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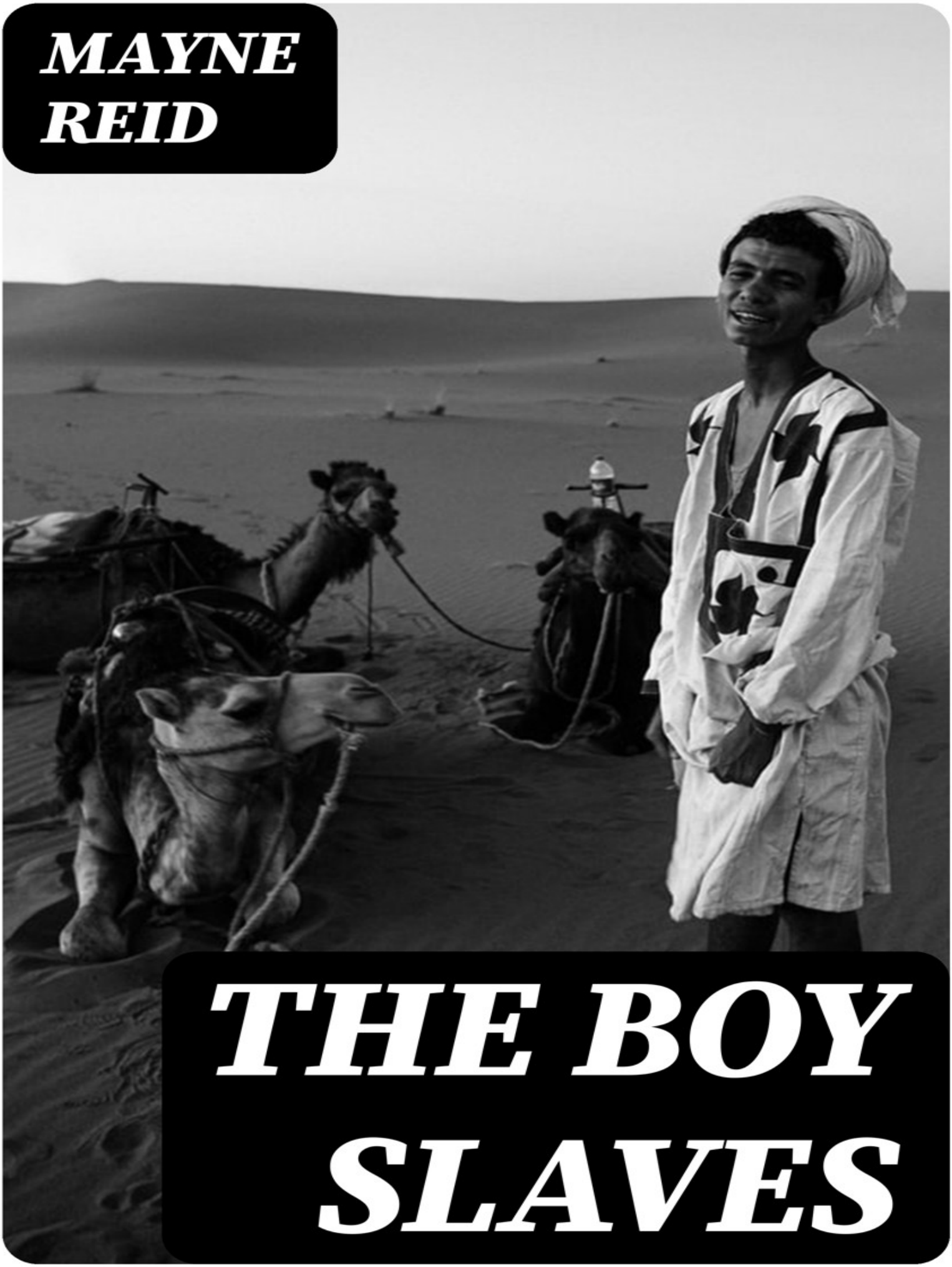

