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**Howard Pyle's Book of Pirates,
fiction, fact & fancy concerning
the buccaneers & marooners of the**

Howard Pyle

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HOWARD PYLE'S BOOK OF PIRATES

Fiction, Fact & Fancy concerning the Buccaneers &
Marooners of the Spanish Main:
From the writing & Pictures of Howard Pyle:

Compiled by Merle Johnson

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FOREWORD

PIRATES, Buccaneers, Marooners, those cruel but picturesque sea wolves who once infested the Spanish Main, all live in present-day conceptions in great degree as drawn by the pen and pencil of Howard Pyle.

Pyle, artist-author, living in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, had the fine faculty of transposing himself into any chosen period of history and making its people flesh and blood again—not just historical puppets. His characters were sketched with both words and picture; with both words and picture he ranks as a master, with a rich personality which makes his work individual and attractive in either medium.

He was one of the founders of present-day American illustration, and his pupils and grand-pupils pervade that field to-day. While he bore no such important part in the world of letters, his stories are modern in treatment, and yet widely read. His range included historical treatises concerning his favorite Pirates (Quaker though he was); fiction, with the same Pirates as principals; Americanized version of Old World fairy tales; boy stories of the Middle Ages, still best sellers to growing lads; stories of the occult, such as *In Tenebras* and *To the Soil of the Earth*, which, if newly published, would be hailed as contributions to our latest cult.

In all these fields Pyle's work may be equaled, surpassed, save in one. It is improbable that anyone else will ever bring his combination of interest and talent to the depiction of these old-time Pirates, any more than there could be a second Remington to paint the now extinct Indians and gun-fighters of the Great West.

Important and interesting to the student of history, the adventure-lover, and the artist, as they are, these Pirate stories and pictures have been scattered through many magazines and books. Here, in this volume, they are gathered together for the first time, perhaps not just as Mr. Pyle would have done, but with a completeness and appreciation of the real value of the material which the author's modesty might not have permitted. MERLE JOHNSON.

PREFACE

WHY is it that a little spice of devilry lends not an unpleasantly titillating twang to the great mass of respectable flour that goes to make up the pudding of our modern civilization? And pertinent to this question another—Why is it that the pirate has, and always has had, a certain lurid glamour of the heroical enveloping him round about? Is there, deep under the accumulated debris of culture, a hidden groundwork of the old-time savage? Is there even in these well-regulated times an unsubdued nature in the respectable mental household of every one of us that still kicks against the pricks of law and order? To make my meaning more clear, would not every boy, for instance—that is, every boy of any account—rather be a pirate captain than a Member of Parliament? And we ourselves—would we not rather read such a story as that of Captain Avery's capture of the East Indian treasure ship, with its beautiful princess and load of jewels (which gems he sold by the handful, history sayeth, to a Bristol merchant), than, say, one of Bishop Atterbury's sermons, or the goodly Master Robert Boyle's religious romance of "Theodora and Didymus"? It is to be apprehended that to the unregenerate nature of most of us there can be but one answer to such a query.

In the pleasurable warmth the heart feels in answer to tales of derring-do Nelson's battles are all mightily interesting, but, even in spite of their romance of splendid courage, I fancy that the majority of us would rather turn back over the leaves of history to read how Drake captured the Spanish treasure ship in the South Sea, and of how he divided such a quantity of booty in the Island of Plate (so named because of the tremendous dividend there declared) that it had to be measured in quart bowls, being too considerable to be counted.

Courage and daring, no matter how mad and ungodly, have always a redundancy of vim and life to recommend them to the nether man that lies within us, and no doubt his desperate courage, his battle against the tremendous odds of all the civilized world of law and order, have had much to do in making a popular hero of our

friend of the black flag. But it is not altogether courage and daring that endear him to our hearts. There is another and perhaps a greater kinship in that lust for wealth that makes one's fancy revel more pleasantly in the story of the division of treasure in the pirate's island retreat, the hiding of his godless gains somewhere in the sandy stretch of tropic beach, there to remain hidden until the time should come to rake the doubloons up again and to spend them like a lord in polite society, than in the most thrilling tales of his wonderful escapes from commissioned cruisers through tortuous channels between the coral reefs.

