

THE EXPLORATION OF AUSTRALIA.

"How Australia was discovered and explored," was the title of a lecture delivered yesterday evening in the Athenaeum, by the Rev. Julian E. Tenison Woods, F.L.S., F.G.S. The fame of the lecturer, together with the interest of the subject, attracted a large attendance. Mr. W. H. Archer was in the chair.

The Rev. Father Woods, who was very heartily received, said that a great historian had remarked that everyone should at least know the history of his own country. There were few countries indeed which did not interest their own people—perhaps the only exceptions being those countries which might be said to have yet hardly developed a history of their own. If he were to ask who the discoverer of Australia was, there was not a single person in the room who could answer the question, he did not know himself. It was believed at one time that Torres, who in 1605 passed through Torres Straits and saw land to the South, was the discoverer; but it had been ascertained since that there were earlier discoveries or explorations of Australia. A Spanish navigator, D'Eredia, in 1601 passed through Torres Straits, a fact which was proved by documents still in existence, and in these documents references were made to even earlier explorations. Who the discoverers were was not known, but there was a map in the British Museum, dated about 1542, which showed land somewhat of the shape of Australia, and in about the same latitude and longitude. Recently a still earlier map, dated 1531, had been discovered or purchased by the trustees of the Museum, in which a distinct outline of Australia was shown. The map was drawn by a celebrated geographer of the time, and names were given on the map in a language which at first was supposed to be Portuguese, but which more extensive research proved to be Provençal. A French navigator, De la Testu, was supposed to be the discoverer, from certain circumstances, but the map was dated 1531, and De la Testu did not appear in any record until 20 years later.

The object of the lecture, however, was rather to direct attention to the way in which Australia was explored, and he purposed to divide the subject into two parts—first, the coast exploration; and, secondly, the exploration of the interior, which really formed the true history of this country. After the Spanish and Portuguese discoveries, the Dutch, in trading to Java, were sometimes carried by the currents out of their course, and made acquaintance with the western coast of Australia not unfrequently by being wrecked on the coral reefs there. The Gulf of Carpentaria was explored by an expedition sent out under the Dutch East India Company, and in the reign of James II the northwest coast was visited by Dampier. The northern coast of Australia, near Port Darwin, was touched at by different explorers, whose names were preserved in the archives of the Dutch E. I. Company. Australia was believed at that time to be a desert land, inhabited by savages fierce and intractable. The country might, in fact, be said to be unexplored until the middle of the last century, when Captain Cook was sent out on a scientific expedition into the Pacific Ocean. Cook visited New Zealand and Tasmania (called after Tasman, who touched there in 1644), and then coasted along the eastern portion of Australia, making such careful surveys that

even up to the present time no improvements had been made in some of them. He reached as far as the Endeavour River, where he was shipwrecked, but he managed to beach the vessel and repair it.

In 1788 an expedition was sent out under Governor Phillip to form a penal settlement at Botany Bay. That place, however, was found to be unsuitable, and Phillip coasted northwards until he reached the entrance to Port Jackson, and he established his settlement on the site where Sydney now stands. Beyond the discovery of the Hunter River, with the deposit of coal on its banks, nothing much was done in exploration until Surgeon Bass and Midshipman Flinders, of the transport *Reliance*, arrived. These two were perhaps the most adventurous explorers that Australia ever had anything to do with. Their first expedition was made in a small boat, in which they explored the coast as far as Twofold Bay. They underwent many difficulties and dangers, encountering a terrible storm outside Sydney Heads, but at length arrived back in safety. Bass afterwards in a whaleboat, with a crew of eight convicts, discovered that Tasmania was an island, and not, as was previously supposed, a portion of the mainland. He came as far as Western Port.

Flinders, in a small sloop, explored the north-eastern coast of Australia, and discovered Moreton Bay. He afterwards, in the *Investigator*, discovered and explored the Great Australian Bight—one of the most remarkable geological features of the country. For over 300 miles extended one unbroken coast line of fossiliferous rocks, rising from 300 to 1000 feet sheer from the water's edge. Flinders reached Port Phillip, previously explored by Grant and continued a course around the coast! He also explored the Gulf of Carpentaria. His later career was a melancholy one. He was captured and detained for many years a prisoner at the Mauritius, and the glory of his discoveries was appropriated by Admiral Baudin, a French officer whom he had met whilst near the Australian Bight. Flinders regained his liberty, and wrote a book on his discoveries, but died broken-hearted on the day it was to be published.

