

## Chapter 8

The witness said: "If, for the sake of argument, it be admitted that it was really an object to get rid of 20 out of 100 of these... the expense has been £370 per head." For the rest it might have been better "in the present state of the labour market" to release them at home<sup>47</sup>.

Earlier the same report gave estimates of a "steady provision of work" which would not require alteration for many years:— Undergoing separate punishment, 1900; Portland, 1500; Chatham, 1150; Portsmouth, 1050; Gibraltar, 800; Bermuda, 600 (with 600 additional reserved); Parkhurst, 600 (boys); Dartmoor, 77; "*Stirling Castle*" hulk, 400 (invalids); and West Australia, 300 — Total 9000<sup>48</sup>. Thus a needy colony got less than 3% and this partly for a breakwater; the rest of the reliable and able were earmarked for defence works and naval bases. The "more advantageous employment" had been in mind even before Lord Stanley so candidly expressed it.

The formation of a convict establishment at Portland was decided on even before transportation to New South Wales had ceased (1840) with a view to "systematic application of convict labour to national works" and as the best means of training men in habits of industry which would fit them on discharge for earning an honest livelihood either at home or abroad<sup>49</sup>. The objects were still punishment and reformation but the nature of national needs had changed.

## The Parallel of Freetown, Sierra Leone

IN 1787 a British trading settlement was formed in the Sierra Leone River, near the present site of Freetown. It is, on that coast, the only large, natural harbour. It had been for two centuries the chief port of the slave traders. It became after 1850 the great collecting centre for West African produce — all cargo steamers shipped there a band of Krio boys as boatmen for the open roadsteads of the Guinea coast and paid them off at Freetown when homeward bound. The temporary convenience fixed over the stern for them was known as a "West Coast Ensign".

In world wars it was the great convoy port; deep, commodious and defensible from seaward. The Lion Mountains over 2000 feet high mark its location from far out at sea and thus gave a landfall to slavers, traders and naval vessels. In 1942 from the Hill Station one could count from 100 to 200 ships at anchor in neat lines; the tramps and ore freighters, tankers and passenger ships moved in or out by the deep channel; troop convoys for Suez put in for water; those for Singapore sailed just in time for their troops to be captured by the Japanese; the "*Prince of Wales*" and "*Repulse*" called on their way to their foredoomed end. It was a bastion of seapower in those days of the Battle of the Atlantic.

In 1786 some English philanthropists, mindful of the problem of the Black Poor — negroes, living on charity, who had served in the British forces — conceived a plan for making a settlement there to provide for them, open a legitimate commerce in African produce and carry on a "spirited cultivation" of sugar, cotton and coffee, using local African workers on a wage basis. The site was recommended by Smeathman, a Swedish scientist who, with others, had been studying the commercial possibilities of Africa. (One of these was Anders Sparrman who shipped with Cook from Capetown.) In all the proposals and reports of the syndicate

47—Report on Convict Prison Discipline, 1857. Page 100.

48—Ibid. Page 94.

49—Ibid. Page 79.



which promoted the settlement the issues involved are stated as:—Abolition of the slave trade, philanthropy, cultivation and legitimate commerce and the "introduction of civilisation and Christianity as a compensation to Africa" for the past wrongs done to her.

How the founding of a plantation and trading post in Sierra Leone could compensate those who had been bought from the Gold Coast or Biafra to die at sea or in West Indian sugar works is obscure. This "argument" is quoted in the hope that historians and journalists will leave to the diplomats the personifying of States, Towns and even Continents. Such verbiage is usually specious and always erroneous.

The syndicate consisted of the enlightened evangelicals of the Clapham Sect — Wilberforce, Thornton, Whitbread, Clarkson and the rest. Granville Sharp was the chief organiser. Money was subscribed, a Charter obtained from the Government and the Black Poor were invited to apply. Some 700 were enrolled but when the time came to embark only some 400 came forward. Sharp had been meeting them weekly in a public house in "Marrybone" to give a weekly allowance. To encourage laggards he asked the parishes and citizens to withhold from giving alms to black beggars (this was in December 1); the Lord Mayor ordered City Marshal and constables to bring black beggars before a magistrate so that "they might be sent home or to the new colony".<sup>1</sup>

Here then was a colony being founded by vagrants in the same year that convicts were being drafted to ships for Botany Bay. If any still think that Australia could have been settled with free people, at this time, here is the evidence of the absurdity of such notions. Free settlers as private traders were willing enough; free labourers, in any number, simply did not then exist. Even in this case of masterless beggars the legal power had to be invoked.

