

***WILLIAM CLARK
RUSSELL***



***WILLIAM
DAMPIER***

William Clark Russell

William Dampier

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CHAPTER I

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THE BUCCANEERS—NAVIGATION IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY—FEATURES OF THE VOCATIONAL LIFE OF THE EARLY MARINER

In or about the middle of the seventeenth century the island of San Domingo, or Hispaniola as it was then called, was haunted and overrun by a singular community of savage, surly, fierce, and filthy men. They were chiefly composed of French colonists, whose ranks had from time to time been enlarged by liberal contributions from the slums and alleys of more than one European city and town. These people went dressed in shirts and pantaloons of coarse linen cloth, which they steeped in the blood of the animals they slaughtered. They wore round caps, boots of hogskin drawn over their naked feet, and belts of raw hide, in which they stuck their sabres and knives. They also armed themselves with firelocks which threw a couple of balls, each weighing two ounces. The places where they dried and salted their meat were called *boucans*, and from this term they came to be styled bucaniers, or buccaneers, as we spell it. They were hunters by trade, and savages in their habits. They chased and slaughtered horned cattle and trafficked with the flesh, and their favourite food was raw marrow from the bones of the beasts which they shot. They ate and slept on the ground, their table was a stone, their bolster the trunk of a tree, and their roof the hot and sparkling heavens of the Antilles.

But wild as they were they were at least peaceful. It is not clear that at this stage, at all events, they were in any way associated with the freebooters or rovers who were now worrying the Spaniards in those seas. Their traffic was entirely innocent, and it was assuredly the policy of the Don to suffer them to continue shooting the wild cattle without molestation. Unfortunately for themselves, the Spaniards grew jealous of them. They regarded the West Indies and the continent of South America as their own, and the presence of the foreigner was intolerable. They made war against the buccaneers, vowing expulsion or extermination. Both sides fought fiercely. The Spaniard had discipline and training; on the other hand, the buccaneer had the art of levelling as deadly a piece as the Transvaal Boer of to-day. The struggle was long and cruel; the Spaniards eventually conquered, and the hunters, quitting San Domingo, sought refuge in the adjacent islands. In spite of their defeat, troops of the buccaneers contrived from time to time to pass over into San Domingo from their head-quarters in Tortuga, where they hunted as before, and brought away with them as much cattle as sufficed them to trade with. The Spaniards lay in ambush, and shot the stragglers as they swept past in chase; but this sort of warfare proving of no avail, it was finally resolved to slaughter the whole of the cattle throughout the island, that the buccaneers should be starved into leaving once and for good. No act could have been rasher and more impolitic. The hunters finding their occupation gone, went over to the freebooters, and as pirates, as their history shows, in a short time abundantly avenged their indisputable wrongs.

Novelists and poets have found something fascinating in the story of the buccaneers. The light of romance colours their exploits, and even upon the maturest gaze there will linger something of the radiance with which the ardent imagination of boyhood gilds the actions and persons of those fierce sea-warriors. It is unhappily true, nevertheless, that the buccaneers were a race of treacherous, cruel, and profligate miscreants. Their name was at a later date given to, or appropriated by, such men as Clipperton, Cowley, Dampier, Woodes Rogers, and Shelvocke, whose behaviour as enemies, whose skill and heroism as seamen, and whose discoveries as navigators, greatly lightened the blackness of the old traditions. But the buccaneers of the Spanish Main,—the men who are the principal figures in the annals of the freebooters, the people whose lives are contained in such narratives as those of Joseph Exquemeling, De Lussan, De Montauban, Captain Charles Johnson, in Von Archenholtz's brief but excellent history, and in other works,—were rogues and ruffians without parallel in the history of villainy. They owned indeed many extraordinary qualities, which, exerted in honest fields of action, might have been deemed virtues of a high kind. Their courage was great, their achievements wonderful, their fortitude worthy of noble causes, their capacity of endurance unrivalled in sea story. No skilfuller body of seamen were ever afloat. But their history is loathsome for the cruelties it relates. Olonois or Lolonois, Braziliano, Morgan, Bat, Le Grand, and others famous as pirates, were monsters whose like is nowhere to be matched. The relation of their sailings and landings and marchings, their assaults, pillagings, defeats, and triumphs,

is a sickening narrative of barbarities; but it must be admitted, coupled with extraordinary examples of courage in some instances absolutely sublime, and of unconquerable resolution.

