

4

Society

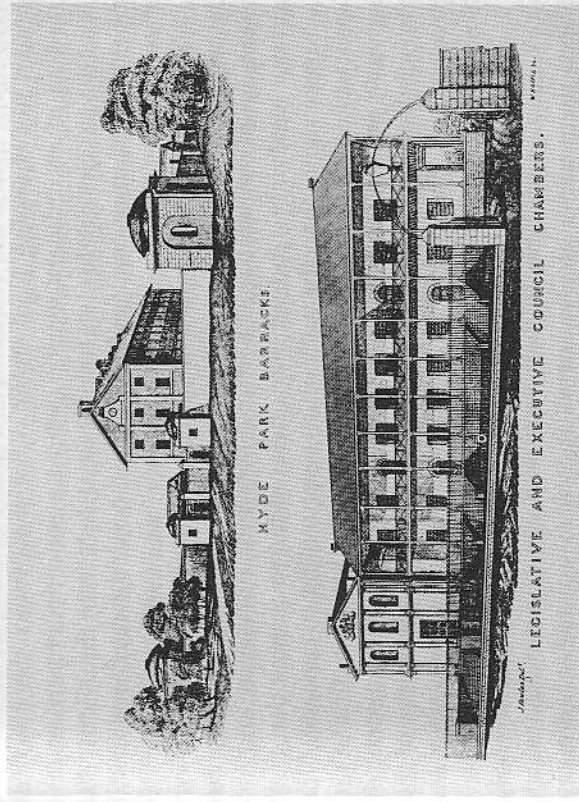
In founding the penal colony of New South Wales Britain rid itself of an immediate problem – but did not solve it. Instead the problem of crime and punishment was exported to the antipodes, and transposed to a colonial setting. Here the problem could take on a different appearance, for the colonial gaol did not return its inmates, after they had served their sentence, to the old society, but delivered them into an improvised local adaptation of it. There were always fears as to how contaminated or corrupt such a community would be, and therefore concern that traditional British institutions were not appropriate to it. Paradoxically this was to give stimulus to colonial moves for the abolition of transportation, particularly once free immigrants had become a significant element. At the same time convictism was an economic system which created powerful interests dedicated to its continuation.

To speak of the colony as a gaol is misleading insofar as it conjures up an image of walls and cells. The convicts were confined not so much by buildings but by a system which attempted, not always successfully, to regulate their employment and conduct. In the early years the government had a great need for convict labour for public works, but soon the majority of convicts were assigned to private settlers. In return for the free labour, the settlers had to feed and clothe their convict servants, thus saving the government money. If the convict misbehaved, the settler could bring the offender before a magistrate, who would usually prescribe a flogging. Unsatisfactory servants would be returned to the government. Convicts with a record of disobedience were banished to what were called the penal settlements, places such as Moreton Bay and, later on, Norfolk Island,* which were designed to be forbidding. Port

* The original colony was abandoned in 1814, following the failure to realise the promise of flax and timber industries. Its redevelopment as a penal settlement was ordered in 1824, but not achieved until the 1830s.

Arthur in Van Diemen's Land came particularly to be identified with the dark side of transportation. A British Select Committee appointed in 1837, and presided over by Molesworth, an opponent of transportation, took relish in describing the 'unmitigated wretchedness' of Port Arthur, which, situated 'on a small and sterile peninsula', was 'guarded, day and night, by soldiers, and by a line of fierce dogs'. According to the chief superintendent of convicts, the prisoners' work was 'of the most incessant and galling description the settlement can produce', while 'any disobedience of orders, turbulence or other misconduct' was 'instantaneously punished by the lash'.¹ By 1870, when Marcus Clarke began the serialised publication of the novel, *His Natural Life*, the days of transportation were long since past (though Port Arthur still had a human residue) but his portrayal of the Gothic horror of the penal settlements became a stereotype image of convictism. Even today, Port Arthur, a picturesque ruin, is capable of sending a shiver down the tourist's spine.

Port Arthur, however, was not the experience of most convicts;



4.1 Two Francis Greenway buildings, both, appropriately enough, on Macquarie Street in Sydney: Greenway, the convict architect, was the great exponent of the colonial Georgian style. These illustrations were published in Joseph Fowles's *Sydney in 1848*.

nor were conditions at the penal settlements as universally dreadful as Clarke depicted. How the convict fared in the colony depended on a range of factors. For a man, skills were important: they were usually in demand, and therefore a convict possessed of them was advantaged. An extreme case was the architect Francis Greenway, transported for forgery, who soon after his arrival in 1814 was in private practice. Within a year or two he was designing buildings for a governor, Macquarie, who was determined to leave his mark on the colony. Other educated convicts and skilled artisans were similarly able to win privileges. Much depended, too, on the luck of assignment. It was not simply a question of good or bad masters, but of the employment involved and its physical location. The master might be the owner of a large estate, intent on following the English gentry model, and consequently treating his convicts rather as traditional servants, even dressing them in livery. Or he might be an ex-convict farmer who would eat – and drink – with his servants, though this familiarity was no guarantee of humane treatment.

It was always a problem to realise the full labour potential of convicts – Phillip had early remarked on the innate indolence of many – so carrots as well as sticks were used. A ticket-of-leave, though not changing legal status, gave the convict the practical freedom of an ordinary worker, whilst a conditional pardon restored the convict's rights but forbade departure from the colony. An absolute pardon, much less frequently conceded, was the ultimate prize.

The convicts were not altogether powerless. They had always the negative capacity to thwart their masters, by offering only the minimum of cooperation. They were servants, not slaves, and not without legal rights; indeed they often tended to assume that they had more rights than the authorities were willing to concede. Nor was it unknown for a magistrate, not from the district, to find in the convict's favour: this was particularly so when the treatment of convicts became a political issue to be manipulated by critics of the government. Transportation was a system capable of being exploited even by those who were theoretically its victims.

For female convicts, however, the choices were fewer. The only work usually available to them was as domestic servants, which placed them under greater surveillance than was the lot of many men. When they offended, they were sent to the Female Factory, where they were subject to more rigorous supervision. (After 1817 women could no longer be flogged.) Female convicts were also the victims of their reputation for being licentious and unruly, and their

situation was the more easily overlooked. Yet women were not without their own resources. Given their relative fewness in the colony, their sexuality was a commodity at their disposal. Apart from the prospect of liaisons with those who exercised power, at whatever level, marriage was often seen as a deliverance from servitude. Marriage was officially encouraged, on the grounds that it would improve the morality of the colony, but for female convicts it was a means of improving their own position. Mary Haydock, for example, transported at the age of thirteen for horse-stealing, married, at seventeen, the free settler Thomas Reibey, helping him to become a successful businessman. As his widow she made her own name as a respected figure in colonial commerce. Mrs Reibey's success was unusual, but many other women profited by the marital alliance which rescued them from convict service.

Generally the convicts did not constitute a challenge to authority. In the early years the Irish were under suspicion, particularly after the 1798 rebellion in Ireland. Those fears were briefly realised in 1804 when convicts working at the Castle Hill government farm, many of them Irish, broke out and mobilised a few hundred supporters, but the ill-planned rising was promptly put down. Apart from this episode, and intermittent trouble at the Norfolk Island penal settlement where the impossibility of escape increased tension, the convict system functioned with minimal organised resistance. Settlers' concern about law and order seemed little different from that which characterises any frontier society.

A principal reason for this was that assignment dispersed the convicts, so that only in government service were there groups large enough to provide a focus for rebellion. Moreover the system deliberately played off convict against convict. Informing to the authorities was rewarded by advancing the prospect of a ticket-of-leave, while turning King's evidence gave an offender immunity. The 'freemasonry of felony' might have operated in day to day relations with masters, but in the larger matters of survival convicts were well versed in treachery to each other. Resistance to the system was expressed either in sporadic gestures (such as rick-burning) or in escape. The system offered plenty of opportunities for the latter, but authorities were secure in the knowledge that unless the escapees turned to bushranging their return to the convict fold was but a question of time. So when despatched to a master, the convict would usually travel unescorted, carrying a pass. The servitude of convictism often did not seem so very different from that of ordinary employment, governed, as it was, by the stringent conditions of the

Masters and Servants Acts. The New South Wales Act, for example, provided for up to six months gaol for a worker found to have breached his contract with his employer.

Governors, officers and free settlers often waxed loud about the moral failings of the convicts, particularly their drunkenness and sexual proclivities; and they saw them as lacking that sense of shame which would have made the spectacle of their excesses more bearable. Yet they, the rulers, were hardly paragons. In the early years many found it easy to overcome their distaste and took convict women as mistresses. For three years after Phillip's departure in 1792 the colony was run by the officers who soon organised themselves a trade monopoly, in which rum gained such an importance as a kind of currency that it served as a nickname for the New South Wales Corps. The officers of this 'Rum Corps' catered for and profited by the thirst of their subjects. Nor did they, and their successors, lack the thirst themselves. A young surgeon arriving at Moreton Bay in 1830 remarked that 'all the officers here are desperate grog-drinkers and cigar smokers'.² This might, of course, have been considered almost a condition of colonial service, but a few years earlier Archdeacon Scott, returning to New South Wales, complained more generally that he saw 'the same persons, pursuing the same licentious & profligate lives still in authority, setting forth all their bad examples of vice they did when I was here before'.³

Such a society was characterised by vexatious personal disputes, often culminating in litigation, and even duels. Bickering might be symptomatic of a small remote community, but personal animosities also became entangled with clashes of interests. A historian of Van Diemen's Land has observed that there were in that colony 'splendid opportunities for embezzlement'⁴, but a system in which land and labour were so freely available to those in favour was bound to engender a more pervasive corruption. Interests quickly established proved difficult to dislodge. Successive governors tried to break the grip of the Rum Corps, yet the officers, led by John Macarthur, were so self-assured that they even took it upon themselves in 1808 to depose the unfortunate Governor Bligh when he threatened their position. Thus Bligh, the former captain of the *Bounty*, suffered a second mutiny for which he could hardly be blamed: this was indeed a Rum Rebellion.

