Echoes from the Great Barrier Reef.*

By CAPT. JOHN MACKAY (August, 1913.

[Abstract of a paper read at a meeting of the Society on September 2nd, 1915].

The extension of the Dutch Colonial Empire in the East Indies and of the Spanish Colonial Empire in South America, had made the value of oversea trade evident to Holland and Spain, and both nations became anxious to extend their commercial influence still further. From Batavia the Dutch urged their seamen and traders towards the South and East, while from Lima the Spanish adventurers sailed towards the west, in search of their El Dorado. Rumours had long been current of a great continent hidden in the South Seas, and the Dutch merchants as well as the Spanish treasure-seekers were untiring in their efforts to discover it. Both were successful and both were disappointed. The merchant ships of Holland found no commerce, the galleons of Spain were wrecked upon the Great Barrier Reef, for while the Dutch discovered the northern, western, and the south-western coasts of Australia, the north-eastern coast was first reached by a band of Spanish adventurers.

These men, however, left no record of their journeys and we are indebted to the illustrious Cook for the discovery, and first description of the Great Barrier Reef. Cook's survey was necessarily incomplete, but the work of Captain King in the "Mermaid," and that of Captain Blackwood in the "Fly" led to the selection of a route to India midway between the Barrier and the coast.

The paper dealt with these matters in detail, the disappointed hopes of the Spanish voyagers, the achievements of Cook, of King, and of Blackwood, and then the author proceeded on an imaginary journey along the reef. Each point recalled some "story of shipwreck, disaster and death," each bay had "become the repository of some sad secret of the sea." This "old sailor's narrative, gleaned from various sources during many years of a shipmaster's life throughout the island groups of the Pacific," brought together for the first time the records of discovery and of shipwreck on the north-eastern coast of Australia.

* The subject matter of Captain Mackay's paper will be more fully dealt with in the story of his life, which, it is hoped, will shortly be published.