

Captain Kidd's Money.

by Harriet Beecher Stowe

One of our most favorite legendary resorts was the old barn. Sam Lawson preferred it on many accounts. It was quiet and retired, that is to say, at such distance from his own house, that he could not hear if Hepsy called ever so loudly, and farther off than it would be convenient for that industrious and painstaking woman to follow him. Then there was the soft fragrant cushion of hay, on which his length of limb could be easily bestowed. Our barn had an upper loft with a swinging outer door that commanded a view of the old mill, the waterfall, and the distant windings of the river, with its grassy green banks, its graceful elm draperies, and its white flocks of water-lilies; and then on this Saturday afternoon we had Sam all to ourselves. It was a drowsy, dreamy October day, when the hens were lazily "craw, crawling," in a soft, conversational undertone with each other, as they scratched and picked the hay-seed under the barn windows. Below in the barn black Cæsar sat quietly hatchelling flax, sometimes gurgling and giggling to himself with an overflow of that interior jollity with which he seemed to be always full. The African in New England was a curious contrast to everybody around him in the joy and satisfaction that he seemed to feel in the mere fact of being alive. Every white person was glad or sorry for some appreciable cause in the past, present, or future, which was capable of being definitely stated; but black Cæsar was in an eternal giggle and frizzle and simmer of enjoyment for which he could give no earthly reason: he was an "embodied joy," like Shelley's skylark.

"Jest hear him," said Sam Lawson, looking pensively over the hay-mow, and strewing hayseed down on his wool. "How that 'are critter seems to tickle and laugh all the while 'bout nothin'. Lordy massy! he don't seem never to consider that 'this life's a dream, an empty show.'"

"Look here, Sam," we broke in, anxious to cut short a threatened stream of morality, "you promised to tell us about Capt. Kidd, and how you dug for his money."

"Did I, now? Wal, boys, that 'are history o' Kidd's is a warnin' to fellers. Why, Kidd had pious parents and Bible and sanctuary privileges when he was a boy, and yet come to be hanged. It's all in this 'ere song I'm a goin' to sing ye. Lordy massy! I wish I had my

bass-viol now.--Cæsar," he said, calling down from his perch, "can't you strike the pitch o' 'Cap'n Kidd,' on your fiddle?"

Cæsar's fiddle was never far from him. It was, in fact, tucked away in a nice little nook just over the manger; and he often caught an interval from his work to scrape a dancing-tune on it, keeping time with his heels, to our great delight.

A most wailing minor-keyed tune was doled forth, which seemed quite refreshing to Sam's pathetic vein, as he sang in his most lugubrious tones,--

"My name was Robert Kidd As I sailed, as I sailed, My name was Robert Kidd; God's laws I did forbid, And so wickedly I did, As I sailed, as I sailed.'

"Now ye see, boys, he's a goin' to tell how he abused his religious privileges; just hear now:--

"My father taught me well, As I sailed, as I sailed; My father taught me well To shun the gates of hell, But yet I did rebel, As I sailed, as I sailed.

"He put a Bible in my hand, As I sailed, as I sailed; He put a Bible in my hand, And I sunk it in the sand Before I left the strand, As I sailed, as I sailed.'

"Did ye ever hear o' such a hardened, contrary critter, boys? It's awful to think on. Wal, ye see that 'are's the way fellers allers begin the ways o' sin, by turnin' their backs on the Bible and the advice o' pious parents. Now hear what he come to:--

"Then I murdered William More, As I sailed, as I sailed; I murdered William More, And left him in his gore, Not many leagues from shore, As I sailed, as I sailed.

"To execution dock I must go, I must go. To execution dock, While thousands round me flock, To see me on the block, I must go, I must go.'

"There was a good deal more on't," said Sam, pausing, "but I don't seem to remember it; but it's real solemn and affectin'."

"Who was Capt. Kidd, Sam?" said I.

"Wal, he was an officer in the British navy, and he got to bein' a pirate: used to take ships and sink 'em, and murder the folks; and so they say he got no end o' money,--gold and silver and precious stones, as many as the wise men in the East. But ye see, what good did it all do him? He couldn't use it, and dar'sn't keep it; so he used to bury it in spots round here and there in the awfulest heathen way ye ever heard of. Why, they say he allers used to kill one or two men or women or children of his prisoners, and bury with it, so that their sperits might keep watch on it ef anybody was to dig arter it. That 'are thing has been tried and tried and tried, but no man nor mother's son on 'em ever got a cent that dug. 'Twas tried here'n Oldtown; and they come pretty nigh gettin' on't, but it gin 'em the slip. Ye see, boys, it's the Devil's money, and he holds a pretty tight grip on't."

