

THE MYSTERY OF HAYSTACK ROCK

Spanish Adventure of early times with an Oregon Coast Sequel of recent date—by Hubert C. Lyman.

HAYSTACK ROCK, OFF THE TILLAMOOK COAST.

IT MAY be remembered by those who read the account at the time that a profound mystery surrounded the discovery in August last of the "Old Man," as he was generally referred to by those who knew him at all. Indeed he was known by no other name, and I myself have never learned what his real one was, although I have made many investigations.

The "Old Man" lived on the sea coast a few miles south of Seaside, Or., near the mouth of Elk Creek, where he was occasionally seen by those who included Elk Creek among their excursions.

It was on such an expedition that I first met the old man and formed an acquaintance which resulted fatally for him and so unexpectedly for me. I was spending my vacation of three weeks at Seaside, where I had quite exhausted the ordinary round of amusements. I had gone bathing in the surf nearly every day, taken a trip around Tillamook head at low tide, visited Thompson's Falls, Gearhart, and other points of interest in the vicinity, had gone clamming, crabbing and rowing, and was now longing for other worlds to conquer.

It was at this time that I heard of Elk Creek and how far the beach at that place surpassed in beauty the one at Seaside. I immediately resolved to take a trip thither and see it for myself. I persuaded a young Dr. H., of Portland, to accompany me. He was equally enthusiastic with myself, but unfortunately his time was limited to a single day, while I still had a week. However, as the distance was only about nine miles we could easily make it in the time specified, although we were resolved to walk one way at least. We were both indefatigable walkers, and expected to derive from the tramp itself half the pleasure of the entire trip.

We set out as early as possible on the morning of Tuesday, July 31, and were soon striding along with the most joyous hearts in the world, little anticipating what startling events were to befall, and in what altered circumstances I, at least, should return along that road. Our way lay for some distance up the winding Necanicum, and I have no doubt that many a boat in its waters received a sore fright at the thundering voice of my companion as he made the welkin ring in the excess of his gaiety.

We continued on our way rapidly in the cool freshness of the morning. The thick bushes on either side were covered with dew and sparkled brightly as we passed. The tall firs and spruces rose high in the air on all sides.

After passing over the ridge connecting with Tillamook Head and descending for some distance on the other side, we began to hear the sound of the surf and concluded that we were nearing our destination. A moment later we caught the first glimpse directly ahead of what was to play so vast a part in my fortunes. This was a high, cone-shaped peak, of which we could see only the green summit over the intervening trees. "That will be an elegant climb," exclaimed my companion, rapturously, for he was an ardent climber.

We hastened on and suddenly emerged in full view of the beach. At our left was a large house, evidently used as a hotel. We did not stop, however, but went on to the creek, which was backed up by the high tide from the ocean at our right. We crossed on a floating plank and walked down toward the edge of the surf, which was still nearly half a mile distant.

The tall peak was still some distance down the beach. Our plan of climbing it, however, we saw to be entirely out of the question. It was not, as we had at first supposed, a part of the mainland, or even a projection from it. On the contrary it rose directly from the midst of the dashing breakers, while between it and the sandy shore lay a strip of calmer water some 50 or 60 feet in width. But even had the base of the peak been accessible, the idea of scaling its summit would have been absurd. It was, in fact, nothing more nor less than a solid rock rising nearly perpendicularly on all sides to a height, as nearly as we could judge, of 200 feet. The bright green color which we had observed before was due to a heavy growth of moss, which covered the summit and even the sides where they were not absolutely perpendicular. At the foot of this huge rock were multitudes of smaller ones jutting above the surface of the water and continually washed by the foam and spray which dashed over them.

These observations we made while approaching along the beach. As we drew near another singular feature caught my eye. "Look," said I, as I directed my companion's attention to it, "see that cave right at the water's edge. There, on the outer edge, you can't see it if you go any nearer."

The cave was, in fact, on the ocean side of the cliff, and was visible only at a long angle from it. A small opening could be seen above the water, and that only at the water's edge. There, on the outer edge, you can't see it if you go any nearer. It was impossible to tell how far into the rock it extended. There is probably quite a cavern there at low tide," observed the doctor, as he walked on down the beach. I remained looking at the cave for a few moments, until I suddenly heard a loud whistle, and looking up saw my companion some distance ahead beckoning to me. I immediately rejoined him, and in answer to my queries he indicated a point on the side of the cliff opposite where we had been looking, and said, "There is the other end of your cave. It must be clear through."

