

THE FOUNDERED GALLEON.

BY
WEATHERBY CHESNEY,
AND ALICK MUNRO.

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CHAPTER XIII NICK'S SNUGGERY.

Ask any sailor what he feels like when he takes his first run ashore after being cooped up for long months within the narrow bounds of shipboard. Ask him if he feels it a luxury or not to have the firm ground under his feet again and to know that he can walk, if he should chance to want to, right ahead in a straight line for miles and never be pulled up by a ship's encircling bulwark. And provided he has not been long enough ashore for the sea hunger to have got into his blood again you will find that on such a theme the veriest tar soaked shell back can become a man of eloquence.

As soon as the Eureka had swung round to her kedge anchor the boat was hauled up to the gangway, and every one tumbled down into her.

The doctor was in the highest of spirits and kept up a three cornered fire with Dolly and Guthrie. Hans, being and jiggling his feet about like a monkey, pointed to a patch of ground that looked almost "Bafarian" everybody, in fact, was in high glee except Cain Laversha, whose large, plain face expressed nothing but stolid indifference. Under four eager oars the boat sped rapidly over the smooth lagoon until Dolly, who had got the tiller, sang out, "Way enough!" and ran her skillfully up alongside a natural jetty of coral. And then out they all scrambled upon the hard ground and proceeded straightway to make fools of themselves, always—that is, with the exception of Cain Laversha.

He, worthy man, disembarked from this his first sea trip without demonstration and, going up to a patch of sea moss, slowly settled himself down there on and directed his gaze heavily toward the toes of his boots. He did not look as if his mind was particularly busy, but perhaps we wrong him; perhaps he was thinking of "Zsuan Pierce."

As for the rest of the Eureka's people, they shouted and larked about without ceasing until the land crabs scuttled away to their holes and the gray sea fowl flapped off to shelter with angry screams of protest.

Presently Guthrie, whose eyes never seemed to stray far away from Miss Colepepper, burst into a roar of laughter.

"Oh, Dolly!" he gasped, holding his sides weakly. "Don't!"

"Why, what am I doing that's so very funny?" asked the girl.

"You're rolling in your gait like a portly duck! And look at Dr. Tring! He's swaying like an inverted pendulum!"

"Am I?" said the doctor with an amused smile. "Well, I guess, young man, that if we'd got a pier glass for you to see yourself in you'd find that you are doing much the same yourself, only maybe a trifle worse. We've all got our sea roll on, you see. Now, if Cain there were to condescend to get up and walk I shouldn't be surprised to see him lurch over bodily at the first attempt."

With a quick sign to the others Dolly led to the farmer. He got up slowly, then the doctor's prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. The whole party went into shrieks of laughter, and Dolly, the subject of their mirth allowed a smile to flicker over his ham colored face. Then he sat down again solidly and gave up the attempt at locomotion.

But Captain Colepepper was a bit of martinet in his way, and as there was work to be done on the morrow he recently called all hands to return to the kitchen. A good night's rest was sorely needed by every one after the heavy day of the day, and the captain declared that there had been enough of skylarking for the present. In this he was right, for by the time they had got the Eureka snuggled down and had had their supper all hands found themselves too deadily tired to move a limb less under the impulse of necessity.

"What about an anchor watch, Colepepper?" inquired the doctor, as he leaned back from the table against the ink behind him and produced tobacco pipe and cigarette papers.

"As regards weather," replied the captain, "I'd guarantee the ketch to be snugly where she is till her plating is nibbled to bits from sheer old age. You know best whether we're likely to be starved from shore."

"There are turtles on the island," said the doctor, "and I should say a tolerably large company of ghosts if its character hasn't been sadly maligned. It, barring these and land crabs and sea gulls, I don't think there's any else to guard against. With regard to the ghosts, Dolly there might like to hullo, the young woman's gone to bed and she'll be nodding over into stard directly. Guthrie, just Miss Colepepper's elbow slightly."

"I say, Dolly, as your medical adviser I should recommend bed or you will be earning a pair of

Dolly apparently was sufficiently used to understand this remark and gave the undergraduate a sidelong glance and blushed a little, and then, purely thanking the doctor for his advice, slipped away to the little stateroom beside the companion, where she lay in her quarters.

