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THE ROYAL READERS

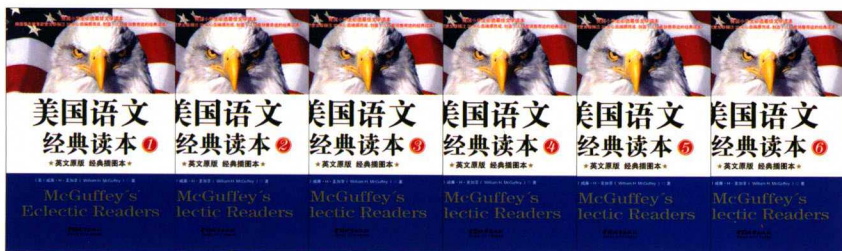
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THOMAS NELSON

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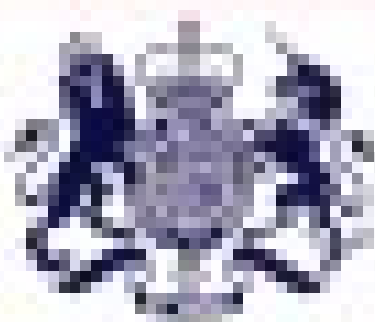


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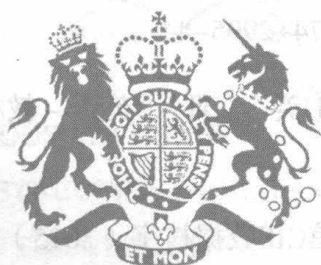
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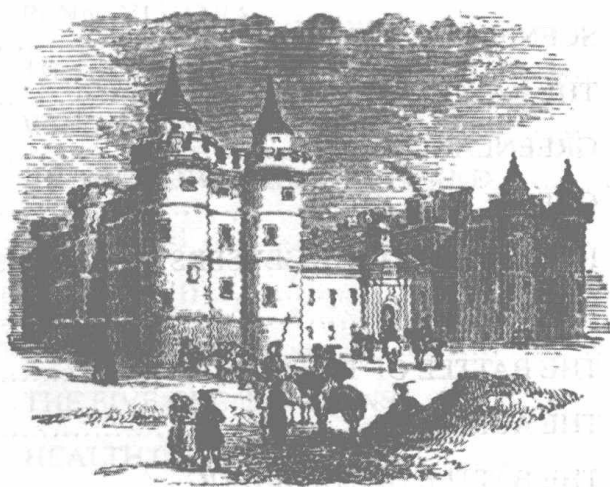
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## Lesson 1 A PERILOUS ADVENTURE

THREE or four lads are standing in the channel below the great Natural Bridge of Virginia. They see hundreds of names carved in the limestone buttresses, and resolve to add theirs to the number. This done, one of them is seized with the mad ambition of carving his name higher than the highest there! His companions try to dissuade him from attempting so dangerous a feat, but in vain. He is a wild, reckless youth; and afraid now to yield, lest he should be thought a coward, he carves his way up and up the limestone rock, till he can hear the voices, but not the Words of his terror-stricken playmates.

One of them runs off to the village, and tells the boy's father of his perilous situation. Others go for help in other directions; and ere long there are hundreds of people standing in the rocky channel below, and hundreds on the bridge above, all holding their breath, and awaiting the fearful catastrophe. The poor boy can just distinguish the tones of his father, who is shouting with all the energy of despair, — "William! William! don't look down! Your mother, and Henry, and Harriet are all here praying for you! Don't look down! Keep your eyes towards the top!"

The boy does not look down. His eye is fixed towards heaven, and his young heart on Him who reigns there. He grasps again his knife. He cuts another niche, and another foot is added to the hundreds that remove him from the reach of human help from below.

The sun is half way down in the west. Men are leaning over the outer edge of the bridge with ropes in their hands. But fifty more niches must be cut before the longest rope can reach the boy! Two minutes more, and all will be over. That blade is worn to the last half inch. The boy's head reels. His last hope is dying in his heart, his life must hang upon the next niche he cuts. That niche will be his last.

At the last cut he makes, his knife — his faithful knife — drops from his little nerveless hand, and ringing down the precipice, falls at his mother's feet! An involuntary groan of despair runs through the

crowd below, and all is still as the grave. At the height of nearly three hundred feet, the devoted boy lifts his hopeless heart and closing eyes to commend his soul to God.

Hark! — a shout falls on his ears from above! A man who is lying with half his length over the bridge, has caught a glimpse of the boy's head and shoulders. Quick as thought the noosed rope is within reach of the sinking youth. No one breathes. With a faint, convulsive effort, the swooning boy drops his arm into the noose.

Not a lip moves while he is dangling over that fearful abyss; but when a sturdy arm reaches down and draws up the lad, and holds him up before the tearful, breathless multitude — such shouting and such leaping and weeping for joy never greeted a human being so recovered from the jaws of death.