It was inevitable that the successes of these pirates should prove a temptation to English seafaring men. Small vessels were fitted out in British ports or the Colonies, and sailed for the West Indian Seas to pillage the Spaniard wherever he might be found on land or water. Often it happened, as Harris, the editor of a voluminous collection of voyages, tells us, that crews were embarked and pilots engaged without being apprised of the object of the voyage, "and nothing was said about the true design until they were at sea, where they (the captains) were absolute masters."

[1] To this order belongs that race of English buccaneers of whom Dampier may be advanced as the most conspicuous example. They possessed all the high-spirited qualities, the daring, the courage, the endurance of the Morgans and Bats and Brazilianos, but they were seldom or never wantonly cruel; they burned, they sacked, as freely as the others; they pillaged churches with as little compunction; poverty and sickness pleaded to them in vain when, with firelocks in one hand and firebrands in the other, they thundered through the deserted street and marked their progress with flaming houses. But when human life was in their power they respected it; they fought and behaved as though the king's flag flew over their heads; there was something of the sentiment of honourable naval warfare in their lawlessness; and to their credit let this stand, that though they professed themselves as no more than privateersmen, their behaviour

will certainly bear comparison with the state-sanctioned and instructed conduct of the officers and crews of the expedition under Commodore Anson.

But my business is with Captain William Dampier only. Morgan and the cut-throats who preceded or followed him have found apologists and admirers in plenty. Happily Dampier's chief claims upon the attention of posterity are based upon adventures of a very different kind from those which rendered buccaneering one of the most infamous pursuits that the wickedness or misery of mankind ever invented.

It is impossible to appreciate the intrepid seamanship of the early navigators without first taking a view of the art of navigation as it was in their time, and understanding the shapes, bulk, and rigs of the vessels in which they cruised in search of plunder or started on long voyages of discovery. In these days one is so used to the facilities of science for traversing the deep with swiftness and certainty, that it is necessary to bend the mind with some severity of thought to compass the difficulties of the old sailors and honour their triumphs justly. In the first place, their ships were so unwieldy that it was scarcely possible to get them to beat against the wind, or, to use the old-fashioned term, to “ply.” An example of this will be found in Anson's *Voyage*. It is there recorded that the *Centurion's* consort, the *Gloucester*, was descried on June 21st from the island of Juan Fernandez some eight or ten miles to leeward, beating or reaching into the bay. The weather thickened and she disappeared. Five days afterwards she again hove in sight, and for a whole fortnight she was stretching away first on one, then on the

other tack, in vain effort to reach the island; nor was it until July 23rd that she was able to enter the bay, and then only because the wind had shifted, and permitted her to head for her destination with a flowing sheet. Thus for above a month was this ship striving to get to windward and traverse three leagues on a taut bowline!

The old vessels were cumbrously rigged. At the head of their lower masts they carried huge round tops as big as a ballroom. Forward their bowsprit was encumbered with massive spritsail and sprit-topsail yards. Their sides were loaded with great channels embellished with enormous dead-eyes for setting up shrouds as thick as hawsers. They seldom exposed canvas above their topsails, though the topgallant-sail had long been introduced, as we know by a passage in Sir Walter Raleigh's Remains. [2] Their sterns were high and pink-shaped—that is, broad at the water-line and narrowing at the taffrail. They were built with deck upon deck in the after-part, the topmost being called the “topgallant-deck” by the English, and the “poop-royal” by the French and Spaniards; with the consequence that they were dangerously deep-waisted, though with their extraordinary height of side aft they floated, to the eye, like castles. As if this were not enough, the structure where it was loftiest was crowned with enormous poop-lanterns of a size to hold “wind enough to last a Dutchman a week!”

