The Strange Story Book



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Yours Very Truly
A Lang

THE STRANGE STORY BOOK

BY MRS. LANG

EDITED BY ANDREW LANG

WITH PORTRAIT OF ANDREW LANG
AND 12 COLOURED PLATES AND
NUMEROUS OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. J. FORD

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PREFACE

TO THE CHILDREN

And now the time has come to say good-bye; and good-byes are always so sad that it is much better when we do not know that we have got to say them. It is so long since Beauty and the Beast and Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood came out to greet you in the 'Blue Fairy Book,' that some of you who wore pigtails or sailor suits in those days have little boys and girls of your own to read the stories to now, and a few may even have little baby grandchildren. Since the first giants and enchanted princes and ill-treated step-daughters made friends with you, a whole new world of wheels and wings and sharp-voiced bells has been thrown open, and children have toy motors and aeroplanes which take up all their thoughts and time. You may see them in the street bending over pictures of the last machine which has won a prize of a thousand pounds, and picturing to themselves the day when *they* shall invent something finer still, that will fly higher and sail faster than any of those which have gone before it.

Now as this is the very last book of all this series that began in the long long ago, perhaps you may like to hear something of the man who thought over every one of the twenty-five, for fear lest a story should creep in which he did not wish his little boys and girls to read. He was born when nobody thought of travelling in anything but a train—a very slow one—or a steamer. It took a great deal of persuasion to induce him later to get into a motor and he had not the slightest desire to go up in an aeroplane—or to possess a telephone. Somebody once told him of a little boy who, after giving a thrilling account at luncheon of how Randolph had taken Edinburgh Castle, had expressed a desire to go out and see the Museum; 'I like old things better than new,' said the child! 'I wish I knew that little boy,' observed the man. 'He would just suit me.' And that was true, for he too loved great deeds of battle and adventure as well as the curious carved and painted fragments guarded in muse-

ums which show that the lives described by Homer and the other old poets were not tales made up by them to amuse tired crowds gathered round a hall fire, but were real—real as our lives now, and much more beautiful and splendid. Very proud he was one day when he bought, in a little shop on the way to Kensington Gardens, a small object about an inch high which to his mind exactly answered to the description of the lion-gate of Mycenæ, only that *now* the lions have lost their heads, whereas in the plaster copy from the shop they still had eyes to look at you and mouths to eat you. His friends were all sent for to give their opinion on this wonderful discovery, but no two thought alike about it. One declared it dated from the time of Solomon or of Homer himself, and of course it would have been delightful to believe that! but then somebody else was quite certain it was no more than ten years old, while the rest made different guesses. To this day the question is undecided, and very likely always will be.

All beasts were his friends, just because they *were* beasts, unless they had been very badly brought up. He never could resist a cat, and cats, like beggars, tell each other these things and profit by them. A cat knew quite well that it had only to go on sitting for a few days outside the window where the man was writing, and that if it began to snow or even to rain, the window would be pushed up and the cat would spend the rest of its days stretched in front of the fire, with a saucer of milk beside it, and fish for every meal.

But life with cats was not all peace, and once a terrible thing happened when Dickon-draw-the-blade was the Puss in Possession. His master was passing through London on the way to take a journey to some beautiful old walled towns in the south of France where the English fought in the Hundred Years War, and he meant to spend a few weeks in the country along the Loire which is bound up with the memory of Joan of Arc. Unluckily, the night after he arrived from Scotland Dickon went out for a walk on the high trellis behind the house, and once there did not know how to get down again. Of course it was quite easy, and there were ropes of Virginia creeper to help, but Dickon lost his presence of mind, and instead of doing anything sensible only

stood and shrieked, while his master got ladders and steps and clambered about in the dark and in the cold, till he put Dickon on the ground again. Then Dickon's master went to bed, but woke up so ill that he was obliged to do without the old towns, and go when he was better to a horrid place called Cannes, all dust and tea-parties.

Well, besides being fond of beasts, he loved cricket, and he never could be in a house with a garden for half an hour without trying to make up a cricket team out of the people who were sitting about declaring it was too hot to do anything at all; yet somehow or other, in ten minutes they were running and shouting with the rest. He would even turn a morning call to account in this way. Many years ago, a young lady who wished to introduce a new kind of dancing and thought he might be of use to her, begged a friend to invite them to meet. They did meet, but before a dozen words had been exchanged one was on the lawn and the other in the drawing-room, and there they remained to the end of the visit.