"Well, how was it about digging for it? Tell us, did you do it? Were you there? Did you see it? And why couldn't they get it?" we both asked eagerly and in one breath.

"Why, Lordy massy! boys, your questions tumbles over each other thick as martins out o' a martin-box. Now, you jest be moderate and let alone, and I'll tell you all about it from the beginnin' to the end. I didn't raily have no hand in't, though I was know-in' to 't, as I be to most things that goes on round here; but my conscience wouldn't raily a let me start on no sich undertakin'.

"Wal, the one that fust sot the thing a goin' was old Mother Hokum, that used to live up in that little tumble-down shed by the cranberry-pond up beyond the spring pastur'. They had a putty bad name, them Hokums. How they got a livin' nobody knew; for they didn't seem to pay no attention to raisin' nothin' but childun, but the duce knows, there was plenty o' them. Their old hut was like a rabbit-pen: there was a tow-head to every crack and cranny. 'Member what old Cæsar said once when the word come to the store that old Hokum had got twins. 'S'pose de Lord knows best,' says Cæsar, 'but I thought dere was Hokums enough afore.' Wal, even poor workin' industrious folks like me finds it's hard gettin' along when there's so many mouths to feed. Lordy massy! there don't never seem to be no end on't, and so it ain't wonderful, come to think on't, ef folks like them Hokums gets tempted to help along in ways that ain't quite, right. Anyhow, folks

did use to think that old Hokum was too sort o' familiar with their wood-piles 'long in the night, though they couldn't never prove it on him; and when Mother Hokum come to houses round to wash, folks use sometimes to miss pieces, here and there, though they never could find 'em on her; then they was allers a gettin' in debt here and a gottin' in debt there. Why, they got to owin' two dollars to Joe Gidger for butcher's meat. Joe was sort o' good-natured and let 'em have meat, 'cause Hokum he promised so fair to pay; but he couldn't never get it out o' him. 'Member once Joe walked clear up to the cranberry-pond artor that 'are two dollars; but Mother Hokum she see him a comin' jest as he come past the juniper-bush on the corner. She says to Hokum, 'Get into bed, old man, quick, and let me tell the story,' says she. So she covered him up; and when Gidger come in she come up to him, and says she, 'Why, Mr. Gidger, I'm jest ashamed to see yo: why, Mr. Hokum was jest a comin' down to pay yo that 'are money last week, but ye see he was took down with the small-pox'--Joe didn't hear no mow: he just turned round, and he streaked it out that 'are door with his coat-tails flyin' out straight ahind him; and old Mother Hokum she jest stood at the window holdin' her sides and laughin' fit to split, to see him run. That 'are's jest a sample o' the ways them Hokums cut up.

"Wal, you see, boys, there's a queer kind o' rock down on the bank 'o the river, that looks sort o' like a grave-stone. The biggest part on't is sunk down under ground, and it's pretty well growed over with blackberry-vines; but, when you scratch the bushes away, they used to make out some queer marks on that 'are rock. They was sort o' lines and crosses; and folks would have it that them was Kidd's private marks, and that there was one o' the places where he hid his money.

"Wal, there's no sayin' fairly how it come to be thought so; but fellers used to say so, and they used sometimes to talk it over to the tahvern, and kind o' wonder whether or no, if they should dig, they wouldn't come to suthin'.

"Wal, old Mother Hokum she heard on't, and she was a sort o' enterprisin' old crittur: fact was, she had to be, 'cause the young Hokums was jest like bag-worms, the more they growed the more they eat, and I expect she found it pretty hard to fill their mouths; and so she said ef there was any thing under that 'are rock, they'd as good's have it as the Devil; and so she didn't give old Hokum no peace o' his life, but he must see what there was there.

"Wal, I was with 'em the night they was a talk-in' on't up. Ye see, Hokum he got thirty-seven cents' worth o' lemons and sperit. I see him goin' by as I was out a splittin' kindlin's; and says he, 'Sam, you jest go 'long up to our house to-night,' says he: 'Toddy Whitney and Harry Wiggin's com-in' up, and we're goin' to have a little suthin' hot,' says he; and he kind o' showed me the lemons and sperit. And I told him I guessed I would go 'long. Wal, I kind o' wanted to see what they'd be up to, ye know.

"Wal, come to find out, they was a talkin' about Cap'n Kidd's treasures, and layin' out how they should get it, and a settin' one another on with gret stories about it.

"'I've heard that there was whole chists full o' gold guineas,' says one.

"'And I've heard o' gold bracelets and ear-rings and finger-rings all sparklin' with diamonds,' says another.

