

Reid Mayne

The Boy Slaves



Томас Майн Рид

The Boy Slaves

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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

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.

CHAPTER I. 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 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.

CHAPTER II. 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 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.

CHAPTER III. 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 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 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.

CHAPTER IV. 'WARE THE TIDE

Through that freak, or law, of nature by which peninsulas are shaped, the point of the sand-spit 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 souging 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 than 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 sand-spit, 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!

CHAPTER V. 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 Saära.

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 that 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 further 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 sand-spit 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 Saära 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 Saära'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 VI. WADE OR SWIM?

For 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 sand-spit. 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 the land the peninsula became all the more depressed. This, however, was but a fancy. They had already passed the neck of the sand-spit 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 favor.

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 VII. 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!

It was "Old Bill" who was deficient in natatory prowess: Old Bill the sailor.

It may be wondered that one who has spent nearly the whole of his life on the sea should be wanting in an accomplishment, apparently and really, so essential to such a calling. Cases of the kind, however, are by no means uncommon; and in a ship's crew there will often be found a large number of men, – sometimes the very best sailors, – who cannot swim a stroke.

Those who have neglected to cultivate this useful art, when boys, rarely acquire it after they grow up to be men; or, if they do, it is only in an indifferent manner. On the sea, though it may appear a paradox, there are far fewer opportunities for practising the art of swimming than upon its shores. Aboard a ship, on her course, the chances of "bathing" are but few and far between; and, while in port, the sailor has usually something else to do than spend his idle hours in disporting himself upon the waves. The sailor, when ashore, seeks for some sport more attractive.

As Old Bill had been at sea ever since he was able to stand upon the deck of a ship, he had neglected this useful art; and though in every other respect an accomplished sailor – rated A.B., No. 1 – he could not swim six lengths of his own body.

It was a noble instinct which prompted his three youthful companions to remain by him in that critical moment, when, by flinging themselves upon the waves, they might have gained the shore without difficulty.

Although the bay might be nearly two miles in width there could not be more than half that distance beyond their depth, – judging by the shoal appearance which the coast had exhibited as they were approaching it before sundown.

All three felt certain of being able to save themselves; but what would become of their companion, the sailor?

"We cannot leave you, Bill!" cried Harry: "we will not!"

"No, that we can't: we won't!" said Terence.

"We can't, and won't," asseverated Colin, with like emphasis.

These generous declarations were in answer to an equally generous proposal: in which the sailor had urged them to make for the shore, and leave him to his fate.

"Ye must, my lads!" he cried out, repeating his proposition. "Don't mind about me; look to yersels! Och! shure I'm only a weather-washed, worn-out old salt, 'ardly worth savin'. Go now – off wi' ye at onest! The water'll be over ye, if ye stand 'eer tin minutes longer."

The three youths scrutinized each other's faces, as far as the darkness would allow them. Each tried to read in the countenances of the other two some sign that might determine him. The water was already washing around their shoulders; it was with difficulty they could keep their feet.

"Let loose, lads!" cried Old Bill; "let loose, I say! and swim richt for the shore. Don't think o' me; it bean't certain I shan't weather it yet. I'm the whole av my head taller than the tallest av ye. The tide mayn't full any higher; an' if it don't I'll get safe out after all. Let loose, lads – let loose I tell ye!"

This command of the old sailor for his young comrades to forsake him was backed by a far more irresistible influence, – one against which even their noble instincts could no longer contend.

At that moment, a wave, of greater elevation than any that had preceded it, came rolling along; and the three midshipmen, lifted upon its swell, were borne nearly half a cable's length from the spot where they had been standing.

In vain did they endeavor to recover their feet. They had been carried into deep water, where the tallest of them could not touch bottom.

For some seconds they struggled on the top of the swell, their faces turned towards the spot from which they had been swept. They were close together. All three seemed desirous of making back to that dark, solitary speck, protruding above the surface, and which they knew to be the head of Old Bill. Still did they hesitate to forsake him.

Once more his voice sounded in their ears.

"Och, boys!" cried he, "don't thry to come back. It's no use whatever. Lave me to my fate, an' save yersels. The tide's 'ard against ye. Turn, an' follow it, as I tell ye. It'll carry ye safe to the shore; an' if I'm washed afther ye, bury me on the bache. Farewell, brave boys, – farewell!"

To the individuals thus apostrophized, it was a sorrowful adieu; and, could they have done anything to save the sailor, there was not one of the three who would not have risked his life over and over again. But all were impressed with the hopelessness of rendering any succor; and under the still further discouragement caused by another huge wave, that came swelling up under their chins, they turned simultaneously in the water; and, taking the tidal current for their guide, swam with all their strength towards the shore.

CHAPTER VIII. SAFE ASHORE

The swim proved shorter than any of them had anticipated. They had scarce made half a mile across the bay, when Terence, who was the worst swimmer of the three, and who had been allowing his legs to droop, struck his toes against something more substantial than salt water.

"I' faith!" gasped he, with exhausted breath, "I think I've touched bottom. Blessed be the Virgin, I have!" he continued, at the same time standing erect, with head and shoulders above the surface of the water.

"All right!" cried Harry, imitating the upright attitude of the young Hibernian. "Bottom it must be, and bottom it is. Thank God for it!"

Colin, with a similar grateful ejaculation, suspended his stroke, and stood upon his feet.

All three instinctively faced seaward – as they did so, exclaiming —

"Poor Old Bill!"

"In troth, we might have brought him along with us!" suggested Terence, as soon as he had recovered his wind; "might we not?"

"If we had but known it was so short a swim," said Harry, "it is possible."

"How about our trying to swim back? Do you think we could do it?"

"Impossible!" asserted Colin.

"What, Colin, you are the best swimmer of us all! Do you say so?" asked the others, eager to make an effort for saving the old salt, who had been the favorite of every officer aboard the ship.

"I say impossible," replied the cautious Colin; "I would risk as much as any of you, but there is not a reasonable chance of saving him, and what's the use of trying impossibilities? We'd better make sure that we're safe ourselves. There may be more deep water between us and the shore. Let us keep on till we've set our feet on something more like terra firma."

The advice of the young Scotchman was too prudent to be rejected; and all three, once more turning their faces shoreward, continued to advance in that direction.

They only knew that they were facing shoreward by the inflow of the tide, but certain that this would prove a tolerably safe guide, they kept boldly on, without fear of straying from the track.

For a while they waded; but, as their progress was both slower and more toilsome, they once more betook themselves to swimming. Whenever they felt fatigued by either mode of progression, they changed to the other; and partly by wading and partly by swimming, they passed through another mile of the distance that separated them from the shore. The water then became so shallow, that swimming was no longer possible; and they waded on, with eyes earnestly piercing the darkness, each moment expecting to see something of the land.

They were soon to be gratified by having this expectation realized. The curving lines that began to glimmer dimly through the obscurity, were the outlines of rounded objects that could not be ocean waves. They were too white for these. They could only be the sand-hills, which they had seen before the going down of the sun. As they were now but knee-deep in the water, and the night was still misty and dark, these objects could be at no great distance, and deep water need no longer be dreaded.

The three castaways considered themselves as having reached the shore.

Harry and Terence were about to continue on to the beach, when Colin called to them to come to a stop.

"Why?" inquired Harry.

"What for?" asked Terence.

"Before touching dry land," suggested the thoughtful Colin, "suppose we decide what has been the fate of poor Old Bill."

"How can we tell that?" interrogated the other two.

"Stand still awhile; we shall soon see whether his head is yet above water."

Harry and Terence consented to the proposal of their comrade, but without exactly comprehending its import.

"What do you mean, Coley?" asked the impatient Hibernian.

"To see if the tide's still rising," was the explanation given by the Scotch youth.

"And what if it be?" demanded Terence.

"Only, that if it be, we will never more see the old sailor in the land of the living. We may look for his lifeless corpse after it has been washed ashore."

"Ah! I comprehend you," said Terence.

"You're right," added Harry. "If the tide be still rising, Old Bill is under it by this time. I dare say his body will drift ashore before morning."

They stood still, – all three of them. They watched the water, as it rippled up against their limbs, taking note of its ebbing and flowing. They watched with eyes full of anxious solicitude. They continued this curious vigil for full twenty minutes. They would have patiently prolonged it still further had it been necessary. But it was not. No further observation was required to convince them that the tidal current was still carried towards the shore; and that the water was yet deepening around them.

The data thus obtained were sufficient to guide them to the solution of the sad problem. During that interval, while they were swimming and wading across the bay, the tide must have been continually on the increase. It must have risen at least a yard. A foot would be sufficient to have submerged the sailor: since he could not swim. There was but one conclusion to which they could come. Their companion must have been drowned.

With heavy hearts they turned their faces toward the shore, – thinking more of the sad fate of the sailor than their own future.

Scarce had they proceeded a dozen steps, when a shout, heard from behind, caused them to come to a sudden stop.

"Avast there!" cried a voice that seemed to rise from out the depths of the sea.

"It's Bill!" exclaimed all three in the same breath.

