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.

By Richard Le Gallienne

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SYNOPSIS.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.—The author, who tells the story, is on a visit to his friend, John Saunders, British official in the town of Nassau, Bahama Islands. Conversation turns on buried treasure.

CHAPTER II.—Saunders produces a document supposedly written by Henry P. Tobias, once a pirate, telling of two places where gold had been secreted in the islands. Their conversation apparently is overheard, and the document disappears.

CHAPTER III.—The writer charters a schooner, the Maggie Darling, and sets out on a search for the treasure. As they sail they take aboard a passenger, whom the author instinctively distrusts.

CHAPTER IV.—The hero strikes up a particular friendship with "Old Tom" a negro member of the crew. The boat is passed by the Susan B., a faster sailer, also from Nassau.

CHAPTER V.—On the second morning out they find that the supply of gasoline has been allowed to run out. Our writer blames the engineer and in a fit of temper knocks him down. The passenger, calling himself Henry P. Tobias, Jr., protests, and it comes out that he is active in a conspiracy to have the blacks rise against the British government in the Bahamas. He attempts the life of the hero and with two others is put ashore.

CHAPTER VI.—The Maggie Darling arrives at her destination and the party finds the Susan B. has reached there and landed men. A fight ensues and the captain of the Maggie Darling is killed, but his gang is driven off, several being left behind dead.

CHAPTER VII.—The author and "Old Tom" start a search for the treasure.

CHAPTER VIII.—In a cave they find two skeletons, evidently of pirates, and an empty chest. They give up the quest and sail back to Nassau.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.—At Nassau Charlie Webster, a friend of both Saunders and the writer, joins the party and they arrange an expedition to "Dead Men's Shoes." Webster's object is solely the capture of Tobias, whom he is hunting down as a traitor.

CHAPTER II.—The author visits a character known as the "King," reputed to possess "second sight," and gets information he thinks of value.

Then—I having closed my eyes—we began again, and it was astonishing with what rapidity the thick-coming pictures began to crowd upon that inner vision with which the Lord had endowed his faithful follower!

Of course I was inclined now to take the whole thing as an amusing imposture; but presently, watching his face and the curious "seeing" expression of his eyes, and noting the exactitude of one or two pictures, I began to feel that, however much he might be inventing or elaborating, there was some substratum of truth in what he was telling me.

The first pictures that came to him were merely pictures, though astonishingly clear ones, of Webster's boat, the Flamingo, of Webster himself, and of the men and the old dog Sailor; but in all this he might have been visualizing from actual knowledge. Yet the details were curiously exact. Presently his gaze becoming more fixed:

"I see you anchored under a little settlement. You are rowing ashore. Dere are little pathways running up among de coral rock, and a few white houses. Seems to be a forest; big trees—not like Nassau trees—and thick brush everywhere; all choked up so thick and dark, can't see nut'n. Wait a minute, dough. Dere seems to be old houses all sunk in and los', like old ruins. Can't see dem for de brush. And wait—Lord love you, sar, but I'se afraid—I seem to see a big light coming up trough de brush from far under de ground—just like you see old rotten wood shining in de dark—deep, deep down. Didn't I tell you de Lord gave me eyes to see into de bowels of de earth?—it's de bowels of de earth for sure—all lit up and shining. Praise de Lord—it am de gold, for certain, all hidden away and shining dere under de ground—"

"Can't you see it closer, clearer?" I exclaimed involuntarily; "get some idea of the place it's in?"

The old man gazed with a renewed intensity.

"No," he said presently, and his disappointed tone seemed to me the best evidence yet of his truth, "I only see a little golden mist deep, deep down under de ground; now it is fading away. It's gone; I can only see de woods and de ruins again."

This brought his visions to an end. The spirits obstinately refused to make any more pictures, though the old man continued to gaze on in the decanter stopper for fully five minutes.

CHAPTER III.

In Which We Take Ship Once More.

The discovery which—through my friend the dealer in "marine curiosities"—I had made, or believed myself to have made, of the situation of Henry P. Tobias' second "pod" of treasure, fitted exactly with Charlie Webster's wishes for our trip, small stock as he affected to take in it at the moment.

"Short Shrift island" lay a few miles to the northwest of Andros island. Now Andros is a great haunt of wild duck, not to speak of that more august bird, the flamingo. Attraction number one for the good Charlie. Then, though it is some hundred and fifty miles long and some fifty miles broad at its broadest, it has never yet, it is said, been entirely explored.

Its center is still a mystery. The natives declare it is haunted, or at all events inhabited by some strange people no one has yet approached close enough to see. You can see their houses, they say, from a distance, but as you approach them, they disappear. Here, therefore, seemed an excellent place for Tobias to take cover in. Charlie's duck-shooting preserves, endless marl lakes islanded with mangrove copses, lay on the fringe of this mysterious region. So Andros was plainly marked out for our destination.