Do you love ghosts? So did he, and often and often he wanted to write you a book of the deadliest, creepiest ghost-stories he could find or invent, but he was afraid: afraid not of the children of course, but of their mothers, who were quite certain that if such a volume were known only to be in print, all kinds of dreadful things would happen to their sons and daughters. Perhaps they might have; nobody can prove that they wouldn't. At any rate, it was best to be on the safe side, so the book was never written.

The books that told of wonderful deeds enthralled him too, and these he read over and over again. He could have stood a close examination of Napoleon's battles and generals, and would have told you the ground occupied by every regiment when the first shot was fired at Waterloo. As for travelling, he longed to see the places where great events had happened, but travelling tired him, and after all, when it came to the point, what was there in the world better than Scotland? As long as he could lie by a burn with a book in his pocket, watching the fish dancing in and out, he did not care so very much even about catching them. And he lay so still that two or three times a little bird came and

perched on his rod—once it was a blue and green kingfisher—and he went home brimming with pride at the compliment the bird had paid him. Wherever he stayed, children were his friends, and he would tell them stories and write them plays and go on expeditions with them to ghost-haunted caves or historic castles. He would adapt himself to them and be perfectly satisfied with their company, and there is certainly one story of his own which owes its ending to a little girl, though in the Preface he was careful to speak of her as 'The Lady.'

Everything to do with the ideas and customs of savages interested him, and perhaps if some of you go away by and bye to wild parts of the world, you will make friends with the people whose stories you may have read in some of the Christmas books. But remember that savages and seers of fairyland are just like yourselves, and they will never tell their secrets to anyone who they feel will laugh at them. This man who loved fairies was paying a visit in Ireland several years ago and the girls in the house informed him that an old peasant in the hills was learned in all the wisdom and spells of the little folk. He perhaps might be persuaded to tell them a little, he did sometimes, but never if his own family were about—'they only mocked at him,' he said. It was a chance not to be missed; arrangements were made to send his daughters out of the way, and the peasant's fairy-tales were so entertaining that it was hours before the party came back.

Well, there does not seem much more to add except to place at the end of these pages a poem which should have gone into the very first Fairy Book, but by some accident was left out. It is only those who know how to shake off the fetters of the outside world, and to sever themselves from its noise and scramble, that can catch the sound of a fairy horn or the rush of fairy feet. The little girl in the poem had many friends in fairyland as well as pets among the wood folk, and she has grown up among the books year by year, sometimes writing stories herself of the birds and beasts she has tamed, and being throughout her life the dearest friend of the man who planned the Christmas books twenty-five years ago.

TO ELSPETH ANGELA CAMPBELL

Too late they come, too late for you,
These old friends that are ever new,
Enchanted in our volume blue.
For you ere now have wandered o'er
A world of tales untold of yore,
And learned the later fairy lore!
Nay, as within her briery brake,
The Sleeping Beauty did awake,
Old tales may rouse them for your sake.
And you once more may voyage through
The forests that of old we knew,
The fairy forests deep in dew,
Where you, resuming childish things,
Shall listen when the Blue Bird sings,
And sit at feasts with fairy kings,
And taste their wine, ere all be done,
And face more welcome shall be none
Among the guests of Oberon.
Ay, of that feast shall tales be told,
The marvels of that world of gold
To children young, when you are old.
When you are old! Ah, dateless when,
For youth shall perish among men,

And Spring herself be ancient then.

A. L.

1889.

THE DROWNED BUCCANEER

The story of Wolfert Webber was said by Louis Stevenson to be one of the finest treasure-seeking stories in the world; and as Stevenson was a very good judge, I am going to tell it to you.

Wolfert's ancestor, Cobus Webber, was one of the original settlers who came over from Holland and established themselves on the coast of what is now the State of New York. Like most of his countrymen, Cobus was a great gardener, and devoted himself especially to cabbages, and it was agreed on all sides that none so large or so sweet had ever been eaten by anybody.

Webber's house was built after the Dutch pattern, and was large and comfortable. Birds built their nests under the eaves and filled the air with their singing, and a button-wood tree, which was nothing but a sapling when Cobus planted his first cabbage, had become a monster overshadowing half the garden in the days of his descendant Wolfert early in the eighteenth century.

The button-wood tree was not the only thing that had grown during those years. The city known at first as 'New Amsterdam,' and later as 'New York,' had grown also, and surrounded the house of the Webbers. But if the family could no longer look from the windows at the beautiful woods and rivers of the countryside, as their forefathers had done, there was no reason to drive a cart about from one village to another to see who wanted cabbages, for now the housewives came to Wolfert to choose their own, which saved a great deal of trouble.

Yet, though Wolfert sold all the cabbages he could raise, he did not become rich as fast as he wished, and at length he began to wonder if he was becoming rich at all. Food was dearer than when he was a boy, and other people besides himself had taken to cabbage-growing. His daughter was nearly a woman, and would want a portion if she mar-

ried. Was there no way by which he could make the money that would be so badly needed by and bye?