"'Old on my 'arties, if that's yerselves that I see!" continued the voice. "Arrah, 'old on there. I'm so tired wadin', I want a short spell to rest myself. Wait now, and I'll come to yez, as soon as I can take a reef out of my tops'ls."

The joy caused by this greeting, great as it was, was scarce equal to the surprise it inspired. They who heard it were for some seconds incredulous. The sound of the sailor's voice, well known as it was, with something like the figure of a human being dimly seen through the uncertain mist that shadowed the surface of the water was proof that he still lived; while, but the moment before, there appeared substantial proof that he must have gone to the bottom. Their incredulity even continued, till more positive evidence to the contrary came before them, in the shape of the old man-o'-war's-man himself; who, rapidly splashing through the more shallow water, in a few seconds stood face to face with the three brave boys whom he had so lately urged to abandon him.

"Bill, is it you?" cried all three in a breath.

"Auch! and who else would yez expect it to be? Did yez take me for 'ould Neptune risin' hout of the say? Or did yez think I was a mare-maid? Gee me a grip o' yer wee fists, ye bonny boys. Ole Bill warn't born to be drowned!"

"But how did ye come, Bill? The tide's been rising ever since we left you."

"Oh!" said Terence, "I see how it is, the bay isn't so deep after all: you've waded all the way."

"Avast there, master Terry! not half the way, though I've waded part of it. There's wather between here and where you left me, deep enough to dhrown Phil Macool. I didn't crass the bay by wading at all – at all."

"How then?"

"I was ferried on a nate little craft – as yez all knows of – the same that carried us safe to the sand-spit."

"The spar?"

"Hexactly as ye say. Just as I was about to gee my last gasp, something struck me on the back o' the head, making me duck under the wather. What was that but the tops'l yard. Hech! I was na long in mountin' on to it. I've left it out there afther I feeled my toes trailin' along the bottom. Now, my bonny babies, that's how Old Bill's been able to rejoin ye. Flippers all round once more; and then let's see what sort o' a shore we've got to make port upon."

An enthusiastic shake of the hands passed between the old sailor and his youthful companions; after which the faces of all were turned towards the shore, still only dimly distinguishable, and uninviting as seen, but more welcome to the sight than the wilderness of water stretching as if to infinity behind them.

CHAPTER IX.

UNCOMFORTABLE QUARTERS

The waders had still some distance to go before reaching dry land; but, after splashing for about twenty minutes longer, they at length stood upon the shore. As the tide was still flowing in they continued up the beach; so as to place themselves beyond the reach of the water, in the event of its rising still higher.

They had to cross a wide stretch of wet sand before they could find a spot sufficiently elevated to secure them against the further influx of the tide. Having, at length, discovered such a spot, they stopped to deliberate on what was best to be done.

They would fain have had a fire to dry their dripping garments: for the night had grown chilly under the influence of the fog.

The old sailor had his flint, steel, and tinder – the latter still safe in its water-tight tin box; but there was no fuel to be found near. The spar, even could they have broken it up, was still floating, or stranded, in the shoal water – more than a mile to seaward.

In the absence of a fire they adopted the only other mode they could think of to get a little of the water out of their clothes. They stripped themselves to the skin, wrung out each article separately; and then, giving each a good shake, put them on again – leaving it to the natural warmth of their bodies to complete the process of drying.

By the time they had finished this operation, the mist had become sensibly thinner; and the moon, suddenly emerging from under a cloud, enabled them to obtain a better view of the shore upon which they had set foot.

Landward, as far as they could see, there appeared to be nothing but white sand – shining like silver under the light of the moon. Up and down the coast the same landscape could be dimly distinguished.

It was not a level surface that was thus covered with sand, but a conglomeration of hillocks and ridges, blending into each other and forming a labyrinth, that seemed to stretch interminably on all sides – except towards the sea itself.

It occurred to them to climb to the highest of the hillocks. From its summit they would have a better view of the country beyond; and perhaps discover a place suitable for an encampment – perhaps some timber might then come into view – from which they would be able to obtain a few sticks.

On attempting to scale the "dune," they found that their wading was not yet at an end. Though no longer in the water, they sank to their knees at every step, in soft yielding sand.

The ascent of the hillock, though scarce a hundred feet high, proved exceedingly toilsome – much more so than wading knee-deep in water – but they floundered on, and at length reached the summit.

To the right, to the left, in front of them, far as the eye could reach, nothing but hills and ridges of sand – that appeared under the moonlight of a whiteness approaching to that of snow. In fact, it would not have been difficult to fancy that the country was covered with a heavy coat of snow – as often seen in Sweden, or the Northern parts of Scotland – drifted into "wreaths," and spurred hillocks of every imaginable form.

It was pretty, but soon became painful from its monotony; and the eyes of that shipwrecked quartette were even glad to turn once more to the scarce less monotonous blue of the ocean.

Inland, they could perceive other sand-hills – higher than that to which they had climbed – and long crested "combings," with deep valleys between; but not one object to gladden their sight – nothing that offered promise of either food, drink, or shelter.

Had it not been for their fatigue they might have gone farther. Since the moon had consented to show herself, there was light enough to travel by; and they might have proceeded on – either through the sand-dunes or along the shore. But of the four there was not one – not even the tough old tar himself – who was not regularly done up, both with weariness of body and spirit. The short slumber upon the spit – from which they had been so unexpectedly startled – had refreshed them but little; and, as they stood upon the summit of the sand-hill, all four felt as if they could drop down, and go to sleep on the instant.

It was a couch sufficiently inviting, and they would at once have availed themselves of it, but for a circumstance that suggested to them the idea of seeking a still better place for repose.

The land wind was blowing in from the ocean; and, according to the forecast of Old Bill – a great practical meteorologist, – it promised ere long to become a gale. It was already sufficiently violent – and chill to boot – to make the situation on the summit of the dune anything but comfortable. There was no reason why they should make their couch upon that exposed prominence. Just on the landward side of the hillock itself – below, at its base – they perceived a more sheltered situation; and why not select that spot for their resting place?

There was no reason why they should not. Old Bill proposed it; there was no opposition offered by his young companions, – and, without further parley, the four went floundering down the sloping side of the sand-hill, into the sheltered convexity at its base.

On arriving at the bottom, they found themselves in the narrowest of ravines. The hillock from which they had descended was but the highest summit of a long ridge, trending in the same direction as the coast. Another ridge, of about equal height, ran parallel to this on the landward side. The bases of the two approached so near, that their sloping sides formed an angle with each other. On account of the abrupt acclivity of both, this angle was almost acute, and the ravine between the two resembled a cavity out of which some great wedge had been cut, – like a section taken from the side of a gigantic melon.

It was in this re-entrant angle that the castaways found themselves, after descending the side of the dune, and where they had proposed spending the remainder of the night.

They were somewhat disappointed on reaching their sleeping-quarters, and finding them so limited as to space. In the bottom of the ravine there was not breadth enough for a bed, – even for the shortest of the party, – supposing him desirous of sleeping in a horizontal position.

There were not six feet of surface – nor even three – that could strictly be called horizontal. Even longitudinally, the bottom of the "gully" had a sloping inclination: for the ravine itself tended upwards, until it became extinguished in the convergence of its inclosing ridges.

On discovering the unexpected "strait" into which they had launched themselves, our adventurers were for a time nonplussed. They felt inclined to proceed farther in search of a "better bed," but their weariness outweighed this inclination; and, after some hesitation, they resolved to remain in the "ditch," into which they had so unwillingly descended. They proceeded therefore to encouch themselves.

Their first attempt was made by placing themselves in a half-standing position – their backs supported upon the sloping side of one of the ridges, with their feet resting against the other. So long as they kept awake, this position was both easy and pleasant; but the moment any one of them closed his eyes in sleep, – and this was an event almost instantaneous, – his muscles, relaxed by slumber, would no longer have the strength to sustain him; and the consequence would be an uncomfortable collapse to the bottom of the "gully," where anything like a position of repose was out of the question.

This vexatious interruption of their slumbers happening repeatedly, at length roused all four to take fresh counsel as to choosing a fresh couch.

Terence had been especially annoyed by these repeated disturbances; and proclaimed his determination not to submit to them any longer. He would go in search of more "comfortable quarters."

He had arisen to his feet, and appeared in the act of starting off.

"We had better not separate," suggested Harry Blount. "If we do, we may find it difficult to come together again."

"There's something in what you say, Hal," said the young Scotchman. "It will not do for us to lose sight of one another. What does Bill say to it?"

"I say, stay here," put in the voice of the sailor. "It won't do to stray the wan from the t'other. No, it won't. Let us hold fast, thin, where we're already belayed."

"But who the deuce can sleep here?" remonstrated the son of Erin. "A hard-worked horse can sleep standing; and so can an elephant, they say; but, for me, I'd prefer six feet of the horizontal – even if it were a hard stone – to this slope of the softest sand."

"Stay, Terry!" cried Colin. "I've captured an idea."

