

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

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Book II.

CHAPTER I.

Once More in John Saunders' Snuggery.

Need I say that it was a great occasion when I was once more back safe in John Saunders' snuggery, telling my story to my two friends, John and Charlie Webster, all just as if I had never stirred from my easy chair, instead of having spent an exciting month or so among sharks, dead men, blood-lapping ghosts, card-playing skeletons and such like?

My friends listened to my yarn in characteristic fashion, John Saunders' eyes like mice peeping out of a cupboard, and Charlie Webster's huge bulk poised almost threatening, as it were, with the keenness of his attention. His deep-set kind brown eyes glowed like a boy's as I went on, but by their dangerous kindling at certain points of the story, those dealing with our pockmarked friend, Henry P. Tobias, Jr., I soon realized where, for him, the chief interest of the story lay.

"The — rebel!" he roared out once or twice, using an adjective peculiarly English.

For him my story had but one moral—the treason of Henry P. Tobias, Jr. The treasure might as well have had no existence, so far as he was concerned, and the grim climax in the cave drew nothing from him but a pre-occupied nod. And John Saunders was little more satisfactory. Both of them allowed me to end in silence. They both seemed to be thinking deeply.

"I must say you two are a great audience," I said presently, perhaps rather childishly nettled.

"It's a very serious matter," said John Saunders, and I realized that it was not my crony but the secretary to the treasury of his Britannic majesty's government at Nassau that was talking. As he spoke he looked across at Charlie Webster, almost as if forgetting me. "Something should be done about it, eh, Charlie?" he continued.

"—traitor!" roared Charlie, once more employing that British adjective. And then he turned to me:

"Look here, old pal, I'll make a bargain with you, if you like. I suppose you're keen for that other treasure now, eh?"

"I am," said I, rather stiffly.

"Well, then, I'll go after it with you—on one condition. You can keep the treasure, if you'll give me Tobias. It would do my heart good to get him, as you had the chance of doing that afternoon. Whatever were you doing to miss him?"

"I proposed to myself the satisfaction of making good that mistake," I said, "on our next meeting. I feel I owe it to the poor old captain."

"Never mind; hand the captain's rights over to me—and I'll help you all I know with your treasure. Besides, Tobias is a job for an Englishman—eh, John? It's a matter of 'king and country' with me. With you it would be mere private vengeance. With me it will be an execution; with you it would be a murder. Isn't that so, John?"

"Exactly," John nodded.

"Since you were away," Charlie began again, "I've bought the prettiest yawl you ever set eyes on—the Flamingo—forty-five over all, and this time the very fastest boat in the harbor. Yes! she's faster even than the Susan B. Now I've a holiday due me in about a fortnight. Say the word, and the Flamingo's yours for a couple of months, and her captain too. I make only that one condition."

"All right, Charlie," I agreed; "he's yours."

Whereat Charlie shot out a huge paw like a shoulder of mutton and grabbed my hand with as much fervor as though I had saved his life or done him some other unimaginable kindness. And as he did so his broad, sweet smile came back again. He was thinking of Tobias.

While Charlie Webster was arranging his affairs so that he might be able to take his holiday with a free mind I busied myself with provisioning the Flamingo, and in casually chatting with one and another along the water front, in the hope of gathering some hint that might guide us on our coming expedition. I thought it possible, too, that chance might thus bring me some information as to the recent movements of Tobias.

In this way I made the acquaintance of several old salts, both white and black, one or two of whom time and their neighbors had invested with a legendary savor of the old "wrecking days," which, if rumor speaks true, are not entirely vanished from the

remoter corners of the islands. But either their romantic halos were entirely due to imaginative gossip, or they themselves were too shrewd to be drawn, for I got nothing out of them to my purpose.

One afternoon in the course of these rather fruitless if interesting investigations among the picturesque shipyards of Bay street I had wandered farther along that historic water front than is customary with sightseeing pedestrians, and had come to where the road begins to be left alone with the sea, except for a few country houses here and there among the surrounding scrub—when my eye was caught by a little store that seemed to have strayed away from the others—a small timber erection painted in blue and white with a sort of sea-wildness and loneliness about it, and with large, naïve lettering across its lintel announcing itself as an "Emporium" (I think that was the word) "of Marine Curiosities."

I pushed open the door. There was no one there. The little store was evidently left to take care of itself. Inside it was like an old curiosity shop of the sea, every available inch of space, rough tables and walls littered and hung with the queer and lovely bric-a-brac of the sea. Presently a tiny girl came in, as it seemed, from nowhere and said she would fetch her father. In a moment or two he came, a tall, weathered Englishman of the sailor type, brown and lean, with lonely blue eyes.

"You don't seem afraid of thieves," I remarked.

"It ain't a jewelry store," he said,



"You Don't Seem Afraid of Thieves," with the curious soft sing-song intonation of the Nassau "conch."

"That's just what I was thinking it was," I said.

