

# 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 VIII.

### In Which I Understand the Feelings of a Ghost.

So, I surmised, I had been underground a whole day and two nights, and this was the morning of the second day after Calypso's disappearance. What had been happening to her all this time? My flesh crept at the thought, and, with that daylight stealing in like a living presence, and the sound and breath of the sea, my anguish returned a hundredfold.

As I stood on the little rocky platform outside the door through which I had burned my way, and looked down into the glimmering chasm beneath, and heard the fresh voice of the sea busily rumbling and reverberating about hidden grottoes and channels, all that Calypso was to me came back with the keenness of a sword through my heart. Ah! there was my treasure—as I had known when my eyes first beheld her—compared with which that gold and silver in there, whose gleam had made me momentarily distraught, was but so much dust and ashes. Awe-struck as I had sought it, what was it compared to one glance of her eyes? What if in the same hour, I had lost my true treasure, and found the false? At the thought, that glittering heap became abhorrent to me, and, without looking back, I sought for some way by which I could descend.

As my eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, I saw that there were some shallow steps cut diagonally in the rock, and down these I had soon made my way, to find myself in a roomy corridor, so much like that in which I had seen Calypso standing in the moonlight, that, for a moment, I dreamed it was the same, and started to run down it, thinking, indeed, that my troubles were over—that in another moment I would emerge through that enchanted door and face the sea.

But alas! instead of a broad shining doorway, and open arms of freedom widespread for me to leap into, I came at last to a mere long narrow slit—through which I could gaze as a man gazes through a prison window at the sky.

The entrance had once been wide and free, but a mass of rock had fallen from above and blocked it up, leaving only a long crack through which the tides passed to and fro.

I was still in my trap; it seemed more terrible than ever, now that I could see freedom so close, her very voice calling to me, singing the morning song of the sea. But in the caverns behind me, I heard another mocking sound, and I felt a cold breath on my cheek, for death stood by my side again.

"The treasure!" he whispered, "I need you to guard that. The treasure you have risked all to win—the treasure for which you have lost—your treasure! You cannot escape. Go back and count your gold. It is all good money! Ha! ha! It is all good money!"

The illusion seemed so real to me that I burst aloud "I will not die! I will not die!"—cried it so loud, that anyone in a passing boat might have heard me, and shuddered, wondering what poor ghost it was wallowing among the rocks.

But the fright had done me good, and I nervously myself for another effort. If only I could wriggle past that contraction in the middle, I should be safe. And if I stuck fast midway? But the more I measured the width with my eye, the less the narrowing seemed to be. To be so slightly perceptible, it could hardly be enough to make much difference. Caution whispered that it might be enough to make the difference between life and death. But already my choice of those two august alternatives was so limited as hardly to be called a choice. On the one hand, I could worm my way back through the caves and tunnels through which I had passed, and try my luck again at the other end.

"With half a dozen matches," sneered a voice that sounded like Tobias—"Precedently" . . . and the horror of it was more than I dared face again anyway. So there was nothing for it but this aperture, hardly wider than one of those deep stone slits that stood for windows in a Norman castle. It was my last chance, and I meant to take it like a man.

I stood for a moment nervously myself and taking deep breaths, as though I expected to take but few more. Then, my left arm extended, I entered sideways, and began to edge myself along. It was easy enough for a yard or two, after which it was plain that it was beginning to narrow. Very slightly indeed, but still a little. However, I could still go on, and I could still go back, I went on—more slowly it is true, yet still I progressed. But the rock was perceptibly closer to me. I had to struggle harder. It was beginning to hug me—very gently—but it was be-

man's eyes on Tobias—for, of course, it was he.

"You—coward!" I heard his voice roar across the rapidly diminishing distance between the two boats, for the sloop was running with power as well as sails.

Meanwhile, the men had lashed Calypso to the mast, and even in my agony my eyes recorded the glory of her beauty as she stood proudly there—the great sails spread above her, and the sea for her background.

"Now, do your worst," cried Tobias, his evil face white as wax in the sunlight.

"Fire, fire—don't be afraid," rang out Calypso's voice, like singing gold.

At the same instant, as she called Tobias sprang toward her with raised revolver.

"Another word, and I fire," shouted the voice of the brute.

But the rifle that never missed its mark spoke again, Tobias' arm fell shattered, and he staggered away screaming. Still once more, Charlie Webster's gun spoke, and the staggering figure fell with a crash on the deck.