Such appeared to be the case. This

second cave was also just visible above the edge of the water, and the waves dashed in and out with loud splashes and roars. Occasionally, when they struck squarely the side of the rock wall, the spray would dash 20 feet in the air. "That is quite curious, isn't it?" said a strange voice behind us. We turned in some surprise, for we had seen no one. But there, standing motionless within six feet of us, was an old man, who surveyed us calmly, but, as I fancied, with some appearance of mistrust, as though he suspected us of some felonious intention. This fancy, however, it was, was caused, I suspect, by a strange glitter in the old fellow's eyes, which reminded me at first glance of the Ancient Mariner. A long, unkempt white beard descended nearly to his waist. His clothes were of a distinctly nautical type, his coat being a long ulster, considerably the worse for wear, and his hat of the same material. He also wore large rubber boots which reached to his knees.

"It is quite curious, isn't it?" he repeated, glancing from one to the other of us. "Yes," replied Dr. H., recovering from his astonishment at the old man's unexpected appearance. "Yes, indeed. We were just noticing the cave there. It appears to be quite deep."

"Yes," rejoined the old man, whose not least remarkable characteristic was the incongruity between his dress and his speech, the latter indicating a man of education and culture. "Although," he continued, "it is probably not so deep as it appears to be."

"Have you any idea how deep it is?" I asked. "No," he answered, with some hesitation; "there is no way of getting out to explore it, even at low tide. It would be almost certain death to attempt it. And probably not worth the trouble, either."

As we walked on down the beach we continued our conversation with the old man, who seemed to be strangely curious and persistent concerning our movements and intentions, though Dr. H. insisted repeatedly that it was merely my own imagination. Concerning himself the old man was very reticent, saying only that he had lived in the neighborhood for some time, and was well acquainted with the surrounding region.

He was a complete mystery to me, and was evidently bent on remaining so. At least, try as I would, I could get nothing further out of him. His evident education, coupled with his present seemingly poor condition, interested me exceedingly, and I thought if I could only get at his history it would make an excellent story for my paper.

secure a room for the night, but as I did so I perceived the figure of our friend of the morning approaching rapidly, as though wishing to overtake me. As soon as he got within speaking distance he accented me somewhat abruptly with, "So your friend is going back?" "Yes," I replied. "And you," he continued. "I shall remain for a day or two longer. I wish to make a few investigations and would be glad if I could have your assistance."

"What is the nature of your investigations?" he asked, glancing at me so keenly that I half suspected he had already divined my purpose with relation to himself. "Well," said I, a little at a loss, "I merely wish to look at the scenery and examine the natural peculiarities of the surrounding country."

"The old man smiled slightly and said: "Suppose we start in at once. I fancy I shall be able to show you something rather curious."

As it was still early in the afternoon, I readily consented, and we started down the beach. I noticed that he glanced furtively at me from time to time and appeared about to speak and then to think better of it. At length he remarked: "If you will come to my cabin, I will show you something interesting."

Accordingly, we proceeded on down the beach until we arrived directly opposite the large rock, which the old man told me was named Haystack Rock, when we turned to the left and, climbing an abrupt sandy slope, reached a level plateau covered with low bushes and gnarled and stunted pine trees. Near the edge of this plateau and sheltered by a couple of small trees stood the cabin or shanty of my guide.

Upon entering I perceived that it contained but one room, and that a very small one, and supplied with the most meager furnishings—so meager, in fact, that I wondered at the necessity for a lock and key. Of this, however, the old man seemed very careful. After closing the door he turned to one corner of the room, where I had already noticed a long, low trunk or chest. It was riveted with steel bands and appeared to be exceptionally strong.

The old man drew a key from beneath his shirt and, unfastening it from a chain around his neck, bent down to unlock the chest. As he inserted the key in the lock he turned to me and said: "Before I go further, promise me that if you refuse the assistance that I am depending on for you, you will at least not betray to a living soul the secret I am about to reveal to you."

Startled by the old man's earnestness, I hesitated, but, after being assured that by listening to his story I should be under no obligation to extend the desired assistance unless I should see fit, I gave the required promise.

