Our Unknown Islands.

Some Valuable Bits of the West Indies Which Have Become Uncle Sam's Through Spain.

The Isle of Vieques and Its Capital—It Has a French and English Population—Its Fine Cattle and Horses—The Caja de Muertos, or "Dead Man's Chest," and Other Islets Which Have Fortunes in Phosphates—A Look at Mona Island and Its Wonderful Caves—Something About Our New Mammoth Cave in the Porto Rican Mountains.

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ISABELLA SEGUNDA, Isle of Vieques, Aug. 3.—I have spent the past week in gathering information about some of Uncle Sam's unknown islands. By our treaty with Spain we secured scores of islands in addition to Porto Rico. Some of these are points of rock built up by coral insects, forming little more than spots on the face of the sea. Others are of considerable value and, among them, those which I describe in this letter. I am writing now on Vieques, the island of crabs, which lies thirteen miles east of Porto Rico and not very far from St. Thomas. It is sixty-four miles from San Juan, and is connected with the mainland by the little government steamer, the Slocum, which comes to it with supplies for the soldiers and the mail once every week. Through the kindness of the quartermaster at San Juan I was allowed a pass on the Slocum during its present voyage, and by it was landed in Isabella Segunda.

ISLANDS NORTH OF PORTO RICO.

We began to pass islands which belong to Uncle Sam as soon as we left San Juan. We sailed by several on our way out of the harbor, and then along the north coast of Porto Rico, just outside a reef of low coral islets upon which the blue waves dashed themselves, casting up a line of white foam.

Behind this snowy fringe we could see the blue mountains rising in a rolling line of beauty which was now and then lost in the clouds. They hung about the islands, wrapping the mountains with their nebulous humidity. This region is very moist and clouds are one of the peculiar features of all Porto Rican scenery. They are filled with rain which now and then drops down in a needle-like spray, and at times falls in sheets and streams. There are clouds everywhere. They hang so close to the mountains as to make you think that you could by climbing the hills turn on the spigots of the heavens and have shower baths to order.

OUR NEW LEPER ISLAND.

We saw islands in front of us shortly after we left the capital, and after steaming for several hours we passed Cape San Juan at the northwestern end of Porto Rico proper and had the Culebra islands almost directly in front of us. The Culebra islands are quite large. Some contain hundreds of acres of rolling land rising like mountains out of the sea. One of them is of especial interest just now, because it has been chosen as a home for the leper population of Porto Rico.

There are a number of lepers scattered throughout the country, and Uncle Sam is doing all he can to gather them together and isolate them. The lepers are very secretive, and it is difficult to find out just who they are. The poor herd together to such an extent that the danger of contamination is great, and so the government has chosen this island as the exclusive home of the lepers. At present there are eleven lepers in the hospital at San Juan, and four more have been reported as living in different parts of Porto Rico.

As we passed the Culebra group I could see the island which has been chosen. It is known as "Louis Peña." It rises about 400 feet above sea level, contains 400 acres, and is covered with a dense growth of tropical vegetation. About one-half of it can be cultivated, and there are now cattle and goats upon it. It will raise all kinds of vegetables and the tropical fruits peculiar to Porto Rico. There are plenty of fish in the waters about it. Its woods contain parrots and also game birds much like our American pheasants. There are also turtles and shell fish in the waters about the coast, and it is believed that the leper colonies will be largely self-supporting. The government expects to build a hospital on the island. It will give the lepers houses and will supply them with seeds and farming tools, and will stimulate them in every way to form a society of their own.

The government boats will visit the island at regular intervals with supplies for the lepers, but otherwise the colony will be completely isolated from the rest of the world.

DOWN THE EAST COAST.

Sailing by this island, our little steamer skirted the island of Palomainos, steaming southward toward Vieques. Afar off in front of the ship we could see Vieques, a hazy blue line of low mountains floating, as it were, upon the sea apparently about twenty or thirty miles away. We did not go direct, but first entered the harbor of the town of Fajardo, on the northwestern coast of Porto Rico, and then made our way south to the harbor of Humacao. We were so close to the mainland that we could see the sugar plantations which line the shores. They were green squares of light green shining out of the brown fields about them. Back of the green rose the navy blue mountains of the Porto Rican backbone, with the peak El Yunque, the highest mountain of the island, towering above them. At the port for Humacao we came to anchor in a bay surrounded by cocoanut trees. Here we landed a hogshead of ice for some of our army officials, who are stationed about six miles back from the coast, and then turned and steamed eastward toward Vieques.

