shame prevented her from exhibiting nearer home. There was little of a lawless, mercenary, violent, and selfish nature, that the self-styled masters of the continent hesitated to commit, when removed from the immediate responsibilities of the society in which they had been educated. The Drakes, Rogers', and Dampiers of that day, though enrolled in the list of naval heroes.

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were no other than pirates, acting under the sanction of commissions; and the scenes that occurred among the marauders of the land, were often of a character to disgrace human nature.

That the colonies which formed the root of this republic escaped the more serious evils of a corruption so gross and so widely spread, can only be ascribed to the characters of those by whom they were peopled.

Perhaps nine-tenths of all the white inhabitants of the Union are the direct descendants of men who quitted Europe, in order to worship God according to conviction and conscience. If the Puritans of New-England, the Friends of Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, the Catholics of Maryland, the Presbyterians of the upper counties of Virginia and of the Carolinas, and the Huguenots, brought with them the exaggeration of their peculiar sects, it was an exaggeration that tended to correct most of their ordinary practices. Still the English Provinces were not permitted, altogether, to escape from the moral dependency that seems nearly inseparable from colonial government, or to be entirely exempt from the wide contamination of the times.

The State of New-York, as is well known, was originally a colony of the United Provinces. The settlement was made in the year 1613; and the Dutch East India Company, under whose authority the establishment was made, claimed the whole country between the Connecticut and the mouth of Delaware-bay, a territory which, as it had a corresponding depth, equalled the whole surface of the present kingdom of France. Of this vast region, however, they never occupied but a narrow belt on each side of the Hudson, with, here and there, a settlement on a few of the river flats, more inland.

There is a providence in the destiny of nations, that sets at nought the most profound of human calculations. Had the dominion of the Dutch continued a century longer, there would have existed in the very heart of the Union a people opposed to its establishment, by their language, origin, and habits. The conquest of the English in 1663, though unjust and iniquitous in itself, removed the danger, by opening the way for the introduction of that great community of character which now so happily prevails.

Though the English, the French, the Swedes, the Dutch, the Danes, the Spaniards, and the Norwegians, all had colonies within the country which now composes the United States, the people of the latter are more homogeneous in character, language, and opinions, than those of any other great nation that is familiarly known. This identity of character is owing to the early predominance of the English, and to the circumstance that New-England and Virginia, the two great sources of internal emigration, were entirely of English origin. Still, New-York retains, to the present hour, a variety of usages that were obtained from Holland. Her edifices of painted bricks, her streets lined with trees, her inconvenient and awkward stoops, and a large proportion of her names, are equally derived from the Dutch. Until the commencement of this century, even language of Holland prevailed in the streets of the capital, and though a nation of singular boldness and originality in all that relates to navigation, the greatest sea-port of the country betrays many evidences of a taste which must be referred to the same origin.

The reader will find in these facts a sufficient explanation of most of the peculiar customs, and of some of the peculiar practices, that are exhibited in the course of the fel-

lowing tale. Slavery, a divided language, and a distinct people, are no longer to be found, within the fair regions of New-York; and, without pretending to any peculiar exemption from the weaknesses of humanity, it may be permitted us to hope, that these are not the only features of the narrative, which a better policy, and a more equitable administration of power, have made purely historical.

Early released from the fetters of the middle ages, fetters that bound the mind equally with the person, America has preceded rather than followed Europe, in that march of improvement which is rendering the present era so remarkable. Under a system, broad, liberal, and just as hers, though she may have to contend with rivalries that are sustained by a more concentrated competition, and which are as absurd by their pretension of liberality as they are offensive by their monopolies, there is nothing to fear, in the end. Her political motto should be Justice, and her first and greatest care to see it administered to her own citizens.

The reader is left to make the application.

# THE WATER-WITCH.

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## CHAPTER I.

“What, shall this speech be spoke for our excuse?  
Or shall we on without apology?”

ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE fine estuary which penetrates the American coast, between the fortieth and forty-first degrees of latitude, is formed by the confluence of the Hudson, the Hackensack, the Passaic, the Raritan, and a multitude of smaller streams; all of which pour their tribute into the ocean, within the space named. The islands of Nassau and Staten are happily placed to exclude the tempests of the open sea, while the deep and broad arms of the latter offer every desirable facility for foreign trade and internal intercourse. To this fortunate disposition of land and water, with a temperate climate, a central position, and an immense interior, that is now penetrated, in every direction, either by artificial or by natural streams, the city of New-York is indebted for its extraordinary prosperity. Though not wanting in beauty, there are many bays that surpass this in the charms of scenery; but it may be questioned if the world possesses another site that unites so many natural advantages for the growth and support of a widely extended commerce. As if never wearied with her kindness, Nature has placed the island of Manhattan at the precise point that is most desirable for the position of a town. Millions might inhabit the spot, and yet a ship should load near every door; and while the surface of the land just possesses the inequalities that are required for health and cleanliness, its bosom is filled with the material most needed in construction.

