

**THE EMIGRANT: A  
TALE OF  
AUSTRALIA**

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The Emigrant: A Tale of Australia by W. H. Leigh

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**THE EMIGRANT.**

# THE EMIGRANT:

*A Tale of Australia.*

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# THE EMIGRANT:

A TALE OF AUSTRALIA.

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## CHAPTER I.

"I write not of what I have heard, nor of what I have read, *but of what I have seen.*"

PETRARCH.

THERE is neither a more interesting nor a painful sight, than to behold the departure of a vessel, with her tear-bedewed passengers hanging in intense anguish over her side, and gazing, probably for the last time, on faces which, in all human probability, they are destined never more to behold. The brother is there; his tenderly-loved sister is weeping on the sands. The son is in that proud-sailing bark, and his silver-haired sire is supporting himself on his staff as he wafts forth his blessing upon his only hope. Hearts are big with agony, and the bosom is swelling with the vain attempt to drown the deep sorrow that is reigning, to smother the long-drawn sigh that shaketh the hot tear from the straining eyeball. Gallant is the bearing of the vessel, as the favouring wind distends her white sails to the sun. Noisy is the mariner, as he bustles amid the confusion that is around him; but he, even *he*, accustomed as he is to the wild waves and the storm, turns yet an eye of tenderness upon the round, green hills, which are so soon to be enshrouded from his view: the rapidly-drawn sleeve over his bronzed brow swept thence affection's tribute from a heart that no danger could cower, no tempest disturb.



These are the times, and these are the scenes, which would make the most prosy, poetical; the most unthinking, reflective; the most callous, feeling; and cast a momentary shadow over the sunniest, the gladdest brow. The heart that is unaccustomed to the woes of another, now has a double duty to perform; and the eye that has but gazed upon its lonely troubles, is rivetted by the melancholy that is accumulated around it. In that little bark, as viewed from the anxious shore, what numbers have embarked their all! In that lonely speck, fast disappearing in the waste of waters, how many have trusted their entire world! All that can make life sweet, or existence endurable, is there. The father gazeth silently upon his little ones, and their playful smiles but meet in return the pallid cheek of their long-struggling, their ill-rewarded sire. Now, he and his helpless family are there: the land where their forefathers are sleeping is left for ever. The past must be viewed, with all its pleasures, its vicissitudes, or its pains, as a blank which is never to be noted; and the future must be gilded by the ray of all-radiant hope, to light him cheerfully to a more peaceful, a happier goal.

Over the scarcely-heaving bosom of the sea, how silently is skimming that proud triumph of man—that floating ark, destined to traverse such an immensity of water! to meet with the sickening, dispiriting calm, and to lie upon the encircling belt of the world a solitary and unmoving thing! Day after day will she rest, motionless and dead, upon the slumbering wave, where all around is lifeless—not a bird dare raise his drowsy wing—but deathlike stillness, in all its dread solemnity, must attend them till the lazy and fickle wind shall breathe once more spirit and energy into the flagging, useless sails. Then comes the tempest, hurrying along, and driving like a fury in his car; lashing the angry waters into foam, and whirling their giant crests resistless over the sailless and giddy bark, till once more the elements of strife shall sink to peace—the favouring zephyr swell the sail that waits the weary wanderer to his long-looked for, his adopted home.

## CHAPTER II.

"I cannot say but 'tis an awkward sight  
To see one's native land receding through  
The world of waters ; it unmans one quite."--BYRON.

IN a vessel bound for such a voyage as from England to Australia, there must of necessity be but little room to spare ; the supply of provisions, the water, the baggage, articles belonging to the ship, live stock, and compressed hay for their use, hanging round the already-crowded vessel, with the motley group of passengers—all these, mighty in bulk and in weight, are to be wafted over the unfathomable deep, defying the very elements, to the antipodes of the land they have left. What a subject for reflection are those few planks that are bearing so heavy a burden ! and what a subject for wonder is man, who could devise so astonishing a machine, and direct it to lands in darkness or light, through tempest and elemental vicissitude, to its destined port ! How daring the project ! how happy, how marvellous its perfection ! By it, man receives the advantages of lands how remote from his own ! by it, the luxuries of the Orient are at once at the Laplander's cot, and the blessings of civilisation and the education of the human mind can travel with the feet of the wind. How the ill-requited, the unfortunate, must turn to this mighty condor of the water ! must behold in it what at once bespeaks the liberator from the fruitless toils they endure—the willing messenger from climes of a sunnier aspect, and the patient camel of the weary waste, that is ready to bear him to the land he has selected—to waft him, as in a dream, from his chilly clime to where a brighter sun shall beam over him, and the bountiful earth return his labour with the hundredth fold. And there are those within that distant speck who have now forsaken the home of their fathers—

have abandoned for ever the land for which their hearts would bleed. There are those within that swift-retiring speck whose souls are animated with the noblest fire, and whose only hope, humble and unostentatious though it be, is the desire, the certain prospect, that their industry may meet with reward, and their endeavours be crowned with success.

Sad is it for that land which parteth with her choicest sons, unwilling to receive their proffered assistance, or unable to reward them for the labour they have performed, yet how often must the sorrowing eye gaze upon the many hearts that sheer desperation is hurrying from the soil! How often must the Briton turn and sigh to behold his country diurnally drained of her choicest sons—her hard-working, well-deserving, but neglected peasantry! And still oftener must the heart of the philanthropist be shocked when squalid misery surrounds the cot and rank weeds are accumulating around the dwelling where pining industry unwillingly is idle, and where the strength of the soil is left in his squalidness, his helplessness, his want.

“ Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.  
Princes and lords may flourish or may fade;  
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;  
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
When once neglected, ne'er can be supplied.”

Let the sigh that the expatriated tiller of the soil heaved for his deserted country be recorded as an evidence, that indigence, and not inclination, had driven him, an alien, to a distant, but a less-loved land.

The sea had gradually changed from its apple-green, the sandy bottom no longer had illumination from the heavens, and the deep blue of the bottomless water was dashed into foamy diamonds by the speed of the vessel. Every one had gazed for the longest, the latest moment, on the island, the island they so devotedly loved, which now appeared but a dim cloud upon the verge of the horizon. The evening was rapidly advancing. The watch of the night was set. The mate had, with stentorian voice, declared “ eight bells,” and Darkness was, for the first time at sea, drawing her dark mantle around the wanderers.