

# PIECES OF EIGHT

BEING THE AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE OF A TREASURE DISCOVERED IN THE BAHAMA ISLANDS IN THE YEAR 1903—NOW FIRST GIVEN TO THE PUBLIC.

Richard Le Gallienne

## CHAPTER III.

I Charter the "Maggie Darling." As luck would have it, the loss, or rather the theft of Henry P. Tobias's narrative was not so serious as it at first seemed, for it fortunately chanced that John Saunders had had it copied; but the theft remained none the less mysterious.

However, leaving that mystery for later solution, John Saunders, Charlie Webster and I spent the next evening in a general and particular criticism of the narrative itself. There were several obvious objections to be made against its authenticity. To start with, Tobias, at the time of his deposition, was an old man—seventy-five years old—and it was more than probable that his experiences as a pirate would date from his early manhood; they were hardly likely to have taken place as late as his fortieth year. The narrative, indeed, suggested their taking place much earlier, and there would thus be a space of at least forty years between the burial of the treasure and his deathbed revelation. It was natural to ask: Why during all those years did he not return and retrieve the treasure for himself? Various circumstances may have prevented him, the inability from lack of means to make the journey, or what not; but certainly one would need to imagine circumstances of peculiar power that should be strong enough to keep a man with so valuable a secret in his possession so many years from taking advantage of it.

For a long while, too, the names given to the purported sites of the treasure caches puzzled us. Modern maps give no such places as "Dead Men's Shoes" and "Short Shift Island," but at last, in a map dating back to 1763, we came upon one of the two names. So far the veracity of Tobias was supported. "Dead Men's Shoes" proved to be the old name for a certain cay some twenty miles long, about a day and a half's sail from Nassau, one of the long string of coral islands now known as the "Exuma Cays." But of "Short Shift Island" we sought in vain for a trace.

"All the same," said I, "the adventure calls me; the adventure and that million and a half dollars—and those 'Dead Men's Shoes'—and I intend to undertake it. I am not going to let your middle-aged skepticism discourage me. 'Treasure or no treasure, there will be the excitement of the quest, and all the fun of the sea.'"

"And some duck perhaps," added Charlie.

"And some shark fishing for certain," said John.

The next thing was to set about getting a boat and a crew.

After looking over much likely and unlikely craft we finally decided on a two-masted schooner of trim but solid build, the Maggie Darling, 42 feet over all and 13 beam; something under twenty tons, with an auxiliary gasoline engine of 24 horse power, and an alleged speed of ten knots.

Next, the crew. "You will need a captain, a cook, an engineer and a deckhand," said Charlie, "and I have the captain and the cook all ready for you."

That afternoon we rounded them all up, including the engineer and the deckhand, and we arranged to start, weather permitting, with the morning tide, which set east at six o'clock on July 13, 1903.

Ship's stores were the next detail, and these, including fifty gallons of gasoline, over and above the tanks and three barrels of water, being duly got aboard, on the evening of July 12 all was ready for the start; an evening which was naturally spent in a parting conclave in John Saunders' snugery.

"Why, one important thing you've forgotten," said Charlie. "Machetes—and spades and pickaxes. And I'd take a few sticks of dynamite along with you too. I can let you have the lot. We'll get them aboard tonight."

"It's a pity you have to give it away that it's a treasure hunt," said John, "but then you can't keep the crew from knowing. And they're a queer lot on the subject of treasure, have some of the rummiest superstitions. I hope you won't have any trouble with them."

"Had any experience in handling niggers?" asked Charlie.

"Not the least."

"That makes me wish I were coming with you. They are rum beggars. Awful cowards, and just like a pack of children. You know about sailing anyhow. That's a good thing. You can captain your own boat, if ne'd be all to the good. Particularly like any dirty weather. But you one word of advice: course, with them—but

keep your distance all the same. And be careful about losing your temper. You get more out of them by coaxing—hard as it is, at times. And, by the way, how would you like to take old 'Sailor' with you?"

"Sailor" was a great Labrador retriever, who at that moment turned up his big head with a devoted sigh from behind his master's chair.

"Rather," I said. So "Sailor" was thereupon enrolled as a further addition to the crew.

"Old Tom," the cook, was first on hand next morning. I took to him at once. A simple, kindly old "darky" of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" type, with faithfulness written all over him, and a certain sad wisdom in his old face.

"You'll find Tom a great cook," said Charlie, putting the old man on the shoulder. "Many a trip we've taken together after duck, haven't we, Tom?"

"That's right, sah. That's right," said the old man, his eyes twinkling with pleasure.

Then came the captain—Capt. Jabez Williams—a younger man, with an intelligent, self-respecting manner, somewhat noncommittal, businesslike, evidently not particularly anxious as to whether he pleased or not, but looking competent and civil enough.