Thinking of those things, Wolfert walked out one blustering Saturday afternoon in the autumn to a country inn near the sea, much frequented by the Dutchmen who lived within reach. The usual guests were gathered round the hearth, and in a great leather armchair sat Ramm Rapelye, a wealthy and important person, and the first white child born in the State. Wolfert drew up a chair and stared moodily into the fire till he was startled by a remark of the landlord's, which seemed to chime in exactly with his thoughts.

'This will be a rough night for the money-diggers,' said he.

'What! are they at their works again?' asked a one-eyed English captain.

'Ay, indeed,' answered the landlord; 'they have had great luck of late. They say a great pot of gold has been dug up just behind Stuyvesant's orchard. It must have been buried there in time of war by old Stuyvesant, the governor.'

'Yes,' said Peechy Prauw, another of the group. 'Money has been dug up all over the island from time to time. The lucky man has always dreamt of the treasure three times beforehand, and, what is more wonderful still, nobody has ever found it who does not come from the old Dutch settlers—a sure proof that it was a Dutchman that buried it.'

That evening Wolfert went home feeling as if he was walking on air. The soil of the place must be full of gold, and how strange it was that so little of it should yet be upturned! He was so excited that he never listened to a word his wife said, and went to bed with his mind full of the talk he had heard.

His dreams carried on his last waking thoughts. He was digging in his garden, and every spadeful of mould that he threw up laid bare

handfuls of golden coins or sparkling stones. Sometimes he even lighted on bags of money or heavy treasure-chests.

When he woke, his one wish was to know if his dream would be repeated the next two nights, for that, according to Peechy Prauw, was needful before you could expect to discover the treasure.

On the third morning he jumped up almost mad with delight, for he had had the three dreams, and never doubted that he could become rich merely by stretching out his hand. But even so, great caution was necessary, or other people might suspect and rob him of his wealth before he had time to place it in safety. So as soon as he thought his wife and daughter were sound asleep, he got softly out of bed and, taking his spade and a pickaxe, began to dig in the part of the garden furthest from the road. The cabbages he left lying about, not thinking it was worth while for such a rich man to trouble about them.

Of course, his wife and daughter quickly perceived what he was doing, but he would explain nothing, and grew so cross when they ventured to put him a question that they feared he was going out of his mind.

Then the frosts began and the ground for many weeks was too hard to dig. All day long he sat gazing into the fire and dreaming dreams, and his wife saw their savings slowly dwindling.

At last spring came—surely the winter had never before been so long!—and Wolfert went gaily back to his digging; but not so much as a silver penny rewarded his labours. As the months passed by his energy became feverish, and his body thinner and thinner. His friends, one by one, ceased to come to his house, and at length his only visitor was a young man—Dick Waldron by name—whom he had rejected as a husband for his daughter on account of his poverty.

On a Saturday afternoon Wolfert left the house not knowing or caring where he was going, when suddenly he found himself close to the old inn by the sea-shore. It was a year since he had entered it, and several of the usual customers were now present, though in the great armchair once occupied by Ramm Rapelye a stranger was seated. He was

an odd and forbidding-looking person, short, bow-legged, and very strong, with a scar across his face; while his clothes were such a jumble of curious garments that they might have been picked out of dust-heaps at various times. Wolfert did not know what to make of him, and turned to inquire of Peechy Prauw, who took him into a corner of the large hall and explained how the man came there. As to who he was, no one knew; but one night a great shouting had been heard from the water-side, and when the landlord went down with his negro servant he found the stranger seated on a huge oak sea-chest. No ship was in sight, nor boat of any kind. With great difficulty his chest was moved to the inn and put in the small room which he had taken, and there he had remained ever since, paying his bill every night and spending all day at the window, watching with his telescope the ships that went by. And if anyone had been there to notice, they would have seen that it was the little vessels and not the big ones that he examined most attentively.

By and bye, however, there was a change in the stranger's habits. He spent less time in his room and more downstairs with the rest of the company, telling them wonderful stories of the pirates in the Spanish Main. Indeed, so well did he describe the adventures that his listeners were not slow in guessing that he had himself taken a chief part in them.

One evening the talk happened to turn on the famous Captain Kidd, most celebrated of buccaneers. The Englishman was relating, as he often did, all the traditions belonging to this hero, and the stranger who liked no one to speak but himself, could hardly conceal his impatience. At length the Englishman made some allusion to a voyage of Kidd's up the Hudson river in order to bury his plunder in a secret place, and at these words the stranger could contain himself no longer.

