FRANCE AND AUSTRALIA.

THE "PRISE DE POSSESSION."

A NEW CHAPTER IN OUR EARLY HISTORY.

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When Ernest Scott, Professor of History in the University of Melbourne, was working on his *Life of Flinders*, he employed a copyist to obtain material from the Paris archives. The copyist found so much about Australia that the charges mounted very high. So Professor Scott pointed out to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library and the Mitchell Library that they ought to have copies of these valuable historical documents. The authorities agreed, and the cost of Professor Scott's material was one-third of what it would otherwise have been.

This partial overhaul of the Paris archives by an intelligent copyist has thrown a flood of light on the early relations of France and Australia. An examination of the papers in the Commonwealth Library, made by the courtesy of the Speaker, reveals the hitherto unpublished fact that a French expedition did, in 1772, take formal possession of Western Australia.

It is not in France alone that material may be found. Hidden away in some dusty corner in Portugal, Spain, or possibly Holland, there may be documents which upset accepted ideas about the obscure but fascinating subject of early exploration in Australasian regions. For the history

*Owing to the Shipping Strike, the Meeting of the A.A.A.S., which was to have been held in Hobart in January, had to be held in Melbourne. Many difficulties had to be overcome, and it was found impossible to publish the usual full report of the A.A.A.S. Meeting and to print all papers. Arrangements were therefore made for certain papers to be read before the Society and published in the Papers and Proceedings for 1921.

of the early days of settlement, too, there may be valuable material awaiting research. American vessels played a great part in the early trade of Australasia, and in the whaling and sealing which were the greatest industries of those days. In the twenty years from 1792 to 1812 over fifty American vessels called at Sydney, while many others visited Australasian waters without going to Sydney. There may be much of Australian interest in the ships' logs and other records of the old New England whaling towns. Even Russia is not too far afield to have possibilities. Several Russian expeditions visited Australia in the early days, including that of Bellingshausen, one of the greatest of Antarctic explorers, who paid two visits to Sydney in 1820.

THE FEAR OF FRANCE.

France might have been a serious rival for the possession of Australia. To a large extent the early history of Australia was shaped by the fear of French rivalry. This fear caused the founding of the first settlements in Tasmania, in Western Australia, and in tropical Australia. It led to the sending of Collins' Expedition to Port Phillip in 1803, and to the temporary settlement of Westernport in 1826.

French interest in the South Seas goes back to a date nearly a century before the first British Settlement. From 1699 onwards projects for exploration and colonisation in the far South were continually being put forward in France. Two years after Cook had taken formal possession of the Eastern part of Australia for Great Britain a similar ceremony was carried out on the Western Coast on behalf of France.

DE VOUTRON'S VOYAGE OF 1687.

Just as the voyage of Cook was but the greatest of a series of English voyages to the South Seas of which the earlier ones are now almost forgotten, so French interests in the New World of the South by no means began with Marion's voyage of 1772. Take, for instance, the letter which de Voutron, a French sea captain, wrote to the Minister for Marine from La Rochelle on February 10, 1699. In this he offers to lead an expedition to explore, with a view to colonisation, that part of the Terres Australes called by the Dutch New Holland. He states that he and his brother-in-law, Duquesne, had sighted this land in 1687 while on a voyage to Siam. They made their land fall in latitude 31 deg. south (a little to the north of the Swan

River), and coasted the country for some distance, keeping two or three leagues off shore, and finding an open sea, though such charts of this region as they had showed a mass of rocks and reefs extending for 12 or 15 leagues out to sea. "According to appearance the lands are habitable and im- "portant," wrote De Voutron. He asserted that the Dutch knew much more of this country than they chose to tell, and states that their pilot had been strictly forbidden on pain of punishment to give to foreigners any information about these coasts. He asked for two vessels of medium size and a smaller craft for use in shallow water, and mentioned the end of April or the beginning of May as the best time for an exploring expedition to set out from France. De Voutron urged that a port on the Australian coast would be of great value to the French trade with the far East.

On October 8, 1699, de Voutron renewed his request. His scheme was backed by one Renan, who describes him as a "man of stout heart who would not be repelled by difficul- "ties, one accustomed to deep sea voyages, as he had been "several times to the Indies."

SOUTH SEA BUBBLES.

