

CHAPTER XV

Amazed

"Now, Bill, it is unwise to substitute brevity for prudence. To talk to those slaves is only to endanger their lives and our own.

So let's go to the boat, return to Fort Myers, raise an army and rescue all the poor captives and kill that vile demon."

"I suspect you are correct, Dave, so in the morning we will start for the boat and the outside world."

The next morning we made for the boat, and about nine o'clock we entered a dark and gloomy forest and again heard someone hoeing. Creeping up we saw the beautiful Princess once more, working her garden.

"Shall we speak to her, Bill, and jeopardize her life and our own?" Dave asked.

"I feel that we ought to speak to her," I said, "for she may furnish us with valuable information."

Then we stepped out and I said in a low, gentle voice: "Hello."

She whirled; she was frantic; she dropped the hoe and broke for the woods.

"Stop, stop, young lady, stop!" I exclaimed in a commanding tone.

Suddenly she stopped and stood in a quiver.

"We are friends—not foes," I said.

"Have you come to rescue me?" she asked.

"Yes," said Dave.

"Have you an army?"

"No!" I replied.

"Then you cannot rescue me. Tanglebeard will burn up my lungs and yours. Please do not step in the garden and show your tracks. Wait, I will come to you."

Then she came up, shaking from head to heel.

"Are you young men?"

"Yes," said Dave, "but why do you ask that?"

"I never saw one before."

"What is your name?" Dave asked.

"Rebecca."

"Rebecca who?" I inquired.

"I do not know. Tanglebeard kidnapped me when I was a tiny little girl."

We were astonished.

"Can you remember anything," said Dave, "about your house, home and name?"

"I just can remember mamma, papa and the house. We lived in a large building, and mamma used to take me up in her arms and call me darling and honey, and papa gave me a doll one day. This is all I can remember."

"Can you remember your surname," I asked.

She hung her head and thought a moment.

"I cannot remember it, but my name was engraved in my ring which I dropped in an old stump at the Castle. It is in the old stump now."

“What castle?”

“The one within the walls where Tanglebeard keeps little children, ’till they get large enough to work,” she replied.

“Did he keep you there?” Dave asked.

“Yes, but when I got large enough to work he came, one night, to my bed and, blindfolding me and putting a rope around my neck, led me to the cabin of Mrs. Theodosia Burr Alston who taught me to speak English, and how to work in the garden. After I learned to work,” she continued, “he came again and, blindfolding me, brought me to this garden where I have been alone, at work, ever since.”

“Who is Mrs. Alston?” Dave asked.

“She is the only child and daughter of Aaron Burr, the lawyer and Statesman of New York. Tanglebeard must have kidnapped her on her way from New York to Charleston, and taking the valuables, wrecked the ship and brought her to this island.” I explained.

“Where is she now?”

"I do not know," she said, "but I left her somewhere in this island five years ago. I have never seen her since. I want to go home. When you get back into the world tell papa and mamma to come with an army and get me. Tell them I love them and want to go home."

"Well, we will go and soon return with an army. So be content for a while," said Dave.

Then we told her good-bye, and she started to her hoe, and we into the forest.

Turning she said: "Go a new route. Never walk the same way twice."

Going a few miles we sat down on a log to scheme; and, consulting, we decided to take the advice of Rebecca and change the route, bearing to the northwest.

For two days we journeyed over hills, valleys and plains and through dense forests, without seeing one sign of humanity, but stopped the second night in a dark, deep, narrow valley drained by a creek flowing to the west.

The next morning we came down from our

bed in the tangles and went to the creek for water and found it was muddy.

"What can this mean, Bill?"

"I do not know, but let's go up the creek and see," I said. "It may be another slave, or it may be Tanglebeard taking a bath."

So we inched along the bank of the creek in a dense forest, for about one mile, and came in sight of an opening. Creeping to the edge we saw another garden, but no one in it.

Prying around to the east side of the garden, we saw a little cedar cabin nestled under the low swinging limbs of an old cedar.

"Move a little further," said Dave.

"Stop Dave. I see an old gray-headed woman sitting in the door."

"Yes, and she looks like a kind old lady, too," Dave replied.

Then we walked out and up to a point near the door and I said: "Hello."

She jumped, shook and looked amazed.

"Who are you? Where are you from? Have you come with an army to rescue me?"

"We are explorers and have no army, but are now on the way to get one with which to rescue you and others," I said.

"Go, young men, go and rescue me."

"We will, but who are you?"

"Joan of Arc."

"Joan of Arc! It can not be, for she was burned by the English five hundred and sixty-five years ago. You are not over seventy years old. You can not be the real Joan of Arc—the Maid of Orleans."

"You are mistaken. I am Joan of Arc of France. I was not burned. Ruth Parlor, my double, came to my prison and, taking my place that I might return to the head of the French Army, was burned in my stead. I was spirited away and was captured by Tanglebeard, who brought me to this garden and island in Africa, where I have remained for five hundred and sixty-two years at hard labor."

"But how have you kept so young?" I asked.

"By drinking the water of Bimini, the spring of perpetual youth. Tanglebeard brings some of this water to my cabin once a year for me to drink and it cures all my ills, and nearly keeps me young."

"How wonderful! This is the spring Ponce de Leon sought, but did not find," said Dave.

"I am disobeying orders. I must go to work, but, before we part, tell me a word about France," said she.

"Well, I want to tell you first that you are not in Africa, as you think, but you are in America, of the Western hemisphere."

She looked surprised.

"I never heard of the Western hemisphere before. What and where is it?"

"Bill, she came here before Columbus discovered America."

Then I told her about the Western hemisphere, and she was amazed.

"But tell me about France," she said.

"France is a great country now, and full of large cities, railroads, telegraph and telephones and has a big fleet propelled by steam," I replied.

"What is a railroad?" she asked.

Then I told her, in a few sweeping statements, what these things are and she marveled.

"But tell me about the French people themselves," she said.

"The Germans invaded France in 1871, defeated her and took Alsace and Lorraine."

How sad she looked!

"Poor France! Poor bleeding France!" she exclaimed in tears. "Oh, that I could have been there."

"What else?" she asked.

"The Germans and Austrians, in 1914, invaded France with seven millions of soldiers and waged a war for four years, the bloodiest conflict in history."

"Oh, Heavens!" she exclaimed, "what became of France?"

"She and her allies, at the second battle of the Marne, routed the Germans and Austrians, conquered them and took back Alsace and Lorraine."

She sprang to her feet like a little girl, slapping her hands and shouting: Long live France! Long live France! Long live France!"

Quieting down, she exclaimed: "Oh, that I could have been there!"

"Go young men, go and tell the King of France that Joan of Arc still lives. Tell him to send an army and rescue me and take me back to France once more. I long to see home and the little village of Domremy where I was reared."

"We will go to France, tell the story, return and rescue you," I said.

At this her heart leaped for joy.

"Excuse me young men, for I must go to work."

"But wait a moment," I said. "Are there any more captives on this island?"

"I know of one."

"Who is that?" I asked.

She hesitated.

"A few weeks ago, one afternoon just after a shower of rain, a tall, stately man stepped into my yard in a great hurry and, seeing me started to retreat."

"Who are you, who are you?" I asked.

"He did not stop, but as he vanished he said: I am Lord Kitchener of England."

"Great stars, Bill! The English think him dead and gone. Won't they be surprised.

"Now, go young men and speed away and save us all."

"Bidding her adieu, she went to work and we into the forest.