As there emerged a class of ex-convicts, emancipists, some of whom attained wealth, if not status, and as the number of free settlers increased, social relationships became more complex. For the officers and settlers, absorbed in their efforts to establish them-

selves as a colonial gentry, it seemed essential to exclude the emancipists, even when rich and successful, from their ranks. Paradoxically, some of these emancipist merchants, like Henry Kable and Samuel Lord, probably got their start by trading on behalf of the officer monopolists, whose class aspirations discouraged them from acting as retailers. They won their fortunes by determination, guile and, in some cases, sharp practices. Nor were they reluctant to use the law of which they themselves had been victims: both Lord and Samuel Terry, two of the great emancipist successes, were remorseless litigants.

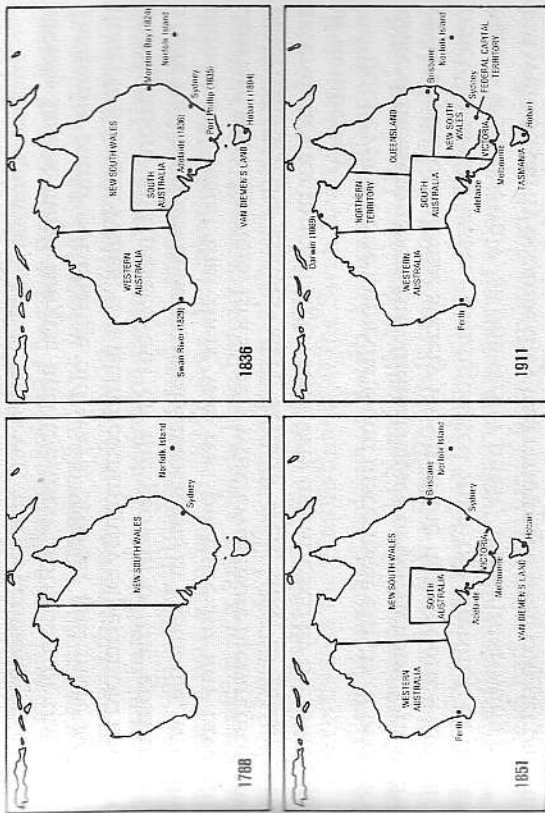
The achievement of such emancipists was in one sense an achievement of the transportation system, but it was also an embarrassment. The free settlers, or 'exclusives' as they were sometimes called, resisted the introduction of trial by jury, fearful that emancipists would be admitted to civil juries; they were alarmed when Macquarie invited them to his dinner table, and appointed a few as magistrates. The emancipists threw off any sense of social diffidence – shame was never part of their make-up – and became a vocal lobby. They found a leader in W. C. Wentworth, the son of a surgeon (reputed to have emigrated to avoid conviction for highway robbery) and a convict mother. Wentworth was an ambitious and restless figure – he had been little more than a youth when he helped lead the Blue Mountains expedition – who at first hoped to integrate himself and his fortunes into the exclusives by marrying a daughter of John Macarthur. Macarthur had been friendly enough to him, but was unlikely to have accepted such a marriage; at about this time he was complaining of the difficulty of marrying off his daughters who were 'too sensitive and too well principled for this society'.⁵ When Wentworth learnt of his own origins – he had grown up not knowing that his mother, who had died when he was a child, had come to the colony as a convict – he too appreciated the futility of his schemes. Instead he took up the emancipist cause, identifying with their sense of injustice.

So could the convict inheritance poison relationships and stimulate political division. Wentworth and the emancipists were cast as liberals when they pressed for the extension of British institutions such as trial by jury and representative government. The exclusives, conservatively conscious of their numerical weakness, resisted, but they too were interested in modifying the system of colonial autocracy which gave the governor such apparent power. The governor, on the other hand, was an unfortunate buffer between a British government which expected him to implement its policies unques-

tioning, and a local community for whom he was a convenient scapegoat. He usually ended his term offending one or the other, quite often both.

Overshadowing all, was the future of transportation. It was ironic that much of the pressure for the ending of transportation should come from Britain, from penal reformers on the one hand and Wakefield colonisers on the other. The founding of South Australia in 1836 dramatised the incongruity of free and penal colonies coexisting on the same continent. But the criticism offered of transportation was often misinformed and inconsistent. Sometimes it was attacked for its failure to act as a deterrent, and evidence of successful emancipists could even be cited to suggest that the 'punishment' had its attractions for potential emigrants. Alternatively it was condemned for its inhumanity. The Molesworth Committee, reporting in 1838, neatly resolved this discrepancy by concluding that most people in Britain, whether criminals or administrators of justice, were 'ignorant of the real amount of suffering inflicted upon a transported felon'. Moreover the Committee argued that not only had transportation failed to reform convicts, but it had also corrupted the free, even turning some of the exclusives into 'cruel and hard-hearted slave-owners'.⁶ Transportation to New South Wales ceased in 1840; it continued to Van Diemen's Land, but without assignment. Later in the 1840s the British Government attempted a modest revival, but by this time most colonists of New South Wales were convinced that the future lay with free immigration, and a quickly mobilised anti-transportation movement expressed a colonial patriotism which had all the excitement of novelty. So the process of phasing out transportation which had begun in Britain was now continued in the colony itself. As it became clear that there could be no significant moves towards colonial self-government without an end to transportation, the settlers of Van Diemen's Land, already deprived of the benefits of assignment, likewise joined the opposition. Between 1850 and 1868 the final phase of transportation saw less than 10,000 convicts (all men) sent to Western Australia, a colony which, in spite of this infusion of conscript labour, could still identify itself as 'free' in its origins.

Once the end of transportation was recognised as inevitable, the political divisions which the functioning of the system had generated underwent a transformation. Free settlers and well-to-do emancipists, concerned about the distribution of power in a society without convicts, found they had much in common. Similarly the interests of landowners and squatters began to coalesce, in the face



Map 5 Colonial and state boundaries, with principal settlements

of an urban middle-class led movement which, while not pressing for manhood suffrage, was beginning to make democratic demands. In this realignment Wentworth emerged as the leading conservative. With the days of gubernatorial autocracy apparently numbered, the fight was on for control of the infant state. Those who had exploited the convict system were anxious lest others should reap the benefits of self-government.

The ending of transportation encouraged a tendency to forget the embarrassments of convictism; it was almost as if there were a silent consensus to sweep the penal past under the colonial carpet. It had always been possible to turn a blind eye when the occasion demanded it. Thus Bishop Broughton, the first Anglican bishop of Australia, faced with the prospect of a great benefaction from Thomas Moore, a wealthy landowner of humble origins with an ex-convict wife, was able to overcome any qualms: 'I never thought it necessary to go back into former histories, not always a pleasant enquiry in the best of places; and *here* particularly ticklish and dangerous'. In 1855 the visiting actress, Ellen Kean, noted that the 'stain' was a topic to be avoided, and added that 'some of the respectable families are ostentatiously tolerant'.⁷ Not only did it become increasingly difficult to maintain old distinctions, but later generations of families with convict ancestry were able, through self-censorship, to obliterate embarrassing memories.

In Van Diemen's Land, however, the psychology of convict society lasted much longer, and the mere adoption of the name Tasmania could not change old ways. Smaller and more isolated than New South Wales, this island community experienced less free immigration, and missed out on the growth of the goldrushes. There had been fewer successful emancipists in Tasmania, with the paradoxical result that there was less pressure for any breaking down of social barriers. In a society which was more hierarchical and paternalistic, the conservative settlers were able to retain their ascendancy for much longer, relatively unimpeded by the challenge of democracy.

But beyond these immediate and discernible effects, it becomes more difficult to assess the cultural legacy of convictism. One of the early myths of colonial society was that the native-born – the 'currency' lads and lasses, distinguished from the 'sterling' or British born – were not only, as one writer put it, 'a fine interesting race'⁸, but were so partly because they had renounced their convict parents and their ways. There was certainly evidence that they were healthier than their parents: it was often noted that they were tall and lean, many of them distinguished by fair hair and blue eyes. It is not difficult to detect the environmental influences of climate and diet. Statistics also confirmed that the 'rising generation' was remarkably law-abiding. But the evidence suggests that the myth was inaccurate in depicting the virtuous 'currency' lads and lasses as alienated from their sinful parents. In the first place not all of the 'currency' generation had convict parents (and many, of course, were the children of, in this sense, 'mixed' marriages). But, more importantly, the authorities, however they judged the morality of their charges, gave them pardons and tickets-of-leave, and sometimes grants of land, and thus acknowledged that the system was, at this level, working. The colony offered greater opportunities than the society from which the convicts had come, and seemed also to be more conducive to the formation of relatively stable family relationships than the authorities would allow. That the children were 'free' and their parents ex-convict was of less consequence than the children's lack of direct knowledge of the complex and chaotic society which had shaped their parents' outlook. The contrast drawn between convict and 'currency' generations was one that gave 'respectable' colonists a convenient cause for optimism about the future and was dramatised accordingly. The possible continuities between parents and children were ignored or, at most, hinted at.