And what a life of adventure is his, to be sure! A life of constant alertness, constant danger, constant escape! An ocean Ishmaelite, he wanders forever aimlessly, homelessly; now unheard of for months, now careening his boat on some lonely uninhabited shore, now appearing suddenly to swoop down on some merchant vessel with rattle of musketry, shouting, yells, and a hell of unbridled passions let loose to rend and tear. What a Carlislean hero! What a setting of blood and lust and flame and rapine for such a hero!

Piracy, such as was practiced in the flower of its days—that is, during the early eighteenth century—was no sudden growth. It was an evolution, from the semi-lawful buccaneering of the sixteenth century, just as buccaneering was upon its part, in a certain sense, an evolution from the unorganized, unauthorized warfare of the Tudor period.

For there was a deal of piratical smack in the anti-Spanish ventures of Elizabethan days. Many of the adventurers—of the Sir Francis Drake school, for instance—actually overstepped again and again the bounds of international law, entering into the realms of de facto piracy. Nevertheless, while their doings were not recognized officially by the government, the perpetrators were neither punished nor reprimanded for their excursions against Spanish commerce at home or in the West Indies; rather were they commended, and it was considered not altogether a discreditable thing for men to get rich upon the spoils taken from Spanish galleons in times of nominal peace. Many of the most reputable citizens and merchants of London, when they felt that the queen failed in her duty of pushing the fight against the great Catholic Power, fitted out fleets upon

their own account and sent them to levy good Protestant war of a private nature upon the Pope's anointed.

Some of the treasures captured in such ventures were immense, stupendous, unbelievable. For an example, one can hardly credit the truth of the "purchase" gained by Drake in the famous capture of the plate ship in the South Sea.

One of the old buccaneer writers of a century later says: "The Spaniards affirm to this day that he took at that time twelvescore tons of plate and sixteen bowls of coined money a man (his number being then forty-five men in all), insomuch that they were forced to heave much of it overboard, because his ship could not carry it all."

Maybe this was a very greatly exaggerated statement put by the author and his Spanish authorities, nevertheless there was enough truth in it to prove very conclusively to the bold minds of the age that tremendous profits—"purchases" they called them—were to be made from piracy. The Western World is filled with the names of daring mariners of those old days, who came flitting across the great trackless ocean in their little tublike boats of a few hundred tons burden, partly to explore unknown seas, partly—largely, perhaps—in pursuit of Spanish treasure: Frobisher, Davis, Drake, and a score of others.

In this left-handed war against Catholic Spain many of the adventurers were, no doubt, stirred and incited by a grim, Calvinistic, puritanical zeal for Protestantism. But equally beyond doubt the gold and silver and plate of the "Scarlet Woman" had much to do with the persistent energy with which these hardy mariners braved the mysterious, unknown terrors of the great unknown ocean that stretched away to the sunset, there in faraway waters to attack the huge, unwieldy, treasure-laden galleons that sailed up and down the Caribbean Sea and through the Bahama Channel.

Of all ghastly and terrible things old-time religious war was the most ghastly and terrible. One can hardly credit nowadays the cold, callous cruelty of those times. Generally death was the least penalty that capture entailed. When the Spaniards made prisoners of the English, the Inquisition took them in hand, and what that meant all the world knows. When the English captured a Spanish vessel the prisoners were tortured, either for the sake of revenge or to compel

them to disclose where treasure lay hidden. Cruelty begat cruelty, and it would be hard to say whether the Anglo-Saxon or the Latin showed himself to be most proficient in torturing his victim.

When Cobham, for instance, captured the Spanish ship in the Bay of Biscay, after all resistance was over and the heat of the battle had cooled, he ordered his crew to bind the captain and all of the crew and every Spaniard aboard—whether in arms or not—to sew them up in the mainsail and to fling them overboard. There were some twenty dead bodies in the sail when a few days later it was washed up on the shore.

