Mamba The Bright Eyed
An Aboriginal Reminiscence

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Mamba The Bright Eyed

An Aboriginal Reminiscence

Melbourne

H.T. Dwight

1867
Preface

IN the introduction to my first aboriginal story (that of “Balladeadro”), I acknowledged myself indebted to another for the MS. notes which I found so useful to me in its construction. I am, I would beg to observe, myself wholly and solely responsible for the material upon which the “life-story” of “Mamba” is founded - having drawn upon my own memory for most of its leading features. It is on this account that I have entitled it a REMINISCENCE. It was my original intention, on the completion of “Balladeadro,” to bring out a mythological tradition of the aborigines, the grandest and, perhaps, the most startling that they possess. I found, however, upon reflection, that a considerable time would be required to enable me to do even ordinary justice to my theme, and being desirous meanwhile of keeping alive the public interest in aboriginal tradition and story, I have been induced to put forth the present volume. I trust that its reception may be such as to warrant me in venturing on the publication of the sublime legend of “KARAKOROK” (THE CROW).

G.G.McC.

29TH MAY, 1867.
Mamba ("The Bright-eyed")

An Aboriginal Reminiscence
Introductory

A STORY of the mount and plain,
The lake, the river, and the sea;
A voice that wakes to life again
An age-long slumbering melody.
A dream of winds and rustling trees,
Of whispering reeds, of sighing sedge,
Of woods that woo the fickle breeze,
Or wave the grass from topmost ledge
Of foreland stretching o'er the deep,
Where, crowned with snowy sparkling foam,
The blue wave thunders 'gainst the steep,
And stars with spray the purple dome.

A memory, in a narrow span,
Of days long dead — too bright to last
A shadow of primeval man,
A foot-fall echo of the past.
Mamba: Canto I

Contents

Birth and Infancy of Mamba, I, II, III.
The Bath, IV., V., VI., VII.
Mamba at Play, VIII., IX.
Nernepten, the Weapon-maker, and the Lesson, X., XL, XIL, XIII.
The First Success, XIV.
Borote to Mamba, XV., XVI., XVII.
The Camp Gossips, XVIII., XIX.
Terillin, XX.
Nernepten and Borote, XXI.
Borote's Grief, XXII.
The Ghim-boboke, or “Man-making,” XXIII, XXIV.
Presentation to the Elders, XXV., XXVI.
Forebodings of Taalar, XXVII.
The Ghim-boboke Yapeen, XXVIII, XVIX.
Mamba, the Hunter, XXX.
The Assassin-Ambush, XXXI., XXXII.
Murder of Mamba, XXXIII., XXXIV.
[END OF CANTO I.]

Mamba

Canto I

I.

THE day declined, the sun had set,
For orb and ocean more than met;
And forth from boughs that heav'nward sprang
Grotesque and mocking laughter rang.
Grim scaur and scalp, and mountain side,
To laughing hill and vale replied;
The distant wood that fring'd the plain
With fainter echoes laughed again;
And cool night-breeze that stirred the reeds,
And all the dancing water-weeds,
Bore softer sounds; and on the tide
The giant halcyon's laughter died.
II.

This night twelve moons had passed away
Seven times, since 'neath the parting ray
That kissed the murmuring river's breast,
Young Mamba's mother found her rest.
She died, but dying left a life
In pledge for her's amid the strife
That closes days and opens years,
With all their future hopes and fears.
But Mamba's father ne'er was known,
And no man claimed him for his own.
Seven summer suns had clothed his head
With darkly clustering curls, that shed
A softness o'er the beaming face,
That bore of pride an early trace.
Young Borote, who for these short years
Had kept the pledge that came in tears,
Nursed with a mourning mother's care
The offspring of another fair,
And saw in every grace it wore
The semblance of one lost before;
And thus the childless found a child,
A mother on the orphan smiled,
And buried babe and mother fond
Faded in mist the world beyond.
Thus ever may the ending be
When our last sun sets gloomily
And some yet brighter image spring
From out our dust, that bard may sing,
Whose deeds shall fire the group around,
As ears entranced drink in the sound.

*      *      *      *      *

III.

Her warmest robe became his nest,
He slept upon her heaving breast,
Or lay beside the little fire,
Nor never dreamt he lacked a sire.
'Twas thus at eve, and so at night
When flames made dark young eyes grow bright;
And when at dawn she rose in bliss
To wake him with a fondling kiss —
Oh! who could paint the tender joy
Of Borote, as she clasp'd the boy,
Impetuous pressing 'gainst her breast,
At once caressing and caress'd?
She gazed into his eyes, and there,
Two Borotes bright, a mirror'd pair,
Smiled from each dark delicious well
O'er which the silken eyelash fell —
Two pictured loves in love enshrined
Before the portal of the mind.

IV.

She bore him to the river banks,
Where, 'mid the rushes, swaying ranks,
Lay Nerinella's long canoe
Floating, impearl'd with glist'ning dew;
And where the weed of green and red
It's floating carpet gaily spread,
Whereon the emerald frog reclined
Fanned by the fragrance of the wind;
And all was darkened by the shade
The water-weeping branches made,
Save where a paler, tend'rer green
Made bright the beauty of the scene.
The morn was gay ere yet the sun
His heav'nward journey had begun;
And flow'rs their spicy odours shed
From drooping branches over-head,
Whilst those around his tender feet
Smiled upward from their grassy seat.
The birds flashed down to drink or lave,
With varied note and joyous stave,
And plunging sidelong from the reeds.
That waver'd 'mid the water-weeds,
Plashed in the stream so cool and calm,
O'erhung by many a fern-tree palm;
And bell-bird peals, whose silvery chimes
Found in the rippled water rhymes,
Throughout the perfumed thicket rang,
Whence the tall-headed bulrush sprang.
The waking river's dimpled face
Bore on its waning smile the trace
Where bird had kissed the brimming tide,
That tiptoe with its lip replied.
She paused. Her robe she cast aside,
And stood in all her naked pride,
With youthful limbs and queenly grace,
And more a girl's than woman's face.
The glorious braids of raven black,
That rippled down her hollow back —
The planted foot — the bosom large,
That heaved and fell like river marge —
And all her fair proportions round,
Some sisters in the water found:
'Twas thus she seem'd, 'twas thus she stood,
In all her beauty, by the flood.

* * * * *

V.

Taking young Mamba by the hand,
She led him to a pebbly strand;
And raising up, with gentle might,
The boy, who danced with wild delight,
She flung him flying from the brink,
And watched the wayward urchin sink.
The waters closed — the circles flew,
With widening stretch, the shore to woo,
And foam and bursting bells of light
Rose from the depths with bubbles bright,
And soon the reappearing head
Sprang up, and little palms outspread;
Then, flinging wide her rounded arms,
She vouchsafed all her bosom's charms,
And tossing back the raven hair
That hid her shapely temples fair,
Allured the gently-swimming boy,
Who cleaved the wave with cries of joy.

VI.

The boy, with mischief-loving eye,
Gained the firm ground, and stood breast-high
Where the white pebbles gleamed and danced,
By murmuring water-music tranced.
He stooped to lift the lily fair,
And wreathe with stolen flowers the hair
That curled about his dripping brow
Like ripples shot from rushing prow,
As Nerinella northwards flew,
On fishing bent, with light canoe.
The boy splashed on with quick'ning pace,
The pearl-drops raining, down his face,
Bright o'er his breast they trickling sped
From sidelong-shaken dripping head;
And many a patch of bubbling foam
Marked yet another step towards home.

