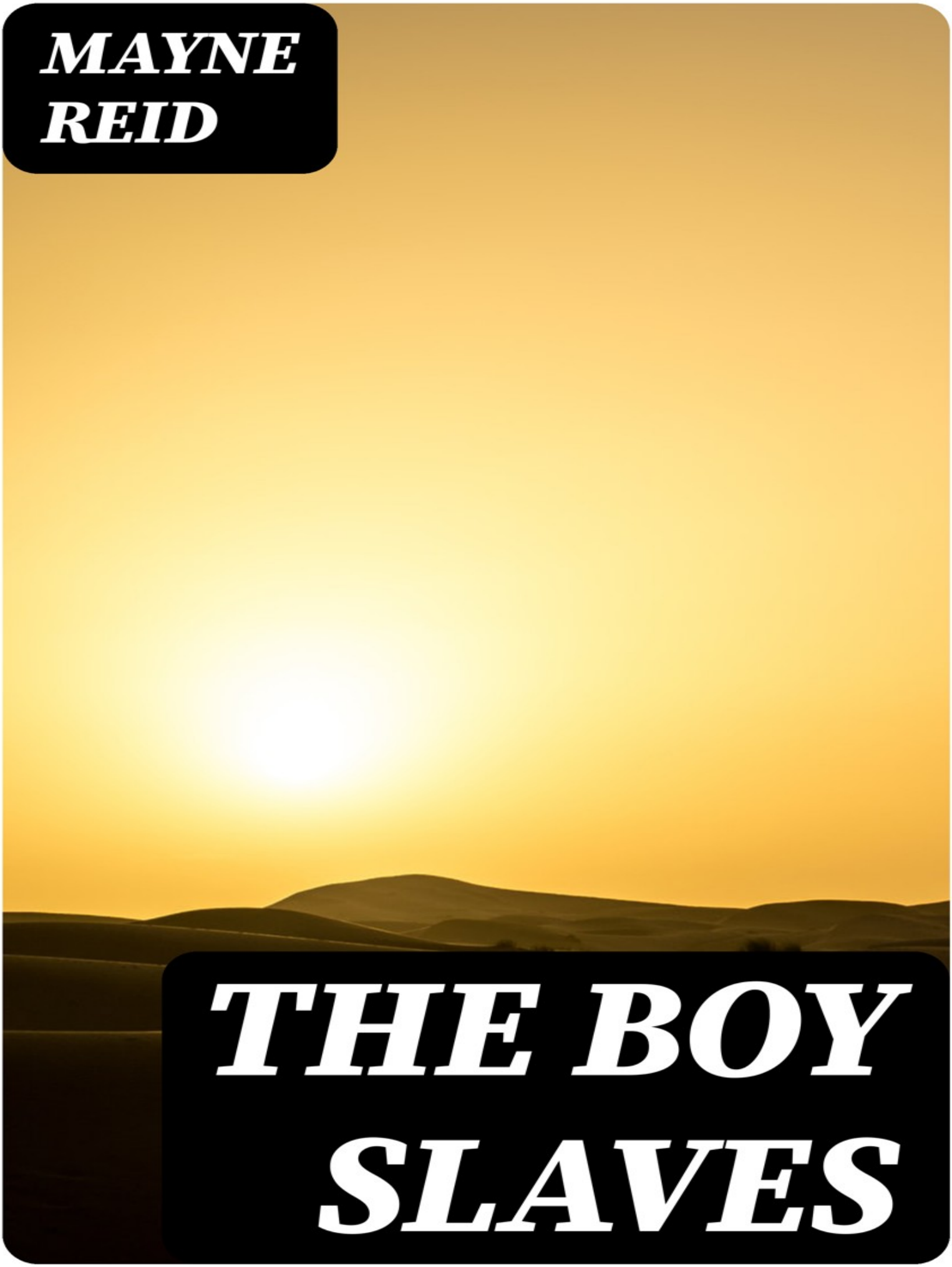
