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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PIRATES AND PIRACY ***

Pirates and Piracy

BY

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With Illustrations by
FREDERICK EHRlich

And an Introduction by
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PIRATES AND PIRACY.

[3]

INTRODUCTION.

There is hardly a person who, as a school-boy, had not received the fire of imagination and the stimulus for adventure and a roaming life through the stirring narratives concerning Captain Kidd and other well-known sea rovers. A certain ineffable glamor metamorphosed these robbers into heroes, and lent an inalienable license to their "calling," so that the songster and romancist found in them and their deeds prolific and genial themes, while the obscure suggestions of hidden treasures and mysterious caves have inspired many expeditions in quest of buried fortunes which, like the Argo of old, have carried their Jasons to the mythical Colchis.

The pens of Byron, Scott, Poe, Stevenson, Russell, and Stockton, and the musical genius of Wagner, were steeped in the productive inspiration of these lawless adventurers, and Kingsley found in Lundy Island, the erstwhile nest of the reckless tribe, a subject for his "Westward Ho!"

[4]

Byron, in "The Corsair," sings:

O'er the glad waters of the dark-blue sea,
Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free,

Far as the breeze can bear, the billows foam,
Survey our empire, and behold our home!
These are our realms, no limits to their sway,
Our flag the sceptre all who meet obey.
Ours the wild life in tumult still to range
From toil to rest, and joy in every change.

Piracy was the growth of maritime adventure, and developed with the advancement of commerce. The Phœnicians and Greeks were especially apt in the interstate wars which frequently degenerated into rapine and plunder, and with them piracy became a recognized enterprise. In Homeric times it was dignified with a respect worthy of a nobler cause—a sentiment in which the freebooters of later centuries took arrogant pride. The pirate—cruel, vicious, debased to the lowest degree of turpitude—established a moral code governing his actions and circumscribing his wanton license, and it was in the rigorous observance of these “trade laws” and customs of their realm that this abortive sense of honor manifested itself. [5]

The successes of the Phœnicians and Greeks soon made the Mediterranean the theatre of maritime robbery, in later years conducted under the authority, sanction, and immunity of the Barbary powers. In fact, so reckless had the enterprise become that the temerity of the free lances knew no bounds, and headquarters, so to speak, were established, and for a long time maintained, at Cilicia.

The vigorous campaign of Pompey in 67 B.C. against the pirates was but the precursor of that systematic defence which the nations of the world eventually adopted. The Hanseatic League of the cities of Northern Germany and neighboring states, no doubt, had its origin in the necessitous combination of merchants to resist the attacks of the Norsemen. England sent out many expeditions to destroy the pestiferous freebooters who swarmed from the African coast, and finally, in 1815, the United States sent Decatur to Algiers to annihilate the nefarious corsairs, who had thrived and become brazen in their recklessness during the three centuries of their ascendant power. The incursions of the Algerine pirates were made as far north as England, Ireland, and Iceland, and through them an iniquitous slave trade was developed. The law of nations did not place its ban upon this slave traffic until by statute England and the United States attempted to obliterate this ineradicable blot upon our civilization, and only a half century ago Austria, Prussia, and Russia declared it to be piracy. [6]

Piracy, by the law of nations, is punishable with death within the jurisdiction of any nation under whose flag the capture may have been made, for the pirate is the common enemy of mankind. Although it has passed the zenith of its perverse glory, and modern naval development has made it impracticable and impossible, vestiges of piracy remain in the Malay Archipelago and the China Sea. As recently as 1864 five men were hanged in London on such a charge.

Privateering, the resourceful auxiliary to a weak navy, is also piracy, though not recognized so by the law of nations. The private ship which, under the authority of letters of marque and reprisal issued by the government, made war upon a hostile power, was always an indispensable adjunct to naval warfare. England considered our privateer Paul Jones a pirate. During the Civil War the Confederate cruisers were termed pirates, and the *Alabama* claims made upon England for damage done by the *Alabama*, the *Florida*, and the *Shenandoah* arose from permitting privateers to depart from her ports. [7]

