

# PIECES 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

After a while, when we have run the gamut of all our ardors and our dreams, solitude comes to seem the one excellent thing, the summum bonum.

I murmured that he certainly seemed to have come to the right place for it. "Very true, indeed," he assented, with a courtly inclination of his head, as though I had said something profound; "very true, indeed, and yet, wasn't it the great Bacon who said: 'Whoever is delighted with solitude is either a beast or a god'—and this particular solitude, I confess, sometimes seems to me a little too much like that enforced solitude of the Pontic marshes of which Ovid wailed and whimpered in the deaf ears of Augustus."

I could not help noticing at last as he talked on with fantastic magnificence, the odd contrast between his speech and the almost equally fantastic poverty of his clothing. The suit he wore, though still preserving a certain elegance of cut, was so worn and patched and stained that a negro would hardly have accepted it as a gift; and his almost painful emaciation gave him generally the appearance of an animated framework of ribs and bones, startlingly embodying the voice and the manners of a prince. Yet the shabby tie about his neck was bound by a ring, in which was set a turquoise of great size and beauty.

Presently, as we loitered on through the palms, we came upon two negroes chopping away with their machetes, trimming up the debris of broken and decaying palm fans. They were both sturdy, ferocious-looking fellows, but one of them was a veritable giant.

"Behold by bodyguard!" said my magnificent friend, with the usual pos-



"Behold My Bodyguard!"

sessive wave of his hand; "my Swissers, my Janissaries, so to say." The negroes stopped working, touched their great straw hats, and flashed their spittle-filled teeth in a delighted smile. Evidently they were used to their master's ways of talking, and were devoted to him.

"This chap here is Erebus," said my host, and the appropriateness of the name was apparent, for he was certainly the blackest negro I had ever seen, as superbly black as some women are superbly white.

"And this is Samson. Let's have a look at your muscles, Samson—there's a good boy!"

And, with grins of pleasure, Samson proudly stripped off his thin calico jacket and exposed a torso of terrific power, but beautiful in its play of muscles as that of a god.

Leaving Samson and Erebus to continue their savage play with their machetes, we walked on through the palms, which here gave a particularly Junglike appearance to the scene from the fact of their being bowed out from their roots and sweeping upward in great curves. One involuntarily looked for a man-eating tiger at any moment, standing striped and splendid in one of the openings.

Then suddenly to the right, there came a flash of level green, suggesting lawns, and the outlines of a house, partly covered with brilliant purple flowers—a marvelous splash of color.

"Bougainvillea! Bougainvillea spectabilis—of course, you know it. Was there ever such a purple? Not Solomon is all his glory, of course. And here we are at the house of King Alcinoos—a humble version of it indeed."

It was a large rambling stucco house, somewhat decayed looking,

and evidently built on the ruins of an older building. We came upon it at a broad Italian-looking loggia, supported by stone pillars bowed in with vines—very cool and pleasant—with mossy slabs for its floor, here and there tropical ferns set out in tubs, some wicker chairs standing about, and a table at one side on which two little barelegged negro girls were busy setting out yellow fruit, and other appurtenances of luncheon, on a dazzling white cloth.

"My daughter," explained my host, "has gone to the town on an errand. She will be back at any moment. Meanwhile, I shall introduce you to a cooling drink of my own manufacture, with a basis of that coconut milk which I need not ask you whether you appreciate, recalling the pleasant circumstance of our first acquaintance."

Motioning me to a seat, and pushing toward me a box of cigarettes, he went indoors, leaving me to take in the stretch of beautiful garden in front of me, the trees of which seemed literally to be hung with gold—for they were mainly of orange and grapefruit ranged round a spacious beautifully kept lawn with the regularity of sumptuous decoration. In the middle of the lawn, a little rocky fountain threw up a jet of silver, falling with a tinkling murmur into a broad circular basin from which emerged the broad leaves and splendid pink blossoms of an Egyptian lotus. Certainly it was no far-fetched allusion of my classical friend to speak of the garden of Alcinoos; particularly connected as it was in my mind with the white bench of a desert isle, and that marble statue in the moonlight.

As I sat dreaming, bathed in the golden-green light of the orange trees, and lulled by the tinkling of the fountain, my host returned with our drinks, his learned disquisition on which I will spare the reader, highly interesting and characteristic though it was.

Suffice it that it was a drink, whatever its ingredients—and there was certainly somewhere a powerful "stetek" in it—that seemed to have been drawn from some cool grotto of the virgin earth, so thrillingly cold and invigorating it was.