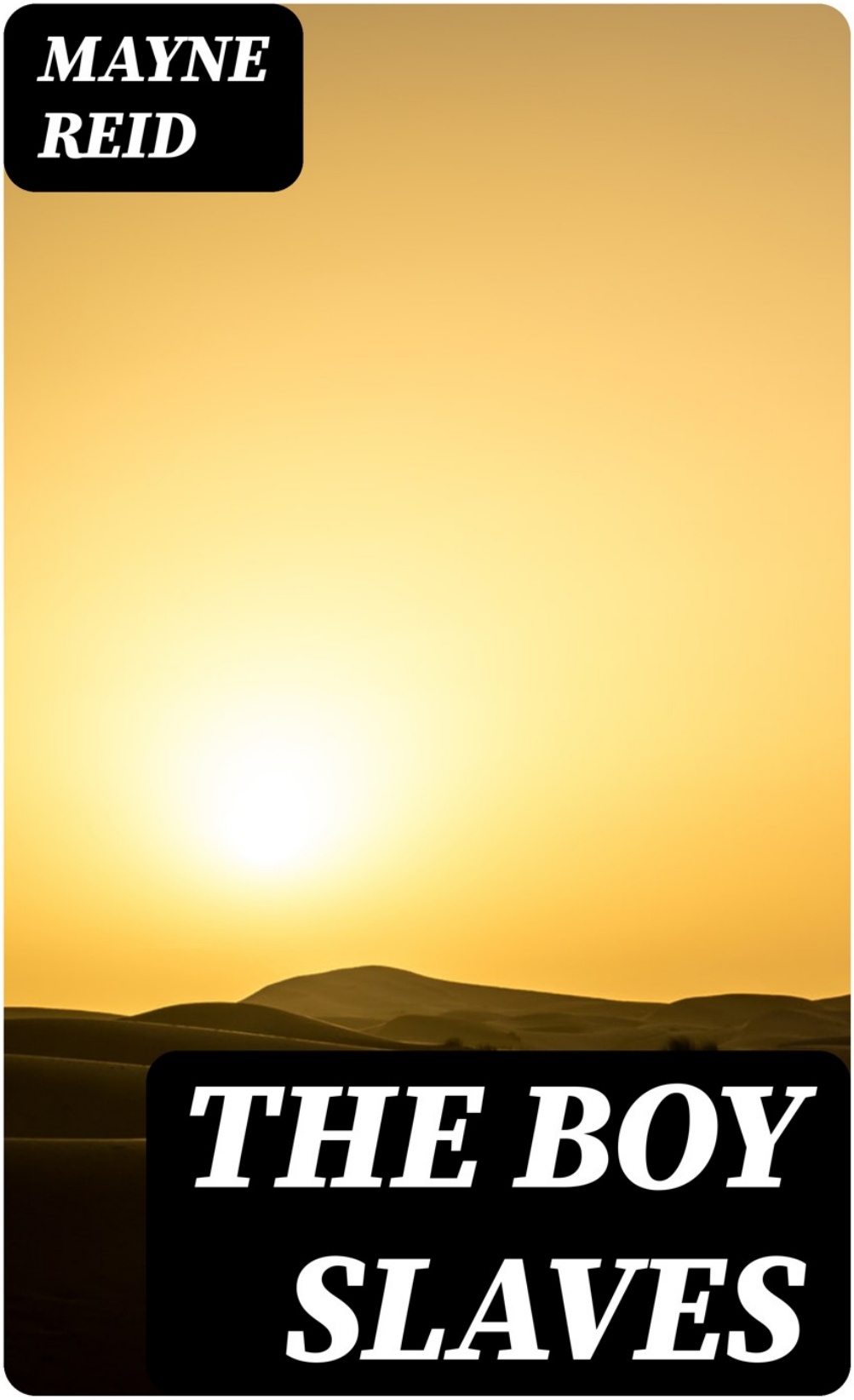
MAYNE REID