VII.

Borote the gentle one — the fair —
Stood in her brightness waiting there;
Beguiled the boy beside the brink —
Not far from whence she saw him sink —
One foot advanced the river kissed,
Whilst she took Mamba by the wrist,
And all the tide that met the green,
Like Mamba, seemed to own a queen.
She laid her in the feathery shade
That 'neath a dark mimosa played,
And clasp'd the child, still feigning coy,
With all a second mother's joy.
There, on the green turf, starr'd with flowers
Where branches rained their golden showers,
They lay in joy, with brows unbent,
In one sweet, dark confusion blent.
She rose, and high the radiant-faced
Upon her rounded shoulder placed;
And took the path embower'd with bloom,
Whose matted masses 'mid the broom
Stared out, and mocked the burning skies
With azure and cerulean dyes;
The path — by maiden footsteps worn,
In water quest at early morn —
Whose arching canopy of green
Shivered with ever-changing sheen —
Whose every twig and tiny tree
Seemed vocal with bird melody.
Thus through the perfumed air they pass'd,
And reached their happy bower at last.

VIII.

Young Mamba with the early day
Arose, and joined his peers at play;
In wandering through the sighing wood,
Or fording streamlets' mimic flood.
The robin, like a living coal,
Fired the young sportsman in his soul,
And soon, by well-directed blow,
His missile laid the scarlet low.
He tried his easy aim again,  
An azure warbler kissed the plain;  
Nor spared he, sitting on a spray,  
The laughing usher of the day.  
The wood, the plain, the river side,  
The pebbly treasures of the tide —  
All, all were ransacked by the boy,  
Who brought his motley hoard with joy  
Back to the beauteous Borote's feet,  
His young companions following fleet.  
He spread before her amber gum  
A bounteous store, but lately come  
From dark mimosa's wounded side,  
That bleeding poured a golden tide;  
The robin red, the warbler blue,  
With wings and back of sable hue,  
And bird that laughed his last “good day”  
From white and nodding leafless spray;  
A nest of withered twisted grass,  
And hair and twigs — one felted mass,  
With moss and fibres intertwined,  
And red and yellow feathers lined;  
The beetle's mail of brilliant sheen,  
One glorious blaze of gold and green,  
He placed 'mid speckled eggs of blue,  
Of russet, brown, and crimson hue,  
That nestled 'mid the whiter ones  
Like pebbles where the current runs  
Silent, and still — together pressed  
Beneath the brooding water's breast.

IX.

And Mamba ever would beguile  
The time with mirth-provoking smile,  
And tale that brought to Borote bliss.  
One I remember; it was this:—  
Two birds were fighting furiously  
A bird looked down and laughed to see.  
I threw, but missed the fighting pair;  
Then he looked down and laughed at me.  
For this I took a steadier aim,  
And hurled in stick at higher game.  
He wildly laughed, and quivering fell —  
'Twas his last laugh — I laughed as well.”  
Short were the tales, and soft the clime —  
The summer in its early prime;
So passed the days, so fled the hours,
Amid the wealth of birds and flowers.
But Mamba could not always be
A child among the children. He —
Fired with the stories of the chase,
That lent new brightness to his face —
Resolved, Nernepten-like, to stand
A hero-hunter 'mid the band.

X.

Nernepten was a warrior bold,
Though grey of head yet scarcely old,
Who bore from all the palm away
In fishing, chase, in fight or fray.
He lived apart — a silent man,
A worker — wonder of the clan;
And brave must that bold spirit be
That dared to keep him company.
The old he loved — his ready spear
Oft furnish'd forth their festive cheer;
But for the well-grown stalwart ones,
He looked on these as younger sons,
And bade them exercise in chase
By his example in the race.
From blatant youth he turned away,
Finding but folly in their say;
But take to him the bright-eyed child,
You found him as a woman mild.
There were no scions of his stock;
He stood alone — a towering rock,
O'ershadowing with his mightiness
The weak ones in life's wilderness.

XI.

Nernepten, naked to the waist,
Sate 'mid the wood himself had placed
That angled portion, soon to be
A wangiem whirling rapidly.
Stripped of its bark, the ruddy pride
Blushed deeply through the wounded side,
And painted, with prophetic might,
Blood to be spilt in future fight.
The long leangle's nascent form
Forespoke the distant battle-storm;
And club and malka's embryo shape
Seem'd longing for red wounds to gape.
The lance of wood, the spear of reed,
Stood symbols there of warlike deed.
Ah! well said Uimba, sage of old,
That each tall tree its story told.
The myrtle green to wild korang
Its bloody fate prophetic sang;
And wind-shook tchyrels, as they moaned,
The hunted emeu's end intoned.
And so the wangiem-yielding tree,
That sighs at sunset mournfully,
Sings to the wind — whose latest breath
Stirs its lank leaves — the song of death;
And vows the vengeance man must wreak
Where sounds the wangiem's battle-shriek.

* * * * *

XII.

The boy delighted marked the man
At work; and, as he still began
Another and another task,
Drew nearer yet, as if to ask
Some question, with inquiring eye
That watched the worker curiously.
Nernepten bade the boy advance,
Whilst he was fashioning a lance,
And showed him how the crooked wood
Became the straightest shaft that stood
When bent on turf, o'erheaped with coals,
That slacked the fibres' rebel souls;
Taught him to hew the wangiem long,
And sing the wangiem-maker's song;
To mould the malka or the mace,
Arm and defence for danger's place.
In short, his brain the man imbued
Well with this maiden lesson rude.

XIII.

Mamba returned each day to view
The axe that fell, the wood that flew,
The fragrant curls and splinters red
The green-stone mogo round it shed.
His wonder wild would never flag,
Searching the magic mocre-bag —
The bunch of brown-barked willoo pins
That stretched the quaintly-figured skins —
The ball of blended gum and clay —
The roll of sinew-thread that lay
Next to the ochred forehead-band,
Wrought of the slend'rest sinew-strand
’Mid flinty fragments from the ford,
The busy workman's varied hoard;
The bath at dawn, the chase at noon,
By night the dance beneath the moon,
The feast around the blazing fires,
Behind the snowy-beaded sires,
And then the ballad or the tale
Tow'rd's morn, until the stars grew pale
And Borote watched, with fearful joy,
The man-like bearing of the boy.

*      *      *      *      *

XIV.

He came one evening from the chase
With joy upon his wearied face,
And threw in silence on the ground
A korang never more to bound.
Borote, with all a mother's pride,
Sprang to the victor-hunter's side,
Admired the spoil and praised the spear,
And paused the hunting-tale to hear.
His maiden prize — his first success,
Both brought the boy some blessedness;
And bright as sun that cleaves the cloud,
The saddened mother still looked proud.
Too well she saw the sand nigh run,
The foster-mother's duty done,
The coming day, the missing face,
The fireside with an empty place;
Herself again without a mate,
Her bower — her bosom — desolate.
She clasped the boy until her breast,
Yielding, received the head she press'd.

