

# 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

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 1908 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 rousing 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 tress of the days under the palm trees and the scarlet poincianas.

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—lord 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 sat together in the hush of his snugger of an evening, surrounded by guns, fishing lines and old prints, there are times when we surely exchange a dozen words between dinner and bedtime, and yet I never 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, slow-smiling, 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 life-long friendship, and unwearied, inexhaustible companionship.

It was in this piece of John Saunders' snugger 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 quizzical 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. The 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 rogues' words, as though they were old friends.

"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 think of the bush. The niggers 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 langed. Their ghosts are still here, back 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 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 strange over at North

Day. 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 this very subject of buried treasure. Better look out, young man!"—smiling at me.

"He used to be always grubbing 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 off on 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—"

Charlie and I exclaimed together; and John continued, with tantalizing deliberation:

"It's a statement purporting to be made by some fellow on his deathbed—some fellow dying out in Texas—a quondam pirate, anxious to make his peace at the end and to give his friends the benefit of his knowledge."

"Oh, John!" said I, "I shan't sleep a wink tonight."

"I don't take much stock in it," said

John.

"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!

CHAPTER III.

I Charter the "Maggie Darling." As luck would have it, the loss of

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 1784). 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 who were really pirates.

We all did our best, but were overpowered, and the whole crew, except three, were killed. I was one of the three they did not kill. They were carried 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 gave one of the pirates the crew. Both of my companions were killed in less time than six months, but I was not.

I was taken by a man who would touch money from different ships we captured. 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 get up our lives, as it would be death if we were taken.

Our ship were too small for the warship, so our ship soon began to sink. When the man-of-war ran alongside of our vessels 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, being afloat on a portion of the wrecked vessel, was blown far away. And on that I floated. The next morning the ship was not seen. I was picked up by a man who was 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 this treasure except myself and it must be and is where we buried it today and unless you get it through this statement it will remain there always and will be one day good.

Therefore, it is your 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., 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, happening 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 cay known as Dead Men's Shoes, near Nassau, in the Bahama Islands. About fifty feet (50 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.) from the rock 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 Shrift Island; on the highest point of this Short Shrift 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 Shrift 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 merchant and it is in Spanish silver dollars.

The other on Short Shrift 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?"

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rather the theft of Henry P. Tobias' narrative was not so serious as it at first seemed, for it fortunately chanced that John Saunders had had it copied; but the theft remained none the less mysterious.

However, leaving that mystery for later solution, John Saunders, Charlie Webster and I spent the next evening in a general and particular criticism of the narrative itself. There were several obvious objections to be made against its authenticity. To start with, Tobias, at the time of his deposition, was an old man—seventy-five years old—and it was more than probable that his experiences as a pirate would date from his early manhood; they were hardly likely to have taken place as late as his fortieth year. The narrative, indeed, suggested their taking place much earlier, and there would thus be a space of at least forty years between the burial of the treasure and his deathbed revelation. It was natural to ask: Why during all those years did he not return and retrieve the treasure for himself? Various circumstances may have prevented him, the inability for lack of means to make the journey, or what not; but certainly one would need to imagine circumstances of peculiar power that should be strong enough to keep a man with so valuable a secret in his possession so many years from taking advantage of it.

For a long while, too, the names given to the purported sites of the treasure caches puzzled us. Modern maps give no such places as "Dead Men's Shoes" and "Short Shrift Island," but at last, in a map dating back to 1763, we came upon one of the two names. So far the veracity of Tobias was supported. "Dead Men's Shoes" proved to be the old name for a certain cay some twenty miles long, about a day and a half's sail from Nassau, one of the long string of coral islands now known as the "Exuma Cays." But of "Short Shrift Island" we sought in vain for a trace.

"All the same," said I, "the adventure calls me; the adventure and that million and a half dollars—and those 'Dead Men's Shoes'—and I intend to undertake it. I am not going to let your middle-aged skepticism discourage me. Treasure or no treasure, there will be the excitement of the quest, and all the fun of the sea."

"And some duck perhaps," added Charlie.

"And some shark fishing for certain," said John.

The next thing was to set about getting a boat and a crew.

After looking over much likely and unlikely craft we finally decided on a two-masted schooner of trim but solid build, the Maggie Darling, 42 feet over all and 13 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' snugger.

"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 rummiest 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?"

"Sailor" was a great Labrador re-

triever, who at that moment turned up his big head with a doctored sigh from behind his master's chair.

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

"Old Tom," the cook, was first on hand next morning. I took to him at once. A simple, kindly old "darkey" of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" type, with faithfulness written all over him, and a certain sad wisdom in his old face.

"You'll find Tom a great cook," said Charlie, patting the old man on the shoulder. "Many a trip we've taken together after duck, haven't we, Tom?"

"That's right, sub. That's right," said the old man, his eyes twinkling with pleasure.

Then came the captain—Capt. Jabez Williams—a younger man, with an intelligent, self-respecting manner, somewhat noncommittal, businesslike, evidently not particularly anxious as to whether he pleased or not, but looking competent and civil enough.

Next came the engineer, a young hulking bronze giant, a splendid physical specimen, but rather heavy and sullen and not over-intelligent to look at. The deckhand proved to be a shakily, rather silly, effeminate fellow, suggesting idjocy, but doubtless wiry and good enough for the purpose.

While they were busy getting up the anchor of the Maggie Darling I went down into my cabin to arrange various odds and ends, and presently came the captain, touching his hat.

"There's a party," he said, "outside here wants to know if you'll take him passenger to Spanish Wells."

"We're not taking passengers," I answered, "but I will look him over."

A man was standing up in a row-boat, leaning against the ship's side.

"You'd do me a great favor, sir," he began to say in a soft, ingratiating voice.

I looked at him with a start of recognition. He was my pockmarked friend, who had made such an unpleasant impression on me at John Saunders' office. He was rather more gentlemanly looking than he had seemed at the first view, and I saw that, though he was a halfbreed the white blood predominated.

"I don't want to intrude," he said, "but I have urgent need of getting to Spanish Wells, and there's no boat going that way for a week. I've just missed the mail."

"I didn't think of taking any passengers," I said.

"I know," he said. "I know it's a great favor I ask." He spoke with a certain cultivation of manner. "But I am willing of course to pay anything you think well for my food and my passage."

I valued that suggestion aside and stood irresolutely looking at him, with no very hospitable expression in my eyes, I dare say. But really my distaste for him was an unreasoning prejudice, and Charlie Webster's phrase came to my mind—"His face is against the poor devil!"

It certainly was.

Then at last I said, surely not over-graciously: "Very well. Get aboard. You can help work the boat," and with that I turned away to my cabin.

(TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

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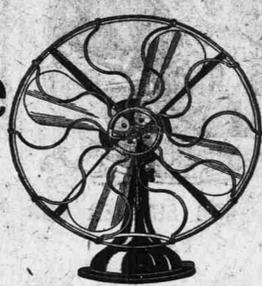
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