'Kidd up the Hudson?' he exclaimed; 'Kidd was *never* up the Hudson.'



WOLFERT FINDS A STRANGER AT THE INN

'I tell you he *was*,' cried the other; 'and they say he buried a quantity of treasure in the little flat called the Devil's Hammer that runs out into the river.'

'It is a lie,' returned the stranger; 'Kidd was *never* up the Hudson! What the plague do *you* know of him and his haunts?'

'What do *I* know?' echoed the Englishman. 'Why, I was in London at the time of his trouble and saw him hanged.'

'Then, sir, let me tell you that you saw as pretty a fellow hanged as ever trod shoe-leather, and there was many a landlubber looking on that had better have swung in his stead.'

Here Peechy Prauw struck in, thinking the discussion had gone far enough.

'The gentleman is quite right,' said he; 'Kidd never did bury money up the Hudson, nor in any of these parts. It was Bradish and some of his buccaneers who buried money round here, though no one quite knew where: Long Island, it was said, or Turtle Bay, or in the rocks about Hellgate. I remember an adventure of old Sam, the negro fisherman, when he was a young man, which sounded as if it might have to do with the buccaneers. It was on a dark night many years ago, when Black Sam was returning from fishing in Hellgate—' but Peechy got no further, for at this point the stranger broke in:

'Hark'ee, neighbour,' he cried; 'you'd better let the buccaneers and their money alone,' and with that the man rose from his seat and walked up to his room, leaving dead silence behind him. The spell was broken by a peal of thunder, and Peechy was begged to go on with his story, and this was it:—

Fifty years before, Black Sam had a little hut so far down among the rocks of the Sound that it seemed as if every high tide must wash it away. He was a hard-working young man, as active as a cat, and was a labourer at a farm on the island. In the summer evenings, when his work was done, he would hasten down to the shore and remove his

light boat and go out to fish, and there was not a corner of the Sound that he did not know, from the Hen and Chickens to the Hog's Back, from the Hog's Back to the Pot, and from the Pot to the Frying Pan.

On this particular evening Sam had tried in turn all these fishing-grounds, and was so eager to fill his basket that he never noticed that the tide was ebbing fast, and that he might be cast by the currents on to some of the sharp rocks. When at length he looked up and saw where he was, he lost no time in steering his skiff to the point of Blackwell's Island. Here he cast anchor, and waited patiently till the tide should flow again and he could get back safely. But as the night drew on, a great storm blew up and the lightning played over the shore. So before it grew too dark, Sam quickly changed his position and found complete shelter under a jutting rock on Manhattan Island, where a tree which had rooted itself in a cleft spread its thick branches over the sea.

'I shan't get wet, anyhow,' thought Sam, who did not like rain, and, making his boat fast, he laid himself flat in the bottom and went to sleep.

When he awoke the storm had passed, and all that remained of it was a pale flash of lightning now and then. By the light of these flashes—for there was no moon—Sam was able to see how far the tide had advanced, and judged it must be near midnight. He was just about to loose the moorings of his skiff, as it was now safe to venture out to sea, when a glimmer on the water made him pause. What could it be? Not lightning certainly, but whatever it was, it was rapidly approaching him, and soon he perceived a boat gliding along in the shadow, with a lantern at the prow. Sam instantly crouched still farther into the shadow, and held his breath as a boat passed by, and pulled up in a small cave just beyond. Then a man jumped on shore, and, taking the lantern, examined all the rocks.

'I've got it!' he exclaimed to the rest. 'Here is the iron ring,' and, returning to the boat, he and the five others proceeded to lift out something very heavy, and staggered with it a little distance, when they paused to take breath. By the light of the lantern which one of them held on high, Sam perceived that five wore red woollen caps, while the

man who had found the iron ring had on a three-cornered hat. All were armed with pistols, knives, and cutlasses, and some carried, besides, spades and pickaxes.

Slowly they climbed upwards towards a clump of thick bushes, and Sam silently followed them and scaled a rock which overlooked the path. At a sign from their leader they stopped, while he bent forward with the lantern, and seemed to be searching for something in the bushes.

'Bring the spades,' he said at last, and two men joined him and set to work on a piece of open ground.

'We must dig deep, so that we shall run no risks,' remarked one of the men, and Sam shivered, for he made sure that he saw before him a gang of murderers about to bury their victim. In his fright he had started, and the branches of the tree to which he was clinging rustled loudly.

'What's that?' cried the leader. 'There's someone watching us,' and the lantern was held up in the direction of the sound and Sam heard the cock of a pistol. Luckily his black face did not show in the surrounding dark, and the man lowered the lantern.

