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

ELLS, CHARLES

New York [u.a.], 1842

Plot of the negroes, for the destruction of the Pirates.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-61163](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-61163)

The natives of Madagascar are negroes, but differ from those of Guinea in the length of their hair and in the blackness of their complexion. They are divided into small nations, each governed by its own prince, who carry on a continual war upon each other. The prisoners taken in war are either rendered slaves to the conquerors, sold, or slain, according to pleasure. When the pirates first settled among them, their alliance was much courted by these princes, and those whom they joined were always successful in their wars, the natives being ignorant of the use of fire-arms. Such terror did they carry along with them, that the very appearance of a few pirates in an army would have put the opposing force to flight.

By these means they in a little time became very formidable, and the prisoners whom they took in war they employed in cultivating the ground, and the most beautiful of the women they married; nor were they contented with one, but married as many as they could conveniently maintain. The natural result was, that they separated, each choosing a convenient place for himself, where he lived in a princely style, surrounded by his wives, slaves and dependants. Nor was it long before jarring interests excited them also to draw the sword against each other, and they appeared at the head of their respective forces in the field of battle. In these civil wars their number and strength were greatly lessened.

The servant, exalted to the condition of a master, generally becomes a tyrant. These pirates, unexpectedly elevated to the dignity of petty princes, used their power with the most wanton barbarity. The punishment of the very least offence was to be tied to a tree, and instantly shot through the head. The negroes, at length, exasperated by continued oppression, formed the determination of extirpating them in one night; nor was it a difficult matter to accomplish this, since they were now so much divided both in affection and residence. Fortunately, however, for them, a negro woman, who was partial to them, ran twenty miles in three hours, and warning them of their danger, they were united and in arms to oppose the negroes before the latter had assembled. This narrow escape made them more cautious, and induced them to adopt the following system of policy:—

Convinced that fear was not a sufficient protection, and that the bravest man might be murdered by a coward in his bed, they labored to foment wars among the negro princes, while they themselves declined to aid either party. It naturally followed, that those who were vanquished fled to them for protection, and increased their strength. When there was no war, they fomented private discords, and encouraged them to wreak their vengeance against each other; nay, even taught them how to surprise their opponents, and furnished them with fire-arms, with which to dispatch them more effectually and expeditiously. The consequences were, that the murderer was constrained to fly to them for protection, with his wives, children, and kindred. These, from interest, became true friends, as their own safety depended upon the lives of their protectors. By this time the pirates were so formidable, that none of the negro princes durst attack them in open war.

Pursuing this system of policy, in a short time each chief had his party greatly increased, and they divided like so many tribes, in order to find ground to cultivate, and to choose proper places to build places of residence and erect garrisons of defence. The fears that agitated them were always obvious in their general policy, for they vied with each other in constructing places of safety, and using every precaution to prevent the possibility of sudden danger, either from the negroes or from one another.

A description of one of these dwellings will both show the fears that agitated these tyrants, and prove entertaining to the reader. They selected a spot overgrown with wood, near a river, and raised a rampart or ditch round it, so straight and steep that it was impossible to climb it, more particularly by those who had no scaling ladders. Over that ditch there was one passage into the wood; the dwelling, which was a hut, was built in that part of the wood which the prince thought most secure, but so covered that it could not be discovered until you came near it. But the greatest ingenuity was displayed in the construction of the passage that led to the hut, which was so narrow, that no more than one person could go abreast, and it was contrived in so intricate a manner, that it was a perfect labyrinth; the way going round and round, with

— following system of policy

several small crossways, so that a person unacquainted with it, might walk several hours without finding the hut. Along the sides of these paths, certain large thorns, which grew on a tree in that country, were stuck into the ground with their points outwards; and the path itself being serpentine, as before mentioned, if a man should attempt to approach the hut at night, he would certainly have struck upon these thorns.

Thus like tyrants they lived, dreading, and dreaded by all, and in this state they were found by Captain Woods Rodgers, when he went to Madagascar in the *Delicia*, a ship of forty guns, with the design of purchasing slaves. He touched upon a part of the island at which no ship had been seen for seven or eight years before, where he met with some pirates who had been upon the island above twenty-five years. There were only eleven of the original stock then alive, surrounded with a numerous offspring of children and grandchildren.

They were struck with terror upon the sight of the vessel, supposing that it was a man-of-war sent out to apprehend them; they, therefore, retired to their secret habitations. But when they found some of the ship's crew on shore, without any signs of hostility, and proposing to treat with them for slaves, they ventured to come out of their dwellings attended like princes. Having been so long upon the island, their cloaks were so much worn, that their majesties were extremely out at elbows. It cannot be said that they were ragged, but they had nothing to cover them but the skins of beasts in their natural state, not even a shoe or stocking; so that they resembled the pictures of Hercules in the lion's skin; and being overgrown with beard, and hair upon their bodies, they appeared the most savage figures that the human imagination could well conceive.

The sale of the slaves in their possession soon provided them with more suitable clothes, and all other necessaries, which they received in exchange. Meanwhile, they became very familiar, went frequently on board, and were very eager in examining the inside of the ship, talking very familiarly with the men, and inviting them on shore. Their design was to surprise the ship during the night.

They had a sufficient number of men and boats to effect their purpose, but the captain suspecting them, kept so strong a watch upon deck, that they found it in vain to hazard an attempt. When some of the men went on shore, they entered into a plan to seize the ship, but the captain observing their familiarity, prevented any one of his men from speaking to the pirates, and only permitted a confidential person to purchase their slaves. Thus he departed from the island, leaving these pirates to enjoy their savage royalty. One of them had been a waterman upon the Thames, and having committed a murder, fled to the West Indies. The rest had all been foremast-men, nor was there one among them who could either read or write.



Captain Avery's Treasure.