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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**

The Life of Captain Edward Low.

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THE LIFE OF  
CAPTAIN EDWARD LOW.

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THIS ferocious villain was born in Westminster, and received an education similar to that of the common people in England. He was by nature a pirate; for even when very young he raised contributions among the boys of Westminster, and if they declined compliance, a battle was the result. When he advanced a step farther in life, he began to exert his ingenuity at low games, and cheating all in his power; and those who pretended to maintain their own right, he was ready to call to the field of combat.

He went to sea in company with his brother, and continued with him for three or four years. Going over to America, he wrought in a rigging-house at Boston for some time. He then came home to see his mother in England, returned to Boston, and continued for some years longer at the same business. But being of a quarrelsome temper, he differed with his master, and went on board a sloop bound for the Bay of Honduras.

While there, he had the command of a boat employed in bringing logwood to the ship. In that boat there were twelve men well armed, to be prepared for the Spaniards, from whom the wood was taken by force. It happened one day that the boat came to the ship just a little before dinner was ready, and Low desired that they might dine before they returned. The captain, however, ordered them a bottle of rum, and requested them to take another trip, as no time was to be lost. The crew were enraged, particularly Low, who took up a loaded musket and fired at the captain, but missing him, another man was shot, and they ran off with the boat. The next day they took a

small vessel, went on board her, hoisted a black flag, and declared war with the whole world.

In their roving, Low met with Lowther, who proposed that he should join him, and thus promote their mutual advantage. We have already related their adventures so long as they remained in company. Having captured a brigantine, Low, with forty more, went on board her; and leaving Lowther, they went to seek their own fortune.

Their first adventure was the capture of a vessel belonging to Amboy, out of which they took the provisions, and allowed her to proceed. On the same day they took a sloop, plundered her, and permitted her to depart. The sloop went into Black Island, and sent intelligence to the governor that Low was on the coast. Two small vessels were immediately fitted out, but, before their arrival, Low was beyond their reach. After this narrow escape, Low went into port to procure water and fresh provisions; and then renewed his search of plunder. He next sailed into the harbor of Port Rosemary, where were thirteen ships, but none of them of any great strength. Low hoisted the black flag, assuring them that if they made any resistance they should have no quarter; and manning their boat, the pirates took possession of every one of them, which they plundered and converted to their own use. They then put on board a schooner ten guns and fifty men, named her the Fancy, and Low himself went on board of her, while Charles Harris was constituted captain of the brigantine. They also constrained a few of the men to join them, and sign their articles.

After an unsuccessful pursuit of two sloops from Boston, they steered for the Leeward Islands, but in their way were overtaken by a terrible hurricane. The search for plunder gave place to the most vigorous exertion to save themselves. On board the brigantine, all hands were at work both day and night; they were under the necessity of throwing overboard six of her guns, and all the weighty provisions. In the storm, the two vessels were separated, and it was some time before they again saw each other.

After the storm, Low went into a small island west of the Caribbees, refitted his vessels, and got provision for them in exchange of goods. As soon as the brigantine

