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THE DISCOVERY OF EASTERN
AUSTRALIA:

A PRIZE POEM.

By HENRY HALLORAN.

SYDNEY: THOMAS RICHARDS, GOVERNMENT PRINTER.

1879.

O. J. Pitman

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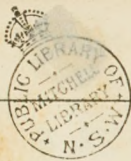
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THE DISCOVERY OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA: A PRIZE POEM.

By HENRY HALLORAN.

[The incidents of which this Poem is composed are taken from Cook's narrative of his Discovery of the Eastern coast of Australia.]

Who can fix limits to the human mind,
Or daring genius in dull bondage bind,—
Arrest the spirit's fervency and fire,
Or lull to apathy its keen desire !
Fame, like an Iris, rests upon the steep,
And lures the seaman o'er the dangerous deep :
Around him roars the loud and hollow wind,
Rocks spread before and coral reefs behind ;
Unfathom'd seas, and vortices that hurl
The quivering barque in their voracious whirl,
Beset his course ; and horrors worse than these :
The freezing sleep—the tropic's fell disease—
Famine and fire—a death and grave unknown—
Would dash a trembling spirit from its throne ;
But eagle genius spurns both doubt and dread,
And rears on high its bold Titanic head—
To unknown regions wends its death-fraught way,
While dangers pass, like fog-banks, far away.

Mute be my lyre when I descend to praise
The sons of blood, or prostitute my lays :
Cold be my heart, and tuneless be my strain,
If e'er I laud the paltry sons of gain ;
But when my theme is virtue, truth my aim,
May my verse glow with bright Byronic flame—

Spread a pure picture to the ravish'd eye,
And in the throbbing heart awake the joyous sigh.
Immortal Cook ! thy lov'd lamented name
May give my simple verse no fleeting fame.
Here on the margin of this southern world,
Where first thy brilliant banners were unfurl'd—
Where first thy barque her streamy image threw
O'er the dim mirror of the ocean blue—
Where first the British cannon pealed around,
And faithful echo rendered back the sound—
Where first thy keels upturn'd the glitt'ring strand—
Yea, on the very shore I musing stand ;
And in unequal and unworthy lays,
Aspire to sing the British Colon's praise.

From Zealand's coast the favouring breezes blew,
And o'er the yielding wave the vessel flew ;
Her swelling sails their snowy forms extend—
Her streamers wave—her lofty topmasts bend ;
Around her prow the fretting billows rise ;
Now o'er the watery ridge she swiftly flies—
Now buried in the trough of gaping seas—
Now reeling 'neath the pressure of the breeze ;
By calms now baffled—now by storms impelled—
O'er the vast deep her fearless course she held ;
Her gallant Chieftain marks each heavenly sign—
Her watchful seamen heave the sounding line ;
And days and nights beheld them on the wave,
Tho' calmly patient—confidently brave.
At length the lead returns with promise crown'd,
With sand encased, with ooze and seaweeds bound ;
And more to glad the Chieftain's anxious eyes,
Athwart the bow the darting gannet flies—
The albatross extends her sailing wings,
And from the wave the sounding egg-bird springs—

The floating sea-weeds—the discoloured seas—
The frequent *lulls* and *freshes* of the breeze—
With many nameless, noted tokens more—
Proclaim them stretching to no distant shore.

'Twere worse than useless in this verse to sing
The like events which stated periods bring ;
The bright ascension of the orb of day—
The faithful log that marks the vessel's way—
The sounding bell, from which the wing of time,
In passing, draws a melancholy chime—
The watery volume whirling o'er the deep—
The dolphin's plunge—the pellock's frequent leap—
The friendly watches of the hardy crew—
The song which echoes to some fond adieu—
With all the trifling changes which impart
A soothing solace to the seaman's heart.

'Tis evening's hour, the sky is dark and wild,
And clouds on clouds are in disorder piled ;
Their mountain masses o'er the heavens extend,
And to the deep their sullen darkness lend ;
No star is seen with scintillating ray,
To dash the murky gloom of night away ;
The waves roll past with long and vale-like sweep,
Then foaming, burst, and whiten all the deep ;
As when the pillar which the impending sky,
Tears from the bounding surge to whirl on high,
Bursts in the billowy air, and to the main,
In gyral torrents rushes down again ;
The squall increases, and the lightnings fly,
In *fiery gashes* thro' the ebon sky ;
While here and there the Chieftain's manly form
Confronting danger, combats with the storm ;
The boatswain's whistle shrieks above the gale,
And daring hands compress the flapping sail ;

The cordage flutters in the dying wind ;
The rain descends in torrents unconfined ;
And faintlier glares the lightning's paler ray,
As in low tones the thunder rolls away.

