



History of Australia and New Zealand

Alex Sutherland

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EXCERPT:

To the people who lived four centuries ago in Europe only a very small portion of the earth's surface was known. Their geography was confined to the regions lying immediately around the Mediterranean, and including Europe, the north of Africa, and the west of Asia. Round these there was a margin, obscurely and imperfectly described in the reports of merchants; but by far the greater part of the world was utterly unknown. Great realms of darkness stretched all beyond, and closely hemmed in the little circle of light. In these unknown lands our ancestors loved to picture everything that was strange and mysterious. They believed that the man who could penetrate far enough would find countries where inexhaustible riches were to be gathered without toil from fertile shores, or marvellous valleys; and though wild tales were told of the dangers supposed to fill these regions, yet to the more daring and adventurous these only made the visions of boundless wealth and enchanting loveliness seem more fascinating.

Thus, as the art of navigation improved, and long voyages became possible, courageous seamen were tempted to venture out into the great unknown expanse. Columbus carried his trembling sailors over great tracts of unknown ocean, and discovered the two continents of America; Vasco di Gama penetrated far to the south, and rounded the Cape of Good Hope; Magellan, passing through the straits now called by his name, was the first to enter the Pacific Ocean; and so in the case of a hundred others, courage and skill carried the hardy seaman over many seas and into many lands that had lain unknown for ages.

Australia was the last part of the world to be thus visited and explored. In the year 1600, during the times of Shakespeare, the region to the south of the East Indies was still as little known as ever; the rude maps of those days had only a great blank where the islands of Australia should have been. Most people thought there was nothing but the ocean in that part of the world; and as the voyage was dangerous and very long—requiring several years for its completion—scarcely any one cared to run the risk of exploring it.

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