"Ah! you Scotch are always capturing something – whether it be an idea, a flea, or the itch. Let's hear what it is."

"After that insult to ma kintree," good-humoredly rejoined Colin, "I dinna know whuther I wull."

"Come, Colin," interrupted Harry Blount, "if you've any good counsel to give us, pray don't withhold it. We can't get sleep, standing at an angle of forty-five degrees. Why should we not try to change our position by seeking another place?"

"Well, Harry, as you have made the request, I'll tell you what's just come into my mind. I only feel astonished it didn't occur to any of us sooner."

"Mother av Moses!" cried Terence, jocularly adopting his native brogue; "and why don't you out with it at wanse? – you Scatch are the throe *rid-tape* of society."

"Never mind, Colly!" interposed Blount; "there's no time to listen to Terry's badinage. We're all too sleepy for jesting; tell us what you've got in your mind."

"All of ye do as you see me, and, I'll be your bail, ye'll sleep sound till the dawn o' the day. Good night!"

As Colin pronounced the salutation he sank down to the bottom of the ravine, where, stretched longitudinally, he might repose without the slightest danger of being awakened by slipping from his couch.

On seeing him thus disposed, the others only wondered they had not thought of the thing before.

They were too sleepy to speculate long upon their own thoughtlessness; and one after the other, imitating the example set them by the young Scotchman, laid their bodies lengthwise along the bottom of the ravine, and entered upon the enjoyment of a slumber from which all the kettle-drums in creation would scarce have awaked them.

CHAPTER XI. 'WARE THE SAND!

As the gully in which they had gone to rest was too narrow to permit of them lying side by side, they were disposed in a sort of lengthened chain, with their heads all turned in the same direction. The bottom of the ravine, as already stated, had a slight inclination; and they had, of course, placed themselves so that their heads should be higher than their feet.

The old sailor was at the lower end of this singular series, with the feet of Harry Blount just above the crown of his head. Above the head of Harry were the heels of Terence O'Connor; and, at the top of all, reclined Colin, – in the place where he had first stretched himself.

On account of the slope of the ground, the four were thus disposed in a sort of *échelon* formation, of which Old Bill was the base. They had dropped into their respective positions, one after the other, as they lay.

The sailor had been the last to commit himself to this curious couch; he was also the last to surrender to sleep. For some time after the others had become unconscious of outward impressions, he lay listening to the "sough" of the sea, and the sighing of the breeze, as it blew along the smooth sides of the sand-hills.

He did not remain awake for any great length of time. He was wearied, as well as his young comrades; and soon also yielded his spirit to the embrace of the god Somnus.

Before doing so, however, he had made an observation, – one of a character not likely to escape the notice of an old mariner such as he. He had become conscious that a storm was brewing in the sky. The sudden shadowing of the heavens; – the complete disappearance of the moon, leaving even the white landscape in darkness; – her red color as she went out of sight; – the increased noise caused by the roaring of the breakers; and the louder "swishing" of the wind itself, which began to blow in quick gusty puffs; all these sights and sounds admonished him that a gale was coming on.

He instinctively noted these signs; and on board ship would have heeded them, – so far as to have alarmed the sleeping watch, and counselled precaution.

But stretched upon terra firma – not so very firm had he but known it – between two huge hills, where he and his companions were tolerably well sheltered from the wind, it never occurred to the old salt, that they could be in any danger; and simply muttering to himself, "the storm be blown!" he laid his weather-beaten face upon the pillow of soft sand, and delivered himself up to deep slumber.

The silent prediction of the sailor turned out a true forecast. Sure enough there came a storm; which, before the castaways had been half an hour asleep, increased to a tempest. It was one of those sudden uprisings of the elements common in all tropical countries, but especially so in the desert tracts of Arabia and Africa, – where the atmosphere, rarefied by heat, and becoming highly volatile, suddenly loses its equilibrium, and rushes like a destroying angel over the surface of the earth.

The phenomenon that had broken over the arenaceous couch, – upon which slept the four castaways, – was neither more nor less than a "sand-storm;" or, to give it its Arab title, a *simoom*.

The misty vapor that late hung suspended in the atmosphere had been swept away by the first puff of the wind; and its place was now occupied by a cloud equally dense, though perhaps not so constant, – a cloud of white sand lifted from the surface of the earth, and whirled high up towards heaven, – even far out over the waters of the ocean.

Had it been daylight, huge volumes, of what might have appeared dust, might have been seen rolling over the ridges of sand, – here swirling into rounded pillar-like shapes, that could easily have been mistaken for solid columns, standing for a time in one place, then stalking over the summits of the hills, or suddenly breaking into confused and cumbering masses; while the heavier particles, no

longer kept in suspension by the rotatory whirl, might be seen spilling back towards the earth, like a sand-shower projected downward through some gigantic "screen."

In the midst of this turbulent tempest of wind and sand – with not a single drop of rain, – the castaways continued to sleep.

One might suppose – as did the old man-o'-war's-man before going to sleep – that they were not in any danger; not even as much as if their couch had been under the roof of a house, or strewn amid the leaves of the forest. There were no trees to be blown down upon them, no bricks nor large chimney-pots to come crashing through the ceiling, and crush them as they lay upon their beds.

What danger could there be among the "dunes?"

Not much to a man awake, and with open eyes. In such a situation, there might be discomfort, but no danger.

Different however, was it with the slumbering castaways. Over them a peril was suspended – a real peril – of which perhaps, on that night not one of them was dreaming – and in which, perhaps, not one of them would have put belief, – but for the experience of it they were destined to be taught before the morning.

Could an eye have looked upon them as they lay, it would have beheld a picture sufficiently suggestive of danger. It would have seen four human figures stretched along the bottom of a narrow ravine, longitudinally aligned with one another – their heads all turned one way, and in point of elevation slightly *en échelon*– it would have noted that these forms were asleep, that they were already half buried in sand, which, apparently descending from the clouds was still settling around them; and that, unless one or other of them awoke, all four should certainly become "smooored."

What does this mean? Merely a slight inconvenience arising from having the mouth, ears, and nostrils obstructed by sand, which a little choking, and sneezing, and coughing would soon remove.

Ask the Highland shepherd who has imprudently gone to sleep under the "blowin' sna"; question the Scandinavian, whose calling compels him to encamp on the open "fjeld"; interrogate Swede or Norwegian, Finn or Lapp, and you may discover the danger of being "smooored."

That would be in the snow, – the light, vascular, porous, permeable snow, – under which a human being may move, and through which he may breathe, – though tons of it may be superpoised above his body, – the snow that, while imprisoning its victim, also gives him warmth, and affords him shelter, – perilous as that shelter may be.

Ask the Arab what it is to be "smooored" by sand; question the wild Bedouin of the Bled-el-jereed, – the Tuarick and Tiboo of the Eastern Desert, – they will tell you it is danger often *death!*

Little dreamt the four sleepers as they lay unconscious under that swirl of sand, – little even would they have suspected, if awake, – that there was danger in the situation.

There was, for all that, a danger, great as it was imminent, – the danger, not only of their being "smooored," but stifled, suffocated, buried fathoms deep under the sands of the Saära, for fathoms deep will often be the drift of a single night.

The Arabs say that, once "submerged" beneath the arenaceous "flood," a man loses the power to extricate himself. His energies are suspended, his senses become numbed and torpid – in short, he feels as one who goes to sleep in a snow-storm.

It may be true; but, whether or no, it seemed as if the four English castaways had been stricken with this inexplicable paralysis. Despite the hoarse roaring of the breakers, despite the shrieking and whistling of the wind, despite the dust constantly being deposited on their bodies, and entering ears, mouth, and nostrils, – despite the stifling sensation one would suppose they must have felt, and which should have awakened them, – despite all, they continued to sleep. It seemed as if that sleep was to be eternal!

If they heard not the storm that raged savagely above them, if they felt not the sand that pressed heavily upon them, what was there to warn, what to arouse them from that ill-starred slumber?

CHAPTER XII. A MYSTERIOUS NIGHTMARE

The four castaways had been asleep for a couple of hours, – that is, from the time that, following the example of the young Scotchman, they had stretched themselves along the bottom of the ravine. It was not quite an hour, however, since the commencement of the sand-storm; and yet in this short time the arenaceous dust had accumulated to the thickness of several inches upon their bodies; and a person passing the spot, or even stepping right over them, could not have told that four human beings were buried beneath, – that is, upon the supposition that they would have lain still, and not got startled from their slumbers by the foot thus treading upon them.

Perhaps it was a fortunate circumstance for them, that by such a contingency they might be awakened, and that by such they *were* awakened.

Otherwise their sleep might have been protracted into the still deeper sleep – from which there is no awaking.

All four had begun to feel – if any sensation while asleep can be so called – a sense of suffocation, accompanied by a heaviness of the limbs and torpidity in the joints, – as if some immense weight was pressing upon their bodies, that rendered it impossible for them to stir either toe or finger. It was a sensation similar to that so well known, and so much dreaded, under the name of *nightmare*. It may have been the very same; and was, perhaps, brought on as much by the extreme weariness they all felt, as by the superincumbent weight of the sand.

