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robbers**

**ELLS, CHARLES**

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The Life of Captain Davis.

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THE LIFE OF  
CAPTAIN DAVIS;

*With an account of his surprising the Fort at Gambia.*

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DAVIS was born in Monmouthshire, and, from a boy, trained to the sea. His last voyage from England was in the sloop Cadogan from Bristol, in the character of chief mate. This vessel was captured by the pirate England, upon the Guinea coast, whose companions plundered the crew, and murdered the captain, as is related in England's life.

Upon the death of Captain Skinner, Davis pretended that he was urged by England to become a pirate, but that he resolutely refused. He added, that England, pleased with his conduct, had made him captain in room of Skinner, giving him a sealed paper, which he was not to open until he was in a certain latitude, and then expressly to follow the given directions. When he arrived in the appointed place, he collected the whole crew, and solemnly read his sealed instructions, which contained a generous grant of the ship and all her stores to Davis and his crew, requesting them to go to Brazil, and dispose of the cargo to the best advantage, and make an equal division of the money.

Davis then commanded the crew to signify whether they were inclined to follow that mode of life, when, to his astonishment and chagrin, the majority positively refused. Then, in a transport of rage, he desired them to go where they would.

Knowing that part of the cargo was consigned to merchants in Barbadoes, they directed their course to that place. When arrived there, they informed the merchants of the unfortunate death of Skinner, and of the proposal



which had been made to them. Davis was accordingly seized, and committed to prison, but he having never been in the pirate service, nothing could be proved to condemn him, and he was discharged without a trial. Convinced that he could never hope for employment in that quarter after this detection, he went to the island of Providence, which he knew to be a rendezvous for pirates. Upon his arrival there, he was grievously disappointed, because the pirates who frequented that place had just accepted of his majesty's pardon, and had surrendered.

Captain Rodgers having equipped two sloops for trade, Davis obtained employment in one of these, called the Buck. They were laden with European goods to a considerable value, which they were to sell or exchange with the French and Spanish. They first touched at the island of Martinique, belonging to the French, and Davis knowing that many of the men were formerly in the pirate service, enticed them to seize the master, and to run off with the sloop. When they had effected their purpose, they hailed the other ship, in which they knew that there were many hands ripe for rebellion, and coming to, the greater part joined Davis. Those who did not choose to adhere to them were allowed to remain in the other sloop, and continue their course, after Davis had pillaged her of what things he pleased.

In full possession of the vessel and stores and goods, a large bowl of punch was made; under its exhilarating influence, it was proposed to choose a commander, and to form their future mode of policy. The election was soon over, and a large majority of legal votes were in favor of Davis, and no scrutiny demanded, Davis was declared duly elected. He then drew up a code of laws, to which he himself swore, and required the same bond of alliance from all the rest of the crew. He then addressed them in a short and appropriate speech, the substance of which was, a proclamation of war with the whole world.

They next consulted, what part would be most convenient to clean the vessel, and it was resolved to repair to Coxon's Hole, at the east end of the island of Cuba, where they could remain in perfect security, as the entrance was so narrow that one ship could keep out a hundred.



They, however, had no small difficulty in cleaning their vessel, as there was no carpenter among them. They performed that laborious task in the best manner they could, and then made to the north side of Hispaniola. The first sail they met with was a French ship of twelve guns, which they captured; and while they were plundering her, another appeared in view. Enquiring of the Frenchmen, they learned that she was a ship of twenty-four guns and sixty men. Davis proposed to his crew to attack her, assuring them that she would prove a rich prize. This appeared to the crew such a hazardous enterprise, that they were rather adverse to the measure. But he acquainted them that he had conceived a stratagem that he was confident would succeed; they might, therefore, safely leave the matter to his management. He then commenced chase, and ordered his prize to do the same. Being a better sailer, he soon came up with the enemy, and showed his black colors. With no small surprise at his insolence in coming so near them, they commanded him to strike. He replied, that he was disposed to give them employment until his companion came up, who was able to contend with them; meanwhile assuring them that, if they did not strike to him, it would most certainly fare the worse with them: then giving them a broadside, he received the same in return.