Of course such acts were not likely to go unavenged, and many an innocent life was sacrificed to pay the debt of Cobham's cruelty.

Nothing could be more piratical than all this. Nevertheless, as was said, it was winked at, condoned, if not sanctioned, by the law; and it was not beneath people of family and respectability to take part in it. But by and by Protestantism and Catholicism began to be at somewhat less deadly enmity with each other; religious wars were still far enough from being ended, but the scabbard of the sword was no longer flung away when the blade was drawn. And so followed a time of nominal peace, and a generation arose with whom it was no longer respectable and worthy—one might say a matter of duty—to fight a country with which one's own land was not at war. Nevertheless, the seed had been sown; it had been demonstrated that it was feasible to practice piracy against Spain and not to suffer therefor. Blood had been shed and cruelty practiced, and, once indulged, no lust seems stronger than that of shedding blood and practicing cruelty.

Though Spain might be ever so well grounded in peace at home, in the West Indies she was always at war with the whole world—English, French, Dutch. It was almost a matter of life or death with her to keep her hold upon the New World. At home she was bankrupt and, upon the earthquake of the Reformation, her power was already beginning to totter and to crumble to pieces. America was her treasure house, and from it alone could she hope to keep her leaking purse full of gold and silver. So it was that she strove strenuously, desperately, to keep out the world from her American possessions—a bootless task, for the old order upon which her power

rested was broken and crumbled forever. But still she strove, fighting against fate, and so it was that in the tropical America it was one continual war between her and all the world. Thus it came that, long after piracy ceased to be allowed at home, it continued in those far-away seas with unabated vigor, recruiting to its service all that lawless malign element which gathers together in every newly opened country where the only law is lawlessness, where might is right and where a living is to be gained with no more trouble than cutting a throat. {signature Howard Pyle His Mark}

HOWARD PILE'S BOOK OF PIRATES

Chapter I. BUCCANEERS AND MAROONERS OF THE SPANISH MAIN

JUST above the northwestern shore of the old island of Hispaniola—the Santo Domingo of our day—and separated from it only by a narrow channel of some five or six miles in width, lies a queer little hunch of an island, known, because of a distant resemblance to that animal, as the Tortuga de Mar, or sea turtle. It is not more than twenty miles in length by perhaps seven or eight in breadth; it is only a little spot of land, and as you look at it upon the map a pin's head would almost cover it; yet from that spot, as from a center of inflammation, a burning fire of human wickedness and ruthlessness and lust overran the world, and spread terror and death throughout the Spanish West Indies, from St. Augustine to the island of Trinidad, and from Panama to the coasts of Peru.

About the middle of the seventeenth century certain French adventurers set out from the fortified island of St. Christopher in longboats and hoys, directing their course to the westward, there to discover new islands. Sighting Hispaniola "with abundance of joy," they landed, and went into the country, where they found great quantities of wild cattle, horses, and swine.

Now vessels on the return voyage to Europe from the West Indies needed revictualing, and food, especially flesh, was at a premium in the islands of the Spanish Main; wherefore a great profit was to be turned in preserving beef and pork, and selling the flesh to homeward-bound vessels.

The northwestern shore of Hispaniola, lying as it does at the eastern outlet of the old Bahama Channel, running between the island of Cuba and the great Bahama Banks, lay almost in the very main stream of travel. The pioneer Frenchmen were not slow to discover

the double advantage to be reaped from the wild cattle that cost them nothing to procure, and a market for the flesh ready found for them. So down upon Hispaniola they came by boatloads and shiploads, gathering like a swarm of mosquitoes, and overrunning the whole western end of the island. There they established themselves, spending the time alternately in hunting the wild cattle and buccanning(1) the meat, and squandering their hardly earned gains in wild debauchery, the opportunities for which were never lacking in the Spanish West Indies.

(1) Buccanning, by which the "buccaneers" gained their name, was of process of curing thin strips of meat by salting, smoking, and drying in the sun.