Their heads, lying higher than their bodies, were not so deeply buried under the drift; which, blown lightly over their faces, still permitted the atmosphere to pass through it. Otherwise their breathing would have been stopped altogether; and death must have been the necessary consequence.

Whether it was a genuine nightmare or no, it was accompanied by all the horrors of this phenomenon. As they afterwards declared, all four felt its influence, each in his own way dreaming of some fearful fascination from which he could make no effort to escape. Strange enough, their dreams were different. Harry Blount thought he was falling over a precipice; Colin that a gigantic ogre had got hold of and was going to eat him up; while the young Hibernian fancied himself in the midst of a conflagration, a dwelling house on fire, from which he could not get out!

Old Bill's delusion was more in keeping with their situation, – or at least with that out of which they had lately escaped. He simply supposed that he was submerged in the sea, and as he knew he could not swim, it was but natural for him to fancy that he was drowning.

Still, he could make no struggle; and, as he would have done this, whether able to swim or not, his dream did not exactly resemble the real thing.

The sailor was the first to escape from the uncomfortable *incubus*; though there was but an instant between the awakening of all. They were startled out of their sleep, one after another, in the order in which they lay, and inversely to that in which they had lain down.

Their awakening was as mysterious as the nightmare itself, and scarce relieved them from the horror which the latter had been occasioning.

All felt in turn, and in quick succession, a heavy crushing pressure, either on the limbs or body, which had the effect, not only to startle them from their sleep, but caused them considerable pain.

Twice was this pressure applied, almost exactly on the same spot, and with scarce a second's interval between the applications. It could not well have been repeated a third time with like exactness, even had such been the design of whatever creature was causing it; for, after the second squeeze, each had recovered sufficient consciousness to know he was in danger of being crushed, and make a desperate effort to withdraw himself.

The exclamations, proceeding from four sets of lips, told that all were still in the land of the living; but the confused questioning that followed did nothing towards elucidating the cause of that sudden and almost simultaneous uprising.

There was too much sneezing and coughing to permit of anything like clear or coherent speech. The *shumu* was still blowing. There was sand in the mouths and nostrils of all four, and dust in their eyes. Their talk more resembled the jibbering of apes, who had unwisely intruded into a snuff shop, than the conversation of four rational beings.

It was some time before any one of them could shape his speech, so as to be understood by the others; and, after all had at length succeeded in making themselves intelligible, it was found that each had the same story to tell. Each had felt two pressures on some part of his person; and had seen, though very indistinctly, some huge creature passing over him, – apparently a quadruped, though what sort of quadruped none of them could tell. All they knew was, that it was a gigantic, uncouth creature, with a narrow body and neck, and very long legs; and that it had feet there could be no doubt: since it was these that had pressed so heavily upon them.

But for the swirl of the sand-storm, and the dust already in their eyes, they might have been able to give a better description of the creature that had so unceremoniously stepped over them. These impediments, however, had hindered them from obtaining a fair view of it; and some animal, – grotesquely shaped, with a long neck, body, and legs, – was the image which remained in the excited minds of the awakened sleepers.

Whatever it was, they were all sufficiently frightened to stand for some time trembling. Just awaking from such dreams, it was but natural they should surrender themselves to strange imaginings; and instead of endeavoring to identify the odd-looking animal, if animal it was, they were rather inclined to set it down as some creature of a supernatural kind.

The three midshipmen were but boys, not so long from the nursery as to have altogether escaped from the weird influence which many a nursery tale had wrapped around them; and as for old Bill, fifty years spent in "ploughing the ocean" had only confirmed *him* in the belief, that the "black art" is not so mythical as philosophers would have us think.

So frightened were all four, that, after the first ebullition of their surprise had subsided, they no longer gave utterance to speech, but stood listening, and trembling as they listened. Perhaps, had they known the service which the intruder had done for them, they might have felt gratitude towards it, instead of the suspicion and dread that for some moments kept them, as if spell-bound, in their places. It did not occur to any of the party, that that strange summons from sleep – more effective than the half-whispered invitation of a *valet-de-chambre*, or the ringing of a breakfast-bell – had in all probability rescued them from a silent, but certain death.

They stood, as I have said, listening. There were several distinct sounds that saluted their ears. There was the "sough" of the sea, as it came swelling up the gorge; the "whish" of the wind, as it impinged upon the crests of the ridges; and the "swish" of the sand as it settled around them.

All these were the voices of inanimate objects, – phenomena of nature, easily understood. But, rising above them, were heard sounds of a different character, which, though they might be equally natural, were not equally familiar to those who listened to them.

There was a sort of dull battering, – as if some gigantic creature was performing a Terpsichorean feat upon the sand-bank above them; but sharper sounds were heard at intervals, – screams commingled with short snortings, both proclaiming something of the nature of a struggle.

Neither in the screams nor the snortings was there anything that the listeners could identify as sounds they had ever heard before. They were alike perplexing to the ears of English, Irish, and Scotch. Even old Bill, who had heard, sometime or other, nearly every sound known to creation, could not classify them.

"Divil take thim!" whispered he to his companions, "I dinna know what to make av it. It be hawful to 'ear 'em!"

"Hark!" ejaculated Harry Blount.

"Hish!" exclaimed Terence.

"Wheesh!" muttered Colin. "It's coming nearer, whatever it may be. Wheesh!"

There could be no doubt about the truth of this conjecture; for as the caution passed from the lips of the young Scotchman, the dull hammering, the snorts, and the unearthly screams were evidently drawing nearer, – though the creature that was causing them was unseen through the thick sand-mist still surrounding the listeners. These, however, heard enough to know that some heavy body was making a rapid descent down the sloping gorge, and with an impetuosity that rendered it prudent for them to get out of its way.

More by an instinct, than from any correct appreciation of the danger, all four fell back from the narrow trench in which they had been standing, – each, as he best could, retreating up the declivity of the sand-hill.

Scarce were they able to obtain footing in their new position, when the sounds they had heard not only became louder and nearer, but the creature that had been causing them paused close to their feet, – so close that most of them could have touched it with their toes.

For all that, not one of the party could tell what it was; and after it had passed, – on its way down the ravine, – and was once more lost to their view amid the swirling sand, they were not a bit further advanced in their knowledge of the strange creature that had come so near crushing out their existence with its ponderous weight!

All that they had been able to see was a conglomeration of dark objects, – resembling the head, neck, body, and limbs of some uncouth animal, – while the sounds that proceeded from it were like utterances that might have come from some other world; for certainly they had but slight resemblance to anything the castaways had ever heard in this – either upon sea, or land!

CHAPTER XIII. THE MAHERRY

For some length of time they stood conjecturing, – the boys with clasped hands, – Old Bill near, but apart.

During this time, at intervals, they continued to hear the sounds that had so astonished them – the stamping, the snorts, and the screaming, though they no longer saw the creature that caused them.

The sand gully opened towards the sea, in a diagonal direction. It could not be many yards to the spot, where it debouched upon the level of the beach; and the creature that had caused them such a surprise – and was still continuing to occupy their thoughts – must have reached this level surface: though not to suspend its exertions. Every now and then could be heard the same repetition of dull noises, – as if some animal was kicking itself to death, – varied by trumpet-like snorts and agonizing screams, which could be likened to the cry of no animal upon earth.

But that the castaways knew they were on the coast of Africa, – that continent renowned for strange existences, – they might have been even more disposed to a supernatural belief in what was near them; but as the minutes passed, and their senses began to return to them, they became more inclined to think that what they had seen, heard, and *felt*, might be only some animal – a heavy quadruped – that had trampled over them in their sleep.

The chief difficulty in reconciling this belief with the actual occurrence was the odd behavior of the animal. Why had it gone up the gorge, apparently *parenti passu*, to come tumbling down again in such a confused fashion? Why was it still kicking and stumbling about at the bottom of the ravine, – for such did the sounds proclaim it to be doing?

No answer could be given to either of these questions; and none was given, until day dawned over the sand-hills. This was soon after; and along with the morning light had come the cessation of the simoom.

Then saw the castaways that creature that had so abruptly awakened them from their slumbers, – and, by so doing, perhaps, saved their lives. They saw it recumbent at the bottom of the gorge, where they had so uneasily passed the night.

It proved to be – what from the slight glimpse they had got of it, they were inclined to believe – an animal, and a quadruped; and if it had presented an uncouth appearance, as it stepped over them in the darkness, not less so did it appear as they now beheld it, under the light of day.

It was an animal of very large size, – in height far exceeding a horse, – but of such a grotesque shape as to be easily recognizable by any one who had ever glanced into a picture-book of quadrupeds. The long craning neck, with an almost earless head and gibbous profile; the great straggling limbs, callous at the knees, and ending in broad, wide splitting hooves; the slender hind-quarters, and tiny, tufted tail, – both ludicrously disproportioned, – the tumid, misshapen trunk; but, above all, the huge hunch rising above the shoulders, at once proclaimed the creature to be a dromedary.