When the other pirate ship drew near, they, according to the directions of Davis, appeared upon deck in white shirts, which making an appearance of numbers, the Frenchman was intimidated, and struck. Davis ordered the captain with twenty of his men to come on board, and they were all put in irons except the captain. He then despatched four of his men to the other ship, and calling aloud to them, desired that his compliments should be given to the captain, with a request to send a sufficient number of hands to go on board their new prize, to see what they had got in her. At the same time, he gave them a written paper with their proper instructions, even to nail up the small guns, to take out all the arms and powder, and to go every man on board the new prize. When his men were on board her, he ordered the greater part of the prisoners to be removed into the empty vessels, and by this means secured himself from any attempt to recover their ship.



During three days, these three vessels sailed in company, but finding that his late prize was a heavy sailer, he emptied her of everything that he stood in need of, and then restored her to the captain with all his men. The French captain was so much enraged at being thus miserably deceived, that, upon the discovery of the stratagem, he would have thrown himself overboard, had not his men prevented him.

Captain Davis then formed the resolution of parting with the other prize-ship also, and soon afterwards steered northward, and took a Spanish sloop. He next directed his course towards the western islands, and from Cape de Verd islands cast anchor at St. Nicholas, and hoisted English colors. The Portuguese supposed that he was a privateer, and Davis going on shore was hospitably received, and they traded with him for such articles as they found most advantageous. He remained here five weeks, and he and half of his crew visited the principal town of the island. Davis, from his appearing in the dress of a gentleman, was greatly caressed by the Portuguese, and nothing was spared to entertain and render him and his men happy. Having amused themselves during a week, they returned to the ship, and allowed the other half of the crew to visit the capital, and enjoy themselves in like manner. Upon their return, they cleaned their ship and put to sea, but four of the men were so captivated with the ladies and the luxuries of the place, that they remained in the island, and one of them married and settled there.

Davis now sailed for Bonavista, and perceiving nothing in that harbor steered for the Isle of May. Arrived there, he found several vessels in the harbor, and plundered them of whatever he found necessary. He also received a considerable reinforcement of men, the greater part of whom entered willingly into the piratical service. He likewise made free with one of the ships, equipped her for his own purpose, and called her the King James. Davis next proceeded to St. Jago to take in water. Davis, with some others going on shore to seek water, the governor came to inquire who they were, and expressed his suspicion of their being pirates. Upon this, Davis seemed highly affronted, and expressed his displeasure in the most polite but deter-



mined manner. He, however, hastened on board, informed his men, and suggested the possibility of surprising the fort during the night. Accordingly, all his men being well armed, they advanced to the assault; and, from the carelessness of the guards, they were in the garrison before the inhabitants were alarmed. Upon the discovery of their danger, they took shelter in the governor's house, and fortified it against the pirates: but the latter throwing in some grando shells, ruined the furniture, and killed several people.

The alarm was circulated in the morning, and the country assembled to attack them; but, unwilling to stand a siege, the pirates dismounted the guns, pillaged the fort, and fled to their ships.

When at sea, they mustered their hands, and found that they were seventy strong. They then consulted among themselves what course they should steer, and were divided in opinion; but by a majority it was carried to sail for Gambia, on the coast of Guinea. Of this opinion was the captain, who having been employed in that trade, was acquainted with the coast; and informed his companions, that there was always a large quantity of money deposited in that castle, and he was confident, if the matter was entrusted to him, he should successfully storm that fort. From their experience of his former prudence and courage, they cheerfully submitted to his direction, in the full assurance of success.

Arrived at Gambia, he ordered all his men below, except just so many as were necessary to work the vessel, that those from the fort, seeing so few hands, might have no suspicion that she was any other than a trading vessel. He then ran under the fort and cast anchor, and having ordered out the boat, manned with six men indifferently dressed, he, with the master and doctor, dressed themselves like gentlemen, in order that the one party might look like foremastmen, and the other like merchants. In rowing ashore, he instructed his men what to say if any questions were put to them by the garrison.

On reaching land, the party was conducted by a file of musqueteers into the fort, and kindly received by the governor, who enquired what they were, and whence they



came? They replied, that they were from Liverpool, and bound for the river Senegal, to trade for gum and elephants teeth; but that they were chased on that coast by two French men-of-war, and narrowly escaped being taken. "We were now disposed," continued Davis, "to make the best of our voyage, and would willingly trade here for slaves." The governor then inquired what were the principal articles of their cargo. They replied, that they were iron and plate, which were necessary articles in that place. The governor then said, that he would give them slaves for all their cargo; and asked if they had any European liquor on board. They answered, that they had a little for their own use, but that he should have a hamper of it. He then treated them with the greatest civility, and desired them all to dine with him. Davis answered, that as he was commander of the vessel, it would be necessary for him to go down to see if she was properly moored, and to give some other directions; but that these gentlemen might stay, and he would return before dinner, and bring the hamper with him.

