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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

Description of their Dows and Proas.

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the Phillipine Islands, which they have continued to infest, with little interruption, for near three centuries, in open defiance of the Spanish authorities, and the numerous establishments maintained to check them. The piracies of the Illanoons, on the contrary, are widely extended, being carried on all the way from their native country to the Spice Islands, on one side, and to the Straits of Malacca on the other. In these last, indeed, they have formed, for the last few years, two permanent establishments; one of these situated on Sumatra, near Indragiri, is called Ritti, and the other a small island on the coast of Linga, is named Salangut. Besides those who are avowed pirates, it ought to be particularly noticed that a great number of the Malayan princes must be considered as accessories to their crimes, for they afford them protection, contribute to their outfit, and often share in their booty; so that a piratical proa is too commonly more welcome in their harbours than a fair trader.

The Malay piratical proas are from six to eight tons burden, and run from six to eight fathoms in length. They carry from one to two small guns, with commonly four swivels or rantakas to each side, and a crew of from twenty to thirty men. When they engage, they put up a strong bulwark of thick plank; the Illanoon proas are much larger and more formidable, and commonly carry from four to six guns, and a proportionable number of swivels, and have not unfrequently a double bulwark covered with buffalo hides: their crews consist of from forty to eighty men. Both, of course, are provided with spears, kripes, and as many fire arms as they can procure. Their modes of attack are cautious and cowardly, for plunder and not fame is their object. They lie concealed under the land, until they find a fit object and opportunity. The time chosen is when a vessel runs aground, or is becalmed, in the interval between the land and sea breezes. A vessel underway is seldom or never attacked. Several of the marauders attack together, and station themselves under the bows and quarters of a ship when she has no longer steerage way, and is incapable of pointing her guns. The action continues often for several hours, doing very little mischief; but when the crew are exhausted with the defence, or have expended

their ammunition, the pirates take this opportunity of boarding in a mass. This may suggest the best means of defence. A ship, when attacked during a calm, ought, perhaps, rather to stand on the defensive, and wait if possible the setting in of the sea breeze, than attempt any active operations, which would only fatigue the crew, and disable them from making the necessary defence when boarding is attempted. Boarding netting, pikes and pistols, appear to afford effectual security; and, indeed, we conceive that a vessel thus defended by resolute crews of Europeans or Americans stand but little danger from any open attack of pirates whatsoever; for their guns are so ill served, that neither the hull or the rigging of a vessel can receive much damage from them, however much protracted the contest. The pirates are upon the whole extremely impartial in the selection of their prey, making little choice between natives and strangers, giving always, however, a natural preference to the most timid, and the most easily overcome.

When an expedition is undertaken by the Malay pirates, they range themselves under the banner of some piratical chief noted for his courage and conduct. The native prince of the place where it is prepared, supplies the adventurers with arms, ammunition and opium, and claims as his share of the plunder, the female captives, the cannon, and one third of all the rest of the booty.

In Nov. 1827, a principal chief of pirates, named Sindana, made a descent upon Mamoodgoo with forty-five proas, burnt three-fourths of the campong, driving the rajah with his family among the mountains. Some scores of men were killed, and 300 made prisoners, besides women and children to half that amount. In December following, when I was there, the people were slowly returning from the hills, but had not yet attempted to rebuild the campong, which lay in ashes. During my stay here (ten weeks) the place was visited by two other piratical chiefs, one of which was from Kylie, the other from Mandhaar Point under Bem Bowan, who appeared to have charge of the whole; between them they had 134 proas of all sizes.

Among the most desperate and successful pirates of the present day, Raga is most distinguished. He is dreaded

by people of all denominations, and universally known as the "prince of pirates." For more than seventeen years this man has carried on a system of piracy to an extent never before known; his expeditions and enterprizes would fill a large volume. They have invariably been marked with singular cunning and intelligence, barbarity, and reckless inattention to the shedding of human blood. He has emissaries every where, and has intelligence of the best description. It was about the year 1813 Raga commenced operations on a large scale. In that year he cut off three English vessels, killing the captains with his own hands. So extensive were his depredations about that time that a proclamation was issued from Batavia, declaring the east coast of Borneo to be under strict blockade. Two British sloops of war secured the coast. One of which, the Elk, Capt. Reynolds, was attacked during the night by Raga's own proa, who unfortunately was not on board at the time. This proa which Raga personally commanded, and the loss of which he frequently laments, carried eight guns, and was full of his best men.