"She's earned her talk," observed her father.

"If ever girl did," assented Dr. Tring. "She's worked like a Briton to-day and never shown the white feather once, though she might well have done so, for we've come through some pretty tight places, I may remind you. Colepepper, you ought to be proud of your daughter. Here's her health!"

The two sipped their grog to the toast, and then the doctor, at Guthrie's request, became anecdotal on the subject of the island at which they had arrived.

They had come here as to the one safest place in the whole of these seas for their purpose, but they were in the event not fated to go away without passing through a great peril, in which their enterprise itself would come within a little of being wrecked, and, in the case of some at least of the party, even life would have to be fought for against foes whom they as yet little expected to meet.

Piper's cay was a long narrow islet of horseshoe shape, nowhere attaining a height of more than 50 or 60 feet above sea level. Its surface was green for the most part, covered with coarse grass, sea moss or scrub, and here and there bearing a few wind distorted coconut trees. In the windings of its shore there were many caves, some shallow and others stretching for unknown distances in toward the centers of the island. In one of these it was that Cain Laversha met with an adventure. But of that more later.

Into most of these caves the sea washed freely. But some of them were dry, and if their echoes had been phonographic the tales which they could tell would surely be tales of fascination, and at any rate they would not lack the weird thrill which horror gives to stories of bloodshed and treachery.

Owing to the intricacy of the channel which led up to the snug anchorage before the cay, the old sea robbers of the days gone by knew that the heavier government craft could no more reach them there than they could have navigated the gorge to Caracas or the swamps which led to Panama. Boats might have worked their way in, certainly, but a boat expedition is a perilous thing, and a man-of-war captain would not have sent his boats to attack a heavily armed schooner or brig, which could warp her broadside in any direction and blow them out of the water from whichever point they came.

So, in all the history of iniquity—in which massive tome, if it ever came to be written, Piper's cay would occupy many pages—there is no record of invasion by vessels or men who represented the laws of nations. The very existence of the place was little known to the powers of order in the days of its greatest activity, for charts were, in those rough and ready times, far from being the complete maps of the seas that they are now, and the buccannier was not a person to enlighten the hydrographer's ignorance gratuitously. The longer the cays remained unknown, the longer would be the sea robber's reign. It was only when his lairs were discovered that it became possible to chase him off the seas.

"The deeds of the old time sea rover," remarked the doctor, "were deeds of darkness, of which small authentic rec-



"Colepepper, you ought to be proud of your daughter."

ord has come down to us. We know where and how he found his fresh beef; we are shown the spots where he careened his broad beamed schooner to clear away the long trailing plants which clung to her and deadened her speed; we have legends of chases, of furious battles, of barbarous executions where a pivoted grating was rigged out from a gangway and captives were cajoled into marching along it till their weight made it tip them overboard to the sharks; but of the men themselves no clear picture has survived. They lived on the sea deserts in red obscurity. If they grew rich and returned to civilization, they died into the crowd, and no man knew them."

Who the original Piper was the doctor could not tell, but he opined that it was reasonable to judge him a man of some discernment, for the small islet named after him was an ideal place for the purpose for which he no doubt used it.

On the sea side it was effectually defended by the reef fortresses against

which old Neptune's artillery was always cannonading, and from any attack of heavy drafted vessels, manned by king's men who did not know the channel, it was absolutely safe. But for the pirate vessels themselves, when once they had been brought by their pilots through the mazes of the reefs, the anchorage inside was perfect.

And there were many other obvious advantages in the place, too; a sloping beach for leaving down upon, a spring of good water where the casks could be filled, dry caves where bulky plunder could be stowed and sea washed caves in whose hidden recesses specie could be snugly cached until the time came for a return to Europe and respectability, for, though the cult of treasure hunters say otherwise, the probability is that these ill got gains were not accumulated only to be forgotten.