The consequences of so unusual a concurrence of favorable circumstances, are well known. A vigorous, healthful, and continued growth, that has no parallel even in the history of this extraordinary and fortunate country, has already raised the insignificant provincial town of the last century to the level of the second-rate cities of the other hemisphere. The New-Amsterdam of this continent already rivals its parent of the other; and, so far as human powers may pretend to predict, a few fleeting years will place her on a level with the proudest capitals of Europe.

It would seem that, as Nature has given its periods to the stages of animal life, it has also set limits to all moral and political ascendancy. While the city of the Medici is receding from its crumbling walls, like the human form shrinking into "the lean and slipper'd pantaloan," the Queen of the Adriatic sleeping on her muddy isles, and Rome itself is only to be traced by fallen temples and buried columns, the youthful vigor of America is fast covering the wilds of the West with the happiest fruits of human industry.

By the Manhattanese, who is familiar with the forest of masts, the miles of wharves, the countless villas, the hundred churches, the castles, the smoking and busy vessels that crowd his bay, the daily increase and the general movement of his native town, the picture we are about to sketch will scarcely be recognized. He who shall come a generation later will probably smile, that subject of admiration should have been found in the existing condition of the city: and yet we shall attempt to carry the recollections of the reader but a century back, in the brief history of his country.

As the sun rose on the morning of the 3d of June, 171-, the report of a cannon was heard rolling along the waters of the Hudson. Smoke issued from an

embrasure of a small fortress, that stood on the point of land where the river and the bay mingle their waters. The explosion was followed by the appearance of a flag, which, as it rose to the summit of its staff and unfolded itself heavily in the light current of air, showed the blue field and red cross of the English ensign. At the distance of several miles, the dark masts of a ship were to be seen, faintly relieved by the verdant back-ground of the heights of Staten Island. A little cloud floated over this object, and then an answering signal came dull and rumbling to the town. The flag that the cruiser set was not visible in the distance.

At the precise moment that the noise of the first gun was heard, the door of one of the principal dwellings of the town opened, and a man, who might have been its master, appeared on its stoop, as the ill-arranged entrances of the buildings of the place are still termed. He was seemingly prepared for some expedition that was likely to consume the day. A black of middle age followed the burgher to the threshold; and another negro, who had not yet reached the stature of manhood, bore under his arm a small bundle, that probably contained articles of the first necessity to the comfort of his master.

"Thrift, Mr. Euclid, thrift is your true philosopher's stone;" commenced, or rather continued in a rich full-mouthed Dutch, the proprietor of the dwelling, who had evidently been giving a leave-taking charge to his principal slave, before quitting the house—"Thrift hath made many a man rich, but it never yet brought any one to want. It is thrift which has built up the credit of my house, and, though it is said by myself, a broader back and firmer base belongs to no merchant in the colonies. You are but the reflection of your master's prosperity, you rogue, and so much the greater need that you look to his interests. If the substance is wasted, what

will become of the shadow? When I get delicate, you will sicken: when I am a-hungred, you will be famished; when I die, you may be—ahem—Euclid. I leave thee in charge with goods and chattels, house and stable, with my character in the neighborhood. I am going to the Lust in Rust, for a mouthful of better air. Plague and fevers! I believe the people will continue to come into this crowded town, until it gets to be as pestilent as Rotterdam in the dog-days. You have now come to years when a man obtains his reflection, boy, and I expect suitable care and discretion about the premises, while my back is turned. Now, harkee, sirrah: I am not entirely pleased with the character of thy company. It is not altogether as respectable as becomes the confidential servant of a man of a certain station in the world. There are thy two cousins, Brom and Kobus, who are no better than a couple of blackguards; and as for the English negro, Diomede—he is a devil's imp! Thou hast the other locks at disposal, and,” drawing with visible reluctance the instrument from his pocket, “here is the key of the stable. Not a hoof is to quit it, but to go to the pump—and see that each animal has its food to a minute. The devil's roysterers! a Manhattan negro takes a Flemish gelding for a gaunt hound that is never out of breath, and away he goes, at night, scampering along the highways like a Yankee witch switching through the air on a broomstick—but mark me, master Euclid, I have eyes in my head, as thou knowest by bitter experience! D'ye remember, ragamuffin, the time when I saw thee, from the Hague, riding the beasts, as if the devil spurred them, along the dyke of Leyden, without remorse as without leave?”

