

**JOHN BATMAN,
THE FOUNDER OF
VICTORIA**

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John Batman, the Founder of Victoria by James Bonwick

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BY

JAMES BONWICK, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "DISCOVERY AND SETTLEMENT OF PORT PHILLIP,"
ETC. ETC.

PROFITS OF THE WORK TO BE DEVOTED TO THE BENEFIT
OF JOHN BATMAN'S GRANDSONS.

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PREFACE.

THE birth of great nations is always regarded with interest. The Roman historians, unable to penetrate the gloom of their past and unwilling to claim a contemptible origin, boldly allied themselves with the celestial Olympus, and made their Romulus the son of a god. A Niebuhr has shattered the fairy fabric of those early days, and robbed our youth of the charming tale of wolf-nursed heroes. Yet who that trod the palaces of the Cæsars, and wondered at the glory of old Rome, would not throw a glance backward, and wish to know the source of so much majesty! And here, in this Melbourne of to-day, with its one hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants, and its noble Inter-colonial Exhibition, as we look upon a sixty-foot pyramid of Victorian gold, can we be otherwise than deeply interested in the origin of our colony!

It is with a view of settling this important question, that the present work is submitted to the Australian public. And a very trying task has it been to write such early history. I arrived in the colonies five years only after the first great exodus from Tasmania to Hobson's Bay, and two years after a settled Government of the Province here. I was per-

sonally acquainted with several of the leaders of the Port Phillip movement. I have made it my business for many years to converse with primitive settlers, and search through old records, to be correctly informed of the colonial past; and yet, with all my care and research, I have failed to satisfy my mind upon certain historical points. If such have been my difficulties to arrive at the truth of events so near our own day, what dependence can be placed in the histories of remoter times, written—it may be—by prejudiced partizans or careless collectors of facts? As a curious illustration of the difficulty of reconciling evidence in the formation of history, it may be mentioned that Wellington's mother said he was born at Dangan Castle, Westmeath, on the first of May, while the nurse affirms he was born at Dublin, on the sixth of March!

To several gentlemen who have kindly contributed to my literary stores I must confess myself deeply indebted; but especially to the Rev. R. K. Ewing, of Launceston, to the Hon. J. H. Wedge, and to W. J. Sams, Esq.

It is now twenty-one years since the first edition of my *Australian Geography* appeared; and I hope before long to bring out, for the *Australian Youth*, my story of the *Last of the Tasmanians*, upon which I have been occupied many years. To my fellow-colonists I am grateful for encouragement.

JAMES BONWICK.

ST. KILDA, VICTORIA,
January 1, 1867.

JOHN BATMAN,

The Founder of Victoria.

LIFE OF MR. JOHN BATMAN.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago I was wandering about the sources of the River Jordan at Jericho, beyond Jerusalem, in Van Diemen's Land, as it was then called. Stooping to drink at the prosaic, hoof-trodden springs, I heard my guide say, "Ah! it was bloody enough once. I shot a lot of crows about here. I caught them camping near, and dropped them down at night." Understanding that the *crows* were blacks, and expressing my shocked feelings, the rough farmer condescended to explain. After a sort of apology he added, "But John Batman didn't knock them down like that, for he and they understood one another." "What Batman do you mean?" was my inquiry. "The fellow that made Fort Phillip, to be sure," answered he. "O," said I, "that is the new colony across the Straits." "Just so," was his reply; "and he might have saved himself the trouble, for they are all smashing to pieces, and coming back here again."

This was my first personal introduction to the name of John Batman, and sad enough were the prospects of the little colony at that time. Numbers were returning to Van Diemen's Land.

A year passed, when a holiday trip to Avoca—the charming meeting-place of waters—brought me under the shadow of the greenstone pile of Ben Lomond, near which, by me, stood the house and farm of John Batman's home at Kingston. Again, and on the adjoining estate to his own, did I hear tales of this remarkable man.

And what have I heard? They told me stories of bloodthirsty natives brought in by the bold hunter, and retained by his spirit of kindness. They spoke of wondrous feats of horseback—bush tracking—endurance of hunger, thirst, and fatigue—and a successful capture of dreadful armed outlaws. I learned that this man of iron nerve, of powerful frame, and daring courage, had the manners of a gentleman, the simplicity of a child, the tenderness of a woman.

Need it be wondered, then, that I thought kindly of the man; that I felt jealous for his honour when I found it afterwards so grossly impugned. I am not the apologist for his frailties, though such were all but universal then in the colony. Blemishes of the same sort have, unfortunately, been attached to the fair fame of many whom the world justly regard as heroes and benefactors. John Batman, in spite of his love of drink, fostered and encouraged by the house kept by the man who can now so freely speak of his victim, and in spite of his unhappy devotion to the other sex, was what his fellow-citizens esteemed honest and honourable. He was heroic in his nature, seeking enterprises of danger, and engaging in noble labours. There is no little merit in him who opens up a wilderness to his race, and leads thousands to a happy home in a strange land.

Not only have Governors spoken highly of the man, but philanthropists, like Mr. Backhouse, have hailed his efforts. His interest in the aboriginal inhabitants will alone entitle him to gratitude. The Rev. J. H. West, in his History, speaks thus of him—"To Mr. Batman belongs the praise of mingling humanity with severity, of perceiving human affections in the creatures he was commissioned to resist. He certainly began in the midst of conflict and bloodshed to try the softer influence of conciliation and charity—being one of the few who entertained a strong confidence in the power of kindness." Mr. Melville, in his Australian history, being well acquainted with the person, speaks of him that he "proceeded not with the sword, but with the olive branch." This is not the man to be sneered at for his treaty with the Port Phillip Blacks, whom he believed to belong to the brotherhood of nations, and

whom he sought to treat with the justice and truth to which their position entitled them.

As to his veracity, it was unquestioned by those who knew him best. His old friend, the captain, calls him "a kind-hearted, heroic, and truthful man." The excellent Mr. George Washington Walker, the Quaker missionary, often spoke to me of his regard for John Batman. Mr. Henry Wedge, one of our esteemed fellow-colonists, writes—"He was always considered a gentleman and man of honour." Mr. Henry Jennings, our well-known Melbourne solicitor, can add—"I do not think he would write falsehoods." The *Cornwall Chronicle* utters the same hearty feeling—"We are certain that our brethren of Victoria will only be too glad to do justice to the memory of a man whose name will always be cherished by the early settlers of this colony." Honest old Captain Robson asserts that "he was a brave, athletic, daring, resolute man, fearing nothing—neither wind nor weather. His perseverance was beyond anything I ever saw." But Mr. William Robertson, of Colac, one of our best known and honoured old colonists, and one of the real founders of the colony, writes thus to me in full about his former friend:—

"I am glad to have been afforded an opportunity of adding my testimony to that of your other correspondents in favour of John Batman; and am pleased to think that by doing so I may assist somewhat in rescuing his name and memory from undeserved obloquy. My acquaintance with Mr. John Batman dates many years before the expedition to Victoria was contemplated; and from that time up to the day of his death I had so many opportunities of forming a judgment of what kind of a man he was, that I have not the slightest hesitation in assuring you that his character for veracity and probity cannot, with regard to the truth, be in the slightest degree impugned. From my own observation, as well as from what I have heard from those who were even more intimately connected with him than I was, my opinion is that his narrative may be taken as a strictly truthful report of what he himself did, and of all that occurred under his immediate notice."