

**THE BUSHRANGERS;  
ILLUSTRATING  
THE EARLY DAYS OF  
VAN DIEMEN'S LAND**

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The Bushrangers; Illustrating the Early Days of Van Diemen's Land by James Bonwick

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**JAMES BONWICK**

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THE  
BUSHRANGERS;

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BY  
JAMES BONWICK,  
AUTHOR OF "GEOGRAPHY OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND,"  
"DISCOVERY AND SETTLEMENT OF PORT PHILIP," ETC.,  
AND COMPILER OF "THE GEOLOGICAL MAP OF VICTORIA."

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MELBOURNE:  
PUBLISHED FOR THE AUTHOR, BY  
GEORGE ROBERTSON, GREAT COLLINS STREET.

1856.

## P R E F A C E.

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THIS Work is not intended as a sort of Newgate Calendar,—a record of deeds of villany,—but a narrative of persons whose career affected the social condition of a whole country, and presented the best illustration of the operations of Prison Discipline, and the early career of a Penal Colony. The present sketch embraces a period anterior to the settlement of Port Phillip.

There is another phase of Tasmanian primitive history, full of melancholy interest, that will shortly be brought before the Public, under the title of "THE BLACK WAR OF VAN DIEMEN'S LAND;—THE END OF THE TASMANIAN ABORIGINES." A publication of somewhat similar character on the natives of Port Phillip is now in press, designated "BUCKLEY, THE WILD WHITE MAN, AND HIS BLACK FRIENDS."

Encouraged by the kind patronage of his fellow-colonists, the Author hopes to be enabled to bring out a further series of volumes, illustrating the history of the Australian Settlements.

MELBOURNE,

June 6th, 1856.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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### EARLY STATE OF SOCIETY IN VAN DIEMEN'S LAND

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THE beautiful Island of Tasmania, the gem of the southern ocean, was first inhabited by wandering, houseless, naked savages. Its foundation, as a British colony was laid on felon chains. With the precedent of Rome before us, such an origin can neither be contemptible nor *disreputable*. As from the ruins of virtue in that ancient capital arose the patriotism of a Brutus, the morality of a Seneca, the eloquence of a Cicero, and the verses of a Virgil,—so may the fair land before us already boast among her youth the intelligence, the moral greatness, the social virtues, and the piety of the most distinguished of older nations.

Colonel Collins landed 307 male prisoners on the shores of the Derwent in 1804, after an unavailing attempt to form a settlement in Port Phillip. These were guarded by fifty marines. With the exception of seventeen married women, no females accompanied the expedition, nor arrived



on the Island for some time after. The convicts were first employed in making pathways through the scrub of the Hobart Town site, and erecting the necessary buildings for themselves and their officers. Although so far from headquarters, they were dependant upon New South Wales for supplies. The failure of the crops in that colony threw the Van Diemen's Land establishment into the greatest distress. The commissariat was obliged to rely upon native animals furnished by hunters; as much as eighteen pence a pound was paid for kangaroo meat. The dispersion of the men thus seeking for food was no auxiliary to penal discipline. It brought, also, the worst of persons in association with the aborigines, under the most unfavorable circumstances; lust and cruelty provoked retaliation and violence.

The moral state of this very early period was not satisfactory. It is no pleasing task to review the crimes of the dead, or to rebuke the improprieties of the leaders of a people. But it is truly sad to notice the disgraceful immoralities of the officers in charge of the new settlement. Their unholy practices excited the ribald jests of the most degraded. The absurd and criminal negligence of the British Government, in not providing some approximate equalization of the sexes, was one cause of this laxity of morals. An illustration of the times is given by Mr. John Pascoe Fawkner. That gentleman, when a boy at Hobart Town, saw the whole colony drunk for several weeks, from the Governor downwards. The Colonel had proclaimed a fortnight's holiday on account of the men's good behaviour during the time of the famine, and revelry reigned for six weeks. A number of violent deaths was the consequence of this shameless dissipation. Although there was a chap-

lain on the settlement, yet his social qualities were more in harmony with convivial mirth than the routine of pious duties. The amount and character of religious instruction communicated to the prisoners even in more recent times, is well described by a condemned man to a Judge; "What is done, your Honor, to make us better? Once a week we are drawn up in a square opposite the military barracks, and all the military are drawn up in front of us with loaded muskets and fixed bayonets, and a young officer then comes to the fence and reads part of the prayers, and that takes may be about a quarter of an hour, and that is all the religion we see."

Before free emigration set in the system of government was sufficiently simple, and the authority of the chief officer unrestrained but by the veto of the Governor-General at Sydney. Even so recently as 1823, we find a colonial enactment authorizing the Governor or Acting Governor to proclaim or enforce any law which he may deem necessary to check or prevent rebellion, though every member of his Executive Council dissent from such procedure. Any port could be closed against merchant trading vessels at the will of the chief ruler. And yet for many years the internal government of the country was puerile and contemptible. No efficient staff of constabulary existed before the days of Colonel Arthur. Governors Collins and Davey were injudicious in their acts, and inconsistent in their discipline. The accumulation of disorders, and the consequences of lengthened misrule, nearly overwhelmed the more prudent and energetic Colonel Sorell, and formed for a series of years a most perplexing difficulty to the mind of our statesman Governor Arthur. The powerful Governor Macquarie, in 1814, had to compromise with the

numerous bushrangers. He proclaimed amnesty for past offences; this extraordinary document was legally drawn up by the Judge-Advocate of the colony. The home authorities were, doubtless, to be blamed for the want of necessary appliances for the enforcement of prison discipline. No adequate buildings were erected for the accommodation of the men, and no suitable employment was provided for their time. Before the construction of the present Hobart Town Penitentiary, in which the town gangs are confined after the day's work, the ill defined boundaries of their lodgings were easily passed, and the town became a prey to uncontrollable uproar and daring plunder. An old resident informed the writer that his loaded carbine hung behind his desk, a sword was beneath his counter, and pistols were ready at hand. Jorgenson, the eccentric prisoner author writes, "I remember when I arrived here first, the public-houses were filled with convicts night and day, tippling, gaming, and concocting robberies. It was often dangerous to walk the streets in day-time."

It was during that first reign of terror that bushrangers flourished, and "the most horrid murders were of common occurrence." One serious impediment to the operations of justice was the practice of sending all persons guilty of serious offences for trial to Sydney. It is true that there was a Judge-Advocate, who was, by the way, a military officer, but such gentlemen were not held responsible for the punishment of capital crimes. In Sorell's reign a Judge Advocate's Court was established for civil cases under £50, and no appeal to that decision was permitted. To show the fitness of the individual for the office, we read that once, when told about a certain course being the legal