THE ISLAND OF VIEQUES.

It took us little more than an hour to come from Porto Rico into the river of Isabella Segunda. This is on the north coast of the island, about halfway between its two ends. Vieques consists of a mountain ridge about twenty-one miles long and six miles wide. It is beautifully green, and the low mountains rise and fall, forming a rolling country, in which are some of the most fertile lands of our West Indian possessions. The soil is such that it will grow all kinds of vegetables and fruits. The island has a number of large sugar plantations, and it raises the best cattle of the West Indies.

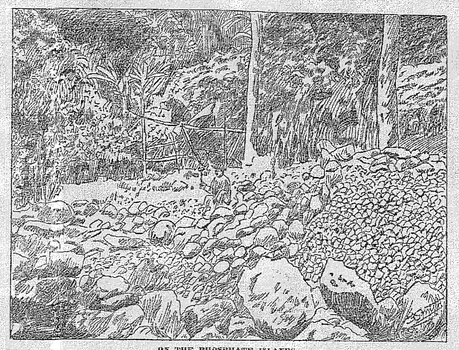
The chief harbor is that of Isabella Segunda, although there is a port on the south which gives a better landing place. The harbor here is surrounded by hills, and it is unsafe at the time of the northerly winds. As it was, our little steamer had to anchor far out to shore, and I climbed down a rope ladder into a boat which carried me to the wharf. It was a ride of perhaps two miles, and the landing at the little pier which runs out into the ocean was by no means easy.

Isabella Segunda nestles among the hills right on the beach. At one side of it there is a blue-colored light-house, and on the hill back of the town is a moss-grown fort, built by the Spaniards, which is now a barracks for our soldiers. The town has about 1,000 population. It is made up of square one-story cottages with galvanized iron roofs. The houses are built along wide unpaved streets, which cross one another at right angles. The streets are shaded beautifully by great trees. Many of the homes have pretty gardens about them. There are benches on the sides of the front doors, and altogether everything looks thrifty and clean. In the center of the town there is a plaza, with a public cistern for the poor.

The people of Vieques number all told, about 8,000. They are not like the Porto Ricans. The island during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries belonged to the English and French, and although for the past 100 years it has been under Spanish rule it still has English and French among its people. It has many negroes who speak English, most of whom have come from the island of St. Thomas to labor on the plantations. The richest of the planters are French, and the French language is largely used throughout the island.

CATTLE AND HORSES.

Vieques has several large horse ranches. The animals are allowed to run out all the year round. The grass is good and no grain is required. It is the same with the Vieques cattle, which are raised for export to Porto Rico and Cuba. Those which I have seen are much larger than the ordinary run of cattle in the United States. Many of the two-year-old steers will weigh 1,100 or 1,200 pounds. The prices of cattle are lower than with us, a fairly good animal costing about $18. The Vieques stock growers are more enterprising than those of Porto Rico. They have some imported stock, Durhams and Herefords being not uncommon. A few weeks ago several cows were given to the soldiers of Company I, of the Eleventh Infantry. They proved to be very good, producing rich milk and fine cream.



ON THE PHOSPHATE ISLANDS.

NO LAND FOR SALE.

I have made inquiries as to prices of land here, but am told there is none for sale. The island is owned by a few people who are well satisfied with their condition. Among the largest owners are the sugar planters, some of whom make as high as 5,000 bags of sugar a year. Their plantations are scattered over the lowlands. There is but little good timber on Vieques, most of it having been cut off. The climate is said to be excellent. There is no sickness whatever, and such epidemics as attack Porto Rico do not seem to come here.

At present the only Americans on the island of Crabs are the postmaster, a Philadelphian named Lancaster, the soldiers and the signal service men, who heliograph messages from this city to the mainland. The distance is not far and the heliograph works quite as well as the telegraph, and all orders can be sent by the flashes of the sun upon mirrors from one point to the other.

There are quite a number of Protestants in Vieques, and among them a blind preacher who lived for a long time in South Carolina. He is a negro, who went from South Carolina to St. Thomas and then came here. He has been a resident of Vieques for many years.

THE DEAD MAN'S CHEST.

