

CHAPTER VIII

"Turn Me Over"

At daylight we started northeast through a deep forest, and going about two miles, heard something like one hoeing in a garden.

"Stop, Dave, stop!" I exclaimed in a whisper.

"Tap, tap, tap."

We shook with excitement.

"Bill, I do believe it is someone hoeing in a garden and it may be a counterfeiter. What shall we do?"

"We must watch, look and listen. We are now approaching the outlaws."

As we inched closer and closer, the noise grew

louder and louder; but, finally peeping through the low-swinging moss, we saw a garden filled with cabbage.

“Look, Dave, look!”

“What, what?”

“Look at that beautiful sixteen-year-old girl hoeing.”

“Great stars, Bill! She looks like a princess. How beautiful!”

We peeped at her, from tree to tree, until we passed clear around the garden to the starting point, but we did not find a house or a path leading to or from the garden.

“Bill, have our eyes proved false as our minds did in the circle, where we got lost?”

“No, no, I am sure our minds are clear, and that girl is real.”

Hoe, hoe, hoe. Chop, chop, chop.

“What can she mean?” Dave asked, “and who is she, and where is her home?”

She was so young, clean and beautiful that I

could but stand and stare at her for sometime myself.

"She must be the daughter of a counterfeiter hoeing her father's garden, and may live near by," I suggested.

"Well, walk out," said Dave, "and speak to her."

I paused to think.

"No. That would not do, for then she would run and tell her father and the counterfeiters would fall on us like an avalanche. We must locate the outlaws and the money mint, and then return unseen to Fort Myers."

For three days we walked and searched the forest for the home of the princess and the outlaws, but did not find one trace of either. Indeed we tried to re-discover the Princess, but failed. So, foiled and tired, we sat down by a spring to rest, talk, and scheme.

"Well, Bill, what do you think of the counterfeit theory now? I confess my faith in it is weakening," Dave said.

"You have expressed my view exactly," I said.

"Well, what theory have you to take its place, Bill?"

"I may be wrong, but I am inclined to believe that this island has been the home and rendezvous, not of counterfeiters, but of sea pirates. I believe this, for we have not found any spurious metal or money or other evidence of bogus money-makers."

"But," I continued, "we have found where two of the most notorious pirates in history registered their names on the cedar trees. They, discovering a secret passage to this island, may have made it their rendezvous, haven and home.

"I believe you are right, Bill, but how do you account for the Coatman?"

This question, at first, staggered me.

"During the World War," I said, "the maps, charts and records of Blackbeard and Captain Kidd may have been found, and falling into the hands of some high official he, with a few trusty friends, may have come to this island to

dig for buried treasure, and in some way have lost his coat on Snakenose Island; and he may have brought the coffin in which to smuggle back the hidden treasure."

"Well, that sounds reasonable, but how do you account for the cut stump and the Princess, Bill?"

This seemed simple to me.

"The sea pirates cut the tall cedar for a mast pole, and the Princess may be the daughter of a treasure-seeker, or a descendent of a family of ancient sea pirates."

"She may be the great, great, great, great, Grand-daughter of Blackbeard or Captain Kidd," I explained. "There may be a small colony of those people who, being left here, are wild and know nothing of the outer world."

This idea made Dave and me happy.

"Oh, I know that the counterfeit theory is false, but the pirate theory is correct," Dave exclaimed.

"Well, it is now more plausible than the other," I said.

Just here a new idea struck Dave, and his eyes sparkled.

"Listen, Bill, listen. This island being their home must have been the place where they buried their silver, gold and diamonds. Let's hunt for the hidden treasure. I expect the subterranean rooms under the panther cabin is full of fortunes. Come, Bill, let's go and find a boat load of gold and diamonds and be as rich as Croesus."

"No, we must continue to look for whoever is here and learn their history and their business."

The next day we searched around in vain for a sign of humanity, and ascending a ridge at sunset, we sat down on a flat rock to rest and look for smoke that might rise from a camp or cabin home of some strange creatures.

"Move, Dave, move! I feel a letter cut in this rock."

He sprang up and looked down, expectantly.

Then we removed the moss from the surface of the rock and read:

“TURN ME OVER AND THEN YOU WILL SEE.”

“Great stars, Bill! This is a hidden treasure. We were sitting on a fortune but did not know it! Let’s turn the stone over. I am a rich man right now!”

Then we brushed away the earth that lay upon it, and giving the stone a heave, pushed it over. There lay a coal-black bundle, the shape and size of a brick, all covered with tar and pitch. I snatched it up.

“What is it?” Dave asked. “It must be a bundle of diamonds. Open it instantly.”

“It may be another infernal machine,” I suggested, “designed to blow us into dust.”

“Well, be careful then,” Dave replied.

To avoid danger, we took shelter behind a big tree, and dropped a stone over on the black bundle; but it did not explode. Then I removed the coat of tar and pitch, and cutting through

a layer of buckskin, found a diary. On its back I read:

“Diary of John McFall, Captain of the Sea Pirates.”

“Open it, Bill, and read it for it will tell us where the buried treasures are. Read it, read it!”

I opened the book, but the diary was written in Scotch dialect, and great was our disappointment.

“We will carry the book along, Dave, and learn to read it if possible; but if we cannot, we will take it back to Fort Myers and get someone who understands Scotch to read it for us.”

“And if it locates hidden treasure, back we will come,” said Dave confidently.

Then we, like squirrels, made a bed in the tangles, and retiring, heard again the bugler blowing his bugle in the north. He blew and blew and blew, and oh, how ghost-like it went! Then, looking at the vanishing red sky across a beautiful lake, we were wafted off to sleep under the sweet music of the evening whip-poor-will.