

The Flamingo Feather by Kirk Munroe

Chapter I: René de Veaux

On a dreary winter's day, early in the year 1564, young René de Veaux, who had just passed his sixteenth birthday, left the dear old chateau where he had spent his happy and careless boyhood, and started for Paris. Less than a month before both his noble father and his gentle mother had been taken from him by a terrible fever that had swept over the country, and René their only child, was left without a relative in the world except his uncle the Chevalier René de Laudonniere, after whom he was named. In those days of tedious travel it seemed a weary time to the lonely lad before the messenger who had gone to Paris with a letter telling his uncle of his sad position could return. When at length he came again, bringing a kind message that bade him come immediately to Paris and be a son to his equally lonely uncle, René lost no time in obeying.

He travelled like a young prince, riding a spirited steed, and followed by a party of servants, mounted and armed to protect him against robbers and other perils of the way. Behind him rode old François, who had been his father's valet and was now his sole friend and protector. The big tears rolled down the boy's cheeks as he turned for a last look at his home; but as it was shut from view by the trees of the park surrounding it, he brushed them away resolutely, and turning to his companion, said,

"Thou hast seen the last of my tears, François, and with them goes my boyhood; for hereafter I am to be a man, and men know not how to weep."

"Well spoken, my young master," replied the old servant, greatly pleased at the brave words of the lad. "Thou art already a man in feeling, and thine Uncle Laudonniere will presently make thee one in fact, if the tales that come to us of his valorous deeds be true, and there is naught to disprove them."

"Tell me of him, François; for though he is my only uncle, I have but little knowledge of him or his deeds. Of what nature are they?"

"Well, then, he is a mighty navigator, and 'tis but little more than a year since he returned from the New World, whither he sailed in company with his Excellency Admiral Jean Ribault. He brings strange tales of those wonderful lands beyond the sea, and rumor has it that he is shortly to set forth again for them with a noble company, who will establish there a sanctuary for our blessed Protestant faith."



The boy's interest was thoroughly aroused by this, and he plied the old servant with questions concerning his uncle and the New World. François answered these to the best of his ability, and even drew largely upon his imagination to aid his glowing descriptions of those distant lands of which the men of that day held such vague knowledge.

With such talk they beguiled much of the tedious journey, that occupied a week ere it was ended and they entered Paris. Here they were finally set down before a modest dwelling near the King's palace, in which Laudonniere was lodged.

Upon meeting his nephew, the chevalier embraced him warmly, and then holding him forth at arm's-length to gain a better view of him, exclaimed, "In good sooth, René, thou'rt a likely lad; and if thy heart be as true and bold as thy face promises, we'll soon make a man of thee such as even thy noble father would approve."

That evening uncle and nephew talked long and earnestly together concerning the latter's future; and ere they slept it was fully decided that, in spite of his youth, he should make one of the expedition that, even as François had reported, Laudonniere was fitting out for the New World.

The next three months were occupied in busy preparation for the long voyage, not unmixed with vexatious delays and grievous disappointments, in all of which young René de Veaux bore manfully his share. He became each day more useful to his uncle, who intrusted him with many important commissions, and who, stern old soldier as he was, learned in this time to love the boy as though he had been his own son.

At length all was in readiness. The stores and munitions of war had been placed on board the three ships that formed the little fleet, the last colonist had embarked, and Laudonniere had taken leave of his King and Admiral Jean Ribault, who was to follow him in a few months with a still larger company. On a bright May morning uncle and nephew reached the little seaport town before which lay their ships, and hastened to embark and take advantage of the favorable wind that promised them a fair start on their long and perilous voyage.

As Laudonniere stepped on board his flagship his broad pennant was flung to the breeze from the mainmast-head, the fleur-de-lis of France floated proudly from the mizzen, and amid the booming of cannon and the loud acclamations of the throngs assembled on the quay to bid them Godspeed, the ships moved slowly down the harbor towards the broad ocean and the New World that lay beyond.