There was no one moment in which New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land ceased to be gaols and became free societies. From the very beginning transportation was integrated into the colonial economy, and the hierarchy of a convict society soon coexisted with the normal functioning of an infant capitalist system. The legal system (even without trial by jury) and the press (an independent newspaper was founded in 1824) gave the colonies some of the characteristics of a 'free' society long before representative institutions had been ceded. The antipodean gaol always existed more in the British imagination than in colonial reality.

Nevertheless the establishment of the Swan River Colony and the Wakefield-inspired colony of South Australia challenged the convict orientation of the old New South Wales–Van Diemen's Land axis. The founding of the Port Phillip District, illegally launched by land hungry settlers from Van Diemen's Land, also implied a break-away from the system, though it was governed as part of New South Wales and had a notable input from convicts and ex-convicts.

The goldrush which began in 1851 in New South Wales and Victoria (as the Port Phillip District was now called) confirmed the end of transportation to eastern Australia. It also created a new human melting pot, as hopeful colonists flocked to the goldfields. The ensuing influx from abroad further confused population patterns. It was no longer possible – Tasmania excepted – to isolate the convict factor. In human terms the goldrush was a uniting experience, and produced a new population amalgam. This is not to say that the goldrush did not in itself create differences between the colonies: Victoria, for example, which had the richest discoveries, was most affected by the European – and Chinese – immigration. Nor is it to say that the growth of the gold years obliterated the convict legacy. The new migrants had, in social terms, to negotiate with the old. The values of convict society may have been diluted, but elements were necessarily incorporated in the new culture.

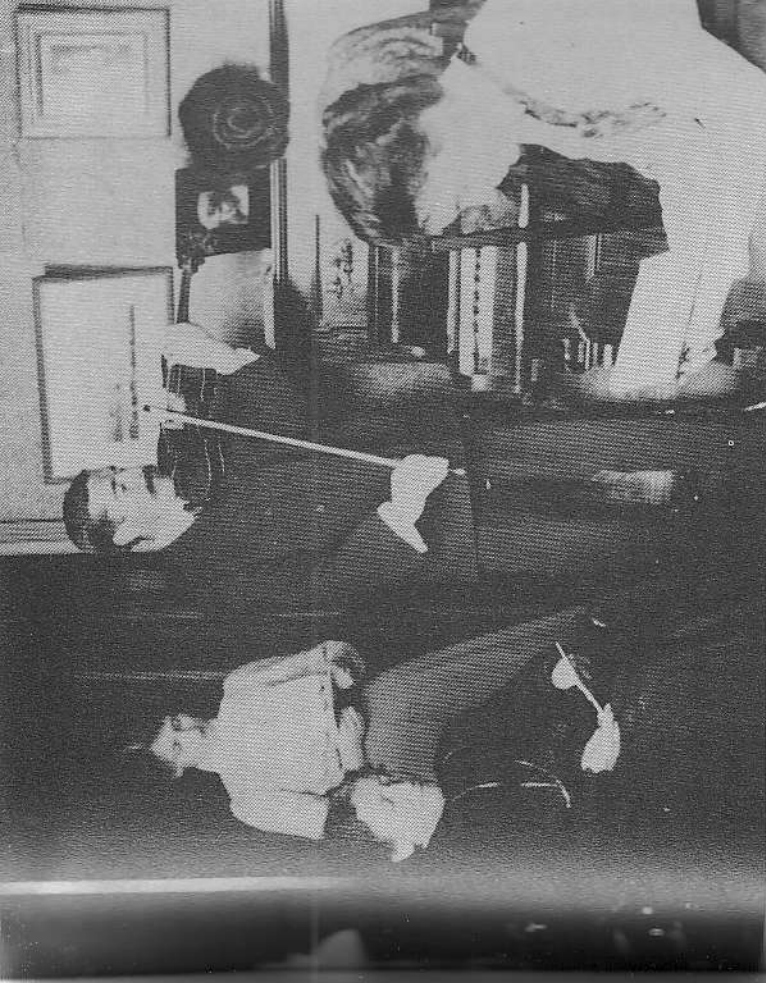
The century of migration from 1788 to 1890 saw a continuing process of cultural transplantation. Institutions and ideologies were imported from the metropolitan society and planted in the colonial environment. Some took root better than others; some grew into unexpected hybrids. The shape they took determined the social landscape of the Australian colonies.

The family – that institution considered so fundamental to European society – was hardly present in New South Wales in 1788, though children were. It was an early policy to encourage marriage,

and there was some response to this, but, as has already been suggested, the convicts saw no particular virtue in the rite, apart from the immediate benefits it might confer, such as freedom for a convict woman. Yet the high rate of illegitimacy which disturbed the authorities was misleading, for many of these children were brought up in family households. Sarah Lyons, for example, transported for shoplifting, arrived at Norfolk Island in 1790, and soon thereafter met Private William Tunks, a marine. They do not appear to have married, and in Reverend Samuel Marsden's notorious female muster of 1806 she was listed as a concubine with two male illegitimate children. Yet she and Tunks cohabited to the end of his days, bringing up a family of three. Son John became a prosperous Parramatta merchant, and called one of his daughters Sarah, who in turn passed the name on to her first-born.

Nevertheless as the number of free settlers increased, and as the institutions which helped purvey bourgeois morality, such as the churches, established themselves, orthodox family values were asserted more confidently. The 'currency' generation observed the rites of marriage much more than their parents. The goldrushes, however, temporarily set back the spreading of family values. Husband and wife, temporarily set off to the primitive goldfields, leaving wives and children in the cities, and sometimes this separation, theoretically for the benefit of all, became desertion. The influx of immigrants from abroad was heavily male, reinforcing the colonial sex imbalance. The sometimes roty behaviour of the early diggers – as, for example, in their boisterous acclamation of the legendary entertainer, Lola Montez, whose notorious 'spider dance' seemed tailored for its male audience – was a cause for moral concern.

Such fears were misplaced. The great majority of immigrant diggers had conventional bourgeois ambitions: independence, home and family. Independence was to elude many, but home and family were more easily attained. For those who, in the wake of the goldrushes, took the opportunity offered by the Selection Acts to go on the land, the family was a valuable economic resource, and often a factor in determining ultimate success or failure. A large tribe of kids – not to mention a healthy wife – was a decided advantage, the extra mouths to feed being outweighed by the unpaid labour. The home also became an important ideal in urban Australia with a level of house owner-occupation high by European standards and, in the case of Melbourne, high by American standards as well. From the inauspicious beginnings of Botany Bay, the family had, within a century, become a pillar of colonial society.



4.2 Family respectability in a goldfield setting: a Coolgardie (Western Australia) interior, circa 1900. In this cluttered and stagey arrangement, everyone is usefully occupied at music or reading.

There were, however, distinctive features to this emerging family ethos. As is the case for all immigrant communities, families were initially truncated, lacking the extended networks which, even in industrialised Britain, remained important. Letters written home by immigrants often sought to persuade relatives to join them in Australia, and although many of these sincerely extol the attractions of colonial life, it is clear that the need felt for kith and kin was a factor. Chain migration, particularly with the Irish, did alleviate this sense of family impoverishment for some, but Australia was always to be a more daunting prospect for distant relatives than North America. Ties with neighbours, however important, particularly in the pioneer setting, could only be a poor substitute for ties of blood, and parents and children were often thrown in upon themselves. Australian families were characterised as being clannish.

Colonial children soon gained a reputation for being spoilt and undisciplined. It seems that the convict generation were not so much 'bad' parents as indulgent ones, happy for their children to run free. Cunningham, writing in the 1820s, saw the 'currency'

lasses as 'children of nature', 'fond of frolicking in the water', whilst those living near the sea 'usually swim and dive like dab-chicks'; he also remarked on the frequent 'sets-to' between 'currency' urchins, attended by seconds, to be witnessed in the streets.⁹ Such behaviour was, of course, encouraged by the benign environment, but by mid-nineteenth century the unruliness of children was seen as a problem. It contributed to the concern about urban larrikins, whose street rowdiness upset respectable citizens. Even so, there were some who preferred to see the unruliness of children as spirited independence, and bush children were sometimes idealised as mature beyond their years. The colonial girl in particular, a healthy tomboy who could nevertheless command the maidenly virtues, emerged as a literary and dramatic stereotype. In George Darrell's melodrama, *The Sunny South*, the heroine 'Babs, 'bred in the bush', is a strapping lass with a colourful colonial vocabulary. Mary Grant Bruce's Norah, in the Billabong children's books, offered a later, more refined version.