Three transports were provided by the Navy; some 400 blacks and 60 white women, described as women of loose character (sisters to those who sailed in our First Fleet), were embarked and lay on board in Portsmouth harbour for months. They saw the First Fleet sail from the Mother Bank; it is no wonder that they thought that they too were going to "Botany Bay". Some sixty of the transportees died before the ships sailed; six months after their arrival in Sierra Leone more than one-third were dead.

One of the Black Poor published in Boston, New England, in 1814, a narrative of his life. When aged 12 (in 1757) he arrived in England and in 1787 was appointed by the government as

1—See footnotes on Page 73 of Mello's *British Imperial Trusteeship, 1783-1850*, Faber 1951.

Commissary to the expedition. There was embezzlement of stores as supply for 750 was made but only 416 were mustered. Beds and clothing were lacking. He informed the Navy Commissioners of the fraud but his dismissal "was procured by a gentleman in the City whom the agent, conscious of his peculation, had deceived by letter and who empowered the agent to receive on board at government expense a number of unauthorised passengers".<sup>2</sup>

This may explain the inclusion of white women. Fyfe's History of Sierra Leone (OUP 1962) says these were married to settlers on board, while drunk. There was a daily rum ration on board. It is clear that Sharp, and other philanthropic gentlemen, were unable to prevent the rackets which plagued Phillip in getting adequate clothing and stores for the First Fleet.

The disintegration of this settlement has been ascribed to rum, disease, laziness and attacks of slave traders. Fyfe states that some of the settlers themselves became slave traders. One Henry Demone, whom Sharp had rescued from slavery, crossed to the north shore of the harbour and became a prosperous slave trader.<sup>3</sup> The diverse types of the Black Poor may be gauged by the statement that "John Lemon, a Bengali hairdresser, one of the headmen of the Black Poor in London, was imprisoned for slave dealing, escaped, joined the French and took part in the plunder of Freetown (1794). In 1808 he was back in the colony, still with one of his prostitute wives. He was ordered out but seems to have returned later".<sup>4</sup>

In 1791 the promoters asked the Government for Incorporation as the Sierra Leone Company, with exclusive trading rights for 31 years. They convinced Pitt that the settlement was valuable as a naval base and that if it were abandoned the French would take it. We must note that Wadstrom, Sparman and Arrhenius had been sent to Africa under the joint backing of the Swedish and French governments and in 1788 Wadstrom was invited to expound his plans to the Privy Council. He held that Africans might be induced to cultivate sugar, cotton and indigo if a colony of Europeans were formed to "bring them to regular and diurnal labour" by diffusing among them the "spirit of liberal commerce".<sup>5</sup>

Wadstrom also advanced the suggestion that whaling might be carried on from Freetown as the Portuguese were already engaged in the sperm whale fishery in those waters.

2—Oluudh Equiana: *Life of Oluudh Equiana or Gustavus Vasa*.

3—Fyfe, Page 23.

4—Fyfe, Page 98.

5—C. B. Wadstrom: *Essay on Colonisation, West Africa*. London 1794. The work was inscribed to Paul le Mesurier, Lord Mayor of the City of London for his "zeal in promoting the civilisation of Africa".



The parallels with New South Wales multiply. An even closer link is asserted. In 1788 "Mr. Granville Sharp was fitting out a vessel for Sierra Leone under the command of Captain Roberts, R.N., who had learned his trade under 'the great Cook' when a 'mercantile dispute about a paltry cargo of skins' nearly ended in war with Spain. The ship and stores were diverted to a 'secret expedition' which I believe was connected with the Nootka Sound business"<sup>6</sup>.

In October, 1791, the Directors of the Sierra Leone Company reported that a remnant of the first settlement had been moved to another site. Their aim was to establish a commercial factory and to introduce civilisation, cultivation and a safe trade. Five vessels had sailed with artificers, servants and English settlers. They had refused to take any more of the London blacks — St. Giles' blackbirds — but were awaiting the arrival of free American blacks from Nova Scotia. These had been largely deported from New York when the British had evacuated it; the promises made during their war service were not fulfilled. Whether it was the wish of the British Government to get rid of negroes or the wish of the Sierra Leone Company for a work force is an open question. In March, 1792, 16 ships brought to Freetown 1131 blacks — 65 had died on the voyage — the Directors were astonished at the number which had come forward.

