

**FITZROY'S 1839 NARRATIVE
(THE AUSTRALIAN SECTION)**

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VOYAGES

OF THE

ADVENTURE AND BEAGLE.

VOLUME II.

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NARRATIVE
OF THE
SURVEYING VOYAGES
OF HIS MAJESTY'S SHIPS
ADVENTURE AND BEAGLE,
BETWEEN
THE YEARS 1826 AND 1836,
DESCRIBING THEIR
EXAMINATION OF THE SOUTHERN SHORES
OF
SOUTH AMERICA,
AND
THE BEAGLE'S CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF THE GLOBE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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1839.

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VOLUME II.
PROCEEDINGS
OF
THE SECOND EXPEDITION,
1831—1836,
UNDER THE COMMAND OF
CAPTAIN ROBERT FITZ-ROY, R.N.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

North Cape of New Zealand — Superstitions — Cook's great Lizard—Traditions — Currents — Thermometer — Sydney — Dr. Darwin — Drought—Aqueduct — Position— Disadvantages—Ill-acquired wealth of Convicts, or Emancipists — Hobart Town — Advantages of Van Diemen's Land—King George Sound — Natives — Dance — Keeling Islands — Tides — Soundings — Coral formations — Malays—Fish—Weather— Mauritius—Cape of Good Hope—St. Helena—Ascension—Bahia — Pernambuco — Cape Verde Islands—Azores — Arrive in England.

ON the last day of this year (1835) we passed the north cape of New Zealand, and steered for Port Jackson. It has been said that the New Zealanders entertain vague ideas about the spirits of their dead hovering near this north cape. I had no opportunity of inquiring into this superstition, but as other authorities besides Cook mention it, no doubt there is some such belief among those who have not acquired different notions from foreigners. To my mind it is interesting in two points of view; one, as showing their belief in a future state of existence; and the other, as indicating the quarter whence New Zealand was first peopled; for it appears to be an impression common to many savage nations, that their souls should go to the land of their ancestors. This is particularly remarkable among the South American aborigines. It is not easy to imagine any motive for the New Zealanders supposing that spirits hover about the North Cape, in preference to any other promontory of New Zealand, unless in connexion with the idea that from the point nearest to the country whence those people formerly migrated, the souls of the deceased would, after a time perhaps, depart to their permanent abode.

In taking leave of this interesting country I will refer to Cook once more, for a curious notice, given in his third voyage, respecting great lizards in New Zealand, which have not, so far as I am aware, been lately described, or even met with. 'Taweiharooa' gave an account of snakes and lizards of an enormous size: "he describes the latter as being eight feet in length,

and as big round as a man's body. He said that they sometimes seize and devour men; that they burrow in the ground; and that they are killed by making fires at the mouths of the holes. We could not be mistaken as to the animal; for, with his own hand, he drew a very good representation of a lizard on a piece of paper; as also of a snake, in order to show what he meant."—(Cook's third Voyage, chap. VII.) Perhaps this huge kind of lizard has become extinct; but it is possible that it yet exists on the southern (or middle) island. In its burrowing we are reminded of the great lizard, or iguana, of the Galapagos Islands; but the assertion that it sometimes seizes men seems to refer to an alligator, or crocodile. Cook heard of it shortly after leaving Queen Charlotte Sound, from a native of the southern large island.* If such a reptile ever existed upon the northern island it must have been exterminated by the earliest aboriginal settlers, as they have now no tradition of any animals except dogs, pigs, rats, mice, and small lizards. Pigs and dogs, say the natives, were brought from the north, in canoes.

On New Year's day, while in sight of the islets called Three Kings, we passed through several tide 'races,' one of which was rather 'heavy,' and would have been impassable for a boat. These races moved towards the north while we could trace their progress. The temperature of the water fell six degrees after passing through the principal one. Next day, at noon, we found that during the past twenty-four hours we had been set as many miles southward (S.S.E.), and hence I am inclined to infer that we were influenced by regular tide-streams, rather than by currents setting always in one direction. To the succeeding day at noon (3d) we were set only seven miles, by the water, and that due east. Afterwards, in our passage to Port Jackson, we

had alternately northerly and south-easterly currents of about ten miles a day, and it was easy to tell which current we were in, by the temperature of the sea:—while the stream set from the north, the water thermometer showed about 72°; but when the current

* At New Zealand the southern large island is usually called the Middle Island.

