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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

Sketch of the Joassamee chief. Rahmah-Ben-Jabir.

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THE BARBAROUS CONDUCT AND ROMANTIC DEATH OF THE
JOASSAMEE CHIEF,
RAHMAH-BEN-JABIR.



Rahmah-ben-Jabir, a Joassamee Chief.

THE town of Bushire, on the Persian Gulf is seated in a low peninsula of sand, extending out of the general line of the coast, so as to form a bay on both sides. One of

these bays was in 1816, occupied by the fleet of a certain Arab, named Rahmah-ben-Jabir, who has been for more than twenty years the terror of the gulf, and who was the most successful and the most generally tolerated pirate, perhaps, that ever infested any sea. This man by birth was a native of Grain, on the opposite coast, and nephew of the governor of that place. His fellow citizens had all the honesty, however, to declare him an outlaw, from abhorrence of his profession; but he found that aid and protection at Bushire, which his own townsmen denied him. With five or six vessels, most of which were very large, and manned with crews of from two to three hundred each, he sallied forth, and captured whatever he thought himself strong enough to carry off as a prize. His followers to the number of two thousand, were maintained by the plunder of his prizes; and as the most of these were his own bought African slaves, and the remainder equally subject to his authority, he was sometimes as prodigal of their lives in a fit of anger as he was of his enemies, whom he was not content to slay in battle only, but basely murdered in cold blood, after they had submitted. An instance is related of his having put a great number of his own crew, who used mutinous expressions, into a tank on board, in which they usually kept their water, and this being shut close at the top, the poor wretches were all suffocated, and afterwards thrown overboard. This butcher chief, like the celebrated Djezzar of Acre, affected great simplicity of dress, manners, and living; and whenever he went out, could not be distinguished by a stranger from the crowd of his attendants. He carried this simplicity to a degree of filthiness, which was disgusting, as his usual dress was a shirt, which was never taken off to be washed, from the time it was first put on till worn out; no drawers or coverings for the legs of any kind, and a large black goat's hair cloak, wrapped over all with a greasy and dirty handkerchief, called the keffeea, thrown loosely over his head. Infamous as was this man's life and character, he was not only cherished and courted by the people of Bushire, who dreaded him, but was courteously received and respectfully entertained whenever he visited the British Factory. On one occasion, (says Mr. Buckingham,) at which I was

present, he was sent for to give some medical gentlemen of the navy and company's cruisers an opportunity of inspecting his arm, which had been severely wounded. The wound was at first made by grape-shot and splinters, and the arm was one mass of blood about the part for several days, while the man himself was with difficulty known to be alive. He gradually recovered, however, without surgical aid, and the bone of the arm between the shoulder and elbow being completely shivered to pieces, the fragments progressively worked out, and the singular appearance was left of the fore arm and elbow connected to the shoulder by flesh and skin, and tendons, without the least vestige of bone. This man when invited to the factory for the purpose of making an exhibition of his arm, was himself admitted to sit at the table and take some tea, as it was breakfast time, and some of his followers took chairs around him. They were all as disgustingly filthy in appearance as could well be imagined; and some of them did not scruple to hunt for vermin on their skins, of which there was an abundance, and throw them on the floor. Rahmah-ben-Jabir's figure presented a meagre trunk, with four lank members, all of them cut and hacked, and pierced with wounds, of sabres, spears and bullets, in every part, to the number, perhaps of more than twenty different wounds. He had, besides, a face naturally ferocious and ugly, and now rendered still more so by several scars there, and by the loss of one eye. When asked by one of the English gentlemen present, with a tone of encouragement and familiarity, whether he could not still dispatch an enemy with his boneless arm, he drew a crooked dagger, or yambeah, from the girdle round his shirt, and placing his left hand, which was sound, to support the elbow of the right, which was the one that was wounded, he grasped the dagger firmly with his clenched fist, and drew it backward and forward, twirling it at the same time, and saying that he desired nothing better than to have the cutting of as many throats as he could effectually open with his lame hand. Instead of being shocked at the uttering of such a brutal wish, and such a savage triumph at still possessing the power to murder unoffending victims, I knew not how to describe my feelings of shame and sorrow

when a loud roar of laughter burst from the whole assembly, when I ventured to express my dissent from the general feeling of admiration for such a man.

This barbarous pirate in the year 1827, at last experienced a fate characteristic of the whole course of his life. His violent aggressions having united the Arabs of Bahrene and Ratiffe against him, they blockaded his port of Daman, from which Rahmah-ben-Jabir, having left a garrison in the fort under his son, had sailed in a well appointed bugalow, for the purpose of endeavoring to raise a confederacy of his friends in his support. Having failed in this object he returned to Daman, and in spite of the boats blockading the port, succeeded in visiting his garrison, and immediately re-embarked, taking with him his youngest son. On arriving on board his bugalow, he was received by his followers with a salute, which decisive indication of his presence immediately attracted the attention of his opponents, one of whose boats commanded by the nephew of the Sheikh of Bahrene, proceeded to attack him. A desperate struggle ensued, and the Sheikh finding after some time that he had lost nearly the whole of his crew by the fire of Rahmah's boat, retired for reinforcements. These being obtained, he immediately returned singly to the contest. The fight was renewed with redoubled fury; when at last, Ramah, being informed, (for he had been long blind,) that his men were falling fast around him, mustered the remainder of the crew, and issued orders to close and grapple with his opponent. When this was effected, and after embracing his son, he was led with a lighted torch to the magazine, which instantly exploded, blowing his own boat to atoms and setting fire to the Shaikh's, which immediately afterwards shared the same fate. Sheikh Ahmed and a few of his followers escaped to the other boats; but only one of Rahmah's brave crew was saved; and it is supposed that upwards of three hundred men were killed in this heroic contest.