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THE EARTH AND ITS INHABITANTS.

WEST AFRICA.

CHAPTER I.

THE CENTRAL AND SOUTH ATLANTIC.

THE FABLED ATLANTIS.



HE term "Atlantis" should properly be restricted to the Atlas region—that is, to Barbary, and more especially to Marocco, which is dominated by the Atlas Range, the Idraren Daren, or "Mountain of Mountains." But by long-established usage this name has been applied to lands which have no existence, and which have probably been submerged for long geological periods. A mythical tradition, referred by Plato to Solon, who was said to have received it from the Egyptian priests of Saïs, has been the main source of the endless conjectures advanced by the learned regarding the identification and locality of some great islands and of a continent supposed to lie beyond the Columns of Hercules. Yet the Greek philosopher's relation contains not a single detail in accordance either with known history or with the vague memories of the oldest peoples of antiquity. When speaking of the Athenians as a civilised nation contending some "nine thousand years" previously with Atlas, son of Neptune, for the supremacy over the Mediterranean world, Plato enters the domain of pure fiction. This Atlantis, which he describes as "larger than Libya and Asia," was for him doubtless an ideal land, a region belonging to the golden age. Its inhabitants were assumed to have long flourished, according to his political ideas, under the sway of ten kings, absolute in their respective territories, but deliberating together for the common weal; and it was the neglect of this model constitution that was supposed to have provoked the angry intervention of the gods, followed by the submergence of this fabled Atlantis.

Nevertheless, Plato may well have heard of some shadowy tradition on the