At first the Spaniards thought nothing of the few travel-worn Frenchmen who dragged their longboats and hoys up on the beach, and shot a wild bullock or two to keep body and soul together; but when the few grew to dozens, and the dozens to scores, and the scores to hundreds, it was a very different matter, and wrathful grumblings and mutterings began to be heard among the original settlers.

But of this the careless buccaneers thought never a whit, the only thing that troubled them being the lack of a more convenient shipping point than the main island afforded them.

This lack was at last filled by a party of hunters who ventured across the narrow channel that separated the main island from Tortuga. Here they found exactly what they needed—a good harbor, just at the junction of the Windward Channel with the old Bahama Channel—a spot where four-fifths of the Spanish-Indian trade would pass by their very wharves.

There were a few Spaniards upon the island, but they were a quiet folk, and well disposed to make friends with the strangers; but when more Frenchmen and still more Frenchmen crossed the narrow channel, until they overran the Tortuga and turned it into one great curing house for the beef which they shot upon the neighboring island, the Spaniards grew restive over the matter, just as they had done upon the larger island.

Accordingly, one fine day there came half a dozen great boat-loads of armed Spaniards, who landed upon the Turtle's Back and sent the Frenchmen flying to the woods and fastnesses of rocks as the chaff flies before the thunder gust. That night the Spaniards drank themselves mad and shouted themselves hoarse over their victory, while the beaten Frenchmen sullenly paddled their canoes back to the main island again, and the Sea Turtle was Spanish once more.

But the Spaniards were not contented with such a petty triumph as that of sweeping the island of Tortuga free from the obnoxious strangers, down upon Hispaniola they came, flushed with their easy victory, and determined to root out every Frenchman, until not one single buccaneer remained. For a time they had an easy thing of it, for each French hunter roamed the woods by himself, with no better company than his half-wild dogs, so that when two or three Spaniards would meet such a one, he seldom if ever came out of the woods again, for even his resting place was lost.

But the very success of the Spaniards brought their ruin along with it, for the buccaneers began to combine together for self-protection, and out of that combination arose a strange union of lawless man with lawless man, so near, so close, that it can scarce be compared to any other than that of husband and wife. When two entered upon this comradeship, articles were drawn up and signed by both parties, a common stock was made of all their possessions, and out into the woods they went to seek their fortunes; thenceforth they were as one man; they lived together by day, they slept together by night; what one suffered, the other suffered; what one gained, the other gained. The only separation that came betwixt them was death, and then the survivor inherited all that the other left. And now it was another thing with Spanish buccaneer hunting, for two buccaneers, reckless of life, quick of eye, and true of aim, were worth any half dozen of Spanish islanders.

By and by, as the French became more strongly organized for mutual self-protection, they assumed the offensive. Then down they came upon Tortuga, and now it was the turn of the Spanish to be hunted off the island like vermin, and the turn of the French to shout their victory.

Having firmly established themselves, a governor was sent to the French of Tortuga, one M. le Passeur, from the island of St. Christopher; the Sea Turtle was fortified, and colonists, consisting of men of doubtful character and women of whose character there could be no doubt whatever, began pouring in upon the island, for it was said that the buccaneers thought no more of a doubloon than of a Lima bean, so that this was the place for the brothel and the brandy shop to reap their golden harvest, and the island remained French.

Hitherto the Tortugans had been content to gain as much as possible from the homeward-bound vessels through the orderly channels of legitimate trade. It was reserved for Pierre le Grand to introduce piracy as a quicker and more easy road to wealth than the semi-honest exchange they had been used to practice.

Gathering together eight-and-twenty other spirits as hardy and reckless as himself, he put boldly out to sea in a boat hardly large enough to hold his crew, and running down the Windward Channel and out into the Caribbean Sea, he lay in wait for such a prize as might be worth the risks of winning.

For a while their luck was steadily against them; their provisions and water began to fail, and they saw nothing before them but starvation or a humiliating return. In this extremity they sighted a Spanish ship belonging to a "flota" which had become separated from her consorts.