*      *      *      *      *

XV.
Mamba! Thou learn'st these ways too fast,
The man arrives ere youth is past;
And thou — too soon — must take thy place
Among the elders of the race.
I bore thee not — but oh, forgive
The heart that asks thee still to live
A while beside the little fire
That warmed ‘the son without a sire’
For years, whilst thou without a peer
Hast reigned in this fond bosom here.
I bore thee not. Thy mother fled,
That thou might'st live — she sought the dead;
And I had lost (methought) my life,
When little Tono ended strife,
And turned upon his leafy bed,
Whereon I deemed my hopes lay dead.

XVI.

“No sire had I — my husband lost —
My only bud the cruel frost
Nipp'd, ere it bloomed a beauteous flower —
Vain was the mother's tear-drop shower.
I thought ('twas ere these lids were dry)
That life was learning but to die;
And then thy mother's hope ('twas said)
Hung by a tiny, treacherous thread.
Alas! she went — and I in grief
Sought by her corpse the strange relief
That woe to woe vouchsafes alway,
By night, and hope with dawning day:
’Twas then I first beheld in thee
A Tono sent mysteriously.
’Tis wrong that we aloud should name
The lost, when life's extinguished flame
No longer warms the curdled red
That chokes the pulse's silent bed.
I chose a flower — the first I found
Upon the green and blessed ground,
Where new-born Mamba sighed and smiled,
And Borote gained a second child.
’Tis thine for life; it bloomed for thee,
It smiled thy welcome pensively.
Long may it glad the much-loved plain,
And speak thy birth for years again.
And aye, where'er I build my bower,
Joy to greet the Mamba flower.”
Mamba replied with speaking eye
That beamed with love despairingly.
It told her more than tongue could tell —
How Mamba, tho' he loved her well,
Had cast his lot among the bold
That ruled the tribe since times of old.
She sighed, and said — “My life, my joy,
My cherished, too-ambitious boy —
The wise men soon shall call thee hence,
Despite a mother's eloquence.
But thou from her hast nought to fear —
From her no sigh, no falling tear,
Shall come to mar the fatal plan
That makes her Mamba yet a man.”
Then Mamba, softening as he spoke,
Whispered the fearful Ghimbo-boke;
But Borote smiling shook her head,
And her voice shook as thus she said —
“Ne'er ask of me — I know it not,
What mystery marks the manly rite;
The hour, the day, the secret spot,
The words of wisdom or of might.
But this is mine — I know it well —
Our fathers all have passed the same;
The secret, man may never tell
Till youth assumes the manly name.
And thou art brave, and bold as they
Who faced the doubtful rite before,
And rose amid the sages grey,
A man among the men of yore.
But this is why I chiefly grieve:
To think a mother's care is o'er;
A mother's words can ne'er deceive —
Thou ne'er shalt own a mother more.”

The tale went round, the gibe and song,
Amid the young, the tall, the strong;
And many a bright and merry eye
Flashed with a pent-up mystery.
At length young Pahmeel laughed aloud.
And Ninghim too, until he bowed
Across the broken spear he mended,
That shook until his laughter ended,
And long, deep-drawn, escaping sighs
Relieved the breast and filled the eyes.
“Ninghim!” he faltered — (and he laughed
To Pahmeel, who had only quaffed
One mouthful from his calabash,
And set it down, lest drinking rash
Should choke him, as he rocked in glee
With hands upon his up-drawn knee) —
“They say young Mamba's found a sire.
(Beware!) The water's in the fire!
This crystal seems bewitched, I think,
And laughs at him who fain would drink.”
“A sire indeed!” quoth Burtalcaang,
Belov'd as story-tellers sang
Of old, when boys forsooth had rather
Lose aught in life except a father;
“But what's a sire to him or thee
That loves to rove the forest free?
His mother — she is not his own,
His father like the summer's flown;
Say, who shall lift the Borote-yoke,
And lead him to the Ghim-boboke?
A father, and a comrade too,
A choice let's hope he'll never rue.”

XIX.

To him, Pahmeel, a merry wight,
Whose large dark eyes were wild and bright —
“Borote supplies his mother's place;
Nernepten takes him to the chase —
Teaches him weapon-maker's art,
The warrior's and the hunter's part;
To wield the malka, stalk the game,
And burn the cover out with flame.
Methinks there's more in this than we
In all our wisdom seem to see;
Except myself and Ninghim wild,
That deem the boy Nernepten's child.”
A laugh went round — “And Mamba's mother!”
Cried Bangan. “Yes! he had another;
But even Borote vows that she
Ne'er pierced that father mystery.
Borote's a foster-mother only —
A woman by herself, and lonely,
But for the boy that shares her bower;
The name-son of a silly flower.
And brave Nernepten — for he's brave —
Would sooner hide in mountain cave
Than where the clack of woman's tongue
Thro' all the forest mazes rung.
If he did wed, we knew it not,
Nor in what wild secluded spot
He kept the wife he woo'd or stole —
The solace of his secret soul.”

XX.

“Shame on you all!” a voice exclaimed
“Shame!” flashed a pair of eyes that flamed,
And grey Terillin turned his beard
Tow'rs the wild group whose tongues were feared,
But most of all by youths and maids
That sighed o'er eyes or glossy braids;
Or chanted love-lays to the morn,
In murmurs as the day was born.
“Nernepten's brave — 'tis truly said,
And brave Nernepten wears a head
Where one, a water-drinker rash,
Wears nothing but a calabash.”
With this he glanced at young Pahmeel
From heel to head, from head to heel;
And looked the cowering stripling down
With snowy, shaggy eyebrows' frown.
“You, Ninghim, too — and Bangan bold,
Sly and deceitful yet not old;
And Burtalcaang — that wear no yoke,
Yet never knew the Ghim-boboke —
Shame on ye all! Ye cannot see
A woman succour misery —
A childless man take up a child,
And train its aspirations wild —
But ye must turn and twist the tale
To laughter's ends, with words that rail.
Mark me again, ye talkers rash:
If aught can one of you abash,
It should be this — an old man's word.
That else for long had been deferred
To future time and wilder scene —
The night of Ghim-boboke Yapeen.”

XXI.

Nernepten never raised his head,
But hewed amain the wangiem red;  
Nor turned with eagle eye askance  
Upon the group an angry glance.  
Borote heard frequent tales that flew  
Around the camp: each breeze that blew  
Bore in its murmur many a gibe  
Against the sireless of the tribe.  
But Borote, listening, only smiled,  
And loved the more the changeling child  
That heaven conferred, when she to earth  
Consigned the infant of her birth.

XXII.

Borote, with heavy heart and sad,  
Traversed the wood, where birdlings glad  
Mocked with their wildest warbling song  
Her thoughts of woe — her dream of wrong.  
The day had come, the morn had broke,  
That ushered in the “Ghim-boboke.”  
From woman's eye that rite is bid,  
To woman is the thought forbid  
To pierce the cloud that veils the light  
Of manhood merging into might.  
Alas! 'Tis sad to grieve alone —  
To know one's chiefest joy is flown;  
But doubly sad to see the sun  
Of woe's first day, but just begun,  
Smile on the face bedewed with tears,  
And laughing, dart a ray that sears  
The heart that aches in deep'ning sorrow,  
Expectant of a dark to-morrow.

XXIII.