The rise and sway of the corsairs of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, developing from disorganized piracy, was evidently the result of the persecution of the Moors of Spain in the sixteenth century, who, exiled and retributive, sought revenge and lucre in the attacks upon the argosies from India to Spain. Their successes attracted adventurers from Asia Minor, and thus augmented they acquired formidable power, established citadels and states, governed by daring and sagacious leaders, and levied blackmail upon Christian countries for the protection of commerce. It was not until the vigorous campaign of Decatur that the backbone of this sanctioned lawlessness of the Barbary States was broken and safety upon the high seas of the East assured. [8]

The bold character of these marauders can be best imagined when we reflect that in the seventeenth century the Algerine pirates cruised in the English Channel, blockaded the Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1635 for weeks in an English port, where he remained helpless till succored by an English man-of-war, and actually entered the harbor of Cork and carried away eight fishermen, who subsequently were sold as slaves in Algiers. But, as we have seen, piracy, which at one time was the formidable enemy of mankind and a menace to progress and development, is now merely a matter of history.

The limits of this article will not permit any extended review of lawless maritime depredations in its various phases, but it may be within our province to refer for a moment to the buccaneers and filibusters of our own continent. The late war in Cuba brought the filibusters once more into prominence. The term applies to one who, warring upon another country, does so, not for private gain, but for public benefit, and refers generally to those who had attempted to conquer certain Spanish-American possessions upon the plea that the objective country was suffering from anarchy and oppression. The theory was that salvation could only be found in annexation to the United States; and if this be so, there are many spiritual filibusters within our borders to-day. The term has now become generally applicable to adventurers from the United States, but was unknown under that name until the expedition of Lopez to Cuba in 1850. Aaron Burr was a filibuster, although we may justly doubt the virtue of his motives. William Walker, perhaps the foremost of them all, invaded Lower California in 1854, attempted to found a republic, was [9]

defeated, and later conquered Nicaragua and became its president, only to shift about in his meteoric career of destiny and sail against Honduras, where he was captured, court-martialled, and shot in 1860.

It is to the buccaneers, however, that the history of piracy is indebted for the “glory” which may fill its pages; it is to the men of the stamp of Morgan, Dampier, Peter of Dieppe, and Van Horn, who by their courage, dash, and spasmodic chivalry lent sufficient romance to their misdeeds as to obscure the crime, that we owe the stirring tales of the conquests in the West Indies and South America. And no less a pirate was Francis Drake, who, despite his knighthood and the official countenance the Elizabethan government lent to his attacks upon Spanish galleons and cities, stands forth as one of the greatest free lances of the world. His history is unique, brilliant, and commanding; his service for his country and the attack upon the Spanish Armada atoning, as it were, for his piratical crimes. What irony of fate, that this wonderful man, a knight of England, a member of Parliament, a warrior and sailor, a robber and conqueror, should now lie in a lead coffin at the bottom of the sea off Porto Rico, conquered by death while on his way to the islands so often the object of his pillage!

[10]

The constant warring of Spain against the powers of the world, not at home but in her western possessions, finally led to that outlawry which under the name of buccaneers terrorized the Caribbean Sea during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1625 the island of St. Christopher was settled by the buccaneers to establish a base; and later the island of Tortuga was captured, which became the scene of constant warfare until the capture of Jamaica in 1655. [*] Pre-eminent amongst the buccaneers of this period who made the Spanish Main a synonym for robbery and bloodshed was Captain Henry Morgan, who, as a pirate, captured Jamaica, was knighted by Charles II., and later made Deputy Governor of the island. He it was who led the buccaneers to the South Sea, opening for them a rich field for booty, by marching across the Isthmus of Panama, fighting a battle and capturing and plundering the city, and, seizing the Spanish vessels in the harbor, set sail for the South Sea, returning by way of Cape Horn with fabulous prizes. After the capture of Cartagena in 1697, the organization of these intrepid, daring, and able freebooters disrupted, and the glory waned and vanished; the degeneracy was rapid and complete, till cut-throats and villainous outlaws took the place of their great predecessors.

[11]

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[*] *Driven from St. Christopher, the expatriated French and English outlaws settled in San Domingo, an island over whose plains thousands of wild cattle roamed, and found excellent revenue in the capture of these beasts and the sale of the flesh and hides. The peculiar manner of smoking the beef and preserving the hides, known as “bucchanning,” gave them their name.*

History shows that in our own country pirates appeared along the Carolina coast as far back as 1565, and before the settlement of the country by the English, under charter of Charles II., the pirates of the Spanish Main occupied the coast, the many harbors lending refuge and safe retreat, while permitting the burying of treasures.

