

ABEL JANSZON TASMAN:
HIS LIFE AND VOYAGES.

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BY

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P R E F A C E.

No life of the first circumnavigator of Australia has hitherto appeared in English. Nothing has been accessible to the English reader but an abstract of one voyage and a few lines in biographical dictionaries. This is scarcely surprising, when we consider how careless Tasman's own countrymen have been of his fame. Fifty years ago all that had been printed in his own country consisted of short abstracts of a few voyages, and these were hidden away in bulky collections. Even the date and place of his birth were matter for conjecture and dispute. Things are somewhat better now. Thirty-five years ago the complete journal of his famous voyage of 1642 was published in Holland, and we are now promised a sumptuous *fac simile* edition of the original manuscript, with notes by two eminent scholars, and with an English translation.

Moreover, patient searchers in the Dutch Colonial Archives have for years past been laboriously gleaning scattered particulars respecting him, and the results of their investigations have been printed from time to time in the transactions of Dutch learned societies, and in other places. It has thus become possible to piece together a fairly connected account of the great navigator's life.

But after all available information has been made use of, the result is disappointing. The man himself remains for the most part an indistinct figure. Personal details are few. The facts are mostly dry and meagre, gathered from formal official despatches and dusty registers. The material is wanting for a biography which would give a clear and sharply defined picture of the man as he lived.

It is possible, however, to attain what is of even more interest. We can arrive at a just estimate of his work as a discoverer, and of his place among the great navigators of the

world. The discovery of Tasmania and New Zealand was no chance adventure. It was the result of a steady policy. It was the outcome of the adventurous energy which in the 16th and 17th centuries created the Dutch Republic; gave to Holland her Colonial Empire; and—not content with her possession of the Eastern Archipelago—sent out her sailors to search for a new world in the unknown regions of the mysterious South. Tasman and Visscher are but types of the men who won for their country her once proud position of mistress of the seas.

In the following pages an attempt has been made not merely to give all that is known of Tasman's life and work, but to present that work in proper historical perspective.

I desire to acknowledge generally my obligation to the authors whose names appear in the list appended to this paper, particularly to Messrs. Dozy, Heeres, Van Boekeren, and Leupe. Also to Sir Edward Braddon for his courtesy in having, when Agent-General for Tasmania, obtained for me valuable information from Holland. Especially to Mr. J. E. Heeres, of the Dutch State Archives at The Hague, for his generous kindness in placing at my disposal manuscript notes of his researches in the old Colonial Records—notes containing interesting details which have never before appeared in print. And, lastly, to the Treasurer, Sir Philip Fysh, for authorising the printing of this paper at the Government Press of the Colony. It is fitting that the first English biography of Tasman should be offered to Australian readers by the country which he discovered and which bears his name.

JAMES B. WALKER.

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