Mamba remote and silent sate  
Secluded, like the youths who wait  
The bidding of the tribal sires  
To join them by the myst'ry fires,  
Not ours the wisdom nor the light  
To shadow forth that solemn rite;  
Nor what the word, nor what the way,  
That moulds a man from boyish clay.  
* * * * * *

XXIV.
Let it suffice — the rite was o'er;
They led him to the river shore,
Whose grassy curves wound in and out
Between the tree-trunks tall and stout.
Headlong he plunged, came out again,
Shook from his locks the river rain,
And stood between his guard and guide
A new-made man, in all his pride,
Flowers on his brow, a golden wreath,
They placed: his bright eyes beamed beneath;
And thus, with nodding blossoms crowned,
They homewards led the “newly-found.”

XXV.

Terillin rose — the grave, the grey —
And met the comers on their way;
Advancing, took the crown'd one's hand,
And led him tow'nds the snow-capped band,
“Fathers!” he cried, “I bring with me
One pass'd the ancient mystery,
That ye and I, and all the old
Have known, but ne'er to stranger told.
He comes, a man amongst our men —
Heaven send us such a one again!
What, though no father's name he bears,
Nor badge of father's bravery wears,
Shall he be less among his peers
Because as yet unfleshed his spears?
Did Burtalcaang, who bears no yoke,
E'er face the dreaded Ghim-boboke?
Or Pahmeel, whose wild laughter rings
Through all the camp, e'er trim the wings
Of flying foes, that fell before
His spear-shaft, stained with traitor's gore?
Ninghim, or Bangan, can they say
Mamba's without a sire to-day?
His sire behold! Am I not he —
His father in the mystery?

XXVI.

Nameless should be the silent dead
(And here Terillin bowed his head);
But, though all nameless in the dust,
To nameless memory be just.
His father was the gallant son
Whom glory from affection won.
When, waking once from dreams of joy,
They told me I had lost my boy,
Red was my spear and red my hand —
I raised the camp with fiery brand;
But all the blood was spilt in vain,
I could not bring him back again.
Childless for long, I see my son,
His life as 'twere again begun.
But I am old, unnerved, and grey,
And half my strength is snatched away.
Thus to Nernepten I bequeath
The boy who wears the golden wreath.
Behold in me thy sires proud sire;
Embrace me, boy! join fire to fire.”
This to young Mamba, as he flew
Into the arms of grandsire true.
Pahmeel and Ninghim hung the head;
The history round the camp-fire spread
And Bangan bold and Burteleaang
Each felt of burning shame the pang.

XXVII.

“'Twas glorious — yes! but was it well
(Cried Taalar) of the dead to tell?
To raise again from where it rests
The secret buried in our breasts —
The woe felt when our hero slain
Victorious fell on Ryndia's plain?
Oh! Death may chance to be forespoke,
E'en at our solemn Ghim-boboke.
And though, methink, a brave grandsire
Sits next him by the mystery fire;
And though his sire at last is known —
Albeit his burning soul is flown —
Mamba may never live to mourn
Terillin from his children torn.”
This, hoarsely whispered by Taalar,
All silent else both near and far;
And Mamba, 'mid the elders placed,
Sate while his face with lines they traced.

XXVIII.

The day had fled, the moon arose,
Night straight began with evening's close —
A night whose calm and silvery sheen
Befitted well the wild yapeen.
Within the circle of the camp
Blazed the clear fire, while measured tramp
Of dancing warriors shook the ground,
To song and time-sticks' throbbing sound.
There twice two hundred feet advanced,
There twice a hundred malkas glanced
Bright in the moon, that silvered o'er
The arms that all those malkas bore.
Wild the device, and strange the sign
That stared in many a snowy line
From beaming face and heaving breast,
And limbs that seldom paused to rest;
Whilst all the rib-like lines laid on,
Made each man seem a skeleton.
Nodded the feathers from the red
And netted band that bound each head,
And hoarsely rustling leaves of trees
Shook round dark ankles in the breeze.
The singers with their time-sticks rang
The cadence of the song they sang;
And every face and limb below,
And tree above them, caught the glow
That spread from camp-fire's rising blaze,
Lighting the yapeen's wond'rous maze
Of feet and ankles in the dance
With fitful gleam or twinkling glance.

XXIX.

Conspicuous 'mid the dancing crowd,
Whose ranks alternate swayed and bowed,
Shone Mamba, tricked with wild design,
And symbol traced in waving line.
No limbs more active wore the green
At yon great Ghim-boboke yapeen;
And no two arms more graceful there
In circling motion cleft the air
Than his — and his the eagle-eye
Inspiring all the minstrelsy.
The young and old in groups around
Drank in the sight, the joy, the sound;
And Mamba's form throughout the dance
Attracted every wondering glance.
Borote! She viewed him and she wept —
Proud of her son; and then she crept
Alone into the darkness wild,
And there bewailed her sundered child.
Out far beyond the camp leant she
Her aching head against a tree;
The fires behind her brightly burned,
The turf the dancers lightly spurned;
And thro’ the forest, laughter rang,
As all the sitting matrons sang,
To “time-stick” cadence by the fire,
The joy of him “that lacked a sire.”
“Ah me!” groaned Borote, “is it well
That I should live the tale to tell
Of love bestowed and love returned,
Love lost again, or all unlearned?
That I — the only joy he knew —
False to myself, to him still true,
Should here alone with salt tears flow,
Weep o'er his joy and call it woe?”
She sobbed; the tears ran down apace —
Blent in each other on her face,
Like sorrows such as seldom come
Alone — but join and make the sum
Of one vast melting, burning grief,
That ever brings its own relief,
She wept, and found her heart's distress
Worthless and worse than nothingness;
Reproached herself, and yet she sighed,
As her sweet streaming face she dried;
And passing to her bower alone,
With dragging foot and fitful moan,
Paused sadly by the ashes there,
For the dark hearth was cold and bare;
Then laid her down, all lost in woe.
Her lullaby the river's flow.
Grief brought it's balm — now past the worst,
And all the river-murmurs nurst
Her soul to sleep, nor sent a dream,
Nor yet of joy nor hope a gleam.

*       *       *       *       *

Suns set, and many a changing moon
Shone on the sad one all too soon;
Tho' Mamba still increased in grace,
Whilst the bright radiance of his face,
Was foremost theme with young and old —
His port the envy of the bold;
A mighty, stalwart hunter he
Fit hero for camp minstrelsy.

XXX.

The bright-eyed Mamba on the trail
Followed his quarry 'gainst the gale;
Outstripped in flight the swift korang
His dogs, with late ensanguined fang;
And every breeze that eastward blew
Bore on its wings the boy's halloo,
As crying eager to his hounds
The hills sent back the cheery sounds;
The shout, the barking chorus rang
Till all the grim, grey forest sang,
And rustling leaves, and boughs that bent
Joined in the airy merriment.
The youth was not unseen. His track
For miles, for leagues, behind his back,
Hard followed by an anxious few,
Gave hopes of victim soon in view.
Mamba, with hunter's practised ear,
Caught the first sounds as man drew near
And standing motionless and still,
He silent scanned the glade and hill,
Revolving in his mind what chance
Might next require his spear or lance.

XXXI.

