

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

Book I.

CHAPTER I.

Introduces the Secretary of the Treasury of His Britannic Majesty's Government at Nassau, New Providence, Bahama Islands.

During the summer of 1903 I was paying what must have seemed like an interminable visit to my old friend John Saunders, who at that time filled with becoming dignity the high-sounding office of secretary of the treasury of his majesty's government, in the quaint little town of Nassau, in the island of New Providence, one of those Bahama islands that lie half lost to the world to the southeast of the Caribbean sea and form a somewhat neglected portion of the British West Indies.

Time was when they had a sounding name for themselves in the world; when the now sleepy little harbor gave shelter to roving freebooters and tarry pirates, tearing in there under full sail with their loot from the Spanish Main.

But those heroic days are gone, and Nassau is given up to a sleepy trade in sponges and tortoise shell, and peace is no name for the drowsy tenor of the days under the palm trees and the scarlet poinsettias.

Here a handful of Englishmen, clothed in the white linen suits of the tropics, carry on the government after the traditional manner of British colonies from time immemorial, each of them, like my friend, not without an English smile at the humor of the thing, supporting the dignity of offices with impressive names—hard chief justice, attorney general, speaker of the house, lord high admiral, colonial secretary and so forth.

My friend the secretary of the treasury is a man possessing in an uncommon degree that rare and most attractive of human qualities, companionship. As we sit together in the hush of his snugery of an evening, surrounded by guns, fishing lines and old prints, there are times when we scarcely exchange a dozen words between dinner and bedtime, and yet we have all the time a keen and satisfying sense of companionship. It is John Saunders' gift. Companionship seems quietly to ooze out of him, without the need of words.

And occasionally we have as third in those evening conclaves a big, shaggy, broad-faced young merchant of the same kidney. In he drops with a nod and a smile, and takes his place in the smoke cloud of our meditations, radiating without the effort of speech that good thing—humanity; though one must not forget the one subject on which now and again the good Charlie Webster achieves eloquence in spite of himself—duck shooting.

John Saunders' subject is shark fishing. Duck shooting and shark fishing. It is enough. Here, for sensible men, is a sufficient basis for lifelong friendship, and unwavering, inexhaustible companionship.

It was in this piece of John Saunders' snugery one July evening in 1903, the three of us being duly met and ensconced in our respective armchairs, that we got onto the subject of buried treasure. It was I who started us off by asking John what he knew about buried treasure.

At this John laughed his funny little quiet laugh. "Buried treasure?" he said; "well, I have little doubt that the islands are full of it—if one only knew how to get at it."

"Seriously?" I asked.

"Certainly. Why not? Weren't these islands for nearly three centuries the stamping ground of all the pirates of the Spanish Main? Morgan was here. Blackbeard was here. Two very governors themselves were little better than pirates. This room we are sitting in was the den of one of the biggest rogues of them all—John Tinker—the governor when Bruce was here building Fort Montague at the east end yonder; building it against pirates, and little else but pirates at the Government house all the time. A great old time Tinker gave the poor fellow. You can read all about it in his 'Memoirs.' Nassau was the rendezvous for all the cutthroats of the Caribbean sea. Here they came in with their loot, their doubloons and pieces of eight; and John's eyes twinkled with enjoyment of the rich old romantic words, as though they were old port.

"Here they squandered much of it, no doubt, but they couldn't squander it all. Some of them were thrifty knaves, too, and those, looking around for some place of safety, would naturally tuck it in the bush. The negroes keep their little hoards there to this day. "It is their form of stocking," put in Charlie Webster.

"Precisely. Well, as I was saying, those old fellows would bury their hoards in some cave or other, and then go off—and get hanged. Their ghosts perhaps came back. But their money is still here, lots of it, you bet your life."

"Do they ever make any finds?" I asked.

"Nothing big that I know of. A jug full of old coins now and then. I



Those Old Fellows Would Bury Their Hoards.

found one a year or two ago in my garden here—buried down among the roots of that old fig tree."

"Then," put in Charlie, "there was that mysterious stranger over at North Cay. He's supposed to have got away with quite a pile."

"Tell me about him," said I.

"Well, there used to be an old eccentric character in the town here—a halfbreed by the name of Andrews. John will remember him—"

John nodded.

"He used to go around all the time with a big umbrella, and muttering to himself. We used to think him half crazy. Gone so brooding over that very subject of buried treasure. Better look out, young man!"—smiling at me.