"Och! it's only a kaymal!" cried Old Bill, as soon as the daylight enabled him to get a fair view of the animal. "What on hearth is it doin' 'ere?"

"Sure enough," suggested Terence, "it was this beast that stepped over us while we were asleep! It almost squeezed the breath out of me, for it set its hoof right upon the pit of my stomach."

"The same with me," said Colin. "It sunk me down nearly a foot into the sand. Ah, we have reason to be thankful there was that drift-sand over our bodies at the time. If not, the great brute might have crushed us to death!"

There was some truth in Colin's observation. But for the covering of sand, – which acted as a cushion, – and also from that which formed their couch yielding beneath them, the hoof of the great

quadruped might have caused them a serious injury. As it was, none of them had received any hurt beyond the fright which the strange intruder had occasioned them.

The singular incident was yet only half explained. They saw it was a camel that had disturbed their slumbers; that the animal had been on its way up the ravine, – perhaps seeking shelter from the sand-storm; but what had caused it to return so suddenly back down the slope? Above all, why had it made the downward journey in such a singular manner? Obscure as had been their view of it, they could see that it did not go on all-fours, but apparently tumbling and struggling, – its long limbs kicking about in the air, as if it was performing the descent by a series of somersaults.

All this had been mysterious enough; but it was soon explained to the satisfaction of the four castaways, who, as soon as they saw the camel by the bottom of the gorge, had rushed down and surrounded it.

The animal was in a recumbent position, – not as if it had lain down to rest, but in a constrained attitude, with its long neck drawn in towards its forelegs, and its head lying low and half-buried in the sand!

As it was motionless when they first perceived it, they fancied it was dead, – that something had wounded it above. This would have explained the fantastic fashion in which it had returned down the slope, – as the somersaults observed might have been only a series of death struggles.

On getting around it, however, they perceived that it was not only still alive, but in perfect health; and its late mysterious movements were accounted for at a single glance. A strong hair halter, firmly noosed around its head, had got caught in the bifurcation of one of its fore-hoofs, where a knot upon the rope had hindered it from slipping through the deep split. This had first caused it to trip up, and tumble head over heels, – inaugurating that series of struggles which had ended in transporting it back to the bottom of the ravine, – where it now lay with the trailing end of the long halter knotted inextricably around its legs.

CHAPTER XIV. A LIQUID BREAKFAST

Melancholy as was the situation of the self-caught camel, it was a joyful sight to those who beheld it. Hungry as they were, its flesh would provide them with food; and thirsting as they were, they knew that inside its stomach would be found a supply of water!

Such were their first thoughts as they came around it.

They soon perceived, however, that to satisfy the latter appetite it would not be necessary for them to kill the camel. Upon the top of its hump was a small, flat pad or saddle, firmly held in its place by a strong leathern band passing under the animal's belly. This proved it to be a "maherry," or riding camel, – one of those swift creatures used by the Arabs in their long rapid journeys across the deserts; and which are common among the tribes inhabiting the Saära.

It was not this saddle that gratified the eyes of our adventurers, but a bag, tightly strapped to it, and resting behind the hump of the maherry. This bag was of goat-skin, and upon examination was found to be nearly half-full of water. It was, in fact, the "Gerba," or water-skin, belonging to whoever had been the owner of the animal, – an article of camel equipment more essential than the saddle itself.

The four castaways, suffering the torture of thirst, made no scruple about appropriating the contents of the bag, and, in the shortest possible time, it was stripped from the back of the maherry, its stopper taken out, and the precious fluid extracted from it by all four, in greedy succession, until its light weight and collapsed sides declared it to be empty.

Their thirst being thus opportunely assuaged, a council was next held, as to what they should do to appease the other appetite.

Should they kill the camel?

It appeared to be their only chance; and the impetuous Terence had already unsheathed his midshipman's dirk, with the design of burying it in the body of the animal.

Colin, however, more prudent in counsel, cried to him to hold his hand, – at least until they should give the subject a more thorough consideration.

On this suggestion they proceeded to debate the point between them. They were of different opinions, and equally divided. Two, – Terence and Harry Blount, – were for immediately killing the maherry, and making their breakfast upon its flesh; while the sailor joined Colin in voting that it should be reprieved.

"Let us first make use of the animal to help carry us somewhere," urged the young Scotchman. "We can go without food a day longer. Then, if we find nothing, we can butcher this beast."

"But what's to be found in such a country as this?" inquired Harry Blount. "Look around you! There's nothing green but the sea itself. There isn't anything eatable within sight, – not so much as would make a dinner for a dormouse!"

"Perhaps," rejoined Colin, "when we've travelled a few miles, we may come upon a different sort of country. We can keep along the coast. Why shouldn't we find shell-fish, – enough to keep us alive? See, – yonder's a dark place down upon the beach. I shouldn't wonder if there's some there."

The glances of all were instantly directed towards the beach, – excepting those of Sailor Bill. His were fixed on a different object; and an exclamation that escaped him – as well as a movement that accompanied it – arrested the attention of his companions, causing them to turn their eyes upon him.

"Shell-fish be blow'd," cried Bill, "here's something better for breakfast than cowl'd oysters. Look!"

The sailor, as he spoke, pointed to an oval-shaped object, something larger than a cocoa-nut, appearing between the hind legs of the maherry.

"It's a shemale!" added he, "and's had a calf not long ago. Look at the 'eldher,' and them tits. They're swelled wi' milk. There'll be enough for the whole of us, I warrant yez."

As if to make sure of what he said, the sailor dropped down upon his knees by the hind-quarters of the prostrate camel; and, taking one of the teats in his mouth, commenced drawing forth the lacteal fluid which the udder contained.

The animal made no resistance. It might have wondered at the curious "calf" that had thus attached himself to its teats; but only at the oddness of his color and costume; for no doubt it had often before been similarly served by its African owner.

"Fust rate!" cried Bill, desisting for a moment to take breath. "Ayqual to the richest crame; if we'd only a bite av bred to go along wi' it, or some av your Scotch porritch, Master Colin. But I forgets. My brave youngsters," continued he, rising up and standing to one side, "yez be all hungrier than I am. Go it, wan after another: there'll be enough for yez all."

Thus invited, and impelled by their hungry cravings, the three, one after another, knelt down as the sailor had done, and drank copiously from that sweet "fountain of the desert."

Taking it in turns, they continued "sucking," until each had swallowed about a pint and a half of the nutritious fluid when, the udder of the camel becoming dry, told that her supply of milk was, for the time, exhausted.

CHAPTER XV. THE SAILOR AMONG THE SHELL-FISH

It was no longer a question of slaying the camel. That would be killing the goose that gave the golden eggs. Though they were still very hungry, the rich milk had to some extent taken the keen edge off their appetites; and all declared they could now go several hours without eating.

The next question was: where were they to go?

The reader may wonder that this was a question at all. Having been told that the camel carried a saddle, and was otherwise caparisoned, it will naturally be conjectured that the animal had got loose from some owner, and was simply straying. This was the very hypothesis that passed before the mind of our adventurers. How could they have conjectured otherwise?

Indeed it was scarce a guess. The circumstances told them to a certainty that the camel must have strayed from its owner. The only question was: where that owner might be found.

By reading, or otherwise, they possessed enough knowledge of the coast, on which they had been cast away, to know that the proprietor of the "stray" would be some kind of an Arab; and that he would be found living – not in a house or a town – but in a tent; in all likelihood associated with a number of other Arabs, in an "encampment."

It required not much reasoning to arrive at these conclusions; and our adventurers had come to them almost on that instant, when they first set eyes on the caparisoned camel.

You may wonder that they did not instantly set forth in search of the master of the maherry; or of the tent or encampment from which the latter should have strayed. One might suppose, that this would have been their first movement.

On the contrary, it was likely to be their very last; and for sufficient reasons, – which will be discovered in the conversation that ensued, after they had swallowed their liquid breakfasts.

Terence had proposed adopting this course, – that is, to go in search of the man from whom the maherry must have wandered. The young Irishman had never been a great reader, – at all events no account of the many "lamentable shipwrecks on the Barbary coast" had ever fallen into his hands, – and he knew nothing of the terrible reputation of its people. Neither had Bill obtained any knowledge of it from books; but, for all that, – thanks to many a fore-castle yarn, – the old sailor was well informed both about the character of the coast on which they had suffered shipwreck, and its inhabitants. Bill had the best of reasons for dreading the denizens of the Saäran desert.

"Sure they're not cannibals?" urged Terence. "They won't eat us, any how?"

"In troth I'm not so shure av that, Masther Terry," replied Bill. "Even supposin' they won't ate us, they'll do worse."

"Worse!"

"Aye, worse, I tell you. They'd torture us, till death would be a blissin'."

"How do you know they would?"

"Ach, Masther Terry!" sighed the old sailor, assuming an air of solemnity, such as his young comrades had never before witnessed upon his usually cheerful countenance; "I could tell yez something that 'ud convince ye of the truth av what I've been sayin', an' that'll gie ye a hidear av what we've got to expect if we fall into the 'ands av these feerocious Ayrabs."