"'Maybe it's old silver plate from some o' them old West Indian grandees,' says another.

"'Wal, whatever it is,' says Mother Hokum, 'I want to be into it,' says she.

"'Wal, Sam, won't you jine?' says they.

"'Wal, boys,' says I, 'I kind o' don't feel jest like j'inin'. I sort o' ain't clear about the rights on't: seems to me it's mighty nigh like goin' to the Devil for money.'

"'Wal,' says Mother Hokum, 'what if 'tis? Money's money, get it how ye will; and the Devil's money 'll buy as much meat as any. I'd go to the Devil, if he gave good money.'

"'Wal, I guess I wouldn't,' says I. 'Don't you 'member the sermon Parson Lothrop preached about hastin' to be rich, last sabba' day?'

"'Parson Lothrop be hanged!' says she. 'Wal, now,' says she, 'I like to see a parson with his silk stockin's and great gold-headed cane, a lollopin' on his carriage behind his fat, prancin' hosses, comin' to meetin' to preach to us poor folks not to want to be rich! How'd he like

it to have forty-'leven children, and nothin' to put onto 'em or into 'em, I wonder? Guess if Lady Lothrop had to rub and scrub, and wear her fingers to the bone as I do, she'd want to be rich; and I guess the parson, if he couldn't get a bellyful for a week, would be for diggin' up Kidd's money, or doing 'most any thing else to make the pot bile.'

"Wal,' says I, 'I'll kind o' go with ye, boys, and sort o' see how things turn out; but I guess I won't take no shere in't,' says I.

"Wal, they got it all planned out. They was to wait till the full moon, and then they was to get Primus King to go with 'em and help do the diggin'. Ye see, Hokum and Toddy Whitney and Wiggin are all putty softly fellers, and hate dreffully to work; and I tell you the Kidd money ain't to be got without a pretty tough piece o' diggin. Why, it's jest like diggin' a well to get at it. Now, Primus King was the master hand for diggin' wells, and so they said they'd get him by givin' on him a shere.

"Harry Wiggin he didn't want no nigger a sherin' in it, he said; but Toddy and Hokum they said that when there was such stiff diggin' to be done, they didn't care if they did go in with a nigger.

"Wal, Wiggin he said he hadn't no objection to havin' the nigger do the diggin,' it was sherin' the profits he objected to.

"Wal,' says Hokum, 'you can't get him without,' says he. 'Primus knows too much,' says he: 'you can't fool him.' Finally they 'greed that they was to give Primus twenty dollars, and shere the treasure 'mong themselves.

"Come to talk with Primus, he wouldn't stick in a spade, unless they'd pay him aforehand. Ye see, Primus was up to 'em; he knowed about Gidger, and there wa'n't none on 'em that was particular good pay; and so they all jest hed to rake and scrape, and pay him down the twenty dollars among 'em; and they 'greed for the fust full moon, at twelve' o'clock at night, the 9th of October.

"Wal, ye see I had to tell Hepsy I was goin' out to watch. Wal, so I was; but not jest in the way she took it: but, Lordy massy! a feller has to tell his wife suthin' to keep her quiet, ye know, 'specially Hepsy.

"Wal, wal, of all the moonlight nights that ever I did see, I never did see one equal to that. Why, you could see the color o' every thing. I 'member I could see how the huckleberry-bushes on the rock was red as blood when the moonlight shone through 'em; 'cause the leaves, you see, had begun to turn.

"Goin' on our way we got to talkin' about the sperits.

"I ain't afraid on 'em,' says Hokum. 'What harm can a sperit do me?' says he. 'I don't care ef there's a dozen on 'em;' and he took a swig at his bottle.

"Oh! there ain't no sperits,' says Harry Wiggin. 'That 'are talk's all nonsense;' and he took a swig at his bottle.

"Wal,' says Toddy, 'I don't know 'bout that 'are. Me and Ike Sanders has seen the sperits in the Cap'n Brown house. We thought we'd jest have a peek into the window one night; and there was a whole flock o' black colts without no heads on come rushin' on us and knocked us flat.'

"I expect you'd been at the tahvern,' said Hokum.

"Wal, yes, we had; but them was sperits: we wa'n't drunk, now; we was jest as sober as ever we was.'

"Wal, they won't get away my money,' says Primus, for I put it safe away in Dinah's teapot afore I come out;' and then he showed all his ivories from ear to ear. 'I think all this 'are's sort o' foolishness,' says Primus.