"I know what you mean," he replied, his lonely face lighting up as faces do at unexpected understanding in a stranger. "Of course there are some that feel that way, but they're few and far between."

"Not enough to make a fortune out of?"

"Oh! I do pretty well," he said; "I mustn't complain. Money's not everything, you see, in a business like this. There's going after the things, you know. One's got to count that in too."

I looked at him in some surprise. I had met something even rarer than the things he traded in. I had met a merchant of dreams, to whom the mere handling of his merchandise seemed sufficient profit: "There's going after the things, you know. One's got to count that in too."

Naturally we were neck-deep in talk in a moment. I wanted to hear all he cared to tell me about "going after the things"—such "things"—and he was nothing loth, as he took up one strange or beautiful object after another, his face aglow, and he quite evidently without a thought of doing business, and told me all about them—how and where he got them, and so forth.

"But," he said presently, encouraged by my unfeigned interest, "I should like to show you a few rarer things I have in the house, and which I wouldn't sell, or even show to everyone. If you'd honor me by taking a cup of tea we might look them over."

So we left the little store, with its door unlocked as I had found it, and a few steps brought us to a little house I had not before noticed, with a neat garden in front of it, all the garden beds symmetrically bordered with conch shells. Shells were evidently the simple-hearted fellow's mania, his revelation of the beauty of the world. Here in a neat parlor, also much decorated with shells, tea was served to us by the little girl I had first seen and an elder sister, who, I gathered, made all the lonely dreamer's family. Then, shyly pressing on me a cigar, he turned to show me the promised treasures. He also told me more of his manner of finding them, and of the long trips which he had to take in seeking them, to out-of-the-way cays and in dangerous waters.

He was showing me the last and rarest of his specimens. He had kept, he said, the best to the last. To me, as a layman, it was not nearly so attractive as other things he had shown me—little more to my eye than a rather commonplace though pretty shell; but he explained that it was found, or had so far been found, only in one spot in the islands, a lovely, seldom-visited cay several miles to the north-east of Andros Island.

"What is it called?" I asked, for it was part of our plan for Charlie to do a little duck shooting on Andros, before we tackled the business of Tobias and the treasure.

"It's called — Cay nowadays," he answered, "but it used to be called Short Shrift Island."

"Short Shrift Island!" I cried in spite of myself, immediately annoyed at my lack of presence of mind.

"Certainly," he rejoined, looking a little surprised but evidently without suspicion. He was too simple and too taken up with his shell.

"It is such an odd name," I said, trying to recover myself.

"Yes! those old pirate chaps certainly did think up some of the rummier names."

"One of the pirate haunts, was it?" I queried with assumed indifference.

"Supposed to be. But one hears that of every other cay in the Bahamas. I take no stock in such yarns. My shells are all the treasure I expect to find."

"What did you call that shell?" I asked.

He told me the name, but I forgot it immediately. Of course I had asked it only for the sake of learning more precisely about Short Shrift Island. He told me innocently enough just where it lay.

"Are you going after it?" he laughed. "Oh! well," I replied, "I am going on a duck-shooting trip to Andros before long, and I thought I might drop around to your cay and pick a few of them up for you."

"It would be mighty kind of you, but they're not easy to find. I'll tell you exactly—" He went off, dear fellow, into the minutest description of the habits of —, while all the time I was eager to rush off to Charlie Webster and John Saunders and shout into their ears—as later I did at the first possible moment that evening: "I've found our missing cay! Short Shrift Island is —." (I mentioned the name of a cay, which, as in the case of "Dead Man's Shoes," I am unable to divulge.)

"Maybe!" said Charlie, "maybe! We can try it. But," he added, "did you find out anything about Tobias?"

CHAPTER II.

In Which I Am Afforded Glimpses Into Futurity—Possibly Useful.

Two or three evenings before we were due to sail, at one of our snuggery conclaves, I put the question whether anyone had ever tried the diving rod for treasure in the islands.

Old John nodded and said he knew the man I wanted, a half-crazy old negro back there in Grant's Town—the negro quarter spreading out into the brush behind the ridge on which the town of Nassau proper is built.

"He calls himself a 'king,'" he added, "and the natives do, I believe, regard him as the head of a certain tribe. The lads call him 'Old King Coffee'—a memory I suppose of the Ashantee war. Anyone will tell you where he lives. He has a name as a preacher—among the Holy Jumpers!—but he's getting too old to do much preaching nowadays. Go and see him for fun anyway."

So next morning I went.

I had hardly been prepared for the plunge into "Darkest Africa" which I found myself taking, as, leaving Government house behind, perched on the crest of its white ridge, I walked a few yards inland and entered a region which, for all its green palms, made a similar sudden impression of pervading blackness on the mind which one gets on suddenly entering a coal-mining district after traveling through fields and meadows.

There were far more blacks than whites down on Bay street, but here there were nothing but blacks on every side.