While in the fort, his eyes were keenly employed to discover the position of the arms, and how the fort might most successfully be surprised. He discovered that there was a sentry standing near a guard-house, in which there were a quantity of arms heaped up in a corner, and that a considerable number of small arms were in the governor's hall. When he went on board, he ordered some hands on board a sloop lying at anchor, lest, hearing any bustle they should come to the aid of the castle; then desiring his men to avoid too much liquor, and to be ready when he should hoist the flag from the walls, to come to his assistance, he proceeded to the castle.

Having taken these precautions and formed these arrangements, he ordered every man who was to accompany him to arm himself with two pair of pistols, which he himself also did, concealed under their clothes. He then directed them to go into the guard-room, and fall into conversation, and immediately upon his firing a pistol out of the governor's window, to shut the men up, and secure the arms in the guard-room.



When Davis arrived, dinner not being ready, the governor proposed that they should pass the time in making a bowl of punch. Davis's boatswain attending him, had an opportunity of visiting all parts of the house, and observing their strength. He whispered his intelligence to his master, who being surrounded by his own friends, and seeing the governor unattended by any of his retinue, presented a pistol to the breast of the latter, informing him that he was a dead man, unless he should surrender the fort and all its riches. The governor, thus taken by surprise, was compelled to submit; for Davis took down all the pistols that hung in the hall, and loaded them. He then fired his pistol out of the window. His men flew like lions, presented their pistols to the soldiers, and while some carried out the arms, the rest secured the military, and shut them all up in the guard-house, placing a guard on the door. Then one of them struck the union flag on the top of the castle, which the men from the vessel perceiving, rushed to the combat, and in an instant were in possession of the castle, without tumult or bloodshed.

Davis then harrangued the soldiers, many of whom enlisted with him; and those who declined, he put on board the small ships, and to prevent the necessity of a guard, or the possibility of escape, carried off the sails, rigging and cables.

That day being spent in feasting and rejoicing, the castle saluting the ship, and the ship the castle, on the day following they proceeded to examine the contents of their prize. They, however, were greatly disappointed in their expectations, a large sum of money having been sent off a few days before. But they found money to the amount of about two thousand pounds in gold, and many valuable articles of different kinds. They carried on board their vessel whatever they deemed useful, gave several articles to the captain and crew of the small vessel, and allowed them to depart, while they dismounted the guns, and demolished the fortifications.

After doing all the mischief that their vicious minds could possibly devise, they weighed anchor; but in the mean time, perceiving a sail bearing towards them with all possible speed, they hastened to prepare for her reception,



and made towards her. Upon her near approach they discovered that she was a French pirate of fourteen guns and sixty-four men, the one half French, and the other half negroes.

The Frenchman was in high expectation of a rich prize, but when he came nearer, he suspected, from the number of her guns and men, that she was a small English man-of-war; he determined, notwithstanding, upon the bold attempt of boarding her, and immediately fired a gun, and hoisted his black colors: Davis immediately returned the compliment. The Frenchman was highly gratified at this discovery; both hoisted out their boats, and congratulated each other. Mutual civilities and good offices passed, and the French captain proposed to Davis to sail down the coast with him, in order to look out for a better ship, assuring him that the very first that could be captured should be his, as he was always willing to encourage an industrious brother.

They first touched at Sierra Leone, where they espied a large vessel, and Davis being the swifter sailer, came first up with him. He was not a little surprised that she did not endeavor to make off, and began to suspect her strength. When he came alongside of her, she fired a whole broadside, and hoisted black colors. Davis did the same, and fired a gun to leeward. The satisfaction of these brothers in iniquity was mutual, at having thus acquired so much additional strength and ability to undertake more formidable adventures. Two days were devoted to mirth and song, and upon the third, Davis and Cochlyn, the captain of the new confederate, agreed to go in the French pirate ship to attack the fort. When they approached, the men in the fort, apprehensive of their character and intentions, fired all the guns upon them at once. The ship returned the fire, and afforded employment until the other two ships arrived, when the men in the fort seeing such a number on board, lost courage, and abandoned the fort to the mercy of the robbers.