“I alway b'rieve some make-mischief tell Masser dat time;” returned the negro sulkily, though not without doubt.

“His own eyes were the tell-tales. If masters had

no eyes, a pretty world would the negroes make of it! I have got the measure of every black heel, on the island, registered in the big book you see me so often looking into, especially on Sundays; and, if either of the tire-legs I have named dares to enter my grounds, let him expect to pay a visit to the city Provost. What do the wild-cats mean? Do they think that the geldings were bought in Holland, with charges for breaking in, shipment, insurance, freight, and risk of diseases, to have their flesh melted from their ribs like a cook's candle?"

"Ere no'tin' done in all 'e island, but a color' man do him! He do a mischief, and he do all a work, too! I won'er what color Masser t'ink war' Captain Kidd?"

"Black or white, he was a rank rogue; and you see the end he came to. I warrant you, now, that water-thief began his iniquities by riding the neighbors' horses, at night. His fate should be a warning to every negro in the colony. Theimps of darkness! The English have no such scarcity of rogues at home, that they could not spare us the pirate to hang up on one of the islands, as a scarecrow to the blacks of Manhattan."

"Well, I t'ink 'e sight do a white man some good, too;" returned Euclid, who had all the pertinacity of a spoiled Dutch negro, singularly blended with affection for him in whose service he had been born. "I hear ebbery body say, 'er'e war' but two color' man in he ship, and 'em bot' war' Guinea-born."

"A modest tongue, thou midnight scamperer! look to my geldings—Here—here are two Dutch florins, three stivers, and a Spanish pistareen for thee; one of the florins is for thy old mother, and with the others thou canst lighten thy heart in the Paus merymakings—if I hear that either of thy rascally cousins, or the English Diomedé, has put a leg across beast of mine, it will be the worse for all Africa!

"Famine and skeletons! here have I been seven years trying to fatten the nags, and they still look more like weasels than a pair of solid geldings."

The close of this speech was rather muttered in the distance, and by way of soliloquy, than actually administered to the namesake of the great mathematician. The air of the negro had been a little equivocal, during the parting admonition. There was an evident struggle, in his mind, between an innate love of disobedience, and a secret dread of his master's means of information. So long as the latter continued in sight, the black watched his form in doubt; and when it had turned a corner, he stood at gaze, for a moment, with a negro on a neighboring stoop; then both shook their heads significantly, laughed aloud, and retired. That night, the confidential servant attended to the interests of his absent master, with a fidelity and care which proved he felt his own existence identified with that of a man who claimed so close a right in his person; and just as the clock struck ten, he and the negro last mentioned mounted the sluggish and over-fattened horses, and galloped, as hard as foot could be laid to the earth, several miles deeper into the island, to attend a frolic at one of the usual haunts of the people of their color and condition.

Had Alderman Myndert Van Beverout suspected the calamity which was so soon to succeed his absence, it is probable that his mien would have been less composed, as he pursued his way from his own door, on the occasion named. That he had confidence in the virtue of his menaces, however, may be inferred from the tranquillity which immediately took possession of features that were never disturbed, without wearing an appearance of unnatural effort. The substantial burgher was a little turned of fifty; and an English wag, who had imported from the mother country a love for the humor of his nation,

had once, in a conflict of wits before the city council, described him to be a man of alliterations. When called upon to explain away this breach of parliamentary decorum, the punster had gotten rid of the matter, by describing his opponent to be "short, solid and sturdy, in stature; full, flushed and funny, in face; and proud, ponderous and pragmatistical, in propensities." But, as is usual, in all sayings of effort, there was more smartness than truth in this description; though, after making a trifling allowance for the coloring of political rivalry, the reader may receive its physical portion as sufficiently descriptive to answer all the necessary purposes of this tale. If we add, that he was a trader of great wealth and shrewdness, and a bachelor, we need say no more in this stage of the narrative.

Notwithstanding the early hour at which this industrious and flourishing merchant quitted his abode, his movement along the narrow streets of his native town was measured and dignified. More than once, he stopped to speak to some favorite family-servant, invariably terminating his inquiries after the health of the master, by some facetious observation adapted to the habits and capacity of the slave. From this, it would seem, that, while he had so exaggerated notions of domestic discipline, the worthy burgher was far from being one who indulged, by inclination, in the menaces he has been heard to utter. He had just dismissed one of these loitering negroes, when, on turning a corner, a man of his own color, for the first time that morning, suddenly stood before him. The startled citizen made an involuntary movement to avoid the unexpected interview, and then, perceiving the difficulty of such a step, he submitted, with as good a grace as if it had been one of his own seeking.

"The orb of day—the morning gun—and Mr Alderman Van Beverout!" exclaimed the individual

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