THE BOY SLAVES


MAYNE REID
THE BOY SLAVES

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The Boy Slaves

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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

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Captain Mayne Reid is pleased to have had the help of an American Author in preparing for publication this story of "The Boy Slaves," and takes the present opportunity of acknowledging that help, which has kindly extended beyond matters of merely external form, to points of narrative and composition, which are here embodied with the result of his own labor.

THE RANCHO, December, 1864.

MEMOIR OF MAYNE REID.

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No one who has written books for the young during the present century ever had so large a circle of readers as Captain Mayne Reid, or ever was so well fitted by circumstances to write the books by which he is chiefly known. His life, which was an adventurous one, was ripened with the experience of two Continents, and his temperament, which was an ardent one, reflected the traits of two races. Irish by birth, he was American in his sympathies with the people of the New World, whose acquaintance he made at an early period, among whom he lived for years, and whose battles he helped to win. He was probably more familiar with the Southern and Western portion of the United States forty years ago than any native-born American of that time. A curious interest attaches to the life of Captain Reid, but it is not of the kind that casual biographers dwell upon. If he had written it himself it would have charmed thousands of readers, who can now merely imagine what it might have been from the glimpses of it which they obtain in his writings. It was not passed in the fierce light of publicity, but in that simple, silent obscurity which is the lot of most men, and is their happiness, if they only knew it.

Briefly related, the life of Captain Reid was as follows: He was born in 1818, in the north of Ireland, the son of a Presbyterian clergyman, who was a type of the class which Goldsmith has described so freshly in the "Deserted Village," and was highly thought of for his labors among the poor of his neighborhood. An earnest, reverent man, to whom his calling was indeed a sacred one, he designed his

son Mayne for the ministry, in the hope, no doubt, that he would be his successor. But nature had something to say about that, as well as his good father. He began to study for the ministry, but it was not long before he was drawn in another direction. Always a great reader, his favorite books were descriptions of travel in foreign lands, particularly those which dealt with the scenery, the people, and the resources of America. The spell which these exercised over his imagination, joined to a love of adventure which was inherent in his temperament, and inherited, perhaps with his race, determined his career. At the age of twenty he closed his theological tomes, and girding up his loins with a stout heart he sailed from the shores of the Old World for the New. Following the spirit in his feet he landed at New Orleans, which was probably a more promising field for a young man of his talents than any Northern city, and was speedily engaged in business. The nature of this business is not stated, further than it was that of a trader; but whatever it was it obliged this young Irishman to make long journeys into the interior of the country, which was almost a *terra incognita*. Sparsely settled, where settled at all, it was still clothed in primeval verdure—here in the endless reach of savannas, there in the depth of pathless woods, and far away to the North and the West in those monotonous ocean-like levels of land for which the speech of England has no name—the Prairies. Its population was nomadic, not to say barbaric, consisting of tribes of Indians whose hunting grounds from time immemorial the region was; hunters and trappers, who had turned their backs upon civilization for the free, wild life of nature; men of doubtful or dangerous antecedents, who had found it convenient to leave their country for their country's good; and scattered about hardy pioneer communities from Eastern States, advancing waves of the great sea of emigration which is still drawing the course of empire westward. Travelling in a country like this, and among people like these, Mayne Reid passed five years

of his early manhood. He was at home wherever he went, and never more so than when among the Indians of the Red River territory, with whom he spent several months, learning their language, studying their customs, and enjoying the wild and beautiful scenery of their camping grounds. Indian for the time, he lived in their lodges, rode with them, hunted with them, and night after night sat by their blazing camp-fires listening to the warlike stories of the braves and the quaint legends of the medicine men. There was that in the blood of Mayne Reid which fitted him to lead this life at this time, and whether he knew it or not it educated his genius as no other life could have done. It familiarized him with a large extent of country in the South and West; it introduced him to men and manners which existed nowhere else; and it revealed to him the secrets of Indian life and character.

There was another side, however, to Mayne Reid than that we have touched upon, and this, at the end of five years, drew him back to the average life of his kind. We find him next in Philadelphia, where he began to contribute stories and sketches of travel to the newspapers and magazines. Philadelphia was then the most literate city in the United States, the one in which a clever writer was at once encouraged and rewarded. Frank and warm-hearted, he made many friends there among journalists and authors. One of these friends was Edgar Allan Poe, whom he often visited at his home in Spring Garden, and concerning whom years after, when he was dead, he wrote with loving tenderness.

The next episode in the career of Mayne Reid was not what one would expect from a man of letters, though it was just what might have been expected from a man of his temperament and antecedents. It grew out of the time, which was warlike, and it drove him into the army with

which the United States speedily crushed the forces of the sister Republic—Mexico. He obtained a commission, and served throughout the war with great bravery and distinction. This stormy episode ended with a severe wound, which he received in storming the heights of Chapultepec—a terrible battle which practically ended the war.