Structures thus shaped—the length rarely exceeding three times the beam—and propelled by low-seated canvas, could do little or nothing against head-winds and seas; and as a result the old narrators are repeatedly telling us that they were forced to *hull*, or *try*,—in other words, to heave

their ship to, often in breezes in which a sailing vessel of to-day would expose a topgallant-sail over a single-reefed topsail. A succession of favourable gales would indeed put life into the clumsy waggons and furnish them with some sort of despatch, but as a rule the passage that is now made in sixty days was hardly completed by the early navigators in a twelvemonth. Their ships were unsheathed. It is true that Sebastian Cabot caused the ships under the command of Sir Hugh Willoughby to be protected with thin sheets of lead to guard against the worm “which many times pearceth and eateth through the strongest oake”; [\[3\]](#) but I cannot discover that this example was continued, and it is at least certain that the vessels commanded by Dampier and his buccaneering companions breasted the surge with no other coating on their bottoms than pitch and tallow. Hence in all long voyages there was frequent occasion to careen, practicable only by tedious deviation in search of a convenient place, and by wearisome detention, that the hull might be listed over and the accumulation of shells and weed removed. Another formidable difficulty lay in the scurvy. This is a distemper still with us, but in those days it was incredibly fatal. Few ships from Europe managed to pass the Horn without the loss of half, and often two-thirds, of their crews from this dreadful scourge. The “chirurgeons” could do nothing. There was no remedy but to bring up off some fruitful coast and send the men ashore. Whenever practicable this was done; but often it happened that the ship's company were dying in fives and tens every day, with the vessel herself a thousand miles out upon the ocean. The old navigators overdid their pickling. The brine they soaked

their meat in made it harder and less nourishing than mahogany before they were out of the English Channel. Of all the wonders of the early voyages none surprises me so much as the capacity of the people to subsist upon the victuals shipped for them.

In Dampier's time navigation as an art had scarcely made a stride since the days of Columbus and the Portuguese discoverers. The instruments for measuring the sun's altitude were the astrolabe, the cross or forestaff, and Davis's backstaff,—engines for mensuration ludicrously primitive, as will be supposed when viewed side by side with the sextant of to-day. The mariner made shift with these contrivances to determine his latitude within a degree or two, but he had no means of ascertaining his longitude. There were no chronometers, there was no portable Greenwich time, no aids whatever towards the solution of what was regarded down to the days of Maskelyne and the Commissioners of Longitude as the greatest marine problem that ever perplexed the mind. Apparently the old practice was to run down the parallels and then make direct easting or westing for the desired destination. Or they took “a departure,” as it was called, from any point of land, and calculated the meridians by the log. Or, as an alternative, the early navigators employed dead-reckoning, as we still practise it—that is, they found out a vessel's place on the chart by putting down her rate of sailing as it was to be ascertained at regular intervals by “heaving the log,” and by allowing for leeway and difference of courses. In Captain Thomas James's *Strange and Dangerous Voyage in the years 1631-32* [\[4\]](#) there is included a list of the instruments

