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**Pirates own book, or authentic narratives of the lives,
exploits, and executions of the most celebrated sea
robbers**

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Danish and Norman Pirates.

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318
319
324
326
327
329
332
333
335
337
338
366
375
379
380
381
382
383
384
385
387
388
389
391
392
397
399
408
411
414
422
425
427
429
430
431
432

Quest

THE
DANISH AND NORMAN PIRATES.



A Priest thrown from the Ramparts of an Abbey.

THE Saxons, a people supposed to be derived from the Cimbri, uniting the occupations of fishing and piracy, commenced at an early period their ravages in the German Ocean; and the shores of Gaul and Britain were for ages open to their depredations. About the middle of the fifth century, the unwarlike Vortigern, then king of Britain, embraced the fatal resolution of requesting these hardy warriors to deliver him from the harassing inroads of the

Picts and Scots; and the expedition of Hengist and Horsa was the consequence. Our mention of this memorable epoch is not for its political importance, great as that is, but for its effects on piracy; for the success attending such enterprises seems to have turned the whole of the northern nations towards sea warfare. The Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes, from their superior knowledge of navigation, gave into it most; and on whatever coast the winds carried them, they made free with all that came in their way. Canute the Fourth endeavored in vain to repress these lawless disorders among his subjects; but they felt so galled by his restrictions, that they assassinated him. On the king of Sweden being taken by the Danes, permission was given to such of his subjects as chose to arm themselves against the enemy, pillage his possessions, and sell their prizes at Ribnitz and Golnitz. This proved a fertile nursery of pirates, who became so formidable under the name of "Victalien Broders," that several princes were obliged to arm against them, and hang some of their chiefs.

Even the females of the North caught the epidemic spirit, and proudly betook themselves to the dangers of sea-life. Saxo-Grammaticus relates an interesting story of one of them. Alwilda, the daughter of Synardus, a Gothic king, to deliver herself from the violence imposed on her inclination, by a marriage with Alf, the son of Sygarus, king of Denmark, embraced the life of a rover; and attired as a man, she embarked in a vessel of which the crew was composed of other young women of tried courage, dressed in the same manner. Among the first of her cruises, she landed at a place where a company of pirates were bewailing the loss of their commander; and the strangers were so captivated with the air and agreeable manners of Alwilda, that they unanimously chose her for their leader. By this reinforcement she became so formidable, that Prince Alf was despatched to engage her. She sustained his attacks with great courage and talent; but during a severe action in the gulf of Finland, Alf boarded her vessel, and having killed the greatest part of her crew, seized the captain, namely herself; whom nevertheless he knew not, because she had a casque which covered her

visage. The prince was agreeably surprised, on removing the helmet, to recognise his beloved Alwilda; and it seems that his valor had now recommended him to the fair princess, for he persuaded her to accept his hand, married her on board, and then led her to partake of his wealth, and share his throne.

Charlemagne, though represented as naturally generous and humane, had been induced, in his extravagant zeal for the propagation of those tenets which he had himself adopted, to enforce them throughout Germany at the point of the sword; and his murders and decimations on that account disgrace humanity. The more warlike of the Pagans flying into Jutland, from whence the Saxons had issued forth, were received with kindness, and furnished with the means of punishing their persecutor, by harassing his coasts. The maritime towns of France were especially ravaged by those pirates called "Normands," or men of the North; and it was owing to their being joined by many malcontents, in the provinces since called Normandy, that that district acquired its name. Charlemagne, roused by this effrontery, besides fortifying the mouths of the great rivers, determined on building himself a fleet, which he did, consisting of 400 of the largest galleys then known, some having five or six benches of oars. His people were, however, extremely ignorant of maritime affairs, and in the progress of having them taught, he was suddenly called to the south, by the invasion of the Saracens.

Another division of Normans, some years afterwards, in the same spirit of emigration, and thirsting, perhaps, to avenge their injured ancestors, burst into the provinces of France, which the degeneracy of Charlemagne's posterity, and the dissensions which prevailed there, rendered an affair of no great difficulty. Louis le Debonnaire had taken every means of keeping on good terms with them; annually persuading some to become Christians, and then sending them home so loaded with presents, that it was discovered they came to be baptized over and over again, merely for the sake of the gifts, as Du Chesne tells us. But on the subsequent division of the empire among the undutiful sons of Louis, the pirates did not fail to take advantage of the general confusion; braving the sea almost

