

***JOHN
PINKERTON***

***EARLY
AUSTRALIAN
VOYAGES:
PELSART,
TASMAN,
DAMPIER***

John Pinkerton

Early Australian Voyages: Pelsart, Tasman, Dampier

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INTRODUCTION.

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In the days of Plato, imagination found its way, before the mariners, to a new world across the Atlantic, and fabled an Atlantis where America now stands. In the days of Francis Bacon, imagination of the English found its way to the great Southern Continent before the Portuguese or Dutch sailors had sight of it, and it was the home of those wise students of God and nature to whom Bacon gave his New Atlantis. The discoveries of America date from the close of the fifteenth century. The discoveries of Australia date only from the beginning of the seventeenth. The discoveries of the Dutch were little known in England before the time of Dampier's voyage, at the close of the seventeenth century, with which this volume ends. The name of New Holland, first given by the Dutch to the land they discovered on the north-west coast, then extended to the continent and was since changed to Australia.

During the eighteenth century exploration was continued by the English. The good report of Captain Cook caused the first British settlement to be made at Port Jackson, in 1788, not quite a hundred years ago, and the foundations were then laid of the settlement of New South Wales, or Sydney. It was at first a penal colony, and its Botany Bay was a name of terror to offenders. Western Australia, or Swan River, was first settled as a free colony in 1829, but afterwards used also as a penal settlement; South Australia, which has Adelaide for its capital, was first established in 1834, and colonised in 1836; Victoria, with Melbourne for its capital,

known until 1851 as the Port Philip District, and a dependency of New South Wales, was first colonised in 1835. It received in 1851 its present name. Queensland, formerly known as the Moreton Bay District, was established as late as 1859. A settlement of North Australia was tried in 1838, and has since been abandoned. On the other side of Bass's Straits, the island of Van Diemen's Land, was named Tasmania, and established as a penal colony in 1803.

Advance, Australia! The scattered handfuls of people have become a nation, one with us in race, and character, and worthiness of aim. These little volumes will, in course of time, include many aids to a knowledge of the shaping of the nations. There will be later records of Australia than these which tell of the old Dutch explorers, and of the first real awakening of England to a knowledge of Australia by Dampier's voyage.

The great Australian continent is 2,500 miles long from east to west, and 1,960 miles in its greatest breadth. Its climates are therefore various. The northern half lies chiefly within the tropics, and at Melbourne snow is seldom seen except upon the hills. The separation of Australia by wide seas from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, gives it animals and plants peculiarly its own. It has been said that of 5,710 plants discovered, 5,440 are peculiar to that continent. The kangaroo also is proper to Australia, and there are other animals of like kind. Of 58 species of quadruped found in Australia, 46 were peculiar to it. Sheep and cattle that abound there now were introduced from Europe. From eight merino sheep introduced in 1793 by a settler named McArthur, there has been multiplication into millions, and

the food-store of the Old World begins to be replenished by Australian mutton.

The unexplored interior has given a happy hunting-ground to satisfy the British spirit of adventure and research; but large waterless tracts, that baffle man's ingenuity, have put man's powers of endurance to sore trial.

The mountains of Australia are all of the oldest rocks, in which there are either no fossil traces of past life, or the traces are of life in the most ancient forms. Resemblance of the Australian cordilleras to the Ural range, which he had especially been studying, caused Sir Roderick Murchison, in 1844, to predict that gold would be found in Australia. The first finding of gold—the beginning of the history of the Australian gold-fields—was in February, 1851, near Bathurst and Wellington, and to-day looks back to the morning of yesterday in the name of Ophir, given to the Bathurst gold-diggings.

Gold, wool, mutton, wine, fruits, and what more Australia can now add to the commonwealth of the English-speaking people, Englishmen at home have been learning this year in the great Indian and Colonial Exhibition, which is to stand always as evidence of the numerous resources of the Empire, as aid to the full knowledge of them, and through that to their wide diffusion. We are a long way now from the wrecked ship of Captain Francis Pelsart, with which the histories in this volume begin.