Next to Vieques, the two most valuable of Uncle Sam's new islands about Porto Rico are Mona Island and the Caja de Muertos, or "Chest of the Dead." I will treat of the Dead Man's Chest first.

The Caja de Muertos lies south of Porto Rico. It was at one time a hospital island to which incurables were transported to die, and from this fact came its name. It lies about four miles from Ponce. It is about a mile long and half a mile wide. You can see it from the Ponce harbor, for it rises abruptly from the sea and has a light house upon it. It has some good pasture lands, but this is a small part of its value.

The treasures of the Dead Man's Chest are in the phosphates which are found in its caves and in the soil a little back from the shore. In one of the caves I am told there are probably more than 100,000 tons of valuable phosphates. They are of two kinds. One is a pure lime phosphate and the other a phosphate much like our South Carolina rock. They are earth phosphates which have been enriched by the manure of the millions of birds and bats which live in the caves.

This island is now owned by a Porto Rican who had a concession from the Spanish government for working the phosphate, and this has, I am told, been confirmed by our government. The property is said to be valuable, its owners claiming that the phosphates, after paying all expenses of mining and shipment to Hamburg, will net $7 a ton there, and that there is a demand for all that can be exported.

THE ISLAND OF MONA.

I saw something of the island of Mona in going about the western end of Porto Rico to Ponce. Our government transports land first at San Juan and thence steam around the eastern end of Porto Rico through the Mona passage. This is the name of a broad channel in the ocean flowing between Porto Rico and Santo Domingo. It is one of the highways of travel, but is not frequented as much as some of the other channels into the Caribbean sea.

Mona Island lies just west of the city of Mayaguez. It is of volcanic origin, with coasts rising perpendicularly to a great height above sea level. Some of its shores are bounded with white cliffs in which are numberless grottoes or caves, where, from a map recently published by the war department, there are large caverns marked as "positively unknown." Other parts of Mona Island are good for grazing, and a small part of it is wooded.

Mona Island once contained large deposits of phosphates, which were mined and sent to Hamburg. One of the men interested in the industry was the same Porto Rican, who now owns half the phosphates of the Caja de Muertos. It may be that a re-exploration of Mona Island will result in additional discoveries of fertilizers. The island can be easily reached by small boats from Mayaguez, although at present it is inhabited only by a stray fisherman or so who comes for a time and then go back to Porto Rico.

FORTUNES IN PHOSPHATES.

This matter of phosphates is one that will pay careful investigation. I am told that nearly all of the numerous small islands about Porto Rico have phosphatic deposits. The most of them have not been worked and many have not been prospected. Every now and then I hear of some new place containing phosphates. One of the most remarkable stories is concerning an island which lies eleven miles south of Guayama, and some distance east of the Caja de Muertos. This island has about 400 acres, which is underlaid with phosphate rock. The rock lies in veins, like the phosphate rock of South Carolina. When analyzed it shows 64 per cent of phosphate of lime, 5 per cent of water and 5 per cent of clay. It is easily mined, has a small dock and a tunnel will have to be made before it can be gotten out to the ships.

One of the army officials who is interested in this property tells me that the company expects to ship the product to Hamburg. This same man says that he knows of another place where there are 3,000,000 tons of phosphate in sight, which, when in Hamburg, will sell for $17 a ton.

I believe that there are also valuable fertilizers on the mainland of Porto Rico. Some parts of it contain phosphates, and in my rides over the mountains I have passed square miles of stone which seems to be almost pure lime. They have here some kinds of limestone which are as solid as marble. The marble crops out in different places all over the island. It is ragged on top, but farther down it lies in solid blocks, and could be made into fine building material. Another kind of limestone is very soft. All you need to do is to put it into an oven and fire it, and you have excellent lime.

There is a cement which might be of value which is found in many parts of Porto Rico. It crops out much like limestone, and when crushed it looks not unlike Portland cement. It has great adhesive power, and in the houses where it has been used for building it stands up in ridges after the bricks have worn away. This is especially so in the pavements when are cemented with it. I asked the secretary of state of Porto Rico about it. He tells me that it is fairly good, but not as good as foreign cement.

THE CAVES OF PORTO RICO.

