

# *The Flamingo Feather* by Kirk Munroe

## Chapter X: Mutiny at Fort Caroline

During the progress of the exciting events related in the preceding chapters, troublous times had come to Fort Caroline, on the banks of the Great River of May. Above it hung the three black clouds of starvation, mutiny, and war.

Before the sudden departure of René de Veaux on his journey in search of food, a party of ten men had been sent out by Laudonniere to explore the country to the south of the fort, and discover, if possible, the mountains of gold that were supposed to exist there. For more than a month they had traversed broad sand barrens, crossed deep rivers, and been lost in the mazes of dark swamps. They had discovered rare birds of gorgeous plumage, strange and beautiful flowers, and many wild animals whose nature was unknown to them, but no trace of the gold of which they were in search.

Keenly disappointed, ragged, sick, and hungry, they at length came to a village of Indians who had never seen nor heard of white men, and who fled at their approach. The famished soldiers rushed into the lodges, took whatever they could find to eat, and, building a fire, proceeded to cook for themselves a feast. While they were thus busy, their carelessly tended fire crept to one of the tinder-like palmetto lodges, and in a few minutes more the whole village was in flames.

From their hiding-places in the surrounding forest, the savages, witnessing what they supposed to be a wanton destruction of their property, discharged a cloud of arrows at the white men, by which one was killed and several were wounded. Flying from the place, the wretched soldiers started for Fort Caroline, followed by their unseen foes, from whom they did not escape until four more had paid with their lives for their carelessness. When, some days later, the five miserable survivors of this unfortunate expedition dragged themselves into Fort Caroline, it was only to bring the news of their failure to find gold, of the death of their comrades, and of the fact that they had stirred up all the Southern Indians to war upon the whites.

Laudonniere, who had taken René's departure keenly to heart, and who had grieved over the lad as though he were lost to him, had also suffered great anxiety on account of the scarcity of provisions within the fort. Now, added to these troubles, came these latest tidings of ill, and, as a result, the fever against which he was struggling overcame him, and he was confined to his bed.

To many within Fort Caroline the serious illness of their chief brought great sorrow; but others, seeing in it an opportunity for the carrying out of their own plans, rejoiced accordingly. These others were those who were dissatisfied with the present aspect of affairs, and despairing of a change for the better while remaining at Fort Caroline, were secretly planning a mutiny. Its object was to compel Laudonniere to abandon the fort and the New World, and to lead them back to France in a ship which they proposed to build from such materials as they had at hand.

The mutineers were headed by no less a person than René's old friend Simon, the armorer. He had always been inclined to grumble and growl, and his feelings had been deeply wounded by being arrested, confined in the guard-house for one day, and finally discharged (because of the necessity for his services), with a sharp reprimand from Laudonniere for having, though unconsciously, aided René's departure. The old growler had always secretly sided with the mutineers, and after this he openly took part with them, and soon became their leader.

It thus happened that as the good Le Moyne, who, during the illness of Laudonniere and most of the other officers, was acting as lieutenant in command of the fort, sat writing one morning, there came to him Simon, the armorer, followed by most of the garrison. The old soldier gave a military salute, which Le Moyne returned, and then he said,

"We have come, Master Le Moyne, these good men here and I, to make certain propositions that we desire should be laid before his Excellency the commandant."

"Well," said Le Moyne, in a tone of mild surprise, "have to them without further delay, and return quickly to thy duties."

"It may be," replied Simon, "that we will return not to them at all; at least not in the wise meant by thy use of the word. We are starving."

"Ye have not overmuch to eat, tis true," said Le Moyne; "but we hope for better things."

"We are dying of the fever."

"To a certain extent this is also true."

"We are threatened by an enemy."

"And have stout walls behind which to defend ourselves."

"We are abandoned and forgotten, and our bodies will rot in this place ere succor is sent us."

"Admiral Jean Ribault is never the man to abandon or forget those to whom he has promised succor," replied the artist, with a flush of color in his pale cheeks.

"This country yields no gold, and is unfitted for human residence."



“Yet Micco’s people live and thrive here, and have a plenty of the best raised from its soil. As for gold, the mere fact that it has not yet been discovered proves nothing against its existence.”

Without replying to this, Simon continued:

“These be our grievances, and to remedy them we pray his Excellency to allow us to construct here as speedily as may be a vessel such as will suffice to carry us back whence we came. We also pray that he will in person lead us from this evil place back to our own country, always supposing that his health permits.”

The good Le Moyne was much disturbed by this bold proposal, and attempted to persuade the men to abandon their wild scheme and return to their duties, awaiting patiently meantime the arrival of the promised reinforcements from France. They insisted, however, that they would not take their leave of him without hearing from the commandant himself, and Le Moyne was finally forced to comply with their request, and deliver their message to Laudonniere.