'It was only some beast or other,' he said, 'and surely you are not going to fire a pistol and alarm the country?'

So the pistol was uncocked and the digging resumed, while the rest of the party bore their burden slowly up the bank. It was not until they were out of sight that Sam ventured to move as much as an eyelid; but great as his fear was, his curiosity was greater still, and instead of creeping back to his boat and returning home, he resolved to remain a little longer.

The sound of spades could now be heard, and as the men would all be busy digging the grave, Sam thought he might venture a little nearer.

Guided by the noise of the strokes he crawled upwards, till only a steep rock divided him from the diggers. As silently as before he raised himself to the top, feeling every ledge with his toes before he put his feet on it, lest he should dislodge a loose stone which might betray him.

Then he peered over the edge and saw that the men were immediately below him—and far closer than he had any idea of. Indeed, they were so near that it seemed as if it were safer to keep his head where it was than to withdraw it.

By this time the turf was carefully being replaced over the grave, and dry leaves scattered above it.

'I defy anybody to find it out!' cried the leader at last, and Sam, forgetting everything, except his horror of their cruelty, exclaimed:

'The murderers!' but he did not know he had spoken aloud till he beheld the eyes of the whole gang fixed upon him.

'Down with him,' shouted they; and Sam waited for no more, but the next instant was flying for his life. Now he was crashing through undergrowth, now he was rolling down banks, now he was scaling rocks like a mountain goat; but when at length he came to the ridge at the back, where the river ran into the sea, one of the pirates was close behind him.

The chase appeared to be over; a steep wall of rock lay between Sam and safety, and in fancy he already heard the whiz of a bullet. At this moment he noticed a tough creeper climbing up the rock, and, seizing it with both hands, managed to swing himself up the smooth surface. On the summit he paused for an instant to take breath, and in the light of the dawn he was clearly visible to the pirate below. *This* time the whiz of the bullet was a reality, and it passed by his ear. In a flash he saw his chance of deceiving his pursuers and, uttering a loud yell, he threw himself on the ground and kicked a large stone lying on the edge into the river.

'We've done for him now I *think*,' remarked the leader, as his companions came panting up. 'He'll tell no tales; but we must go back and collect our booty, so that it shan't tell tales either,' and when their footsteps died away Sam clambered down from the rock and made his way to the skiff, which he pushed off into the current, for he did not dare to use the oars till he had gone some distance. In his fright he forgot all about the whirlpools of Pot and Frying Pan, or the dangers of the group

of rocks right in the middle of Hellgate, known as the Hen and Chickens. Somehow or other he got safely home, and hid himself snugly for the rest of the day in the farmhouse where he worked.

This was the story told by Peechy Prauw, which had been listened to in dead silence by the men round the fire.

'Is that all?' asked one of them when Peechy stopped.

'All that belongs to the story,' answered he.

'And did Sam never find out what they buried?' inquired Wolfert.

'Not that I know of,' replied Peechy; 'he was kept pretty hard at work after that, and, to tell the truth, I don't think he had any fancy for another meeting with those gentlemen. Besides, places look so different by daylight that I doubt if he could have found the spot where they had dug the grave. And after all, what is the use of troubling about a dead body, if you cannot hang the murderers?'

'But *was* it a dead body that was buried?' said Wolfert.

'To be sure,' cried Peechy. 'Why, it haunts the place to this day!'

'Haunts!' repeated some of the men, drawing their chairs nearer together.

'Ay, haunts,' said Peechy again. 'Have none of you heard of Father Redcap that haunts the old farmhouse in the woods near Hellgate?'

'Yes,' replied one; 'I've heard some talk of that, but I always took it for an old wives' tale.'

'Old wives' tale or not,' answered Peechy, 'it stands not far from that very spot—and a lonely one it is, and nobody has ever been known to live in it. Lights are seen from time to time about the wood at night, and some say an old man in a red cap appears at the windows and that he is the ghost of the man who was buried in the bushes. Once—so my mother told me when I was a child—three soldiers took shelter there, and when daylight came they searched the house through from top to bottom and found old Father Red Cap in the cellar outside on a cider-barrel, with a jug in one hand and a goblet in the other. He offered

them a drink, but just as one of the soldiers held out his hand for the goblet, a flash of lightning blinded them all three for several minutes, and when they could see again, Red Cap had vanished, and nothing but the cider-barrel remained.'

'That's all nonsense!' exclaimed the Englishman.

'Well, I don't know that I don't agree with you,' answered Peechy; 'but everybody knows there is something queer about the house. Still, as to that story of Black Sam's, I believe it just as well as if it had happened to myself.'