The report described them as sober, orderly and industrious. They wrote: "From their ability and disposition to labour, much may be hoped." There was a high mortality in the first wet season; delay in surveying land, provisions were dear (on account of the war said the Directors who thought ten per cent profit on stores a fair thing). Some servants combined to raise wages and two delegates were sent to London to lay complaints before the Directors. To them the delegates, "after being exhorted as free-men and Christians to discourage unreasonable discontent and pay respect and obedience to the government", showed the same "vehemence and disrespect" which they had shown to the government.

After all the trouble and expense caused by the Nova Scotians the Directors doubted the expediency of introducing them. They had been employed at double the wages paid to native workers; it was conceded that they were more skilled. Here the Directors save the commentators the trouble of speculating by raising the "if only" cry: "if only the land had been as fruitful as it had been described; if only the Nova Scotians had been industrious". So much for free labour. At this time one member of the council in the colony was "Mr. Dawes who had been at Botany Bay".

By contrast with the free blacks, there was a plantation on the Bullom shore (northern) employing natives growing rice and cotton. They had a money wage and rations. An incentive to punctuality was given at sunrise and sunset — a small glass of rum. Thus they were being trained in the capitalistic virtues. The importance of rum as a wage good was at the base of the rum monopoly in Australia, showing that many or most of the convicts needed similar incentives (called here indulgences) to teach application, diligence and punctuality. In Sierra Leone the trouble with the Nova Scotians arose from the fact that they were more skilled and also more sophisticated in their use of money and knowledge of the value of their work.

In 1794 a French naval force raided and plundered the settlement — the loss was estimated at £52,000. The Nova Scotians continued to "manifest a spirit of turbulence and insubordination". In 1800 a new body of immigrants arrived, known as Maroons. They were brought as a counterpoise to the Nova Scotians and arrived in time to quell an insurrection and an attempt to take over the government. In 1801 there was an attack on the fort by natives led by some "escaped Nova Scotians"; a truce was arranged and then 65 additional British troops arrived. These details are from a statement of the Directors to the Committee of the Privy Council. In May, 1802, the Committee found these facts:—"That funds granted by Parliament to the settlement had been insufficient and should be increased. Without these the Colony could not continue. With perseverance the advantages originally proposed, in particular the introduction of habits of industry and civilisation among the natives of Africa, might be realised. It called the attention of the House to the advantage Sierra Leone afforded to H.M. vessels as a naval station."

The term Maroon derives from the Spanish for a domestic animal that has gone wild. The Maroons of Jamaica were descended from runaway slaves who lived as an independent people in the mountain fastnesses of the Cockpit country of Jamaica. In 1795 the government there, fearing the spread of revolution to Jamaica from the French negroes of Haiti, sent expeditions against them: five hundred accepted government terms and submitted. Then they were deported to Nova Scotia whereon General Walpole who had led the expedition against them resigned. The new problem for Nova Scotia, eight years after getting rid of the civilised blacks to Sierra Leone, was solved by the British enlisting the Maroons in a West African regiment and sending them to Freetown to coerce the free and rebellious negroes there. Thus were warlike dissidents transformed into a police force to coerce a free people of whom so much had been hoped. So much what? This too in a colony which has been

<sup>6</sup>—Wadstrom, Page 609.



commonly represented as a philanthropic venture to give an asylum to freed negro slaves.

The report of the Directors to the Committee ascribes the "constant state of hostility" of the Nova Scotians to the weakness of the government; they "instilled into their children such prejudices against the Europeans as counteracted all endeavours to promote a love of right principles and orderly and virtuous conduct". They add: "The Nova Scotians are now much awed by the Maroons and look up to the Europeans for protection." Earlier in the report they stated that the number of male adults among the Maroons equalled that of the remaining Nova Scotians. This means that death or defections had halved the numbers of those from whom so much had been hoped.

This raised the question of the "dangerous influence" of the Maroons unless the government had sufficient forces to keep the warlike native tribes at bay. The Maroons are described as active, intrepid, confident of their strength and harbouring a desire to go back to Jamaica. This made it more difficult to get them to work at their plantations — and thereby raise trade produce for the Company. It was feared that without a permanent British force the Maroons might take over and then make war on the native tribes in order to sell their captives as slaves.