The Carolinas remained friendly to pirates with a persistency of popular favor which was well-nigh ineradicable. And this is quite readily understood when we reflect that the depredations were committed upon ships of His Catholic Majesty, the foe of England, and that the pirates brought their gold and silver plate to the colonies for sale and barter, thus bringing wealth and resource to the struggling communities; and, lastly, the example and sanction set by the king in knighting Henry Morgan, the leading pirate of the day. It was impossible to obtain a jury to convict any one upon the charge of piracy, and so the authorities found themselves helpless.

The best known of all the pirates in America is beyond doubt Captain Kidd, of whom we all have sung:

[13]

Oh, my name is Captain Kidd,
As I sailed,
As I sailed.
Oh, my name is Captain Kidd,
And God's laws I did forbid,
And right wickedly I did,
As I sailed.

The English government, alarmed at the bold and heinous offences committed by the Indian pirates in the Colonies, issued to him letters of marque against the French and the ubiquitous rover of the coast, whose “Jolly Roger” floating from the mizzen, with its sinister portend, struck terror to the helpless merchantman.

His work was efficient and sweeping, and in 1691 the Council of the City of New York presented him £100, in appreciation of his energetic campaign. In 1697 he reached Madagascar to annihilate the pirates in the Eastern waters, but soon strange reports reached England concerning his actions, and it developed that he had fallen a victim to the seductive aphorism, “the pirate is the free child of the sea,” and in the degree as he was their destroyer, so he rose as their energetic leader. Subsequently he sailed to the West Indies, Delaware, Oyster Bay, and, burying his treasures on Gardiner's Island, set sail for Boston, where he was captured, sent to England, and hanged on Execution Dock, London. The treasures found on Gardiner's Island amounted to \$170,000, and to this day hopes are entertained of other buried booty.

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The scope of Mr. Herrmann's lecture is not to embrace the history of piracy, but to narrate the

incidents and vicissitudes of a pirate's life and to illustrate their *modus operandi*. His story depicts to us the terrible misdeeds as practised by those ferocious and heartless demons, amongst whom Captain Fly, Captain Teach, the Blackbeard, and Captain North were the most notorious.

H. A. H.

NEW YORK, February, 1902.

[15]

PIRATES AND PIRACY.

A LECTURE.

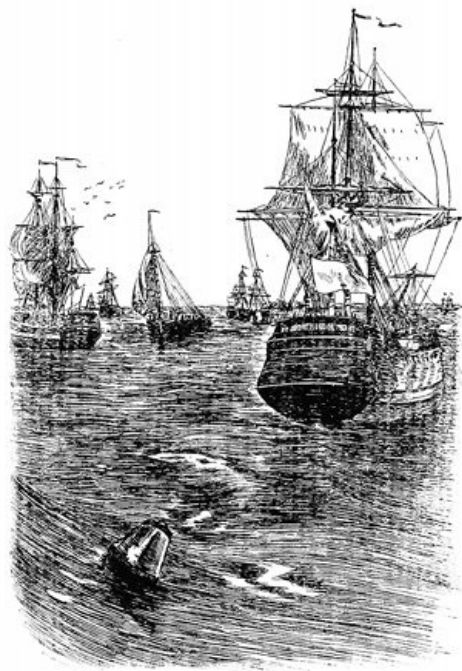
The limitations of a lecture will not permit the discussion of the subject upon an extended scope, nor will it allow a more than cursory review of the general doings, adventures, and methods of pirates in general, leaving the historical treatment for another occasion.

The Latin word *piratia* defines the crime, answering to robbery on land, with the distinction that it is committed upon the high seas or navigable waters generally. The law of nations has defined it as the taking of property from others by open violence, with intent to steal, and without lawful authority, on the sea. And with the stringency arising from the ever-growing depredations, and the community of interests of the civilized world, the crime was made punishable by death, and jurisdiction was recognized in that country into whose ports the pirate may be carried.