Porto Rico is full of natural wonders. Nearly all of the islands which I have described in this letter have caves which are worth exploration. There are wonderful caves in Porto Rico proper. On the north coast, about seven miles southeast of Arecibo, there is a rock over three hundred feet high, which is almost perpendicular. About one-third the way up from the bottom is a grotto, which has a number of caverns and arches. It has stalactites and other curiosities, which are said to equal the famous caves of Luray in Virginia. The entrance to these caves is about five feet high and nine feet in width; it is now covered with brambles.

Another remarkable cave is not far from the center of the island, near Aguas Buenas. I have not visited this cave, but some soldiers who have been there describe it as one of the wonders of the world. It may, indeed, be called "the mammoth cave" of the West Indies. You go through a narrow passage about 300 feet long and fifteen feet high, when you enter a series of large chambers which are fairly alive with bats. It is necessary to use torches to dispel the darkness, and the bats fly in myriads this way and that, now striking you in the face, and making a rushing noise that is terrifying in the darkness. Now and then you come to a deep hole, in which you can cast a stone and hear it thump, thump, thump, as it goes downward to unknown depths.

These caverns go on and on, one opening into another, for a long distance. They form, in fact, a natural catacomb, only a part of which has ever been explored. Enough is known however, to be sure that they are one of the greatest of natural wonders and well worthy of a survey by our government scientists.

—Frank G. Carpenter.

RAILROAD STATIONERY.

A railroad official in a recent lecture stated that it cost his road each year about $1,000 for pins, $5,000 for rubber bands, $5,000 for ink, $7,000 for lead pencils; also that it cost nearly as much for stationery to carry on the business as for iron.

A NEGRO TOWN.

A community in Alabama, containing 400 negroes and but two white persons, is about to be incorporated. The negroes propose to have a strict negro town. All the officials will be negroes.

AGE OF WHALES.

Whales from 300 to 400 years old are sometimes met with. The age is ascertained by the size and number of layers of blubber, which increase yearly.

A THAMES PIRAT

BY GRANT ALLEN.

When news first reached me that a distinguished M. P. had been set upon and robbed by a well-dressed highwayman on the main stream of the Thames, just below Cliveden Woods, I confess I was more than half inclined, on the first hasty of it, to treat the whole affair as a cock-and-bull story.

I had been high constable of the country for fifteen years, and as my own place at Bray slopes down with its lawn to the river's edge, I know perfectly well how crowded this part of the Thames is with punts and rowing boats during the whole summer season. Moreover, the particular spot chosen for the extraordinary attempt seemed so very unlikely. Cliveden reach is the most frequented stretch of water on the whole river; hundreds of holiday-makers pour down from London every day to Taplow or Maidenhead; so that the channel is alive with sculling and steam launches for some five miles up stream till a late hour in the evening. I poohpoohed the policeman who first told me the tale.

"Nonsense," I said; "the gentleman must have been dining at some riverside hotel, perhaps with casual or undesirable acquaintances, and having had his pocket picked by them, or been diddled out of his money, he has invented this extremely improbable story to allay his wife's well-grounded suspicions."

For, I am sorry to say, one cannot be high constable of a riverside county for fifteen years and yet retain a childlike trust in the perfect goodness of human nature.

But when the Right Honorable Edward Symington himself, the respected member for the Plympton Boroughs, appeared before me and told his tale, I confess I was staggered.

Mr. Symington was not the sort of man, I took it, to be the victim of a delusion; nor did he look particularly gullible. Tall, thickset, stoutly built, a typical, hard-headed English squire, a good rider to hounds, a conservative country member, he had the solidity and credibility which we always attribute to the honest, straightforward, unimaginative John Bull.

He told his story with perfect frankness. He had been out on the river with a party of friends—intimate friends, and had dined—he did not attempt to deny the fact of dining—at that well conducted house, the Ferry Inn at Cookham. After dinner, about 9 at night, on a fine early summer evening, he started in a Canadian canoe for Maidenhead. He was accustomed to manage a boat, and was a good sculler and paddler. Where the stream divides he took the inner channel, under the Cliveden woods; and there, just behind the island, he was surprised, as he passed, to see another canoe glide rapidly out in the gloom, and a man accost him threatningly:

"Fork out whatever you have in your purse! Quick; hand it over, this minute, or I shoot you!"

"What sort of man?" I asked, eyeing my informant hard.

Symington answered like a truthful person:

"I could hardly make out, as it was growing dusk; but he seemed to me tall, with much black hair about his face—beard, mustache and whiskers."