"Now, boys, ready," I heard Charlie's voice roar out again, as the sloop tore alongside the schooner—where the rest of the negro crew with raised arms had fallen on their knees, crying for mercy.

All this I saw from the water, as I swam wildly toward the two boats, which now had closed on each other, a mass of thundering canvas, and screaming and cursing men—and Calypso there, like a beautiful statue, still lashed to the mast, a proud smile on her lovely lips.

Another moment, and Charlie had sprung aboard, and, seizing a knife from one of the screaming negroes, he cut her free.

His deep calm voice came to me over the water.

"That's what I call courage," he said, "I could never have done it."

"The 'king' had been right. He knew his daughter."

By this I was hearing the boats though as yet no one had seen me. They were all too busy with the confusion on deck, where four men lay dead, and three others still kept up their gibberish of fear.

I saw Calypso and Charlie Webster stand a moment looking down at the figure of Tobias, prostrate at their feet.

"I am sorry I had to kill him," I heard Charlie's deep groan. "I meant to keep him for the hangman."

But suddenly I saw him start forward and stamp heavily on something.

"No, you don't," I heard him roar—and I learned afterward that Tobias, though mortally wounded, was not yet dead, and that, as the two had stood looking down on him, they had seen his hand furtively moving toward the fallen revolver that lay a few inches from him on the deck. Just as he had grasped it, Charlie's heavy boot had come down on his wrist. But Tobias was still game.

"Not alive, you English brute!" he was heard to groan out, and, snatching free his wrist too swiftly to be prevented, he had gathered up all his remaining strength, and hurled himself over the side into the sea.

I was but a dozen yards away from him, as he fell; and, as he rose again, it was for his dying eyes to fix with a glare upon me. They dilated with terror, as though he had seen angels, down and sobbed like a child.

"Thank God you are safe—my treasure, my treasure!" was all I could say, after they had lifted me aboard, and I lay face down on the deck, at her feet. Swiftly she knelt by my side, and caressed my shoulder with her dear hand.

All of which—particularly my reference to "my treasure"—must have been much to the bewilderment of the good simple-hearted Charlie, towering, lanoctent-eyed, above us. I believe I stayed a little longer at her feet than I really had need to, for the comfort of her being so near and kind; but, presently, we were all aroused by a voice from the cliffs above. It was the "king," with his bodyguard, Erebus and the crew of the Flamingo—no Sanson, alas! The sound of the firing had reached them in the woods, and they had come hurrying to discover its cause.

So we deferred asking our questions, and telling our several stories, till we were pulled ashore.

As Calypso was folded in her father's arms, he turned to me:

"Didn't I tell you that I knew my daughter?" he said.

"And I told you something too, O king," I replied—my eyes daring at last to rest on Calypso, with the love and pride of my heart.

"And where on earth have you been, young man?" he asked, laughing. "Did Tobias kidnap you too?"

It was very hard, as you will have seen, to astonish the "king."

But, though it was hard to astonish and almost impossible to alarm him, his sense of wonder was quite another matter, and the boyish delight with which he listened to our several stories would have made it worth while to undergo tenfold the perils we had faced. Our stories, said the "king," were quite in the manner of "The Arabian Nights," dovetailing one into the other.

"And now," he added, "we will begin with the 'Story of the Murdered Slave and the Stolen Lady.'"

Calypso told her story simply and in a few words. The first part of it, of which the poor murdered Sanson had been the eloquent witness, needed no further telling. He had done his brave best—poor fellow—but Tobias had had six men with him, and was soon over. Her father had gagged

and bound and carried in a sort of improvised sedan chair; Tobias had done the thing with a certain style and—she had to admit—with absolute courtesy.

When they had gone a mile or two from the house, he had had the gag taken from her mouth, and, on her promise not to attempt to escape (which was, of course, quite impossible) he had also had her unbound, so that her hurried journey through the woods was made as comfortable as possible.

They were making, she had gathered—and as we had surmised—for the northern shore, and, after about a three hours' march, she heard the sound of the sea. On the schooner she had found a cabin all nicely prepared for her—even dainty toilet necessities—and an excellent dinner was served, on some quite pretty china, to her alone. Poor Tobias had seemed bent on showing—as he had said to Tom—that he was not the "carrion" he had thought him.

After dinner, Tobias had respectfully asked leave for a few words with her. He had apologized for his action, but explained that it was necessary—the only way he had left, he said, of protecting his own interests, and safeguarding a treasure which belonged to his living man. It had seemed to her that it was a monomania with him.