The clouds dis sever, and the Queen of Night
Spreads o'er the watery world her solemn light ;
Midst silent stars, she seems to glide away,
To where the past receives the parting day ;
Again the sails along the masts extend,
And o'er the deep their fleeting shadows send ;
The helmsman's form is now distinctly seen,
His upturn'd gaze, his meditative mien ;
Awhile he wonders why each distant star
Calls to his mind the dream of joys afar,
Why throbs of transport to his bosom come,
And memory paints his visionary home.

'Tis beauteous midnight, and the sounding lead
Seeks for the mighty ocean's oozy bed ;
Its answer cheers them, and their course they keep,
In silent hope, along the eternal deep ;
While far upon the bosom of the night
The lone pintado takes her lonely flight,
And, with one cry of weariness, again
Sinks on the surface of the moonlit main.

Cool is the midnight air ! the tall sails lie
Along the masts in sleep-like apathy ;
Upon the prow the hardy seaman rests,
With folded arms upon his dauntless breasts,
And weaves the song a Briton loves to hear,
By faithful memories rendered doubly dear ;
Or mutely leaning on the massy gun,
Glow with the deeds his daring sires have done ;

Views the vast tablet of his country's fame,
And proudly glories in a Briton's name.

The morning breaks, and in the eastern sky
One lovely planet holds her throne on high ;
Until the sun, with amethystine light,
Consumes this latest, loveliest orb of night—
Throws his long beams above the rising clouds,
Which spread above him their vermilion shrouds—
He flames thro' all, and his vast disk is roll'd
O'er burnished piles of red and molten gold.

Far to the west, upon the horizon's verge,
A misty ridge uprises from the surge ;
Tho' dimly seen, the Chieftain's piercing sight
Beams with the sudden fulness of delight ;
The glass is raised, its magic powers portray
The lofty mountain and the shelving bay—
The white waves dashing on the rocky shore—
The distant forest's wide and waving store—
The Iron Cliff, so named the headland brow,
Which spurns afar the vessel's foaming prow,
Rears from the waves its desolated form,
And seems to throne the genius of the storm ;
While, further inland, shining rivers come,
In bright meanderings, from their mountain home—
Speed thro' the vales, and to the forests give
The dews by which their spreading honors live.
But when the blazing sun's meridian ray
Spreads o'er the world the fulness of the day,
The hidden treasure of six thousand years,
More plainly traced, its mighty form uprears ;
Mountain o'er mountain rises from the plain,
Or valleys meet the margin of the main ;
The spiry smoke uprises from the land,
While dusky figures pass along the strand,

And tell, that even in this southern clime,
Where Nature walks with footsteps half sublime,
Grasping creation in her boundless span,
She framed that awful mystery—a man !
What, tho' the meanest of the human kind,
His form bespeaks the presence of a mind,
Which time may rescue from its rayless mine,
For British hands to model and refine,
And from this poor, degraded race may rise
Some fearless son of mighty enterprise,
Whose deathless deeds shall for his country claim
The sacred chaplet of historic fame !

Along the shore their steady course they keep,
And sound at every hour the faithless deep—
Trace every feature of the varying shore,
And unto knowledge add their little store,
That future pilgrims of the wave may be
By doubt unclouded, and from error free.

To scan creation, mortals boldly dare
To float through regions of unpeopled air—
To grasp the lightning as it streams on high,
And win it from its eyrie in the sky—
To traverse deserts where the Samiel's breath,
In storms of dust, brings black and noisome death—
To furrow waves where keels have never been—
To make of sterile shores a lovely scene—
To trace the mazes of the dreary mine,
And o'er the mountains lead the clustering vine.

Where nature freezes 'neath the northern skies,
We'll rear a tomb to martyr'd enterprise ;
Mourn o'er a Hudson's unrecorded grave,
And weep that pity had not power to save.

Onward they sweep thro' waves of silvery spray,
And mark each sandy beach and shallow bay ;
Now here, now there, the dusky forms appear,
With threat'ning gesture and uplifted spear ;
Along the shore, like famished wolves, they run,
Then pause, and listen to the flashing gun,
Which wounds the darting gannet, as on high,
With outstretch'd wings, he sails along the sky ;
Then from some lofty rock or headland's brow,
They watch the vessel as she reels below ;
With savage wonder, terror, and surprise,
Indulge the fears which ignorance supplies ;
Believe her cloud-born, with her sails of snow,
Her lofty masts, bright flags, and gilded prow.