"Armed?"

"Certainly; armed with a revolver. He pointed it full at me and cried, 'No hesitation, or I fire!' He was bland, but peremptory."

"He dared not have fired," I said. "He would have aroused the neighborhood."

"I am not so sure of that; it is lonely behind the islands, and the hour was late. I passed only one other boat all the way from Cookham. The river is crowded, I admit, colonel, till 8 or half past; but as soon as it grows dark not a soul is left on it."

"And you gave him your purse?"

"Well, it was cowardly of me. I own; but what would you have done? He was covering me with his revolver; I was quite unarmed. And remember, too, in a Canadian canoe, which is not the sort of place one would choose for a tussle—the least thing upsets one. Moreover, I don't swim; it's the sole manly accomplishment I never acquired, having been brought up inland, far away from any river. When I went to Oxford I was either too old or too ashamed to learn, and I have never learned; so the rogue had me at his mercy."

"How much money did your purse contain?"

"Oh, nothing to speak of—about seven pounds. But that's not why I mind. It's the principle of the thing—that a pirate should be permitted to go about unchecked on the upper Thames with 'Your money or your life!' in this nineteenth century."

I paused and reflected.

"Things of the sort will crop up," I said, "in spite of all the pains one may take to prevent them. But nothing like this shall crop up again. I promise you. I will have the river properly patrolled and guarded."

"You must," he said warmly. "It is an outrage to a disgrace to our boasted civilization. You must catch the rogue. Till he is imprisoned, Col. Venables-Hughes, you have not fulfilled your duty to the community."

As soon as he had gone I asked my chief detective, who had been present during our interview, what he thought of Mr. Symington's story. He stroked his smooth chin wearily—a chief detective's chin is always smooth, as he has to get himself up in so many disguises—and answered with great deliberation:

"His account has a ring of truth in it, sir. I should say, myself, he was probably robbed. Of course, a gentleman may give away money, and then desire to account for it; but Mr. Symington is not a very young gentleman, nor a very foolish one; and it's the young ones and the foolish ones that trump up stories of such adventures. My impression is, we might watch the reach carefully from the bank for a week or two."

"Atkins," I said, "we shall watch it, but not from the bank. You're the man to do it. You know the river well, and you can manage a boat. We must fight the fellow with his own weapons. Get there by any fellow, which is far from certain. He uses a Canadian canoe. He's right, of course; no lot is so noiseless; with none other can you see so well ahead exactly where you are going, and guide yourself so perfectly. You must have a Canadian canoe; pervade Cliveden reach and see whether any such outrage is attempted again."

"It will be attempted again, sir," Atkins said, decidedly. "You may count upon that. If the story's true, the fellow will have learned that he can induce a strong and vigorous man, a member of parliament, and a good sculler, to deliver up his purse by just presenting a loaded revolver at his head. The process is simplicity itself. Is it likely he won't try the same game on again, when he finds it so easy?"

We debated where we should post him. My own idea was that the rogue, having tried Cliveden reach once, would make his second attempt somewhere near Marlow or Bisham, just to avoid our precautions. But Atkins said no; and Atkins' experience was worth much in such matters. The only reach where the fellow could be sure of catching somebody worth robbing, he saw, was the most frequented piece of water. At Marlow or Bisham, after dark, he might wait for hours without seeing any one. But on Cliveden reach there was always a passer by. Besides, he would need the cover of the reed

greed that Atkins was right, and made all ments for the canoe, as well as for a couple men with a double sculling skiff to be in wait by whenever Atkins sprang his rattle.

The magistrates laughed at me. "D y suppose, colonel," one of them said to m things can happen in England today? I am posterous. Old Symington had had quite enough was good for him, that's the long and short lost his purse, and then invented this cock story; or else he found some agreeable per relieved him of his cash, and he wanted to the little mishap away. The tale's not worth gating."

However, I went on with my plans, and this to work. Eight days later I had th over the magistrates.

Two young ladies, daughters of Mr. Talbo the well known stockbroker, who has a hous three near Quarry woods, had gone down to low bridge after dinner in a skiff, both of th ing. About a quarter past 9 they returned, as they neared the larger island, one of th jokingly to the other, "I hope Mr. Symington wayman won't come out and catch us!" Eve uttered the words a Canadian canoe appeare them, darting like an arrow out of a high A man was in it, with very bushy, black w He drew a revolver.