The boat in which the buccaneers sailed might, perhaps, have served for the great ship's longboat; the Spaniards out-numbered them three to one, and Pierre and his men were armed only with pistols and cutlasses; nevertheless this was their one and their only chance, and they determined to take the Spanish ship or to die in the attempt. Down upon the Spaniard they bore through the dusk of the night, and giving orders to the "chirurgien" to scuttle their craft under them as they were leaving it, they swarmed up the side of the unsuspecting ship and upon its decks in a torrent—pistol in one hand and cutlass in the other. A part of them ran to the gun room and secured the arms and ammunition, pistoling or cutting down all such as stood in their way or offered opposition; the other party burst into the great cabin at the heels of Pierre le Grand, found the captain and a party of his friends at cards, set a pistol to his

breast, and demanded him to deliver up the ship. Nothing remained for the Spaniard but to yield, for there was no alternative between surrender and death. And so the great prize was won.

It was not long before the news of this great exploit and of the vast treasure gained reached the ears of the buccaneers of Tortuga and Hispaniola. Then what a hubbub and an uproar and a tumult there was! Hunting wild cattle and buccanning the meat was at a discount, and the one and only thing to do was to go a-pirating; for where one such prize had been won, others were to be had.

In a short time freebooting assumed all of the routine of a regular business. Articles were drawn up betwixt captain and crew, compacts were sealed, and agreements entered into by the one party and the other.

In all professions there are those who make their mark, those who succeed only moderately well, and those who fail more or less entirely. Nor did pirating differ from this general rule, for in it were men who rose to distinction, men whose names, something tarnished and rusted by the lapse of years, have come down even to us of the present day.

Pierre Francois, who, with his boatload of six-and-twenty desperadoes, ran boldly into the midst of the pearl fleet off the coast of South America, attacked the vice admiral under the very guns of two men-of-war, captured his ship, though she was armed with eight guns and manned with threescore men, and would have got her safely away, only that having to put on sail, their mainmast went by the board, whereupon the men-of-war came up with them, and the prize was lost.

But even though there were two men-of-war against all that remained of six-and-twenty buccaneers, the Spaniards were glad enough to make terms with them for the surrender of the vessel, whereby Pierre Francois and his men came off scot-free.

Bartholomew Portuguese was a worthy of even more note. In a boat manned with thirty fellow adventurers he fell upon a great ship off Cape Corrientes, manned with threescore and ten men, all told.

Her he assaulted again and again, beaten off with the very pressure of numbers only to renew the assault, until the Spaniards who survived, some fifty in all, surrendered to twenty living pirates, who poured upon their decks like a score of blood-stained, powder-grimed devils.

They lost their vessel by recapture, and Bartholomew Portuguese barely escaped with his life through a series of almost unbelievable adventures. But no sooner had he fairly escaped from the clutches of the Spaniards than, gathering together another band of adventurers, he fell upon the very same vessel in the gloom of the night, recaptured her when she rode at anchor in the harbor of Campeche under the guns of the fort, slipped the cable, and was away without the loss of a single man. He lost her in a hurricane soon afterward, just off the Isle of Pines; but the deed was none the less daring for all that.

Another notable no less famous than these two worthies was Roch Braziliano, the truculent Dutchman who came up from the coast of Brazil to the Spanish Main with a name ready-made for him. Upon the very first adventure which he undertook he captured a plate ship of fabulous value, and brought her safely into Jamaica; and when at last captured by the Spaniards, he fairly frightened them into letting him go by truculent threats of vengeance from his followers.

Such were three of the pirate buccaneers who infested the Spanish Main. There were hundreds no less desperate, no less reckless, no less insatiate in their lust for plunder, than they.

The effects of this freebooting soon became apparent. The risks to be assumed by the owners of vessels and the shippers of merchandise became so enormous that Spanish commerce was practically swept away from these waters. No vessel dared to venture out of port excepting under escort of powerful men-of-war, and even then they were not always secure from molestation. Exports from Central and South America were sent to Europe by way of the Strait of Magellan, and little or none went through the passes between the Bahamas and the Caribbees.