Next came the engineer, a young hulking bronze giant, a splendid physical specimen, but rather heavy and sullen and not over-intelligent to look at. The deckhand proved to be a shakily, rather silly, effeminate fellow, suggesting idiocy, but doubtless wry and good enough for the purpose.

While they were busy getting up the anchor of the Maggie Darling I went down into my cabin to arrange various odds and ends, and presently came the captain, touching his hat.

"There's a party," he said, "outside here wants to know if you'll take him passenger to Spanish Wells."

"We're not taking passengers," I answered, "but I will look him over."

A man was standing up in a row-boat, leaning against the ship's side. "You'd do me a great favor, sir," he began to say in a soft, ingratiating voice.

I looked at him with a start of recognition. He was my pockmarked friend, who had made such an unpleasant impression on me at John Saunders' office. He was rather more gentlemanly looking than he had seemed at the first view, and I saw that, though he was a half-breed the white blood predominated.

"I don't want to intrude," he said, "but I have urgent need of getting to Spanish Wells, and there's no boat going that way for a week. I've just missed the mail."

"I didn't think of taking any passengers," I said.

"I know," he said. "I know it's a great favor I ask." He spoke with a certain cultivation of manner. "But I am willing of course to pay anything you think well for my food and my passage."

I waived that suggestion aside and stood irresolutely looking at him, with no very hospitable expression in my eyes. I dare say. But really my distaste for him was an unreasoning prejudice, and Charlie Webster's phrase came to my mind—"His face is against the poor devil!"

It certainly was.

Then at last I said, surely not over-graciously: "Very well. Get aboard. You can help work the boat;" and with that I turned away to my cabin.

## CHAPTER IV.

In Which Tom Catches an Enchanted Fish, and Discourses of the Dangers of Treasure Hunting.

The morning was a little overcast, but a brisk northeast wind soon set the clouds moving as it went humming in our sails, and the sun, coming out in its glory over the crystalline waters, made a fine flashing world of it, full of exhilaration and the very breath of youth and adventure, very uplifting to the heart.

Nassau looked very pretty in the morning sunlight, with its pink and white houses nestling among palm trees and the masts of its sponging schooners, and soon we were abreast of the picturesque low-lying fort, Fort Montague, that Major Bruce, nearly two hundred years ago, had such a time building as a protection against pirates entering from the east end of the harbor. It looked like a veritable piece of the past, and set the imagination dreaming of those old days of Spanish galleons and the black flag, and brought my thoughts eagerly back to the object of my trip, those doubloons and pieces of eight that lay in glittering heaps somewhere out in those island wildernesses.

Then Tom came up with my breakfast. The old fellow stood by to serve me as I ate, with a pathetic touch of the old slavery days in his deferential,

half-fatherly manner, dropping a quaint remark every now and again; as, when drawing my attention to the sun bursting through the clouds, he said, "The poor man's blanket is coming out, sah"—phrases in which there seemed a whole lot of pathos to me.

Presently, when breakfast was over, and I stood looking over the side into the incredibly clear water, in which it seems hardly possible that a boat can go on floating, suspended as she seems over gleaming gulfs of liquid space, down through which at every moment it seems she must dizzily fall.

As Tom and I gazed down, lost in those rainbow depths, I heard a voice at my elbow saying with peculiarly sickening unctious:

"The wonderful works of God." It was my unwelcome passenger, who had silently edged up to where we stood. I looked at him, with the question very clear in my eyes as to what kind of disagreeable animal he was.

"Precisely," I said, and moved away. I had been trying to feel more kindly toward him, wondering whether I could summon up the decency to offer him a cigar, but "the wonderful works of God" finished me.

"Hello! captain," I said presently, pointing to some sails coming up rapidly behind us. "What's this? I thought we'd got the fastest boat in the harbor."

"It's the Susan B., sponger," said the captain.

The captain was a man of few words. The Susan B. was a rakish-looking craft with a black hull, and she certainly could sail. No doubt it was pure imagination, but I did fancy that I noticed our passenger signal to them in a peculiar way.

I confess that his presence was beginning to get on my nerves, and I was ready to get "edgy" at anything or nothing—an irritated state of mind which I presently took out on George the engineer, who did not belie his hulking appearance, and who was forever letting the engine stop and taking forever to get it going again. One could almost have sworn he did it on purpose.

My language was more forcible than classical—had quite a piratical flavor, in fact; and my friend of "the wonderful works of God" looked up with a deprecating air. Its effect on George was all, except perhaps to further deepen his sulks.

And this I did notice, after a while, that my remarks to George seemed to have set up a certain sympathetic acquaintance between him and my passenger, the shakily deckhand being apparently taken in as a humble third. They sat forward, talking together, and my passenger read to them, on one occasion, from a piece of printed paper that fluttered in the wind.

The captain was occupied with his helm, and the thoughts he didn't seem to feel the necessity of sharing; a quiet, poised, probably stupid man, for whom I could not deny the respect we must always give to content, however simple. He was a sailor, and I don't know what better to say of a man.