THE BOY SLAVES

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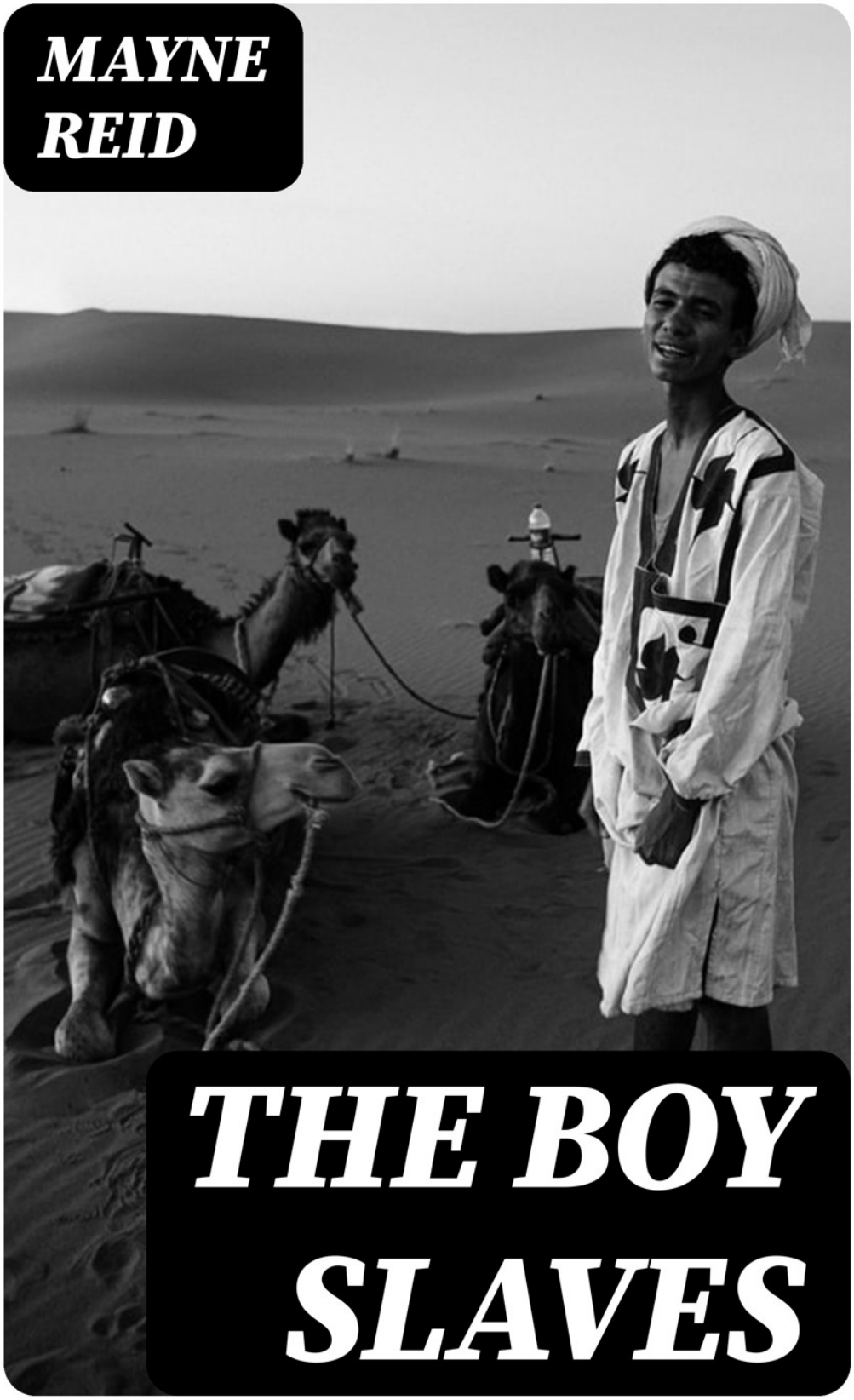

THE BOY SLAVES

Mayne Reid

The Boy Slaves

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Chapter One.

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The Land of the Slave.

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 camel-leopard, 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, ay thousands, of their own colour 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 Saara, and look upon some pictures that should teach the son of Shem, while despising his brothers Ham and Japhet, that he is not 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 Saara 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, Phoenician, 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 Saara 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 Saara 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, ay 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 Saara, 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.

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 sandspit, 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 sandspit 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 any one 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 civilised, 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—partially releasing the canvas. But it needed not a sailor to tell why this had been done. A ship has foundered somewhere near 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, other of the crew escaped, or escaping in like manner, but there are no others in sight. The castaways slowly drifting towards the sandspit 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 eldest 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 colour, 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 sandspit.

