

**THE
C O R S A I R ;
A ROMANTIC LEGEND OF HELL GATE**

PREFACE.



AS we have invited the reader to a long Poem, we feel some misgiving in setting before him a lengthy Preface. We will therefore bring to his attention, as an Appendix, the matter intended as an Introduction, thus leaving him free to begin with the Story of the **CORSAIR** at once, while the former may afterward be read with advantage, should he feel interested in the facts and history of the locality of which it treats. He will also find therein some particulars relating to the leading characters described in the Story. There he will also learn why the Pirate's daughter became so impressed with fear as the vessel approached the turbulent Strait, whose name, even now, is suggestive of wreck and disaster.

PRELUDE.


THIS story of the sea,
Full of weird mystery,
'Twere vain to tell to thee
'Mid dusty lore I found it!
You still might doubt its truth,—
The truest tale, in sooth,
(Such as Boaz and Ruth)
Has gathered skeptics round it!

Yet, should you deign to read
Where'er the Muse may lead,
The tale, as you proceed,
Will wake some tender feeling,
Till, like a pleasant dream,
The Corsair's MAID will seem
To throw a hallowed beam
Where phantom-shades were stealing!

THE CORSAIR.

Nor florid prose,
Nor honied lies of rhyme,
Can blazon evil deeds,
Or consecrate a crime.
—CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE.

The whirligig of Time
Brings in his revenges.
—SHAKESPEARE.

 IS said, in ancient times,
Cursed with a thousand crimes, Blood-stained in all the
climes,
Sailed hither a Pirate;—
Flax'n was his flowing hair,
Rake-like his haughty air,
Eyes that revealed despair,
His passions fierce and irate.

Sprung from the Vikings bold,—
Sea-kings they were of old
Who held their warlike hold
On Norway's stormy shore,—
He made the sea his home,
And hoped, where he might roam,
The waves would be his tomb
When he should be no more!

His Norman castle lost,
His fate by battle crossed,
His life like ship a-tossed,
The raging seas pursuing,
He reared a stronger hold,
Afar from winter's cold,
And filled its cells with gold
From many a ship subduing.

He'd sailed o'er tropic seas;
'Mong sun-bright Cyclades;
Before the gelid breeze,
And gales Siberian;—
Upon the Spanish Main
Captives many he had slain,
Blood running there like rain
From veins Iberian!

Thrice, when o'ermatched in fight,
He sailed through Hell Gate, light
As sea-mew out of sight
Through tempest-clouds careering,
While ships for war arrayed,
The treach'rous rocks delayed,
Or there forever staid—
To Pluto's realms steering!

Once, sweeping o'er the Sound,
Amid the dark profound,
These fateful words resound—
“A foe!—*They* must defend her!”
While a frigate on their course
Hailed them in stormy Norse,

Shrill, clear and free, then hoarse,
Demanding their surrender!

Laden with golden store,
The Pirate sunk in shore
A thousand bars or more
Before he joined in battle:
Then roared his guns amain,
Then poured his iron rain.
Till groaned the decks with slain,
Mid spars' and cables' rattle.

Down went the Norseman brave,
Down to his sea-green grave,
No more to be a slave
Where the dark norms [\[A\]](#) bewilder!—
Athwart the morning skies
The wheeling sea-bird flies
And mocks the coral's rise,
Old Neptune's silent builder.

The Pirate's buried gold
Sands of the Sound still hold,
Nor wizard's wand has told
The place of its concealing;
Yet, ere the Corsair died,
He sought these waters wide
More spoil, perhaps, to hide,
Or this, perchance, revealing

Ere Fortune frowned again,
That oft had brought him pain,
Instead of golden gain,

The only thing he cherished,
Save her he wed of yore,
Save the bright child she bore,
His blue-eyed Leonore—
For these he would have perished!

But ere he spread his sail,
To catch the westward gale,
His vassals, growing pale,
Sighed at the words then spoken;—
Hushed was the wassail all
Within the castle hall,
And shadows on the wall
Grew phantom-like and broken.

For, o'er the Corsair grim,
There came a wayward whim
That hither should sail with him
His daughter Leonore,
Who, bright and beautiful,
Was always dutiful,
With pride not yet too full
She left her island shore.

Her father's castle there
Soon fades, a speck in air,
With banners floating fair
From loop and turret, waning.
Then on the deck—alone—
She knelt to Nature's Throne,
Whose God rules there—unknown—
The mighty billows chaining.

