The Story of Australia

Joseph Bryant

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PREFACE

A BOOK of this modest size could not be a History of Australia; quite evidently much has been omitted. It is, however, an attempt to set up landmarks of history, so that the main road or highway through the years may be intelligently followed, or, in other words, that a clear, general view of the making of Australia as it is to-day may be obtained. Care has been taken to secure historical accuracy on the one hand; while, on the other hand, a story interesting enough for its own sake has been aimed at.

The chapter on "The Bush: its Trees and Flowers" has been read by Mr. R. T. Baker, F.L.S., Curator of the Technological Museum, Sydney; that on "The Bush: its Animals and Birds," by Mr. A. H. S. Lucas, M.A., B.Sc., and that on "Water for Thirsty Lands" by Mr. W. Claude Wilson, C.E. To these gentlemen I am greatly indebted for this service so kindly given.

J. B.

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FOREWORD

By SIR W. P. CULLEN, K.C.M.G.
(Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New South Wales; Chancellor of the University of Sydney)

THE deep and absorbing love of Australians for their native land was a puzzle to many in the Old World who talked with our soldiers during the Great War, whether during their scanty leisure from service at the front, or when wounds or illness compelled them to quit it for a time or altogether. Well may we love Australia, not only because our very flesh and blood and bone are derived from materials raised from her kindly soil, and our thoughts and feelings and speech have come to us through the people who have made it their home. It is a spacious land, as large as most of the historic countries of Europe put together; a land full of beauty and variety on sea-line and coastland, on the mountains fronting the ocean and the plains stretching back from their far foothills to the centre of the continent. Its people, sprung from a race of pioneers, claim and enjoy free scope for all their energies; for its future they will abate no hope, whatever discouragement may threaten. The choicest and best of their sons spoke for them in deeds, not words, upon the battlefields of Europe, Asia, and Africa when the world's freedom and Australia's

called for such as they, telling that pain and death are less evils than failure in a man's duty. Such is the price which Australia's honour and safety called for; and that price mounts up when we add the strenuous labours and privations of her pioneers of former generations, and the long and faithful care wherewith the incomparable fleets of our British nation have guarded us against invasion.

The history of our own country, of the navigators, explorers, and pioneers who served it, must help us to realise what we owe to the men and women who came before us. Our pioneers had half the circumference of the globe stretched between them and their homeland. A wilderness without a rod of cleared land, without a road or house or shop or bank, or church or school or hospital, lay in front of them. If food or clothes ran short a voyage of many months was needed before it could be fetched. Generation after generation of hard work and thrifty self-reliance had to go to the building up of this dear land as we know it now.

Can any one wonder if Australians, when they let themselves think of their country without either foolish boastfulness or equally foolish dispraise, should feel that it lies upon their honour that her good fame shall not suffer at their hands?

CHAPTER I

A HIDDEN COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE

FOR a long time in the world's history Australia was a hidden land. Nobody, except the black people who lived in it, knew of its existence. It lay out of sight of the rest of the world, solitary and unnoticed. Daring sea captains made long and perilous voyages searching for unknown lands; but all of them missed Australia. It was not because it was small and hard to find. Australia is twenty-five times the size of the British Isles, and large enough to be ranked as a continent. But its position was remote from civilised lands, and in an out-of-the-way corner of the world as then known. Thus Australia played a game of hide and seek with those old sea rovers.

The inhabitants of this hidden land were sparsely scattered over it, wandering from place to place in small tribes. They were dark brown or black in colour, of about the same average height as the British, and were a very backward people, living in the poorest sort of way. They were without towns, villages, houses, agriculture, pottery, tools—except axes made of sharpened stones—or clothes, except sometimes skins of animals.

The one business in life of these poverty-stricken wander-

ing tribes was to obtain food. Hunting and foraging, varied only by occasional tribal fights, kept them employed. Though Australia provides only scanty natural food supplies, the blacks managed to get a considerable variety of eatables. These included not only kangaroos, opossums and other animals fish and birds; but also ants, grubs, caterpillars, moths, lizards and snakes. White clay even was on their food list, and was looked upon as a great delicacy. Roots and seeds were pounded between two smooth stones, and baked.

They knew just when different articles of food would be in season, and where they could be found. It was the following up of food supplies from one place to another, requiring the moving of their camps, that prevented settlement in villages or towns. At times supplies ran short or failed; and hunger and starvation were experienced. But generally the blacks of Australia lived well in their own rude way, and had their own tasty dishes and titbits.