Sometimes the concern about children simply stemmed from a greater awareness of their presence. Babies abounded, and they were always *there*: the domestic hearth, so sentimentalised in popular Victorian literature, could in the colonies be decidedly noisy. Moreover, as Richard Twopeny noted, the baby went everywhere with its mother: 'he fills railway carriages and omnibuses, obstructs the pavement in perambulators, and is suckled *coram populo* in the Exhibition'.¹⁰ At a middle-class level this was partly explained by the difficulty in finding servants – of which more later – so that mothers were less able to place their children in the care of others. But even upper middle-class families, with servants, had a much more free-for-all atmosphere than their English counterparts. Australia's best known children's book, Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians*, celebrates one such household, where in spite of a military father who believes in order and discipline, the rebellious (though, of course, loveable) children refuse to be contained by the nursery.

The demands on mothers were great. Not only did they have the responsibility for child rearing, but often two decades or more of repetitive pregnancies. Yet it has been suggested that within marriage Australian women enjoyed a relatively high status, particularly when a family enterprise such as a farm was concerned. According to the actress, Nellie Stewart, there was no country 'in which the sexes meet on so healthy a plane of frank comradeship'.¹¹ Certainly the sex imbalance which existed through most of the colonial period gave women a kind of psychological bargaining

position when it came to marrying. Trollope, visiting the colonies in 1871–72, remarked how easily his cook was able to make an advantageous marriage. In spite of being so locked into home and child-rearing women gained political rights in Australia much earlier than in Britain, South Australia leading the way with female suffrage in 1894; though this clearly also had something to do with the more politically democratic climate of the colonies.

It may at first seem surprising that there was in the eastern colonies, Tasmania excepted, such a rapid transition from autocracy to democracy – or at least that limited form of democracy based on manhood suffrage which had been introduced by 1858. The agitation for representative institutions before the goldrush included a radical component, nourished particularly by free immigrants, who brought with them a range of British influences including trade unionism and Chartism. The diggers of the 1850s, however, brought a sudden infusion of ideas and expectations. Although they were, in many ways, a transitory population, moving from place to place as new 'rushes' were publicised, and not necessarily expecting to remain in the colonies, they nevertheless formed articulate and politically conscious communities, particularly once the decline of alluvial mining had set in. As early as 1853 the diggers of Bendigo were vocal about their grievances (especially the gold licence and its administration), and soon a wider democratic platform was being invoked to challenge the established colonial interests. On 30 November 1854 angry miners at Ballarat, whose leaders were an international crew of English, Irish, European and American diggers, built a stockade and prepared to defend it. It was a gesture of defiance, and not a revolutionary assault on the government, but the authorities foolishly decided to attack, and in the ensuing brief affray some thirty diggers and five soldiers were killed. Eureka quickly acquired an aura of popular legend – juries would not convict the rebels – and the political implications of such discontent were soon appreciated. Although some conservatives were alarmed at the perceived threat to the old society of landowners, squatters and allied mercantile interests, the democratic concessions offered were a tactical compromise. The Chinese, portrayed as the racial villains of the goldrush, were also a handy scapegoat, and legislation aimed at them to some extent placated the diggers.

Although the colonial parliaments were miniature Westminsterers, not all British political institutions were easily transplanted. The party system, so often considered an integral part of the British parliamentary tradition, did not develop until towards the end of

the century; only in Victoria, where the goldrushes had caused such ferment, did something resembling liberal and conservative parties take early shape, and then only intermittently. Generally a faction system predominated, with a complex interaction of personalities, issues and localism. In New South Wales Sir Henry Parkes symbolised the nature of the system. A poor but ambitious ivory turner from Birmingham, Parkes emigrated with his wife in 1839 and soon became enmeshed in journalism and radical politics. In his parliamentary career Parkes saw himself as a British free-trade liberal, whose heroes were Cobden, Gladstone and Carlyle. No one could have been more vocal in upholding British parliamentary values, yet no one was better able to operate and exploit the faction system which was the product of the local situation.

It was not that the colonies lacked divisive political issues. The attempts to break the squatters' grip on the land to pave the way for a farming yeomanry caused much strife, and the debate about tariff policy and taxation likewise roused passions, particularly in Victoria which, in an attempt to create industries and jobs, set itself on a protectionist path. But although some saw politics as a struggle between the 'classes' and the 'masses' – which often meant between upper and lower houses – in the popular assemblies alliances of interests shifted too frequently to be cemented in formal parties. The very flux of colonial life, and the competing local interests which sought their share of roads, bridges and, most importantly, railways, militated against party order.

Moreover the period from 1851 to 1890 was characterised, dispute over particular issues notwithstanding, by an underlying social optimism which encouraged the politics of growth rather than division. It might seem that convictism was too easily forgotten, but in enthusiastically taking up fashionable nineteenth century ideas of moral improvement the colonists were recognising that they had particular application to a society with such an inheritance. As early as 1827 a Van Diemen's Land Mechanics' Institute had been established, and the 1850s saw a renewed growth of such institutes dedicated to mutual improvement and the diffusion of useful knowledge. In the 1840s the movement to found a Sydney University began, and it took its first students in 1852. With astonishing and competitive speed Melbourne followed suit, it being argued that the institution of a university for the education of Victoria's youth would 'go far to redeem their adopted country from the social and moral evils with which she is threatened'.¹²

Universities, of course, were for the elite, and even mechanics'

institutes, in spite of original intentions, soon became part of the middle-class landscape of urban Australia. While being promoted as appropriate to the democratic colonial environment, the institutes could still acknowledge the inherited structures of class. So the mayor of Geelong could proclaim the social benefits:

Let them put aside the old fashioned notions of aristocracy, let the people mingle together for their mutual improvement. People of all classes might meet together and deport themselves like ladies and gentlemen and yet each maintain their respective positions in society.¹³

However if they were serious about their mission in a social sense, the improvers had ultimately to look to public education. Given that the hope of the colony lay in the 'rising generation', it was understandable that the importance of education in the convict settlements should be stressed. In both New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land the government helped set up schools, sometimes paying the wages of teachers who were, ironically enough, often convicts or ex-convicts. However in the British context any belief that *all* had a right to education was still, in these early years, deemed not so much controversial as preposterous. Nor did one have to be an upholder of the churches' monopoly of education to be suspicious of a state role, though in the convict colonies circumstances encouraged a dependence on state initiatives. It is therefore not so surprising that as late as 1844 more than half the children of New South Wales were receiving no education. By this time the churches had their schools, and attempts to establish 'national' schools foundered on objections by Anglicans and Catholics to the provision made (or lack of it) for religious instruction.

The goldrush stimulated the demand for education at several levels. The image of a society consumed by disorder and greed encouraged anew the promotion of education as an agent of improvement. But the gold immigrants themselves, generally more literate than their predecessors, also wanted education for their children. The granting of manhood suffrage introduced a dimension of practical politics, summed up in the jibe attributed to Robert Lowe, 'We must educate our masters'.¹⁴ Initially church and state schools coexisted, both supported by government funds. But as the liberals gathered confidence in advocating the national virtues of 'free, compulsory and secular' education, the debate focused not only on the nexus between Church and State, but on the relationships between the churches themselves. In the end state aid to the

English sense, though this tended to be assumed, not least by the Church itself. Other churches were ignored. Catholics, for example, were without official chaplains for thirty years; but the early fear of Irish sedition, to which Romish priests were seen as contributing, was eventually overtaken by an acceptance that any religion, even Catholicism, should be exploited in controlling the convicts. Furthermore, as convictism receded, and as a population pattern emerged in which Anglicans, even in a nominal sense, did not form a majority, governors found themselves compelled to deal with the different denominations on something like an equal basis.

Sometimes pioneering conditions encouraged a sort of informal ecumenism. For the first few years in Adelaide Presbyterians were content to join the Anglicans for worship; Colonel Light, the surveyor who planned Adelaide, even envisaged a cathedral for the use of all denominations. But as priests, ministers and preachers arrived, and as the churches established their colonial infrastructure, denominational boundaries firmed up. It was a time, too, of dispute within the churches. Rome, to appease the British, had appointed English Benedictines to nurture the faith in Australia, and this naturally enough provoked a struggle to remake the Church in an Irish image. The Presbyterians, among whom the radical J. D. Lang was a disturbing presence, fell out among themselves, even before the Scottish 'Disruption' emigrated to the colonies. The fragmentation of Wesleyanism into several Methodist sects came with their adherents, while the contest between evangelical and tractarian (Anglo-Catholic) movements for the soul of Anglicanism was likewise imported.