A second episode of a similar character, but with a more fortunate conclusion, occurred about four years later. It grew out of another war, which, happily for us, was not on our borders, but in the heart of Europe, where the Hungarian race had risen in insurrection against the hated power of Austria. Their desperate valor in the face of tremendous odds excited the sympathy of the American people, and fired the heart of Captain Mayne Reid, who buckled on his sword once more, and sailed from New York with a body of volunteers to aid the Hungarians in their struggles for independence. They were too late, for hardly had they reached Paris before they learned that all was over: Görgey had surrendered at Arad, and Hungary was crushed. They were at once dismissed, and Captain Reid betook himself to London.

The life of the Mayne Reid in whom we are most interested—Mayne Reid, the author—began at this time, when he was in his thirty-first year, and ended only on the day of his death, October 21, 1883. It covered one-third of a century, and was, when compared with that which had preceded it, uneventful, if not devoid of incident. There is not much that needs be told—not much, indeed, that can be told—in the life of a man of letters like Captain Mayne Reid. It is written in his books. Mayne Reid was one of the best known authors of his time—differing in this from many authors who are popular without being known—and in the walk of fiction which he discovered for himself he is an acknowledged master. His reputation did not depend upon the admiration

of the millions of young people who read his books, but upon the judgment of mature critics, to whom his delineations of adventurous life were literature of no common order. His reputation as a story-teller was widely recognized on the Continent, where he was accepted as an authority in regard to the customs of the pioneers and the guerilla warfare of the Indian tribes, and was warmly praised for his freshness, his novelty, and his hardy originality. The people of France and Germany delighted in this soldier-writer. "There was not a word in his books which a school-boy could not safely read aloud to his mother and sisters." So says a late English critic, to which another adds, that if he has somewhat gone out of fashion of late years, the more's the pity for the school-boy of the period. What Defoe is in Robinson Crusoe—realistic idyl of island solitude—that, in his romantic stories of wilderness life, is his great scholar, Captain Mayne Reid.

R. H. STODDARD.

THE BOY SLAVES.

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CHAPTER I.

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THE LAND OF THE SLAVE.

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Land of Ethiope! whose burning centre seems unapproachable as the frozen Pole!

Land of the unicorn and the lion—of the crouching panther and the stately elephant—of the camel, the camelopard, and the camel-bird! land of the antelopes—of the wild gemsbok, and the gentle gazelle—land of the gigantic crocodile and huge river-horse—land teeming with animal life, and last in the list of my apostrophic appellations—last, and that which must grieve the heart to pronounce it—land of the slave!

Ah! little do men think while thus hailing thee, how near may be the dread doom to their own hearths and homes! Little dream they, while expressing their sympathy—alas! too often, as of late shown in England, a hypocritical utterance—little do they suspect, while glibly commiserating the lot of thy sable-skinned children, that hundreds—aye, thousands—of their own color and kindred are held within thy confines, subject to a lot even lowlier than these—a fate far more fearful.

Alas! it is even so. While I write, the proud Caucasian—despite his boasted superiority of intellect—despite the whiteness of his skin—may be found by hundreds in the

unknown interior, wretchedly toiling, the slave not only of thy oppressors, but the slave of thy slaves!

Let us lift that curtain, which shrouds thy great Saära, and look upon some pictures that should teach the son of Shem, while despising his brothers Ham and Japhet, that he is not yet master of the world.

Dread is that shore between Susa and Senegal, on the western edge of Africa—by mariners most dreaded of any other in the world. The very thought of it causes the sailor to shiver with affright. And no wonder: on that inhospitable seaboard thousands of his fellows have found a watery grave; and thousands of others a doom far more deplorable than death!

There are two great deserts: one of land, the other of water—the Saära and the Atlantic—their contiguity extending through ten degrees of the earth's latitude—an enormous distance. Nothing separates them, save a line existing only in the imagination. The dreary and dangerous wilderness of water kisses the wilderness of sand—not less dreary or dangerous to those whose misfortune it may be to become castaways on this dreaded shore.

Alas! it has been the misfortune of many—not hundreds, but thousands. Hundreds of ships, rather than hundreds of men, have suffered wreck and ruin between Susa and Senegal. Perhaps were we to include Roman, Ph[oe]nician, and Carthaginian, we might say thousands of ships also.