every summer in their light coracles, sailing up the Seine, the Somme, or the Loire, and devastating the best parts of France, almost without resistance. In 845, they went up to Paris, pillaged it, and were on the point of attacking the royal camp at St. Dennis; but receiving a large sum of money from Charles the Bald, they retreated from thence, and with the new means thus supplied them, ravaged Bordeaux, and were there joined by Pepin, king of Aquitaine. A few years afterwards, they returned in great numbers. Paris was again sacked, and the magnificent abbey of St. Germain des Prés burnt. In 861, Wailand, a famous Norman pirate, returning from England, took up his winter quarters on the banks of the Loire, devastated the country as high as Tourraine, shared the women and girls among his crews, and even carried off the male children, to be brought up in his own profession. Charles the Bald, not having the power to expel him, engaged the freebooter, for 500 pounds of silver, to dislodge his countrymen, who were harassing the vicinity of Paris. In consequence of this subsidy, Wailand, with a fleet of 260 sail, went up the Seine, and attacked the Normans in the isle of Oiselle: after a long and obstinate resistance, they were obliged to capitulate; and having paid 6000 pounds of gold and silver, by way of ransom, had leave to join their victors. The riches thus acquired rendered a predatory life so popular, that the pirates were continually increasing in number, so that under a "sea-king," called Eric, they made a descent in the Elbe and the Weser, pillaged Hamburg, penetrated far into Germany, and after gaining two battles, retreated with immense booty. The pirates, thus reinforced on all sides, long continued to devastate Germany, France, and England; some penetrated into Andalusia and Hetruria, where they destroyed the flourishing town of Luni; whilst others descending the Dniپر, penetrated even into Russia.

Meanwhile the Danes had been making several attempts to effect a *lodgment* in England; and allured by its fertility, were induced to try their fortune in various expeditions, which were occasionally completely successful, and at other times most fatally disastrous. At length, after a struggle of several years, their success was so decided, that king Alfred was obliged for a time to abandon his king-

dom, as we all know, to their ravages. They immediately passed over to Ireland, and divided it into three sovereignties; that of Dublin fell to the share of Olaf; that of Waterford to Sitrih; and that of Limerick to Yivar. These arrangements dispersed the forces of the enemy, and watching his opportunity, Alfred issued from his retreat, fell on them like a thunderbolt, and made a great carnage of them. This prince, too wise to exterminate the pirates after he had conquered them, sent them to settle Northumberland, which had been wasted by their countrymen, and by this humane policy gained their attachment and services. He then retook London, embellished it, equipped fleets, restrained the Danes in England, and prevented others from landing. In the twelve years of peace which followed his fifty-six battles, this great man composed his body of laws; divided England into counties, hundreds, and tithings, and founded the University of Oxford. But after Alfred's death, fresh swarms of pirates visited the shores, among the most formidable of whom were the Danes, who spread desolation and misery along the banks of the Thames, the Medway, the Severn, the Tamar, and the Avon, for more than a century, though repeatedly tempted to desist by weighty bribes, raised by an oppressive and humiliating tax called *Danegelt*, from its object; and which, like most others, were continued long after it had answered its intent.

About the end of the 9th century, one of the sons of Rognwald, count of the Orcades, named Horolf, or Rollo, having infested the coasts of Norway with piratical descents, was at length defeated and banished by Harold, king of Denmark. He fled for safety to the Scandinavian island of Soderoe, where finding many outlaws and discontented fugitives, he addressed their passions, and succeeded in placing himself at their head. Instead of measuring his sword with his sovereign again, he adopted the wiser policy of imitating his countrymen, in making his fortune by plundering the more opulent places of southern Europe. The first attempt of this powerful gang was upon England, where finding Alfred too powerful to be coped with, he stood over to the mouth of the Seine, and availed himself of the state to which France was reduced. Horolf, how-

ever, did not limit his ambition to the acquisition of booty, he wished permanently to enjoy some of the fine countries he was ravaging, and after many treaties made and broken received the duchy of Normandy from the lands of Charles the Simple, as a fief, together with Gisle, the daughter of the French monarch, in marriage. Thus did a mere pirate found the family which in a few years gave sovereigns to England, Naples, and Sicily, and spread the fame of their talents and prowess throughout the world.

Nor was Europe open to the depredations of the northern pirates only. Some Asiatic moslems, having seized on Syria, immediately invaded Africa, and their subsequent conquests in Spain facilitated their irruption into France, where they pillaged the devoted country, with but few substantial checks. Masters of all the islands in the Mediterranean, their corsairs insulted the coasts of Italy, and even threatened the destruction of the Eastern empire. While Alexis was occupied in a war with Patzinaces, on the banks of the Danube, Zachas, a Saracen pirate, scoured the Archipelago, having, with the assistance of an able Smyrniote, constructed a flotilla of forty brigantines, and some light fast-rowing boats, manned by adventurers like himself. After taking several of the surrounding islands, he established himself sovereign of Smyrna, that place being about the centre of his newly-acquired dominions. Here his fortunes prospered for a time, and Soliman, sultan of Nicea, son of the grand Soliman, sought his alliance, and married his daughter, about A. D. 1093. But in the following year, young Soliman being persuaded that his father-in-law had an eye to his possessions, with his own hand stabbed Zachas to the heart. The success of this freebooter shows that the Eastern emperors could no longer protect, or even assist, their islands.