While he had been talking, she had made up her mind what she would do. She would tell him the plain truth about her doubloons, and offer him what remained of them as a ransom. This she did, and was able at last last to persuade him that, so far as anyone knew, that was all the treasure there was, and then the digging among the ruins of the old house was a mere fancy of her father's. There might be something there or not—and she went so far as to give her word of honor that, if anything was found, he should have his share of it.

Tobias had seemed impressed, and promised his answer in the morning, leaving her to sleep with a content in her cabin door. She had slept soundly, and awakened only at dawn. As soon as she was up, Tobias had come to her, saying that he had accepted her offer, and asking her to direct him to her treasure.

"This she had done, and, to avoid passing the settlement, they had taken the course round the eastern end of the island. As they had approached the cave (and here Calypso turned a quizzical smile on me, which no one, of course, understood but ourselves), a sloop was seen approaching them from the westward . . . and here she stopped and turned to Charlie Webster.

"Now," said the "king," "we shall hear the story of Apollo—or, let us say, rather Ajax—the Far-Darter—the of the arrow that never missed its mark."

And Charlie Webster, more at home with deeds than words, blushed and blushed through his part of the story, Calypso had been brought on deck, but she had given him courage—he paused to beam on her, a broad-faced admiration, for which he could find no words—and, as he had never yet missed a flying duck at—I forget how many yards Charlie mentioned—well . . . perhaps he oughtn't to have risked it.

And so his story came to an end, amid reassuring applause.

"Now," said the "king," "for the Story of the Disappearing Gentleman and the Lighted Lantern."

And then I told my story as it is already known to the reader, and I have to confess that, when I came to the chestful of doubloons and pieces of eight, I had a very attentive audience. The "king" was for starting off that very night. But, reminded of the difficult situation in which the treasure still lay, he was persuaded to wait till the morrow.

"What dawn then," he said, "tomorrow—what time, the ray-footed dawn . . . so be it. And now I am going to talk to Ajax—the Far-Darter of duck shooting."

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"This she had done, and, to avoid passing the settlement, they had taken the course round the eastern end of the island. As they had approached the cave (and here Calypso turned a quizzical smile on me, which no one, of course, understood but ourselves), a sloop was seen approaching them from the westward . . . and here she stopped and turned to Charlie Webster.

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"But wait!" I cried. "Why did 'Jack Harkaway' go to Nassau?"

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But, after a time, other matters claimed the attention of his other auditors. During the flow of his discourse night had fallen. Calypso and I perceived that we were forgotten—so, by an impulse that seemed to be one, we rose and left them there, and stole out into the garden where the little fountain was dancing like a spirit under the moon, and the orange trees gave out their perfume on the night breeze. I took her hand, and we walked softly out into the moonlight, and looked down at the closed fortress in the little pool. And then we took courage to look into each other's eyes.

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And, with that, she was in my arms, and I felt her heart beating against my side.

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man's eyes on Tobias—for, of course, it was he.

"You—coward!" I heard his voice roar across the rapidly diminishing distance between the two boats, for the sloop was running with power as well as sails.

Meanwhile, the men had lashed Calypso to the mast, and even in my agony my eyes recorded the glory of her beauty as she stood proudly there—the great sails spread above her, and the sea for her background.

"Now, do your worst," cried Tobias, his evil face white as wax in the sunlight.

"Fire, fire—don't be afraid," rang out Calypso's voice, like singing gold.

At the same instant, as she called Tobias sprang toward her with raised revolver.

"Another word, and I fire," shouted the voice of the brute.

But the rifle that never missed its mark spoke again, Tobias' arm fell shattered, and he staggered away screaming. Still once more, Charlie Webster's gun spoke, and the staggering figure fell with a crash on the deck.

"Now, boys, ready," I heard Charlie's voice roar out again, as the sloop tore alongside the schooner—where the rest of the negro crew with raised arms had fallen on their knees, crying for mercy.

All this I saw from the water, as I swam wildly toward the two boats, which now had closed on each other, a mass of thundering canvas, and screaming and cursing men—and Calypso there, like a beautiful statue, still lashed to the mast, a proud smile on her lovely lips.

Another moment, and Charlie had sprung aboard, and, seizing a knife from one of the screaming negroes, he cut her free.

His deep calm voice came to me over the water.

"That's what I call courage," he said, "I could never have done it."

"The 'king' had been right. He knew his daughter."

