

CHAPTER VII

The Faithful Witnesses

Next morning, refreshed, but hungry and thirsty, I told Dave to gather some cow coconuts, while I went to the spring for water. We sat down on the ancient breastworks and had a real feast.

"This is the best milk, Dave, I ever drank. I have not had the headache since I took my first cupful, it is fine."

"Well, I have not suffered with cold since we landed on this rich and wonderful island. I believe the milk, or the climate has cured me," he said.

We looked at our watches and found that they

were not only running, but had started at the same time the afternoon before.

"I guess they started, Bill, when we got them out of the influence of the panther den deposit of metal under the old rock cabin."

"Yes, I think you are correct, but my compass is a little crazy yet. It tries to stand north and south but cannot quite make it. When we have gone a bit further I believe the compass will behave all right and be again our constant friend and guide."

We decided to bear a little to the northeast and look for evidence of the counterfeiters and the bugler, and, going a few miles, we saw a beautiful range of hills whose top looked like a pasture or golf links, with a shrub here and a clump of trees there. The hills were covered with tall grass, and stately old cedars stood zigzag along the crest.

"Let's go, Bill, to yonder largest cedar and look for more bark names. It is just the kind

of a place where an engraver would naturally cut his name."

After a long walk we finally topped the ridge and saw a large and beautiful valley beyond.

Turning, we walked up to the old cedar. Six feet in diameter, and what a grand old patriarch it was! It must have been as old as the cedars of Lebanon that have stood and looked over Jerusalem for two thousand years.

We scraped off the moss and to our delight saw some more letters which read:

Dr. George Parkman
of Boston, May 14, 1848."

"Well, whose name is that?" asked Dave.

"This is the name of a wealthy old bachelor doctor of Boston who mysteriously disappeared on March 14th, 1848. When last seen he was going toward the office of Professor John White Webster, an eminent professor and chemist, of Harvard University."

"Blood stains were found on the Professor's floor, and some teeth that resembled those of the

Doctor, were discovered in the office stove, but, to be brief, the Professor was finally convicted of the crime and hung on circumstantial evidence July 14th, 1852."

"Is it possible?," asked Dave.

"Yes, it is true. But there is one strange fact I cannot understand. The date on the tree was cut," I said, "two months, to a day, after the Doctor disappeared. Who could have done it?"

"It must have been cut," said he, "by some Boston counterfeiter who, knowing the Doctor and the history of the trial, came here and engraved the name."

"That theory sounds reasonable," I said.

Then removing the moss from the opposite side of the cedar we found this engraving:

Mrs. Theodosia Burr Alston, wife of Joseph K. Alston, of South Carolina, June 15th, 1812."

"Whose name can that be, Bill?"

"This lady was the only child and daughter of Aaron Burr, the eminent lawyer, and statesman of New York City."

Then Dave asked to know more about her.

"She married the accomplished and courtly Governor Joseph K. Alston, of South Carolina, one of the finest young men in America, a gentleman and an aristocrat of the old school."

"Is this the Aaron Burr who killed Alexander Hamilton, the great statesman, in a duel?" asked Dave.

"Yes, he is the one."

"On May the first, 1812, Mrs. Alston set sail on the Patriot from Charleston to New York to see her father. She, her boat and the crew never landed, nor have they been heard from since."

"How sad and strange. Some outlaw, who read of her tragic death must have carved the name of that American princess on this cedar," Dave conjectured.

This explanation I thought was correct but—

"The name on the cedar," I said, "was cut forty-five days after she left for New York."

"Well, what do you think of that, Bill?"

"A mystery still, which I hope we, some day, can solve."

Then I sat down on the ground to think and rest.

"Look, Bill, here is a little gold ring."

"Where did you get it?"

"I picked it up at the foot of the cedar and it, too, has the name of Mrs. Alston on the inside. It now looks as if the engraver had her ring. Bill, we can never solve all these riddles."