But, though Dr. Tring knew of the existence of all these various charms in the island, he did not remember the exact positions where they were to be found, and of the whereabouts of the spring, which the state of their water casks rendered the most important treasure of all to the crew of the Eureka he had no recollection. And so on the morning after their arrival Captain Colepepper announced that he would give Dolly and the undergraduate a roving commission to explore, while the others busied themselves in repairing the breaches which the tornado had made in their craft.

The young man made no secret of the satisfaction with which he heard this decision, but Dolly did not seem to be quite so sure of the advantages of the plan. She remembered the episode which had occurred during the storm of a day or two ago, and as she had not yet made up her mind upon the problem which that incident had set her to solve she was doubtful about the wisdom of spending a whole day just now in Guthrie's company.

"I wonder what we shall find," said the young man to her as they stood on the deck together after breakfast. "I'm prepared for anything, so long as it's romantic. Piper's cay looks as if it ought to bristle with romance, doesn't it?"

The girl kept silence for a moment, and then, without raising her eyes, answered quietly, "I don't think I shall go."

"Dolly!" cried her companion in astonishment. "Why ever not?"

"Well, you see," began Miss Colepepper hesitatingly, "there are—reasons!"

"Do you mean you'd rather not spend a whole day with me?" he asked bluntly.

"No, Alan; not that. But—"

"Well, what?" persisted Guthrie, as she did not seem to be inclined to finish her sentence.

"Oh, can't you see? I mean of course that we were silly the other night in the storm and—"

"You think I might be tempted to be what you call silly again?"

The girl nodded and blushed.

"And if I were you would be angry?"

"Yes, Alan, I think I should. You see, we're both very young."

"Umph! I'm 21 and you're 17—both old enough to know our own minds, I should think!"

"Now, Alan, you know we're not! At least other people would say we're not," she corrected herself. "And in any case I don't choose that there should be any more of that sort of thing just now."

"All right, Dolly; we'll let it stand at that—for the present," said Guthrie. And then with some hesitation he added: "I wouldn't have said anything the other night if I hadn't thought we were in really great danger and that I mightn't ever have another chance of—of telling you—well, of telling you that I loved you, you know! You believe that, Dolly, don't you?"

"Yes," said the girl. "You said so at the time, and, of course, I believed you."

"Then you'll trust yourself with me today?"

"Yes."

"Thank you, Dolly," said the young man, and then he added earnestly: "I'll stick to our bargain for the present, of course; but, mind, I don't mean to give you up for all that. When we've got all the Spanish dollars on board from the Santa Catarina, I shall speak to Captain Colepepper if you will let me."

"When we have got the Spanish dollars on board!" said the girl mischievously. "Very well; I'll agree to that. We may both of us be a good deal older when that day comes."

Guthrie laughed. "I've a better belief in our luck than that, Dolly," said he. "Anyway it's a bargain. And now we'd better start, hadn't we?"

They tumbled into the boat, which had been left lying in the water alongside since the night before. Tom Jelly rowed them ashore, and then returned with the boat to the Eureka.

"Where do you want to go?" asked Guthrie.

"Not having the guidebook of Piper's cay, can't say precisely," laughed the girl. "Where would you suggest?"

"Let's walk straight ahead and see where it leads us."

"The bush up yonder is terribly thick. I shall be torn to ribbons!"

"Jove, yes, so you would. I might perhaps manage to clear it a bit for you if I went first. But there's no need for us to go that way at all unless you like. We may just as well keep along the shore. If we go on long enough, we shall come round again at the other side, and if we get tired of it, we can always take a bee line across country for the Eureka. What do you say to that?"

"All right, that'll do nicely. Besides, we shall stand the best chance that way of finding the place where the fresh water runs into the sea, and then we can track it up to the spring. Let's set off at once before it gets hotter."

They started along the white, blinding beach. The little wavelets swished and whispered at their feet, throwing

up and drawing back again their handfuls of coral shingle in a rhythm of never ceasing effort. The sand flies, which the doctor had predicted, were there in swarms, though his estimate of their size proved to be, fortunately, a little bit exaggerated. There were mosquitoes, too, booming away like a regiment of drummers, but the larger insects were quieter and so more insidious in their attack, and, as in addition to all this, the sun's heat was like the draft from a blast furnace, the walk was not quite the picnic ramble which they had expected it to be.