John Pinkerton was born at Edinburgh in February, 1758, and died in Paris in March, 1826, aged sixty-eight. He was the best classical scholar at the Lanark grammar school; but his father, refusing to send him to a university, bound him to

Scottish law. He had a strong will, fortified in some respects by a weak judgment. He wrote clever verse; at the age of twenty-two he went to London to support himself by literature, began by publishing "Rimes" of his own, and then Scottish Ballads, all issued as ancient, but of which he afterwards admitted that fourteen out of the seventy-three were wholly written by himself. John Pinkerton, whom Sir Walter Scott described as "a man of considerable learning, and some severity as well as acuteness of disposition," made clear conscience on the matter in 1786, when he published two volumes of genuine old Scottish Poems from the MS. collections of Sir Richard Maitland. He had added to his credit as an antiquary by an Essay on Medals, and then applied his studies to ancient Scottish History, producing learned books, in which he bitterly abused the Celts. It was in 1802 that Pinkerton left England for Paris, where he supported himself by indefatigable industry as a writer during the last twenty-four years of his life. One of the most useful of his many works was that *General Collection of the best and most interesting Voyages and Travels of the World*, which appeared in seventeen quarto volumes, with maps and engravings, in the years 1808-1814. Pinkerton abridged and digested most of the travellers' records given in this series, but always studied to retain the travellers' own words, and his occasional comments have a value of their own.

H. M.

VOYAGE OF FRANCIS PELSART TO AUSTRALASIA. 1628-29.

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It has appeared very strange to some very able judges of voyages, that the Dutch should make so great account of the southern countries as to cause the map of them to be laid down in the pavement of the Stadt House at Amsterdam, and yet publish no descriptions of them. This mystery was a good deal heightened by one of the ships that first touched on Carpenter's Land, bringing home a considerable quantity of gold, spices, and other rich goods; in order to clear up which, it was said that these were not the product of the country, but were fished out of the wreck of a large ship that had been lost upon the coast. But this story did not satisfy the inquisitive, because not attended with circumstances necessary to establish its credit; and therefore they suggested that, instead of taking away the obscurity by relating the truth, this story was invented in order to hide it more effectually. This suspicion gained ground the more when it was known that the Dutch East India Company from Batavia had made some attempts to conquer a part of the Southern continent, and had been repulsed with loss, of which, however, we have no distinct or perfect relation, and all that hath hitherto been collected in reference to this subject, may be reduced to two voyages. All that we know concerning the following piece is, that it was collected from the Dutch journal of the voyage, and having said thus much by way of introduction, we now proceed to the translation of this short history.

The directors of the East India Company, animated by the return of five ships, under General Carpenter, richly laden, caused, the very same year, 1628, eleven vessels to

be equipped for the same voyage; amongst which there was one ship called the *Batavia*, commanded by Captain Francis Pelsart. They sailed out of the Texel on the 28th of October, 1628; and as it would be tedious and troublesome to the reader to set down a long account of things perfectly well known, I shall say nothing of the occurrences that happened in their passage to the Cape of Good Hope; but content myself with observing that on the 4th of June, in the following year 1629, this vessel, the *Batavia*, being separated from the fleet in a storm, was driven on the Abrollos or shoals, which lie in the latitude of 28 degrees south, and which have been since called by the Dutch, the Abrollos of Frederic Houtman. Captain Pelsart, who was sick in bed when this accident happened, perceiving that his ship had struck, ran immediately upon deck. It was night indeed; but the weather was fair, and the moon shone very bright; the sails were up; the course they steered was north-east by north, and the sea appeared as far as they could behold it covered with a white froth. The captain called up the master and charged him with the loss of the ship, who excused himself by saying he had taken all the care he could; and that having discerned this froth at a distance, he asked the steersman what he thought of it, who told him that the sea appeared white by its reflecting the rays of the moon. The captain then asked him what was to be done, and in what part of the world he thought they were. The master replied, that God only knew that; and that the ship was fast on a bank hitherto undiscovered. Upon this they began to throw the lead, and found that they had forty-eight feet of water before, and much less behind the vessel. The crew

immediately agreed to throw their cannon overboard, in hopes that when the ship was lightened she might be brought to float again. They let fall an anchor however; and while they were thus employed, a most dreadful storm arose of wind and rain; which soon convinced them of the danger they were in; for being surrounded with rocks and shoals, the ship was continually striking.