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Piracy flourished in its reckless dare-deviltry and wanton lawlessness about one hundred and fifty years ago, its most productive operations being confined to the Spanish Main, over whose vast paths the newly discovered wealth and hidden treasures of the New World were carried. The unprotected state of commerce permitted these piratical invasions with immunity and thus allowed this nefarious trade to flourish and develop unchecked and uncontrolled. By reason of this the lawless element of the community was encouraged and allured by the visions of fabulous riches with the attendant excitement incident to its capture. Pirates, as a class, were principally outlaws, social outcasts, or 'longshoremen of a desperate and brutal character, who deemed it the more enjoyable the more hazardous their undertaking, and who considered it safer to maraud on the high seas than upon the land, in constant fear of the minions of the law. But not all pirates were of this character. Some, not inherently vicious nor absolutely depraved, had adopted this lawless calling by reason of some stigma which deprived them of their social position; others, by reason of their indolence; and others from sheer necessity, who found in their dire distress the justification for the dangerous step.

[17]



Whenever a band of these men had determined upon their new enterprise, they immediately seized some available ship in the shore waters, which was frequently accomplished by two or three approaching in a rowboat, in the guise of purchasers of merchandise. As a rule, a vessel, when in shore waters, is inadequately protected by guards, and thus the pirates, finding the deck in their control, would overcome the watch and, with drawn pistols and threats of death, proceed to make them helpless prisoners. With practical control of the vessel thus assured, some of the number would stand sentry at the hatchways while a signal to the shore brought the reinforcement of their comrades in crime. Should the captured crew show remonstrance or any

intimation of resistance, the swords, cutlasses, and heavy chains were most effective as a quietus; and thus with sails all set, and flying the flag of the home port as a mantle to their knavery, they sailed forth to some small town in search of provisions, to dispose of their merchandise, release their prisoners (or, as frequently happened, maroon them upon some desolate island), and thus equipped and provisioned, with magazines ammunitioned, they set forth in search of prey.

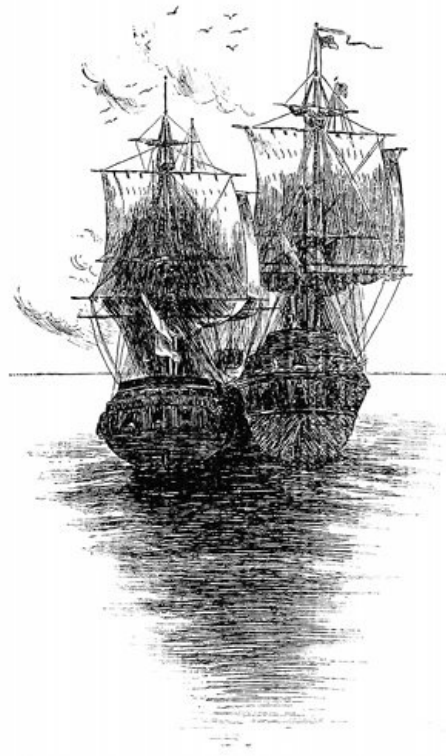


Not infrequently the vessel captured would prove too small and insufficient for marauding expeditions upon the high seas, and unable to give battle or a spirited chase to a sturdy merchantman. In such event, their operations were confined to the coast-line and in the harbors which had been located by spies^[1] as having richly laden vessels ready for the outward journey; and, having ascertained the date of departure, the ship's complement, its possible fighting strength, and its destination, a close watch was set, avoiding, however, all cause for suspicion, and, with lights extinguished, the careful, silent watch was kept till the midnight hour. As eight bells rang out upon the darkness, and the unsuspecting sailor keeping the midnight watch looked blankly into the night, several rowboats, with occupants armed to the teeth, would be lowered, and without a splash ride the waters, over which they glided, carrying the sea-robbers to the grim sides of their intended prey.^[2]



In many cases the decks, by reason of the fancied security afforded by the harbor, would be deserted, and, taking advantage of this opportunity, the attacking party quickly leap over the

sides and, under the noiselessly given commands of their captain, creep stealthily to the hatchways, cautiously taking their positions so that no miscalculations might frustrate their designs. And so, invading below decks, with weapons poised and every fibre on the alert, the concerted attack upon the sleeping victims would be given. With one fell swoop, and with the savagery born of their nefarious undertaking, the crew would be ruthlessly butchered, some few, perhaps, escaping in the general skirmish and fleeing up the gangway, only to be struck down by the villain on guard.^[3] For the present we will close our eyes to the awful picture of torture and murder here enacted, to revert to it upon a subsequent occasion.