By this I was hearing the boats though as yet no one had seen me. They were all too busy with the confusion on deck, where four men lay dead, and three others still kept up their gibberish of fear.

I saw Calypso and Charlie Webster stand a moment looking down at the figure of Tobias, prostrate at their feet.

"I am sorry I had to kill him," I heard Charlie's deep groan. "I meant to keep him for the hangman."

But suddenly I saw him start forward and stamp heavily on something.

"No, you don't," I heard him roar—and I learned afterward that Tobias, though mortally wounded, was not yet dead, and that, as the two had stood looking down on him, they had seen his hand furtively moving toward the fallen revolver that lay a few inches from him on the deck. Just as he had grasped it, Charlie's heavy boot had come down on his wrist. But Tobias was still game.

"Not alive, you English brute!" he was heard to groan out, and, snatching free his wrist too swiftly to be prevented, he had gathered up all his remaining strength, and hurled himself over the side into the sea.

I was but a dozen yards away from him, as he fell; and, as he rose again, it was for his dying eyes to fix with a glare upon me. They dilated with terror, as though he had seen angels, down and sobbed like a child.

"Thank God you are safe—my treasure, my treasure!" was all I could say, after they had lifted me aboard, and I lay face down on the deck, at her feet. Swiftly she knelt by my side, and caressed my shoulder with her dear hand.

All of which—particularly my reference to "my treasure"—must have been much to the bewilderment of the good simple-hearted Charlie, towering, lanoctent-eyed, above us. I believe I stayed a little longer at her feet than I really had need to, for the comfort of her being so near and kind; but, presently, we were all aroused by a voice from the cliffs above. It was the "king," with his bodyguard, Erebus and the crew of the Flamingo—no Sanson, alas! The sound of the firing had reached them in the woods, and they had come hurrying to discover its cause.

So we deferred asking our questions, and telling our several stories, till we were pulled ashore.

As Calypso was folded in her father's arms, he turned to me:

"Didn't I tell you that I knew my daughter?" he said.

"And I told you something too, O king," I replied—my eyes daring at last to rest on Calypso, with the love and pride of my heart.

"And where on earth have you been, young man?" he asked, laughing. "Did Tobias kidnap you too?"

It was very hard, as you will have seen, to astonish the "king."

But, though it was hard to astonish and almost impossible to alarm him, his sense of wonder was quite another matter, and the boyish delight with which he listened to our several stories would have made it worth while to undergo tenfold the perils we had faced. Our stories, said the "king," were quite in the manner of "The Arabian Nights," dovetailing one into the other.

"And now," he added, "we will begin with the 'Story of the Murdered Slave and the Stolen Lady.'"

Calypso told her story simply and in a few words. The first part of it, of which the poor murdered Sanson had been the eloquent witness, needed no further telling. He had done his brave best—poor fellow—but Tobias had had six men with him, and was soon over. Her father had gagged

and bound and carried in a sort of improvised sedan chair; Tobias had done the thing with a certain style and—she had to admit—with absolute courtesy.

When they had gone a mile or two from the house, he had had the gag taken from her mouth, and, on her promise not to attempt to escape (which was, of course, quite impossible) he had also had her unbound, so that her hurried journey through the woods was made as comfortable as possible.

They were making, she had gathered—and as we had surmised—for the northern shore, and, after about a three hours' march, she heard the sound of the sea. On the schooner she had found a cabin all nicely prepared for her—even dainty toilet necessities—and an excellent dinner was served, on some quite pretty china, to her alone. Poor Tobias had seemed bent on showing—as he had said to Tom—that he was not the "carrion" he had thought him.

After dinner, Tobias had respectfully asked leave for a few words with her. He had apologized for his action, but explained that it was necessary—the only way he had left, he said, of protecting his own interests, and safeguarding a treasure which belonged to his living man. It had seemed to her that it was a monomania with him.

While he had been talking, she had made up her mind what she would do. She would tell him the plain truth about her doubloons, and offer him what remained of them as a ransom. This she did, and was able at last last to persuade him that, so far as anyone knew, that was all the treasure there was, and then the digging among the ruins of the old house was a mere fancy of her father's. There might be something there or not—and she went so far as to give her word of honor that, if anything was found, he should have his share of it.

Tobias had seemed impressed, and promised his answer in the morning, leaving her to sleep with a content in her cabin door. She had slept soundly, and awakened only at dawn. As soon as she was up, Tobias had come to her, saying that he had accepted her offer, and asking her to direct him to her treasure.

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