Unknown her father's trade,

Unseen his reeking blade,
Not yet had that sweet maid
Found he was cruel-hearted;
For, guarded in her home,
Whene'er his ship did come,
She, not allowed to roam,
Ne'er from her mother parted.

Few were the tears she shed,
As o'er the waves she sped,
Without one hope ahead
To cheer the loved behind her!
And though too brave to fear,
She sighed to leave those dear
For skies less bright and clear,
Faint filial love to bind her;

For, 'mid his reveling band,
Her father held in hand,
And poured, while he could stand,
The purple grapes' libation,
Till quite forgot was she,
Whose eyes, he said, should be
The light of every sea.
The pride of queenly station!

Soon—when his ship was light—
He met in tropic night
A foe, with armor bright,
Off the Azores:
Up went the Pirate's flag—
Black, as round Pico's crag [\[B\]](#)
The infant storm-clouds lag

Before they sweep the shores.

Far o'er the waters threw
The moon her amber hue,
As swift the foeman's crew
Their guns unlimbered;—
Then, as when thunders roar,
Their broadsides they did pour,
Which did the pirate gore,
Though heavily timbered.

Undaunted on his track,
The Corsair would not slack
While pouring fire back
From every gun's embrasure.—
For, once his crew aboard,
The conflict, sword to sword,
Had made the Pirate lord
Of ship and golden treasure.

Unequal grew the fight,—
The pirate's guns, too light,
The Dutchman could not "bite"—
Van Tromp, the Admiral!
Who loved these tropic shores,
Where Night her starlight pours,
And heard from the Azores
Love's sweetest madrigal. [\[C\]](#)

Then mid that dreadful fray
Fair Leonore did pray—
"Oh, father, do not stay,
Or we shall all be slaughtered!—"

I dreamt but yesternight
A frigate hove in sight
With men, in armor bright,
Who ne'er midst carnage loitered!"

"Nay—daughter, do not fear!—
The Dutch we'll conquer here!—
Ho, men! make ready—clear
The foeman's decks, undaunted!"
But ere his men could test
Their foemen, breast to breast,
The wind veered to the west,
As if the seas were haunted!

Far o'er the sultry main
There rose a hurricane,
Black, as was Chaos' reign
Before the earth was lighted;—
The heavens seemed roll
Together like a scroll,
As flashed from pole to pole
The spirit long benighted!

Out of the tempest's gloom—
As from unhallowed tomb—
A raven on the boom
Fluttered above the Pirate!—
The croaking of the bird
The crew in terror heard—
"Death!" was the fearful word
It uttered, wild and irate!

Wide grew their vacant stare—
More grim their dumb despair—

As thunder-bursts in air
Came pealing—booming—crashing!
While, like red meteors' blaze,
The lightning's lurid rays
Lit spars and sails and stays
With never-ceasing flashing!

Oh, the wild hurricane!
Thou terror of the main!
What victims thou hast slain,
The fairest tropic scourging!
Though in thy maddest mood,
Thou did'st the Corsair good,
Else had his crew been food,
Beneath the green waves' surging!

So quick the tempest came—
With thunder and with flame—
The Dutchman's fire was tame
From which the pirate parted!
Then o'er the angry sea,
As strove each ship to be
Well braced toward the lee,
They, through the storm-clouds, darted!

Long was that famous chase—
The hurricane's embrace
Long lines of foam did trace
As fast they sped to leeward:
The pirate, swift of wing,
Flew, like a bird in spring,
Away from the storm-king,
Sweeping from seaward,

Till, like a mighty ghost,
A headland on the coast,
Grim as a sullen host
In battle late defeated,
Rose like a tower of stone—
As pale the moonbeams shone—
And then in darkness—gone—
Like host that had retreated!

“Oh, father!” cried the maid,
Like one of ghosts afraid,
“What is that dreadful shade
That looms before us?”
“’Tis but the land, my girl,
That bends in graceful whorl,
And soon ’twill shine like pearl,
When bright the sun beams o’er us!”

With fortune now more kind,
They sped before the wind
Six days—the Dutch behind
Growling like thunder,
Before their path was seen
To glow with light between
The isles that lay serene
In all their tropic wonder.

Then came more dreary days,—
Dull—dark—with misty rays
A moment in a blaze,
And then in darkness ending!—
At last fair Leonore,
Longing to tread the shore,
Cried—“Will we nevermore

Escape this gloom impending?