While we were slowly sipping it, and smoking our cigarettes, in an unaccountable pause of my friend's fanciful verbosity, I almost jumped in my chair at the sound of a voice indoors. It was instantly followed by a light and rapid tread, and the sound of a woman's dress. Then a tall, beautiful young woman emerged on the loggia.

"Ah! there you are!" cried my host, as we both rose; and then turning to me, "this is my daughter—Calypso. Her real name I assure you—none of my nonsense—doesn't she look it? Allow me, my dear, to introduce—Mr. Ulysses"—for we had not yet exchanged each other's names.

I am a wretched actor, and I am bound to say that she proved herself no better. For she gave a decided start as she turned those glowing eyes on me, and the lovely olive of her cheeks glowed as with submerged rose-color. Our embarrassment did not escape the father.

"Why, you know each other already!" he exclaimed, with natural surprise. "Not exactly—I was grateful for the sudden nerve with which I was able to hasten to the relief of her lovely distress—but possibly Miss-Calypso recalls as naturally as I do, our momentary meeting in Sweeney's store, one evening. I had no expectation of course, that she should meet me again under such pleasant circumstances as this."

She gave me a grateful look as she took my hand, and with it—or was it only my eager imagination?—a shy little pressure, again as of gratitude.

I had tried to get into my voice my assurance that, of course, I remembered no other more recent meeting—though, naturally, as she had given that little start in the doorway, there had flashed on me again the picture of her standing, moonlit, in another resounding doorway, and of the wild start she had given then, as the golden pieces streamed from her lovely surprised mouth, and her lifted hands. And her eyes—I could have sworn—were the living eyes of Jack Harkaway! Had she a brother, I wondered. Yet my mind was too dazzled and confused with her nearness to pursue the speculation.

As we sat down to luncheon, waited upon by the little barelegged black children—waited on, too, surprisingly well, despite the contortions of their primitive embarrassment—my host once more resumed his character of

the classic king welcoming the storm-tossed stranger to his board.

"Far wanderer," he said, raising his glass to me, "eat of what our board affords, welcome without question of name and nation. But if, when the food and wine have done their genial office, and the weariness of your journey has fallen from you, you should feel stirred to tell us somewhat of yourself and your wanderings, what manner of men call you kinsman, in what fair land is your home and the place of your loved ones, be sure that we shall count the tale good hearing, and, for our part, make exchange in like fashion of ourselves and the passage of our days in this lonely isle."

We all laughed as he ended—himself with a whinny of laughter. For, odd as such discourse may sound in the reading, it was uttered so whimsically, and in so spirited and humorous a style that I assure you it was very captivating.

"You should have been an actor, my lord Alcinoos," I said, laughing. I seemed already curiously at home, seated there at that table with this fantastic stranger and that being out of fairyland toward whom I dared only turn my eyes now and again by stealth. The strange fellow had such a giggle, twisting and grimacing with embarrassment.

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her honey-golden voice for the base purpose of mentioning him.

"Impossible!" I cried; "he is long since safe in Nassau jail." "Oh, not lately," she answered to our interrogative surprise, and giving a swift embarrassed look at her father, which I at once connected with the secret of the doubloons.

"Seriously, Calypso?" asked her father, with a certain stern affection, as thinking of her safety. "On one of your errands to town?" And then, turning to me, he said: "Sir Ulysses, you have spoken well, and your speech has been that free, open-hearted speech that wins its way alike among the Hyperboreans that dwell in frozen twilight near the northern star, and those dwarfed and swarthy intelligences that blacken in the fierce sunlight of that fearful axle we call the equator. Therefore, I will make return to you of speech no less frank and true . . ."

He took a puff at his cigar, and then continued: "I should not risk this confession, but that it is easy to see that you belong to the race of Eternal Children, to which, you may have realized, my daughter and I also belong. This adventure of yours after buried treasure has not seriously been for the doubloons and pieces of eight, the million dollars, and the million and a half dollar themselves, but for the fun of going after them, sailing the unknown seas, coral islands, and all that sort of blessed moonshine. Well, Calypso and I are just like that, and I am going to tell you something exciting—we too have our buried treasure. It is nothing like so magnificent in amount as yours, or your Henry P. Tobias'—and where it is at this particular moment I know as little as yourself. In fact it is Calypso's secret . . ."

I looked across at Calypso, but her eyes were far beyond capture, in unplumeted seas. "I will show you presently where I found it, among the rocks near by—now a haunt of wild bees.

"Can you ever forget that passage in the Georgics? It makes the honey taste sweeter to me every time I taste it. We must have some of it for dinner, by the way, Calypso."