With the crew slain, gagged or in chains, with all possible resistance overcome, the coming of the day was awaited. And as the first faint streaks of gray broke in upon the darkness of the night and the harbingers of the dawn sent their shafts athwart the horizon, the ship rode proudly at her anchor, silently and stately, giving no indication of the carnage of the night. The creaking of the chain around the capstan was but the mariners' music to sing the glory of the voyage to be begun, and so, without creating the least suspicion in the vessels lying round about, the captors brought their prize abreast their old vessel, transferred their stock of provisions and merchandise,^[4] if any, to the newly captured vessel, and, thus prepared, sailed grandly out of the harbor. When once again the breath of the ocean bellied their sails and sped them on to the unknown argosy, the dead, vanquished crew was rudely cast into the sea, without the semblance of respect for the dead, the decks thoroughly scrubbed, the scuppers flushed, the inventory prepared, and so, once again, the course was set for a port in which to dispose of their cargo.^[5] The argus-eyed lookout stationed far up in the foremast scanned every point of the far-reaching horizon,^[6] signalling to his mates the appearance of a spar against the heavens. Then, with course changed and wheel set, and sped on by conspiring winds, they bore down upon the unfortunate vessel, displaying at the proper moment the ominous and fateful black flag and its ghastly emblem of skull and cross-bones.

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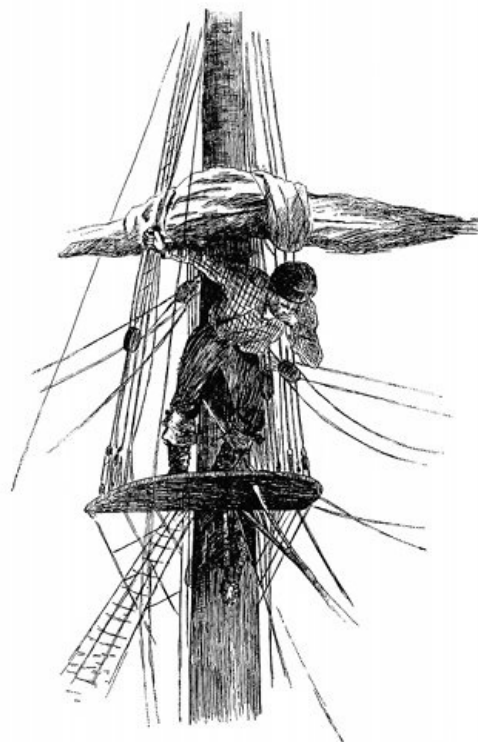


Thus, for months perhaps, the fitful winds and steady currents carried them hither and thither, ever alert, ever ready for combat and plunder. With guns primed and powder-horn stocked, these plunderers roamed the trackless sea, at times with impatience and drooping hopes, until the

sight of a large, heavily riding merchantman sent their blood a-leaping and transformed the deck into a scene of feverish activity. If we recall the peaceful errand of the merchantmen and reflect that their armature was little calculated to cope with the war-waging outlaws, it is quite apparent how gross the inequality of the struggle must necessarily be. While most of the merchantmen carried defensive armament, the unpractised, unskilled crew made the guns in their hands little more than ineffective. As the pirate ship approached, she displayed the same flag flying from the stern of the merchantman; and with the crew hidden below decks, in order not to betray their purpose, the vessels approached sufficiently close to enable the pirates to fire a broadside into the unsuspecting vessel and demand immediate surrender.^[7] At times a vessel, by reason of its superiority, would succeed in outsailing the pirates, but frequently the result was most disastrous. Often a stout-hearted merchantman, seeing that capture was inevitable, would offer battle in desperation, firing volley after volley of stone shot, the pirates, stubborn, furious, tenacious, fighting with all the ferocity their natures were capable of, resulting, after a decisive contest, in the lowering of the merchantman flag in disgrace and humiliation. With the lowering of the sails as an indication of surrender, the pirates sent out several boats with armed men, under the command of a chosen leader, who at once placed the captain under arrest and demanded the ship's papers under pain of death. This request was usually, though unwillingly, acceded to. The old vessel was thereupon dismantled, the captured boat refitted, and, burning the hull of the forsaken vessel,^[8] the pirates once more set sail, with the imprisoned captain and crew in chains cast into the dark, foul hold of the ship. Immunity was sometimes granted the captives upon their taking the oath of allegiance to the piratical horde. Can we not imagine how the intense anguish and unendurable torture finally forced from the unwilling lips the fearful avowal of allegiance?