Nevertheless in spite of these inner tensions, and in spite of what might have seemed unpromising human material in the convict colonies, the churches were soon integrated into colonial society. Chapels, churches and modest cathedrals were built, and proudly pictured in colonial guides; romantic Gothic and occasionally Romanesque styles became fashionable even with 'non-conformists' (an inherited label which lacked meaning in the colonies). Clergy penetrated the bush, bringing the comforts of the sacraments and the Word to a society which, while it may have been able to cope without them, nevertheless respected these symbols of its culture. Institutions as various as orphanages, bible classes and Sunday schools (these latter particularly important in terms of improving the 'rising generation') all represented aspects of the churches' mission; while the modern temperance movement, with its democratic American origins, had a special reforming role in a



4.3 The importance of the school in a new community: this picture was taken at an outfield near the goldmining town of Gulgong in New South Wales in 1872, a time when the provision of education was a major political issue. The photographer, Beaufoy Merlin, worked in the field, formally recording entire townships for the benefit of their residents – families outside their homes, tradesmen in front of their shops etc. Merlin's patron, Bernard Holtermann, was interested in the use of photography to promote emigration to Australia.

churches and their schools was withdrawn; South Australia, with its strong voluntarist tradition, had led the way in 1851, while Western Australia, then the smallest of the colonies, was the last to make the break in 1895. The colonies were left with a tripartite system of education: private (sometimes, in the English manner, called 'public') schools run, usually, by the Anglican and Protestant churches for the children of the well-to-do; a completely separate and self-contained system of Catholic schools for the children of the Irish-derived community; and the new state system, seen by its promoters as being for 'the people', but in fact for those not catered for by other schools.

This outcome can only be understood in terms of the unique denominational balance of Australian society. In the beginning the Church of England had been attached to the state: it provided chaplains who were under the authority of the governor. No one bothered to spell out whether the Church was 'established' in the

society which, it could be said, had been baptised in grog. Although regular church-goers were never to be a majority, church attendances grew steadily through the century, though tapering off towards the end.

The churches, then, pursued improvement in their own way, but they also pursued each other. All the other denominations had reason to dispute Anglican claims to pre-eminence, but Anglicans and Protestants showed a growing concern about Catholic expansionism. The Anglican Bishop Broughton was himself a High Churchman and sympathetic to the tractarians, but he was also an anti-Catholic who, in the wake of the British Catholic Emancipation of 1829, was obsessed with Rome's designs on England. That his own appointment had been stimulated by a Colonial Office decision to let a Roman Catholic bishop into New South Wales increased his sense of the colony being an arena for this religious war. Later the creation of a new Roman hierarchy in England, the Syllabus of Errors and the promulgation of Papal Infallibility all reinforced colonial anti-Catholic sentiment. When, in the course of the colonies' first royal tour in 1868, a neurotic Irishman took a potshot at Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, the identification of Catholicism with sedition was, for many, confirmed.

The liberal crusade for education for all now became inextricably entangled with sectarian spite. The stridency of Catholic opposition to 'Godless' state education alerted Protestants to the realisation that withdrawal of state aid would harm Rome more than them. Whilst Anglicans were divided on the issue, they too recognised the sectarian benefits. The triumph of secularism was not, therefore, necessarily an indication that 'moral enlightenment' reigned in the colonies, but rather that the tense religious balance made secular solutions the path of least resistance for politicians. Some Protestants hoped that the Catholic community would now be split between those who would have to send their children to state schools and those left with an impoverished Catholic system. In fact education became the Catholic obsession, as funds were raised to build new schools, and the Irish-Australian community turned inwards more than ever. Social prejudice against Catholics was reinforced. While a few Catholics were successful in the professions and in trade (pubs were an understandable favourite), and while the degree of their acceptance varied from colony to colony, most Catholics were confined to working-class or farming occupations, with the public service offering white-collar respectability for some. Sectarianism had always been present in

colonial society, as in Britain, but the education settlement institutionalised and embedded it deep in the childhood experience of all Australians.

Thus the way in which the Anglo-Protestant majority and Irish Catholic minority dealt with each other, at all sorts of levels, became part of the colonial culture. Marriage, for example: in the convict years when the churches, Catholic included, had believed that any marriage was better than an illicit union, mixed marriages had been common, but as the Catholic Church became both more aggressive in dogma, and at the same time more sensitive to the Australian Irish community's social vulnerability, mixed marriages were actively discouraged, if not forbidden. Yet they still took place, and posed difficult questions of acceptance or rejection for the families concerned. In work and recreation Protestants and Catholics met and intermingled, yet all the time were increasingly aware of what could be called the etiquette of sectarianism. Religious (and cultural) dispute discreetly manifested itself in the debate on issues such as education and Irish Home Rule, in the gossipy propaganda of electioneering at the local level, or in the internal factionalism of the public service: otherwise for much of the time it was possible to pretend that it did not exist.

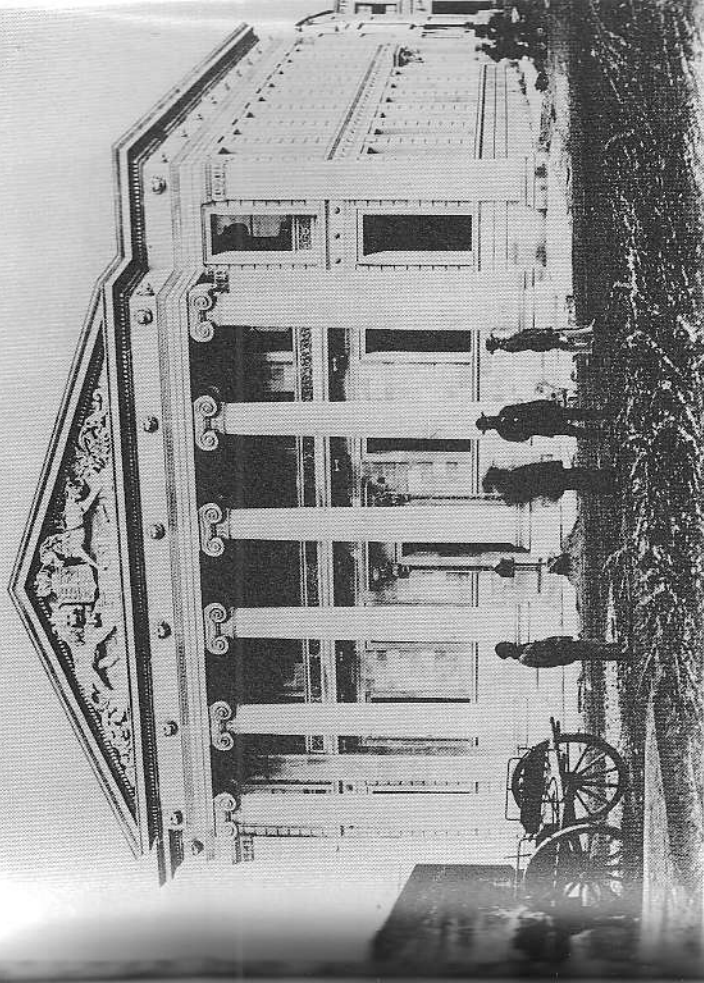
The workplace gave rise to its own institutions. An immediate impact of the goldrushes was to create a shortage of labour, and thus an economic climate conducive to the formation of trade unions. High wages attracted many immigrant artisans away from mining, and, infected by the goldfields ethos, they joined together to exploit their market advantage. The eight-hour day was an early success for building tradesmen, who were careful, nevertheless, to draw on the rhetoric of improvement for their cause: the stonemasons, for example, argued that shorter hours would not only be beneficial for the trade, but would 'also tend to improve our social and moral condition'.¹⁵ Eight Hours Day, which celebrated this initial success of craft trade unionism, was to become the symbolic festival of colonial labour.

The founders of trade unions and friendly societies usually drew on British experience. In the case of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers the immigrants simply formed a colonial branch of an imperial union. By the 1870s miners, both of gold and coal, were beginning to organise, and the Amalgamated Miners' Association emerged as one of the first big intercolonial unions. Perhaps most surprising of all was the unionising of the migratory shearers in the later 1880s in what was to become the powerful Australian Workers'

Union. Meanwhile in the cities the growth of trade unionism was reflected in the linking up of individual unions in trades and labour councils. Even though the majority of workers remained outside trade unions the mood of labour leaders was confident. In 1889 the strike of the London dockers provided the occasion for an expression of the colonial labour success story, when the Australian colonies sent about £37,000 to support the strikers, whose cause had won widespread sympathy.

The professions also acquired their organisations. Lawyers and doctors could hope for a higher social status in a fluid society which lacked a traditional aristocracy, but their associations were much concerned with reinforcing their position, particularly in terms of controlling entry. Sometimes they fell out among themselves: competition for hospital honorary appointments caused medical faction fighting, while solicitors and barristers were at loggerheads when the former sought the amalgamation of the profession. Other professionals such as architects, accountants and dentists sought, through their associations, the status and control mechanisms which the lawyers and doctors had. School teachers were organising from the 1870s, partly in response to the creation of new centralised education departments to run the state system. Their associations served some of the functions of a trade union, for the teachers were employees, but also strove to attain the dignity and standards of a profession, though, given the primitive training they received, with less success. The rise of the professions and their associations was a universal aspect of nineteenth century bourgeois society, but in the context of the colonies, where the pecking order was much more negotiable, became crucial. The professional classes grasped the opportunity to establish themselves as a cultural elite, particularly in urban society, while their associations, all the more powerful for being less noticeable, exceeded in effectiveness the trade unions of the workers.