I could not help laughing, and so, for a moment, breaking up the story. The dear fellow! Was there any business of human importance from which he could not be diverted by a quotation from Homer or Virgil or Shakespeare? But he was soon in the saddle again.

"Well," he resumed, "some day, some seven years ago, in a little cove, some orange trees, grubbing about as I am fond of doing, I came upon a beautiful old box of beaten copper, sunk

deep among the roots of a fig tree. It was strong, but it seemed too dainty for a pirate—some great lady's jewel box more likely—Calypso shall show it to us presently. On opening it—what do you think? It spilled over with golden doubloons—among which were submerged some fine jewels, such as this ring you see me wearing. Actually, it was no great treasure, at a monetary calculation—certainly no fortune—but from our romantic point of view, as belonging to the race of Eternal Children, it was El Dorado, Alcinoos's lamp, the mines of Peru, the whole sunken Spanish Main, glimmering fifty fathoms deep in brother-of-pearl and the moon. It was the very Secret Rose of Romance; and, also, perhaps, all told, it might be some five thousand guineas, or—what would you say?—twenty-five odd thousand dollars; Calypso knows better than I, and she, as I said, alone knows where it is now hid, and how much of it now remains."

He paused to relight his cigar, while Calypso and I—well, he began again: "Now my daughter and I" and he paused to look at her fondly, "though of the race of Eternal Children, are not without some of the innocent wisdom which Holy Writ countenances as the self-protection of the innocent—Calypso, I may say, is particularly endowed with this quality, needing it as she does especially for the guardianship for her foolish talkative old father, who, by the way, is almost at the end of his tale. So, when this old chest flashed its bewildering dazzle upon us, we being poor folk, were not more dazzled than afraid. For—like the poor man in the fable—such good for-

ture was all too likely to be our undoing, should it come to the ears of the great, or the indigent criminal. The 'great' in our thought was, I am ashamed to say, the sacred British treasury, by an ancient law of which forty per cent of all 'treasure-trove' belongs to his majesty the king. The 'indigent criminal' was represented by—well, our colored (and not so very much colored) neighbors. Of course we ought to have sent the whole treasure to your friend, John Saunders of his Britannic majesty's government at Nassau, but—Well, de didn't. Some day, perhaps, you will put in a word for us with him, as you drink his old port, in the songery. Meanwhile, we had an idea, Calypso and I—"

He paused—for Calypso had involuntarily made a gesture, as though pleading to be spared the whole revelation—and then with a smile, continued: "We determined to hide away our little hoard where it would be safe from our neighbors, and dispose of it according to our needs with a certain tradesman in the town whom we thought we could trust—a tradesman, who, by the way, quite naturally levies a little tax upon us for his security. No blame to him! I have lived far too long to be hard on human nature."

"John Sweeney?" I asked, looking over at Calypso with eyes that dared at last to smile. "The very same, my Lord Ulysses," answered my friend. "And so I came to understand that Mr. Sweeney's reluctance in selling me that doubloon was no stouter as it had, at the moment, appeared; that it had in fact come of a loyalty which was already for me the most precious of loyalties."

"Then," said I, "as a fitting conclusion to the confidence you have reposed in me, my Lord Alcinoos, if Miss Calypso would have the kindness to let us have a sight of that chest of beaten copper of which you spoke, I would like to restore to you, that was once a part of its contents, wherever the rest of them" (and I confess that I paused a moment) "may be in hiding."

And I took from my pocket the sacred doubloon that I had bought from John Sweeney—may Heaven have mercy upon his soul!—for sixteen dollars and seventy-five cents, on that immortal evening.

CHAPTER IV. In Which the "King" Dreams a Dream—and Tells Us About It. The afternoon, under the spell of its various magic, had been passing all too swiftly, and at length I grew reluctantly aware that it was time for me to go. King Alcinoos raised his hand with a gesture that could not well be denied. That led me—his invitation being accepted without further parley—to mention the idea I had conceived as I came along, of exploring those curious old ruined buildings.

"Tomorrow," he announced, "tomorrow we shall begin—there is not a moment to lose. We will send Samson with a message to your captain—there is no need for you to go yourself; time is too precious—and in a week, who knows but that Monte Cristo shall seem like a pauper and a penny gaw in comparison with the fantasies of our fearful world."

So, for that evening, all was laughingly decided. In a week's time, it was agreed, we should have difficulty in recognizing each other. We should be so disguised in cloth of gold, and so blinding to look upon with rings and ropes of pearls.

When we met at breakfast next morning, glad to see one another again as few people are at breakfast, it was evident that, as far as the "king" was concerned, our dream had lost nothing in the night watches. On the contrary, his wings had grown to an amazing span and iridescence.