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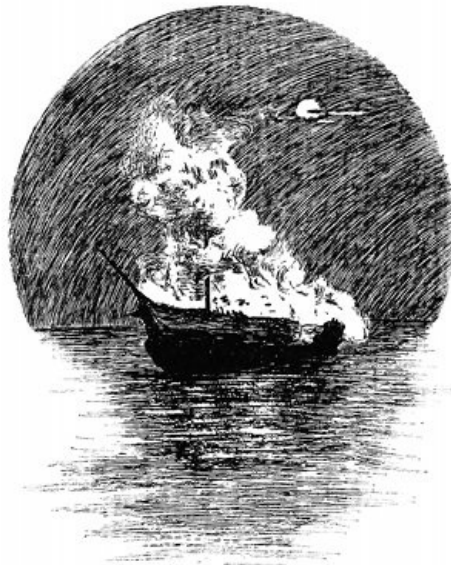
We can plainly observe the purpose of the pirates in endeavoring to capture a large, powerful, and speedy vessel, for that was the only safeguard of their barbarous trade. They readily recognized that success and security depended solely upon speed to overtake a fleeing ship or to escape a powerful adversary. Their motto, "He who fights and runs away may live to fight another day," was in reality the only literature the bold and adventurous pirate would comprehend or accept. Therefore, well equipped in a stanch, trim vessel, with the lockers filled, the magazines stocked, the guns aimed and ready for action, they were brave enough to combat even a man-of-war. The books are replete with the thrilling accounts of engagements and set battles waged between pirates and resisting armed merchantmen, resulting completely in victory for the black flag which so defiantly floated from the mizzenmast. The gradual progress and growth of the energetic sea-robbers, from the looting of vessels riding peacefully at anchor in the harbors to the management of large and seaworthy craft, permitted them to undertake long and seemingly endless cruises, the most daring of which being undertaken, no doubt, by that notorious chieftain, Captain Nathaniel North,^[9] who cruised from Newfoundland to the West Indies, then across the Southern Atlantic to the Cape of Good Hope, thence via Mozambique to the Indian Ocean, and northward to the Red Sea, traversing the same track to the Arabian Sea and East Indies—a voyage of 28,670 miles, the toy of the monsoon, the victim of the typhoon, and the sport of the trade-winds in the many latitudes. History has reserved a rather infamous niche for such freebooters as Thomas Howard, Captain Misson, Captain Fly, and Captain Kidd, whose voyages and exploits have given themes to the historian, the narrator, and the novelist. It was during these long cruises that the coast towns suffered through the depredations, plundering, and pillage, and the inhabitants put in constant fear of these sudden and vicious onslaughts.

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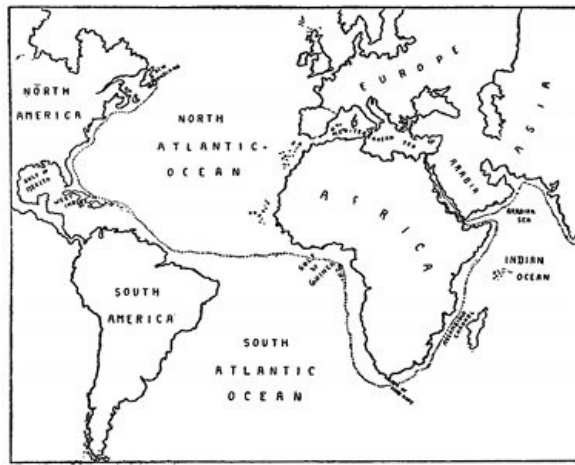
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Not infrequently the pirates selected some desolate locality in which to bury their treasures and store their stolen goods,^[10] generally building a “village” inland, well hidden in the foliage of the forests or tropical shrubbery, and perhaps inaccessible save through the devious paths cunningly planned to secure immunity from attack. These natural defences were supplemented with a series of forts as a further protection from the incursions of the natives. The internecine wars so fiercely waged by the inhabitants of the African East Coast frequently brought the vanquished to these “villages” to secure protection—a safety usually given in exchange for practical slavery in tilling the ground and cultivating crops.