It was in this same year that the British Admiralty sent out William Dampier in the *Roebuck* to explore the Australian coast, but de Voutron was less persuasive, or less fortunate than that eminent buccaneer. Interest in de Voutron's suggestion was apparently revived a few years later. Bouvet states in a memorandum written in 1735, that but for the death of du Vivier, the Captain who was to have taken command, a French vessel would in 1708 have been sent to explore the "land discovered by Dampier."

The year 1699 was marked by a great stirring of French interest in Southern exploration. Another document of that year is a "Memorandum on the Discovery of the Terres Australes" by Saint Marie. Saint Marie accepts as correct the alleged discovery in 1503 by a Norman Sea Captain named de Gonneville of a Southern Land which he, like others, is inclined to identify with Australia. De Gonne- ville stated that he had brought back to France a native of the new-found land named Essomeric, a chief's son, who settled in France and founded a family there. But even in France the de Gonneville story found critics. In a docu- ment written in 1738 Bernard de la Harpe claims that the story contains contradictions and impossibilities, and con- siders it more probable that de Gonneville, if he made the

voyage at all, reached some point on the South American coast.

In a later memorandum, undated, but written after 1745, since it states that in that year the English sent two vessels, the *George* and the *California*, to seek for a north-west passage to the Pacific, de la Harpe tells us that at the beginning of the 18th century there was a very active French trade with the Pacific coast of South America. He states that between 1703 and 1720 the inhabitants of St. Malo sent ninety-two vessels to the South Pacific. One of these, the *Francois*, was commanded by Marion du Fresne, no doubt of kin to the more famous Marion who visited Tasmania and New Zealand in 1772, and was the first white man to meet the aborigines of Tasmania. This earlier Marion was at Concepcion in Chile in 1714, when the Captain of a Spanish vessel told him that 400 leagues to the west and in latitude 38 deg. south he had fallen in with a high land and coasted along it for a day. De la Harpe received without question the theory that there was a great southern continent, quite distinct of course from Australia, a belief generally held until Cook proved that such a continent, if it existed, was confined to the Antarctic regions. Of this continent New Zealand, de la Harpe thought, formed part, and he conjectured that its inhabitants had crossed from Australia or Van Diemen's Land to New Zealand. Like de Voutron, he thought that a French Settlement in these Southern lands would largely control the trade "with India, "China, and the South Seas."

While de la Harpe was sceptical, Bouvet fully accepted the de Gonneville story. Bouvet tells us that in 1734 he had, in the *Dauphin*, bound to the East Indies, run down the easting till he sighted the Australian coast, "as almost all "the English now do." He urged the planting of a colony in the Terres Australes du Saint Esprit. In 1738 Bouvet set out in two vessels to search for the great southern continent armed in a model form for taking possession. But he searched in the stormy seas southward of the Cape of Good Hope, and found only Bouvet Island. In a memorandum written in 1767, Bouvet proposed another voyage, but nothing came of it. Incidentally Bouvet complains that Bougainville had stolen his ideas.

ACADIANS FOR SOUTHERN COLONIES.

In later years the English suspected the French of designs on Australia which apparently they did not enter-

tain. In these earlier days the French sometimes thought that the English ideas about expansion in the South Seas were far more definite than was actually the case. Bougainville, writing from the Falkland Islands, apparently in 1764, says: "The views of the English about forming estab-"lishments in the South Seas and in the neighbouring coun-"tries have long been known, but it is above all since the "relation of the voyages of Anson that the English have "decided to follow seriously the execution of these views." Bougainville states that they intended to seize the Island of Juan Fernandez.

Though Bougainville did not visit Australia, he anticipated a proposal made when the British did actually begin to think of settling in Australia. It was urged by James Maria Matra in 1783 that the American Loyalists expelled from the United States should be sent as settlers to Australia. Owing to delays and to other causes the idea came to nothing, though one or two United Empire Loyalists did reach Australia. We are, for instance, told of James Reid, who came out as a superintendent of convicts in 1789, that he had been a planter in America. Bougainville's idea was to use the Acadians of Longfellow's "Evangeline," expelled from the maritime province of Canada by the English, to found a new French Colony in the far south. He wrote in 1763: "As the modest funds of the owners of the vessel "do not allow them to embark, at their own cost, large crews, "they would ask the King for forty men, half soldiers and "half Acadians. The soldiers should be men who have "served in Canada, and are therefore accustomed to live in "the woods, to rove and to traverse unknown countries. The "Acadians are sailors and fishermen, and are the more re-"commended by the strong and constant proofs of attachment "to France given since the Peace of Utrecht. They are "most suitable men for founding a flourishing settlement. "The Acadians who had made the voyage would determine "their compatriots to transfer themselves to the south."