Business lobby groups such as chambers of commerce and manufactures, and associations of particular employers such as coalmine and steamship owners, grew in response to the need to make representations to governments and to deal with trade unions, but only in the late 1880s were moves made to organise employers more generally. Businessmen, of course, had, along with squatters and professionals, a range of other associations which meshed into their working lives, gentlemen's clubs perhaps being the most significant. And Freemasonry, with a reputation for tolerance which included Jews, even if it in practice excluded Catholics,



4.4 The handsome, classical edifice of Melbourne's Oriental Bank, built in 1857. The pristine grandeur of the temple-like facade contrasts with the primitive state of the street.

was an institution particularly suited to the colonial need for establishing networks of influence.

In trade unions, clubs and lodges the concerns of work and leisure often intertwined. Similarly the societies and institutions dedicated to improvement also catered for the appetite for amusement. Lectures and political addresses – even sermons – were in this sense performances, and the oratorical skills of politicians and clergymen were respected, even when their messages were not. Libraries and galleries were to uplift, but they were also urban landmarks and attractions. On the other hand entertainments such as cycloramas and waxworks, which appealed to the Victorian taste for visual excitement, were often marketed in terms of their instructive value.

The local worthies who strove to civilise their colonial surroundings clung to important symbols of English culture. Thus Redmond Barry, the Anglo-Irish lawyer who did much to found Melbourne's Public Library, felt that it should have on its shelves every work

news to serialised fiction, but they also became organs of colonial influence. Melbourne's *Age*, owned by the evangelising protectionist Scotsman, David Syme, gained for some years a legendary power in Victorian politics which owed much to the extraordinary 90,000 circulation the paper is reputed to have enjoyed by the 1890s.

The strength of the British connexion and the smallness of the local market often made for a tenuous existence for colonial writers. Patronage existed but usually at a low-key level of minor encouragement, or perhaps helping out a needy writer in terms of employment; Parkes, for instance, himself an ardent if untalented rhymester, saw to it that the poet Henry Kendall was given a government job. Local publishers were few, and the authors of colonial novels usually sent their manuscripts off to London. Writing was sometimes a spare-time activity for the reasonably well-to-do or for women who were able to use their marriage as a base; it could also be a cause for struggle and anguish. The writers' perception of colonial society as unresponsive or philistine sometimes compounded more personal problems. The poet Charles Harpur wrote an embittered epitaph for himself about the 'sham age' in which he lived¹⁶; Kendall and Clarke drank themselves into early graves; Adam Lindsay Gordon, later to be hailed as the 'National Poet' and accorded a bust in Westminster Abbey, simply got up one morning, went out on the beach and shot himself.

Painters had the reassurance of a more specialised market, for it was not long before successful colonists wanted their houses – and themselves – painted. But painting was also less specifically British in a cultural sense, and merely to recite the names of some of the leading painters – von Guérard, Chevalier, Becker, Buvelot, Nerli, Loureiro – suggests the more cosmopolitan context. By the same token many of them were less committed to the colonies and either returned home or moved on to new adventures.

Whilst in music there was a certain deference to German culture – *lieder* were formed and German bands were popular – taste tended to follow British example. The Romantic appetite was well catered for by the swelling sounds of choral and organ music, and it has been suggested that the secular choir, an organisation of democratic character which usually appointed its own conductor, was well suited to the colonial temperament. Opera enjoyed a peak of success in the 1860s and 1870s when the company of W. S. Lyster introduced a large repertoire to an often enthusiastic and by no means elite audience.

The leading actor-managers and entrepreneurs came usually



4.5 In a rapidly changing society photography was an important technological innovation. A rather raffish collection of town characters gathered in front of the studio: the photographer, Beaufoy Merlin, standing at the doorway, hands in pocket, is appropriately more bohemian in appearance.

referred to by Gibbon. The relatively literate colonists of the post-gold era soon gained a reputation for being readers, but the books they read were, naturally enough, mostly imported. Special cheaper colonial editions of books catered for the empire market, of which Australia formed the most lucrative part. It was a cause for concern, however, that the novel – still a frivolous form of literature for many serious persons – was so popular, though the great Victorian exponents of the form were beginning to be acceptable. Dickens was a colonial favourite.

Newspapers were also much devoured, and any town of even modest size came to boast at least one. The new technology in printing, paper-making and communications which made possible, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the rise of the popular (often penny) press gave the city newspapers the opportunity to extend their territorial influence. Based on English models, these papers conveyed much British content to their readers ranging from

from Britain, sometimes, as in the case of J. C. Williamson, from the USA. They brought with them the traditional repertoire which immigrants were used to, ranging from Shakespeare to pantomime. It was reassuring for many in 1855 when the Irish tragedian, Gustavus Vaughan Brooke, trod the colonial boards: as one critic said of his *Othello*, 'it was a performance such as on leaving our English home we never again expected to witness'. Some like Brooke and Charles and Ellen Kean (who thought it 'a country for artisans not artists')¹⁷ hoped that their tours would restore financial fortunes; others stayed on and became part of the colonial scene.

For some people theatres were raffish places, associated with liquor and painted women. But the leaders of the profession strove hard, in Australia as in England, to establish the respectability of theatre, and many of their dramatic vehicles trod a careful path between popularity and moral sentiment. Pantomime – in spite of the dubious presence of a leggy 'principal boy' and chorus – was family entertainment, with spectacular effects and transformations, whilst melodrama combined sensation and blood-curdle with a cosmic but simple morality. Both pantomime and melodrama were resourcefully adapted to colonial conditions. It was of the essence of English panto that it offered a revue-like commentary on contemporary events, so this compelled some adaptation, but sometimes the colonial creators transposed traditional stories to a local setting. Gulliver, for example, identifies his unfamiliar antipodean surroundings with the aid of very familiar pantomime punning:

No trace of man I can discover yet,
Nothing but trails of horses can I get.

Man's impress in this region seems a failure –
This country must, I think, be Cook's Horse-trail-*yer*.¹⁸

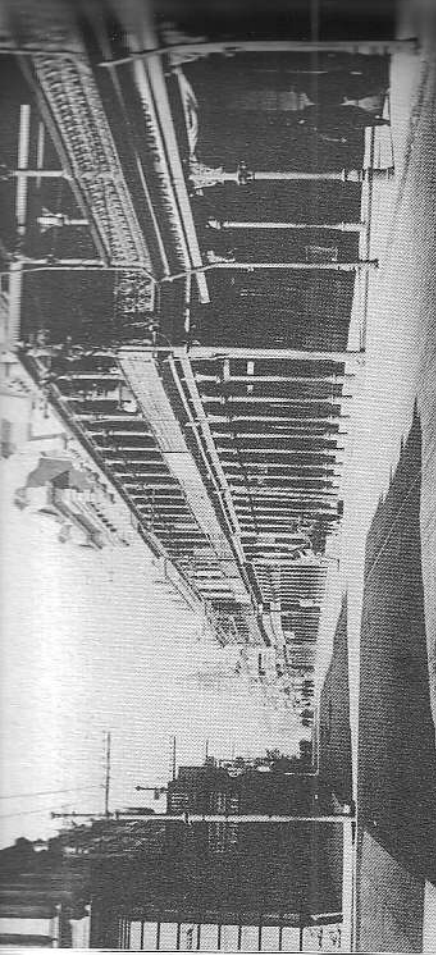
Likewise the clichés of melodramatic plotting were placed in a colourful colonial panorama, with a squatter or digger hero, a hearty native-born heroine, a comic 'new chum' and other local stereotypes. Sometimes the bushranger was exploited as a symbol of evil, but colonial adapters found it hard to part with the suave cloak-and-dagger of the conventional villain. These productions were not self-conscious exercises in national drama, but ephemeral entertainments targeted at a popular audience.

A temperate climate was a natural inducement to outdoor leisure activities, but it was the gathering pace of urbanisation which provided the incentive for the development of spectator sport. The gradual introduction of the Saturday half-holiday was a response to

the demand for leisure opportunities, but in turn helped create the demand for spectator sport. The early colonists had brought with them traditional British leisure pursuits. The British love of horses, for example, was easily accommodated in the colonial setting, even if it meant, as in the early years at Fremantle, racing horses along the beach; to this was added a colonial passion for gambling which derived at least in part from the fatalism of the convict temperament. But racing as a mass entertainment came later, an event of symbolic importance being the running of the first Melbourne Cup in 1861. A handicap race, it soon acquired a local, and then, more surprisingly, a national popularity. By 1870 there was a crowd of 30,000 attending, and the day itself (at this time a Thursday) was already becoming something of a bank holiday in Melbourne.

Cricket, too, already had a history when the British made their settlement in 1788; indeed, in that very year the Marylebone Cricket Club had set out rules for the game. However as with other sports there was still much variation in the way the game was played, and codification awaited the development of regular and organised competitions. When the first English team came out in 1862 – their tour was promoted by two colonial entrepreneurs – the visitors' eleven would usually play 22 colonists, judged an appropriate handicap. There was enormous public interest, even though the playing relationship between English and colonial resembled that between teacher and student. The first Australian tour of England was made by an Aboriginal team, but although the players were proficient it seemed to be sponsored more for its antipodean oddity. It was not until the 1880s that the rhythm of reciprocal tours was established, and the successful Australian team of 1882 returned from England with, for the first time, the 'ashes' of English cricket. The relationship of friendly but intense imperial rivalry had been set.