"Wal,' says I, 'boys, I ain't a goin' to have no part or lot in this 'ere matter, but I'll jest lay it off to you how it's to be done. Ef Kidd's money is under this rock, there's 'sperits' that watch it, and you mustn't give 'em no advantage. There mustn't be a word spoke from the time ye get sight o' the treasure till ye get it safe up on to firm ground,' says I. 'Ef ye do, it'll vanish right out o' sight. I've talked with them that has dug down to it and seen it; but they allers lost it, 'cause they'd call out and say suthin'; and the minute they spoke, away it went.'

"Wal, so they marked off the ground; and Primus he begun to dig, and the rest kind o' sot round. It was so still it was kind o' solemn. Ye see,

it was past twelve o'clock, and every critter in Oldtown was asleep; and there was two whippoorwills on the great Cap'n Brown elm-trees, that kep' a answerin' each other back and forward sort o' solitary like; and then every once in a while there'd come a sort o' strange whisper up among the elm-tree leaves, jest as if there was talkin' goin' on; and every time Primus struck his spade into the ground it sounded sort o' holler, jest as if he'd been a diggin' a grave. 'It's kind o' melancholy,' says I, 'to think o' them poor critters that had to be killed and buried jest to keep this 'ere treasure. What awful things 'll be brought to light in the judgment day! Them poor critters they loved to live and hated to die as much as any on us; but no, they hed to die jest to satisfy that critter's wicked will. I've heard them as thought they could tell the Cap'n Kidd places by layin' their ear to the ground at midnight, and they'd hear groans and wailin's."

"Why, Sam! were there really people who could tell where Kidd's money was?" I here interposed.

"Oh, sartin! why, yis. There was Shebna Basconx, he was one. Shebna could always tell what was under the earth. He'd cut a hazel-stick, and hold it in his hand when folks was wantin' to know where to dig wells; and that 'are stick would jest turn in his hand, and p'int down till it would fairly grind the bark off; and ef you dug in that place you was sure to find a spring. Oh, yis! Shebna he's told many where the Kidd money was, and been with 'em when they dug for it; but the pester on't was they allers lost it, 'cause they would some on 'em speak afore they thought."

"But, Sam, what about this digging? Let's know what came of it," said we, as Sam appeared to lose his way in his story.

"Wal, ye see, they dug down about five feet, when Primus he struck his spade smack on something that chincked like iron.

[Illustration: They dug down about five feet, Page 119]

"Wal, then Hokum and Toddy Whitney was into the hole in a minute: they made Primus get out, and they took the spade, 'cause they wanted to be sure to come on it themselves.

"Wal, they begun, and they dug and he scraped, and sure enough they come to a gret iron pot as big as your granny's dinner-pot, with an iron bale to it.

"Wal, then they put down a rope, and he put the rope through the handle; then Hokum and Toddy they clambered upon the bank, and all on 'em began to draw, up jest as still and silent as could be. They drawed and they drawed, till they jest got it even with the ground, when Toddy spoke out all in a tremble, 'There,'. says he, 'we've got it!' And the minit he spoke they was both struck by suthin that knocked 'em clean over; and the rope give a crack like a pistol-shot, and broke short off; and the pot went down, down, down, and they heard it goin', jink, jink, jink; and it went way down into the earth, and the ground closed over it; and then they heard the screechin'est laugh ye ever did hear."

"I want to know, Sam, did you see that pot?" I exclaimed at this part of the story.

"Wal, no, I didn't. Ye see, I jest happened to drop asleep while they was diggin', I was so kind o' tired, and I didn't wake up till it was all over.

"I was waked up, 'cause there was consid'able of a scuffle; for Hokum was so mad at Toddy for speakin', that he was a fistin' on him; and old Primus he jest haw-hawed and laughed. 'Wal, I got my money safe, anyhow,' says he.

"Wal, come to,' says I. "Tain't no use cryin' for spilt milk: you've jest got to turn in now and fill up this 'ere hole, else the selectmen 'll be down on ye.'

"Wal,' says Primus, 'I didn't engage to fill up no holes;' and he put his spade on his shoulder and trudged off.

"Wal, it was putty hard work, fillin' in that hole; but Hokum and Toddy and Wiggin had to do it, 'cause they didn't want to have everybody a laughin' at 'em; and I kind o' tried to set it home to 'em, showin' on 'em that 'twas all for the best.

"Ef you'd a been left to get that 'are money, there'd a come a cuss with it,' says I. 'It shows the vanity o' hastin' to be rich.'

"Oh, you shet up!" says Hokum, says he. 'You never hasted to any thing,' says he. Ye see, he was riled, that's why he spoke so."

"Sam," said we, after maturely reflecting over the story, "what do you suppose was in that pot?"

"Lordy massy! boys: ye never will be done askin' questions. Why, how should I know?"