Calypso, it transpired, had certain household matters—of which the "king" of course was ever divinely oblivious—that would take her on an errand into the town. Those disposed of, we two eternal children were at liberty to be as foolish as we pleased. The "king" bowed his unworldly head, as kings, from time immemorial have bowed their diadems before the quiet command of the domesticities; and it was arranged that I should be Calypso's escort on her errand.

So we set forth in the freshness of the morning, and the woods that had been so black and bewildering at my coming opened before us in easy paths, and all that tropical squalor that had been foul with sweat and insects seemed strangely vernal to me, so that I could hardly believe that I had trodden that way before. And for our companion all the way along—or, at least for my other companion—was the Wonder of the World, the beautiful strangeness of living, and that marvel of a man's days upon the earth which lies in not knowing what a day shall bring forth, if only we have a little patience with Time—Time, with those gold keys at his girdle, ready, at any turn of the ways, to unlock the hidden treasure that is to be the meaning of our lives.

How should I try to express what it was to walk by her side, knowing all that we both knew—knowing, or glidingly believing that I knew, how her heart, with every breath she took, vibrated like a living fower, with waves of color, changing from moment to moment like a happy, trembling dawn. To know—yet not to say! Yes! we were both at that divine moment which hangs like a dewdrop in the morning sun—ah! all too ready to fall. Oh!

keep it poised, in that miraculous balance, 'twixt time and eternity—for this crystal made of light and dew is the meaning of the life of man and

woman upon the earth.

As we came to the borders of the wood near the edge of the little town we called a counsel of two. As the outcome of it we concluded that, having in mind the "king's" ambitious plans for our cloth-of-gold future, and for other obvious reasons, it was better,

that she went into the town alone—I to await her in the shadow of the mahogany tree.

As she turned to leave me she drew up from her bosom a little bag that hung by a silver chain, and opening it drew out, with a laugh—a golden doubloon!

I sprang toward her; but she was too quick for me, and laughingly vanished through an opening in the trees. I was not to kiss her that day.

Calypso was so long coming back that I began to grow anxious—was, indeed, on the point of going down into the town in search of her, when she suddenly appeared, rather out of breath and evidently a little excited—as though, in fact, she had been running away from something. She caught me by the arm with a laugh.

"Do you want to see your friend Tobias?" she said. "Tobias? Impossible!" "Come here," and she led me a yard or two back the way she had come, and then looked through the trees.

"Gone!" she said, "but he was there a minute or two ago—or at least some one that is his photograph—and of course he's there yet, hidden in the brush, and probably got his eyes on us all the time. Did you see that seven-year apple tree move?"

"His favorite tree," I laughed. "Hardly strong enough to hang him on, though." And I realized that she was King Alcinoos's daughter.

We crouched lower for a moment or two but the seven-year apple tree didn't move again, and we agreed that there was no use in waiting for Tobias to show his hand.

"But what made you think it was Tobias?" I asked, "and how did it all happen?" "I could hardly fail to recognize him from your flattering description," she answered, "and indeed it all happened rather like another experience of mine. I had gone into Sweeney's store—you remember?—and was just paying my bill."

"In the usual coilage?" I ventured. She gave me a long, whimsical smile—once more her father's daughter.

"That, I'm afraid, was the trouble," she answered; "for as I laid my money down on the counter I suddenly noticed that there was a person at the back of the store."

"A person?" I interrupted. "Yes! Suppose we say a pocket-marked person; was it you?" "What a memory you have for details," I parried; "and then?" "Well! I took my change and managed to whisper a word to Sweeney—a good friend, remember—and came out. I took a short cut back, but the 'person' that had stood in the back of the store seemed to know the way almost better than I—so well that he got ahead of me. He was walking quietly this way and so slowly that I had at last to overtake him. He said nothing, just watched me as if interested in the way I was going—but, I'm ashamed to say, he rather frightened me! And here I am."

"Well, then," I said, "let's hurry home and talk it over with the 'king.'" The "king," as I had realized, was a practical "romantic" and at once took the matter seriously, leaving—as might have surprised some of those who had only heard him talk—his conversational fantasies on the theme to come later.

Calypso, however, had the first word.

"I always told you, dad," she said—and the word "dad" on the lips of that statuesque girl—who always seemed ready to take that inspired framework of ribs and bones and talking music into her protecting arms—seemed quite the quaintest of paradoxes—I always told you, dad, what would happen, with your fairy tales of the doubloons."