For many weeks they sailed ever westward, seeing no ship save their own, and becoming every day more weary of the vast, endless expanse of sea and sky. It is no wonder, then, that when on the morning of the 22d of June the welcome cry of

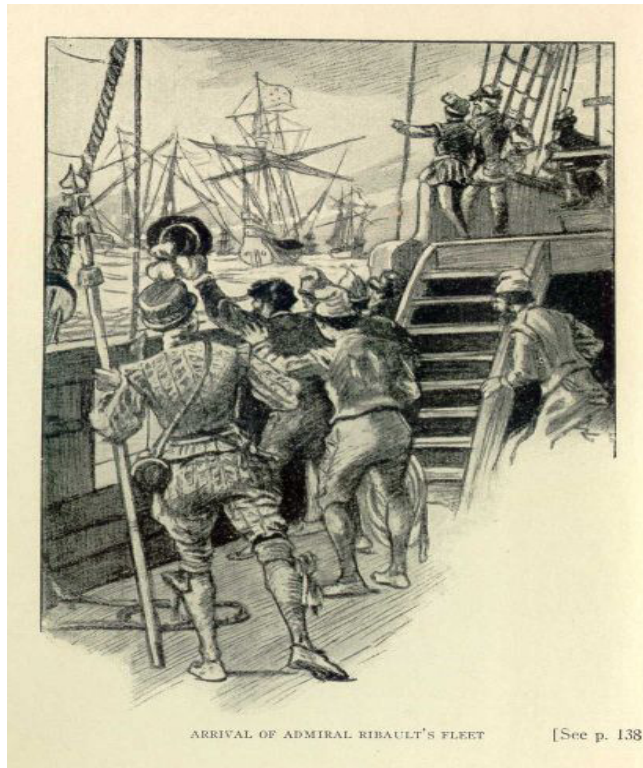


“Land, ho!” rang through the flag-ship every soul on board rushed on deck with joyous exclamations to catch once more a glimpse of the blessed land. The cry that had brought them such pleasure had come from the mast-head, and it was some time before those on deck could detect the dim blue cloud, low-lying in the west, that was said to be land. Even then one man, who was known as Simon the Armorer, was heard to mutter that it might be land and then again it might not; for his part, he believed the whole world had been drowned in a flood, as in the days of Noah, and that the only land they should ever see would be at the bottom of the ocean.

As the day wore on, and before a light breeze the ships were wafted towards the blue cloud, it was proved beyond a doubt to be land, for some palm-trees and tall pines became above all other distinct, the heavy,

By noon the as near to the prudent, and for leaving France their and their sails were

They had come mouth of an inlet, a bar upon which breaking and that no passage for seemed to offer thought he as one leading on the opposite located an Indian



ARRIVAL OF ADMIRAL RIBAULT'S FLEET [See p. 138]

distinguishable, and sounds came, faint but regular boom of surf. ships had approached coast as was deemed the first time since anchors were dropped furling.

to anchor off the before which extended the great seas were roaring so frightfully the ships among them itself. Laudonniere recognized the inlet into a broad river, side of which was village called Selo.

This place he had visited two years before in company with Admiral Ribault, and he determined to reassure himself as to the locality; therefore, bidding René accompany him, he entered a small boat, and ordering another, full of soldiers, to follow them, he gave the word to pull straight for the breakers.

Just as René thought the boat was to be swallowed by the raging seas, his uncle guided her, with great skill, into a narrow passage that opened in their very midst. After a few minutes of suspense, during which René dared hardly to breathe, they shot into smooth waters, rounded a point of land, and saw before them the village of which they



were in search. On the beach in front of it a crowd of savage figures, nearly naked, were dancing wildly, and brandishing bows and spears.

Meanwhile, the village that the boats were now approaching had been thrown into a state of the greatest excitement by the appearance of the ships, which had been discovered while yet so distant that their sails resembled the wings of the white seagull. Upon the first alarm all the warriors had been collected on the beach, and the women had left their work in the fields of maize and hurried with the children to the security of the forest depths. When, however, the fleet came to anchor and the Indians could distinguish the meaning of their banners, their alarm was changed to joy; for they had learned to love the French—who, upon their previous visit, had treated them with kindness—as much as they hated the cruel Spaniards, whose ships had also visited that coast. Then the women and children were recalled from the forest, the warriors washed the war-paint from their faces, and preparations for feasting were begun.