In the silence that followed this discussion, the roar of the storm might plainly be heard, and the thunder grew louder and louder every moment. It was accompanied by the sound of guns coming up from the sea and by a loud shout, yet it was strange that, though the whole strait was constantly lit up by lightning, not a creature was to be seen.

Suddenly another noise was added to the rest. The window of the room above was thrown up, and the voice of the stranger was heard answering the shout from the sea. After a few words uttered in a language unknown to anyone present, there was a great commotion overhead, as if someone were dragging heavy furniture about. The negro servant was next called upstairs, and soon he appeared holding one handle of the great sea-chest, while the stranger clung to the other.

'What!' cried the landlord, stepping forward in surprise, and raising his lantern. 'Are you going to sea in such a storm?'

'Storm!' repeated the stranger. 'Do you call this sputter of weather a storm? Don't preach about storms to a man whose life has been spent amongst whirlwinds and tornadoes,' and as he spoke, the voice from the water rang out, calling impatiently.

'Put out the light,' it said. 'No one wants lights here,' and the stranger turned instantly and ordered the bystanders who had followed from curiosity, back to the inn.

But although they retired to a little distance, under the shadow of some rocks, they had no intention of going any further. By help of the lightning they soon discovered a boat filled with men, heading up and down under a rocky point close by, and kept in position with great difficulty by a boat-hook, for just there the current was strong. One of the crew reached forward to seize a handle of the stranger's heavy sea-chest and assist the owner to place it on board. But his movement caused the boat to drift into the current, the chest slipped from the gunwale and fell into the sea, dragging the stranger with it, and in that pitch darkness and amidst those huge waves, no aid was possible. One flash, indeed, showed for an instant a pair of outstretched hands; but when the next one came, nothing was to be seen or heard but the roaring waters.

The storm passed at midnight, the men were able to return to their homes, casting, as they went along, fearful glances towards the sea. But the events of the evening, and the tales he had listened to, made a deep impression on the mind of Wolfert, and he wondered afresh if he were not the person destined to find the hidden treasure of Black Sam's adventure. It was no dead body, he felt sure, that the pirates had buried on the island, but gold and, perhaps, jewels; and the next morning he lost no time in going over to the place and making cautious inquiries of the people who lived nearest to it.

'Oh! yes,' he was told, 'he had heard quite right. Black Sam's story had filtered out somehow, and many were the visits which had been paid to the wood by experienced money-diggers, though never once had they met with success. And more, it had been remarked that for ever after, the diggers had in every case been dogged by ill-luck.' (This, thought Wolfert to himself, was because they had neglected some of the proper ceremonies necessary to be performed by every hunter after treasure.) 'Why, the very last man who had dug there,' went on the speakers, 'had worked the whole night, in spite of two handfuls of earth being thrown in for one which he threw out. However, he persevered and managed to uncover an iron chest when, with a roar that might have been heard across the Sound, a crowd of strange figures sprang out of the hole and dealt him such blows that he was fain to betake

himself to his boat as fast as his legs could carry him. This story the man told on his death-bed, so no doubt it was true.'



FATHER REDCAP FOUND IN THE CELLAR

Now every tale of the sort only went to prove to Wolfert that Sam had actually seen the pirates burying the treasure, and he was quite determined to make an effort to obtain it for himself. The first thing to be done was to get Sam to serve as his guide, for many years had passed since his adventure, and the trees and bushes would have grown thickly about the hole.

The negro was getting old by this time, but he perfectly recollected all that had happened, though *his* tale was not quite the same as the one told by Peechy Prauw. But, he was an active man yet, and readily agreed to go with Wolfert for a couple of dollars. As to being afraid of ghosts or pirates, Sam had long forgotten that he had feared either.

This time the two made their expedition mostly on foot, and after walking five or six miles they reached a wood which covered the eastern part of the island. Here they struck into a deep dark lane overgrown with brambles and overshadowed by creepers, showing that it was seldom indeed that anybody went that way. The lane ended at the shore of the Sound, and just there were traces of a gap surrounded by trees that had become tall since the days when Sam last saw them. Near by stood the ruins of a house—hardly more than a heap of stones, which Wolfert guessed to be the one in Peechy Prauw's story.

It was getting late, and there was something in the loneliness and desolation of the place which caused even Wolfert to feel uncomfortable. Not that he was specially brave, but his soul was so possessed with the idea of money-getting—or, rather, money-finding—that he had no thoughts to spare for other matters. He clung to Sam closely, scrambling along the edges of rocks which overhung the sea, till they came to a small cave. Then Sam paused and looked round; next he pointed to a large iron ring fastened to a sort of table-rock.