Bougainville had served under Montcalm in Canada, and had conceived the idea of indemnifying France for her losses in the New World by calling into existence French colonies in the "third part of the world" in the south. Unluckily, he took his colonising expedition and his Acadian settlers to the Falkland Islands, the Iles Malouines of the French, and as the result of Spanish objections the French colony was withdrawn after three years.

KERGUELEN'S VOYAGES.

In the year 1772 two French expeditions visited Australasia. The story of the voyage of Marion du Fresne and Crozet from Mauritius to Tasmania and New Zealand is well known, but a strange oblivion has fallen on the activities of Saint Allouarn on the western side of Australia. The name of Saint Allouarn is preserved by an island near Cape Leeuwin, and there are one or two casual references to his voyage, but no one seems to have suspected that he actually took formal possession of part of Australia for France. Saint Allouarn was a companion of Ives Kerguelen, who had set out from France to seek for the southern continent. This was the vast continent supposed to exist in the temperate regions of the southern hemisphere, the continent whose existence Cook finally disproved, a work which he considered of far more importance than the mere charting of the east coast of "New Holland." Had Cook had a better vessel he might never have visited Australia at all.

While Cook decided in 1770 that there was not much to be found between New Zealand and the Cape of Good Hope, though he had yet to prove that no southern continent existed between New Zealand and Cape Horn, Kerguelen was in 1772 still searching for a southern continent south-east of the Cape of Good Hope. After a visit to Mauritius he sailed to the Southward on January 16, 1772, in the *Fortune*, accompanied by Saint Allouarn in command of the *Gros Ventre*, a 300 ton vessel carrying 14 guns and a crew of 105 men. On February 13, they reached Kerguelen Land, which Kerguelen named La Nouvelle France, and took to be part of the long-sought continent. Next day a storm separated the two vessels. Kerguelen returned to Mauritius, but St. Allouarn bore away for Australia. Of his voyage two accounts are preserved in the Commonwealth Library. One is the log of the *Gros Ventre*, the other the Diary of Rosily, properly an officer of Kerguelen's vessel, who was on the *Gros Ventre* by accident. He had been sent in the sloop to sound on February 14, and managed to reach the *Gros Ventre* when the storm broke. The log tells us the land near Cape Leeuwin was sighted on March 17, 1772. Next day St. Allouarn sent a boat to reconnoitre, but those in it were unable to land. They caught many fish, but saw no signs of inhabitants. The *Gros Ventre* then sailed northward along the coast, missing the Swan River, discovered in 1697

by Vlaming, until March 30. The vessel was then in latitude 25 deg. 25 min. south, or somewhere about Shark Bay.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA CLAIMED.

The log continues: "At ten o'clock this morning M. de "Saint Allouarn sent a boat with an officer to reconnoitre "this land, supported by the boat's crew and five soldiers. "They effected a landing at a bay to the south south east, "and penetrated about three leagues into the country without "seeing a living soul. This land is sandy, and covered with "bushes and small scrub, as at the Cape of Good Hope. "M. de Mings, on returning to the coast, took possession of "the land, hoisting a flag and causing a notification of the "fact that he had taken possession to be read in the form "usual in such cases. The document was put in a bottle "and buried at the foot of a little tree. Near it were put "two crowns of six francs each. In the afternoon the sloop "went on shore with many persons. They traversed a space "of three leagues without finding any one. They returned "on board in the evening. They found on land traces of "some quadrupeds, and saw a kind of little fox. At 6 o'clock "in the evening the captain sent the boat on shore to bury "one Massicot, a gunner's mate, who had died that day of "scurvy. They were to pass the night and to see if they "could catch turtles in the great bay, but none came on "shore."

The log refers to this Bay as the "Baie de Prise de "Possession." It mentions that on April 1 the vessel entered the "Baie de Bricarloge," which no doubt means the bay of Dirk Hartog, or Dirk Hartog's Road, as Vlaming calls it, the Bay in which Dirk Hartog had anchored in 1616.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COUNTRY.