They took possession, remained there seven weeks, and cleaned their vessels. They then called a council of war, to deliberate concerning future undertakings, when it was resolved to sail down the coast in company; and, for the



greater regularity and grandeur, Davis was chosen Commodore. That dangerous enemy, strong drink, had well nigh, however, sown the seeds of discord among these affectionate brethren. But Davis, alike prepared for council or for war, addressed them to the following purport: "Hear ye, you Cochlyn and La Boise, (which was the name of the French captain) I find, by strengthening you, I have put a rod into your hands to whip myself; but I am still able to deal with you both: however, since we met in love, let us part in love; for I find that three of a trade can never agree long together." Upon this, the other two went on board of their respective ships, and steered different courses.

Davis held down the coast, and reaching Cape Appolonia he captured three vessels, two English and one Scottish, plundered them, and allowed them to proceed. In five days after he met with a Dutchman of thirty guns and ninety men. She gave Davis a broadside, and killed nine of his men; a desperate engagement ensued, which continued from one o'clock at noon until nine next morning, when the Dutchman struck.

Davis equipped her for the pirate service, and called her "The Rover." With his two ships he sailed for the bay of Anamaboa, which he entered about noon, and took several vessels which were there waiting to take in negroes, gold, and elephants' teeth. Davis made a present of one of these vessels to the Dutch captain and his crew, and allowed them to go in quest of their fortune. When the fort had intelligence that they were pirates, they fired at them, but without any effect; Davis fired also, and hoisted the black colors, but deemed it prudent to depart.

The next day after he left Anamaboa, the man at the mast-head discovered a sail. It may be proper to inform our readers, that, according to the laws of pirates, the man who first discovers a vessel, is entitled to the best pair of pistols in the ship, and such is the honor attached to these, that a pair of them has been known to sell for thirty pounds.

Davis pursued that vessel, which, being between him and the shore, labored hard to run aground. Davis perceiving this, got between her and the land, and fired a broadside at



her, when she immediately struck. She proved to be a very rich prize, having on board the Governor of Acra, with all his substance, going to Holland. There was in money to the amount of fifteen thousand pounds, besides a large quantity of merchant goods, and other valuable articles.