Scarce out of sight, with heads to wind,
With listening ears to turf inclined,
There crouched a mute and murderous band
That Mamba's swift destruction plann'd.
They rose, by turns, on hands and knees,
Peered through the brushwood and the trees,
Saw the tall plume on Mamba's head,
But heard no more his springy tread;
For Mamba, warned by air-borne sound,
And pointed ear of whining hound,
Stood like a statue, black as night,
Relieved against a flood of light.
The broad sun smiled on bad and good,
On swift pursuer and pursued;
One golden gleam the follower caught,
The followed seeker and the sought.
XXXII.

Sudden before young Mamba stood,
With green branch riven from the wood,
A figure tall, athletic, dark,
All knotted, sinewy, stout and stark —
Advancing waved the peaceful green,
That emblem'd friendship might be seen
But Mamba still uncertain gazed
Upon the flutt'ring symbol raised,
Yet dropped his stout death-dealing spear,
As scorning to acknowledge fear.
The foe (for foe it was) drew nigh
With strangely wild uncertain eye;
Him followed — crawling on the ground
Like snakes, and with as little sound —
The other ruffians — Wamthalar
And Yal-yal, Yarat, Mambanar.
Each in his crookt foot-fingers brought
A something for the life he sought:
One trailed a black and long-barb'd spear,
With all a murderer's covert fear;
And one a club, a nerum-noose,
That o'er the arm hung long and loose.
With noiseless foot and curving frame,
One onwards, then another, came.

XXXIII.

But all the grass they bent was green,
Short — so no footstps could be seen
When the avenger's searching face
Should try those villain prints to trace.
The leader, with the wav'ring bough,
And well-feign'd friendship on his brow,
Approached, and on the instant broke
The silence, whence the woods awoke.
To Mamba's ear the tongue seem'd strange —
In every phrase some turn or change,
In every gesture of the hand
A fashion of some other land.
Transfix'd he stood, he paused in doubt,
When, deftly thrown his neck about,
Fell the long cords around him loose,
The snaring “nerum's” twisted noose.
These tightened — for assassin hands
Stretched stoutly on the straining strands
Struggling in death he fell to earth,
Feeble and senseless as in birth,
When first his little form was seen
Rolling in wonder on the green.
Crash fell the clubs, and scarce a trace
Remained that told of Mamba's face;
While all the crushed — still shapely — frame,
Convulsed, seemed pride at war with shame.

XXXIV.

They wrought their will. 'Twas spoke by Fate,
That they the corse should mutilate,
And grimly tear with savage pride
The trophy from his reeking side.
The dark dishonoured bleeding clay
Amid the trodden grass-blades lay,
But none appeared, with decent care,
To shroud in leaves his body bare;
Nor round the fires sate those that showed
A hundred gaping mouths, whence flowed
The tears of blood the women shed
O'er the young, brave, or beauteous dead:
For him no whitened faces glared,
No swelling eye-balls blankly stared,
No silence marked the direful day,
It passed like any other — gay!

END OF CANTO I.
Mamba: Canto II.

Contents

Presentiment of Borote, I., II., III.
Nernepten's Resolve, IV.
The Guardian-Spear and Pennon-Plume, V., VI., VII.
Nernepten on the Revenge-Trail, VIII.
The Finding of Mamba's Plume, IX., X.
The First Night, XI.
Discovery of Mamba's Body, XII.
The Ordeal of the Beetle, XIII.
Nernepten in the Great Swamp, XIV., XV.
Nernepten and the "Wygabil-Korang," XVI., XVII.
The Encounter with the Murderers, XVIII., XIX.
The Night after the Struggle — The Burial of the Slain, XX.
The Symbol-Carving on the Tree, XXI.
The Return, XXI., XXII.
Nernepten's Supper, XXIII.
The Morning of the Entry into the Camp, XXIV., XXV.
Arrival of the Avenger, XXVI., XXVII.
Marriage of Nernepten and Borote, XXVIII.
[END OF CANTO II.]

Canto II.

I.

 But one remark that spoke alarm,
One fear lest sudden hurt or harm
Had kept the youth — from Borote fell,
The woman that had nurst him well.
Her muttered doubt, her whispered fear,
Fell on Nernepten's wakeful ear.
'Neath the pale moon's meridian rays
Died out the camp-fire's brilliant blaze,
Which ceased in flickering tongues to flow,
Tho' embers in their "after-glow"
Gilded the upright guardian spears,
Bright with a thousand dew-drop tears —
The same the sorrowing night-queen shed
O'er the dim distant bleeding dead.
A woman's sigh, a woman's groan —
A half-repress'd, half-whisper'd moan —
Told all he feared. — She sudden wailed,
And men and maids awaking quailed.

II.

The pah-goork, awe-struck, caught the child,
That next her in its slumbers smiled,
Tight to her bosom-while her ear
Was strained to note some danger near.
Thus for a little space there crept
Fear round the camp, and then it slept
But brave Nernepten — he, the same
That first trained Mamba's youthful aim,
And taught his limbs to climb the tree
Or stem the river steadily —
Smit to the heart by piercing wail
Borne on the softly sighing gale,
Arose and gently stole away
With shield and spear ere dawn of day;
But, ere departing, softly crept
Tow'rd Borote, who had never slept
Since three bright suns had tinged the skies
With dawning gold or evening dyes.
Borote beside the embers sate,
Childless, alone, and desolate.
Her hands were clasped about her knees;
Her hair, dishevell'd in the breeze,
Waved like the melancholy sedge
That sighs beside the water's edge;
She rocked her body to and fro,
And murmured to the river's flow,
That answered back in murmuring strain
Its sad lament for lost or slain.

III.

The stars o'erhead had veiled their light;
Full thickly fell the dew — for night
Was passing, merging into day
On far horizon cool and grey.
On came “the man that loved the child,”
His rugged brow with grief grown mild;
He paused, and heard her still repeat
Her woes. She knew the coming feet,
And raising both her streaming eyes,
Viewed the sad partner of her prize.
Nernepten! Brave one! — Come at last,
I knew the shadows of the past
Would raise in thee th' avenger's fire,
For thou to him wert more than sire.
If he be lost or prisoner ta'en,
Wounded, or sick, or haply slain,
'Thou art the man to take the track,
And lead the weary wand'rer back;
Or, nerving for the fight thine arm,
Venge Mamba's death or Mamba's harm.”

IV.

Silent the chief outstretched his palm,
And laid it on her brow, to calm
The brain that wildly throbbed beneath
The loosened locks, the tumbled wreath.
She clasped his hand — he raised her up,
As sang the dreamy “waiparup”
His matin song of mystery,
Ta'en from some wizard history.
He folded Borote to his breast,
His lips upon her forehead prest,
Nor spoke a word, but held her there —
Whose upturned face and flowing hair
Struck pity to the warrior's heart,
Yet made him anxious to depart.
He laid her gently 'neath the roof
Whose flow'ry warp and leafy woof
In fragrant drooping masses spread
A canopy o'er Borote's bed;
He trimmed the fire that sinking sighed,
And drew some water from the tide,
Then dimpled first by breast and wings
Of earliest bird that bathes and sings —
By waking fish, that springs to view
The sun that mounts the deepening blue;
While the dull eddying oily tide,
That bubbled from a tumbling side,
Spoke the “bird-otter” on his way
To welcome in the coming day.