This report was signed by Henry Thornton (Chairman), Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, T. Babington and others. Zachary Macaulay was then Secretary, having at one time been Governor of the Colony. Like many others who were employed by the Company he had managed sugar plantations in the West Indies.

The Directors stressed the advantages of the colony as a naval base for a commercial nation; a safe and commodious harbour, at all times easy of access. There was no other harbour to compare with it between Gibraltar and the Cape.

It is sufficient to know that in 1808 the British Government took over the settlement as a Crown Colony. Zachary Macaulay built a tidy fortune out of West African trade. The port became the base of British operations against the slave trade and was so "successful" that thirty years after the slave trade was made illegal for British subjects more slaves were being sold out of Africa than ever before. The hypocrisy attending the suppression of the slave trade is not in question here. What is advanced is that a colony founded by upright and sincere philanthropists could never have begun without the backing of British naval forces and that the British government, at all times, measured the achievement of the Company by the value of its settlement, and its insignificant trade, in terms of national power. Like all chartered companies, working by remote control, the cupidity of the instruments it had to use, from the scalawags among the Black

Poor to the headmen of the Maroons or its own European officials, alongside the opportunities for private gain, would have frustrated the starry-eyed intentions of people much more sophisticated than the Saints of Clapham.

In 1784 the British government had sent the "*Nautilus*", Capt. Thompson, to explore the coasts of Africa for a site for a penal settlement. The prospective site was Das Voltas, near the mouth of the Orange River. This and other harbours had been visited by whalers engaged in the Southern Whale Fishery, as the name Walvisch Bay suggests. As the proposals of the Beauchamp Committee for this venture fit closely the one that followed for Botany Bay, it is probable that it was the logical next step, as it was intended to take Capetown to prevent the French from doing so.

The "*Nautilus*" was sent in February, 1787, with the first settlement of the Black Poor. To provide for merchant-banker-philanthropists to found a trading colony was in line with the policy of seizing all good harbours to safeguard the expanding eastern trade. The French still held Mauritius and Pondicherry and were planning to take over Trincomali, Batavia and Capetown from the Dutch. So the Sierra Leone River, the only safe harbour on the way to Capetown, had value for that African and eastern trade alike.

That the Black Poor proved worse than useless is clear. The four hundred who were sent had "come forward" — that is statistically true; it is a fair inference, from the record of fraud and slave trading by them, that it was the boss gangsters among them who had led the rest into the venture, along with their fancy women.

The government had paid much of the cost; after the fiasco they also paid the cost of sending the Nova Scotians. When these proved refractory the Maroons were sent as mercenaries to keep the remnant of the Nova Scotians in order. From the beginnings the costs of the establishment and of transport had been met by the government. The complete takeover came in 1808 because of the exigencies of war and inflation and the inadequacy of the capital funds of the Chartered Company. The members of the Company then formed an African Association to promote trade with the interior; such journeys as had already been made by Mungo Park. About Park two points might be noted: between his two journeys he had studied Cook's methods of navigation, and had been invited by the government to explore the inland of New South Wales.

The specious points advanced by the philanthropists have been taken as having a material influence. Compensation for the wrongs of Africa is merely ridiculous. To make a home for freed



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slaves is simply not true. The Maroons were not freed slaves nor were most of the Nova Scotians. To settle the Maroons in Sierra Leone was comparable to the policy of settling ex-servicemen on the frontiers of Canada and of Cape Colony — to keep dissident elements in order.

The dominant fact was the quality of the harbour and its situation in relation to the expanding trade. Thus in the one year the government established three separate settlements, Sydney, Norfolk Island and Freetown, not counting those of Penang and Malacca made by the East India Company. The evidence of events should long since have caused writers to cease mentioning the alleged aversion of "Britain" to founding new colonies.

## Conclusion

**THIS** work has attempted to make clear the commercial forces which almost two hundred years ago were decisive in the making of the first settlements in Australia. Most of them have been ignored by professed historians because they either did not understand or did not want to understand them.

In writing history one is asserting his ability to explain how "we all became, with the world's acclaim, the marvellous mugs we are" (G. K. Chesterton). Australians have been brought up in the belief that after 1776 there was in Britain (or England, or London but not in Ireland) an accumulation of criminals and that it was of importance to the moral condition of the realm that these should be voided somewhere. This condition had arisen because it was no longer possible to transport criminals to His Majesty's Plantations in America and this led to a search for a new "dumping ground", a mere receptacle.