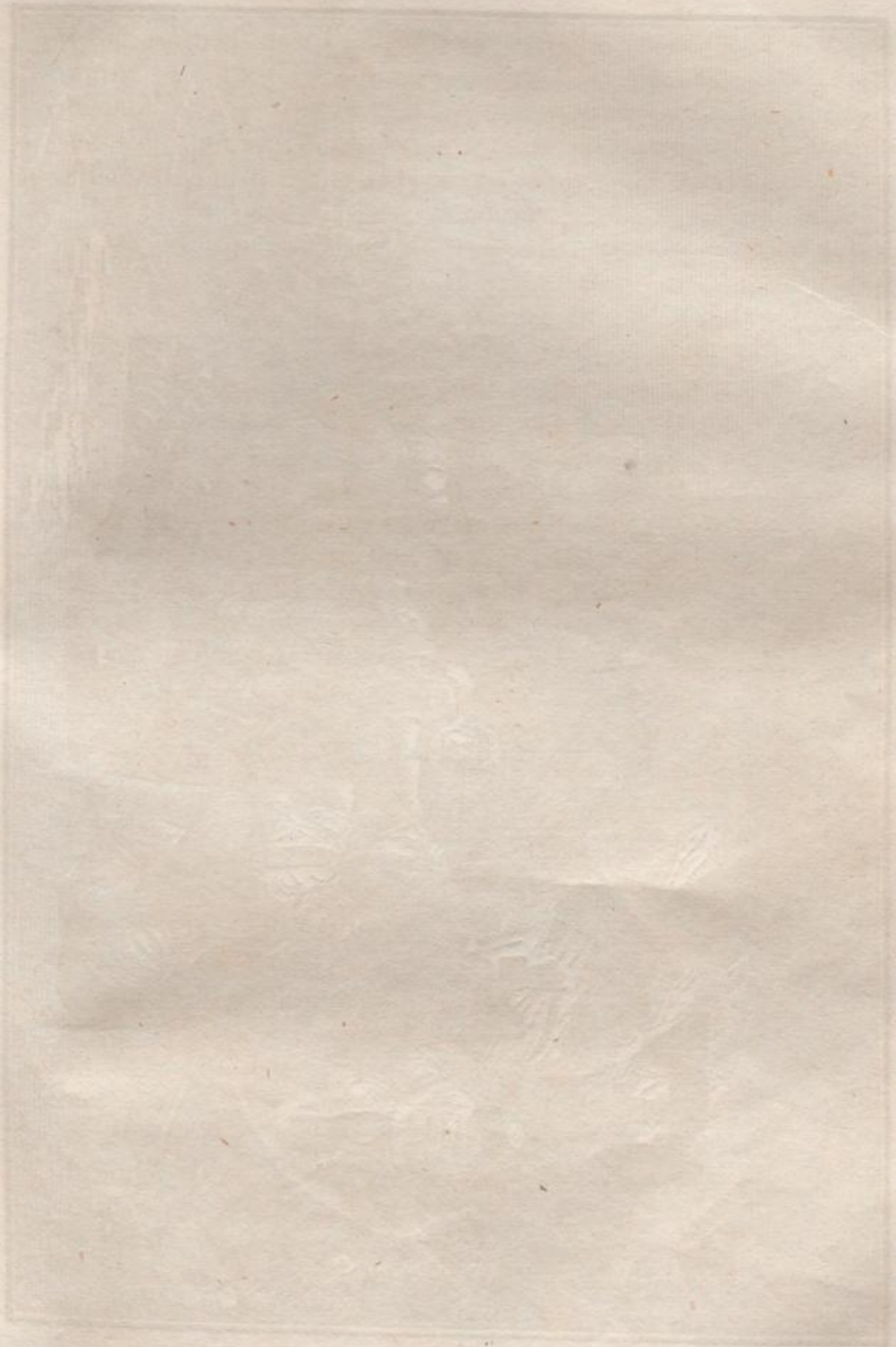
Before they reached the Isle of Princes, the *St. James* sprang a leak, so that the men and the valuable articles were removed into Davis's own ship. When he came in sight of the fort he hoisted English colors. The Portuguese, seeing a large ship sailing towards the shore, sent a sloop to discover her character and destination. Davis informed them, that he was an English man-of-war, sent out in search of some pirates which they had heard were in this quarter. Upon this, he was piloted into the port, and anchored below the guns at the fort. The governor was happy to have Englishmen in his harbor; and to do honor to Davis, sent down a file of musqueteers to escort him into the fort, while Davis, the more to cover his design, ordered nine men, according to the custom of the English, to row him on shore.

Davis also took the opportunity of cleaning and preparing all things for renewing his operations. He, however, could not contentedly leave the fort, without receiving some of the riches of the island. He formed a scheme to accomplish his purpose, and communicated the same to his men. His design was to make the governor a present of a few negroes in return for his kindness; then to invite him, with a few of the principal men and friars belonging to the island, to dine on board his ship, and secure them all in irons, until each of them should give a large ransom. They were accordingly invited, and very readily consented to go: and deemed themselves honored by his attention, all that were invited, would certainly have gone on board. Fortunately however, for them, a negro, who was privy to the horrible plan of Davis, swam on shore during the night, and gave information of the danger to the governor.