Rosily was evidently one of those who went ashore at the Baie de Prise de Possession. He says that with much difficulty they climbed up a steep sand hill covered with scrub. "From the top of this," he writes, "we perceived a "landscape extending away for seven or eight leagues. The "land rose imperceptibly, and we penetrated for about two "and a half leagues inland. We saw there many burnt "trees and others where it appeared that one had set fire to "the foot of them. I do not believe that it is the heat of "the sun that sets fire to these trees, for they are very green, "and in the night there is a very heavy dew that refreshes "them and gives them nourishment. We thought that we

"saw traces of men and of children, but we could hardly "distinguish them, because of the very shifting nature of "the sand. There was in particular one place as if it "appeared that people had danced in a ring. We saw there "animals like makis (long tailed monkeys) and others like "mangoustes (the ichneumon or Pharaoh's rat), and several "birds, including a kind of goose which had difficulty in "flying, but never allowed us to approach within gun shot. "Generally speaking, all the animals that we saw were very "wild. We found no water at all. I believe that the "animals drink only at night, taking advantage of the dew. "We found on the beach thousands of little tortoises no "bigger than your hand. The persons who passed the night "in catching them saw a large animal in the shape of a "dog which was scratching in this place in a search for the "eggs of the tortoises. We caught many very good fish with "the line, but could not succeed with the seine, the shore "being very steep."

Rosily states that the *Gros Ventre* was detained for eight days before she could get out of the Bay which she entered on April 1. She lost two anchors there owing to the strength of the currents.

The *Gros Ventre* left the coast on April 11, being then in latitude 20 deg. 44 min. south, and sailed by way of Timor and Java to Mauritius, which she reached on September 5. There Francois Alesne de Saint Allouarn, who had long been grievously sick, died a few days later, at the age of thirty-five.

KERGUELEN'S DOWNFALL.

As may be judged from the remarks of Rosily, about the lack of water, and the look of the country generally, Saint Allouarn's officers were not enthusiastic about the region round Shark's Bay of which possession had been taken. Kerguelen Land, on the other hand, was for the moment looked on as part of a great continent, and a discovery of capital importance. "In two months M. Ker- "guelen has discovered for France a new world," wrote M. Poivre, the Intendant at Mauritius, on March 21, 1772, when Kerguelen had just returned. In another note, however, M. Poivre wrote, "I have the honour to observe that the cost of "these expeditions ordered by the Court should not be borne "by the Colony." There was a fear that the English would try to get hold of the new "Continent." In a memorandum dated August 2, 1772, it is urged that Kerguelen should be

sent back without waiting to see what had become of the *Gros Ventre*. "A pressing incentive," says the anonymous but apparently official writer, "is the necessity of forestalling "the English, who, on the reports spread abroad of this dis- "covery, might seek to trouble at its inception our possession "of these lands of which the Commander of the *Gros Ventre* "has probably taken possession in the name of His Majesty." This refers, of course, not to Western Australia, of which Saint Allouarn had actually taken possession, but to Kerguelen Land. Kerguelen asked for three good ships, stating that the English were equipping four for an expedition to the South Seas. After a good deal of delay he went down to Kerguelen Land again, but was so buffeted by gales and beset by the ice and snow of that inhospitable region that he ran north to Madagascar, and then to Mauritius, and reported sadly that New France "offered no resources." Perhaps he would have tried the Australian coast for a change, but wine and wassail at Port Louis led to trouble. Eventually Kerguelen was tried by a court-martial, broken, and dismissed from the Navy. A book which he wrote was suppressed, and a score of years after his voyage, in the days of the revolution, he was still seeking to make good a claim to justice. There was a new Intendant at Mauritius by the time of Kerguelen's second Expedition, one Maillart Dumesse, and he had no sympathy with these explorations. In language of a kind not unfamiliar in our own day he urged that the first consideration should be the promotion of payable enterprises. Agriculture at Mauritius should be encouraged by importing negro slaves from Mozambique and cattle from Madagascar. "Our expedition," wrote Dumesse, in complaining of Kerguelen's requisitions for supplies, "should have no other objects than blacks and beasts "(noirs et bestiaux)."

French activity in Australasian seas continued for many years after this. It is enough to mention the great voyages of La Perouse, who put into Botany Bay when Sydney was a few days old, of D'Entrecasteaux and of Baudin, with later voyagers like Dumont d'Urville. But Saint Allouarn was the first and last to claim for France a foot of the soil of Australia.