It was in football, however, that the most interesting adaptations occurred. In the winter of 1858 a well-known cricketer, T. W. Wills, wrote a jovial letter to a Melbourne journal referring to 'the state of torpor' now enveloping his fellow cricketers, and suggesting the formation of 'a foot-ball club' which would, among other things, 'keep those who were inclined to become stout from having their joints encased in useless superabundant flesh'.¹⁹ What emerged from this call was an enjoyable game between two of Melbourne's new 'public' schools, Scotch College and Church of England Grammar. At this time there were no codified rules for football in England, but Wills, who, although native-born, had been sent to school at Rugby, drew on that experience. However, Wills thought that the Rugby



4.6 (a) and (b) Two images of the main street. [On the left] Fremantle's High Street, relatively narrow with its imposing verandahs, suggests an intensive urban environment. Much of Fremantle has survived and has been recently restored as a tourist precinct. The main street [on the right], of an unidentified town in northern Queensland, seems to disappear in a nothingness of bush. A solitary figure is making the journey from one side to the other.

game was not entirely suited to the hard Australian grounds, and even from the beginning there seemed to be a conscious preference for a game which, although 'manly', was fast and not unduly rough. So over the next decade Melbourne football evolved its own distinctive rules, and its crowd appeal was early appreciated: in 1863 it was remarked that spectators 'understood it better than cricket; it is more exciting'. One English visitor, while noting a lack of science, admitted that it was 'the fastest game I have ever seen'.²⁰ Soon the game which had begun as a public school diversion became the principal winter entertainment of suburban Melbourne. When the Heidelberg painter, Streeton, put one such Saturday afternoon on canvas in the late 1880s he called it 'The National Game'. As a Victorian he was exaggerating, for New South Wales and Queensland remained impervious to its appeal, a fact which his compatriots have attributed to a perversity born of colonial rivalry. The more likely explanation is that the stirring of interest in football in Sydney, which had not experienced the goldrush boom of Melbourne, occurred later, when rugby was already codified and, therefore, 'available'. Often the ties between 'Home' (as Britain was called) and colony could be stronger than between, say, Victoria and New South Wales.

The Australian colonies – and particularly Victoria – were in the forefront of the development of spectator sport, and the early crowds attracted to sporting fixtures were high by world standards. It was not simply climate and urbanisation, however, but the dispersed character of Australian cities, with their generous provision of parks and grounds, which so encouraged sport. As a result this subtle fusion of the pursuits of pleasure and excellence became a significant expression of the colonial culture. Sport could nominate heroes – and later on heroines – who could command uncontroversial respect in a society still uncertain, even divided, about its origins and history.

The growth of the cities had been a remarkable feature of the prosperity of the period 1851–90. To contemporaries it often seemed paradoxical, even unhealthy, that an economy dependent on primary product exports, whether mining, pastoral or agricultural, should countenance such a high degree of urbanisation. Mining, of course, itself created urban communities often characterised by intense civic pride even when conditioned by transience; it was also the nature of pastoralism, with large holdings and only intermittent labour needs, which helped reinforce the urbanising process. Agriculture was the main hope for closer settlement but the selection acts met with only limited success. Farming, as has been remarked, so often depended on the family economy, but was then unable to provide a living for all the children when they came to marry. In spite of the export importance of the rural industries, much of the economic growth of this period was in the capital cities. Government and business were heavily centralised in these cities, and only

older, long-established citizens who usually monopolised positions of authority. It was as if there were two communities, migrants and settlers, whose interests and outlooks did not always coincide. So it was possible that in spite of such movements of population around the continent the six colonies, as political and economic entities, could remain remarkably isolated from each other. When, in 1881, Melbourne and Sydney were linked by rail for the first time, the ceremony at the border symbolised the power of parochialism. The two premiers, Berry and Parkes, were both successful British emigrants, yet seized the occasion to promote the provincial interests of their adopted colonies. Nor could the ceremony disguise the fact that the different rail gauges of Victoria and New South Wales meant that for the next eighty years travellers would have to change at the border – a symbolic acknowledgment of colonial separatism.

Social mobility was the colonial boast, but was in fact problematic. There were certainly success stories, particularly in the early days. George Coppin, for example, was an actor turned entrepreneur who, from the 1840s on, won and lost several fortunes. He also won election to Victoria's elitist Legislative Council, cheekily putting down his occupation as 'comedian'. Coppin, a loyal Freemason, was, according to Ellen Kean, honourable and upright but – and here was the colonial rub – 'a common man'. In one sense the Legislative Councils of the colonies were full of 'self-made men' of the old generation, and it was easy for an English upper-middle-class socialist like Beatrice Webb to characterise Coppin's colleagues as 'a mean undignified set of little property owners, with illiterate speech and ugly manners', just as an earlier radical, George Higinbotham, had called them 'the wealthy lower orders'.²¹

In their first experience of the colonies immigrants often felt that their expectations were justified. 'We are sure of making a comfortable independence for ourselves and being able to put our children in the way of doing so too', wrote Penelope Selby in 1840; 'I never saw my way so clear to Independence as I do now,' affirmed Francis Mapleson in 1854. Yet many were to face at least partial disillusion. As one Irishman observed in 1884 the squatters were still powerful 'so the[y] make the laws to suit themselves like the landlords of Ireland'.²² Even in the years of prosperity while many immigrants may have found themselves relatively 'comfortable' they were denied the 'independence' emigration seemed to promise. The rise of trade unionism was in itself a recognition that the colonies were, in an economic sense, not so much a new world as a capitalist extension of the old.

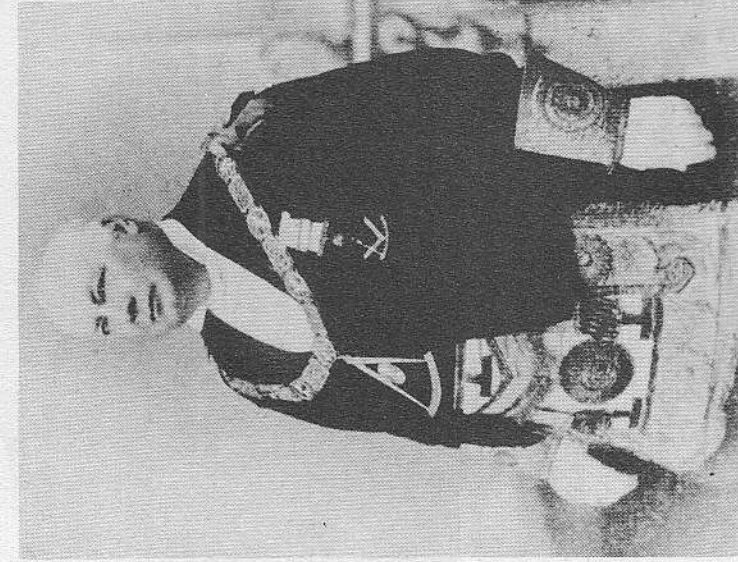


4.7 These gold-diggers have travelled from Charters Towers in northern Queensland to Kalgoorlie in Western Australia circa 1895, but not, presumably, on their bicycles. The recently introduced modern bicycle was understandably popular in the spread-out urban communities of colonial Australia.

in Queensland and Tasmania was there a measure of decentralisation. By the end of the century 35 per cent of colonists lived in six capital cities, and this figure, based on boundaries which often lagged behind the reality, is probably an underestimate.

The gathering impetus of urbanisation points to another significant feature of this period with cultural implications, namely, the geographical mobility of much of the population. Immigrants rarely found their niche the first time; moving was part of the settling process. Cities of gold mushroomed overnight, some to wither away again into ghost towns. Diggers sometimes travelled great distances. The Kalgoorlie rushes of the 1890s brought thousands of 't'other-siders' (as migrants from the east were called) to sleepy Western Australia; there were even miners who came from Charters Towers in northern Queensland, circuiting half the continent. Seasonal work, such as shearing, created another sort of migratory population; in the bush families were used to being separated. The economic fluctuations of colonies and regions caused complex patterns of migration, and colonists, in the quest for betterment, developed a disregard for distance.

Such a shifting population promoted a degree of cultural integration, but it did not submerge regional identity. Those on the move were least likely to influence civic institutions, while it was the



4.8 George Coppin, comedian and colonial success story, here in Masonic regalia. No doubt his Masonic connexions were useful to him in his career.

The myth of social mobility also ignored a sizeable minority who were the victims of the colonial enterprise. Aborigines, it went without saying, were not part of the colonists' society, but rather a legacy of the conquered environment. Although a few Chinese were successful as merchants, and others made a competence in market gardens, laundries and furniture making, 'Asiatics' were in effect socially quarantined. Indeed this pattern had been established on the goldfields when they were herded into 'Protectorates'.