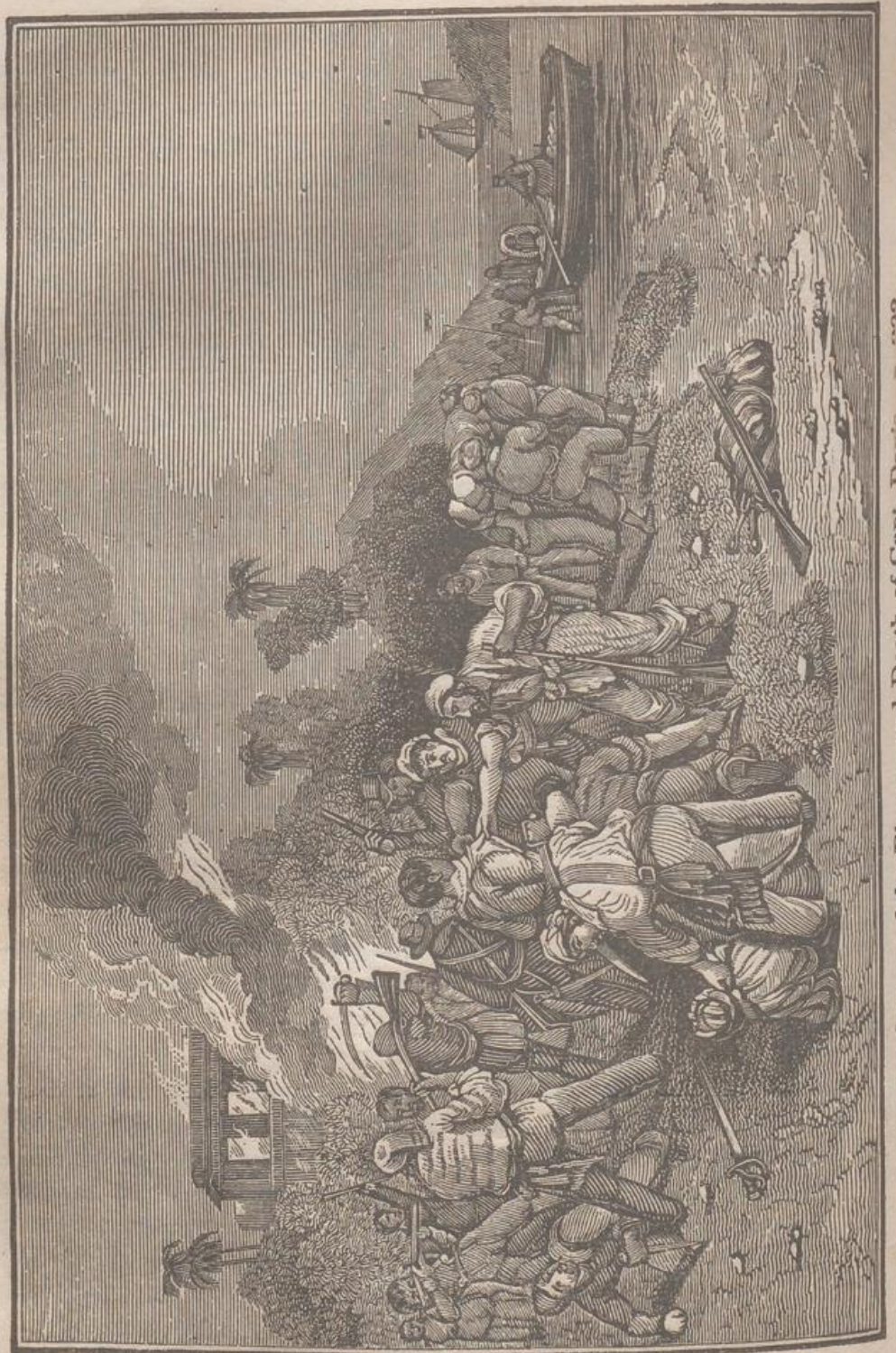
The governor occupied the whole night in strengthening the defences and posting the men in the most advantageous places. Soon after day-break, the pirates, with Captain Davis at their head were discovered landing from the



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Death of the Pirates, and Death of Capt. ...



boats; and quickly marched across the open space toward the fort. A brisk fire was opened upon them from the fort, which they returned in a spirited manner. At length, a hand grenade, thrown from the wooden veranda of the fort killed three of the pirates; but several of the Portuguese were killed. The veranda of the fort being of wood and very dry, it was set fire to by the pirates. This was a great advantage to the attacking party, who could now distinguish those in the fort without their being so clearly seen themselves; but at this moment Captain Davis fell, mortally wounded by a musket ball in his belly. The fall of their chief, and the determined resistance of those in the fort, checked the impetuosity of the assailants. They hesitated, and at last retreated, bearing away with them their wounded commander. The Portuguese cheered, and led on by the governor, now became the assailants. Still the pirates' retreat was orderly; they fired and retired rank behind rank successively. They kept the Portuguese at bay until they had arrived at the boats, when a charge was made and a severe conflict ensued. But the pirates had lost too many men; and without their Captain, felt dispirited. As they lifted Davis into the boat in his dying agonies he fired his pistols at his pursuers. They now pulled with all their might to escape from the muskets of the Portuguese, who followed them along the banks of the river, annoying them in their retreat to the vessel. And those on board, who expected to hoist in treasure had to receive naught but their wounded comrades and dead commander.