*   *   *   *   *

V.
He set the water by her head,
And heaped up all the embers red
In one close mass of glowing heat
Before the prostrate pah-goork's feet;
He kissed away the last round tear
That pearled her cheek — then took a spear;
To this he bound an emeu plume,
The badge the swift-of-foot assume,
And this he planted point upright,
In token that the swift one's might
Guarded the space where Borote lay
From day to night, from night to day.

VI.

The morning's early rosy ray
Lighted Nernepten on his way;
And all the waking camp beheld
The guard of Borote's leafy bield —
Saw the tall, plumed, protecting spear
Wave its light pennon in the air,
And noted on the bright'ning earth
One fireless hut, one spearless hearth.
They gazed — and gazing knew the sign.
It took no wizard to divine
Why the stout warrior spurn'd his bed,
Why stood the spear at Borote's head.
Yes! 'twas a dream — some vision lent
A darkly strange presentiment
Of evil to the absent boy,
Nernepten's life and Borote's joy.

VII.

The birds gave joy to new-born day
With many a merry roundelay,
As camp-fires column'd vapour rose
To join the cloud-land's heavenly snows.
Each, every soul at morning meal
Seemed to have something to conceal —
A something felt, or thought, surmised,
Of Mamba trapped or slain, surprised —
Of Borote's dream, Nernepten's flight,
The warrior's weakness, woman's might;
And covertly each turn'd the eye
Tow'rd the spear-pennon silently.
VIII.

Three days and nights th' avenger prest
His foot against the earth's green breast;
Toiled silent thro' the yielding brake,
Forded the stream and swam the lake
Climbed the tall tree, and peered around
To farthest verge of circled ground,
And waited night to cross the plain,
The distant thicket's shade to gain.
And thus he strove, nor knew delay,
Scanning whate'er around him lay
On blooming earth, or 'mid the grass,
Or by the water's looking-glass —
A feather dropt by bathing bird,
The foot-prints of the korang herd
That stately came at dawn to drink
The cool calm waters of the brink —
Marked where amid the sandhills brown
The russet fern was flatten'd down —
Where e'en a tiny twig lay cracked,
It gave him hopes of those he tracked.

IX.

Three silent days, three fireless nights,
Passed 'tween the valleys and the heights;
Part in green ambush in the wood
Silent as any tree he stood,
A witness of the daily deeds
Of birds and bees, of flowers and weeds.
It chanced he crost a field in bloom
That languished in its own perfume,
And prying round with anxious eye
For token whence he might descry
The dead he sought, or else the track
Of Mamba's murd'rs, leading back
Tow'rs some sequestered silent glen,
Stronghold of wild marauding men —
When, lo! suspended from a reed,
Gemmed with full many a dewy bead,
In airy sport an eaglet's plume
Toyed with the golden blossom'd broom.
Ah! well the dainty plume he knew,
In mimic flight that circling flew;
'Twas he himself that trophy tore
Warm from an eaglet's pinion core,
When, stretched on mountain summit steep,
In death's dull torpor fast asleep,
Lay a huge bleeding king korang,
The prize of hound with hungry fang,
He seized the bird that rent the prey,
And snatched its proudest plume away.
This he had placed on Mamba's brow —
There once it waved — Behold it now!

X.

'Twas nothing more, 'twas little less,
Than signal of a past distress;
A token from the silent dead,
For, oh! that flutt'ring plume was red —
Red on the quill, and where the down
Swept snowy o'er the dark'ning brown.
He saw, and eager sprang to seize
The plume that waver'd in the breeze;
But ere he clutched it turned him round,
Like korang when he hears the hound.
'Twas thus he gazed, and hearkened well;
But save the birdling's distant bell,
That clearly pealed from river brink
Its summons to the flock to drink,
No sound fell on the listening ear —
The brake, the plain, the dell seemed clear.
Once more he clomb the giant green,
Seeking around what might be seen;
But strained his racking eye in vain
From thence to confines of the plain.

XI.

Down from his watch-tower in the tree
Th' avenger slid, still silently;
And hid him in the ferny brake,
Coiled like some safety-seeking snake.

* * * * *
* * * * *

Night! and the sombre marshes dank
Rang out the clear sonorous clank
Of frog, that sentinelled the scene
Where thousands raised the wild “yapeen.”
Borne on the murky air afloat
Sailed the great night-jar's saddest note,
And shrill his wailing whistle blew
The shy, mistrustful, wild curlew;
Slow with the breeze's wavering moan
Sounded the “time-sticks”' monotone,
That spoke, pulsating thro' the air,
The sleepy savage in his lair.
The sun began to climb the sky,
And not a leaf nor spray was dry
As the avenger forward crept,
A wakeful one whilst others slept.

XII.

He sought again the yellow broom
Where first he found the eaglet's plume,
And stooping felt the ground beneath
For signs — when, lo! a plaited wreath
Of Korang sinew, stained with red,
The band that once bound Mamba's head!
There too was blood, as on the plume,
A splash or so upon the broom;
And from the grass a gelid drop
Hung like a ruby 'gainst a stop
Of glittering crystal, where the dew
Spangled the blade's fresh emerald hue.
Two stealthy steps, one silent stride,
Bore him to murdered Mamba's side.
Vain were a curse, or mourning plaint,
Th' avenger's rage and grief to paint;
He silent bent him o'er the clay
Whence the proud soul had passed away,
And marked with strange and staring eye
That murdered mould of gallantry.

XIII.

Nernepten bent, but never wept,
Whilst all the fallen leaves he swept
From the dark corse, that marked the spot
With many a sad and bloody blot.
And round the feet, and round the head,
And round the body of the dead,
He cut a trench with mogo green,
And paused for omen to be seen.
He paced the body round and round
Three times — when, issuing from the ground,
Behold a beetle's shining mail —
The beetle crawling to the vale
That lay below the mountain pass
Above the wild, the wide morass;
Eastward, still eastward on he fled
To show the band with murder red.

XIV.

At dawn he rose and pressed aside
The jungle-grass that far and wide
Climb'd tow'rd the sun, with hope intense
Thro' thorny thicket dark and dense;
And struggling on, 'twixt underwood
And flowering rush, he breathless stood,
Tired, on the margin of the moor
In quest of sign, and all but sure.
Whilst in the swamp and dark morass
Fed, 'mid the damp, dishevelled grass,
The ibis and the mottled rail,
The swiftly-running painted-quail,
The russet parrot-of-the-plain,
With long and black-barred yellow train,
That tried his short, lame, wav'ring flight,
Now up, now down, then, lost to sight,
Settled amid the sighing reeds,
Where the tall crane, knee-deep in weeds,
Stood like a sentry by the pool
Of still and silent waters cool.
The n'garan birds with accents harsh
Dashed thro' the thicket by the marsh,
And raised a gale with whirring wings,
Ruffling the iron-clouded springs,
Whose floating films with rainbow hues
Vied in their violets, crimsons, blues,
With painted lory's plumage gay
That decked the bending, dancing spray,
As he, a blue and crimson clown,
With motley antics weighed it down.

XV.

