

**THE NEW DEMOCRACY,
A FRAGMENT OF
CAUCASIAN HISTORY**

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The New Democracy, a Fragment of Caucasian History by New Democracy

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THE NEW DEMOCRACY.

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CHAPTER I.

MID-OCEAN, some time in September, 188—. An open boat, drifting heedlessly along in a sunlit sea, whose calm surface is broken only by soft, glad ripples, extending to the horizon. A cloudless sky above, of purest azure, with a glowering sun, sending its burning rays over the expanse of ocean. A beautiful, brilliant picture, with but one spot of contrast—the boat. The single sail is motionless against the mast, ragged and unsightly; the rudder motionless too, though no hand is guiding it; the paint upon its sides blistered with the heat. There is no motion about it; there is no life about it—save the human form, that is lying in a heap forward, with its hands stretched vainly towards the heavens, and its face buried in the bows.

Extend your pity, kind reader—you who are, perhaps, reading these lines in all the comfort of an English home; extend your pity to the poor, forlorn being lying in that open boat upon that heated, smiling ocean, for that being was myself!

To tell you how I came there is a brief story. Two months before I was in London, taking leave of my friends before I quitted my native country. My reason for leaving was not of the ordinary kind, for my means were sufficient, and my prospects were good; but my health was precarious, and my doctor counselled a voyage to the Antipodes. I had been reading hard for my final examination for the Bar, and, as I was not physically strong, and had no natural cleverness—though owning a certain power of plodding on calmly, and a facility for acquiring languages through colloquial intercourse—I had overtasked my strength, and, while succeeding in my object, had fallen a prey to some low malady, which my medical advisers feared might develop, if not checked, into a decline.

I was not unwilling to leave England, for the desire to travel had always been a part of me; but my condition of mind at that time was such that I cared little where I went, or what became of me. However, I shook off my despondency sufficiently to take a farewell of the few relatives I possessed, and the many kind friends who had so often cheered me onwards—especially my good master, Mr. Orpen, of Pump Court, Temple, in whose chambers I had been reading, and who, I see, has lately taken silk, a worthy reward for his legal talent and general ability—and secured my passage on board the sailing clipper, *Ben Alder*, Captain Richard Price, belonging to

Messrs. MacQueen and Co., of Billiter Court, Fenchurch Street, and bound for Sydney, with a general cargo.

The ship sailed on the 3rd of August, and I had no sooner shaken off the sea-sickness, to which, as a thorough landsman, I quickly succumbed, than I began to experience a return of bodily and mental vigour. We were a small party on board, for there were but three passengers, besides myself, and the crew all told only numbered twenty-one. But we quickly became intimate, and, encouraged by the bracing sea-air and regularity of life, full of good companionship and merriment. The captain was a bluff old seaman, touchy and crotchety through the day, yet yielding to the influence of hot grog, and appreciative listeners in the evening, and the first and second mates—Mr. Hodder and Mr. Jackson—were both as good humoured, kindly-disposed souls as one could wish to meet. Of my three fellow-passengers, one was an elderly Australian, somewhat taciturn in manner, and inclined to view life from the dark side; but the other two were young, devil-may-care Englishmen, who seemed to exist in a perpetual atmosphere of good spirits and jollity.

Of Johnson I can safely say that he was the prince of good-fellows, ever ready with a jest, ever game for a frolic, with a bright, happy nature that was absolutely contagious; while Powell, with his ever-handly banjo, and his absurdly comic songs, which

he sang with excellent effect, was a constant source of laughter and amusement.

But what are these memories but sad, bygone things now!

Day by day passed in the same even manner, yet never heavily, and by the beginning of September we were in the eastern seas. I had almost recovered my health, and was looking forward joyously to landing at Sydney, though with some regret at having to part from the ship and my fellow-comrades. It was on the seventh day of the month—how well I remember it—when all our happiness was suddenly brought to a close by a catastrophe of a terrible character.

I had been asleep some two hours, when I was awakened by a hurrying to and fro overhead, and by the voices of the captain and the first mate calling out successive commands with an unaccustomed vehemence. I tried to think there was nothing unusual, and pressed my head again to the pillow; but the next moment Johnson threw open the door of my cabin, and came to my bunk-side.

"Are you awake?" he said, in a low, solemn tone, so different from that which he habitually used. "Dress yourself at once, and come on deck. The ship is on fire."

He dashed out, and in five minutes I followed him. Once on deck I could not have any doubt of the serious nature of the calamity that had happened

to us. I could see the flames leaping from the hold, where a cargo of cotton goods was stored, and, through the red smoke, the quickly vanishing forms of the sailors, as they endeavoured, with all the means at their command, to arrest the progress of the fire. The captain was steadily giving his orders, apparently undismayed by the terrible scene before him, though, as I neared him, I could see that his face wore an anxious look, that told me he anticipated the worst.

And so it was, though, heaven knows, we did all that man can do to save the vessel which had sheltered us so well during the past six weeks. But it was not to be ; all our efforts were in vain : the fire gained steadily, in spite of our incessant attacks, and, as the early morning broke, we recognized the fact that a greater power than our weak human hands could control was upon us, and that our gallant ship must be abandoned.

There was a haze over the water, but the air was still and calm as we began our preparations, proceeding without bustle and dismay, though it was doubtful how long the raging fire would permit us to remain on board the doomed ship. The four boats were lowered successfully, and we were careful to provide each with an abundance of provisions and water, besides a proper complement of oars and sails. When all was ready the first mate allotted us to the different boats, and silently we went down the side and took up our stations. The captain was the last

to leave, and I can never forget how affected he was at having to desert his good old craft. It required several entreaties from the mate before he could make up his mind to quit her, and then, as he stepped into our boat, I saw that his eyes were filled with tears, and caught the words that fell murmuringly from his lips.

"Good-bye, dear old ship!" he said. "I am loth to leave you, nor would I were there the least chance of saving you." And he stood up in the boat as we pulled away, and watched the gradual destruction of the thing he loved best on earth, until the spectacle was lost in the gathering haze.

In our boat we had the captain, Mr. Hodder, the first mate, Stapleton, the old Australian, Powell, and myself, with two of the crew; while the rest of the ship's company, and Johnson, who had displayed much courage and resource, were distributed among the other three boats.

We all kept together, and were, in spite of the dismal events we had gone through, of good heart, even singing rollicking sea-songs in chorus, and passing our jokes and fun, though I fancy there was a deep element of insincerity about them. I know, for my part, I felt thoroughly the seriousness of the situation, and was never less inclined to jest in my life; yet I found myself joining in the songs, and trying a feeble repartee every now and then in answer to Johnson's humorous remarks.

It was, of course, our intention and our hope to