The exploration of the interior of Australia was a more interesting chapter in the history of the country than the coast exploration. The early settlers were hemmed in by the impassable barrier presented by the Blue Mountains. Various attempts were made to cross them but without success for many years

In 1812 and 1813 unfavourable seasons occurred and the very existence of the colony depended upon new pasture lands for the herds being discovered. In 1813 three explorers—Wentworth, Lawson and Blaxland—started and after almost incredible difficulties succeeded in crossing the Range and reached the country now known as the Macquarie Plains. They discovered two rivers, one flowing NW and the other SW which were called after the Governor of the colony the Lachlan and the Macquarie. These were supposed to have their exit in an inland lake and many attempts were made to solve the problem. Oxley the Surveyor General, in a season of extraordinary rain explored the Lachlan and the inundation caused by the river overflowing its banks appeared to him to prove that the theory of the inland lake as true indeed. He afterwards explored the Macquarie also in a wet season and after passing Mount Harris found that the river lost its channel and disappeared in an immense forest of reeds. He cut his way into them for three days with great difficulty and then believed he had ascertained that there was in fact an inland sea in the centre of Australia. In 1827 Captain Sturt who succeeded Oxley, and who doubted the

existence of the inland sea went on an exploration in a very dry season He found the Macquarie to be dry and instead of a marsh of reeds the outer edge of the inland sea he saw a sandy desert with the reeds there it is true but no water He pushed on and came at last to the Darling of which the Macquarie was a tributary.

He found the Darling to be in some places salt and in others fresh, the fact being that there were salt springs in the bed of the river. Sturt continued to explore the Darling as far as his means would permit but at last he was obliged to return. The question of where those rivers flowed was not yet solved. It was discovered that the Lachlan was a tributary of the Murrumbidgee and in 1830 Sturt again set out, well equipped to explore this latter river. After many difficulties he reached its junction with the Murray, and pursued his way down that river which still flowed in a north westerly direction He came to the point where the Darling joined the Murray and continuing on found at length that the river turned to the south His hopes that he would find an exit into the sea were disappointed for he discovered that it flowed into a large fresh water lake and that there was only a very narrow outlet with a large bar across the mouth This explained how the outlet had not been found in the previous surveys of the southern coast The journey back up the Murray exhibited the heroic perseverance of Sturt and his comrades

About 1835 settlement was proceeding in South Australia, and Mr Eyre commenced a series of explorations He explored the northern range, and ascertained that the range did not traverse the continent as supposed, but ended in one of the most remarkable districts of the world, geographically speaking. The range ended in a series of salt lakes, and from Mount Searle, the last of the range, might be seen vast plains of salt white as snow. In 1840, Eyre started on his celebrated expedition overland from South Australia to King George's Sound, following the line of the Great Australian Bight. The sufferings and privations he underwent were almost beyond belief. The country was a sandy desert, without grass and almost without water. He travelled sometimes for seven days without finding water, but at length, after incredible hardships, and after losing his companion Baxter, who was murdered by two natives who accompanied him, he reached Albany.

The lecturer, after describing the heart-breaking efforts of Sturt to cross the Sandy and Stony Deserts, and after referring to the expeditions of Mitchell, Kennedy, Leichhardt, and Gregory in Northern Queensland, proceeded to relate the story of the memorable and disastrous attempt to cross the continent which culminated in the death of Burke and Wills. He gave credit to the colony of Victoria, which had the least to gain, for the lead it took in that expedition. No expense was spared to render it successful. The command was given to Burke, who had had no experience as an explorer, but whatever his lack of experience might have been, no one could say that he showed any want of courage, energy, or perseverance. He was accompanied by one of the most eminent men who ever took part in Australian exploration—Wills, who was at one time an assistant at the Williamstown Observatory. They were successful in reaching the Gulf of Carpentaria, but on their return they experienced a series of disasters. Gray, the weakest of the party, died first. Burke, Wills, and King, pressed on, upheld with the hope of reaching the depot; but how great was their disappointment when they arrived and found the depot abandoned; the depot had only been abandoned that very day, and it afterwards transpired that the depot party camped within four miles of the unfortunate explorers. Unhappily, Burke did not follow their tracks, but decided to strike

direct down the Barcoo towards the settled districts. Their strength was not sufficient for the journey, and after great hardships, first Wills lay calmly down to die, recording in his diary, as his life ebbed away, the experiences of his last hours; and then Burke succumbed, and also passed away during the night. King received aid from the blacks, and was afterwards recovered by the relief party. Burke and Wills, at the cost of their lives, showed that the centre of Australia was not all desert, and that communication could be opened up from north to south.

The lecturer also briefly described the gallant expeditions of Stuart, who, after more than one unavailing attempt, succeeded in crossing the continent in its broadest part. To Stuart's explorations must be attributed the success which attended the great achievement of recent Australian history, the crossing of the continent by the telegraph wire. He had been obliged to pass over the expeditions of many eminent explorers, but the subject was too large for the dimensions of one brief lecture. Well might these explorers be called the heroes of our history, and our admiration was due to them for the heroic way in which they had sacrificed themselves. He hoped that in the future history of this country those who came after might prove themselves worthy of those who had gone before. The rev. lecturer resumed his seat amidst loud and continued applause.

On the motion of Dr. Brownless, seconded by the Rev. Father O'Malley, a vote of thanks was accorded to the Rev. Father Woods for his admirable lecture.

A vote of thanks to the chairman concluded the proceedings.