provided by him for his undertaking to discover the north-west passage into the South Sea. A few of the items will furnish the reader with a tolerable idea of the primitive character of the nautical implements with which the mariner in the days of James, and later yet in the days of Dampier, embarked on his voyages into the remotest parts of the world in quest of new lands or in search of short cuts. James begins the list with "a quadrant of old-seasoned pear-tree wood, artificially made and with all care possible divided with diagonals, even to minutes. It was a four-foot at least (semi-diameter)." Next: "An equilateral triangle of light wood, whose radius was five-foot at least, and divided out of Petiscus's table of tangents." "A quadrant of two-foot semi-diameter of light wood and with like care projected." Then: "Four staves for taking altitudes and distances in the heavens." The captain also took with him "a staff of seven-feet long, whose transom was four-foot divided into equal parts by way of diagonals that all the figures in a radius of 10,000 might be taken out actually." "Another of six-foot near as convenient and in that manner to be used. Mr. Gunter's cross-staff, three Jacob's staves projected after a new manner and truly divided after the table of tangents, two of Mr. Davis's backstaves with like care made and divided." These were the captain's instruments for measuring the height of the sun. Other items comprised "six meridian compasses ingeniously made; four needles in square boxes; four special needles (which my good friends Mr. Allen and Mr. Marre gave me) of six inches diameter, and toucht curiously with the best loadstone in England; a loadstone to refresh any of these if occasion were, whose

poles were marked for fear of mistaking." Further, Captain James carried a watch-clock, "a table every-day calculated, correspondent to the latitude according to Mr. Gunter's directions in his book, the better to keep our time and our compass to judge of our course." A chestful of mathematical books, the Collections of Purchas and Hackluyt, and "two pair of curious globes."

Such was the scientific equipment of a man bound on a Polar voyage in the year 1632. It is not to be supposed that such mariners as Dampier and his buccaneering associates went half as well furnished. Indeed their poverty in this direction was so great that one may read here and there of their employing their leisure on shipboard in making quadrants to replace those which were lost or worn out. Their Norie, Raper, and Nautical Almanac in one was the crude *Speculum Nauticum* of Wagener, made English by Anthony Ashley in 1588, and universally known by the seamen in those days as *Waggoner*. [5] Sir Thomas Browne, writing in 1664 to his son Thomas, a naval officer, says, "*Waggoner* you will not be without, which will teach the particular coasts, depths of roades, and how the land riseth upon the several points of the compass." It will not be supposed that *Waggoner's* instructions were very trustworthy. The art of surveying was scarcely understood; charts even in Dampier's time were absurdly ill-digested, and portions of the world are barely recognisable in the grotesque tracings. Therefore it happened that the early mariner was forced to depend upon his own judgment and experience to a degree scarce realisable in these days of exact science and matured inventions. He hardly

understood what was signified by the variation of the compass, and there was very little outside the Pole Star that was not doubtful. But happily for him there was no obligation of hurry. There was no managing owner to worry him. Prompt despatch was no condition of the charter-party. His was the day of ambling, and he was happy if he could confirm with his lead and log-line the reckonings he arrived at with his forestaff.

It is proper to remember all these conditions of the sea-vocation in reviewing the life of William Dampier. The habit of self-reliance makes the character of the sea-worthies of his age admirable, and it qualified them for their great undertakings and achievements. They were helped with nothing from science that can be mentioned with gravity. The ocean was to them as blank as it looks to the landsman's eye, and it was their business to find out the roads to the wonders and mysteries which lay hidden leagues down behind its familiar shining line. If a sailor nowadays is at fault he can seek and find the hints and assurances he desires in twenty directions. He has Admiralty charts of incomparable accuracy. He has a deep-sea lead with which he can feel the ground whilst his ship moves through the water at fourteen knots an hour. He has instruments for indicating the angle to which his vessel rolls, and for showing him instantly her trim as she sits upon the water. He has a dial that registers on deck, under his eye, the number of miles his ship has made since any hour he chooses to time her from. His chronometer may be accepted as among the most perfect examples of human skill. Dampier and such as he wanted all these adjuncts to their