More noted, however, have been the disasters of modern times, during what may be termed the epoch of modern navigation. Within the period of the last three centuries, sailors of almost every maritime nation—at least all whose

errand has led them along the eastern edge of the Atlantic—have had reason to regret approximation to those shores, known in ship parlance as the Barbary coast; but which, with a slight alteration in the orthography, might be appropriately styled "Barbarian."

A chapter might be written in explanation of this peculiarity of expression—a chapter which would comprise many parts of two sciences, both but little understood—ethnology and meteorology.

Of the former we may have a good deal to tell before the ending of this narrative. Of the latter it must suffice to say: that the frequent wrecks occurring on the Barbary coast—or, more properly, on that of the Saära south of it—are the result of an Atlantic current setting eastwards against that shore.

The cause of this current is simple enough, though it requires explanation: since it seems to contradict not only the theory of the "trade" winds, but of the centrifugal inclination attributed to the waters of the ocean.

I have room only for the theory in its simplest form. The heating of the Saära under a tropical sun; the absence of those influences—moisture and verdure—which repel the heat and retain its opposite; the ascension of the heated air that hangs over this vast tract of desert; the colder atmosphere rushing in from the Atlantic Ocean; the consequent eastward tendency of the waters of the sea.

These facts will account for that current which has proved a deadly maelstrom to hundreds—aye, thousands—of ships, in all ages, whose misfortune it has been to sail unsuspectingly along the western shores of the Ethiopian continent.

Even at the present day the castaways upon this desert shore are by no means rare, notwithstanding the warnings

that at close intervals have been proclaimed for a period of three hundred years.

While I am writing, some stranded brig, barque, or ship may be going to pieces between Bojador and Blanco; her crew making shorewards in boats to be swamped among the foaming breakers; or, riding three or four together upon some severed spar, to be tossed upon a desert strand, that each may wish, from the bottom of his soul, should prove *uninhabited*!

I can myself record a scene like this that occurred not ten years ago, about midway between the two headlands above named—Bojador and Blanco. The locality may be more particularly designated by saying: that, at half distance between these noted capes, a narrow strip of sand extends for several miles out into the Atlantic, parched white under the rays of a tropical sun—like the tongue of some fiery serpent, well represented by the Saära, far stretching to seaward; ever seeking to cool itself in the crystal waters of the sea.

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TYPES OF THE TRIPLE KINGDOM.

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Near the tip of this tongue, almost within "licking" distance, on an evening in the month of June 18—, a group of the kind last alluded to—three or four castaways upon a spar—might have been seen by any eye that chanced to be near.

Fortunately for them, there was none sufficiently approximate to make out the character of that dark speck, slowly approaching the white sand-spit, like any other drift carried upon the landward current of the sea.

It was just possible for a person standing upon the summit of one of the sand "dunes" that, like white billows, rolled off into the interior of the continent—it was just possible for a person thus placed to have distinguished the aforesaid speck without the aid of a glass; though with one it would have required a prolonged and careful observation to have discovered its character.

The sand-spit was full three miles in length. The hills stood back from the shore another. Four miles was sufficient to screen the castaways from the observation of anyone who might be straying along the coast.

For the individuals themselves it appeared very improbable that there could be any one observing them. As far as eye could reach—east, north, and south, there was nothing save

white sand. To the west nothing but the blue water. No eye could be upon them, save that of the Creator. Of His creatures, tame or wild, savage or civilized, there seemed not one within a circuit of miles: for within that circuit there was nothing visible that could afford subsistence either to man or animal, bird or beast. In the white substratum of sand, gently shelving far under the sea, there was not a sufficiency of organic matter to have afforded food for fish—even for the lower organisms of *mollusca*. Undoubtedly were these castaways alone; as much so, as if their locality had been the centre of the Atlantic, instead of its coast!

We are privileged to approach them near enough to comprehend their character, and learn the cause that has thus isolated them so far from the regions of animated life.

There are four of them, astride a spar; which also carries a sail, partially reefed around it, and partially permitted to drag loosely through the water.