Some of their methods of securing food were very ingenious. In order to find where wild bees stored their honey, a black would catch a bee, and with a touch of gum stick a tiny bit of white down to its body. He would then let it go and follow the white signal in its flight, noticing where it disappeared into its hive in some hollow tree. Then with his stone axe he would chop into the tree and rob the hive of its honeycomb. The wild bees of Australia have no stings, so he had no difficulty on that score. In order to bag wild ducks a black would bind grass or rushes round his head, and quietly creep or swim up to them, with only his covered head above

water. The ducks supposing the green turban to be just a clump of floating weeds would allow him to approach; he would then seize one from beneath and noiselessly wring its neck under water, leaving its body to float while he secured others. With skill and patience and good luck he would get as many as he needed. But not every tribe lived near a haunt of water-fowl and could put roast duck on its bill of fare.

Fire was made by them in the way that is known to all uncivilised peoples. A stick of hard wood, about a foot long, was taken, and its blunt end pressed against a piece of softer wood which was covered with dry leaves or grass. The hard wood stick was then twirled round and round very quickly in the palms of both hands. The pieces became hotter and hotter with the friction and at last sparks were produced and the leaves or grass became alight. Or a piece of wood with a groove cut along it was taken, another piece being rubbed up and down the groove until the sparks appeared. But in moving from place to place the blacks generally took with them a lighted fire stick, which was entrusted to one of the women to carry, thus saving themselves the trouble of going through the process of rubbing the sticks; though an expert black would create the necessary sparks in a very few minutes.

The weapons of the blacks for hunting and fighting were spears made of wood, throwing- sticks, clubs and boomerangs. Except among some tribes in the north of Australia bows and arrows were not known. The boomerang was the most remarkable invention of these people, who had so few ideas of making things. It is a flat piece of hard wood, generally

about two feet long and about two inches wide, and bent in the middle. One make of boomerang had this peculiarity—that it could be thrown to a distance, and then, turning back to the spot from which it was thrown, would fall at the thrower's feet. This kind of boomerang was not used for hunting or fighting, but only for display in sport. The other kind of boomerang, used in the chase and for war, was longer and without the side-way twist given in the making of a return boomerang. But war among the Australian blacks was not a very bloodthirsty affair. It usually came about through one tribe trespassing on the hunting grounds of another tribe. When they met in battle each side would make a great noise, shouting threats and taunts, and striking their spears together. Dust was thrown in the air, and a furious scene worked up. When they came to blows they were not often of a deadly character. Presently they had exhausted themselves and tribal honour was satisfied. After the battle the combatants usually feasted together in a great "corroboree," A corroboree is a black's entertainment, consisting of music and dancing, athletic sports, action songs, eating, and some solemn religious rites, all combined in one programme.

Among Australian blacks women were required to do the hard work of the camp, and to carry the loads when camp was moved. The men hunted, and fought, and made weapons; and between times loafed around. The women were drudges and carriers.

A mother would make a portable cradle for her child by putting it into a bag made from the skin of some animal. The

bag was hung from her neck and down her back. She could pick up the child by one of its arms and dexterously fling it over her shoulder into this convenient pouch, which left her hands and arms free for other work or other burdens.

Among tribes by rivers or along the sea-coasts, children at a very early age got rough-and-ready lessons in swimming. The mother would swim out holding the child, and then let it go, or would simply throw it into the water. When the child was in danger of drowning she would rescue it. This would be done each day until the child, learning instinctively how to paddle with arms and legs, could keep itself afloat. It soon became expert, and was quickly as much at home in the water as on land.

The marriage laws of these black inhabitants of Australia were most extraordinary. It used to be thought by white people that marriage among them was simply by capture, and that a man just knocked a woman on the head, and carried her off as his wife. This idea was quite a mistake. So far from that being the case, their marriage laws were the most elaborate in the world. These laws were based on a principle called Exogamy, the meaning of which is "marrying out." Each tribe was divided into two or more classes, and these were divided into smaller classes, and these again into yet smaller ones. No one was allowed to marry a member of one of his, or her, own class or sub-classes. He or she must marry out. But not into just any one of the various other classes; oh no! it could only be into a class permitted to him, or her, by these strange marriage laws. The laws as to who and who

might marry were a real criss-cross, which white people find very hard to understand. One scientist has said they are "enough to puzzle a Philadelphia lawyer." Yet this backward and ignorant people made the laws, and remembered and handed them down, without any writing, for a great many hundreds of years.