As the small boats approached, the men ran down to the beach to meet them, dancing and waving their weapons in their joy, and when they recognized Laudonniere standing in the stern of the leading boat, they raised a great cry of welcome that caused the forest to ring with its echoes. As the pious leader of the expedition stepped on shore, he took René by the hand, and both kneeling on the sands, gave thanks to Him who guided them thus far in safety in their perilous wanderings. Though the simple-minded Indians could not understand what Laudonniere said or was doing, they were so anxious to show their respect and love for him that all knelt when he did and maintained a deep silence while he prayed.

When Laudonniere arose to his feet the Indians crowded about him with shouts and gestures of welcome; but they readily made way for him when, still holding René's hand, he began to walk towards the lodge of their chief. He was as anxious as his followers to welcome the white men, but his dignity had not permitted him to rush with them down to the beach.

As they walked, René stared in astonishment at the waving palms with richly plumaged birds flitting among their leaves, the palmetto-thatched huts of the Indians, the shining and inflated fish-bladders that the men wore suspended from their ears, the moss-woven kirtles of the women, and above all, at the mighty antlered stag that, stuffed and mounted on a tall pole, with head proudly turned towards the rising sun, rose from the middle of the village.

He in turn was an object of astonishment and curious interest to the natives; for, although they had become familiar with the appearance of bearded white men, they had never before seen a white boy, René being the first to set foot in this land. The Indians



had thought that all white men were born with beards, and that their closely cropped hair never grew any longer; so that this smooth-faced boy, whose golden hair hung in ringlets over his shoulders, was a much greater curiosity to them than they were to him. The old chief took an immediate fancy to him, and as he had given to Laudonniere the Indian name of Ta-lah (a palm) upon the occasion of his previous visit to Seloy, he now called René Ta-lah-lo-ko (the palmetto, or little palm), a name ever afterwards used by all the Indians in their intercourse with him.

The chief entreated Laudonniere to tarry many days in Seloy; but the latter answered that the orders of his own great chief were for him to proceed without delay to the river known as the River of May, and there erect a fort and found his colony. So, after an exchange of presents, they parted, and taking to their boats, the white men regained their ship. As they left, René gave many a backward glance at the pleasant little village of Seloy, and would have loved to linger there among its simple and kindly people.

As they crossed the bar, in going again to the ships, their boats were surrounded by a number of what they called dolphins, but what are today called porpoises, sporting in the great billows; and on their account Laudonniere named the river they had just left the River of Dolphins.

Spreading their white wings, the ships sailed northward forty miles during the night, and daylight found them standing off and on at the mouth of the great River of May. By the aid of a chart, made by Admiral Ribault two years before, they crossed its dangerous bar, and sailed up its broad channel.

Short as was the time since they had been discovered off Seloy, swift runners had already conveyed the great tidings of their coming to Micco, the chief of this part of the country, and he and his people were thus prepared to greet them upon their arrival. When René and his uncle, followed by a company from the ships, landed, they were received with shouts and extravagant gestures of joy by the friendly Indians, and conducted by them to the top of a hill upon which Admiral Ribault had set a pillar of stone engraved with the French coat of arms. They found it twined with wreaths of flowers, and surrounded by baskets of maize, quivers of arrows, and many other things that the kindly Indians took this means of offering to their white friends.

Not far from this point Laudonniere selected the site of his fort, and work upon it was immediately begun. He named it Fort Caroline, in honor of King Charles IX of France, and about it he hoped to see in time a flourishing colony of French Huguenots.

After all the stores and munitions had been landed from the ships, they sailed for France, leaving the little company of white men the only ones of their race in



all that vast unknown wilderness. As Laudonniere remained in command of Fort Caroline, René de Veaux of course remained with him, and thus became the hero of the surprising adventures that will be related in the chapters that follow.

