

CHAPTER XVI

Shewbread

Winding around southward for some hours we came to a meadow, about one mile across, in the center of which was a beautiful lake, fringed about with willows, clumps of trees and palms.

We sat down on a log to rest, admire the view, hear the birds sing and watch the wild animals graze.

"Look, Bill, look. Yonder comes an old white-headed negro man, walking with two sticks as high as his head."

"Where?" I asked.

"Look this way. Don't you see him trudging along on the east side of the lake?"

"Yes, but he is the oldest man I ever saw," I said. "He barely creeps. I don't believe he could walk without his sticks. Be quiet and let's see where he goes."

The poor old man came on up to the north end of the lake and, winding feebly around to the west, vanished into a large clump of oaks and palms by the waters' edge.

Then we took the hazard of walking in the open and, creeping up to the clump of trees, peeped in. We saw the old negro nodding in his cabin door by a little garden.

"Poor old slave," I said.

"Isn't it pitiable, Bill?"

Then we stepped up to him and said: "Hello."

He jumped and bleared his eyes at us and shook with fear.

"Have no fear, old man," said I "for we are friends. We are going to rescue you."

He fell upon his knees saying: "Save me, save me and take me back home."

We then helped him up and set him down in

his chair.

"Who are you?" I asked. "What is your name?"

"Shewbread Cheops," he replied.

"Where are you from?"

"I was born the slave of King Cheops and was reared in old Egypt."

"How old are you?" I asked.

"I do not know," he said, "but I have been here a mighty long time."

"Tell me some great event that occurred when you were a boy, and I may be able to fix your age by the date of that event," I requested.

Then the old negro hung his head for a moment and said: "I was a boy when King Cheops, my master, built the pyramids on the Nile. I can now see the workmen raising the great stones and placing them in layers on each other."

We were startled.

"Great stars, Uncle Shewbread!" Dave ex-

claimed. "Are you the slave of that great King?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, the pyramids were built six thousand years ago. How can you be that old?" I asked.

"I drink the water of Bimini which Tanglebeard brings to my door steps once a month. If I could drink that water every day I could live on and on for ages."

"Well, how came you here, Uncle Shrewbread?" I questioned.

"When Bimini, the great Egyptian navigator, discovered this country and the spring of youth, King Cheops ordered the story to be kept a secret, and he, coming here, brought me with him, built the Waving Moss Castle and made it his winter home."

"Who," I asked "lived in this country when you came here?"

"The Mounders."

"Who were they?" I said.

"They were the men who built the mounds."

"Were they Indians?" I asked.

"No. But they were a race that lived in this country before the Indians came." said he.

"Well, what became of King Cheops?" I asked.

"Tanglebeard, the terror of mid Africa, came here with lung fire, killed every soldier, the King and all his servants and attendants except me and my wife Nellie."

The old man made this statement with great earnestness.

"Why did he spare you?" I said.

"To be his slave and to work in his gardens."

"How long," said I "did you serve him?"

"Till the sons of King Cheops came, with a great army, and drove Tanglebeard out of the island and back to Africa."

"Well, then what happened?" I asked.

"I served the Egyptian King here in the Waving Moss Castle for ages, but finally Tanglebeard suddenly returned, burned up the lungs of the King and every one on the island and, making

me and my wife slaves, took possession of the island again."

This said, the old slave looked sad.

"Well now, Uncle Shewbread, when did this happen?" I asked.

"I do not know. It has been a long time, and not so long either."

"Well, tell of some great event that occurred about that time and let me fix the date again," I suggested.

He sat down on the door-step and dropped his head in deep study.

"Just before the last invasion I made a visit back to Egypt and served my master, the young Prince, for a long time and accompanied him on his journeys over there."

"Well, now I know you can recall some great events recorded in history, so relate some of them." I requested.

"Did you," said he "ever hear of a place called Rome?"

"Yes, what do you know about it?" I replied.

"I was there once with the Prince and saw the men kill each other with their swords, in a great circle."

"Bill, that must have been the gladiators in the arena. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Well, what else, Uncle Shewbread?" I urged.

"I was in Rome the day the conspirators killed a man by the name of Julius Caesar and oh, what an uproar it threw the people in. Men, women and children shrieked and fled in dismay."

"Bill, this is the most wonderful story I ever heard. Can it be true?"

I was amazed.

"Well, go on, Uncle Shewbread," I said "and think up something else."

"I, and the Prince, heard Cicero make a speech against a man by the name of Cataline."

"That was Cataline the robber," said Dave. "Think of it!"

"Isn't it wonderful?" said I. "But go on, Uncle Shewbread, go on."

"Several times I heard the great preacher preach."

"Who was that?" I asked.

"They called him Paul, and I saw the Romans put him in prison."

"Bill, Bill, Bill!" exclaimed Dave.

"Tell me something else, Uncle Shewbread, do!" I urged.

"We were present once, in a country east of the Mediterranean Sea, when the multitude were fed on two fishes and five loaves of bread, and I heard a man they called the Saviour of the world preach the Sermon on the Mount, and what a commotion it created."

We were astounded and amazed both.

"Great Heavens, Bill! Did anyone ever hear the like before?"

"I am amazed to the last degree," I replied.

Then we sat down on the old door-step.

"Now how long has it been since Tanglebeard killed the last King?" asked Uncle Shewbread.

"Well, according to your statement of facts,

it has been about two thousand years." I answered. "Now, Uncle Shewbread, I want to know how Tanglebeard kidnaps his victims?"

"This has always been a mystery," said he. "Some of the captives believe he has a machine that can fly in air and water both, but no one knows. However, one thing is certain, he has three monkeys—ghost-like in appearance and behavior—which he brought down to earth with him when he came."

Dave pushed his hat back, made a step and looked at me with a glance I can never describe.

"Well, what do they do, Uncle Shewbread?" he asked, nervously.

"Old Whitehead says he guards the house and home of Tanglebeard, Eagle-eye accompanies him on his island rambles, but old Hoochchin, the she-hag, dwells in a coffin somewhere in the Everglades."

"What became of your wife, Uncle Shewbread?" asked Dave.

"Tanglebeard separated us two thousand years

ago and I have never seen or heard of her since."

"Uncle Shewbread, I want to know how you came to speak English so well?" I asked.

"For more than a hundred years I, and an English slave, lived together, worked the same garden, and he taught me how to speak his language."

"Well, Uncle Shewbread, I want to know how you protect yourself from wild animals?" asked Dave.

Then he ran his hand into his pocket and, pulling out a strange looking stone, said: "This is the snake stone which Tanglebeard left for me on the door-steps. The odor of this stone does not bother me, but an animal will not come near it."

Thanking him for the wonderful story and history, we assured him we would rescue him.

"No, Master," said he, "I did ask you to free me, but you cannot do it. It would take an army to deliver me and, of course, I could not

expect you to send soldiers to rescue an old, wornout negro like me."

"We are now on our way to the outer world for an army to rescue you and the others," I said.

Then he fell upon his knees and cried: "Young Master, save the old negro and give him a few days freedom from Tanglebeard, if it is not too much trouble."

We helped him up, set him in the cabin door and, assuring him that we would rescue him, told him good-bye and started for the boat landing to see Charlie.