Bill had already hinted at the prospective peril of an encounter with the people of the country.

"Tell us, Bill. What is it?"

"Well, young masthers, it beant much, – only that my own brother was wrecked som'ere on this same coast. That was ten years agone. He never returned to owld Hengland."

"Perhaps he was drowned?"

"Betther for 'im, poor boy, if he 'ad. No, he 'adn't that luck. The crew, – it was a tradin' vessel, and there was tin o' them, – all got safe ashore. They were taken prisoners as they landed by a lot o' Ayrabs. Only one av the tin got home to tell the tale; and he wouldn't a 'ad the chance but for a Jew merchant at Mogador, that found he had rich relations as 'ud pay well to ransom him. I see him a wee while after he got back to Hengland; and he tell me what he had to go through, and my hown brother as well: for Jim, – that be my brother's name, – was with the tribe as took 'im up the counthry. None o' yez iver heerd o' cruelties like they 'ad to put up with. Death in any way would be aisy, compared to what they 'ad to hendure. Poor Jim! I suppose he's dead long ago. Tough as I be myself, I don't believe I could a stood it a week, – let alone tin years. Talk o' knockin' about like a Turk's head. They were knocked about, an' beat, an' bullied, an' kicked, an' starved, – worse than the laziest lubber as ever skulked about the decks o' a ship. No, Masther Terry, we mustn't think av thryin' to find the owner av the beest; but do everythink we can to keep out o' the way av both him and his."

"What would you advise us to do, Bill?"

"I don't know much 'bout where we be," replied the sailor; "but wheresomever it is, our best plan are to hug by the coast, an' keep within sight o' the water. If we go innard, we're sure to get lost one way or t' other. By keepin' south'ard we may come to some thradin' port av the Portagee."

"We'd better start at once, then," suggested the impatient Terence.

"No, Masther Terry," said the sailor; "not afore night. We musn't leave 'eer till it gets dark. We'll 'ave to thtravel betwane two days."

"What!" simultaneously exclaimed the three midshipmen. "Stay here till night! Impossible!"

"Aye, lads! an' we must hide, too. Shure as ye are livin' there'll be somebody afther this sthray kaymal, – in a wee while, too, as ye'll see. If we ventured out durin' the daylight, they'd be sure to see us from the 'ills. It's sayed, the thievin' schoundrels always keep watch when there's been a wreck upon the coast; an' I'll be bound this beest belongs to some av them same wreckers."

"But what shall we do for food?" asked one of the party; "we'll be famished before nightfall! The camel, having nothing to eat or drink, won't yield any more milk."

This interrogative conjecture was probably too near the truth. No one made answer to it. Colin's eyes were again turned towards the beach. Once more he directed the thoughts of his comrades to the shell-fish.

"Hold your hands, youngsters," said the sailor. "Lie close 'eer behind the 'ill, an' I'll see if there's any shell-fish that we can make a meal av. Now that the sun's up, it won't do to walk down there. I must make a crawl av it."

So saying, the old salt, after skulking some distance farther down the sand gully, threw himself flat upon his face, and advanced in this attitude, like some gigantic lizard crawling across the sand.

The tide was out; but the wet beach, lately covered by the sea, commenced at a short distance from the base of the "dunes."

After a ten minutes' struggle, Bill succeeded in reaching the dark-looking spot where Colin had conjectured there might be shell-fish.

The old sailor was soon seen busily engaged about something; and from his movements it was evident, that his errand was not to prove fruitless. His hands were extended in different directions; and then at short intervals withdrawn, and plunged into the capacious pockets of his pea-jacket.

After these gestures had been continued for about half an hour, he was seen to "slew" himself round, and come crawling back towards the sand-hills.

His return was effected more slowly than his departure; and it could be seen that he was heavily weighted.

On getting back into the gorge, he was at once relieved of his load, which proved to consist of about three hundred "cockles," – as he called the shell-fish he had collected, – and which were found to be a species of mussel.

They were not only edible, but delicious, – at least they seemed so to those who were called upon to swallow them.

This seasonable supply did a great deal towards allaying the appetites of all; and even Terence now declared himself contented to remain concealed, until night should afford them an opportunity of escape from the monotony of their situation.

CHAPTER XVI. KEEPING UNDER COVER

From the spot, where the camel still lay couched in his "entetherment," the sea was not visible to one lying along the ground. It was only by standing erect, and looking over a spur of the sand-ridge, that the beach could be seen, and the ocean beyond it.

There would be no danger, therefore, of their being discovered, by any one coming along the strand – provided they kept in a crouching attitude behind the ridge, which, sharply crested, like a snow-wreath, formed a sort of parapet in front of them. They might have been easily seen from the summit of any of the "dunes" to the rear; but there was not much likelihood of any one approaching them in that direction. The country inward appeared to be a labyrinth of sand-hills – with no opening that would indicate a passage for either man or beast. The camel, in all probability, had taken to the gorge – guided by its instincts – there to seek shelter from the sand-storm. The fact of its carrying a saddle showed that its owner must have been upon the march, at the time it escaped from him. Had our adventurers been better acquainted with Saäran customs, they would have concluded that this had been the case: for they would have known that, on the approach of a "shuma" – the "forecasts" of which are well known – the Bedouins at once, and in all haste, break up their encampments; and put themselves, and their whole personal property, in motion. Otherwise, they would be in danger of getting smooored under the settling sand-drift.

Following the counsels of the sailor – whose desert knowledge appeared as extensive as if it, and not the sea, had been his habitual home – our adventurers crouched down in such a way as not to be seen by any one passing along the beach.

Scarcely had they placed themselves in this humble attitude, when Old Bill – who had been keeping watch all the while, with only the upper half of his head elevated above the combing of the sand-wreath – announced, by a low exclamation, that something was in sight.

Two dark forms were seen coming along the shore, from the southward; but at so great a distance that it was impossible to tell what sort of creatures they might turn out.

"Let me have a look," proposed Colin. "By good luck, I've got my glass. It was in my pocket as we escaped from the ship; and I didn't think of throwing it away."

As the young Scotchman spoke, he took from the breast of his dreadnought jacket, a small telescope, – which, when drawn out to its full extent, exhibited a series of tubes, *en échelon*, about half a yard in length. Directing it upon the dark objects, – at the same time taking the precaution to keep his own head as low down as possible, – he at once proclaimed their character.

"They're two bonny bodies," said he, "dressed in all the colors of the rainbow. I can see bright shawls, and red caps, and striped cloaks. One is mounted on a horse; the other bestrides a camel, – just such a one as this by our side. They're coming along slowly; and appear to be staring about them."

"Ah, that be hit," said Old Bill. "It be the howners of this 'eer brute. They be on the sarch for her. Lucky the drift-sand hae covered her tracks, – else they'd come right on to us. Lie low, Masther Colin. We mayn't show our heeds over the combin' o' the sand. They'd be sure to see the size o' a saxpence. We maun keep awthegither oot o' sicht."

One of the old sailor's peculiarities – or, perhaps, it may have been an eccentricity – was, that in addressing himself to his companions, he was almost sure to assume the national *patois* of the individual spoken to. In anything like a continued conversation with Harry Blount, his "h's" were handled in a most unfashionable manner; and while talking with Terence, the Milesian came from his lips, in a brogue almost as pure as Tipperary could produce.

In a *tête-à-tête* with Colin, the listener might have sworn that Bill was more Scotch than the young Macpherson himself.

Colin perceived the justice of the sailor's suggestion; and immediately ducked his head below the level of the parapet of sand.

This placed our adventurers in a position at once irksome and uncertain. Curiosity, if nothing else, rendered them desirous to watch the movements of the men who were approaching. Without noting these, they would not be able to tell when they might again raise their heads above the ridge; and might do so, just at the time when the horseman and the rider of the maherry were either opposite or within sight of them.

As the sailor had said, any dark object of the size of a sixpence would be seen if presented above the smooth combing of snow-white sand; and it was evident to all that for one of them to look over it might lead to their being discovered.

While discussing this point, they knew that some time had elapsed; and, although the eyes they dreaded might still be distant, they could not help thinking, that they were near enough to see them if only the hair of their heads should be shown above the sand.

They reflected naturally. They knew that these sons of the desert must be gifted with keen instincts; or, at all events, with an experience that would enable them to detect the slightest "fault" in the aspect of a landscape, so well known to them, – in short, that they would notice anything that might appear "abnormal" in it.

From that time their situation was one of doubt and anxiety. They dared not give even as much as a glance over the smooth, snow white sand. They could only crouch behind it, in anxious expectation, knowing not when that dubious condition of things could be safely brought to a close.

Luckily they were relieved from it, and sooner than they had expected. Colin it was who discovered a way to get out of the difficulty.

"Ha!" exclaimed he, as an ingenious conception sprang up in his mind. "I've got an idea that'll do. I'll watch these fellows, without giving them a chance of seeing me. That will I."

