

PIRATES AND PIRACY

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Pirates and Piracy by Oscar Herrmann

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OSCAR HERRMANN

**PIRATES
AND PIRACY**

Pirates and Piracy

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PIRATES AND PIRACY.

INTRODUCTION.

There is hardly a person who, as a school-boy, had not received the fire of imagination and the stimulus for adventure and a roaming life through the stirring narratives concerning Captain Kidd and other well-known sea rovers. A certain ineffable glamor metamorphosed these robbers into heroes, and lent an inalienable license to their "calling," so that the songster and romancist found in them and their deeds prolific and genial themes, while the obscure suggestions of hidden treasures and mysterious caves have inspired many expeditions in quest of buried fortunes which, like the Argo of old, have carried their Jasons to the mythical Colchis.

The pens of Byron, Scott, Poe, Stevenson, Russell, and Stockton, and the musical genius of

Wagner, were steeped in the productive inspiration of these lawless adventurers, and Kingsley found in Lundy Island, the erstwhile nest of the reckless tribe, a subject for his "Westward Ho!"

Byron, in "The Corsair," sings:

O'er the glad waters of the dark-blue sea,
Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free,
Far as the breeze can bear, the billows foam,
Survey our empire, and behold our home!
These are our realms, no limits to their sway,
Our flag the sceptre all who meet obey.
Ours the wild life in tumult still to range
From toll to rest, and joy in every change.

Piracy was the growth of maritime adventure, and developed with the advancement of commerce. The Phœnicians and Greeks were especially apt in the interstate wars which frequently degenerated into rapine and plunder, and with them piracy became a recognized enterprise. In Homeric times it was dignified with a respect worthy of a nobler cause—a sentiment in which the freebooters of later centuries took arrogant pride. The pirate—cruel, vicious, debased to the lowest degree of turpitude—estab-

lished a moral code governing his actions and circumscribing his wanton license, and it was in the rigorous observance of these "trade laws" and customs of their realm that this abortive sense of honor manifested itself.

The successes of the Phœnicians and Greeks soon made the Mediterranean the theatre of maritime robbery, in later years conducted under the authority, sanction, and immunity of the Barbary powers. In fact, so reckless had the enterprise become that the temerity of the free lances knew no bounds, and headquarters, so to speak, were established, and for a long time maintained, at Cilicia.

The vigorous campaign of Pompey in 67 B.C. against the pirates was but the precursor of that systematic defence which the nations of the world eventually adopted. The Hanseatic League of the cities of Northern Germany and neighboring states, no doubt, had its origin in the necessitous combination of merchants to resist the attacks of the Norsemen. England sent out many expeditions to destroy the pestiferous freebooters who swarmed from the African coast, and finally, in 1815, the United States sent Decatur

to Algiers to annihilate the nefarious corsairs, who had thrived and become brazen in their recklessness during the three centuries of their ascendant power. The incursions of the Algerine pirates were made as far north as England, Ireland, and Iceland, and through them an iniquitous slave trade was developed. The law of nations did not place its ban upon this slave traffic until by statute England and the United States attempted to obliterate this ineradicable blot upon our civilization, and only a half century ago Austria, Prussia, and Russia declared it to be piracy.

Piracy, by the law of nations, is punishable with death within the jurisdiction of any nation under whose flag the capture may have been made, for the pirate is the common enemy of mankind. Although it has passed the zenith of its perverse glory, and modern naval development has made it impracticable and impossible, vestiges of piracy remain in the Malay Archipelago and the China Sea. As recently as 1864 five men were hanged in London on such a charge.

Privateering, the resourceful auxiliary to a

weak navy, is also piracy, though not recognized so by the law of nations. The private ship which, under the authority of letters of marque and reprisal issued by the government, made war upon a hostile power, was always an indispensable adjunct to naval warfare. England considered our privateer Paul Jones a pirate. During the Civil War the Confederate cruisers were termed pirates, and the *Alabama* claims made upon England for damage done by the *Alabama*, the *Florida*, and the *Shenandoah* arose from permitting privateers to depart from her ports.

The rise and sway of the corsairs of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, developing from disorganized piracy, was evidently the result of the persecution of the Moors of Spain in the sixteenth century, who, exiled and retributive, sought revenge and lucre in the attacks upon the argosies from India to Spain. Their successes attracted adventurers from Asia Minor, and thus augmented they acquired formidable power, established citadels and states, governed by daring and sagacious leaders, and levied blackmail upon Christian countries for the protection of commerce. It

was not until the vigorous campaign of Decatur that the backbone of this sanctioned lawlessness of the Barbary States was broken and safety upon the high seas of the East assured.

The bold character of these marauders can be best imagined when we reflect that in the seventeenth century the Algerine pirates cruised in the English Channel, blockaded the Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1635 for weeks in an English port, where he remained helpless till succored by an English man-of-war, and actually entered the harbor of Cork and carried away eight fishermen, who subsequently were sold as slaves in Algiers. But, as we have seen, piracy, which at one time was the formidable enemy of mankind and a menace to progress and development, is now merely a matter of history.

The limits of this article will not permit any extended review of lawless maritime depredations in its various phases, but it may be within our province to refer for a moment to the buccaneers and filibusters of our own continent. The late war in Cuba brought the filibusters once more into prominence. The term applies to one who, warring upon another country, does so,