

Mrs. Hemans's Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers

The following poem "Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers" comes from a great volume of poetry for children, *The Home Book of Verse for Young People*. This book formed the centerpiece of our poetry literature program for the elementary grades at the Master's School, Camarillo, California. Our first year we began with five students in kindergarten and first grade. We studied this poem first by way of memorization. We also thoroughly studied its meaning. For big, hard words, we recorded a vocabulary. We worked for three weeks. At Thanksgiving time, we held our first Master's School Thanksgiving potluck in the home of John and Theresa Ford, where the school met. The children recited "Pilgrim Father's," all ten stanzas, for their parents with great gusto, and with no prompting. (By the way, the Master's School eventually had to rent the Camarillo Community Center Hall to hold the 300 to 400 family members that gathered to celebrate our school Thanksgiving each year.) At the end of the semester, I asked the students to choose their favorite poem from all those we studied, including the merely fun ones for a final recital. Two of five of the children—our first graders—chose to recite the most difficult and demanding, but the most meaningful, of the poems we studied—"Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers." I pray you will read it, envision it, and enjoy it as well as those children—now moms and dads—did themselves. Remember. There is no pause on lines ending without punctuation. Recite it with feeling!—Ronald W. Kirk

LANDING OF THE PILGRIM FATHERS

By Felicia Dorothea Hemans (1793-1835)

The breaking waves dashed high
On a stern and rock-bound coast,
And the woods against a stormy sky
Their giant branches toss'd;

And the heavy night hung dark,
The hills and waters o'er,
When a band of exiles moored their bark
On the wild New England shore.

Not as the conqueror comes,
They, the true-hearted came;
Not with the roll of the stirring drums,
And the trumpet that sings of fame;

Not as the flying come,
In silence and in fear;
They shook the depths of the desert gloom
With their hymns of lofty cheer.

Amidst the storm they sang,
And the stars heard, and the sea;
And the sounding aisles of the dim woods rang
To the anthem of the free!

The ocean eagle soared
From his nest by the white wave's foam;
And the rocking pines of the forest roared—
This was their welcome home.

There were men with hoary hair
Amidst the pilgrim band;—
Why had they come to wither there,
Away from their childhood's land?

There was woman's fearless eye,
Lit by her deep love's truth;
There was manhood's brow, serenely high,
And the fiery heart of youth.

What sought they thus afar?
Bright jewels of the mine?
The wealth of seas, the spoils of war?
They sought a faith's pure shrine!

Ay, call it holy ground,
The soil where first they trod;
They have left unstained what there they found --
Freedom to worship God.

From *The Works of Mrs. Hemans, with A Memoir by Her Sister, and an Essay on her Genius,*
by Mrs. Sigourney (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1842)

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