## Words

ambition, *aspiration*.

attempting, *undertaking*.

buttresses, *supports*.

catastrophe, *event*.

commend, *commit*.

convulsive, *agitated*.

dangerous, *perilous*.

despair, *hopelessness*.

dissuade, *discourage*.

dying, *expiring*.

energy, *vehemence*.

glimpse, *glance*.

greeted, *welcomed*.

involuntary, *unintentional*.

leaning, *stretching*.

multitude, *crowd*.

nerveless, *feeble*.

precipice, *cliff*.

reckless, *rash*.

resolve, *determine*.

seized, *inspired*.

swooning, *fainting*.

## Questions

What did the boys see on the limestone rocks? What did they resolve to do? What did one of them propose? Who came to witness his dangerous position? In what did his chance of safety lie? How was he at last saved?

## Lesson 2

# THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB'S ARMY

THE Assyrian<sup>1</sup> came down like the wolf on the fold,  
And his cohorts<sup>2</sup> were gleaming with purple and gold.  
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,  
When the blue waves roll nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,  
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;  
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,  
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,<sup>3</sup>  
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;  
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,  
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever were still.

And there lay the steed with his nostrils all wide,  
But through them there rolled not the breath of his pride  
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,  
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider, distorted and pale,  
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail  
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,  
The lances unlifted, the trumpets unblown.

And the widows of Asshur<sup>4</sup> are loud in their wail;  
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;<sup>5</sup>

And the might of the Gentile, unsmeared by the sword,<sup>6</sup>  
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

—Lord Byron (1788–1824)

## Words

banners, *standards*.  
distorted, *deformed*.  
gasping, *panting*.  
gleaming, *sparkling*.  
sheen, *brightness*.

silent, *noiseless*.  
wail, *lamentation*.  
waxed, *became*.  
withered, *faded*.

## Notes

1 The Assyrian. — Sennacherib, King of Assyria, who invaded Judah in the reign of Hezekiah, and was pacified by a tribute. But Sennacherib broke his pledge and suddenly sent a blasphemous letter to the king at Jerusalem, threatening him with destruction. Before this threat could be carried out, a “blast” from the LORD killed 185,000 of the Assyrian host in one night. (See 2 Kings, xix.)

2 Cohort. a division of the Roman army, a tenth part of a legion; here put for companies or troops generally.

3 The blast. — Thought by some to have been the poisonous wind, the sirocco, which blows from the Libyan Desert towards Italy, Greece, and Syria.

4 Asshur, Assyria.

5 Baal, the chief idol of the Assyrians; generally called Bel or Belus. The word Baal means “lord,” and was the general name for the “strange gods” of the nations adjoining Israel, especially of the Phoenicians.

6 Unsmote by the sword. — Because their destruction was accomplished by natural means, without the aid of man.

### Lesson 3 "ABOVE THE CLOUDS"

IN 1856 an attempt was made, under the auspices of the British Government, to commence a series of observations in some region "above the clouds," where the serene and quiet air would be specially favourable for viewing the heavenly bodies. The island of Teneriffe<sup>1</sup> was selected for this purpose, as combining more of the required advantages than any other mountain within easy reach of Europe.

The expedition was under the direction of Piazzzi Smyth, the distinguished astronomer at Edinburgh; who, in a remarkable and interesting work, has since published a narrative of the expedition. In an article contributed to a popular magazine he thus graphically describes the ascent of Teneriffe to a point high "above the clouds:" —

It was only a few days after — on a morning also cloudy, and with north-east cloud too — that the little party set forth from the town of Orotava, on the northern coast of Teneriffe, to climb the great mountain, and put to the only true test of actual practice their hopes of getting "above the clouds." Through long, winding, stony pathways, between vineyards and cactus plantations,<sup>2</sup> between orange groves and fig-trees, they proceeded, always ascending; past gardens, and then past orchards, still ever ascending; past corn-fields and oat-fields, ascending yet higher, and then amongst natural vegetation only — ferns and heath and some few wild laurels; and now, at a height of 3000 feet vertical, they are close under the cloud.

Before entering therein, let us pause for a moment and survey the beauties of creation in the region we are leaving behind. If, for that one purpose of severe astronomy, a position below the clouds is unsuitable, yet what an infinite amount of benefit for man to enjoy, and of beauty for him to contemplate, is connected therewith! Beneath the clouds are kindly rains and gentle dews; and these, assisted by a warm climate, encourage all those exquisite forms of vegetation which we have admired clothing the lower slopes of the mountain. Without these, where were the fruits to support human life; where the buds and



blossoms and fading flowers which teach us many a lesson useful to life eternal?

But duty now calls us on our upward way. Before many more seconds are passed, first comes one cold hurrying blast, with mist upon its wings, and then another, and another. Then, in the midst of a constant dense wet fog, all creation is shut out of our view, except the few feet of sloping earth on which we are treading, and that appears of a dull gray; and the occasional spiders' webs seen across our path are loaded with heavy drops of moisture.