They then resolved to cut away the mainmast, which they did, and this augmented the shock, neither could they get clear of it, though they cut it close by the board, because it was much entangled within the rigging; they could see no land except an island which was about the distance of three leagues, and two smaller islands, or rather rocks, which lay nearer. They immediately sent the master to examine them, who returned about nine in the morning, and reported that the sea at high water did not cover them, but that the coast was so rocky and full of shoals that it would be very difficult to land upon them; they resolved, however, to run the risk, and to send most of their company on shore to pacify the women, children, sick people, and such as were out of their wits with fear, whose cries and noise served only to disturb them. About ten o'clock they embarked these in their shallop and skiff, and, perceiving their vessel began to break, they doubled their diligence; they likewise endeavoured to get their bread up, but they did not take the same care of the water, not reflecting in their fright that they might be much distressed for want of it on shore; and what hindered them most of all was the brutal behaviour of some of the crew that made themselves drunk with wine, of which no care was taken. In short, such was

their confusion that they made but three trips that day, carrying over to the island 180 persons, twenty barrels of bread, and some small casks of water. The master returned on board towards evening, and told the captain that it was to no purpose to send more provisions on shore, since the people only wasted those they had already. Upon this the captain went in the shallop, to put things in better order, and was then informed that there was no water to be found upon the island; he endeavoured to return to the ship in order to bring off a supply, together with the most valuable part of their cargo, but a storm suddenly arising, he was forced to return.

The next day was spent in removing their water and most valuable goods on shore; and afterwards the captain in the skiff, and the master in the shallop, endeavoured to return to the vessel, but found the sea run so high that it was impossible to get on board. In this extremity the carpenter threw himself out of the ship, and swam to them, in order to inform them to what hardships those left in the vessel were reduced, and they sent him back with orders for them to make rafts, by tying the planks together, and endeavour on these to reach the shallop and skiff; but before this could be done, the weather became so rough that the captain was obliged to return, leaving, with the utmost grief, his lieutenant and seventy men on the very point of perishing on board the vessel. Those who were got on the little island were not in a much better condition, for, upon taking an account of their water, they found they had not above 40 gallons for 40 people, and on the larger island, where there were 120, their stock was still less. Those on

the little island began to murmur, and to complain of their officers, because they did not go in search of water, in the islands that were within sight of them, and they represented the necessity of this to Captain Pelsart, who agreed to their request, but insisted before he went to communicate his design to the rest of the people; they consented to this, but not till the captain had declared that, without the consent of the company on the large island, he would, rather than leave them, go and perish on board the ship. When they were got pretty near the shore, he who commanded the boat told the captain that if he had anything to say, he must cry out to the people, for that they would not suffer him to go out of the boat. The captain immediately attempted to throw himself overboard in order to swim to the island. Those who were in the boat prevented him; and all that he could obtain from them was, to throw on shore his table-book, in which he wrote a line or two to inform them that he was gone in the skiff to look for water in the adjacent islands.

He accordingly coasted them all with the greatest care, and found in most of them considerable quantities of water in the holes of the rocks, but so mixed with the sea-water that it was unfit for use; and therefore they were obliged to go farther. The first thing they did was to make a deck to their boat, because they found it was impracticable to navigate those seas in an open vessel. Some of the crew joined them by the time the work was finished; and the captain having obtained a paper, signed by all his men, importing that it was their desire that he should go in search of water, he immediately put to sea, having first taken an

observation by which he found they were in the latitude of 28 degrees 13 minutes south. They had not been long at sea before they had sight of the continent, which appeared to them to lie about sixteen miles north by west from the place they had suffered shipwreck. They found about twenty-five or thirty fathoms water; and as night drew on, they kept out to sea; and after midnight stood in for the land, that they might be near the coast in the morning. On the 9th of June they found themselves as they reckoned, about three miles from the shore; on which they plied all that day, sailing sometimes north, sometimes west; the country appearing low, naked, and the coast excessively rocky; so that they thought it resembled the country near Dover. At last they saw a little creek, into which they were willing to put, because it appeared to have a sandy bottom; but when they attempted to enter it, the sea ran so high that they were forced to desist.