Beyond the isles that outward lay
The tolem navy cleft its way
Tow'rd emerald shores with reedy marge,
Where fallen leaf, the wild-bee's barge,
Sailed careless on the crystal plain,
Or, veering, sought the shore again;
And where the coot in mimic fright
Dived sudden and was lost to sight.
Here the huge pompous pelicans
Shone snowy, as the sable swans
Sailed through their ranks in dusky files,
Dimpling the water's face with smiles.
The green frog rang his muffled bell,
The grey one's clank was heard as well,
And all the tribe with varied note
Chimed wildly in, as half-afloat,
With balanced breasts and heads borne high,
They watched the clouds above them fly.

XVI.

He turned him from the water side
Where reeds hedged in the crystal tide;
Scrambling thro' brake and matted grass,
Sinking at times in the morass
From ankle half-way to the knee,
In mire that gurgled sullenly,
He passed, and gained the mountain-side.
That stretched aloft in craggy pride
Above the spreading marsh and vale.
As freshly blew the eastern gale,
He crossed the shoulder of the hill,
And, lo! a korang standing still —
Erect his port, and calm his eye,
Unconscious of a passer-by;
And as he stood and scanned the scene
The marshes and the islets green,
Nernepten paused — his hunter-soul
Burn'd hot within him like a coal;
Then but an instant clutched his lance,
And gazed upon the brute askance.
“Oh! for my lithe-armed Mamba here
To fit a womra to a spear!”
Broke from his trembling, fevered lips,
That tingled like his finger-tips.
“But let it pass — another's game,
Reward of some ignobler aim.
And yet it seems too grand a beast
To furnish forth the far-fetched feast
Of murdering ruffians such as they
That stole my hunter-son away.
Begone, dark korang — wygabil! —
Pass on thy way, and eat thy fill.
This spear is meant for traitor's side —
Away — untouched by me thy pride.”
With feelings strange, and wild, and mixed,
He saw the korang fall transfixed,
And hanging from his breast a spear,
Blood-stained, that shook as if in fear.

XVII.

Nernepten crouched in dire suspense
Behind a blackened tree-trunk, whence
He viewed the owner of the spear,
As he, with careless stride, drew near
To mark how well the shaft had sped,
To see how well the quarry bled.
Or friend or foe, it mattered nought,
Nernepten “life-blood-vengeance” sought.
The beetle told him, “To the east” —
His thirst for vengeance still increased;
And the “first-met,” as well we know,
His blood should be the first to flow.
Nernepten staunch, with spear in rest,
And, save his girdle, all undrest,
Stole from behind the blackened tree
With side-ward strides, and silently
Stretched back his right arm till his ear
And shoulder met, and kissed the spear,
Which trembled through its bending length
Like reed before the east wind's strength.
He shouted loud — the stranger turned,
And saw the gleaming eyes that burned
Red, as revenge that flashed from each
Told more than all his shouting speech.
The murd'rer — for a murd'rer he —
Sheltered a moment by a tree,
Wielded with warrior skill a shield
More honoured in a battle field.
Nernepten soon exhausted all
His spears — but caught (he marked their fall)
The shafts the wily murd'rer sent,
And swift returned him all he lent;
Then with his club th' avenger sprang,
And closed with him, whose death-song rang
In air as swift the wood descended,
And all his wicked days were ended.

**XIX.**

Thus Yal-yal fell, but Yarat rose
The foremost of Nernepten's foes;  
And huge, broad-shouldered Mambanar  
Pressed to the front with Wamthalar.  
Nernepten's club with sonorous stroke  
Fell on tall Yarat's arm, that broke;  
And one more sudden crashing blow  
For ever laid the caitiff low.  
Then came the last, wild, mingled strife,  
Where the three struggled life for life —  
Where foot to foot, and breast to breast,  
His foemen on Nernepten press'd;  
And smoke in jets from nostril wide  
Flew from the boiling life-blood's tide.  
Stout club and nulla-nulla swung  
High in the air: descending, sung  
Their curt farewell to fleeting soul,  
Bound to its dark mysterious goal.  
Wamthalar's corse obscured the green,  
And left but two upon the scene.  
The fight was long, each respite brief,  
For either knew but short relief,  
And many a bloody bruise and blow  
Fell to each lot, till one lay low;  
With doubly-broken hand and arm  
Fell Mambanar; then, passed alarm,  
And the avenger panting reeled,  
And fainting fell upon the field.

* * * * *

**XX.**

The day was o'er, the stars were out  
When he awaked. That heart were stout  
That had not quailed at such a scene  
By midnight in those woods, I ween.  
Three darkened corses lay around  
Upon the damp, blood-slippery ground,  
Where broken shield and shattered spear  
Lay strewed as on a warrior's bier.  
Forth from behind a cloud the moon  
Passed forth — and so he from his swoon,
As plaint of “jar” and hermit owl,
And the wild wolf's sad piercing howl,
Made the night horrid — as the wind
Sighed o'er the corpses cold and blind.
The maimed, and crushed, and wounded man
Had crawled away ere night began;
And now th' avenger sate alone,
Like some dark statue carved in stone.
When o'er the hill the daylight broke,
And all the warbling birds awoke,
Nernepten, sore, and stiff, and lame,
Buried what lost in death its name;
But first the vengeful victor's pride
Tore for Terillin from the side
Of fallen Yal-yal as he lay
Helpless (his spirit passed away).
Mamba avenged, Nernepten press'd
The body 'neath the turf to rest;
But fixed the spear-arm o'er the grass
Upright, in sign to who might pass,
That there a punish'd murd'rer lay,
Wrapt like his victim in the clay.
The sun was bright, the heav'n was blue,
The' emerald turf was wet with dew,
As, tripping through the bowing trees,
Approached the cool face-fanning breeze;
And grass and herb in tossing waves
Bent low, and sang the song of slaves.
The waking woods took up the strain,
Tree answered back to tree again;
And shadows danced across the green,
As boughs waved sun and turf between.
The magpie's call, the parrot's cry,
The “bronze-wing's” cooing sob and sigh,
The bittern's boom, the plover's note,
The sounds of joy from all afloat
Upon the lake-like marsh beneath,
That lay within a verdant wreath —
Told the same tale of blest content,
That echoed in the firmament.

* * * * *

XXI.

Mamba, was buried where he fell —
The murd'rors 'neath the turf as well
Slept their last sleep; while on the tree,
That o'er their mound stood silently,
Nernepten carved the symbol “slain;”
O'er that, a sun; and then again,
With rude stone chisel edgeways placed,
The “vengeance-guider.'s” figure traced —
A beetle, and a foot-print's track,
A foot-print also turning back.
These, on the side next orient sun,
Show'd the avenger's duty done.
And then Nernepten faced the west,
And journeyed tow'rs his home and rest.
Four days his wallet stood him well
And till the fifth day's curtain fell,
No pang of hunger knew the chief,
Nor sought the fire for that relief
Karakorok shed o'er the land
In times of old with heav'n-snatched brand.
Fireless, and stiff, and faint — half-fed,
Onward and homeward still he sped;
And sometimes leaning on a tree
He slept, by snatches, heavily.
Some salad herbs and way-side roots,
And what he found of wild-wood fruits,
Formed all the stay Nernepten knew
Beneath that sky of burning blue.

XXII.

