

Classic Poetry Series

Ernest Favenc
- poems -

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Ernest Favenc(21 October 1845 – 14 November 1908)

Ernest Favenc was an explorer of Australia, a journalist and historian.

Personal Life

Favenc was born in Walworth, Surrey, England. Of Huguenot descent, he was the son of Abraham George Favenc, merchant, and his wife Emma, née Jones. He was educated at the Werderscher Gymnasium, Berlin and at Temple College, Cowley, Oxfordshire.

Favenc arrived in New South Wales in 1864, and, after being in the colony for about a year, in a commercial position, he afterwards worked in the pastoral industry in the frontier squatting districts of Queensland.

Favenc died at his Darlinghurst home in Sydney on 14 November 1908, and was survived by his wife and family

Exploration

In July 1878 he was selected to explore the country along the western border of Queensland to Darwin to see evaluate the possibility of connecting the Queensland Railways to Port Darwin. The journey took him six months, and he reported that such a line would be feasible.

In the early 1880s also undertook expeditions in the country to the south of the Gulf of Carpentaria and north-west of Western Australia.

Writing

Favenc's first publication was The Great Austral Plain in 1887, The Last of Six: Tales of the Austral Tropics appeared in 1893, followed by The Secret of the Australian Desert (a short novel) in 1895, Marooned on Australia and The Moccasins of Silence, both in 1896.

Favenc also wrote under the pseudonym of "Dramingo", often for The Queenslander, and was an accomplished pencil sketcher. He also published romances, children's stories and verse as well as several books on exploration, the most extensive being The History of Australian Exploration from 1788 to 1888.

On the original launch of this book in 1888 the Australian Daily Telegraph reported...

"The History of Australian Exploration is an important one and however diverse may have been the aims, ideas and successes of those by whom the work was done,...Ernest Favenc's rather formidable volume...gathers together all those scattered memorials merging it into a unity of a great labour. Favenc was himself an explorer and treats his subject not in a perfunctory way, but as one who feels the wild charm and the magical attraction of the unknown... ☐

Daybreak In The Desert

No cheerful note of bird in leafy bower,
No glistening water dancing in the light,
No dewdrop trembling on some modest flower,
No early cock to crow farewell to-night.

Only a greater stillness in the air,
Save for hot sighs of desert-heated breath,
Only the stars, ceasing their sleepless stare,
Only the east, rose-flushing, fresh from death.

All the wide plain, hid 'neath the waning round
Of a tired moon, grew dimly into view;
With a dull haze hung on its furthest bound,
Then sprang the sun into the steely blue.

Ernest Favenc

In The Desert

A cloudless sky o'erhead, and all around
The level country stretching like a sea—
A dull grey sea, that had no seeming bound,
The very semblance of eternity.

All common things that this poor life contained
Had passed from me, leaving no sign nor token;
My footfall first broke stillness that had reigned
For centuries unbroken.

Almost it was as if my steps had strayed
Into some strange old land or unknown isle,
Where Time himself, with drowsy hand had stayed
The shadow on the dial.

The sun at even sank down angry red
In the dim haze that bounded the far plain;
And then the stars usurped the heavens instead,
With silence in their train—

A deep, dread silence, save when fitful sighs
Of wailing wind were wafted from the south.
Nature seemed dying: light had left her eyes,
The smile of her mouth.

Only in dreams unquietly she talked,
In broken murmurs restlessly did 'plain;
Then came strange sounds, as if a spirit walked,
Wringing its hands in pain,

Crying, 'No rest! no rest! Who dares intrude,
And waken silence that for countless years
Has been unbroken? Must our solitude
At last know human tears?

Leave but a little space, O restless race!
Free from your carking vanity and care.
Keep back! keep back!' And then, a phantom face
Shone lurid in the air,

Gazing in mine, with a strange, earnest look
Of solemn sadness, more than mortal pain,
Then vanished with a bitter cry that shook
The dim, dead plain.

Ernest Favenc

Song Of The Torres Strait Islands

Bold Torres, the sailor, came and went,
with his swarthy, storm-worn band,
he saw Saavedra's Isle to north-
to south a loom of land.
He left unknowing his name would live
through ages with big fate,
as the first to stem with broad-bowed ship
the wash of the Northern Strait.

Round the western coast the Dutch ships crept,
seeking the hidden way;
some left their bones on that bare, west coast,
and the others sailed away.
Turned back, turned back, by reef and shoal,
twin guards of the narrow gate-
the path of the sun from the eastern seas-
they were mocked by the Northern Strait.

Year in, year out, the monsoons swept
o'er the isles of the coral shore,
The savage tossed in his frail canoe,
but the white man came no more.
No sail in sight at the flash of dawn!
No sail at the gloaming late!
Silent and still was the lonely pass-
Unsought was the Northern Strait.

A rattle of arms and a roll of drums,
and the meteor flag flies free,
as an English voice proclaims King George
Lord of the tropic sea.
The parrots scream as the volleys flash;
the gulls their haunts vacate;
and the 'south-east' fills the 'Endeavours' sails
as she heads through the Northern Strait.

And ever since then has our watch been kept
o'er the ships in the narrow way,
where the smoking funnels flare by night,

and the house-flags flaunt by day.
Ever the same strong south-east blows,
and ever we watch and wait,
the wardens we, in Australia's name,
the guard of the Northern Strait.

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