On the 10th they remained on the same coast, plying to and again, as they had done the day before; but the weather growing worse and worse, they were obliged to abandon their shallop, and even throw part of their breath overboard, because it hindered them from clearing themselves of the water, which their vessel began to make very fast. That night it rained most terribly, which, though it gave them much trouble, afforded them hopes that it would prove a great relief to the people they had left behind them on the islands. The wind began to sink on the 11th; and as it blew from the west-south-west, they continued their course to the north, the sea running still so high that it was impossible to approach the shore. On the 12th, they had an

observation, by which they found themselves in the latitude of 27 degrees; they sailed with a south-east wind all that day along the coast, which they found so steep that there was no getting on shore, inasmuch as there was no creek or low land without the rocks, as is commonly observed on seacoasts; which gave them the more pain because within land the country appeared very fruitful and pleasant. They found themselves on the 13th in the latitude of 25 degrees 40 minutes; by which they discovered that the current set to the north. They were at this time over against an opening; the coast lying to the north-east, they continued a north course, but found the coast one continued rock of red colour all of a height, against which the waves broke with such force that it was impossible for them to land.

The wind blew very fresh in the morning on the 14th, but towards noon it fell calm; they were then in the height of 24 degrees, with a small gale at east, but the tide still carried them further north than they desired, because their design was to make a descent as soon as possible; and with this view they sailed slowly along the coast, till, perceiving a great deal of smoke at a distance, they rowed towards it as fast as they were able, in hopes of finding men, and water, of course. When they came near the shore, they found it so steep, so full of rocks, and the sea beating over them with such fury, that it was impossible to land. Six of the men, however, trusting to their skill in swimming, threw themselves into the sea and resolved to get on shore at any rate, which with great difficulty and danger they at last effected, the boat remaining at anchor in twenty-five fathoms water. The men on shore spent the whole day in

looking for water; and while they were thus employed, they saw four men, who came up very near; but one of the Dutch sailors advancing towards them, they immediately ran away as fast as they were able, so that they were distinctly seen by those in the boat. These people were black savages, quite naked, not having so much as any covering about their middle. The sailors, finding no hopes of water on all the coast, swam on board again, much hurt and wounded by their being beat by the waves upon the rocks; and as soon as they were on board, they weighed anchor, and continued their course along the shore, in hopes of finding some better landing-place.

On the 25th, in the morning, they discovered a cape, from the point of which there ran a ridge of rocks a mile into the sea, and behind it another ridge of rocks. They ventured between them, as the sea was pretty calm; but finding there was no passage, they soon returned. About noon they saw another opening, and the sea being still very smooth, they entered it, though the passage was very dangerous, inasmuch as they had but two feet water, and the bottom full of stones, the coast appearing a flat sand for about a mile. As soon as they got on shore they fell to digging in the sand, but the water that came into their wells was so brackish that they could not drink it, though they were on the very point of choking for thirst. At last, in the hollows of the rocks, they met with considerable quantities of rainwater, which was a great relief to them, since they had been for some days at no better allowance than a pint a-piece. They soon furnished themselves in the night with about eighty gallons, perceiving, in the place where they

landed, that the savages had been there lately, by a large heap of ashes and the remains of some cray-fish.

On the 16th, in the morning, they returned on shore, in hopes of getting more water, but were disappointed; and having now time to observe the country, it gave them no great hopes of better success, even if they had travelled farther within land, which appeared a thirsty, barren plain, covered with ant-hills, so high that they looked afar off like the huts of negroes; and at the same time they were plagued with flies, and those in such multitudes that they were scarce able to defend themselves. They saw at a distance eight savages, with each a staff in his hand, who advanced towards them within musket-shot; but as soon as they perceived the Dutch sailors moving towards them, they fled as fast as they were able. It was by this time about noon, and, perceiving no appearance either of getting water, or entering into any correspondence with the natives, they resolved to go on board and continue their course towards the north, in hopes, as they were already in the latitude of 22 degrees 17 minutes, they might be able to find the river of Jacob Remmescens; but the wind veering about to the north-east, they were not able to continue longer upon that coast, and therefore reflecting that they were now above one hundred miles from the place where they were shipwrecked, and had scarce as much water as would serve them in their passage back, they came to a settled resolution of making the best of their way to Batavia, in order to acquaint the Governor-General with their misfortunes, and to obtain such assistance as was necessary to get their people off the coast.