Sailor had watched his master getting his guns ready for some days, and, doubtless, memories stirred in him of Scotch moors they had shot over together. He raised his head to the night wind and sniffed impatiently, as though he already scented the wild duck on Andros island. He was impatient, like the rest of us, because, though it was an hour past sailing time, we had still to collect two of the crew. The two loiterers turned up at last and, all preliminaries being at length disposed of, we threw off the mooring ropes and presently there was heard that most exhilarating of sounds to anyone who loves seafaring, the rippling of the ropes through the blocks as our mainsail began to rise up high against the moon which was beginning to look out over the huge block of the Colonial hotel, the sea wall of which ran along as far as our mooring. A few lights in its windows here and there broke the blank darkness of its facade, glimmering through the avenues of royal palms. I am thus explicit because of something that presently happened and which stayed the mainsail in its rippling ascent.

A tall figure was running along the sea wall from the direction of the hotel, calling out, a little breathlessly, in a rich young voice as it ran:

"Wait a minute there, you fellows! Wait a minute!"

We were already moving, parallel with the wall, and at least twelve feet away from it, by the time the figure—that of a tall boy, cowboy-hatted and picturesquely outlined in the half light—stopped just ahead of us. He raised something that looked like a bag in his right hand, calling out "Catch" as he did so; and, a moment after, before a word could be spoken,

Before a Word Could Be Spoken, He Took a Flying Leap.

he took a flying leap and landed amongst us, plump in the cockpit and was clutching first one of us and then the other, to keep his balance.

"Did it, by Jove!" he exclaimed in a beautiful English accent, and then started laughing as only absurd daredevil youngsters can.

"Forgive me!" he said, as soon as he could get his breath, "but I had to do it. Heaven knows what the old man will say!"

"You're something of a long jump!" said Charlie.

"Oh! I have done my twenty-two and an eighth on a broad running jump, but I had no chance for a run there," answered the lad, carelessly.

"But suppose you'd hit the water instead of the deck?"

"What of it? Can't one swim?"

"I guess you're all right, young man," said Charlie, softened; "but . . . well, we're not taking passengers."

The words had a familiar sound. They were the very ones I had used to Tobias, as he stood with his hand on the gunwale of the Maggie Darling. I rapidly conveyed the coincidence—and the difference—to Charlie. It struck me as odd, I'll admit, that our second start, in this respect, should be so like the first. Meanwhile, the young man was answering, or rather pleading, in a boyish way:

"Don't call me a passenger; I'll help work the boat. I'll tell the truth. I heard—never mind how—about your trip, and I'm just nutty about buried treasure. Come, be a sport. We can let the old guv'nor know, somehow . . . and it won't kill him to tear his hair for a day or two. He knows I can take care of myself."

"Well! said Charlie, after thinking awhile in his slow way, "we'll think it over. You can come along till the morning. Then I can get a good look at you. If I don't like your looks we'll still be able to put you off at West End; and if I do—well—right-ho! Now, boys," he shouted, "go ahead with the sails."

Once more there was that rippling of the ropes through the blocks, as our mainsail rose up high against the moon and filled proudly with the steady northeast breeze we had been waiting for.

So two or three hours went by, as we plunged on, to the seething sound of the water, and the singing of our sails, and all the various rumor of wind and sea. After all, it was a good music to sleep to and, for all my scorn of sleeping landsmen, an irresistible drowsiness stretched me out on the roof of the little cabin, wonderfully rocked into forgetfulness.

My nap came to an end suddenly, as though some one had flung me out through a door of blue and gold into a new-born world. There was the sun rising, the moon still on duty, and the morning star divinely naked in the heaven.

And there was Charlie, his broad face beaming with boyish happiness, and something like a fatherly gentleness in his eyes, as he watched his companion at the tiller, whom, for a half-asleep moment of waking, I couldn't account for, till our start all came back to me, when I realized that it was our young scapegrace of overnight. Charlie and he evidently were on the best of terms already.

Old Tom had been busy with breakfast and soon the smells of coffee and freshly made "johnny-cake" and frying bacon competed not unsuccessfully with the various fragrances of the morning.

Breakfast over, Charlie filled his pipe, assuming, as he did so, a judicial aspect. I filled mine and our young friend followed suit by taking a silver cigarette case from his pocket and striking a match on the leg of his khaki knickerbockers with a professional air.

"All set?" asked Charlie, and, after a slight pause, he went on:

"Now, young man, you can see we are nearing the end of the island. Another half-mile will bring us to West End. Whether we put you ashore there, or take you along, depends on your answers to my questions."

"Fire away," answered the youth, blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke in a delicate spiral up into the morning sky; "but I've really told you all I have to tell."

"No; you haven't told us how you came to know of our trip, what we were supposed to be after, and when we were starting."

"That's true!" flushed the lad, momentarily losing his composure. Then, partly regaining it: "Is it necessary to answer that question?"

"Absolutely," answered Charlie, beginning to look really serious.

"Because, if you don't mind . . . well, I'd just as soon not."

"For that very reason I want to know. We are out on a more serious business than perhaps you realize, and your answer may mean more to us than you think."