For half an hour we must toil on and on through this winding-sheet of gloom; perpetually on the same upward way, but strong in faith and hope of what must in the end be presented to our eyes; on still, and up higher, when suddenly a momentary break appears overhead, and a portion of sky is seen — oh, so blue! — but it is lost again.

In a few minutes, however, another opening, another blue patch is seen; and then another, and another. Before three minutes more are passed, all the hurrying clouds seem blown on one side. Fair sky is everywhere above and around, a brilliant sun is shining, and there, there below us, is the upper surface of the clouds, extending far and wide, like a level plain, shutting out lowland and city and sea all from view, and in their place substituting brilliant reflections of solar light, which make the surface of this new mist-country look winter than snow! Yes, indeed, we are now "above the clouds;" and this view that we have attempted to describe is the first example of the heightened, the advanced, the glorified appearance of even Earth's sombre fog-banks to those who are privileged for a time to look on them from the heavenward side.

"Above the clouds!" — not only no rain, no mist, no dew, but a scorching sun, and an air, both by day and by night, dry to almost an alarming degree. The further we advance, and the higher we ascend, the drier becomes the air; while at the same time the strength of the north-east trade-wind<sup>3</sup> is continually decreasing, and at the height of about six or seven thousand feet has completely died away.

Not that it has ceased elsewhere as well, for the driving clouds below show that it is still in its accustomed violence there. The distant movements of those rollers of white cloud betray that it must yet be

raging down there in all its strength, tearing the mist piecemeal, and bowing down the heads of suffering palm-trees, and lashing the sea into foam-crested waves. Heaven grant that no cry of shipwrecked mariners be borne on the breeze; and, more still, that no evil thoughts be engendering in the cities of men.

It was when our party on the mountain were in the fullest enjoyment of their daily and nightly views of the heavens, that their friends in the towns of Teneriffe near the sea-coast wrote to them most sympathizingly:

“Oh! what dreadful weather you must have been suffering! Down here we have had for three weeks the most frightful continuance of storms — constant clouds, rain, and howling winds; and if that was the case with us, what must it not have been with you at the greater height!”

Yet at the greater height, at that very time, the air was tranquil and serene, the sky clear, and bad weather entirely confined to that lower depth in the atmosphere beneath “the grosser clouds.”

## Words

accustomed, *usual*.

actual, *real*.

alarming, *disquieting*.

ascending, *mounting*.

auspices, *patronage*.

brilliant, *gorgeous*.

commence, *begin*.

completely, *entirely*.

confined, *limited*.

contemplate, *consider*.

continuance, *succession*.

decreasing, *diminishing*.

distinguished, *eminent*.

dreadful, *terrible*.

engendering, *growing*.

expedition, *enterprise*.

exquisite, *dedicate*.

graphically, *forcibly*.

heightened, *elevated*.

hurrying, *fleeting*.

mariners, *seamen*.

momentary, *transient*.

narrative, *account*.

observations, *investigations*.

perpetually, *constantly*.

practice, *expedience*.

privileged, *permitted*.

region, *district*.

serene, *tranquil*.

severe, *accurate*.

substituting, *exchanging*.

survey, *examine*.

sympathizing, *compassionately*.

vegetation, *plant life*.

treading, *walking*.

violence, *vehemence*.

unsuitable, *inconvenient*.

## Notes

1 Teneriffe, one of the Canary Islands (belonging to Spain), situated off the north-west coast of Africa. Its most remarkable feature is the Peak of Teneriffe, an extinct volcano, which is upwards of 12,000 feet high. The Canary Islands yield wine, oil, grain, sugar-cane, and fruits.

2 Cactus plantations. — The cactus is cultivated partly for the Indian or prickly pear which grows upon some species, but, chiefly for the sake of the cochineal insect, which feeds upon this plant, and from which a valuable dye is procured.

3 Trade-winds, constant winds that blow in the tropical regions of the great oceans, especially in the Atlantic, where they are most regular. Currents of cold air are always flowing from the poles to the equator, to supply the place of the hot air which rises there from the surface of the earth. If the globe were at rest these would be due north and south winds; but as the globe turns from west to east more quickly than the surrounding air, these lagging currents become a north-east and a south-east wind respectively. They are called trade-winds because of their great advantage to navigators in sailing from east to west.

## Questions

What place was selected for the astronomical expedition of 1856? Who directed it? At what height was the party close under the cloud? What benefits arise to man from being beneath the clouds? How long was the party in piercing the cloud? What was the state of the sky above it? What was the appearance of the clouds from above? What was the state of the air as they ascended higher? What change did the trade-wind undergo? What showed that it had not ceased elsewhere? What was the state of the weather near the sea-coast? What, above the clouds?