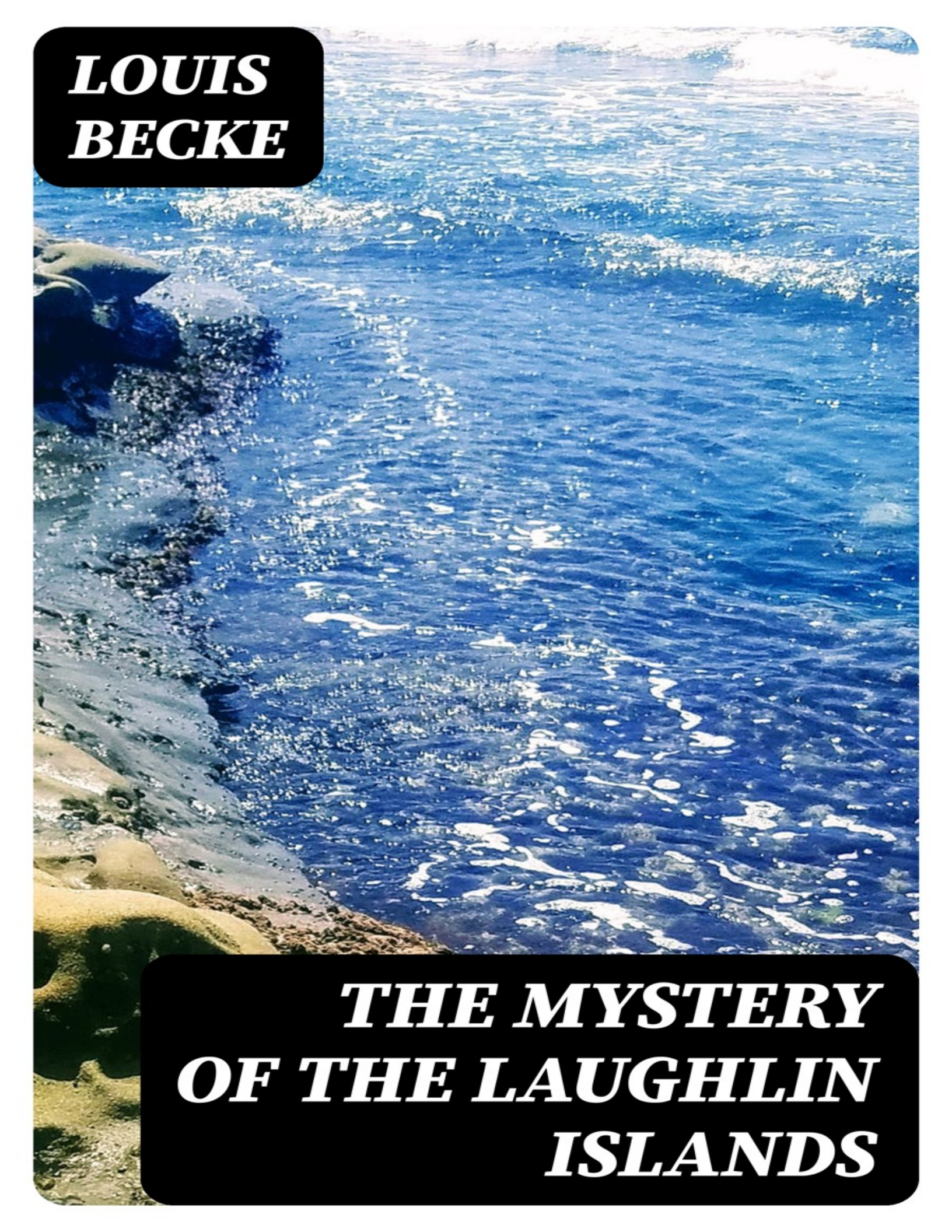




***LOUIS
BECKE***

***THE MYSTERY
OF THE LAUGHLIN
ISLANDS***

Louis Becke

The Mystery of the Laughlin Islands

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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PART 1

THE OFFICIAL VERSION

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It was a close, steamy morning, and a heavy mist still hung over the harbour and concealed the shore from view, when Mr. William Irish, the master of the *Salamander* came on deck and asked the mate if the hands had finished breakfast.

“No, sir,” answered the officer, “not quite.”

“Well, hurry ’em up, Wilkins. That flash gentleman over there,” pointing to the spars of the *Resolution* that towered up about a cable’s length away, “seems in a damned hurry to get away before us. Now I would like to get away first, just to spite him. He is a lowlived swab.”

Mr. William Irish did not like Mr. John Locke the master of the *Resolution*, and was not diffident in expressing his dislike upon every possible occasion.

The master of the *Resolution* was a gentleman of no small importance, and of considerable personal attractions. This was his own estimate of himself. Mr. William Irish—a short, stout man with a leathern-hued complexion—held different opinions. We know this because on one memorable occasion he thus expressed himself to a sergeant of the New South Wales Corps, who had boarded the *Salamander* on pressing official business.

“I call myself Bill Irish. I am a plain man, with no damned nonsense about me; but I am honest, and I am a master