At a glance a sailor could have told that the spar on which they are supported is a topsail-yard, which has been detached from its masts in such a violent manner as to unloose some of the reefs that had held the sail, thus partially releasing the canvas. But it needed not a sailor to tell why this had been done. A ship has foundered somewhere near the coast. There has been a gale two days before. The spar in question, with those supported upon it, is but a fragment of the wreck. There might have been other fragments—others of the crew escaped, or escaping in like manner—but there are no others in sight. The castaways slowly drifting towards the sand-spit are alone. They have no companions on the ocean—no spectators on its shore.

As already stated, there are four of them. Three are strangely alike—at least, in the particulars of size, shape, and costume. In age, too, there is no great difference. All

three are boys: the oldest not over eighteen, the youngest certainly not a year his junior.

In the physiognomy of the three there is similitude enough to declare them of one nation—though dissimilarity sufficient to prove a distinct provinciality both in countenance and character. Their dresses of dark blue cloth, cut pea-jacket shape, and besprinkled with buttons of burnished yellow—their cloth caps, of like color, encircled by bands of gold lace—their collars, embroidered with the crown and anchor, declare them, all three, to be officers in the service of that great maritime government that has so long held undisputed possession of the sea—midshipmen of the British navy. Rather should we say, had been. They have lost this proud position, along with the frigate to which they had been attached; and they now only share authority upon a dismasted spar, over which they are exerting some control, since, with their bodies bent downwards, and their hands beating the water, they are propelling it in the direction of the sand-spit.

In the countenances of the three castaways thus introduced, I have admitted a dissimilitude something more than casual —something more, even, than what might be termed provincial. Each presented a type that could have been referred to that wider distinction known as a nationality.

The three "middies" astride of that topsail-yard were of course castaways from the same ship, in the service of the same government, though each was of a different nationality from the other two. They were the respective representatives of Jack, Paddy, and Sandy—or, to speak more poetically, of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle—and had the three kingdoms from which they came been searched throughout their whole extent, there could scarcely have been discovered purer representative types of

each, than the three reefers on that spar, drifting towards the sand-spit between Bojador and Blanco.

Their names were Harry Blount, Terence O'Connor, and Colin Macpherson.

The fourth individual—who shared with them their frail embarkation—differed from all three in almost every respect, but more especially in years. The ages of all three united would not have numbered his: and their wrinkles, if collected together, would scarce have made so many as could have been counted in the crowsfeet indelibly imprinted in the corners of his eyes.

It would have required a very learned ethnologist to have told to which of his three companions he was compatriot; though there could be no doubt about his being either English, Irish, or Scotch.

Strange to say, his tongue did not aid in the identification of his nationality. It was not often heard; but even when it was, its utterance would have defied the most accomplished linguistic ear; and neither from that, nor other circumstance known to them, could any one of his three companions lay claim to him as a countryman. When he spoke—a rare occurrence already hinted—it was with a liberal misplacement of "h's" that should have proclaimed him an Englishman of purest Cockney type. At the same time his language was freely interspersed with Irish "ochs" and "shures"; while the "wees" and "bonnys," oft recurring in his speech, should have proved him a sworn Scotchman. From his countenance you might have drawn your own inference, and believed him any of the three; but not from his tongue. Neither in his accent, nor the words that fell from him, could you have told which of the three kingdoms had the honor of giving him birth.

Whichever it was, it had supplied to the Service a true British tar: for although you might mistake the man in other respects, his appearance forbade all equivocation upon this point.

His costume was that of a common sailor, and, as a matter of course, his name was "Bill." But as he had only been one among many "Bills" rated on the man-o'-war's books—now gone to the bottom of the sea—he carried a distinctive appellation, no doubt earned by his greater age. Aboard the frigate he had been known as "Old Bill"; and the soubriquet still attached to him upon the spar.

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THE SERPENT'S TONGUE.

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The presence of a ship's topsail-yard thus bestridden plainly proclaimed that a ship had been wrecked, although no other evidence of the wreck was within sight. Not a speck was visible upon the sea to the utmost verge of the horizon: and if a ship had foundered within that field of view, her boats and every vestige of the wreck must either have gone to the bottom, or in some other direction than that taken by the topsail-yard, which supported the three midshipmen and the sailor Bill.

