

CHAPTER XIV

The Rescue

"Now, Dave, I will be frank. We are now facing a foe more desperate than the counterfeiters and sea pirates, all. That cunning old beast possesses human skill and more. We must have the stealth of the cat and the eye of an eagle, or else fall a victim to his strange influence and be either enslaved for life or burned at the stake."

"Well let's make for Fort Myers, Bill, and do it now. I would rather meet an army of outlaws with a toothpick than to face this super-giant with a sword, a pistol and a gattling gun," said Dave.

"No. We will rescue these poor captives and slaves, or die trying."

"No, Bill, no. I am cool now, not angry, so I beseech you to stop, and let's go to Fort Myers and get help."

"Hush, Dave. Do not spring Fort Myers on me. Should you refuse to rescue the Princess, your good mother would lose all respect for you, and Mary, the girl you love, would spurn you out of her sight."

"All right, Bill. I will back you up, but let's rescue the Princess first."

Then we started for the Buffalo valley to look for the Princess and, reaching the Buffalo creek, turned up it, but though searching 'till sundown, we did not find the Princess or her garden.

The next morning as we lay in our bed in the tangle we heard someone sneeze. We were startled. Then we heard someone hoeing in a garden.

"That must be the Princess," Dave suggested, "for we found her somewhere in this valley."

"Come, and be careful," I said, "and let's creep up and peep into the garden and see."

Then we came down and, inching up to the edge of the garden, and peeping in, we saw a tall, elegant looking man, about forty years old, hoeing cabbage. He was busy, but looked worn, worried and haggard.

"He is a slave and a friend, Bill. Step out and speak to him."

We stepped out and I said: "Hello!"

Suddenly he looked up and started to run, but instantly he stopped and said: "Do not make any tracks in the garden. I will come to you. Who are you? Have you come to rescue me?"

"Yes, we are Bill Argo and Dave Williams who have come to free you," I answered.

"Have you an army?" He asked.

"No." I said.

"You cannot rescue me then. Go and bring an army, I beseech you! Go, and take me out of hell," said he, shaking with excitement.

"Who are you?" I asked.

“Marshal Ney of France.”

“Marshal Ney!” I exclaimed. “It cannot be, for that gallant soldier—the hero of Montebello and Lodi—and right-arm of the great Napoleon—was shot in France in 1815 during the French revolution.”

He was greatly agitated and seemed to be affected when I mentioned the name of Napoleon.

“I am Marshal Ney of France,” he said, earnestly. “They shot me with blank cartridges and spirited me away to the States and, en-route, I was kidnapped by Tanglebeard, who brought me to this island and enslaved me. I am a captive and have been in bondage ever since he brought me here.”

“But, Marshal Ney,” I said, “is a man now two hundred years old. You appear to be forty so you cannot be the great Marshal Ney the French adore.”

For a moment he hesitated.

“Young men you do not understand,” said he.

"Tanglebeard brings me, once a year, a bottle of water from Bimini, the spring of perpetual youth, and I drink it, and while I age a little, I am still young, elastic, vigorous and strong."

"Is it possible that old age can be baffled and delayed like this?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "I am honest with you. I am Marshal Ney and I believe I will live to be as old as Methuselah."

Then he walked up, giving us the army salute.

"I am disobeying the orders of Tanglebeard," he said. "We must be brief; we must part, but before we do tell me a word about France."

"All right," I replied.

He looked anxious.

"What became of Napoleon?"

"He, sick with cancer of the stomach, and forsaken at the critical moment by Grouchie, met Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo in Belgium, in 1815, was defeated and captured. Then the English carried him a prisoner to the

lonely and barren island of Saint Helena, where he died an exile in May, 1821," I explained.

The great Marshal stood dazed and choked; his lips quivered and, turning, he hung his head. In a few moments he faced about and said:

"How is France?"

"In 1871 the Germans invaded France, conquered her and took Alsace and Lorraine." I answered.

Suprised, he straightened himself up and said; "Oh, that I could have been there to have led my legion to the front! Poor France, poor France!" he exclaimed.

Hesitating for a moment he said: "Tell me more of France."

"In 1914 the Germans and Austrians invaded France with seven million soldiers and waged the bloodiest war in history," I answered.

"Oh Heavens, who won?" he exclaimed.

"France and her allies," I said, "routed the Germans and Austrians, at the last battle of

the Marne—whipped them and took back Alsace and Lorraine.”

The Marshal, shaking with excitement, jerked off his hat and began to beat a tree with it and exclaimed: “Long live France! Long live the Republic!”

“Go, young men, go and tell France that Marshal Ney lives. Tell them to send an army, rescue me and take me back to the land I love.”

“Come Marshal, come.” I exclaimed, “We will rescue you right now.”

“Impossible, impossible!” he exclaimed. “It will take an army to rescue me. Fly, young men, fly if you would save yourselves and me.”

We hesitated.

“Go, young men, go,” he urged. “I know what I am talking about. If I were to accompany you he would overtake us all, set our lungs on fire, beat and burn us at the stake. Go and bring an army, go!”

“Stay for a moment, Marshal. How many captives are there on this island?”

"I do not know. In 1852 I accidentally met Dr. Parkman," said he, "the wealthy bachelor of Boston. He was then young, vigorous, a captive and slave, but speaking only a few words we parted, and I have never heard from him since."

"Dr. Webster, the eminent professor of Yale, was hanged for the supposed murder of this very man," Dave exclaimed. "What a pity!"

"Have you ever seen or heard of any one else?"

"About twenty years ago," replied the Marshal, "I met a tall, striking young fellow in the forest, one day, and asked him his name. He did not stop, but as he vanished he said: 'I am John Wilkes Booth, the actor.'"

"Great stars!" I exclaimed.

"That is the man, Bill, who killed Abraham Lincoln, for which an innocent man was shot."

"Yes, you are right, and many people have always thought Booth escaped and that the wrong man paid the penalty," I replied.

Facing about the Marshal saluted us again and returned to his hoe. We walked away into the forest and sat down on a log to think, scheme and plan.