Satisfied with this, the old man continued: "I am about to reveal to you one of the most wonderful secrets of the century, a secret that is worth a fortune—or rather, one that is a fortune, if we but stretch forth our hands and take it."

As he said this, his eyes glowed like fires and his whole being evidenced an excitement which he could hardly control. "I reveal this secret to you," he went on without pausing, "because I need your help and because you, when you have heard what I shall tell, will not reveal it to you."

My first surprise gave way to a fear that the old man's mind was unbalanced. I was resolved to see the adventure out, however, and even as the thought crossed my mind he resumed in a calmer tone and with an observation well calculated to dispel my half-formed suspicion: "The event of my being mistaken is, of course, not impossible; but I will never admit it until a trial has been made."

With this the old man turned the key in the chest and, raising the lid, revealed to my expectant eyes nothing more than what appeared to be an ordinary block of wood about a foot long and about four inches wide by one thick. The edges and sides were perfectly smooth, as though by long contact with the waves of the ocean. This he placed in my hand, and in reply to my look of astonishment said: "Do you see nothing uncommon about the piece of wood?"

I looked more closely and now perceived on one of the flat surfaces a number of characters burned into the wood, as though by the point of a sharp tool or weapon heated red hot. They were nearly worn away, however, and had become so indistinct that I could make nothing of them except that they seemed to represent a rude map or drawing of some kind and that words also were scattered around somewhat promiscuously. In one corner was what I took to be the signature, but at length made out to be merely four figures placed in a row, 1765.

"Don't you see?" said the old man excitedly. "It is in that year, 1765, that this drawing was done."

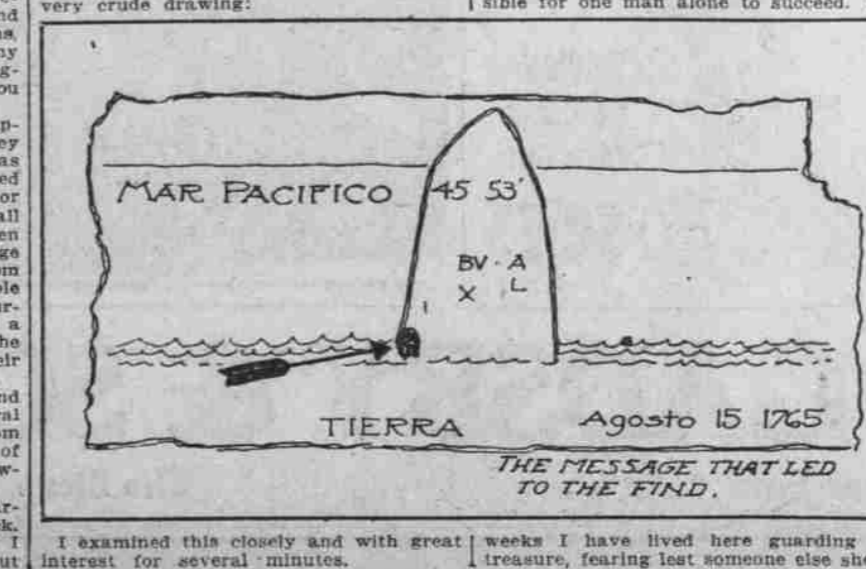
I looked up in amazement and incredulity. "What?" I exclaimed, "in 1765?" "That is the fact," he replied, "pointing at the figures I had deciphered. 'Impossible or not,' he answered positively, 'it is the fact. I will tell you how certain a possession—'

"But tell me first," I interrupted, "what is the meaning of the writing?" "In due time, in due time, the other first. It is a simple enough tale and will take but a moment."

"After several hours of intense application I succeeded in making out most of it, supplying a letter or a line here and there, so that finally I was able to make the copy which I have here. It is nearly exact as I could make it."

With these words he produced a sheet of paper, upon which was the following very crude drawings:

"I examined this closely and with great interest for several minutes. Weeks I have lived here guarding the treasure, fearing lest someone else should



discover it and take it from me. Finally I resolved to confide my secret to the next comer that should appear suitable and together we would force the rock to give up its spoils. Providence sent me you and to you, I give this chance of a thousand years."

The old man's excitement wrought upon me until I was nearly as enthusiastic as himself, though by no means so confident of success. It will be an exciting adventure, at any rate, even if it proves to be nothing more," that I to myself.