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was running from the southward, the temperature of the ocean, a foot below, as well as at, the surface,* was only 67°. I ought to have remarked elsewhere, if I have not already done so, that the thermometer may be used at sea to detect and trace currents; but little, if any, confidence can be placed in its indications as a guide to the approach of land. Icebergs may indeed affect it, but they will affect the temperature of the air probably sooner than that of the ocean.

Near midnight, on the 11th, we saw the red, revolving light of Sydney Light-house, and next day entered Port Jackson, and anchored in Sydney Cove. Much as I had heard of the progress and importance of this place, my astonishment was indeed great, when I saw a well-built city covering the country near the port. Not many days previously I had been reading the account of Governor Phillip's voyage to Botany Bay in 1787–8, and little did I think that, in forty-eight years from the first discovery of Port Jackson, a city, upon a large scale, could have arisen out of a wilderness so near our antipodes. In the account just mentioned it is stated that "from a piece of clay imported from Sydney Cove, Mr. Wedgwood caused a medallion to be modelled, representing Hope, encouraging Art and Labour, under the influence of Peace, to pursue the means of giving security and happiness to the infant settlement. The following lines, in allusion to this medallion, were written by Dr. Darwin."

"Where Sydney Cove her lucid bosom swells,
Courts her young navies and the storm repels,
High on a rock, amid the troubled air,
Hope stood sublime, and wav'd her golden hair;
Calm'd with her rosy smile the tossing deep,
And with sweet accents charm'd the winds to sleep;
To each wild plain, she stretch'd her snowy hand,
High-waving wood, and sea-encircled strand.
'Hear me,' she cried, 'ye rising realms! Record
Time's opening scenes, and Truth's unerring word.—
There shall broad streets their stately walls extend,
The circus widen, and the crescent bend;

* For no difference could be detected, under ordinary circumstances.

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There ray'd from cities o'er the cultur'd land,
Shall bright canals, and solid roads expand.—
There the proud arch, Colossus-like, bestride
Yon glittering streams, and bound the chasing tide;
Embellish'd villas crown the landscape scene,
Farms wave with gold, and orchards blush between.—
There shall tall spires, and dome-capt towers ascend,
And piers and quays their massy structures blend;
While with each breeze approaching vessels glide,
And northern treasures dance on every tide!
Here ceased the nymph—tumultuous echoes roar,
And Joy's loud voice was heard from shore to shore—
Her graceful steps descending press'd the plain;
And Peace, and Art, and Labour, join'd her train."

When I was at Sydney in 1836, all that was foretold in this allegory had come to pass, with one exception only, that of canals. It was always a country comparatively dry; and unfortunately the more wood is cleared away, the drier both climate and soil become, therefore it is unlikely that canals should ever be made there. This want of fresh water is the only drawback to the future prosperity of this mushroom city; which is now dependent upon a supply brought through iron pipes from a distance of several leagues. Mr. Busby, father of the resident at New Zealand, was the projector and executor of this aqueduct, but,—like many other really valuable things,—his useful work as ably planned as it was perseveringly carried on against uncommon difficulties, is but little appreciated, even by those who daily drink the pure water which it supplies.

It is difficult to believe that Sydney will continue to flourish in proportion to its rise. It has sprung into existence too suddenly. Convicts have forced its growth, even as a hotbed forces plants, and premature decay may be expected from such early maturity. Other rising colonies have advantages in point of situation and climate, which the country about Sydney does not possess; and if our government establishment should be withdrawn, from that day the decline of the city would commence, because its natural advantages are not sufficient to enable it to compete with other places in those regions,

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excepting while fostered by the presence of regularly paid government officers, troops, and a large convict establishment.

There must be great difficulty in bringing up a family well in that country, in consequence of the demoralizing influence of convict servants, to which almost all children must be more or less exposed. Besides, literature is at a low ebb: most people are anxious about active farming, or commercial pursuits, which leave little leisure for reflection, or for reading more than those fritterers of the mind—daily newspapers and ephemeral trash. It was quite remarkable to see how few booksellers' shops there were in Sydney, and what a low class of books — with some exceptions — was to be found in them. These few exceptions were the works usually called 'standard,' which some persons who buy books, for show as furniture, rather than for real use, think it necessary to purchase. Another evil in the social system of Sydney and its vicinity, is the rancorous feeling which exists between the descendants of free settlers and the children of convicts. Fatal, indeed, would it be to the former, if the arm of power were removed; for their high principles and good feelings would be no match for the wiles and atrocities of such abandoned outcasts as are there congregated, and almost rejoice in their iniquity. Money is gained by such people by any and every means, save those of honest industry. By selling spirits, frequently drugged—by theft—by receiving and selling stolen goods—by the wages of iniquity—and by exorbitant usury—fortunes have been amassed there in a few years which would make an honest man's hair stand on end. But do such men enjoy their wealth? Does it benefit them or their children? No. Their life is a miserable scene of anxiety, care, fear, and generally penuriousness; they die without a friend and without hope.