From time almost immemorial the word *pirate* has been synonymous with all that is villainous, bloodthirsty, and cruel, and capture by a gang of these assassins meant indescribable torture and suffering, and we will devote a few moments to a consideration of these awful scenes; the sudden attacks, the vain attempts at flight, the desperate hand-to-hand struggles for life, mingled with the brutal yells, interspersed with the piteous cries for mercy, followed by the horrible silence which finally settles over the slippery decks, and the gruesome spectacle of the dreadful vandalism as the murderers proceed to strip their victims.



Generally, after a successful attack, the captain of the unfortunate vessel would be placed in chains and questioned as to the cargo and treasures of his ship. A cutlass held menacingly over him indicated the danger of untruth, and frequently a savage gash brought a stubborn and silent captain to submission. Inquisitorial tortures, unrelieved by any mock civility, were continued to extract further confessions from the pain-racked prisoners. Devices born only of a devilish instinct and fiendish delight suggested all forms of suffering, and so the captain was frequently tied to the ship's pump and surrounded with burning combustibles; or, fastened to the deck, surrounded with gunpowder, which they ignited; or his limbs were severed from his body and his flesh prodded with the points of the cutlass, the fiendish pirates forming a circle around him for this inhuman "sport."

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Despite these awful tortures, confessions were often suppressed, in the hope that the pirates would allow the vessel to proceed on its way (as was sometimes the case), and thus a part of the treasures be saved. But all hope of succor or consideration at the hands of these murderers was idle. Unsatisfied with the mere acquisition of booty, these human devils, devoid of the last spark of compassion, would mete out to each member of the crew and the passengers the most unheard-of tortures which human depravity could invent, for the amusement of the captors. Some were tied to a windlass and pelted into insensibility, or perhaps more charitable death. Others were lashed with ropes and cast, almost dead, into the sea; or, spiked hand and foot to^[11] the deck, were exposed mercilessly to the hot rays of the sun until the features were distorted into unrecognizability; some were placed before a gun and thus decapitated, while others were tied back to back and thrown into the waters. In fact, so low were these villainous wretches in their degradation that only the most cruel and cunningly devised torture could satiate their bloodthirsty cravings—human hyenas, who found rest only in the pains and shrieks of other mortals. By far the most favorite pastime was to make the victim "walk the plank" or hang him to the yardarm^[12]—a suggestion of the retribution suffered by the pirates when captured. No word picture can present the awful orgies indulged in by these social outcasts, who continued their carnage, assault, and abuse until the last victim had succumbed. Then, directing their attention to the ship, it was quietly dismantled, set adrift, or frequently burned to the water's edge, allowing the hull to float about, a rudderless derelict.

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One must not form the impression, however, that this reckless lawlessness was attended with insubordination or lack of discipline. On the contrary, they were rigorously governed by an iron hand and by the unwritten "code of honor." A pirate entered upon "the account" (a term meaning piracy) by taking the oath of fealty to the cause, abjuring all social ties, pledging himself never to desert his ship or defraud his comrades or steal anything belonging to his fellows. Having thus bound him by an oath firm and dreadful in its malediction upon any violation of its terms, the organization is completed by the selection of a captain, who, usually, is the strongest, bravest, and most desperate of them all, well calculated to keep the crew in subjection. Mutiny and the spirit of insubordination frequently raised its ominous growl, to be quelled only by the fearlessness of the captain and his ability to keep his men in abject fear of his commands. It held the men in the thralls of hypnotism, and in its efficaciousness depended the safety of the captain and his "loyal" adherents. With some crews the title *Captain* did not convey autocratic power nor dictatorial prerogatives, his power to command absolutely being confined only to times of combat. A usurpation of power frequently brought death as a deterrent to any aspiring successor. In those cases where the captain was not recognized as the sole ruler, each man had a vote in affairs of moment, and had an undivided interest and title in all booty.