"Hush," he said, resolutely. "If either speak one word, I will fire. Mind—I have speak one word, I will fire. Mind—I have slightest noise; take off your jewelry an watches, and pull out your purses and hav over to me. If you delay one second I shoot the word. Fork over!"

The two girls were too terrified to do anyth obey. They pulled out their purses, stripped bracelets and rings, and handed them across expectant ruffian. He took them without a

"Now, mind," he said, "I go off, but I shal you from the reeds. If you give any alarm reach Cookham, I fire; I'm a dead shot, and I you I won't miss you."

He disappeared into the reeds. The girls for a moment, sculled on in silence. But as they reached the opener part of the river, bey islands, they recovered their nerve a little, an ed aloud, "Help! help! Murder! murder! Ri at the top of their voices. The Cliveden re heard them, but before he could put out his kins, who had been hidden a little further ab reeds close by, came out with his canoe, "What is the matter, ladies? I am a detect I have a couple of policemen here. Has anyb insulted you?"

The girls told their story, and Atkins, wi mendable speed, sprang his rattle, and got policemen out from under the shelter of th where they were waiting. Then he took one girls and a policeman down one side of the while the other girl and the second policem down the other. In a quarter of an hour he h rendezvoused with the lock-keepers above and and had gathered together half a dozen oth with lights and boats, to make a cordon ro reed beds and the islands, while he had se selected boatmen thoroughly search them.

But the miscreant had escaped. Their sear in vain. The only thing that a prolonged in tion of the spot next day could reveal was one bracelets dropped in the water, near the point the girls had been overhauled, as well as m much waterlogged, but bearing traces of lavi made of colored paper mache, which Atkins b to be a false nose worn by the pirate. That however, the elder Miss Evatt distinctly den she saw the man well for a moment in the light, and could make out that his nose wa small and regular.

This second outrage naturally aroused deal of feeling on the river. Ladies had been tomed to row about freely alone, without fear interruption; and the unpleasant discovery that might be set upon and robbed caused a ne agreeable awakening for riverside household Talbot Evatt himself offered a reward of £ whoever caught or exposed the robber, and th ty added another £50. But for three or four nothing further was heard; and it began to Hered that the matter had blown over.

At the end of that time, however, I recei formation of another and still more extraordin rage. Mrs. Reginald Wybrook, of Bourne End old lady universally respected on the river; sh the part of chief almoner to the district, bein wealthy and benevolent, and is often intrusted the charities of other people.

One rainy afternoon, about 6 o'clock, th was returning by boat from Bray, rowed by h nieces, both excellent oarswomen, when a episode happened. Mrs. Wybrook had called at enhead on her way up from the Bray hospital she had been visiting the inmates of that plete almshouse; and she had cashed a check at the for £60, as was her wont once a fortnight. S ried the amount in gold in a small canvas ba river was deserted, as it was raining heavil few boats had ventured out in the lashing weather. All at once, at the corner near the island, a Canadian canoe shot swiftly across stream, amid the blinding rain, and a man black beard and whiskers raised his hand w menacing gesture.

"Not a word," he said abruptly. "You kn business. If you hand me over that £60 in without any trouble, you can go on your w molested. Make a moment's delay and I fire out mercy."

Mrs. Wybrook, who is a determined old l the ancient school, an admiral's widow, ans promptly, with great spirit, "I shall do nothing sort; I will not yield to the threats of a big rascal." But her youngest niece, Miss Gladys brook, a timid Grecian girl, snatched the bag screams from her aunt's hand and flung it fran to the robber. He caught it in one hand, tossed in the air with careless ease like a ball, and ro it as it fell, lifted his hat politely, and darte round the island again. As soon as he was go ladies raised a shout, but no one heard them. had almost reached Cookham lock before they upon Atkins paddling about quietly in the dis of his duty, amid the torrents of rain which still falling plenteously.

Atkins was half incredulous at first as to possibility of the incident having ventured in ladies in broad daylight and on the open river. almost like hysteria, etc." he said to me after "especially as the young lady was so very nignated." But he returned down stream with and soon satisfied himself as to the reality of story by finding the man's revolver flung out bank just opposite the island. It was clear the had got rid of it in order to avoid suspicion if he was overtaken. Looking down the river ca again, Atkins also discovered the canvas bag

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