So at last "buccaneering," as it had come to be generically called, ceased to pay the vast dividends that it had done at first. The cream

was skimmed off, and only very thin milk was left in the dish. Fabulous fortunes were no longer earned in a ten days' cruise, but what money was won hardly paid for the risks of the winning. There must be a new departure, or buccaneering would cease to exist.

Then arose one who showed the buccaneers a new way to squeeze money out of the Spaniards. This man was an Englishman — Lewis Scot.

The stoppage of commerce on the Spanish Main had naturally tended to accumulate all the wealth gathered and produced into the chief fortified cities and towns of the West Indies. As there no longer existed prizes upon the sea, they must be gained upon the land, if they were to be gained at all. Lewis Scot was the first to appreciate this fact.

Gathering together a large and powerful body of men as hungry for plunder and as desperate as himself, he descended upon the town of Campeche, which he captured and sacked, stripping it of everything that could possibly be carried away.

When the town was cleared to the bare walls Scot threatened to set the torch to every house in the place if it was not ransomed by a large sum of money which he demanded. With this booty he set sail for Tortuga, where he arrived safely — and the problem was solved.

After him came one Mansvelt, a buccaneer of lesser note, who first made a descent upon the isle of Saint Catharine, now Old Providence, which he took, and, with this as a base, made an unsuccessful descent upon Neuva Granada and Cartagena. His name might not have been handed down to us along with others of greater fame had he not been the master of that most apt of pupils, the great Captain Henry Morgan, most famous of all the buccaneers, one time governor of Jamaica, and knighted by King Charles II.

After Mansvelt followed the bold John Davis, native of Jamaica, where he sucked in the lust of piracy with his mother's milk. With only fourscore men, he swooped down upon the great city of Nicaragua in the darkness of the night, silenced the sentry with the thrust of a knife, and then fell to pillaging the churches and houses "without any respect or veneration."

Of course it was but a short time until the whole town was in an uproar of alarm, and there was nothing left for the little handful of men to do but to make the best of their way to their boats. They were in the town but a short time, but in that time they were able to gather together and to carry away money and jewels to the value of fifty thousand pieces of eight, besides dragging off with them a dozen or more notable prisoners, whom they held for ransom.

And now one appeared upon the scene who reached a far greater height than any had arisen to before. This was Francois l'Olonoise, who sacked the great city of Maracaibo and the town of Gibraltar. Cold, unimpassioned, pitiless, his sluggish blood was never moved by one single pulse of human warmth, his icy heart was never touched by one ray of mercy or one spark of pity for the hapless wretches who chanced to fall into his bloody hands.

Against him the governor of Havana sent out a great war vessel, and with it a negro executioner, so that there might be no inconvenient delays of law after the pirates had been captured. But l'Olonoise did not wait for the coming of the war vessel; he went out to meet it, and he found it where it lay riding at anchor in the mouth of the river Estra. At the dawn of the morning he made his attack sharp, unexpected, decisive. In a little while the Spaniards were forced below the hatches, and the vessel was taken. Then came the end. One by one the poor shrieking wretches were dragged up from below, and one by one they were butchered in cold blood, while l'Olonoise stood upon the poop deck and looked coldly down upon what was being done. Among the rest the negro was dragged upon the deck. He begged and implored that his life might be spared, promising to tell all that might be asked of him. L'Olonoise questioned him, and when he had squeezed him dry, waved his hand coldly, and the poor black went with the rest. Only one man was spared; him he sent to the governor of Havana with a message that henceforth he would give no quarter to any Spaniard whom he might meet in arms—a message which was not an empty threat.

The rise of l'Olonoise was by no means rapid. He worked his way up by dint of hard labor and through much ill fortune. But by and by, after many reverses, the tide turned, and carried him with it from one success to another, without let or stay, to the bitter end.