Now it may be that there is room, or need, for imagination in reconstructing the past of any nation or community. It may be — it depends on what you mean. Imagination surely relates to envisaging things which have not as yet been made clear to one's self or to lesser mortals. It is not merely the discovery of some novel and convincing explanation for our origins and growth. That comes merely from logical thinking on the basis of data not previously known or admitted. One of the greatest of British newsmen, C. P. Scott, founder of the "*Manchester Guardian*", took as his maxim: "Comment is free but facts are sacred."

The people who were transported were not criminals. They were convicts and any writer who asserts more than that is arrogating to himself an attribute that is reserved to divine authority. We have no warrant, save in the assertions of publicists who were often interested parties, that our forebears, or even some of them, were criminals. They were convicts. This means merely persons who had been found guilty of committing any one of some three hundred listed offences for which the



punishment was transportation. This meant that his or her services were, for a term of years, forfeited to the Crown.

In those days most public men, at least, believed there was a social category called "the criminal classes". The best answer to that was given by Eugene Debs, a socialist candidate for President of the United States: "While there is a criminal class I am of it." The category "convict transports" comprised persons who could legally be transported to H.M. Plantations, but also into the armed forces of the Crown or into the Hulks — the unnamed forces of the Crown.

Convicts — that is all; and any historian who on that account dubs them criminals is arrogant and possibly untruthful. Was the Navy manned by criminals? Was William Redfern a criminal? Or D'Arcy Wentworth? John Mitchel was a convict — to some he was a seditious person, and therefore criminal. Sir Roger Casement was a convict who held that no Irishman could be adjudged guilty of treason to an alien government.

In 1787 the Crown had at its disposal, in hulks and prisons, some thousands of half-citizens — that is all that we can say of them as persons — and decided to send some of them to found new settlements in New South Wales. What mattered was their industrial capacity; what work they could do, what capacity they had to learn the skills needed to establish and improve a settlement in a strange environment.

At this time Arthur Young wrote, in his "Tour of Ireland 1776-9": "Such is the weight of the lower classes in the great scale of national importance that a traveller can never give too much attention to every circumstance that concerns them. Their welfare forms the broad basis of public property. It is they that feed, clothe, enrich and fight the battles of all other ranks of a community... in proportion to their ease is the strength and wealth of nations."

"I am convinced that to be ignorant of their state and situation is to be deficient in the first rudiments of political knowledge."

That was a viewpoint rarely expressed in those days. For the convicts, many of whom came from that Ireland of which Young wrote, the Established Church was an organ of the civil power whose function was to instil into the lower classes attitudes conducive to the ease and prosperity of the higher. It was a church for masters and slaves. That some convicts rapidly upgraded themselves in spite of official and church restrictions was apparent within the first twenty years of settlement. Some ascribe this to some mystical abstraction called the Enlightenment. Russell Ward, in "The Australian Legend", finds the emergence of a distinctive Australian independence of spirit in the convict

workers of the outback. He could find stronger evidence of this in the convicts who lived, when at home, in Sydney but who most of their time were chasing the big money in the camps of sealers and shore whaling stations round the Australian coasts or on the islands of the Pacific Ocean. It was Sydney society, not the Bush, that gave a distinctive quality to the Australian way of life.

What our historians have not seen, indeed have almost chosen not to see, is that in those years a new phase of seaborne trade was rapidly growing. New methods of navigation had brought within the reach of commerce many vast new possibilities. Until then a country like Japan was as inaccessible as the back side of the moon. The new methods had brought certainty, which means safety, which means profit, into the pursuit of those new possibilities. There were many wild men of Sydney willing, indeed eager, to exploit these. The convicts, free by servitude or not, were the instruments they used. It was their ability to hold down the job which gave them freedom: freedom of the seas but also of the ports, when they came back with money — even if they earned it like horses and spent it like asses. Men like these took Bass to Western Port, took James Kelly round Van Diemens Land and escaped in small boats even to Timor. To find a distinctive independence in the dumb beliets of the outback and ignore its emergence in these is quite absurd.