The foreshore was, for the most part, wide enough to form a pathway, but occasionally some outcrop of rock rose across it and ran sheer down into the river. These barriers necessitated scrambles which, under such a sun as now blazed down upon them, proved somewhat trying. Indeed, as the obstacles increased in frequency, the two explorers began to consider that the shore route was not worth following after all. So they decided that if after crossing one more rocky wall the path did not seem to improve they would strike inland at once and try their luck among the palm scrub and scattered cocoanut trees.

"Look here, Dolly," said Guthrie, as they reached the foot of a new obstruction, a projecting ridge of black, shiny rock, from whose baked surface the heat rose visibly through the air in shimmering, tremulous waves. "I tell you that if the road's no better farther on there's no need for you to claw up this beastly wall. I'll go first and prospect and let you know."

Dolly nodded and sat down with a sigh of relief upon a boulder. The young man set off aloft, using hands and knees indiscriminately and sometimes pretty hard put to it to get along with both. After five minutes' climbing, he gained the sharp, overhanging ridge and straddled it. He was glad enough to sit there for a space, to regain his wind, for the ascent had been pretty stiff work.

From his vantage point he could trace the sea brink ahead of them. It lapped the edge of honeycombed cliffs as far round as he could follow it. There was no more foreshore. The land ended abruptly in a chaos of tumbled rocks.

"No use going on, Dolly," he sang out, "and no use your scrambling up here. Walk up the rise to that palm tree with the twisted stem, and I'll climb along the ridge and join you there."

For another hour they scrambled slowly along, and the sun grew hotter and hotter. They were making for a peculiarly shaped rock, which showed out boldly at what seemed to be one of the highest points of the island, for they hoped that from it they might perhaps be able to mark down the position of the spring by noting the brighter green of the herbage which would probably surround it, or even, it might be, by catching the glint of the sun on its surface.

But they were not fated to reach that objective without a halt and as it turned out a very long halt.

They came upon a cave suddenly—so suddenly, indeed, that they were almost startled at seeing it; for the mouth did not show till they were straight in front of it, and as a spine of rock rose up directly before it the cave could not be seen at all from the water. Nature, its sole architect, had hidden it with a cunning which seemed almost intentional.

It was evidently one of the caves for which Dr. Tring had said that Piper's cay was celebrated, and the explorers' interest—"archaeological interest," Dolly called it—was promptly roused. Visions of hidden treasure, guarded perhaps by a grim skeleton sentinel, occurred to them both as they pressed forward.

"Come along, Alan!" cried Dolly eagerly. "It's most deliciously exciting!" And she waved him aside with her hand and led the way into the cave.

The entrance was wedge shaped and narrow at first. But the sides very soon began to retreat from one another, though the roof still remained low. Stalactites had evidently hung from above at one time, for the stumps of them still remained, but they had been broken off and carted outside; perhaps, suggested Dolly, because they obstructed the treasure hiders' road. Underfoot the rocky path, though not altogether smooth, was still passable, and the pair got along without much trouble.

The light from the entrance behind grew dimmer as they advanced. But here and there were gaps in the stone ceiling, shafts reaching to the open air, whose upper edges they could see were garlanded with a thick growth of ferns and creepers. Through these shafts there came a gentle twilight glow, and as the rock walls of the cave were almost white the reflection from them gave light enough for the explorers to see the grotto's outlines.

There were plenty of evidences of human agency. Every here and there a footmark could be seen in some dried, muddy patch of the floor, and it was an eerie thought that the foot which had made it might well have been dead a century or even more. And everywhere there were the broken stalactites, which of a surety could not have tumbled down and then marched off by themselves from the floor on which they had fallen.

But of any more valuable relics there was not a trace. There were none of those kegs and barrels, those iron bound chests and piles of rusty armor, those lavish heaps of plunder with which, by all the canons of romance, such a place ought to have been stored. And, as Guthrie remarked, the cave was bone dry and had long been undisturbed, and therefore they were clearly within their rights in expecting to find such things.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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