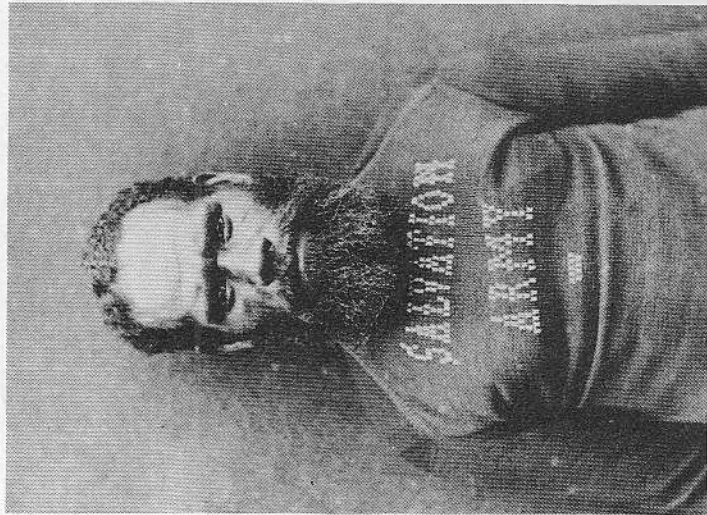
But there were others, too, who did not share in the feast. The new manufacturing industries often exploited female labour, and by the 1880s 'sweating' was a problem. Women's 'mobility' was constrained by marriage, children and the very wage discrimination which made their employment attractive to manufacturers. They were also virtually ignored by the trade union movement. Even at times of peak prosperity there were always stubborn pockets of poverty. Furthermore, the myth of social mobility in focusing on

the self-made men of the market place failed to acknowledge that in an era marked by the rise of the professions, educational opportunity was crucial. There was at this time almost no provision for secondary education in the state system; indeed, the main interest in educational reform was in the technical sphere, with an emphasis on teaching the sons of the working class appropriate skills.

Yet in spite of the gap between myth and reality, the expectation of mobility, even of a marginal nature, conditioned attitudes to wealth and authority. Colonial manners eschewed servility, and even deference was questioned. It was early remarked that the native-born disliked domestic service, which inherited an association with convict status. It remained largely a female preserve, and the colonial opportunities for marriage further whittled away the labour supply. No matter how much the middle class complained, and sponsored the immigration of single women (particularly Irish), the 'problem' seemed insoluble. Later in the century it was evident that women preferred to work in factories, which, no matter how much exploiting them, were at least sociable places, with their own working-class culture, while to be in domestic service usually meant loneliness (most such households only ran to one servant) in an alien social environment.

Elsewhere colonial society devised subtle mechanisms for accommodating master-servant relationships. Manual labour, with its pioneer heritage, commanded respect, as much from self-made men as workers. Hence even when industrial war raged between squatters and shearers, the Tom Roberts heroic image of 'Shearing the Rams' was still broadly acceptable. It was convenient, in the colonial environment of growth, for both employers and workers to profess that they met as equals, and the workplace developed social rituals quite different from those that operated, say, in the home. It was possible, therefore, for the great majority of colonists to ignore the deprived and disadvantaged and to congratulate themselves that they had truly created 'a workingman's paradise'.

In 1890 a month-long maritime strike, in which the cocksure unions were outmanoeuvred and defeated by a quickly mobilised alliance of employers, signalled the end of an era. Strikes in the shearing and mining industries followed and again the unions were humiliated. The economic climate was changing. The collapse of Melbourne's land boom in 1888 heralded a recession; British investors began to lose confidence in the colonies; and 1893 saw an alarming succession of bank crashes. The depression which had materialised affected all



4.9 George Niné, an Islander labourer, who by 1897 is said to have owned a property. The photograph suggests that he owed something to the Salvation Army which had established a significant colonial presence.

colonies except Western Australia, now experiencing its own gold rush, but Victoria, which had been most infected with the boom mentality, suffered the worst.

This reversal of economic fortunes was much more than a hiccup in a saga of growth. It profoundly shook not only economic but cultural confidence in the broader sense. On the one hand the evaporation of British investment reminded colonists of their dependence on imperial approval. On the other hand unemployment and poverty on a scale unacceptable in a 'workingman's paradise' induced soul-searching and guilt. 'Our prosperity... has been our ruin: we became intoxicated by it: it has materialised our lives', bemoaned the Anglican bishop of Brisbane.²³ Moreover, the colonial dream of independence, already fragile, seemed to have been finally shattered. Even some of those who had appeared to control their own destinies, like the squatters, were revealed as being in hock to the land and finance companies.

Economic collapse exposed fissures in colonial society which earlier prosperity had papered over. The railway-assisted growth of middle-class suburbia in Sydney and Melbourne had increasingly left the inner suburbs to become working-class territory, now characterised as slums; in Brisbane and Adelaide there were signs of a similar dichotomy developing. A new bitterness was evident in strikes, sometimes with confrontations – as in the Queensland bush in 1891 and the mining town, Broken Hill, in 1892 – with a whiff of civil war to them. Pastoralists and mine owners invoked the law which arrested and gaoled union leaders. As the trade union movement lost ground industrially, infant labor parties entered the colonial parliaments. In the 1880s trade union leaders had talked about 'direct representation', but now they were motivated to act. The faction system was giving way to party politics, and in this transition the labor party was to play a crucial role. The shifts and movements of colonial society were stabilising into relatively permanent social structures.

Radicals were as much disoriented by the depression as conservatives, but they drew some comfort from the middle-class crisis of conscience. While the *Bulletin*, generally sympathetic to the labour movement, published the odd ballad by Lawson and others with a revolutionary flavour, its idealisation of the bush was a more serious attempt to forge a healing but progressive ethos. The Heidelberg painters struggled to make a living – many evacuated shell-shocked Melbourne for Sydney which at least seemed sunnier – but found reassurance in a sense of cultural mission. Roberts saw it as an important time for painters simply because 'they were getting the last touch of the old colonial days'.²⁴ In a population in which the native-born now predominated, it was significant that many of the new writers and painters were similarly creatures of the colonial environment.

Yet any pursuit of nationalist themes seemed conditioned by the new pessimism abroad. Particularly was this evident in racial fears. Since the end of transportation there had been an employer lobby which sought the introduction of cheap non-European labour. Attempts were made to ship in Chinese and Indian 'coolies', but from the 1860s attention focused on the Queensland recruitment of indentured labour from the Pacific Islands, 'kanakas' as they were called, particularly for the sugar industry. Such schemes were propped up by a new conviction that the tropical climate was unsuited to the white man, and therefore that white labour could not be relied upon to develop northern Queensland. As has been

remarked, this had not worried the early European settlers of the region, but it was more than a local artifice of greedy employers. The new stress on race and environment was evident, for example, in Charles Dilke's *Greater Britain*, in which he depicted the tropics as alien to the white man, even condemning the soft-fleshed banana as a symptom of tropical sloth.

Trade union and liberal opposition to the introduction of Asian or Melanesian labour drew on humanitarian concern about the connotations of slavery, particularly when recruitment was more akin to kidnapping. But more generally it reflected an increasingly strident obsession that the continent should be kept racially pure, beneath its banner, 'Australia for the white man', the *Bulletin* promoted a relentless and vicious brand of jocular racism. This obsession not only consigned the Aborigines to either extinction or irrelevance, but also hounded the local Chinese community. At a time when Chinese numbers were actually declining, hostility to them intensified. Western Australia, for example, legislated to prevent Chinese from settling on its new goldfields. Yet this racial paranoia must also be seen in a broader European context. Imperialism was predicated on notions of racial hierarchy, but even while the European nations scrambled for what was left of Africa, fears were surfacing about the future balance of races. The new racial pessimism was expressed locally in Charles Pearson's *National Life and Character* published – in Britain of course – in 1893. Pearson, an English-born liberal intellectual who had made a great contribution to colonial education and politics, saw the future of Europeans as threatened by the multiplying numbers of the black, brown and yellow races. As a slogan 'Australia for the white man', for all its bravado, reflected a real sense of racial vulnerability, heightened by geographical isolation.

This was part of the context of the federal movement which took shape in the 1890s. A concern about immigration and defence fused with a new belief that federation might improve economic prospects, at least in commanding greater respect on the British money market. Political leaders took up the federal cause with varying degrees of enthusiasm, but the written constitution which emerged was essentially a pragmatic compromise between competing provincial interests. So in Queensland the separatist north wanted federation to reduce its dependence on its distant capital, Brisbane, whilst in Western Australia the 'othersiders' of the goldfields were advocates partly out of resentment towards the old western Australians who governed them. The strongest resistance to federation

was centred in free-trade New South Wales which felt it had least to gain. Although some of its leaders, like Barton and Deakin, saw federalism as a mission, the movement as a whole lacked zest and originality. Federation seemed a reasonable, and perhaps inevitable, outcome for the colonies, rather than a cause worth fighting for. British approval removed even that potential barrier. So when on 1 January 1901 the new Commonwealth was proclaimed in a Sydney park, the good-humoured festivities seemed lacking in patriotic fervour.

It might seem appropriate, even admirable, that Australia should escape the lurid excesses of patriotism, but it raises questions about the kind of society the colonists had created and the loyalties it fostered. The early history of the colonies had been bound up with notions of exile or escape from Britain. Yet the Australian settlements were, or quickly became, an economic frontier for British capitalism in expansionary mood. When Britain conceded self-government it was in the secure knowledge that economic ties were strong enough to sustain the colonial relationship. The complex interactions of race, religion and class which had created a colonial culture had been conditioned by this imperial context. The year 1901 marked little more than the formal birth of the Commonwealth: in one sense 'Australia' already existed, while in that other patriotic sense it would remain curiously problematic. But federation did summon the colonies into a twentieth century in which European events would impinge on them more than ever.