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 had 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 sandspit 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 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 its accent, nor the words that fell from him, could you have told which of the three kingdoms had the honour 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.

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 Saara, in a dark stormy night she had

struck upon a sand-bank; got bilged; and sank 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 the 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 sandspit 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 shoal water, without stop or stay, until they stood high and dry upon the extreme point of the peninsula.

By this time the sun had gone down; and the four dripping forms, dimly outlined in the purple twilight, appeared like four strange creatures who had just emerged from out the depths of the ocean.

“Where next?”

This was the mental interrogatory of all four; though by none of them shaped into words.

“Nowhere to-night” was the answer suggested by the inclination of each.

Impelled by hunger, stimulated by thirst, one would have expected them to proceed onward in search of food and water to alleviate this double suffering. But there was an inclination stronger than either, too strong to be resisted—sleep: since for fifty hours they had been without any; since to have fallen asleep on the spar would have been to subject themselves to the danger, almost the certainty, of dropping off, and getting drowned; and, notwithstanding their need of sleep, increased by fatigue, and the necessity of keeping constantly on the alert—up to that moment not one of them had obtained any. The thrill of pleasure that passed through their frames as they felt their feet upon *terra firma* for a moment aroused them. But the excitement could not be sustained. The drowsy god would no longer be deprived of his rights; and one after another, though without much interval between, sank down upon the soft sand, and yielded to his balmy embrace.

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’Ware the tide!

Through that freak, or law, of nature by which peninsulas are shaped, the point of the sandspit was elevated several feet above the level of the sea; while its neck, nearer the land, scarce rose above the surface of the water.

It was this highest point, where the sand was thrown up in a “wreath” like snow in a storm, that the castaways had chosen for their couch. But little pains had been taken in

selecting the spot. It was the most conspicuous, as well as the driest; and, on stepping out of the water, they had tottered towards it, and half mechanically chosen it for their place of repose.

Simple as was the couch, they were not allowed to occupy it for long. They had been scarce two hours asleep, when one and all of them were awakened by a sensation that chilled, and, at the same time, terrified them. Their terror arose from a sense of suffocation: as if salt water was being poured down their throats, which was causing it. In short, they experienced the sensation of drowning; and fancied they were struggling amid the waves from which they had so lately escaped.

All four sprang to their feet, if not simultaneously, at least in quick succession, and all appeared equally the victims of astonishment, closely approximating to terror. Instead of the couch of soft, dry sand, on which they had stretched their tired frames, they now stood up to their ankles in water, which was soughing and surging around them. It was this change in their situation that caused their astonishment; though the terror quick following sprang from quite another cause.

The former was short-lived: for it met with a ready explanation. In the confusion of their ideas, added to their strong desire for sleep, they had forgotten the tide. The sand, dust-dry under the heat of a burning sun, had deceived them. They had lain down upon it, without a thought of its ever being submerged under the sea; but now to their surprise they perceived their mistake. Not only was their couch completely under water; but, had they slept a

few minutes longer, they would themselves have been quite covered. Of course the waves had awakened them; and no doubt would have done so half an hour earlier, but for the profound slumber into which their long watching and weariness had thrown them. The contact of the cold water was not likely to have much effect: since they had been already exposed to it for more than forty hours. Indeed, it was not that which had aroused them; but the briny fluid getting into their mouths, and causing them that feeling of suffocation that very much resembled drowning.

More then one of the party had sprung to an erect attitude, under the belief that such was in reality the case; and it is not quite correct to say that their first feeling was one of mere astonishment. It was strongly commingled with terror.

On perceiving how matters stood, their fears subsided almost as rapidly as they had arisen. It was only the inflow of the tide; and to escape from it would be easy enough. They would have nothing more to do than keep along the narrow strip of sand, which they had observed before landing. This would conduct them to the true shore. They knew this to be at some distance; but, once there, they could choose a more elevated couch on which they could recline undisturbed till the morning.

Such was their belief, conceived the instant after they had got upon their legs. It was soon followed by another—another consternation—which, if not so sudden as the first, was, perhaps, ten times more intense.

On turning their faces towards what they believed to be the land, there was no land in sight, neither sand-hills nor

shore, nor even the narrow tongue upon whose tip they had been trusting themselves! There was nothing visible but water; and even this was scarce discernible at the distance of six paces from where they stood. They could only tell that water was around them, by hearing it hoarsely swishing on every side, and seeing through the dim obscurity the strings of white froth that floated on its broken surface.