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It can readily be understood how valueless the cast-iron oath of the pirate must be when occasion makes its rejection convenient, and thus apparent dissatisfaction with the captain or with his commands have frequently caused those secret plottings below decks, resulting in open revolt or mutiny:—^[13]pirate against pirate, brute force matched against brute force for power

[42]

and supremacy. The severest punishment to a member of the crew for thieving from a fellow-pirate was marooning—slitting the ears and nose and depositing the offender upon some desolate island or lonely shore with but few provisions and limited ammunition. Life was little prized, for death had no terrors, and life beyond this world entered not into their calculations. Their fearlessness and courage was splendidly exemplified when Captain Teach, alias Black Beard, appeared off Charleston in the year 1717 and sent word to the Governor of the colony to send out to him at once a certain number of medicine chests, in failure of which the port would be blockaded by his single vessel, and all persons on board in-going and out-going ships killed and their heads sent to the Governor as proof of the execution of the threat. He also threatened to set all ships on fire. It illustrates clearly in what dread these sea marauders were held in those times, when we learn that the Governor immediately complied with the demands and the embargo was raised. It is recorded that in moments of defeat pirates voluntarily have set fire to their powder magazines and thus were blown to destruction rather than plead for mercy. During long cruises, when no ships upon the horizon line varied the monotony of the daily routine, pastimes were invented, each one out-rivalling the other in sheer wickedness. Captain Teach considered it rare sport to lock his men in the ship's hold and then set sulphur afire to ascertain how long they could withstand asphyxiation. Yet his greatest "bravery" was displayed (and herein he developed commendable Spartan fortitude) when he married fourteen times with a fearlessness highly worthy of a better purpose! His wickedness was as great as his fearlessness was unbounded, but wickedness was voted manly in a pirate and assured the esteem and admiration of his comrades.

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With the progression of events and the growth of commerce, piracy waned, and gradually the black flag which had so long swept the Spanish Main was furled and drooped into the sea over which it had so long defiantly floated. The European governments made many futile attempts to check the rapid development of the unlawful enterprise, and many expeditions were successful, resulting in the trial, condemnation, and execution of the outlaws on land.

[45]

In England a proclamation of amnesty was issued, insuring freedom and rights of citizenship to all who renounced their calling—a privilege which many accepted, only to find their blood fire and yearn for the wild, aimless, and adventurous roaming on the seas, which gradually drew them back to their calling and away from the restraints of civilization. The capture of a pirate meant death, and, as no practicable defence was available, the prisoners usually entrenched themselves behind the plea that they were kidnapped or shanghaied and were compelled to enter into piracy for the preservation of their lives. But piracy, with its harrowing gruesomeness, its boldness and daring, its romance and adventure, its plunder and murder, its conflicts and reprisals, is a spectre of the past, and now is chiefly confined to the rivers and harbors of the Far East and Northern Africa. It has lost the glamor and enchanting, romantic atmosphere which pervaded the career of Captain Kidd and made him the worshipped hero of every school-boy, or which inspired the pen of a Scott, of an Edgar Allan Poe or Frank R. Stockton, or put the charm to the tales of W. Clark Russell, for pirates and piracy are now dead, and live ingloriously only in the pages of chronicling history.

[46]

PIRATES' SONG.

To the mast nail our flag! It is dark as the grave,
Or the death which it bears while it sweeps o'er the wave.
Let our deck clear for action, our guns be prepared;
Be the boarding-axe sharpened, the scimiter bared.

Set the canisters ready, and then bring to me,
For the last of my duties, the powder-room key.
It shall never be lowered, the black flag we bear;
If the sea be denied us, we sweep through the air.
Unshared have we left our last victory's prey;
It is mine to divide it, and yours to obey:
There are shawls that might suit a sultana's white neck,
And pearls that are fair as the arms they will deck;
There are flasks which, unseal them, the air will disclose
Diametta's fair summers, the home of the rose.
I claim not a portion; I ask but as mine.
'Tis to drink to our victory one cup of red wine.
Some fight, 'tis for riches; some fight, 'tis for fame:
The first I despise, and the last is a name.
I fight, 'tis for vengeance! I love to see flow,
At the stroke of my sabre, the life of my foe.
I strike for the memory of long-vanished years;
I only shed blood where another shed tears.
I come as the lightning comes, red from above,
O'er the race that I loathe, to the battle I love.

[47]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PIRATES AND PIRACY ***

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