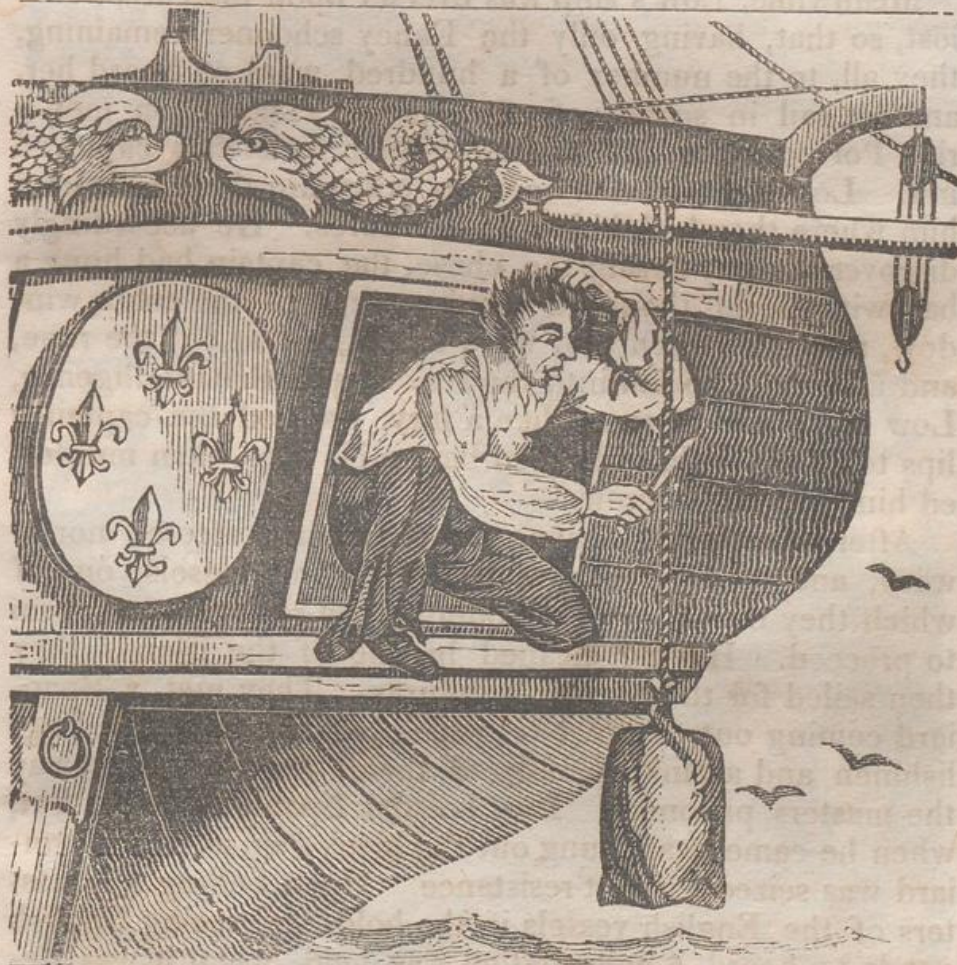
was ready for sea, they went on a cruise until the *Fancy* should be prepared, and during that cruise, met with a vessel which had lost all her masts in the storm, which they plundered of goods to the value of 1000*l.* and returned to the island. When the *Fancy* was ready to sail, a council was held what course they should next steer. They followed the advice of the captain, who thought it not safe to cruise any longer to the leeward, lest they should fall in with any of the men-of-war that cruised upon that coast, so they sailed for the *Nores*.

The good fortune of Low was now singular; in his way thither he captured a French ship of 34 guns, and carried her along with him. Then entering *St. Michael's roads*, he captured seven sail, threatening with instant death all who dared to oppose him. Thus, by inspiring terror, without firing a single gun, he became master of all that property. Being in want of water and fresh provisions, Low sent to the governor demanding a supply, upon condition of releasing the ships he had taken, otherwise he would commit them to the flames. The request was instantly complied with, and six of the vessels were restored. But a French vessel being among them, they emptied of her guns and all her men, except the cook, who, they said, being a greasy fellow, would fry well; they accordingly bound the unfortunate man to the mast, and set the ship on fire.

The next who fell in their way was Captain Carter, in the *Wright galley*; who, because he showed some inclination to defend himself, was cut and mangled in a barbarous manner. There were also two Portuguese friars, whom they tied to the foremast, and several times let them down before they were dead, merely to gratify their own ferocious dispositions. Meanwhile, another Portuguese, beholding this cruel scene, expressed some sorrow in his countenance, upon which one of the wretches said he did not like his looks, and so giving him a stroke across the body with his cutlass, he fell upon the spot. Another of the miscreants, aiming a blow at a prisoner, missed his aim, and struck Low upon the under jaw. The surgeon was called, and stiched up the wound; but Low finding fault with the operation, the surgeon gave him a blow which

broke all the stiches, and left him to sew them himself. After he had plundered this vessel, some of them were for burning her, as they had done the Frenchman; but instead of that, they cut her cables, rigging, and sails to pieces, and sent her adrift to the mercy of the waves.