A ship *had* gone to the bottom—a British man-of-war—a corvette on her way to her cruising ground on the Guinea coast. Beguiled by the dangerous current that sets towards the seaboard of the Saära, in a dark stormy night she had struck upon a sand-bank, got bilged, and sunk almost instantly among the breakers. Boats had been got out, and men had been seen crowding hurriedly into them; others had taken to such rafts or spars as could be detached from the sinking vessel: but whether any of these, or the overladen boats, had succeeded in reaching the shore, was a question which none of the four astride the topsail-yard were able to answer.

They only knew that the corvette had gone to the bottom—they saw her go down, shortly after drifting away from her side, but saw nothing more until morning, when they

perceived themselves alone upon the ocean. They had been drifting throughout the remainder of that long, dark night—often entirely under water, when the sea swelled over them—and one and all of them many times on the point of being washed from their frail embarkation.

By daybreak the storm had ceased, and was succeeded by a clear, calm day; but it was not until a late hour that the swell had subsided sufficiently to enable them to take any measures for propelling the strange craft that carried them. Then using their hands as oars or paddles, they commenced making some way through the water.

There was nothing in sight—neither land nor any other object—save the sea, the sky, and the sun. It was the east which guided them as to direction. But for it there could have been no object in making way through the water; but with the sun now sinking in the west, they could tell the east, and they knew that in that point alone land might be expected.

After the sun had gone down the stars became their compass, and throughout all the second night of their shipwreck they had continued to paddle the spar in an easterly direction.

Day again dawned upon them, but without gratifying their eyes by the sight of land, or any other object to inspire them with a hope.

Famished with hunger, tortured with thirst, and wearied with their continued exertions, they were about to surrender to despair; when, as the sun once more mounted up to the sky, and his bright beams pierced the crystal water upon which they were floating, they saw beneath them the sheen of white sand. It was the bottom of the sea, and at no great depth—not more than a few fathoms below their feet.

Such shallow water could not be far from the shore. Reassured and encouraged by the thought, they once more renewed their exertions, and continued to paddle the spar, taking only short intervals of rest throughout the whole of the morning.

Long before noon they were compelled to desist. They were close to the tropic of Cancer, almost under its line. It was the season of midsummer, and of course at meridian hour the sun was right over their heads. Even their bodies cast no shadow, except upon the white sand directly underneath them, at the bottom of the sea.

The sun could no longer guide them; and as they had no other index, they were compelled to remain stationary, or drift in whatever direction the breeze or the currents might carry them.

There was not much movement any way, and for several hours before and after noon they lay almost becalmed upon the ocean. This period was passed in silence and inaction. There was nothing for them to talk about but their forlorn situation, and this topic had been exhausted. There was nothing for them to do. Their only occupation was to watch the sun, until, by its sinking lower in the sky, they might discover its *westing*.

Could they at that moment have elevated their eyes only three feet higher, they would not have needed to wait for the declination of the orb of day. They would have seen land, such land as it was; but, sunk as their shoulders were almost to the level of the water, even the summits of the sand dunes were not visible to their eyes.

When the sun began to go down towards the horizon, they once more plied their palms against the liquid wave, and sculled the spar eastward. The sun's lower limb was just

touching the western horizon, when his red rays, glancing over their shoulders, showed them some white spots that appeared to rise out of the water.

Were they clouds? No! Their rounded tops, cutting the sky with a clear line, forbade this belief. They should be hills, either of snow or of sand. It was not the region for snow: they could only be sand-hills.

The cry of "land" pealed simultaneously from the lips of all—that cheerful cry that has so oft given gladness to the despairing castaway—and redoubling their exertions, the spar was propelled through the water more rapidly than ever.

Reinvigorated by the prospect of once more setting foot upon land, they forgot for the moment thirst, hunger, and weariness, and only occupied themselves in sculling their craft towards the shore.

Under the belief that they had still several miles to make before the beach could be attained, they were one and all working with eyes turned downward. At that moment old Bill, chancing to look up, gave utterance to a shout of joy, which was instantly echoed by his youthful companions: all had at the same time perceived the long sand-spit projecting far out into the water, and which looked like the hand of some friend held out to bid them welcome.

They had scarce made this discovery before another of like pleasant nature came under their attention. That was, that they were *touching bottom*! Their legs, bestriding the spar, hung down on each side of it; and to the joy of all they now felt their feet scraping along the sand.

As if actuated by one impulse, all four dismounted from the irksome seat they had been so long compelled to keep; and, bidding adieu to the spar, they plunged on through the