

# Linwood Library Gazette

"Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body."

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## CANTERBURY'S FIRST "AUTHOR" A Centenary

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This year marks rather an important centenary in the story of New Zealand literature. Exactly a hundred years ago Canterbury's very earliest resident "author" began the writing of a book, which, as far as New Zealand is concerned, was destined to be famous.

Does this statement seem extravagant? Certain it is that George Hempleman, the hard-bitten South Sea whaler, laboriously writing up his "log" on the bay whaling station he had established at Peraki, did not even remotely picture himself in the guise of an author. One imagines that expression came slowly to him. He indulged in no flights of fancy; not for him were the gentler flowers of speech, or excursions into the realms of imagery. The life which he described was one of stern realism; and, unlike a generation of authors who have succeeded him, he did not write with a view to publication.

Hempleman died at Akaroa in 1880, possessing then, we are told, little in the world beside a pair of blankets—and the Peraki log. He died, all unknowing that historians of the future would one day hold earnest debate over obscure passages in his log; that no collection of New Zealand literature would be complete without a printed copy of the work; and that the manuscript itself would come to be a treasure of the Canterbury Museum—a unique record of life on the wild shores of old Banks Peninsula.

Not all the Peraki log is of Hempleman's writing. At different times two or three employees of his appear to have had

a hand in its composition. One of these men was decidedly illiterate. Sentences such as: "The bots not out, for the natives goin to rob the captains hous and the peples tow" indicate how laboriously parts, at least, of the famous log were penned.

But another of the writers was a man of education. His dislike of the life at Peraki gleams through page after page. He complains of the brawling of his comrades; laments that they desecrated the "Sabaoth" by fishing. Things were not then going well for Hempleman's enterprise. Provisions were scarce . . . ("Sabaoth, but obligated to look for provisions . . ."), and grog ran out.

"A complication of wants," laments the writer on one occasion. "Our spirits quite gone, and not even the auxilliary power of mixing the sweets with the bitters. But Hope still tells the flattering tale that joy will come again."

Joy apparently did come, and thereafter we read: "The men getting drunk on some of their past and promised pay." "Too much grog in circulation—up and at it!" says another entry; and then "Danced heartily all the night."

Our writer was obviously a man of parts; for after dancing all night he proceeded to enliven the log with a sentimental poem to the sunset!

When desertions occurred the writer again burst into verse:

"With whalers and whaling there's always complaining,

Like a boat or a mill out of tune;  
While the whales are in Bay, the men run away,

And we'll have a clear stage of it soon!"

The day's round at Peraki . . . the sighting and killing of whales, the cutting in, the work at the try pots, the making