"He used to be always grumbling about in the bush. Well, several years ago there came a visitor from New York, and he got thick with the old fellow. They used to go about a lot together, and were often on some so-called fishing trips for days on end. Actually, it is believed, they were

after something on North Cay. At all events some months afterward the New Yorker disappeared as he had come and has not been heard from since. But since then they have found a sort of brick vault over there which has evidently been excavated. I have seen it myself. A sort of walled chamber. There, it's supposed the New Yorker found something or other. That's the story for what it's worth."

As Charlie finished John slapped his knee.

"The very thing for you!" he said; "why have I never thought of it before?"

"What do you mean, John?" we both asked.

"Why down at the office I've got the very thing. A pity I haven't got it here. You must come in and see it tomorrow."

"What on earth is it? Why do you keep us guessing?"

"Why, it's an old manuscript that came into my hands a short time ago, Charlie, you remember old Wicks—old Billy Wicks—Wrecker Wicks, they called him—"

"I should say I do. A wonderful old villain—"

"But the document, for heaven's sake," I said. "The document first; the story will keep."

"Well, they were pulling down Wicks' own house just lately, and out of the rafters there fell a roll of paper, purporting to be the account of the burying of a certain treasure, telling the place where it is buried, and giving directions for finding it—"

John. "I'm inclined to think it's a hoax. Someone trying to fool the old fellow. . . . But, boys, it's bedtime, anyhow. Come down to the office in the morning and we'll look it over."

So our meeting broke up for the time being, and taking my candle I went upstairs, to dream of caves overflowing with goldpieces, and John Tinker, fierce and mustachioed, standing over me, a cut-throat between his teeth and a revolver in each hand.

CHAPTER II.

The Narrative of Henry P. Tobias, ex-Pirate, as Dictated on His Death-bed, in the Year of Our Lord 1859. The good John had scarcely made his leisurely, distinguished appearance at his desk on the morning when I too entered by one door and Charlie Webster by the other.

"Now for the document," we both exclaimed in a breath.

"Here it is," he said, taking up a rather grimy-looking roll of foolscap from in front of him, which, as he pointed out, was evidently the work of a person of very little education, and began to read as follows:

County of Travis, State of Texas, December 1859. Feeling my end is near, I make the following statement of my own free will and without solicitation, in full exercise of all my faculties, and feel that I am doing my duty by so doing.

I was born in the city of Liverpool, England, on the 5th day of December 1780. My father was a seaman and when I was young I followed the same occupation. And it happened, that when, on a passage from Spain to the West Indies, our ship was attacked by free-traders, as they called themselves, but they were pirates.

We all did our best, but were overpowered, and the whole crew, except three, were killed. I was one of the three that did not kill. They carried us on board their ship and kept us until next day when they asked us to join them. They tried to get us to join them willingly, but we would not, when they became enraged and loaded three cannon and lashed each one of us before the mouth of each cannon and told us to take our choice to join them, as they would touch the guns and that damn quick. It is useless to say we accepted everything before death, so we came one of the pirates' crew. Both of my companions were killed in less than six months, but I was with them for more than two years, in which time we collected a vast quantity of money from different ships we captured and we buried a great amount in two different lots. I helped to bury it with my own hands. The location of which it is my purpose to point out, so that it can be found without trouble in the Bahama Islands. After I had been with them for more than two years, we were attacked by a large warship and our commander told us to fight for our lives, as it would be death if we were taken. But the guns of our ship were too small for the warship, so our ship soon began to sink, when the man-of-war ran alongside of our vessel and tried to board us, but we were sinking too fast, so she had to haul off again, when our vessel sank with everything on board, and I escaped by swimming under the stern of the ship, as every sailor, without being seen, and holding on to the ship until dark, when I swam to a portion of the wrecked vessel floating not far away. And on that I floated. The next morning the ship was not seen. I was picked up by a passing vessel the next day as a shipwrecked seaman.

And let me say here, I know that no one escaped alive from our vessel except myself and those that were taken by the man-of-war. And those were all executed as pirates—so I know that no other man knows of the treasure except myself and it must be in where we buried it until today and unless you get it through this statement it will remain there always and do no one any good.

Therefore, it is my duty to trace it up and get it for your own benefit, as well as others, so delay not, but act as soon as possible.

I will now describe the places, locations, marks, etc., etc., so plainly that it can be found, without any trouble.

