

CAST UP BY THE SEA.

THE STORY OF JOHN RIDLEY AND HIS DAUGHTER.

The Singular Phenomenon at the Mouth of Spanish Wells Harbor—Fate of a Mysterious Englishman — The Dreadful Storm of the Bahamas.

(Special Correspondence.)

SPANISH WELLS, Bahama Islands, Nov. 8.—The natives of this region still speak with awe of the "hurricane of '66." It was indeed a dreadful storm, and it spread death's mantle all over these beautiful isles. We who live in the busy world have well nigh forgotten the disaster. Its memory is crowded out of our calendar. But the people of Eleuthera and other Bahama islands lead almost eventless lives, and a casualty such as that hurricane is perfectly fresh to this day.

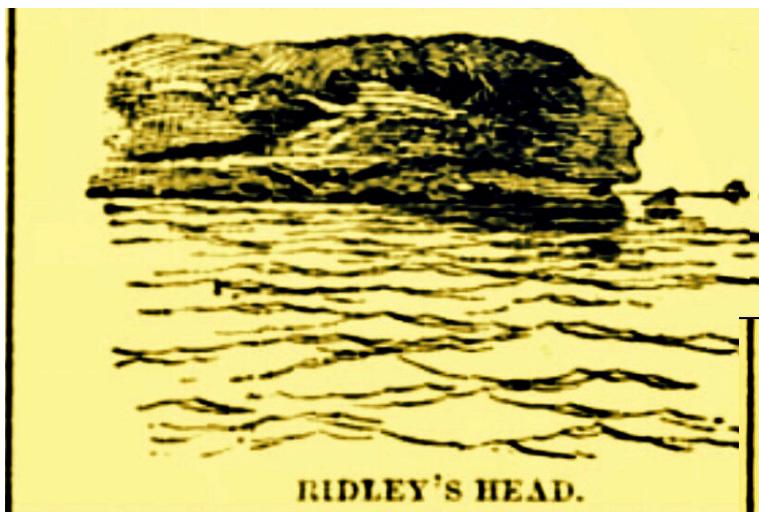
Passing up the coast of Eleuthera from Harbor Island to Spanish Well, I saw the timbers of a vessel projecting above the sand of a little beach. When I arrived at Spanish Wells, Joe Pindar and I sailed day after day in his dingy, and I heard the story of Ridley's Head. I also learned the history of the wreck.

Look for "Ridley Head"
on the
Eleuthera Treasure Map.

I doubt if in all the world there is a more singular phenomenon of nature than this presented in Ridley's Head. At the mouth of Spanish Wells harbor a series of high, jagged cliffs jut boldly out over the ocean. A native of the settlement will convey you in a boat to the harbor entrance, and when he reaches the right spot you will see Ridley's Head. A stranger would never find it himself, but with a Bahaman as a pilot you will behold the crags blend and blend until a gigantic profile is formed. The outline is that of the face of an old man. Every lineament is stern, from the firm chin to the high forehead. Bushes perfectly resemble hair. A fragment of rock has fallen into the water, and that is Ridley's Hat. The face must measure 80 feet in length. It is a wonderful sight.

The eastern coast of Eleuthera is very rough. Instead of the smiling landscape that greets us as we approach the majority of the Bahamas, here the waves beat against precipitous headlands or rocky shores. From Harbor Island up around the north-east of Eleuthera to Spanish Wells the sea is especially dangerous for vessels. The inside passage is rarely attempted—never without an experienced pilot. Reefs show in every direction, and through them and skirting the inhospitable coast winds a narrow channel. Sometimes there is scarcely room for a schooner to slide along. The vicinity is dreaded by sailors and is hardly equaled in the world. God help the ship caught on a lee shore at this point. The sharp coral rocks would splinter her in an instant, and the bones of the crew would be broken in pieces.

The brig John Drew of Nova Scotia was overtaken half way between Harbor Island and Spanish Wells by the hurricane of 1866. She was, of course, absolutely helpless and was driven, in the first fury of the storm, over the reefs upon the shore. When the gale had ceased, such was the force of wind and wave that only a few timbers



RIDLEY'S HEAD.

The "s" in "Ridley's" was eventually dropped and today it is simply referred to as "Ridley Head."

stuck out of the sand to mark her grave. The elements had buried her deep. Her cargo of tobacco was never reached by the wreckers. The bodies of the crew were swallowed by the reefs. The captain's remains were washed upon the crags and there found. Two persons miraculously escaped. The bodies of a man and young girl were discovered in a shallow near the shore. They were not lifeless, and with no inconsiderable exertion the inhabitants who had collected there fanned the spark of vitality in each into a steady flame.

The stranger, when he had recovered consciousness, said his name was John Ridley. The girl was his daughter. When the vessel became unmanageable, the two bound life preservers about them and jumped into the ship's boat. The captain followed them. All the crew had taken the other boat and deserted. The frail craft containing these three was carried over the reefs, right up to the shore, and then capsized. The captain doubtless was hurled on a rock and stunned, but the man and girl managed to cling together. He grasped a crag and hung on until the spray choked him. Then, it seems, the billows flung him and his fainting daughter into an angle behind a reef. Here they were in a comparatively sheltered place. And so life was vouchsafed to John Ridley and his child. He never told his history.

Preacher's Cave, Spanish Wells, and Harbor Island are also on the Eleuthera Treasure Map.

Inquiry since has demonstrated that he was an Englishman of wealthy and noble connections. He was accused of a crime and fled from Liverpool to America. He took passage from Baltimore on the Drew, for his daughter's health, he said. He expressed no desire to return to America. An occasional fruiter is the only vessel that visits Spanish Wells. Ridley appeared to be satisfied with his lot and bought house there, and with the assistance of his neighbors furnished it. He was uncommunicative, and although he appreciated the favors shown him he sought no company save that of his daughter. He idolized her. Bessie Ridley was a veritable angel of light to these simple, homely Bahamans. Her blue eyes, her wavy hair, her slender little figure, her sweetness of disposition, form an ideal worshiped to this day by these islanders.

Ridley purchased a dingy, and he and Bessie spent most of the daytime on the water. Two years passed. On a Sunday afternoon a squall rushed down from the east, and many a small boat was wrecked near Spanish Wells. After the storm was over the body of the Englishman was found, battered and disfigured, at the base of the great head. Life was extinct. The girl, Bessie Ridley, was never seen again, but her hat, daintily ornamented with colored grasses, was picked up way on top of the cliff.

And so Ridley's Head was christened. They say ~~th~~ on bad nights the spirit of the English maiden can be seen there flitting from crag to crag. But John Ridley rests quietly in the little graveyard at Spanish Wells.

ED L. SABIN.