“I know—oh—father dear,
Some dread mishap is near—
A third night, dark and drear,
The scowling Dutch behind us!”
“Nay, daughter;—soon the Sound
We’ll reach, ’mid isles around;—
I know each pass profound,—
No Dutchman there can find us!

“Yes—ere that fair expanse
The foe can win—perchance,
Old Nick himself may dance
Upon his quarter-railing!—
Through Hell Gate’s narrow way
His ship will go astray,
Till gored, like ship of clay,
She ends her days of sailing!”

Another night—“Heigh-ho!”
The reef-foam gleamed like snow,—
Old Coney’s serf below,
The Narrows stretched before them—
With Staten on their left,
And Bedloe’s, far bereft,
And Governor’s, as cleft
From Brooklyn, frowning o’er them.

“I pray thee, father, tell
Why doth that doleful bell
Sound so much like a knell,
So near this gloomy water?”
“’Tis nought, my Leonore,

But watchmen on the shore,
Who toll, while burghers snore,
To fright the Fiend of Slaughter!

“For here the Indian roves
Through islands’ darkling groves,
And those he hates he loves
To wing his arrows through them;
For they are robbers come
To steal away his home;
Tribe after tribe must roam,
And e’en in trade they ‘do’ them!”[\[D\]](#)

Past Wallabout’s cosy nook,
And stormy Corlear’s Hook,
Which many a storied book
Involves in truth and fable,—
Past Blackwell’s wooded shore,
Where turbid waters pour,
Dark, sullen evermore,
Ignoring man or cable;—

Past these the pirate’s sail
Swells wide before the gale,
Which, like a demon’s wail,
Sighs through the cordage, shrilling.
“Oh, father!” cries the maid,
“If blood be on your blade,
Pray now to Heaven for aid
While Heaven yet is willing!

“The stormy petrels fly
Along the waves more nigh—

Then wheel athwart the sky,
Heralds of storm impending!
Nearer the lightnings flash—
Nearer the thunders crash—
Louder the waters lash
These baleful shores, unending!

“Behold those racking clouds!
List to the shivering shrouds!
Lo! spirits come in crowds
From yonder lurid shore!
Oh, father! bend thy knee
Before that fiery sea
Sweeps over thee and me,—
Lost—lost—forevermore!”

“Hush—daughter!—Do not think
Your father fears to sink
Who’s stood on Death’s dark brink
In many a furious fray!—
Our castle by the sea
Is Heaven’s shrine to me,
Where *one* on bended knee
This night for us will pray!”

“Oh, father! List!—I hear
Swift rapids roaring near;—
Oh, what is it I fear
So close our promised haven?”
“’Tis nought, my Leonore,
But waters ’long the shore,
That through dark Hell Gate pour,
Clamorous as a raven!”

“Then, turn, my father, back,—
I hear the vessel crack,—
I dread those waters black,
Hot as the lightning o’er us!”
“Nay—daughter—fear no harm,—
Their tides are not more warm
Than springs upon a farm,—
No danger lurks before us!”

Through Hell Gate’s narrow pass
He steered his ship, alas!
A ship no more than glass
In that fierce current!—
Among the ragged rocks,
With many thundering shocks,
The blood-stained cruiser blocks
The deep, Plutonian torrent!

His daughter Leonore
Alone did reach the shore,
The rest were nevermore
Beheld on this bright planet!—
For them no more shall blow
The winds where spices grow,—
Their flag trails down below
Where breeze shall never fan it!

Their eyes have turned to stone,
That oft in battle shone;—
Their hair to sea-kelp grown,
’Neath wind and wave’s commotion,
Shall stream no more to breeze
Across the Arctic seas,
Or blue Symplegades

Damp with the spray of ocean.

The Pirate's daughter lay
On yonder rock till day,
When from the Lower Bay
Sailed hither a cruiser,
On which a young King came,
Whose heart was set aflame
(Which no fond maid will blame)
While trying to amuse her!

On board the royal craft,
The maiden wept and laughed,
By turns, like one that's daft,
With grief and joy o'erweighted;
While (always at her side)
The kingly sailor's pride
Grew fainter, till it died,
In Beauty's glory fated!—

Fair islands of the sea
Were his—as she must be—
He said, in playful glee,
And threw a necklace o'er her!
Then on his noble breast
She laid her head to rest,
Though half afraid to test
The golden dream before her!

No woman's heart will deign
To question more,—'twere vain;—
The lands of Deloraine
Were hers forevermore!
And there the orange grew,

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