"Quite true, my dear," he answered, "but isn't a fairy tale worth paying for?—worth a little trouble? And remember, if you will allow me, two



She Drew Up From Her Bosom a Little Bag That Hung by a Silver Chain, and, Opening It, Drew Out, With a Laugh—a Golden Doubloon.

things about fairy tales; there must always be some evil fairy in them, some dragon or such like; and there is always—a happy ending. Now the dragon enters at last—in the form of Tobias; and we should be happy on that very account. It shows that the race of dragons is not, as I feared, extinct. And as for the happy ending, we will arrange it, after lunch—for which, by the way, you are somewhat late."

After lunch the "king" resumed, but in a brief and entirely practical vein: "We are about to be besieged," he said. "The woods, probably, are already thick with spies. For the moment we must suspend operations on our Golconda"—his name for the ruins that we were to excavate—and, as our present purpose—yours no less than ours, friend Ulysses—is to confuse Tobias, my suggestion is this: that you walk with me a mile or two to the northward. There is an entertaining mangrove swamp I should like to show you, and also you can give me your opinion of an idea of mine that you will understand all the better when I have taken you over the ground."

So we walked beyond the pines, down onto a low, interminable flat land of mud marshes and mangrove trees—so like that in which Charlie Webster had shot the snake and the wild duck—that only Charlie could have seen any difference.

"Now," said the "king," "do you see a sort of river there, overgrown with mangroves and palmettos?" "Yes," I answered, "almost—though it's so choked up it's almost impossible to say."

"Well," said the "king," "that's the idea; you haven't forgotten those old ruins; you are going to explore. You remember how choked up they are. Well, this was the covered waterway, the secret creek, by which the pirates—John Teach, or whoever it was; perhaps John P. Tobias himself—used to land their loot. It's so overgrown nowadays that no one can find the entrance but myself and a friend or two; do you understand?"

We walked a little farther, and then at length came to the bank of the creek the "king" had indicated. This we followed for half a mile or so, till we heard the murmur of the sea.

"We needn't go any farther," said the "king," "it's the same all the way along to the mouth—all overgrown as you see, all the way, right out to the 'white water' as they call it—which is four miles of shoal sand and which a nor'easter is liable to blow dry for a week on end. Naturally it's a hard place to find, and a hard place to get off!—and only two or three persons besides Sweeney—all of them our friends—know the way in. Tobias may know of it; but to know it is one thing, to find it is another matter. I could hardly be sure of it myself—if I were standing in from the sea, with nothing but the long palmetto-fringed coast line to go by."

"Now you see it? I brought you here, because words—"

"Even yours, dear 'king,'" I laughed. "—could not explain what I suggest for us to do. You are interested in Tobias. Tobias is interested in you. I am interested in you both. And Calypso and I have a treasure to guard."

"I have still a treasure to seek," I said, half to myself. "Now, to be practical. We can assume that Tobias is on the watch. I don't mean that he's around here just now, for before we left I spoke to Samson and Erebus and they will pass the word to four men blacker than themselves; therefore we can assume that this square mile or so is for the moment 'to ourselves.' But beyond our fence you may rely that Tobias and his myrmidons—in that the word" he asked with a concession to his natural foolishness—"are there."

"So," he went on, "I want you to go down to your boat tomorrow morning to say good-by to the commandant, the parson and the postmaster; to haul up your sail and head for Nassau. Call in on Sweeney on the way, buy an extra box of cartridges, and say Dieu et mon Droit—it is our password; he will understand, but if he shouldn't, explain in your own way that you come from me, and that we rely upon him to look out for our interest. Then head straight for Nassau; but, about eight o'clock, or anywhere around twilight, turn about and head—well, we'll map it out on the chart at home—anywhere up to eight miles along the coast till you come to a light low down right on the edge of the water. As soon as you see it drop anchor; then wait till morning—the very beginning of dawn. As soon as you can see land look out for Samson—within a hundred yards of you—the land will look alike to you. Only make the captain head straight for Samson, and just as you think you are going to run ashore— Well, you will see!"

(Continued Next Saturday.)

Advance In Milk Prices To Bring Action In Washington

Tacoma, Wash., Aug. 1.—The new state law passed by the last legislature, prohibiting combinations or agreements to fix the price of dairy products, may be brought into play here, if an attempt is made by the Pierce County Milk Producers' association or Tacoma distributors to fix a new price for milk and cream next week, it developed today.

Tacoma distributors announced yesterday that the price of milk and cream would advance next week—milk from 12½ to 15 cents a quart and cream from 15 to 17½ cents a half pint.

\$\$\$ Keep 'em In The Circle \$\$\$