The first is a sum of one million and a half dollars (\$1,500,000).

At this point John paused. We all took a long breath, and Charlie Webster gave a soft whistle and smacked his lips.

"A million and a half dollars. What ho!"

Then I happened to cast my eye through the open door, caught sight of a face gazing through the ironwork of the outer office with a fixed and glittering expression, a face anything but prepossessing, the face of a half-breed, deeply pockmarked, with a coarse hook nose and evil-looking eyes, unnaturally close together. It was evident from his expression that he had not missed a word of the reading.

"There is someone in the outer office," I said, and John rose and went out.

"Good morning, Mr. Saunders," said an unpleasantly soft and cringing voice.

"Good morning," said John, somewhat grumpily, "what is it you want?"

It was some detail of account, which, being dispatched, the man shuffled off, with evident reluctance, casting a long, inquisitive look at us seated at the desk, and John, taking up the manuscript once more, resumed:

... a sum of one million and one half dollars—buried at a cove known as Dead Men's Shoes, near Nassau, in the Bahama Islands. About fifty feet (15 ft.) south of this Dead Men's Shoes is a rock, on which we cut the form of a compass.

And twenty feet (20 ft.) East from the cross is another rock on which we cut a cross (X). Under this rock it is buried four feet (4 ft.) deep.

The other is a sum of one million dollars (\$1,000,000). It is buried on what was known as Short Shift Island, on the highest point of this Short Shift Island is a large cabbage wood stump and twenty feet (20 ft.) south of that stump is the treasure, buried five feet (5 ft.) deep and can be found without difficulty. Short Shift Island is a place where passing vessels stop to get fresh water. No great distance from Nassau, so it can be easily found.

The first pot was taken from a Spanish warship and it is in Spanish silver dollars.

The other on Short Shift Island is in different kinds of money, taken from different ships of different nations—it is all good money.

Now friends, I have told you all that is necessary for you to know to recover these treasures and I leave it in your hands and it is my request that when you read this, you will at once take steps to recover it, and when you get it, it is my wish that you use it in a way most good to yourself and others. This is all I ask.

I am, truly your friend, HENRY P. TOBIAS.

"Henry P. Tobias?" said Charlie Webster. "Never heard of him. Did you, John?"

"Never!"

And then there was a stir in the outer office. Someone was asking for the secretary of the treasury. So John rose.

"I must get to work now, boys. We can talk it over tonight." And then, handing me the manuscript: "Take it home with you, if you like, and look it over at your leisure."

As Charlie Webster and I passed out into the street I noticed the fellow of the sinister pockmarked visage standing near the window of the inner office. The window was open, and anyone standing outside could easily have heard everything that passed inside. As the fellow caught my eye he smiled unpleasantly and slunk off down the street.

"Who is that fellow?" I asked Charlie. "He's a queer-looking specimen." "Yes! he's no good. Yet he's more

half-witted than bad, perhaps. His face is against him, poor devil."

And we went our ways till the evening, I to post home to the further study of the narrative. There, seated on the pleasant veranda, I went over it carefully, sentence by sentence. While I was reading, someone called me indoors. I put down the manuscript on the little bamboo table at my side and went in. When I returned a few moments afterward the manuscript was gone!

"Who is That Fellow?" I Asked Charlie.

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

"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.

"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 need be. That's all to the good. Particularly if you strike any dirty weather. But let me give you one word of advice: Be kind, of 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?"

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unlikely craft we finally decided on a two-masted schooner of trim but solid build, the Maggie Darling, 42 feet over all and 18 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 convale 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 ruminate 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 need be. That's all to the good. Particularly if you strike any dirty weather. But let me give you one word of advice: Be kind, of 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?"

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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 intonation:

"The wonderful works of God."

It was my unvetted 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. Spenger," 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 practical flavor, in fact; and my friend of "the wonderful works of God" looked up with a deprecating air. Its effect on George was nil, 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 shabby deckhand being apparently taken in as an 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

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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.

"A sucking fish!" said Tom. "That's good luck; and he proceeded to turn over the poor creature and cut from his back, immediately below his head, a flat inch and a half of skin lined and stamped like a rubber sole—the device by which he held on 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 north-west wind; the wind is just right—nor-nor-east—and there is no mascot like it, specially when—" Old Tom hesitated, with a sly 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 north-west 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, sar, 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?"