"How?" asked the others.

Colin made no verbal reply; but instead, he was seen to insert his telescope into the sand-parapet, in such a way that its tube passed clear through to the other side, and of course commanded a view of the beach, along which the two forms were advancing.

As soon as he had done so, he placed his eye to the glass, and, in a cautious whisper, announced that both the horseman and camel-rider were within his "field of view."

CHAPTER XVII. THE TRAIL ON THE SAND

The tube of the telescope, firmly imbedded in the sand, kept its place without the necessity of being held in hand. It only required to be slightly shifted as the horseman and camel-rider changed place, – so as to keep them within its field of view.

By this means our adventurers were able to mark their approach and note every movement they made, without much risk of being seen themselves. Each of them took a peep through the glass to satisfy their curiosity, and then the instrument was wholly intrusted to its owner, who was thenceforth constantly to keep his eye to it, and observe the movements of the strangers. This the young Scotchman did, at intervals communicating with his companions in a low voice.

"I can make out their faces," muttered he, after a time; "and ugly enough are they. One is yellow, the other black. He must be a negro, – of course he is, – he's got woolly hair too. It's he that rides the camel, – just such another as this that stumbled over us. The yellow man upon the horse has a pointed beard upon his chin. He has a sharp look, like those Moors we've seen at Tetuan. He's an Arab, I suppose. He appears to be the master of the black man. I can see him make gestures, as if he was directing him to do something. There! they have stopped, – they are looking this way!"

"Marcy on us!" muttered old Bill, "if they have speered the glass!"

"Troth! that's like enough," said Terence. "It'll be flashing in the sun outside the sand. That sharp-eyed Arab is almost sure to see it."

"Had you not better draw it in?" suggested Harry Blount.

"True," answered Colin. "But I fear it would be too late now. If that's what halted them, it's all over with us, so far as hiding goes."

"Slip it in, any how. If they don't see it any more, they mayn't come quite up to the ridge."

Colin was about to follow the advice thus offered, when on taking what he intended to be a last squint through the telescope, he perceived that the travellers were moving on up the beach, as if they had seen nothing that called upon them to deviate from their course.

Fortunately for the four "stowaways," it was not the sparkle of the lens that had caused them to make that stop. A ravine, or opening through the sand-ridges, much larger than that in which our adventurers were concealed, *emboucheed* upon the beach, some distance below. It was the appearance of this opening that had attracted the attention of the two mounted men; and from their gestures Colin could tell they were talking about it, as if undecided whether to go that way or keep on up the strand.

It ended by the yellow man putting spurs to his horse, and galloping off up the ravine, followed by the black man on the camel.

From the way in which both behaved, – keeping their eyes generally bent upon the ground, but at intervals gazing about over the country, – it was evident they were in search of something, and this would be the she-camel that lay tethered in the bottom of the sand-gorge, close to the spot occupied by our adventurers.

"They've gone off on the wrong track," said Colin, taking his eye from the glass as soon as the switch tail of the maherry disappeared behind the slope of a sand-dune. "So much the better for us. My heart was at my mouth just a minute ago. I was sure it was all over with us."

"You think they haven't seen the shine of the lens?" interrogated Harry.

"Of course not; or else they'd have come on to examine it. Instead, they've left the beach altogether. They've gone inland, among the hills. They're no longer in sight."

"Good!" ejaculated Terence, raising his head over the ridge, as did also the others.

"Och! good yez may well say, Masther Terence. Jist look fwhot fools we've been all four av us! We never thought av the thracks, nayther wan nor other av us!"

As Bill spoke, he pointed down towards the beach, in the direction in which he had made his late crawling excursion. There, distinctly traceable in the half-wet sand, were the marks he had made both going and returning, as if a huge tortoise or crocodile had been dragging itself over the ground.

The truth of his words was apparent to all. It was chance and not their cunning that had saved them from discovery. Had the owner of the camel but continued another hundred yards along the beach, he could not have failed to see the double "trail" made by the sailor, and of course would have followed it to the spot where they were hidden. As it was, the two mounted men had not come near enough to note the sign made by the old salt in his laborious flounderings; and perhaps fancying they had followed the strand far enough, they had struck off into the interior, – through the opening of the sand-hills, in the belief that the she-camel might have done the same.

Whatever may have been their reason, they were now gone out of sight, and the long stretch of desert shore was once more under the eyes of our adventurers, unrelieved by the appearance of anything that might be called a living creature.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE "DESERT SHIP."

Though there was now nothing within sight between them, they did not think it prudent to move out of the gorge, nor even to raise their heads above the level of the sand-wreath. They did so only at intervals, to assure themselves that the "coast was clear"; and satisfied on this score, they would lower their heads again, and remain in this attitude of concealment.

One with but slight knowledge of the circumstances – or with the country in which they were – might consider them over-cautious in acting thus, and might fancy that in their forlorn, shipwrecked condition they should have been but too glad to meet men.

On the contrary, a creature of their own shape was the last thing they desired either to see or encounter; and for the reasons already given in their conversation, they could meet no men there who would not be their enemies, – worse than that, their tyrants, perhaps their torturers. Old Bill was sure of this from what he had heard. So were Colin and Harry from what they had read. Terence alone was incredulous as to the cruelty of which the sailor had given such a graphic picture.

Terence, however rash he was by nature, allowed himself to be overruled by his more prudent companions; and therefore, up to the hour when the twilight began to em-purple the sea, no movement towards stirring from their place of concealment was made by any of the party.

The patient camel shared their silent retreat; though they had taken precautions against its straying from them, had it felt so inclined, by tying its shanks securely together. Towards evening the animal was again milked, in the same fashion as in the morning; and, reinvigorated by its bountiful yield, our adventurers prepared to depart from a spot, of which, notwithstanding the friendly concealment it had afforded them, they were all heartily tired.

Their preparations were easily made, and occupied scarce ten seconds of time. It was only to untether the camel and take to the road, or, as Harry jocosely termed it, "unmoor the desert ship and begin their voyage."

Just as the last gleam of daylight forsook the white crests of the sand-hills, and went flickering afar over the blue waters of the ocean, they stole forth from their hiding-place, and started upon a journey of which they knew neither the length nor the ending.

Even of the direction of that undetermined journey they had but a vague conception. They believed that the coast trended northward and southward, and that one of these points was the proper one to head for. It was almost "heads or tails" which of them they should take; and had they been better acquainted with their true situation, it might as well have been determined by a toss-up, for any chance they had of ever arriving at a civilized settlement. But they knew not that. They had a belief – the old sailor stronger than the rest – that there were Portuguese forts along the coast, chiefly to the southward, and that by keeping along shore they might reach one of these. There were such establishments it is true – still are; and though at that time there were some nearer to the point where their ship had been wrecked, none were near enough to be reached by the starving castaway, however perseveringly he might travel towards them.

Ignorant of the impracticability of their attempt, our adventurers entered upon it with a spirit worthy of success, – worthy of the country from which they had come.

For some time the maherry was led in hand, old Bill being its conductor. All four had been well rested during the day, and none of them cared to ride.

As the tide, however, was now beginning to creep up into the sundry inlets, to avoid walking in water, they were compelled to keep well high up on the beach; and this forced them to make their way through the soft yielding sand, a course that required considerable exertion.

Ore after another now began to feel fatigue, and talk about it as well; and then the proposal was made, that the maherry – who stepped over the unsure surface with as much apparent lightness as a cat would have done – should be made to carry at least one of the party. They could ride in turns, which would give each of them an opportunity of resting.

No sooner was the proposition made than it was carried into execution. Terence, who had been the one to advance it, being hoisted in the hump of the camel.

But though the young O'Connor had been accustomed to the saddle from childhood, and had ridden "across country" on many an occasion, it was not long before he became satisfied with the saddle of a maherry. The rocking, and jolting, and "pitching," as our adventurers termed it, from larboard to starboard, fore and aft, and alow and aloft, soon caused Terence to sing out "enough"; and he descended into the soft sand with a much greater desire for walking than the moment before he had had for riding.

Harry Blount took his place, but although the young Englishman had been equally accustomed to a hunting-saddle, he found that his experience went but a little way towards making him easy on the hump of a maherry; and he was soon in the mood for dismounting.

The son of Scotia next climbed upon the back of the camel. Whether it was that natural pride of prowess which oft impels his countrymen to perseverance and daring deeds, – whether it was that, or whether it arose from a sterner power of endurance, – certain it is that Colin kept his seat longer than either of his predecessors.

But even Scotch sinews could not hold out against such a tension, – such a bursting and wrenching and tossing, – and it ended by Colin declaring that upon the whole he would prefer making the journey upon "Shank's mare."

Saying this he slid down from the shoulders of the ungainly animal, resigning the creature once more to the conduct of Old Bill, who had still kept hold of the halter.

CHAPTER XIX. HOMEWARD BOUND

The experience of his young companions might have deterred the sailor from imitating their example; more especially as Bill, according to his own statement, had never been "abroad" a saddle in his life. But they did not; and for special reasons. Awkward as the old salt might feel in a saddle, he felt not less awkward *afoot*. That is ashore, – on *terra firma*.