Maritime pursuits had now revived, the improvement of nautical science was progressing rapidly, and the advantages of predatory expeditions, especially when assisted and masked by commerce, led people of family and acquirements to embrace the profession. The foremost of these were the Venetians and Genoese, among whom the private adventurers, stimulated by an enterprising spirit, fitted out armaments, and volunteered themselves into the ser

vice of those nations who thought proper to retain them ; or they engaged in such schemes of plunder as were likely to repay their pains and expense. About the same time, the Roxolani or Russians, became known in history, making their debut in the character of pirates, ravenous for booty, and hungry for the pillage of Constantinople—a longing which 900 years have not yet satisfied. Pouring hundreds of boats down the Borysthenes, the Russian marauders made four desperate attempts to plunder the city of the Cæsars, in less than two centuries, and appear only to have been repulsed by the dreadful effects of the celebrated Greek fire.

England, in the mean time, had little to do with piracy ; nor had she any thing worthy the name of a navy ; yet Cœur de Lion had given maritime laws to Europe ; her seamen, in point of skill, were esteemed superior to their cotemporaries ; and King John enacted, that those foreign ships which refused to lower their flags to that of Britain should, if taken, be deemed lawful prizes. Under Henry III., though Hugh de Burgh, the governor of Dover Castle, had defeated a French fleet, by casting lime into the eyes of his antagonists, the naval force was impaired to such a degree, that the Normans and Bretons were too powerful for the Cinque Ports, and compelled them to seek relief from the other ports of the kingdom. The taste for depredation had become so general and contagious, that privateers were now allowed to be fitted out, which equipments quickly degenerated to the most cruel of pirates. Nay more : on the disputes which took place between Henry and his Barons, in 1244, the Cinque Ports, who had shown much indifference to the royal requisitions, openly espoused the cause of the revolted nobles ; and, under the orders of Simon de Montfort, burnt Portsmouth. From this, forgetful of their motives for arming, they proceeded to commit various acts of piracy, and considering nothing but their private interests, extended their violence not only against the shipping of all countries unfortunate enough to fall in their way, but even to perpetrate the most unwarrantable ravages on the property of their own countrymen. Nor was this confined to the Cinque Port vessels only ; the example and the profits were too stimulating to the rest-

less; and one daring association on the coast of Lincolnshire seized the Isle of Ely, and made it their receptacle for the plunder of all the adjacent countries. One William Marshall fortified the little island of Lundy, in the mouth of the Severn, and did so much mischief by his piracies, that at length it became necessary to fit out a squadron to reduce him, which was accordingly done, and he was executed in London; yet the example did not deter other persons from similar practices. The sovereign, however, did not possess sufficient naval means to suppress the enormities of the great predatory squadrons, and their ravages continued to disgrace the English name for upwards of twenty years, when the valor and conciliation of the gallant Prince Edward brought them to that submission which his royal parent had failed in procuring.

Those "harum-scarum," expeditions, the Crusades, were perhaps influential in checking piracy, although the rabble that composed the majority of them had as little principle as the worst of the freebooters. From the time that Peter the Hermit set Europe in a blaze, all ranks, and all nations, streamed to the East, so that few vessels were otherwise employed than in conveying the motly groups who sought the shores of Palestine; some from religious zeal; some from frantic fanaticism; some from desire of distinction; some for the numberless privileges which the crusaders acquired; and the rest and greater portion, for the spoil and plunder of which they had a prospect. The armaments, fitted in no fewer than nine successive efforts, were mostly equipped with such haste and ignorance, and with so little choice, that ruinous delays, shipwrecks, and final discomfiture, were naturally to be expected. Still, the effect of such incredible numbers of people betaking themselves to foreign countries, advanced civilization, although vast means of forwarding its cause were buried in the East; and those who assert that no benefit actually resulted, cannot deny that at least some evils were thereby removed. Montesquieu says, that Europe then required a general shock, to teach her, by the sight of contrasts, the theorems of public economy most conducive to happiness. And it is evident, that notwithstanding these follies wasted the population of Europe, squandered its treasures, and



Alwilda, the Female Pirate. See p. 14.



Alwilda, die Fomale Fines. See p. 14.

infected us with new vices and diseases, still the crusades diminished the bondage of the feudal system, by augmenting the power of the King, and the strength of the Commons; while they also occasioned a very increased activity in commerce: thus taming the ferocity of men's spirits increasing agriculture in value from the safety it enjoyed, and establishing a base for permanent prosperity.