The blacks had their own religious ideas. They believed in good and evil spirits, and in one Great Spirit who was above all. They had no name for that Great Spirit. When they spoke of him, they did it in solemn frightened whispers, as Ngunda; which is not a name, but means simply "He." They believed in magic, and spent their lives in fear of it. Each tribe had its maker of magic, or medicine man. It was thought that he was able to cause sickness, or cure it, as he willed. The way in which he was supposed to cause sickness was by putting evil magic into a stick, or bone, or stone, and then pointing it at the one he wished to sicken. When a man had been pointed at, his only hope was to get the curse taken off by some opposite magic. Very often the man who believed himself to have been pointed at did really sicken and die of very fear. He looked upon himself, and everyone in his tribe looked upon him, as a doomed man. He lost his appetite; no longer went hunting; wondered which day would be his last; had no heart for anything and finally lay down to wait the end: so the end came. The medicine man was believed to be a rain-maker, too, and was very much honoured and feared. Among the religious ideas of the blacks was that of life after

death. It was reckoned most unlucky to speak of the dead, and the names of the dead were never mentioned.

In the northern and western parts of Australia numbers of blacks may still be found carrying on their old customs and modes of life. But in the parts now populated by white people they have almost, or altogether, disappeared. They never were at all numerous for such a large country, and were scattered very thinly over it. Since white settlement came they have rapidly become fewer, and it is only in the far back, still unsettled, parts that tribes now exist.

The Governments of the different States make some provision for them; and the Churches have established mission stations, where they can be taught and cared for. But it is quite clear that the Australian blacks are a dying race. This is sad, for in spite of their backwardness, they are in many ways a likeable and teachable people. Black children get on very well at school, and some of them are really clever. The men make good hands on sheep and cattle stations; and the women take up house work quite well. They are a very light-hearted race, full of fun and laughter, are great mimics, and make good musicians.

One of the special attainments of the blacks is that of tracking. They can follow the track of man or animal, where no white man would see the faintest trace. The slightest turn of a twig, or a leaf, or a blade of grass, touched by anything in passing, is guidance enough for their sharp eyes, which see at once the most trivial mark. This art of theirs has often been useful to settlers in the uninhabited forests or plains,

and back-country police stations have usually had a black tracker attached to them.

The fatal thing to the blacks is that they cannot settle down permanently, and fit themselves into white man's civilised life. The wandering habit is in their blood. The wild life is the only life for them. As they cannot have that when the country is taken up by white people for farms and sheep and cattle stations, and when towns and villages spring up, the blacks die off more and more. It is sad, but this strange race is vanishing away.

CHAPTER II

THE HIDDEN LAND IS FOUND

WHO was the first to find Australia? No one can tell. There were stories among the ancient Greeks and Romans, and long before their time, about a continent far away in the South. It was thought in olden times that there must be just as much land on one half of the world as on the other, to keep it level. Whether anybody really knew of a great southern land or not, this theory about balancing the world required such a land. It must be there, said these ancients, and so they put it on their maps, guessing at its position and shape. There is a map as far back as the eighth century which shows this southern land, but it is not in the least like Australia.

Then come later maps showing a land which is rather more like the real thing, though very far from correct. These later maps, however, were based upon some very slight knowledge of Australia. Someone had seen its shores and reported about it. "Jave la Grande" it was named. Some of these old maps are highly pictorial. One of them, dated 1546, has on the country intended for Australia pictures of trees and lions and men; and in the surrounding ocean are sea-serpents with a man riding on the back of one of them. Another map is almost covered with drawings quite well done. There is a procession of black

men wearing coats, following a man on horseback; and one of the procession holds over the horseman's head a sunshade on a long pole. Houses, camels, horses, and wild-looking men, come into the drawings. These pictures represent the ideas of the map-makers as to what might be in that far-off land. But as time passed on these early maps improved, becoming decidedly more like Australia; and it is evident that some further knowledge of the great South Land had been obtained, though still indefinitely.

It is almost certain that some Portuguese navigator was the first from the outside world to see Australia. But what his name was, or anything else about him, we do not know. Spanish seamen came next. In the year 1605 Pedro Fernandez de Quiros sailed from Callao in South America to find the Great South Land, and take possession of it for the King of Spain. He had already been in those seas with the great Spanish commander Mendana, who had looked for it in vain. De Quiros had three ships. Strange-looking vessels they would seem to us, and very small; though they were reckoned huge affairs in those old days. They rose very high out of the water; their masts and broad sails standing tall above the lofty decks; the ships' sides pierced with openings for the cannons' mouths; the prow of each vessel surmounted by the figure of a saint or angel carved in wood, and richly gilded. Luis Vaez de Torres commanded in the fleet as second to de Quiros.