Wolfert's eyes followed him, and glistened brightly and greedily. This was the ring of Peechy Prauw's tale, and when the negro stooped to examine the rock more carefully, Wolfert fell on his knees beside

him and was able to make out just above the ring three little crosses cut in the stone.

Starting from this point, Sam tried to remember the exact path that the pirates had taken, and after losing his way two or three times came to the ridge of rock from which he had overlooked the diggers. On the face of it also were cut three crosses, but if you had not known where to look you would never have found them, for they were nearly filled up with moss. It was plain that the diggers had left this mark for their guidance, but what was not so plain was where they had buried their treasure, for fifty years change many things. Sam fixed first on one spot and then on another—it must have been under that mulberry tree, he declared. Or stay, was it not beside that big white stone, or beneath that small green knoll? At length Wolfert saw that Sam could be certain of nothing, and as he had brought neither spade nor pickaxe nor lantern with him, decided that he had better content himself with taking notes of the place, and return to dig some other day.

On their way back Wolfert's fancy began to play him strange tricks, as it has a way of doing when people are excited or very tired. He seemed to behold pirates hanging from every tree, and the fall of a nut or the rustling of a leaf caused him to jump and to feel for his companion. As they approached the garden of the ruined house, they saw a figure advancing along a mossy path with a heavy burden on his shoulders. On his head was a red cap, and he passed on slowly until he stopped at the door of what looked to be a burying-vault. Then he turned and shook his fist at them, and as Wolfert saw his face he recognised with horror the drowned buccaneer.

Wolfert did not need to look twice, but rushed away helter-skelter with Sam behind him, running nearly as fast as he had done fifty years before. Every stone they stumbled over they imagined to be the pirate's foot stretched out to trip them up; every bramble that caught them to be his hands grasping at their clothes. They only breathed fully when Wolfert's home was in sight.

It was several days before he recovered from the shock and the run combined, and all that time he behaved in such a strange manner that his wife and daughter were convinced that he was rapidly going mad. He would sit for hours together staring before him, and if a question was put to him, seldom gave a sensible answer. He scarcely ate any food, and if he *did* fall asleep, he talked about money-bags, and flung the blankets right and left, imagining that he was digging the earth out of the hole.

In this extremity the poor woman felt that the matter was beyond her skill, and she hastened to consult a German doctor famous for his learning. But the result was very different from what she had expected. At the doctor's first interview with Wolfert he questioned the patient closely as to all that he had seen and heard of the treasure, and at length told him that if he was ever to find it, it was necessary to proceed with the utmost caution and to observe certain ceremonies.

'You can never dig for money except at night,' ended the doctor, 'and then you must have the help of a divining rod. As I have some experience in these matters, you had better let me join in the search. If you agree to this, you can leave all preparations to me. In three days everything will be ready.'

Wolfert was delighted at this offer. Now, he thought, he was sure of success, and though he neglected his work as much as ever, he was so much brighter and happier than before that his wife congratulated herself on her wisdom in sending him to the doctor.

When the appointed night arrived Wolfert bade his women-kind go to bed and not to feel frightened if he should be out till daylight; and dressed in his wife's long, red cloak, with his wide felt hat tied down by his daughter's handkerchief, he set gaily out on his adventure.

The doctor was awaiting him, with a thick book studded with clasps under his arm, a basket of dried herbs and drugs in one hand, and the divining rod in the other. It was barely ten o'clock, but the whole village was fast asleep, and nothing was to be heard save the sound of

their own footsteps. Yet, now and then it seemed to Wolfert that a third step mingled with theirs, and as he glanced round he fancied he saw a figure moving after them, keeping always in the shadow but stopping when they stopped, and proceeding when they proceeded.

Sam was ready for them and had put the spades and pickaxes in the bottom of his boat, together with a dark lantern. The tide was in their favour running fast up the Sound, so that oars were hardly needed. Very shortly they were passing the little inn where these strange adventures had begun; it was dark and still now, yet Wolfert thought he saw a boat lurking in the very place where he had beheld it on the night of the storm, but the shadow of the rocks lay so far over the water that he could be sure of nothing. Still, in a few minutes he was distinctly aware of the noise of oars, apparently coming from a long way off, and though both his companions were silent, it was evident from the stronger strokes instantly pulled by Sam that he had heard it also. In half an hour the negro shot his skiff into the little cave, and made it fast to the iron ring.