"I'm sure it cannot be of such importance to you. Really, it's hardly fair for me to tell. I should have to give away a friend."

"I'm sorry, but I shall have to insist," replied Charlie, looking very grim.

"All right, then," answered the youth, looking him straight in the eyes, "put me ashore."

"No; I won't do that now, either," declared Charlie, sternly setting his jaw. "I'll put you in irons, rather—and keep you on bread and water—till you answer my questions."

"You will, eh?" retorted the youth, flashing fire from his fine eyes. And as he spoke, quick as thought, he leaped up on to the gunwale and, without hesitation, dived into the great glassy rollers.

But Charlie was quick, too. Like a flash he grabbed one of the boy's ankles, so that the beautiful dive was spoiled; and there was the boy, hanging by an imprisoned leg over the ship's side, a helpless captive—his arms in the water and his leg struggling to get free. But he might as well have struggled against the grip of Hercules. In another moment Charlie had him hauled aboard again, his eyes full of tears of boyish rage and humiliation.

"You young fool!" exclaimed Charlie. "The water round here is thick with sharks; you wouldn't have gone fifty yards without one of them getting you."

"Sharks!" gasped out the boy, contemptuously. "I know more about sharks than you do."

"You seem to know a good many things I don't," said Charlie, whose grimness had evidently relaxed a little at the lad's display of mettle. Meanwhile, my temper was beginning to rise on behalf of our young passenger.

"I tell you what, Charlie," I interposed; "if you are going to keep this up, you'd better count me out on this trip and set us both ashore at West End. You're making a fool of yourself. The lad's all right."

The boy shot me a warm glance of gratitude.

"All right," agreed Charlie, beginning to lose his temper, too. "I'm damned if I don't." And, his hand on the tiller, he made as if to turn the boat about and tack for the shore.

"No! no!" cried the boy, springing between us and appealingly laying one hand on Charlie's shoulder, the other on mine. "You mustn't let me spoil your trip. I'll compromise. And, skipper, I'll tell your friend here all there is to tell—everything—I swear—if you will leave it to his judgment."

"Right-o!" agreed Charlie at last;

"You Young Fool!" Exclaimed Charlie.

so our passenger and I thereupon withdrew for our conference.

It was soon over and I couldn't help laughing aloud at the simplicity of it all.

"Just as I told you, Charlie," I exclaimed; "it's innocence itself." Turning to the lad, I said: "Dear boy, there is really no need to keep such a small secret as that from the skipper here. You'll really have to let me tell him."

The boy nodded acquiescence.

"All the same, I gave my word," he said.

When I told Charlie the innocent secret, he laughed as I had done, and his usual good humor instantly returned.

The stubbornly held secret had merely amounted to this: Our lad was acquainted with my conchologist, and had paid him a visit the very afternoon I did, had in fact seen me leaving the house. Answering to the boy's romantic talk of buried treasure and so forth, the shell enthusiast had thought no harm to tell him of our projected trip; and that was the whole of the mysterious matter.

Yet the day was not to end without a little incident which, slight though indeed it was, was momentarily to arouse Charlie's suspicions of our charming young companion once more.

Presently, in the far southwest, tiny points like a row of pins began very faintly to range themselves along the sky-line. They were palm trees, though you could not make them out to be such, or anything in particular, till long after. One darker point seemed closer than the rest.

"There's High Cay!" rang out the rich young voice of our passenger, whom we'd half forgotten in our tense scanning of the horizon. Charlie and I both turned to him together in surprise—and his face certainly betrayed the confusion of one who has let something slip involuntarily.

"Ho! ho! young man," cried Charlie, his face darkening again, "what do you know about High Cay? I thought this was your first trip."

"So it is," answered the boy, "on the sea."

"What do you mean: 'on the sea?'"

"I mean that I've done it many a time—on the chart. I know every bluff and roof and shoal and cay around Andros from Morgan's Bluff to Washington's Cut—"

"You do, eh?"

"On the chart. Why, I've studied charts since I was a kid, and gone every kind of voyage you can think of—playing at buccaneering or whaling, or discovering the north pole. Every kid does that."

"They do, eh?" said Charlie, evidently quite unimpressed. "I never did."

"That's because you've about as much imagination as a turnip in that head of yours," I broke in, in defense of my young Apollo.

"Maybe, if you're so smart," continued Charlie, paying no attention to me, "you can navigate us through the North Bight?"

"Maybe!" answered our youngster pertly, with an odd little smile. He had evidently recovered his nerve, and seemed to take pleasure in piquing Charlie's suspicions.

Continued next week

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The Acid Test.

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A big colored boy from Alabama looking for work was told a good job awaited him if he could convince O'Shanahan he was a Tipperarian.

"Where are ye from?" said O'Shanahan, in due course of his quizzing.

"Ahse from Tipperary, sah," answered the darky, his lips quivering and his knees shaking.

"Wash your face, me good mon, an' go to wurrk."—New York Evening Post.

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