However, as night was by this time fast approaching, I thought of returning to the hotel. But to this the old man vigorously protested. "No," he said, "you must stay here. We will make the attempt tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning?" "Yes, you do not hesitate, do you? The tide will be low about 5 o'clock. In the meantime we will eat supper and get what sleep we can, for I warn you we will need our strength."

We went before daylight, after a troubled sleep and made preparations for our venture. First we made two torches of pine knots wrapped tightly with greased cloth. These we proposed to use after reaching the inside of the cavern.

Leaving the cabin, we made our way as rapidly as possible in the slow-growing dawn down the steep bank and out toward the sea. Its muffled roar came to my ear with a sinister foreboding. A light gray mist filled the air and touched our faces coldly.

After picking our way carefully over the driftwood for a short distance, my companion, who had spoken scarcely a word, but who was trembling in his excitement and whose eyes gleamed with an unnatural lustre, drew me to one side and after rummaging among the debris for a moment, began tugging at what appeared to be a raft. It was made of three logs about six feet long, securely fastened together. Although quite heavy, we managed to drag it down to the water's edge.

I saw that the tide was much lower than it had been at my previous visit. In fact, only a narrow strip of water separated us from the rock, which rose dimly from the white foam of the breakers. The small rocks we could barely discern, it was from these, the old man explained, that our greatest danger lay, as we might be dashed against them and crushed. The advantage of a raft was that, while more difficult to propel and steer than a boat, it could not sink. We were both provided with long iron-pointed poles.

After lashing our torches to small pick rope and an extra pole securely to the raft, we dragged it into the surf and pushed off. The water between us and the rock, being comparatively sheltered, was quite calm, and it was with no small gratification that we perceived we were able with our poles to force our way steadily and easily toward the dark hole which we could see dimly through the gray mist some ten yards distant. About the mouth of the cave the water was rougher, though by no means so rough as I had seen it the previous day. The opening also was much larger, owing to the low tide. We kept on the raft, to which we each had one foot tied, in such a manner as to be easily released in case of necessity, however, so that we should not be knocked off or washed off.

As we grew gradually nearer, the difficulty of keeping our raft from being dashed against some of the jagged rocks sticking up on all sides, the raft being washed back to land, grew every moment greater. Several times we narrowly escaped disaster, and more than once we would have been thrown into the water but for our precaution in fastening ourselves on.

After physical exertion, that would have been impossible, except in an expected state of mind, we reached the mouth of the cave. At the same instant a wave, larger than any we had yet met, struck us, but, while we were against the side of the rock with such force as to daze me and nearly twist my foot off. Fortunately, however, it was not so violent as to prevent being driven back. In fact, it was now a comparatively easy matter to make our way inward, as the waves were now let each wave carry us in and then hold ourselves from being taken out with its return.

As we advanced, the walls of the cave became lower, and we were obliged to take extreme care not to smash our heads as we rose and fell with the flood of water that poured in and out. The light grew dimmer, and dimmer until we could barely distinguish the outlines of the passage about us, while ahead was nothing but a rushing, echoing darkness.

All at once we seemed to be seized by a strong inward current and were swept with irresistible force into the dark. We were afraid to trust our poles but they met nothing. Suddenly we felt our raft scrape along the bottom, slip slightly, then stop. We were stranded.

After making sure that we were indeed firmly fixed our first care was to light our torches. This done, the water found it had been washed with water, but the grease with which they were saturated was soon aflame and a bright light was shed about us. The old man's amazement at the scene that was lighted up.

We were at one end of a large rock room, whose floor was a plain, seemingly bottomless expanse of heaving water. The walls rose about us, smooth and wet and black, except where particles of sand had collected and shown with a dead whiteness. The shape of the room was like a dome, broken off at the further end, where it extended farther than we could see.

After this general survey we examined our immediate vicinity more closely and perceived that we were situated in a large, shallow, and shallowly ebbing tide would soon leave us secure. Upon glancing at the wall at our side our attention was attracted by a rough narrow ledge extending gradually upward toward the right. At sight of this my companion smiled in a triumphant manner and said something which I did not hear above the sound of the water. However, he stepped upon the ledge and I, after securing the raft as well as possible, followed.

(Concluded on Page 45.)