At length 'twas past, and all was o'er —
The toil, the climb, the swim to shore —
When he again across the lake
Found sanctuary in the brake.
Here, in his tribe's green hunting-grounds,
Broke on his ear familiar sounds,
Tokens of known encampment near —
Sweet music to a wand'rer's ear:
The drowsy hum of dreamy song,
The pulse-beat stroke of time-stick long,
The mellowed voices, and the bark
Of hounds that waked as day grew dark;
And, echoing thro' the woodland wild,
The laughter-peal of many a child.

XXIII.

Well pleased, he threw his wallet down
Among the wayside fern-leaves brown,
And deftly piled with twig's and bark
A steadily increasing spark.
A “tolem,” snared upon the way,
He smeared full thick with river-clay;
And when the fire that blazed so bright
Sank softly into calmer light,
And all the ash-crowned embers red
A last fond radiance ceased to shed,
He dug a grave and laid it there
Nor left the clay-wrapped mummy bare,
But o'er the cave where it lay hid
Piled high a glowing pyramid;
Then spread his palms to catch the heat
That still upon him gently beat,
As, lying by the fire-side long,
He murmured snatches of a song,
And faced the molten gold — the lake
Out-rolled behind the darken'd brake,
Where crossing bough and leaflet spray
Stood blackly out against the day,
And whilst the blue smoke faintly curled
Up to the fading sun-god's world.

*   *   *   *   *

XXIV.

Full soon the pallid moon and stars
Peered thro' the cloud-bank's golden bars,
As the chief drew his reeking prize
Hot from the ashes, and his eyes
Gleamed anxious with a fore-cast joy
Of hunger-feast without alloy.
Careless he turned aside the clay,
And stripped the skin that came away.
Then in a little dish of bark
He served his supper, smoking-stark;
Ate, lay refreshed, and courted sleep,
Just as the night began to weep.
His spears stood upright at his head,
And guarded well his leafy bed;
And all the bright-eyed toortie smiled
On the brave “man that loved a child.”

*   *   *   *   *
XXV.

Morn! dewy morn! her clustering beads
Of crystal cast upon the meads,
Or hung those glistening gems around
The neck of night, as from the ground
She rose at last to wend her way
Westward before the rival day.
She left them there, those diamond drops —
Hung on the warbling, waking copse,
Or showered like spangles on the green,
To add what brightness to the scene
They might — and then fled past, so silently
None knew it till the summer sky,
Awaking, blushed in loving pride
Above her image in the tide.

* * * * *

The rosy clouds to crimson turned
The crimson to a gold that burned,
The gold to saffron, and the blue
Of Heav'n assumed the lilac's hue.
Thro' all shot rays of sunny glory;
'Mid these the scarlet told its story
Of love, and arms, and generous blood —
Repeated in the lazy flood
That weltering lay beneath the sky,
One glowing picture-rhapsody.

XXVI.

Thus smiled the heavens, and thus the earth,
Auspicious on the young day's birth,
As the avenger, spear in hand,
Among the elders took his stand.
Silent he came, and towering stood
Like some grim monarch of the wood;
And as the fathers mutely gazed,
His wallet o'er his head he raised,
And feeling in its dark recess,
Drew forth in horrid nakedness
The bloody token that he tore
From Yal-Yal's side three days before.
This at Terillin's feet he laid,
As old avenger-custom bade;
And he, with dull and saddened face,
That bore his woe in furrowed trace,
Waved the new-comer to a seat
Beside his agèd outstretched feet;
And there a muttered converse low
Arose 'mid clustered heads of snow,
Lauding the deed th' avenger wrought,
And gazing on the spoil he brought —
Bloody the trophy as the deed
For which the traitor came to bleed
But not more hideous than the crime
That shortened Mamba's youthful prime.

XXVII.

One only theme for three long days,
One song three nights by camp-fire blaze —
And then it died like western wind,
Still in its latest accents — kind.
Out from their souls the tale I tell
Pass'd like the circle from a well,
When onward time has smoothed its face,
And swept out every ring-like trace
That showed where once the pebble fell
Into the crystal citadel.
The playful wrestle and the race,
The food-providing daily chase,
Or shift of camp to other scene —
From river marge and woodland green,
To where the azure ocean rolled
His waves against a strand of gold,
And scattered dazzling bright before
A surge of diamonds on the shore —
These claimed their souls, and every thought
Less of the past than future sought,
But still the woman and the man
Dwelt marked ones 'mid the motley clan.

XXVIII.

None knew it — how or when it happ'd —
The story's old — in mystery wrapt;
But one bright morning saw the plume,
"The badge the swift-of-foot assume,"
Float idly in the summer air
Above a happy wedded pair.
The man that never knew a fear
Redeemed the plumed and pointed spear;
And she that nurst the sireless son,
From birth to manly life begun,
Fell in her fuller, riper charms,
A wife, into a warrior's arms.
Thus Borote and Nernepten pass'd
Into the happier state at last.

THE END

Steam Printing Works, 51 and 53 Flinders Lane West, Melbourne.
Footnotes

Footnotes Page 9:
Wangiem — boomerang.
Leangle — A kind of club used only in war.
Malka, i.e., Shield, used in warding off spears.
Korang, i.e., Kangaroo.
Tchyrel — the great reed used in spear-making.
Casuarina, from which the best are made.

Footnotes Page 10
Mogo — green-stone hatchet.
Mocre-mocre-bag — a net for tools and implements used in and repairing weapons, &c.
willoo-the opossum.

Footnote Page 12: Among certain of the tribes it was once the custom of young mothers to name their children after flowers.

Footnote Page 13: ie., The man-making rite—a mysterious and trying ordeal.

Footnote Page 14: The word calabash is advisedly substituted here for the aboriginal kulimin, it being more generally familiar.

Footnote Page 17: Yapeen — The dance commonly called the corroboree; also, sometimes the song accompanying it.

Footnote Page 19: In allusion to the aboriginal custom which forbids all mention of the name of the dead.

Footnote Page 20: The adornment for the “yapeen,” or corroboree.

Footnotes Page 25
Foot fingers — Aboriginal term for the toes,
nerum-noose — A noose used alike in capturing men and emus.

Footnotes Page 26
Leaves his body bare — A practice of the natives where there is no immediate burial.
“Tears of blood.” — In allusion to the laceration by the women of their heads, breasts, and arms, in token of mourning for the dead.
Whitened faces — The mourning paint in use for the face is invariably white, and is generally traced in broad curves round the orbit of the eye.

Footnote Page 29: Pah-goork — “Young mother.”

Footnote Page 31: Waiparup — Wizard.

Footnote Page 32: Bird otter — Platypus.

Footnote Page 34: Fireless nights — A native on a secret expedition kindles no fire, lest the smoke should betray his presence.

Footnote Page 37: Omen — The “Ordeal of the Beetle.” A native on the “revenge-trail” having discovered the body of the murdered man, in accordance with ancient custom, cuts a trench in the turf around the corpse. He watches the first insect or beetle issuing from the damp soil, and follows in the direction thus indicated, and he kills then the first man that he meets when pursuing the course thus supposed to be pointed out by the finger of Fate.

Footnotes Page 38
Ngaran, — honeysucker.
Lory, — one of the parrot tribe.
Tolem, — wild duck.

Footnotes Page 39
Womra — Spear-rest.
Wygabil — huge

Footnotes Page 42
Wolf, — or wild dog.
Upright — An ancient aboriginal custom.

Footnote Page 45: Toortie — ie., stars.