They next sailed for the island of Madeira, and took up a fishing boat with two old men and a boy. They detained



*The Captain of the Portuguese Ship cutting away the Bag of Moidores.*

one of them, and sent the other on shore with a flag of truce, requesting the governor to send them a boat of water, else they would hang the other man at the yard arm. The water was sent, and the man dismissed.

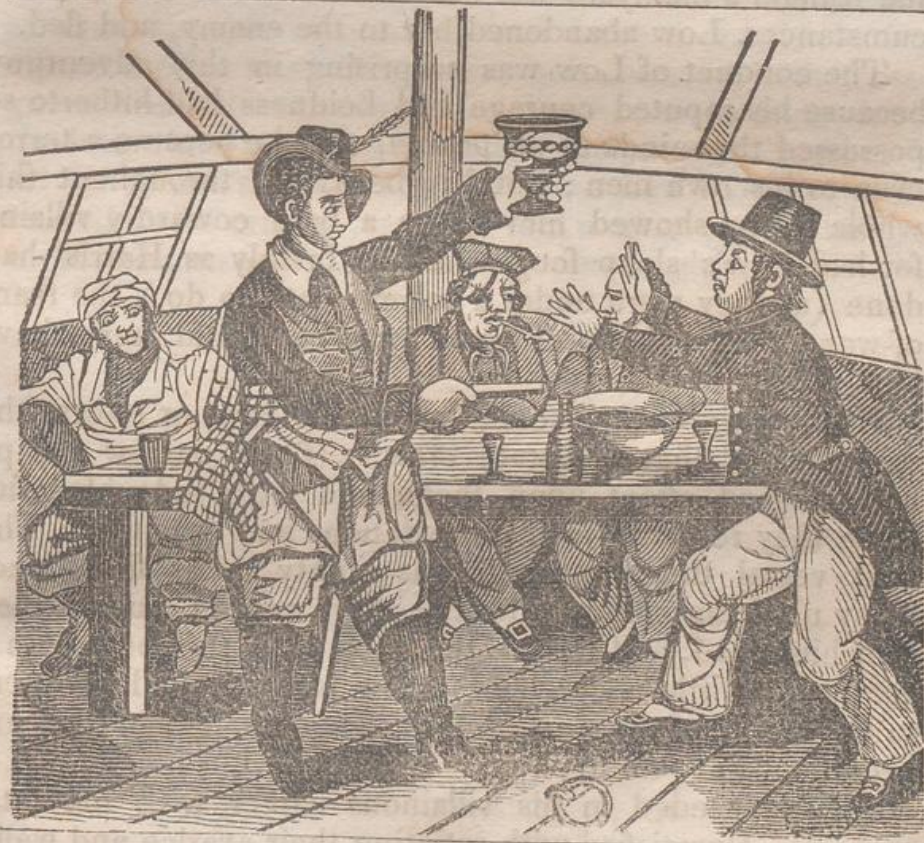
They next sailed for the Canary Islands, and there took

several vessels; and being informed that two small galleys were daily expected, the sloop was manned and sent in quest of them. They, however, missing their prey, and being in great want of provision, went into St. Michael's in the character of traders, and being discovered, were apprehended, and the whole crew conducted to the castle, and treated according to their merits.

Meanwhile, Low's ship was upset upon the careen and lost, so that, having only the Fancy schooner remaining, they all, to the number of a hundred, went on board her, and set sail in search of new spoils. They soon met a rich Portuguese vessel, and after some resistance captured her. Low tortured the men to constrain them to inform him where they had hid their treasures. He accordingly discovered that, during the chase, the captain had hung a bag with eleven thousand moidores out of the cabin window, and that, when they were taken, he had cut the rope, and allowed it to fall into the sea. Upon this intelligence, Low raved and stormed like a fury, ordered the captain's lips to be cut off and broiled before his eyes, then murdered him and all his crew.