calling. But it cannot be disputed that they were the better sailors for the very poverty of their equipment in this way. It forced upon them faith in nothing but their own observation, so that there never was a race of sailors who kept their eyes wider open and examined more closely those points which have long since slid into the dull prosaics of the deep. No one can follow them without wonder and admiration. We find them in crafts of forty, twenty, even ten tons—boats half-decked and undecked—exploring the frozen silence of the North Pole, beating to the westward against the fierce surge of the Horn, seeking land amidst the vast desolation of the southern ocean, and making new history for their country upon the coast of North America and in the waters of the Mozambique. Their lion-hearts carry them all over the world, and they have nothing to help them but the lead-line over the side and a quadrant big enough to serve as a gallows. Nor was the ocean quite as it is now. In Dampier's time it was still gloomy with mysteries, and there lingered many a dark and terrifying superstition, whose origin was to be traced to those early Portuguese and Spanish sailors who chanted a litany when they saw St. Elmo's Fire glittering at the masthead, and exorcised the demon of the waterspout by elevating their swords in the form of crosses. The mermaid still rose in the tranquil blue waters alongside, and with impassioned eyes and white and wooing arms courted the startled seaman to share her coral pavilion at the bottom of the sea. The enchanted island, steeped in the purple splendour of a radiance that owed nothing of its glory to the heavens, was yet to be discovered by seeking. The darkness of the storm was thronged with gigantic shadowy

shapes of fleeting spirits. Amid the tranquillity of the midnight calm, dim fiery figures of undeterminable proportions floated in the black profound, and voices as of human creatures could be heard out of the hush on the deep syllabling the names of the listening and affrighted crew. It is true that the Jack of Dampier's time was not so amazingly superstitious as we find him in the pages of Purchas and Hackluyt. He was not quite so young-eyed as the ancient mariner of the Elizabethan and preceding ages. Nevertheless he was still exceedingly credulous, and he never embarked on a voyage into distant parts without a mind prepared for marvels of many sorts. Also let us remember the shadowiness of the globe whose oceans he was to navigate, the vagueness of countries now as well known to us as our own island home. Australia was rising upon the gaze of the world like a new moon, the greater part of whose disk lies in black shadow. Islands which now have their newspapers and their hotels were uncharted, were less real than the white shoulders of clouds dipping upon the sea-line. Of countries whose coast had been sighted, but whose interiors were unknown, wild guesses at the wonders within resulted in hair-stirring imaginations. These and more than there is room to name are conditions of the early mariner's vocational life, which we must take care to bear in mind as we accompany him in his adventures, or certainly we shall fail to compass the full significance of his magnificent resolution, his incomparable spirit, and his admirable intrepidity.

CHAPTER II

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1652-1681

DAMPIER'S EARLY LIFE—CAMPECHÉ—HE JOINS THE BUCCANEERS

There is an account of Dampier's early life written by himself in the second volume of his Travels. I do not know that anything is to be added to what he there tells us. A man should be accepted as an authority on his own career when it comes to a question of dates and adventures. The interest of this sailor's life really begins with his own account of his first voyage round the world; and though he is a very conspicuous figure in English maritime history, the position he occupies scarcely demands the curious and minute inquiry into those parts of his career on which he is silent that we should bestow on the life of a great genius.

William Dampier was born at East Coker in the year 1652. His parents intended him for a commercial life, but the idea of shopkeeping was little likely to suit the genius of a lad who was a rover in heart whilst he was still in petticoats; and on the death of his father and mother his friends, finding him bent upon an ocean life, bound him apprentice to the master of a ship belonging to Weymouth. This was in or about the year 1669. With this captain he made a short voyage to France, and afterwards proceeded to Newfoundland in the same ship, being then, as he tells us, about eighteen years of age. The bitter cold of Newfoundland proved too much for his seafaring