After many months of sailing, during which several islands were discovered, de Quiros thought he had come to the land he sought. He named it Austrialia (not Australia) del

Espiritu Santo, which means Austrialia of the Holy Ghost. He chose "Austrialia" as a compliment to the King of Spain, who belonged to the Imperial House of Austria. But de Quiros was mistaken as to the land he had reached. It was an island of the New Hebrides group, and not the Great South Land. However, he never found out his mistake. One night he suddenly sailed away with his flag-ship, giving no notice to Torres on his ship near by. It seems most likely that this sudden sailing was not de Quiros' own doing, and that his crew had mutinied and taken charge of the ship. De Quiros arrived after many months at a port in Mexico. When he returned to Spain he begged very hard again and again for ships to visit Austrialia del Espiritu Santo, still believing that it was the Great South Land. At last he determined to undertake the voyage without the aid of the King. But he had waited too long. He died on his way to Lima in South America, from which place he had hoped to sail with his new expedition.

After de Quiros had sailed away so strangely, Torres waited for some time to see whether his commander would return. When he did not come, Torres sailed off on his own account. He very nearly discovered Australia. It is most likely that he did see its coasts in the distance. But if he did, he thought they were only the coasts of another island, such as he had seen many of in those seas. He passed on, and lost his chance of being the discoverer of Australia.

The Dutch followed the Spanish closely in the southern seas. One day in the year 1606 there came sailing towards Australia a Dutch ship named the *Duyfken*, which means

Little Dove. It was a tiny vessel to be on a voyage of discovery in far-off seas but the Dutch were fine sailors, and the skilful captain knew how to navigate his *Little Dove*, with its grey sails for wings, through all weathers and over all seas. This ship had been sent out by the Governor of the Dutch East Indies, whose headquarters were at Batavia, in the island of Java. The captain's instructions were to look for the Great South Land which no one had yet claimed, and which might be a great prize to add to the Dutch possessions. He sailed along the coast of New Guinea already known. Then, without being aware that he had left that island, but believing that its coasts still continued though out of sight, he kept sailing on until he entered a wide opening in the North Coast of Australia. This opening is now known as the Gulf of Carpentaria. The Dutch captain had found Australia; but he did not know that he had found it. He thought it was a continuation of the island of New Guinea.

The name of the staunch little Dutch ship has been known from the first. But the name of her commander was lost, and he could only be spoken of as the "Captain of the *Duyfken*." He was a hero without a name. Quite recently the lost name has been found. Willem Jansz, captain of the *Duyfken* and discoverer unawares of Australia, we salute you!

Jansz sent some of his crew ashore in the Gulf of Carpentaria. They were at once attacked by blacks who had watched the coming of the strange ship, and lay in ambush. Some of the landing party were killed. The country looked very uninviting; provisions were getting short on board; it

did not seem worth while to risk the lives of more men; and after sailing some distance into the Gulf, the *Duyfken* was headed round at a point which Jansz named Kaap Keer Weer ("Cape Turn-Again"), and sailed back to Java. The first report given of Australia was a poor one. "A land for the most part desert, and inhabited by cruel, wild, black savages," was the opinion Jansz formed of it.

Ten years after this, another Dutch ship, the *Eendracht*, sailed along the west coast of Australia. Her commander was Dirk Hartog. He landed on a small island, which is now called Dirk Hartog's Island, and set up a post, fastening to it a tin plate with the names of the ship and its officers, and the date of the visit inscribed on it. The little island was left to its wind-swept solitude for eighty years after this. In the year 1697 another Dutch vessel, the *Geelvink* under Captain Vlaming sighted the island. Vlaming landed a party, and Hartog's old post and plate were found. The plate was taken down, and its inscription copied on to a new one put in its place, with something added about Vlaming and the Geelvink. For a hundred years after this the island was unvisited. Then a French ship, the Naturaliste, happened to come along. Hartog's post was found, and Vlaming's tin plate lying at its foot almost buried in sand. It was fixed to the post again. Hartog's original plate, carried away by Vlaming, was found in the Museum at Amsterdam not many years ago.