It was not altogether the darkness of the night that obscured their view, though this was of itself profound; it was a thick mist or fog, that had arisen over the surface of the ocean, and which enveloped their bodies; so that, though standing almost close together, each appeared to the others like some huge spectral form at a distance.

To remain where they were was to be swallowed up by the sea. There could be no uncertainty about that; and therefore no one thought of staying a moment longer on the point of the sandspit, now utterly submerged.

But in what direction were they to go? That was the question that required to be solved before starting; and in the solution of which, perhaps, depended the safety of their lives.

We need scarce say, perhaps. Rather might we say, for certain. By taking a wrong direction they would be walking into the sea, where they would soon get beyond their depth, and be in danger of drowning. This was all the more likely, that the wind had been increasing ever since they had laid down to rest, and was now blowing with considerable violence. Partly from this, and partly by the tidal influence, big waves had commenced rolling around them; so that,

even in the shoal water, where they stood, each successive swell was rising higher and higher against their bodies.

There was no time to be lost. They must find the true direction for the shore and follow it quickly too, or perish amid the breakers.

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A false Guide.

Which way to the shore?

That was the question that arose to the lips of all.

You may fancy it could have been easily answered. The direction of the wind and waves was landward. It was the sea-breeze, which at night, as every navigator is aware, blows habitually towards the land—at least in the region of the tropics, and more especially towards the hot Saara.

The tide itself might have told them the direction to take. It was the in-coming tide, and therefore swelling towards the beach.

You may fancy they had nothing to do but follow the waves, keeping the breeze upon their back.

So they fancied, at first starting for the shore; but they were not long in discovering that this guide, apparently so trustworthy, was not to be relied upon; and it was only then they became apprised of the real danger of their situation. Both wind and waves were certainly proceeding landward, and in a direct line; but it was just this direct line the castaways dared not, in fact could not, follow; for they had

not gone a hundred fathoms from the point of the submerged peninsula when they found the water rapidly deepening before them; and a few fathoms farther on they stood up to their armpits!

It was evident that, in the direction in which they were proceeding, it continued to grow deeper; and they turned to try another.

After floundering about for a while they found shoal water again, reaching up only to their knees; but, wherever they attempted to follow the course of the waves, they perceived that the shoal trended gradually downward.

This at first caused them surprise, as well as alarm. The former affected them only for an instant. The explanation was sought for, and suggested to the satisfaction of all. The sandspit did not project perpendicularly from the line of the coast, but in a diagonal direction. It was, in fact, a sort of natural breakwater, forming one side of a large cone, or embayment, lying between it and the true beach. This feature had been observed on their first setting foot upon it, though at the time they were so much engrossed with the joyous thought of having escaped from the sea, that it had made no impression upon their memory.

They now remembered the circumstance, though not to their satisfaction, for they saw at once that the guide in which they had been trusting could no longer avail them.

The waves were rolling on over that bay, whose depth they had tried, only to find it unfordable.

This was a new dilemma. To escape from it there appeared but one way. They must keep their course along the combing of the peninsula, if they could. But their ability

to do so had now become a question, each instant growing more difficult to answer.

They were no longer certain that they were on the spit; but, whether or not, they could find no shallower water by trying on either side. Each way they went it seemed to deepen; and even if they stood still but for a few moments, as they were compelled to do while hesitating as to their course, the water rose perceptibly upon their limbs.

They were now well aware that they had two enemies to contend with, time and direction. The loss of either one or the other might end in their destruction. A wrong direction would lead them into deep water; a waste of time would bring deep water around them. The old adage about time and tide, which none of them could help having heard, might have been ringing in their ears at that moment. It was appropriate to the occasion.

They thought of it; and the thought filled them with apprehension. From the observations they had made before sunset, they knew that the shore could not be near, not nearer than three miles, perhaps four.

Even with free footing, the true direction, and a clear view of the path, it might have been a question about time. They all knew enough of the sea to be aware how rapidly the tide sets in, especially on some foreign shores, and there was nothing to assure them that the seaboard of the Saara was not beset by the most treacherous of tides. On the contrary, it was just this, a tidal current, that had forced their vessel among the breakers, causing them to become what they now were, castaways!