The Beagle sailed from Sydney on the 30th, and anchored off Hobart Town (or Hobarton) on the 5th of February. The change of scene was as striking as a view of Gibraltar or Madeira after leaving the Downs. Comparatively speaking, near Sydney all was light-coloured and level; while in Van Diemen's Land we almost thought ourselves in another Tierra

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del Fuego. But this was only a first impression, on a blustering wet day. Fields of ripe corn, dotted, as it were, about the hilly woodlands, told us that the climate must generally be favourable; and the number of red brick cottages, thickly scattered about, though apparently at random, proved an extent of population incompatible with an unproductive place.

During a few days' stay in Sullivan Cove, the chief anchorage, we had opportunities of going to some distance into the country, and seeing things which led me to think that there is a more solid foundation for future prosperity in Van Diemen's Land than can be found near Sydney. Natural advantages are greater; and likely to increase as the country is cleared and inhabited—because rain is now almost too plentiful, though corn ripens well and is of excellent quality. As a convict colony, it of course partakes of the evils I have mentioned; but it does so in a far less degree, partly because the convicts sent there were of a less profligate and more reclaimable class than those landed at Sydney, and partly because an excellent local government restrained the licentious, and encouraged the moral to a far greater extent than was, or perhaps could be effected among the more numerous and dispersed population of Sydney and its environs.

On the 17th, we sailed out of the picturesque Derwent, an arm of the sea extending inland many miles beyond Hobart Town, and thence worked our way southward round the Land of Van Diemen. We then steered westward, or as much so as the contrary winds would admit, until we made the land off King George Sound on the 6th of March; and a few hours afterwards moored in the principal anchorage, called Princess Royal Harbour; a wide but shallow place, with a very narrow entrance. The country round King George Sound has a dull, uniform aspect; there are no mountains or rivers;* few trees are visible; white, sandy patches; scrubby bushes; bare masses of granite; and a slightly undulating outline meet and disappoint the eye of a stranger.

* Unless a few brackish, indeed salt-water, brooks can be termed rivers.

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A few straggling houses, ill-placed in an exposed, cheerless situation, were seen by us as we entered the harbour; and had inclination been our guide, instead of duty, I certainly should have felt much disposed to 'put the helm up,' and make all sail away from such an uninviting place.

Next day, however, we found that appearances were worse than the reality; for behind a hill, which separates the harbour from the sound, a thick wood was discovered, where there were many trees of considerable size; and in the midst of this wood I found Sir Richard Spencer's house, much resembling a small but comfortable farm-house in England. This sort of isolated residence has a charm for some minds; but the loss of society, the numerous privations, and the vastly retrograde step necessarily taken in civilized existence by emigrating to perfectly new countries, are I think stronger objections to the plan than usually occur to persons who have not seen its consequences in actual operation.

At this time there were about thirty houses, or cottages, in the neighbourhood of the sound and harbour; some had small gardens; but, generally speaking, there was no appearance of agriculture, excepting immediately around Sir Richard's house, where a few fields had been cleared and cultivated in the midst of the wood.

There is an extraordinary degree of local magnetic attraction about this place. We could not ascertain the amount of variation with any degree of accuracy until our compasses were placed upon a sandy beach of considerable extent, near the sea. Wherever there was stone (a kind of granite) near the instruments, they were so much affected as to vary many degrees from the truth, and quite irregularly: those on board were not influenced, at least not more than a degree. We were also perplexed by the irregular and peculiar tides; but as they are mentioned elsewhere, I will refrain from farther remark on them here.

We had a good opportunity of seeing several of the aborigines; for not only were there unusual numbers of neighbouring natives then about the settlement, but a strange tribe,

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called 'Cocotu,' had lately arrived from a distance, and as the residents wished to conciliate them, a 'corobbery' was proposed, and Mr. Darwin ensured the compliance of all the savages by providing an immense mess of boiled rice, with sugar, for their entertainment.