"Well, don't lose hope. We may yet find new facts that will explain all things."

Turning, we walked along the ridge south for several miles and coming to another very old cedar we removed the moss and found this name cut deep into the bark:

"Marshal Ney of France,

February 1st, 1815."

"Well, what on earth, Bill, do you think of this?"

--"During the French Struggles he—the greatest Marshal Napoleon had—was ordered

shot, on December 7th, 1816, but some say the soldiers fired blank shells, and, making a sham of his killing, spirited him away to America," I explained.

"And a preacher of high repute has written a book to prove that the great Marshal was not shot. But notice, Dave, this name was cut just fifty-one days after he was supposed to have been killed."

"I guess this name, Bill, was cut by a French countrefeiter who admired the great soldier."

Just south of this tree the forest lapped over the ridge; so turning, we went back north a few miles and came to another cedar, the oldest veteran on the ridge, and from its rugged bark we moved the moss.

"Great stars! Dave, read this."

 "God bless Ruth Parlor,

 Joan of Arc,

 August 30th, 1431."

We looked at each other amazed, and indeed we were.

"Well, now Bill this beats them all. The name was cut sixty-one years before Columbus discovered America. Do you suppose that cedar was standing here then?"

"From its appearance I dare say it is one thousand years old, and probably much older, for the cedars of Lebanon, now old and shaggy, stood there and witnessed the crucifixion of Christ. Think of it!"

"I have forgotten the details, Bill, so tell me about Joan of Arc."

"She was a poor little obscure peasant girl, of the village of Arc in Lorraine in France, during one of the great wars between that country and England. The French, being hard pressed and pushed back, by the English, were staggering under defeat when suddenly Joan, the maid of Orleans, appeared, took command, gave battle and defeated the English and rolled them back like a torrent. Afterwards the English captured the girl of nineteen, tried and convicted her of

being a witch, and on May 30th, 1431, burned her at the stake."

This re-told, Dave recalled the story of the wonderful little girl—the idol of the French.

"Well, Bill, this beats all. This name was cut ninety days after she was burned, and sixty-one years before Columbus discovered America. How do you account for all this?"

"The engraver simply must have made a mistake in his date, that is all. It must have been cut by an old counterfeiter who admired the little girl."

"God bless Ruth Parlor."

"What can that mean? Who is she, Bill?"

"I never heard of her before. The mystery thickens instead of thinning."

"Was she a witch," asked Dave.

"Oh no. There are no witches, but the English thought she was and the French people look upon her as being human, and a little more, and so she seems. Think of an uneducated peasant girl rising in a day and leading a power-

ful army to victory against a formidable foe. There is nothing like it in history."

Hearing the story, Dave, too, thought she was human, and a little more.

"Here is the same coincidence again. The name was cut one hundred and ninety days after she was burned. So all the names we have seen were cut soon after the person had died. Think of it! What can it mean?" Dave asked.

"It is a riddle. We are in a strange land, but I hope we may solve each and every mystery before we leave. I believe, however, that every strange thing we have found is connected somehow with the Coat Man."

Seeing another large cedar on a tall hill some two miles west, we left Cedar Ridge, and crossing the valley went to it.

"Look, Bill, look! There is the name of a famous outlaw."

"Blackbeard.

1695."

"He was a sea pirate," I said, "and desperate

character who roamed the high seas of the western world in 1695."

"Stop Bill. Here is the name of another outlaw."

"Captain Kidd.

1698."

"Well, he too was a sea pirate and a terror, a robber and murderer."

These names puzzled me, I confess.

"And I guess they were counterfeiters, too," Dave exclaimed, "and coming here carved their own names."

This theory seemed to be correct, for pirates would be none too good to make bogus money.

We ate supper, and seeing the sun set behind golden clouds, built a nest in the old cedar and lay down to rest, with our souls filled with wonders which we, at the time, could not explain.