In the year 1628 a fleet of ten ships sailed from Holland with the intention of possibly making a settlement on the west coast of Australia. A warship, the *Batavia*, under Cap-

tain-General Pelsart, went with the fleet as escort. During a storm the *Batavia* became separated from the other ships, and struck a reef about thirty miles off the Australian coast. The reef had been discovered by another Dutch captain some years before, and named by him Houtman's Abrolhos. Pelsart succeeded in landing most of his passengers and crew on some of the small neighbouring islets. There was no fresh water to be found on them, and boats were sent to get supplies from the main-land. Pelsart himself set off with a few men in one of the ship's boats to obtain help from Java. Soon after his departure some of the sailors on one island formed a plot under the leadership of the supercargo, Cornelis by name, to murder the rest of the company, secure all the stores, seize the relief ship when it came, and set out as pirates. They carried out their murderous schemes in part, killing forty or more on the island, and then proceeded to attack those on another. They, however, had been warned, and defended themselves successfully.

Meanwhile Pelsart reached Java, and returned with another ship, the *Saardam*. Cornelis and his band of ruffians in the meantime had decked themselves out in uniforms taken from the wrecked ship. Cornelis himself had been proclaimed Captain-General, and had a body-guard dressed in scarlet. As the *Saardam* drew near, the party on the other island succeeded in giving some warning of trouble. Cornelis and his men, who rowed out to the ship, were foolishly dressed in their finery and carrying arms, which made Pelsart suspicious. When he demanded from them what all this meant, Cornelis replied that

he would tell them when he and his men had come on board. At once Pelsart declared that unless they gave up their arms immediately he would sink their boat where it lay. Sullenly the mutineers, who were conducting themselves so stupidly, obeyed. They were then ordered on board, and put in irons.

Pelsart held a council of war, and it did not take long to decide that Cornelis and his fellow scoundrels should be hanged from the yardarms. One hundred and twenty were executed. Two of the mutineers, however, were spared this sentence, and instead were put ashore on the mainland of Australia to take their chance of life or death there. Their chance of life was a poor one, and probably they fell victims to the blacks.

CHAPTER III

A DUTCH SAILOR

A GREAT many Dutch vessels visited the coast of Australia. Some of them did so accidentally, being driven out of their course by storms on their voyages to the Dutch East Indies; and some of them never returned, but met their end in those uncharted seas. In the year 1655 the *Vergulde Draeck* was wrecked on the west coast, and none of her crew were ever heard of again. Seventy-eight thousand silver guilders went down with the ship. Search vessels were sent out, but nothing of ship or crew was found. About the year 1684 the *Ridderscap van Holland* was lost on the same coast. In 1727 the *Zeewyck* was wrecked there; but some of the crew built a raft, and eighty-two persons reached safety, bringing with them two treasure chests.

The best known of all the Dutch captains who sailed in Australian seas is Abel Janszen Tasman. We have interesting accounts of his voyages. On August 14, 1642, he set out from Batavia, with two ships, the *Heemskerck* and the *Zeehaen*. He was directed by the Governor-General, Antonio van Diemen, to make a thorough examination of Australia, and any other lands he might find lying to the south. He sailed first south-west to Mauritius to get the advantage of the trade wind.

Then with this wind filling his sails he sped south-east, and later on full east.

Tasman had a good look-out kept. There was need for it in such unknown seas, where treacherous reefs might be lying in wait anywhere. A man was kept at the masthead night and day, and he would need to sit tight as the vessel rolled and pitched; the long deep swell doing its best to fling him from his perch. A reward was offered to any who discovered land, reefs, or sand-banks. The reward for "keeping their eyes skinned," as sailors say, was three reals and a pot of arrack. A real was a coin worth two pence-halfpenny in English money of that time, and arrack was, of course, something to drink.

After about seven weeks, sailing land was sighted. Tasman named it Van Diemen's Land, after the Governor-General. It bore that name for a long time, but it has been very properly changed to Tasmania, after its discoverer, the brave Dutch captain himself. The weather was very stormy, and Tasman, after touching the west coast, had to stand out to sea again. He returned to a beautiful bay which still bears the name he gave it, Storm Bay. Two boats' crews went ashore, and returned with stories of strange sights and sounds. They saw trees of immense size, with steps five feet apart cut in them. Tasman wrote "Either these people are of prodigious size, or they have some way of climbing trees which we are not used to." The blacks had cut these steps with their stone axes, as they pulled themselves up the tree with their arms and legs round it, using the cuts as resting-places and jumping-points by putting their toes into them. Tasman also reported that