About two hours after dark the affair began. Nearly all the settlers, and their visitors, had assembled on a level place just outside the village, while the native men belonging to both tribes were painting, or rather daubing and spotting their soot-coloured bodies with a white pigment, as they clustered round blazing fires. When all was ready—the fires burning brightly—the gloom at a little distance intense, by contrast, and the spectators collected together—a heavy tramp shook the ground, and a hundred prancing demon-like figures emerged from the darkness, brandishing their weapons, stamping together in exact accordance, and making hoarse guttural sounds at each exertion. It was a fiendish sight, almost too disagreeable to be interesting. What pains savage man takes—in all parts of the world where he is found—to degrade his nature; that beautiful combination which is capable of so much intelligence and noble exertion when civilized and educated. While watching the vagaries of these performers, I could not but think of our imprudence in putting ourselves so

completely into their power: about thirty unarmed men being intermixed with a hundred armed natives. The dancers were all men; a short kangaroo-skin cloak was thrown about their hips, and white feathers were stuck round their heads: many were not painted, but those who were had similar figures on their breasts; some a cross, others something like a heart. Many had spears, and all had the 'throwing-stick'; and a kind of hatchet,* in a girdle round the waist. Much of the dancing was monotonous enough, after the first appearance, reminding me of persons working in a treadmill; but their imitation of snakes, and

* This hatchet is made of two pieces of stone, joined together by a lump of gum, almost as hard as the stone: it is used for notching trees, that the men may climb after opossums.

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kangaroos, in a kind of hunting dance, was exceedingly good and interesting. The whole exhibition lasted more than an hour, during most of which time upwards of a hundred savages were exerting themselves in jumping and stamping as if their lives depended on their energetic movements. There was a boy who appeared to be idiotic, or afflicted with a kind of fit; but the man who was holding him seemed to be quite unconcerned about his convulsive efforts, saying, "by and bye he would be a doctor" (as I was told by a resident who understood the language), which reminded me of what Falkner says of the Patagonians.* After the corobbery the natives collected round the house where the feast was preparing; and it will not be easy to forget the screams of delight that burst from old and young as they looked in at the door and saw the tub in which their rice was smoking. Before the food was distributed they were told to sit down, which they immediately did, in a circle round the house. They separated, of their own accord, into families, each little party lighting a small fire before them. Their behaviour, and patience, were very remarkable and pleasing. One family had a native dog, which in size, colour, and shape, was like a fox, excepting that the nose was not quite so sharp, nor the tail so bushy.

Most of the aborigines had rather good countenances, and well-formed heads, as compared with those about Sydney, or in Van Diemen's land. The lathy thinness of their persons, which seemed totally destitute of fat, and almost without flesh, is very remarkable. I have since seen some drawings of South African aborigines, executed under the critical eye of Doctor Andrew Smith, by the correct hand of Mr. Charles Bell, which are so like the natives who live near King George Sound in colour, as well as countenance, and extraordinary shape, that they might be taken for full-length portraits of the latter instead of Africans.

Many of these natives have features smaller and less marked than are usual among savages; but their foreheads are higher and more full: they are not tall, few exceeding five feet eight

* Page 163.

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inches in height: and the women are wretched objects. Some of the men had pieces of bone stuck through the cartilage of the nose, which, I heard, was to prevent their being killed by another tribe, who were seeking to revenge the death of one of their own party. I was told also, that when any death occurs in one tribe, the first individual of another that is encountered is sacrificed by the bereaved party, if strong enough; but I suspect my informant confused revenge for manslaughter with the strange story—that for every death in one tribe, however caused, a life must be taken from another. Should it be true, however, the scarcity of aboriginal population would have an explanation in addition to those which various writers

have given. These natives bury their dead in a short grave; the body being laid on its side, with the knees drawn up to the chin.

During our stay at this place we caught plenty of fish, of twenty different kinds, with a seine; yet with such an abundant supply close at hand, the settlers were living principally on salt provisions.

Before quitting King George Sound I must add my slight testimony to the skill and accuracy with which Flinders laid down and described those parts of New Holland and Van Die-men's Land that I have seen. His accounts also of wind, weather, climate, currents, and tides, are excellent; and there are other points of information in his large work, useful to many, but especially to seamen, which would be well worth separating from the technicalities among which they are almost lost in the present cumbersome volumes.

March 13th. We sailed, and advanced towards Cape Leuwin, but it was the 18th before our little ship was sufficiently far westward of that promontory to steer for my next object, the Keeling Islands.

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