Upon receiving a report of what had occurred, the chevalier was highly indignant; and but for the extreme weakness which the fever had laid upon him, he would have arisen and gone out to the mutineers. As this was impossible, he sent answer to them that he could not for a moment consider their proposal. He and they had been sent to take and hold possession of that country by their King, and here he should remain until he received other instructions from the same source. As for them, his orders were that they instantly resume their duties, and use all diligence in strengthening the fort, and preparing for an attack which might at any moment be made upon it by the savages from the south.

When Le Moyne returned to the soldiers with this answer, Simon, still acting as spokesman for the rest, said,

“Thy message from the commandant is much as we expected it would be, Master Le Moyne, and in return thou wilt kindly take to him word again that for the preservation of our lives we shall certainly exert ourselves to repel any attack that may be made against the fort. At the same time we shall as certainly take active measures to insure our own and his speedy departure from this unhappy country, in which we have thus far gained naught but ill.”

With this speech, and once more giving Le Moyne a stiff military salute, the old soldier turned and marched away, followed by the rest of the mutineers.

As soon as he was once more alone, Le Moyne made his report to Laudonniere, and so excited did the sick man become on hearing it that his fever took a sudden turn



for the worse, and he was soon raving deliriously, and calling upon René de Veaux not to desert him for his enemies the Indians.

Meantime matters proceeded so rapidly outside that the keel of a small vessel in which the mutineers hoped to cross the ocean to their own country was laid that very day, and the labor of collecting suitable material for ship-building was entered upon with the fierce energy of men who believed they were working to save their lives.

So actively did this work proceed that in less than a month the hull of the little vessel was completed, and she stood ready for launching.

At this time parties were out in several directions from the fort, some securing pitch from the pine forests for use upon the vessel, others searching the cypress swamps for suitable spars, and still others making unskilled efforts to secure a supply of game and fish for present use, and for salting down to provision their ship during her proposed voyage. These last were the most unsuccessful of all who were out, owing to their limited knowledge of wood-craft. They were at the same time the most anxious to succeed in their quest; for the supply of corn in the fort was now wholly exhausted, and the garrison was subsisting almost entirely upon fish and the leaf buds of the cabbage palm, which they had discovered how to prepare.

On the day that marked a month from the date of René de Veaux's departure, the working parties whose duties took them into the forest were suddenly attacked by great numbers of savages, and driven in the greatest confusion back to the fort, after sustaining severe losses in killed and wounded. The advance of the savages, who followed them closely, even up to the very gates, was only checked by a heavy fire of artillery, which so alarmed them that they fled in a panic to the shelter of the forest, nor stopped until they had retreated to a most respectful distance.

Towards evening a body of the enemy were seen gathered in plain view on and about the great shell mound upon which the Feast of Ripe Corn had been held some weeks before. The sight of them so enraged Simon, the armorer, who was now generally recognized as commandant, that he determined to sally forth at the head of a strong party and bring about a decisive battle, which he had no doubt would result in a victory for the whites.

Although he could muster but about fifty able-bodied men, so sadly had fever and lack of proper food ravaged the garrison, the old soldier, who held the fighting qualities of the savages in great contempt, deemed this number amply sufficient for his purpose, and marched forth confidently at their head. They met with no enemy until they had nearly reached the shell mound, and were preparing to charge upon the savages, who still remained gathered about it.



Suddenly the whites found themselves completely surrounded by a great number of Indians, who seemed to spring, as though by magic, from every bush and from behind every tree. So secretly had their approach been made that the first notice Simon and those with him had of the ambush into which they had fallen, was a vast discharge of arrows and spears into their ranks. These were accompanied by such blood-curdling yells that they affected the white men almost as fearfully as the roar of their own artillery had terrified the savages in the morning.

Rallying from their first panic, they made a desperate attempt to force their way back to the fort, and struggled like men who knew their lives were at stake. In spite, however, of their bravery and the terrible execution of their swords, they were being overpowered by numbers, and it seemed impossible that a single one of them should escape with his life.

As, completely exhausted by the terrible and unequal struggle, they were about giving way to despair, a most welcome and unexpected diversion was made in their favor. A great cry arose beyond the line of savages, and they were so suddenly and fiercely attacked in the rear by an unseen foe that they fled in the utmost terror in all directions.

Not even waiting to learn who had lent them this most timely aid, the soldiers hastened to regain the fort and seek shelter behind its ponderous gates.

As they did so, they heard, or thought they heard, from the depths of the forest, a clear voice crying, "France to the Rescue! France to the Rescue!" and they marvelled greatly thereat.