They had reason to dread the tides of the Saara's shore; and dread them they did, their fears at each moment becoming stronger as they felt the dark waters rising higher and higher around them!

Chapter Six.

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Wade or swim?

Foe a time they floundered on, the old sailor in the lead, the three boys strung out in a line after him. Sometimes they departed from this formation, one or another trying towards the flank for shallower water.

Already it clasped them by the thighs; and just in proportion as it rose upon their bodies, did their spirits become depressed. They knew that they were following the crest of the sandspit. They knew it by the deepening of the sea on each side of them: but they had by this time discovered another index to their direction. Old Bill had kept his "weather-eye" upon the waves; until he had discovered the angle at which they broke over the "bar", and could follow the "combing" of the spit, as he called it, without much danger of departure from the true path.

It was not the direction that troubled their thoughts any longer; but the time and the tide.

Up to their waists in water, their progress could not be otherwise than slow. The time would not have signified could they have been sure of the tide, that is, sure of its not rising higher.

Alas! they could not be in doubt about this. On the contrary, they were too well assured that it was rising higher; and with a rapidity that threatened soon to submerge them under its merciless swells. These came slowly sweeping along, in the diagonal direction, one succeeding the other, and each new one striking higher up upon the bodies of the now exhausted waders.

On they floundered, despite their exhaustion; on along the subaqueous ridge, which at every step appeared to sink deeper into the water, as if the nearer to land the peninsula became all the more depressed. This, however, was but a fancy. They had already passed the neck of the sandspit where it was lowest. It was not that, but the fast flowing tide that was deepening the water around them.

Deeper and deeper, deeper and deeper, till the salt sea clasped them around the armpits, and the tidal waves began to break over their heads!

There seemed but one way open to their salvation, but one course by which they could escape from the engulfment that threatened. This was, to forego any further attempt at wading, to fling themselves boldly upon the waves, and swim ashore.

Now that they were submerged to their necks, you may wonder at their not at once adopting this plan. It is true they were ignorant of the distance they would have to swim before reaching the shore. Still they knew it could not be more than a couple of miles, for they had already traversed quite that distance on the diagonal spit. But two miles need scarce have made them despair, with both wind and tide in their favour.

Why, then, did they hesitate to trust themselves to the quick bold stroke of the swimmer, instead of the slow, timid, tortoise-like tread of the wader?

There are two answers to this question; for there were two reasons for them not having recourse to the former alternative. The first was selfish; or rather, should we call it self-preservative. There was a doubt in the minds of all, as to their ability to reach the shore by swimming. It was a broad bay that had been seen before sundown; and once launched upon its bosom, it was a question whether any of them would have strength to cross it. Once launched upon its bosom there would be no getting back to the shoal water through which they were wading: the tidal current would prevent return.

This consideration was backed by another, a lingering belief or hope that the tide might already have reached its highest, and would soon be on the “turn”. This hope, though faint, exerted an influence on the waders, as yet sufficient to restrain them from becoming swimmers. But even after this could no longer have prevailed, even when the waves began to surge over, threatening at each fresh “sea” to scatter the shivering castaways and swallow them one by one, there was another thought that kept them together.

It was a thought neither of self nor self-preservation, but a generous instinct, that even in that perilous crisis was stirring within their hearts.

Instinct! No. It was a thought, an impulse if you will; but something higher than an instinct.

Shall I declare it? Undoubtedly, I shall. Noble emotions should not be concealed; and the one which at that moment

throbbed within the bosoms of the castaways, was truly noble.

There were but three of them who felt it. The fourth could not: he could not swim!

Surely the reader needs no further explanation?

Chapter Seven.

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A compulsory Parting.

One of the four castaways could not swim. Which one? You will expect to hear that it was one of the three midshipmen; and will be conjecturing whether it was Harry Blount, Terence O’Connor, or Colin Macpherson.

My English boy-readers would scarce believe me, were I to say that it was Harry who was wanting in this useful accomplishment. Equally incredulous would be my Irish and Scotch constituency, were I to deny the possession of it to the representatives of their respective countries, Terence and Colin.

Far be it from me to offend the natural *amour propre* of my young readers; and in the present case I have no fact to record that would imply any national superiority or disadvantage. The castaway who could not swim was that peculiar hybrid, or *tribrid*, already described; who, for any characteristic he carried about him, might have been born either upon the banks of the Clyde, the Thames, or the Shannon!