At length a deep and sheltered bay is seen,
Of tranquil surface and inviting mien ;
Its heads are rocky, and the foaming tide
Rolls round each barren base its hoary pride ;
But further inland, on the southern shore,
The land is low, with sea-weeds mantled o'er ;
And further still, a chain of mountain blue,
In vapoury distance, meets the ardent view ;
The northern shore with sand and shells is strewn,
And piled fragments from some hoar cliff hewn ;
And near the shore, from out its rocky bed,
An islet lifts its low denuded head ;
No plant, no flower adorns its barren side,
But o'er it breaks the rolling ocean-tide.
The Chieftain bids the careful master sound
The channel's depth, the safety of the ground ;
The yawl is lower'd, the sweeping oars keep time,
Now o'er each lofty swelling surge they climb,
Now skim a vale of waves—on every side
Above them frowns the blue and curling tide ;

The *frequent lead* descends, but e'er they reach,
 And press with weary feet, the welcome beach,
 On which in throngs, the hostile Indians stand,
 To meet the invaders of their native land,
 The lofty barque appears ; her foaming prow
 Furrows the waves with its gigantic plough ;
 The sails are clew'd ; the falling anchor rings,
 And to the wind the stately vessel swings.

'Tis eve—'tis cloudy night ; the moon's pale hue
 Along the bay its silvery image threw ;
 But on the shore a red and fearful blaze
 Burst from a lofty pile with flickering rays ;
 Before the flames the thronging Indians spring,
 And, yelling, round it form their mystic ring,
 In wild contortions, strike the blackened sand,
 And whirl the *waddie* in each dusky hand ;
 Now crouching low, now with a sudden cry,
 Around the pile with frantic speed they fly,
 Shout at each turn with horrible delight,
 And mar the beauty of a southern night ;
 Nor cease their revels till the morning gun
 Booms o'er the waves to greet the rising sun ;
 Then to their *gunneahs* sullenly repair,
 Like wolves retreating to their caverned lair.

Why is the Chieftain's brow so changed since night ?
 Can baffled danger yield him no delight ?
 Do painful thoughts disturb his manly soul,
 And o'er his mind their waves of darkness roll ?

Oh ! what is man ? The child of clay and breath,
 Whose path is danger, and whose goal is death !
 Linked to the dust, yet with a spirit fraught,
 That leads him to eternity—or *nought* !

Doubt, fear, and error on his path intrude,
Yet still he struggles faint, tho' unsubdued ;
And as time leads him to his latest day,
He clasps his chain and doats his age away.
In *youth*—all fire and wildness, scorn and strife,
Reckless of danger, prodigal of life,
He spreads his sails with all the pomp of pride,
And, fearless, sweeps existence' treacherous tide :
In *age*—all caution ; feeble, vain, and cold,
Shrinking from shadows, and by fear controll'd,
He hugs the shore, and trembles lest the storm
Should wreck his aged, miserable form.

On yonder beach a mournful throng is seen,
With downcast eyes and melancholy mien :
In silent grief, a brother's corpse they bear,
And o'er it breathe a short, tho' heart-born, prayer ;
To foreign earth a Briton's dust consign,
Above it raise a rude, sepulchral sign ;
A cross—a name—a little mound of earth—
Attest his age, his country, and his birth !
And can the callous breasts of Britons know
Compassion, yearning for another's woe ?
They can, they do ! for hearts where valour's force
Hold its impetuous, overwhelming course,
Have tenderer feelings than the casual eye
Can scan, when masked in hardy apathy :
A form that meets the tempest's death-fraught shock
Unharm'd, unscar'd, unflinching as the rock,
May shroud a spirit, gentle tho' sublime,
As meteors nourished in a northern clime.

The boat, descending from the vessel's side,
Throws into ripples the surrounding tide ;
Flashes the wave beneath the sweeping oar—
Grates the long keel upon the sandy shore.

The Indians seek a rock's protecting height,
And shun all converse with th' intrusive white :
Two from a neighbouring eminence descend,
And vainly strive their country to defend ;
Wave the long lance with savage gesture, wield
The massy club, or raise the painted shield ;
Shake their dark locks—their naked bodies throw
In threat'ning postures, to alarm their foe.
But, vain their threats ! The Britons press the shore—
The ensign spreads—the cannon's deep-mouthed roar,
In iterated echos, peals around !
Flash follows flash, and sound replies to sound !
The clam'rous drum's barbaric tones arise—
The fife's shrill whistle o'er the waters flies—
The smoke in volumes slowly rolls away—
And Britain's Genius hovers o'er the bay !

Far to the east a lofty barque appears ;
Above the waves her white-winged form she rears ;
A cloud—a speck ; and now o'er billows tost,
She ploughs the deep, and is in distance lost ;
And gallant Cook beholds with joyful eyes
The mighty trophy of his bold emprise ;
To Britain's shores, at last, directs his prow,
Where Fame enwreathes the laurel for his brow.





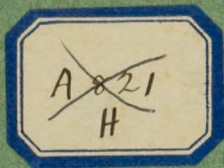


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