Even with the help of the notes he had taken, it was some time before Wolfert managed to hit on the exact spot where the treasure had been buried. After losing their way twice or thrice they reached the ledge of rock with the crosses on it, and at a sign from Wolfert the doctor produced the divining rod. This was a forked twig, and each of the forks was grasped in his hand, while the stem pointed straight upwards. The doctor held it at a certain distance above the ground, and frequently changed his position, and Wolfert kept the light of the lantern full on the twig, but it never stirred. Their hopes and their patience were nearly exhausted when the rod began slowly to turn, and went on turning until the stem pointed straight to the earth.

'The treasure lies here,' said the doctor.

'Shall I dig?' asked Sam.

'No! no! not yet. And do not speak, whatever you see me do,' and the doctor drew a circle round them and made a fire of dry branches and dead leaves. On this he threw the herbs and drugs he had brought with

him, which created a thick smoke, and finished by reading some sentences out of the clasped book. His companions, nearly choked and blinded by the dense vapour, understood nothing of what was going on, and it is quite possible that there was not anything to understand, but the doctor thought that these ceremonies were necessary to the right beginning of any important adventure. At last he shut the book.

'You can dig now,' he said to Sam.

So the negro struck his pickaxe into the soil, which gave signs of not having been disturbed for many a long day. He very soon came to a bed of sand and gravel, and had just thrust his spade into it, when a cry came from Wolfert.

'What is that?' he whispered. 'I fancied I heard a trampling among the dry leaves and a rustling through the bushes.' Sam paused, and for a moment there was no sound to break the stillness. Then a bat flitted by, and a bird flew above the flames of the fire.

Sam continued to dig, till at length his spade struck upon something that gave out a hollow ring. He struck a second time, and turned to his companions.

'It is a chest,' he cried.

'And full of gold, I'll warrant,' exclaimed Wolfert, raising his eyes to the doctor, who stood behind him. But beyond the doctor who was that? By the dying light of the lantern, peering over the rock, was the face of the drowned buccaneer.

With a shriek of terror he let fall the lantern, which fizzled out. His companions looked up, and, seeing what he saw, were seized with a fear as great as his. The negro leaped out of the hole, the doctor dropped his book and basket, and they all fled in different directions, thinking that a legion of hobgoblins were after them. Wolfert made a dash for the water-side and the boat, but, swiftly as he ran, someone behind him ran more swiftly still. He gave himself up for lost, when a hand clutched at his cloak; then suddenly a third person seemed to gain

on them, and to attack his pursuer. Pistol shots were fired in the fierceness of the fight, the combatants fell, and rolled on the ground together.



THE FACE OF THE DROWNED BUCCANEER

Wolfert would thankfully have disappeared during the struggle, but a precipice lay at his feet, and in the pitch darkness he knew not where he could turn in safety. So he crouched low under a clump of bushes and waited.

Now the two men were standing again and had each other by the waist, straining and dragging and pulling towards the brink of the precipice. This much Wolfert could guess from the panting sounds that reached him, and at last a gasp of relief smote upon his ears followed instantaneously by a shriek and then a plunge.

One of them had gone, but what about the other? Was he friend or foe? The question was soon answered, for climbing over a group of rocks which rose against the sky was the buccaneer. Yes; he was sure of it.

All his terrors revived at the sight, and he had much ado to keep his teeth from chattering. Yet, even if his legs would carry him, where could he go? A precipice was on one side of him and a murderer on the other. But as the pirate drew a few steps nearer, Wolfert's fears were lashed into frenzy, and he cast himself over the edge of the cliff, his feet casting about for a ledge to rest on. Then his cloak got caught in a thorn tree and he felt himself hanging in the air, half-choking. Luckily the string broke and he dropped down, rolling from bank to bank till he lost consciousness.

It was long before he came to himself. When he did, he was lying at the bottom of a boat, with the morning sun shining upon him.

'Lie still,' said a voice, and with a leap of the heart he knew it to be that of Dick Waldron, his daughter's sweetheart.

Dame Webber, not trusting her husband in the strange condition he had been in for months, had begged the young man to follow him, and though Dick had started too late to overtake the party, he had arrived in time to save Wolfert from his enemy.

The story of the midnight adventure soon spread through the town, and many were the citizens who went out to hunt for the treasure.

Nothing, however, was found by any of the seekers; and whether any treasure had been buried there at all, no one could tell, any more than they knew who the strange buccaneer was, and if he had been drowned or not. Only one thing was curious about the whole affair, and that was the presence in the Sound at that very time of a brig looking like a privateer which, after hanging about for several days, was seen standing out to sea the morning after the search of the money-diggers.

Yet, though Wolfert missed one fortune, he found another, for the citizens of Manhattan desired to cut a street right through his garden, and offered to buy the ground for a large sum. So he grew to be a rich man after all, and might be seen any day driving about his native town in a large yellow carriage drawn by two big black Flanders mares.