resolutions, and, procuring the cancellation of his indentures, he went home to his friends. But the old instinct was not to be curbed. Being in London some time after his return from the Newfoundland voyage, he heard of an outward-bound East Indiaman named the *John and Martha*, the master of which was one Earning. The idea of what he calls a “warm voyage” suited him. He offered himself as a foremast hand and was accepted. The voyage was to Bantam, and he was away rather longer than a year, during which time he says he kept no journal, though he enlarged his knowledge of navigation. The outbreak of the Dutch war seems to have determined him to stay at home, and he spent the summer of the year 1672 at his brother's house in Somersetshire. He soon grew weary of the shore, and enlisted on board the *Royal Prince*, commanded by the famous Sir Edward Spragge, [6] under whom he served during a part of the year 1673. He fought in two engagements, and then falling sick a day or two before the action in which Sir Edward lost his life (August 11th), he was sent on board the hospital ship, whence he was removed to Harwich. Here he lingered for a great while in suffering, and at last, to recover his health, went to his brother's house. As he gained strength so did his longing for the sea increase upon him. His inclination was soon to be humoured, for there lived near his brother one Colonel Hellier, who, taking a fancy to Dampier, offered him the management of a plantation of his in Jamaica under a person named Whalley; for which place he started in the *Content* of London, Captain Kent master, he being then twenty-two years old. Lest he should be kidnapped and sold as a servant on his arrival, he

agreed with Captain Kent to work his passage out as a seaman. They sailed in the beginning of the year 1674, but the date of their arrival at Jamaica is not given.

His life on that island is not of much interest. He lived with Whalley for about six months, and then agreed with one Captain Heming to manage his plantation on the north side of the island; but repenting his resolution, he took passage on board a sloop bound to Port Royal. He made several coasting voyages in this way, by which he tells us he became intimately acquainted with all the ports and bays of Jamaica, the products and manufactures of the island, and the like. In this sort of life he spent six or seven months, and then shipped himself aboard one Captain Hudsel, who was bound to the Bay of Campeché to load logwood. They sailed from Port Royal in August 1675; their cargo to purchase logwood was rum and sugar. There were about two hundred and fifty men engaged in cutting the wood, and these fellows gladly exchanged the timber for drink. They were nearly all Englishmen, and on the vessel dropping anchor, numbers of them flocked aboard clamorous for liquor. "We were but 6 Men and a Boy in the Ship," says Dampier, "and all little enough to entertain them: for besides what Rum we sold by the Gallon or Ferkin, we sold it made into Punch, wherewith they grew Frolicksom." It was customary in those times to shoot off guns when healths were drunk, but in Dampier's craft there was nothing but small-arms, "and therefore," he says, "the noise was not very great at a distance, but on Board the Vessels we were loud enough till all our Liquor was spent." Dampier was well entertained by these fellows ashore. They hospitably received him in their

wretched huts, and regaled him with pork and peas and beef and dough-boys. He thought this logwood-cutting business so profitable, and the life so free and pleasant, that he secretly made up his mind to return to Campeché after his arrival at Jamaica. Having filled up with wood, they sailed in the latter end of September, and not very long afterwards narrowly escaped being wrecked on the Alacran Reef, a number of low, sandy islands situated about twenty-five leagues from the coast of Yucatan. The vessel was a ketch, the weather very dirty. Dampier was at the helm, or whipstaff as the tiller was called, and describes the vessel as plunging and labouring heavily: "Not going ahead," he says, "but tumbling like an egg-shell in the sea." In spite of their being in the midst of a dangerous navigation, the crew, finding the weather improving, lay down upon the deck and fell asleep. The stout build of the round-bowed craft saved her, otherwise it is highly improbable that anything more would ever have been heard of William Dampier.

Young as he was, his powers of observation, the accuracy of his memory, and what I may call the sagacity of his inquisitiveness, are forcibly illustrated in this passage of his account of his early life. Even while his little ship is bumping ashore, and all hands are running about thinking their last moment arrived, Dampier is taking a careful view of the sandy islands, observing the several depths of water, remarking the various channels, and mentally noting the best places in which to drop anchor. He has a hundred things to tell us about the rats and sea-fowl he saw there, of the devotion of the booby to its young, of the sharks, sword-fish, and "nurses," of the seals, and the Spaniard's way of