So for companionship I was thrown back upon Tom. I felt, too, that he was my only friend on board, and a



Then Tom Came Up With My Breakfast.

vague feeling had come over me that within the next few hours I might need a friend.

"Are we going too fast for fishing, Tom?" I asked.

"Not too fast for a barracouta," said Tom; so we put out lines and watched the stretched strings, and listened to the sea. After a while Tom's line grew taut, and we hauled in a five-foot barracouta.

"Look!" said Tom, as he pointed to a little writhing eel-like shape, about nine inches long, attached to the belly of the barracouta much as the circle of wet leather holds the stone in a schoolboy's sling.

"Now," he said, when he had it clean and neat in his fingers, "we must hang this up and dry it in the northeast wind; the wind is just right—"

"nor-east—and there is no mascot like it, specially when—" Old Tom hesitated, with a slyly innocent smile in his eyes.

"What is it, Tom?" I asked.

"Well, sir, I meant to say that this particular part of a sucking fish, properly dried in the northeast wind, is a wonderful mascot—when you're going after treasure."

"Who said I was going after treasure?" I asked.

"Aren't you, sah?" replied Tom, "asking your pardon."

"Let's talk it over later on, when you bring me my dinner, Tom."

Later, as Tom stood, serving my coffee, I took it up with him again.

"What was that you were saying about treasure, Tom?" I asked.

"Well, sir, what I meant was this: that going after treasure is a dangerous business. . . . It's not only the living you're to think of—" Here Tom threw a careful eye forward.

"The crew, you mean?"

He nodded.

"But it's the dead too."

"The dead, Tom?"

"Well, sir, there was never a buried treasure yet that didn't claim its victim. Not one or two either. Six or eight of them, to my knowledge—and the treasure just where it was for all that. I daresay it sounds all foolishness, but it's true for all that. Something or other'll come, mark my word—just when they think they've got their hands on it: a hurricane or a tidal wave or an earthquake. And—well, the ghost laughs, but the treasure stays there all the same."

"The ghost laughs?" I asked.

"Eh! of course; didn't you know every treasure is guarded by a ghost? He's got to keep watch there till the next fellow comes along, to relieve sentry duty, so to speak. He doesn't give it away. My no! He doesn't do that. But the minute someone else is killed, coming looking for it, then he's free—and the new ghost has got to go on sitting there, waiting for ever so long till someone else comes looking for it."

"But what has this sucking fish got to do with it?" And I pointed to the red membrane already drying in Tom's hand.

"Well, the man who carries this in his pocket won't be the next ghost," he answered.

"Take good care of it for me, then, Tom," I said, "and when it's properly dried let me have it. For I've a sort of idea I may have need of it, after all."

And just then old Sailor, the quietest member of the crew, put up his head

into my hands, as though to say that he had been unfairly lost sight of.

"Yes, and you too, old chap—that's right. Tom and you and I."

And then I turned in for the night.

Continued next week

The Lure of Fame.

"What makes you keep to your nefarious trade after so many promises to reform?"

"Well," answered Bill the Borg, "I never had no education much; an' at the same time I'm jes' as anxious as anybody for a little intellectual recognition. I keep thinkin' that if I stick at it a while longer maybe I'll be wrote up in all the papers as a 'master mind.'"—Washington Star.

BREEZY BUBBLES

Can the yardstick its best foot forward?

Even the round world is made up of square inches.

The honest commercial traveler represents being called a "snare" drummer.

The pipe organist may be a handy player, but as a rule he is inclined also to put his foot in it.

A woman's dress may be after her own mind, but it takes her much longer to change the former.

The women regard the census as one of the perils of the age, because they must tell their real ones.—Philadelphia Bulletin.

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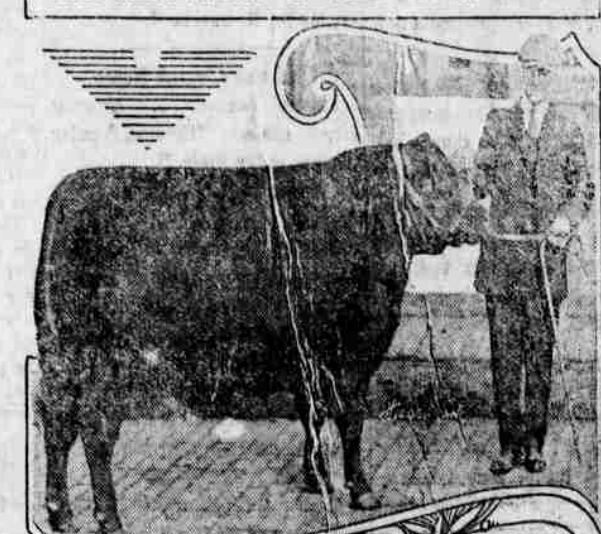


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