The roads ran in every direction, and along them everywhere were figures of black women shuffling with burdens on their heads, or groups of girls, audaciously merry, most of them bonny, here and there almost a beauty. There were churches and dance halls and saloons—all radiating, so to say, a prosperous blackness.

At first the effect of the whole scene was a little sinister, even a little frightening. The strangeness of African jungle, was here, and one was a white man in it all alone among grinding savage faces. But for the figures about one being clothed, the illusion had been complete; but for that and the kind-hearted salutations from comely white-turbaned mammies

which soon sprang up about me, and the groups of elfish children that laughingly blocked one's progress with requests—not in any weird African dialect but in excellent English—for "a copper, please."

This request was not above the maidenly dignity of quite big and buxom lasses. One of these, a really superb young creature, asked for "a copper, please," but with a saucy coquetry befitting her adolescence.

"I'll give you one if you'll tell me where the 'king' lives," said I.

"Ole King Coffee?" she asked, and then fell into a very agony of negro laughter. Recovering, she put her finger to her lips, suggesting silence, and said:

"Come along, I'll show you!"

And walking by my side, lithe as a young animal, she had soon brought me to a cabin-much like the rest, though perhaps a little poorer looking.

"Shh! There he is!" and she shook all over again with suppressed giggles. I gave her a sixpence and told her to be a good girl. Then I advanced up a little strip of garden to where I had caught a glimpse of a venerable white-haired negro seated at the window, as if for exhibition, with a great open book in his hands. This he ap-



This He Appeared to Be Reading With Great Solemnity.

peared to be reading with great solemnity, through enormous goggles, though I thought I caught a side-glimp of his eye, as though he had taken a swift reconnoitering glance in my direction—a glance which apparently had but deepened his attention and increased the dignity of his demeanor.

Remembering that he was not merely royal but pious also, I made my salutation at once courtier-like and sanctimonious.

"Good day to your majesty," I said; "God's good, God looks after his servants."

"De Lord is merciful," he answered gravely; "God takes care of his children. Be seated, sar, and please excuse my not rising; my rheumatism is a sore affliction to me."

I was not long in getting to the subject of my visit. The old man listened to me with great composure, but with a marked accession of mysterious importance in his manner.

"It's true, sar," he said, when I had finished, "I could find it for you. I could find it for you, sure enough; and I'm de only man in all de islands dat could. But I should have to go wid you, and it's de Lord's will to keep me here in dis chair wid rheumatism. De rods has turned in dese old hands many a time, and I have faith in de Lord dey would turn again—yes, I'd find it for you; sure enough. I'd find it if any man could—and it was de Lord's will. But mebbe I can see it for you widout moving from dis chair."

"Do you mean, brother, that the Lord has given you second sight?"

"Dat am it! Glory to his name, hal-eluhah!" he answered. "I look in a glass ball—so; and if de spirit helps me I can see clear as a picture far under de ground—far, far away over de sea. It's de Lord's truth, sar—blessed be his name!"

I asked him whether he would look into his crystal for me. With a burst of profanity, as unexpected as it was vivid, he cursed "dem boys" that had stolen from him a priceless crystal which once had belonged to his old royal mother, who, before him, had had the same gift of the spirit. But, he added—turning to a table by his side, and lifting from it a large cut-glass decanter of considerable capacity, though at present void of contents—that he had found that gazing into the large glass ball of its stopper produced almost equally good results at times.

First he asked me to be kind enough to shut the door.

We had to be very quiet, he declared; the spirit could work only in deep silence. And he asked me to be kind enough to close my eyes. Then I heard his voice muttering, in a strange tongue, a queer dark gobbling kind of words, which may have been ancient African spell-words, or sheer gibberish such as magicians in all times and places have employed to mystify their consultants.

I looked at him through the corner of my eye—as doubtless he had anticipated, for he was glaring with an air of inspired abstraction into the ball of the decanter stopper. So we sat silent

Continued next week

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for I suppose some ten minutes. Then I heard him give another deep sigh. Opening my eyes I saw him slowly shaking his head.

"De spirits don't seem communicable dis afternoon," he muttered tilting the decanter slightly on one side and observing it drearily.

"Do you think, your majesty," I asked with as serious a face as I could assume, "the spirits might work better—if the decanter were to be filled?"

"Mebbe, sar; mebbe. Spirits is curious things; dey need inspiration sometimes, just like ourselves."

"What kind of inspiration do you think gets the best results, your majesty?"

"Well, sar, I can't say as dey is very particular, but I've noticed dey do seem powerful 'tached to just plain good old Jamaica rum."

"They shall have it," I said.

I had noticed that there was a saloon a few yards away, so before many more minutes had passed I had been there and come back again, and the decanter stood ruddily filled, ready for the resumption of our seance. But before we began I of course accepted the seer's invitation to join him and the spirits in a friendly libation.

Continued next week



Careless With Money

Few men are careless with actual cash, but many men do not stop to think that the checks and notes they give out represent money and that fraudulent alteration of a check may mean a serious loss. Protect yourself by using paper that betrays alteration—

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