An European vessel was faintly descried about three o'clock one foggy morning; the rain fell in torrents; the time and weather were favorable circumstances for a surprise, and the commander determined to distinguish himself in the absence of the Rajah Raga, gave directions to close, fire the guns and board. He was the more confident of success, as the European vessel was observed to keep away out of the proper course on approaching her. On getting within about an hundred fathoms of the Elk they fired their broadside, gave a loud shout, and with their long oars pulled towards their prey. The sound of a drum beating to quarters no sooner struck the ear of the astonished Malays than they endeavoured to get away: it was too late; the ports were opened, and a broadside, accompanied with three British cheers, gave sure indications of their fate. The captain hailed the Elk, and would fain persuade him it was a mistake. It was indeed a mistake, and one not to be rectified by the Malayan explanation. The proa was sunk by repeated broadsides, and the commanding officer refused to pick up any of the people, who, with the exception of five were drowned; these, after floating

four days on some spars, were picked up by a Pergottan proa, and told the story to Raga, who swore anew destruction to every European he should henceforth take. This desperado has for upwards of seventeen years been the terror of the Straits of Macassar, during which period he has committed the most extensive and dreadful excesses sparing no one. Few respectable families along the coast of Borneo and Celebes but have to complain of the loss of a proa, or of some number of their race; he is not more universally dreaded than detested; it is well known that he has cut off and murdered the crews of more than forty European vessels, which have either been wrecked on the coasts, or entrusted themselves in native ports. It is his boast that twenty of the commanders have fallen by his hands. The western coast of Celebes, for about 250 miles, is absolutely lined with proas belonging principally to three considerable rajahs, who act in conjunction with Raga and other pirates. Their proas may be seen in clusters of from 50, 80, and 100 (at Sediano I counted 147 laying on the sand at high water mark in parallel rows,) and kept in a horizontal position by poles, completely ready for the sea. Immediately behind them are the campongs, in which are the crews; here likewise are kept the sails, gunpowder, &c. necessary for their equipment. On the very summits of the mountains, which in many parts rise abruptly from the sea, may be distinguished innumerable huts; here reside people who are constantly on the look-out. A vessel within ten miles of the shore will not probably perceive a single proa, yet in less than two hours, if the tide be high, she may be surrounded by some hundreds. Should the water be low they will push off during the night. Signals are made from mountain to mountain along the coast with the utmost rapidity; during the day time by flags attached to long bamboos; at night, by fires. Each chief sends forth his proas, the crews of which, in hazardous cases, are infuriated with opium, when they will most assuredly take the vessel if she be not better provided than most merchantmen.

Mr. Dalton, who went to the Pergottan river in 1830, says, "whilst I remained here, there were 71 proas of considerable sizes, 39 of which were professed pirates. They

were anchored off the point of a small promontory, on which the rajah has an establishment and bazaar. The largest of these proas belonged to Raga, who received by the fleet of proas, in which I came, his regular supplies of arms and ammunition from Singapore. Here nestle the principal pirates, and Raga holds his head quarters; his grand depot was a few miles farther up. Rajah Agi Bota himself generally resides some distance up a small river which runs eastward of the point; near his habitation stands the principal bazaar, which would be a great curiosity for an European to visit if he could only manage to return, which very few have. The Raga gave me a pressing invitation to spend a couple of days at his country house, but all the Bugis' Nacodahs strongly dissuaded me from such an attempt. I soon discovered the cause of their apprehension; they were jealous of Agi Botta, well knowing he would plunder me, and considered every article taken by him was so much lost to the Sultan of Coti who naturally would expect the people to reserve me for his own particular plucking. When the fact was known of an European having arrived in the Pergotten river, this amiable prince and friend of Europeans, impatient to seize his prey, came immediately to the point from his country house, and sending for the Nacodah of the proa, ordered him to land me and all my goods instantly. An invitation now came for me to go on shore and amuse myself with shooting, and look at some rare birds of beautiful plumage which the rajah would give me if I would accept of them; but knowing what were his intentions, and being well aware that I should be supported by all the Bugis' proas from Coti, I feigned sickness, and requested that the birds might be sent on board. Upon this Agi Bota, who could no longer restrain himself, sent off two boats of armed men, who robbed me of many articles, and would certainly have forced me on shore, or murdered me in the proa had not a signal been made to the Bugis' nacodahs, who immediately came with their people, and with spears and krisses, drove the rajah's people overboard. The nacodahs, nine in number, now went on shore, when a scene of contention took place showing clearly the character of this chief. The Bugis from Coti explained, that with regard to me it was