Place him on the deck of a ship, or in the rigging of one, and no man in all England's navy could have been more secure as to his footing, or more difficult to dispossess of it; but set sailor Bill upon shore, and expect him to go ahead upon it, you would be disappointed: you might as well expect a fish to make progress on land; and you would witness a species of locomotion more resembling that of a manatee or a seal, than of a human biped. As the old man-o'-war's-man had now being floundering full five weeks through the soft shore-sand, he was thoroughly convinced that a mode of progression must be preferable to that; and as soon as the young Scotchman descended from his seat, he climbed into it.

He had not much climbing to do, – for the well-trained maherry, when any one wished to mount him, at once knelt down, – making the ascent to his "summits" as easy as possible.

Just as the sailor had got firmly into the saddle, the moon shone out with a brilliance that almost rivalled the light of day. In the midst of that desert landscape, against the ground of snow-white sand, the figures of both camel and rider were piquantly conspicuous; and although the one was figuratively a ship, and the other really a sailor, their juxtaposition offered a contrast of the queerest kind. So ludicrous did it seem, that the three "mids," disregarding all ideas of danger, broke forth with one accord into a strain of loud and continuous laughter.

They had all seen camels, or pictures of these animals; but never before either a camel, or the picture of one, *with a sailor upon his back*. The very idea of a dromedary carries along with it the cognate spectacle of an Arab on its back, – a slim, sinewy individual of swarth complexion and picturesque garb, a bright burnouse steaming around his body, with a twisted turban on his head. But a tall camel surmounted by a sailor in dreadnought jacket and sou'-wester, was a picture to make a Solon laugh, let alone a tier of midshipmen; and it drew from the latter such a cachinnation as caused the shores of the Saära to echo with sounds of joy, perhaps never heard there before. Old Bill was not angry, he was only gratified to see these young gentlemen in such good spirits; and calling upon them to keep close after him, he gave the halter to his maherry and started off over the sand.

For some time his companions kept pace with him, doing their best; but it soon became apparent, even to the sailor himself, that unless something was done to restrain the impetuosity of the camel, he must soon be separated from those following afoot.

This something its rider felt himself incapable of accomplishing. It is true he still held the halter in his hand, but this gave him but slight control over the camel. It was not a mameluke bitt – not even a snaffle – and for directing the movements of the animal the old sailor felt himself as helpless as if standing by the wheel of a seventy-four that had unshipped her rudder. Just like a ship in such a situation did the maherry behave. Surging through the ocean of soft sand, now mounting the spurs that trended down to the beach, now descending headlong into deep gullies, like troughs between the ocean waves, and gliding silently, gently forward as a shallop upon a smooth sea. Such was the course that the sailor was pursuing. Very different, however, were his reflections to those he would have indulged in on board a man-o'-war; and if any man ever sneered at that simile which likens a camel to a ship, it was Sailor Bill upon that occasion.

"Avast there!" cried he, as soon as the maherry had fairly commenced moving. "Shiver my old timbers! what do yez mean, you brute? Belay there! belay! 'Ang it, I must pipe all 'ands, an' take in

sail. Where the deevil are ye steerin' to? Be jabbers, yez may laugh, young gentlemen, but this ain't a fair weather craft, I tell yez. Thunder an' ouns! it be as much as I can do to keep her to her course. Hulloo! she's off afore the wind!"

As the rider of the maherry gave out this declaration, the animal was seen suddenly to increase its speed, not only in a progressive ratio, but at once to double quick, as if impelled by some powerful motive.

At the same time it was heard to utter a strange cry, half scream, half snort, which could not have been caused by any action on the part of its rider.

It was already over a hundred yards in advance of those following on foot; but after giving out that startling cry, the distance became quickly increased, and in a few seconds of time the three astonished "mids" saw only the shadow of a maherry, with a sailor upon its back, first dissolving into dim outline until it finally disappeared behind the sand dunes that abutted upon the beach.

CHAPTER XX. THE DANCE INTERRUPTED

Leaving the midshipmen to their mirth, which, however, was not of very long duration, we must follow Sailor Bill and the runaway camel.

In reality the maherry had made off with him, though for what reason the sailor could not divine. He only knew that it was going at the rate of nine or ten knots an hour, and going its own way; for instead of keeping to the line of the coast, – the direction he would have wished it to take, – it had suddenly turned tail upon the sea, and headed towards the interior of the country.

Its rider had already discovered that he had not the slightest control over it. He had tugged upon the hair halter and shouted "Avast!" until both his arms and tongue were tired. All to no purpose. The camel scorned his commands, lent a deaf ear to his entreaties, and paid not the slightest heed to his attempt to pull up, except to push on in the opposite direction, with its snout elevated in the air and its long ungainly neck stretched forward in the most determined and provoking fashion.

There was not much force in the muscular efforts made to check it. It was just as much as its rider could do to balance himself on its hump, which, of course, he had to do Arab-fashion, sitting *upon* the saddle as on a chair, with his feet resting upon the back of the animal's neck. It was this position that rendered his seat so insecure, but no other could have been adopted in the saddle of a maherry, and the sailor was compelled to keep it as well as he could.

At the time the animal first started off, it had not gone at so rapid a pace but that he might have slipped down upon the soft sand without much danger of being injured. This for an instant he had thought of doing; but knowing that while "unhorsing" himself the camel might escape, he had voluntarily remained on its back, in the hope of being able to pull the animal up.

On becoming persuaded that this would be impossible, and that the maherry had actually made off with him, it was too late to dismount without danger. The camel was now shambling along so swiftly that he could not slip down without submitting himself to a fall. It would be no longer a tumble upon soft sand, for the runaway had suddenly swerved into a deep gorge, the bottom of which was thickly strewn with boulders of rock, and through these the maherry was making way with the speed of a fast-trotting horse.

Had its rider attempted to abandon his high perch upon the hump, his chances would have been good for getting dashed against one of the big boulders, or trodden under the huge hoofs of the maherry itself.

Fully alive to this danger, Old Bill no more thought of throwing himself to the ground; but on the contrary, held on to the hump with all the tenacity that lay in his well-tarred digits.

He had continued to shout for some time after parting with his companions; but as this availed nothing, he at length desisted, and was now riding the rest of his race in silence.

When was it to terminate? Whither was the camel conducting him? These were the questions that now came before his mind.

He thought of an answer, and it filled him with apprehension. The animal was evidently in eager haste. It was snuffing the wind in its progress forward; something ahead seemed to be attracting it. What could this something be but its home, the tent from which it had strayed, the dwelling of its owner? And who could that owner be but one of those cruel denizens of the desert they had been taking such pains to avoid?

The sailor was allowed but little time for conjectures; for almost on the instant of his shaping this, the very first one, the maherry shot suddenly round the hip of a hill, bringing him in full view of a spectacle that realized it.

A small valley, or stretch of level ground enclosed by surrounding ridges, lay before him; its gray, sandy surface interspersed by a few patches of darker color, which the moon, shining brightly from a blue sky, disclosed to be tufts of tussock-grass and mimosa bushes.

These, however, did not occupy the attention of the involuntary visitor to that secluded spot; but something else that appeared in their midst, – something that proclaimed the presence of human beings.

Near the centre of the little valley half a dozen dark objects stood up several feet above the level of the ground. Their size, shape, and color proclaimed their character. They were tents, – the tents of a Bedouin encampment. The old man-o'-war's-man had never seen such before; but there was no mistaking them for anything else, – even going as he was at a speed that prevented him from having a very clear view of them.

In a few seconds, however, he was near enough to distinguish something more than the tents. They stood in a sort of circle of about twenty yards in diameter, and within this could be seen the forms of men, women, and children. Around were animals of different sorts, – horses, camels, sheep, goats, and dogs, grouped according to their kind, with the exception of the dogs, which appeared to be straying everywhere. This varied tableau was distinctly visible under the light of a full, mellow moon.

There were voices, – shouting and singing. There was music, made upon some rude instrument. The human forms, – both of men and women, – were in motion, circling and springing about. The sailor saw they were dancing.

He heard, and saw, all this in a score of seconds, as the maherry hurried him forward into their midst. The encampment was close to the bottom of the hill round which the camel had carried him. He had at length made up his mind to dismount *coute que coute*; but there was no time. Before he could make a movement to fling himself from the shoulders of the animal, he saw that he was discovered. A cry coming from the tents admonished him of this fact. It was too late to attempt a retreat, and, in a state of desponding stupor, he stuck to the saddle. Not much longer. The camel, with a snorting scream, responding to the call of its fellows, rushed on into the encampment, – right into the very circle of the dancers; and there amidst the shouts of men, the screeches of women, the yelling of children, the neighing of horses, the bleating of sheep and goats, and the barking of a score or two of cur dogs, – the animal stopped, with such abrupt suddenness that its rider, after performing a somersault through the air, came down on all-fours, in front of its projecting snout!

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