After this bloody action, the miscreants steered northward, and in their course seized several vessels, one of which they burned, and plundering the rest, allowed them to proceed. Having cleaned in one of the islands, they then sailed for the bay of Honduras. They met a Spaniard coming out of the bay, which had captured five Englishmen and a pink, plundered them, and brought away the masters prisoners. Low hoisted Spanish colors, but, when he came near, hung out the black flag, and the Spaniard was seized without resistance. Upon finding the masters of the English vessels in the hold, and seeing English goods on board, a consultation was held, when it was determined to put all the Spaniards to the sword. This was scarcely resolved upon, when they commenced with every species of weapons to massacre every man, and some flying from their merciless hands into the waves, a canoe was sent in pursuit of those who endeavored to swim on shore. They next plundered the Spanish vessel, restored the English masters to their respective vessels, and set the Spaniard on fire.

Low's next cruise was between the Leeward Islands and the main land, where, in a continued course of prosperity, he successively captured no less than nineteen ships of different sizes, and in general treated their crews with a barbarity unequalled even among pirates. But it happened that the Greyhound, of twenty guns and one hundred and twenty men, was cruising upon that coast. Informed of the mischief these miscreants had done, the Greyhound went in search of them. Supposing they had discovered a prize, Low and his crew pursued them, and the Greyhound, allowing them to run after her until all things were ready to engage, turned upon the two sloops.



*Low presenting a Pistol and Bowl of Punch.*

One of these sloops was called the Fancy, and commanded by Low himself, and the other the Ranger, commanded by Harris; both hoisted their piratical colors, and fired each a gun. When the Greyhound came

within musket shot, she hauled up her mainsail, and clapped close upon a wind, to keep the pirates from running to leeward, and then engaged. But when the rogues found whom they had to deal with, they edged away under the man-of-war's stern, and the Greyhound standing after them, they made a running fight for about two hours; but little wind happening, the sloop gained from her, by the help of their oars; upon which the Greyhound left off firing, turned all hands to their own oars, and at three in the afternoon came up with them. The pirates hauled upon a wind to receive the man-of-war, and the fight was immediately renewed, with a brisk fire on both sides, till the Ranger's mainyard was shot down. Under these circumstances, Low abandoned her to the enemy, and fled.

The conduct of Low was surprising in this adventure, because his reputed courage and boldness had hitherto so possessed the minds of all people, that he became a terror even to his own men; but his behaviour throughout this whole action showed him to be a base cowardly villain; for had Low's sloop fought half so briskly as Harris' had done (as they were under a solemn oath to do,) the man-of-war, in the opinion of some present, could never have hurt them.

Nothing, however, could lessen the fury, or reform the manners, of that obdurate crew. Their narrow escape had no good effect upon them, and with redoubled violence they renewed their depredations and cruelties. The next vessel they captured, was eighty miles from land. They used the master with the most wanton cruelty, then shot him dead, and forced the crew into the boat with a compass, a little water, and a few biscuits, and left them to the mercy of the waves; they, however, beyond all expectation, got safe to shore.

Low proceeded in his villainous career with too fatal success. Unsatisfied with satiating their avarice and walking the common path of wickedness, those inhuman wretches, like to Satan himself, made mischief their sport, cruelty their delight, and the ruin and murder of their fellow men their constant employment. Of all the piratical crews belonging to the English nation, none ever equalled Low in barbarity. Their mirth and their anger had the



same effect. They murdered a man from good humour, as well as from anger and passion. Their ferocious disposition seemed only to delight in cries, groans, and lamentations. One day Low having captured Captain Graves, a Virginia man, took a bowl of punch in his hand, and said, "Captain, here's half this to you." The poor gentleman was too much touched with his misfortunes to be in a humor for drinking, he therefore modestly excused himself. Upon this Low cocked and presented a pistol in the one hand, and his bowl in the other, saying, "Either take the one or the other."

Low next captured a vessel called the Christmas, mounted her with thirty-four guns, went on board her himself, assumed the title of admiral, and hoisted the black flag. His next prize was a brigantine half manned with Portuguese, and half with English. The former he hanged, and the latter he thrust into their boat and dismissed, while he set fire to the vessel. The success of Low was unequalled, as well as his cruelty; and during a long period he continued to pursue his wicked course with impunity.