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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 West Indies.

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sufficient earth for vegetation between the interstices of the rocks, stunted brush-wood grows. But a chief peculiarity of some of the islands, and which renders them suitable to those who frequent them as pirates, are the numerous caves with which the rocks are perforated; some of them are above high-water mark, but the majority with the sea water flowing in and out of them, in some cases merely rushing in and at high-water filling deep pools, which are detached from each other when the tide recedes, in others with a sufficient depth of water to allow a large boat to float in. It is hardly necessary to observe how convenient the higher and dry caves are as receptacles for articles which are intended to be concealed, until an opportunity occurs to dispose of them. The Bahamas, themselves are a singular group of isles, reefs and quays; consisting of several hundred in number, and were the chief resort of pirates in old times, but now they are all rooted from them; they are low and not elevated, and are more than 600 miles in extent, cut up into numerous intricate passages and channels, full of sunken rocks and coral reefs. They afforded a sure retreat to desperadoes. Other islands are full of mountain fastnesses, where all pursuit can be eluded. Many of the low shores are skirted, and the islands covered by the mangrove, a singular tree, shooting fresh roots as it grows, which, when the tree is at its full age, may be found six or eight feet from the ground, to which the shoots gradually tend in regular succession; the leaf is very thick and stiff and about eight inches long and nine wide, the interval between the roots offer secure hiding places for those who are suddenly pursued. Another circumstance assists the pirate when pursued.—As the islands belong to several different nations, when pursued from one island he can pass to that under the jurisdiction of another power. And as permission must be got by those in pursuit of him, from the authorities of the island to land and take him, he thus gains time to secrete himself. A tropical climate is suited to a roving life, and liquor as well as dissolute women being in great abundance, to gratify him during his hours of relaxation, makes this a congenial region for the lawless.

The crews of pirate vessels in these seas are chiefly com-

posed of Spaniards, Portuguese, French, Mulattoes, Negroes, and a few natives of other countries. The island of Cuba is the great nest of pirates at the present day, and at the Havana, piracy is as much tolerated as any other profession. As the piracies committed in these seas, during a single year, have amounted to more than fifty, we shall give only a few accounts of the most interesting.

In November 1821, the brig Cobbessecontee, Captain Jackson, sailed from Havana, on the morning of the 8th for Boston, and on the evening of the same day, about four miles from the Moro, was brought to by a piratical sloop, containing about 30 men. A boat from her, with 10 men, came alongside, and soon after they got on board commenced plundering. They took nearly all the clothing from the captain and mate—all the cooking utensils and spare rigging—unrove part of the running rigging—cut the small cable—broke the compasses—cut the mast's coats to pieces—took from the captain his watch and four boxes cigars—and from the cargo three bales cochineal and six boxes cigars. They beat the mate unmercifully, and hung him up by the neck under the maintop. They also beat the captain severely—broke a large broad sword across his back, and ran a long knife through his thigh, so that he almost bled to death. Captain Jackson saw the sloop at Regla the day before.

Captain Jackson informs us, and we have also been informed by other persons from the Havana, that this system of piracy is openly countenanced by some of the inhabitants of that place—who say that it is a retaliation on the Americans for interfering against the Slave Trade.

About this time the ship Liverpool Packet, Ricker, of Portsmouth, N. H., was boarded off Cape St Antonio, Cuba, by two piratical schooners; two barges containing thirty or forty men, robbed the vessel of every thing movable, even to her *flags*, rigging, and a boat which happened to be afloat, having a boy in it, which belonged to the ship. They held a consultation whether they should murder the crew, as they had done before, or not—in the mean time taking the ship into anchoring ground. On bringing her to anchor, the crew saw a brig close alongside, burnt to the water's edge, and three dead bodies

floating near her. The pirates said they had burnt the brig the day before, and *murdered all the crew!*—and intended doing the same with them. They said “look at the turtles, (meaning the dead bodies) you will soon be the same.” They said the vessel was a Baltimore brig, which they had robbed and burnt, and murdered the crew as before stated, of which they had little doubt. Captain Ricker was most shockingly bruised by them. The mate was hung till he was supposed to be dead, but came to, and is now alive. They told the captain that they belonged in Regla, and should kill them all to prevent discovery.

In 1822, the United States had several cruisers among the West-India islands, to keep the pirates in check, much good was done, but still many vessels were robbed and destroyed, together with their crews. This year the brave Lieutenant Allen fell by the hands of pirates; he was in the United States schooner Alligator, and receiving intelligence at Matanzas, that several vessels which had sailed from that port, had been taken by the pirates, and were then in the bay of Lejuapo. He hastened to their assistance. He arrived just in time so save five sail of vessels which he found in possession of a gang of pirates, 300 strong, established in the bay of Lejuapo, about 15 leagues east of this. He fell, pierced by two musket balls, in the van of a division of boats, attacking their principal vessel, a fine schooner of about eighty tons, with a long eighteen pounder on a pivot, and four smaller guns, *with the bloody flag nailed to the mast.* Himself, Captain Freeman of Marines, and twelve men, were in the boat, much in advance of his other boats, and even took possession of the schooner, after a desperate resistance, which nothing but a bravery almost too daring could have overcome. The pirates, all but one, escaped by taking to their boats and jumping overboard, before the Alligator's boat reached them. Two other schooners escaped by the use of their oars, the wind being light.

Captain Allen survived about four hours, during which his conversation evinced a composure and firmness of mind, and correctness of feeling, as honorable to his character, and more consoling to his friends, than even the dauntless bravery he before exhibited.”