For well over a hundred years before Australian settlement there had been continuous commercial war between France and Great Britain. Continuous — for between declared wars there was merely armed truce with rivalry carried on by commercial means. In that century the power of Britain had grown. So too had that of France but in different ways. In 1786 it was certain that war would recur — a naval war for the control of the trade with India and China. The new factor in the struggle of great powers was the emergent United States, already rich and powerful and trying to effect "a more perfect union". In 1789, the year of the French Revolution, this Union was precariously achieved. From 1784 the aggressive Yankee traders were free to trade with China unhindered by the monopoly of the British East India Company.

Besides this threat was the certainty that the Dutch trading posts were in jeopardy — it was clear that they would fall either to French or to British sea power. The Spanish possessions in the New World and the Philippines would also go to the strongest. The rulers of the British and French commercial oligarchies did not need much imagination to foresee that the prizes of war would be Capetown, Mauritius, Ceylon, Java, Guiana, Trinidad and Malta.



The wealth of the British realm depended increasingly on foreign trade. Cotton, dyestuffs, raw silk, sugar, timber, iron, flax and hemp, saltpetre and oil, animal or vegetable, came mainly from seaborne trade. Of these the greatest value was in sugar but after that came tea in which there was a profitable re-export trade. It came then solely from Canton, the only Chinese port where foreign traders were tolerated.

It was not so much the new lands that Cook had discovered that were of value but the new methods of navigation which he had proved and the charts based thereon. It was this which enabled all others to find with precision, and profit, the ports from which the wealth of nations came. This is a sober fact which historians have been unable or unwilling to assess. Consider the First Fleet — that made such an uneventful voyage to a remote and new destination. Yet the late Brian Fitzpatrick (in "The Australian People") presumed to censure Captain Phillip for sailing, with his "cockleshell flotilla", those three thousand unnecessary miles by calling at Rio de Janeiro and Capetown.

While feeling regret that this stricture was not published in Fitzpatrick's lifetime, we must still see that historians who can so ignore fundamentals of seafaring should avoid them altogether. If they do they are ignoring the basic reasons for the settlement of Australia. It is more serious that Professor Manning Clark should go to such lengths to assess Captain Cook's moral defects, ignoring essential naval aspects of events, and then credit Cook with visiting twice a port which he never saw. Imagination is one thing, imagining's another, but gross carelessness in matters of recorded fact make one doubt the value of other judgments drawn from evidence.

It is no wonder that no historian has pointed out that the First Fleet was a well-ordered expedition pioneering a new route to Canton; that three of the transports were East India Company ships under charter to proceed to Canton as soon as they had discharged their cargo on account of the government.

Even before the travels of Marco Polo the reported wealth of far Cathay had excited the cupidity of the western world — as it does still. Two centuries later Columbus had sought the East by going west. The quest for a north-west or a north-east passage went on for centuries — the second is now in use. The East Indies merchants of all European powers had sought to break through the trade barriers of China, Korea and Japan. By land the trade in silk and tea had reached the western world by the caravan routes of the Tartar Empire. By 1700 the Russia of Peter the Great had pushed back the Tartar power and opened land and river routes even to Kamschatka — for furs to sell in the Kiakhna market to Peking merchants.

## CONCLUSION

By 1784 a new way to China was clearly known. The North West Passage was impassable. There was faint hope of a water-way from Hudson's Bay to the Pacific coast. The first American ship arrived in Canton and the British East India Company for the first time sent ships direct to Canton by Sunda Strait, by-passing Indian ports. The main objective was the monopoly of the trade in tea to Europe and America. (We may recall that two of the English ships chartered by the East India Company for the Boston Tea Party were owned by Samuel Enderby of London.)

In 1785 the French government sent La Perouse to survey the North Pacific and test the trade in furs from America to Canton. The continual worry of the tea trade was to reduce the amount of silver required to make up a sufficient "investment" for the amount of tea brought to market; it was this which enhanced the interest in furs.

Therefore in 1786 the British government mounted a V.I.P. embassy to Peking to display to the Chinese all the marvels of British manufacture and make lavish presents to the Emperor and his officials. It was the most elaborate trade mission ever planned and given top diplomatic status. Lord Calcraft, head of the mission, died at sea in Sunda Strait so it was abandoned.

In 1787 an American ship arrived in Canton by the New Holland route. "The officers of the European ships at Canton were much surprised to see a ship arrive in December and expressed great satisfaction when the captain showed them the track (chart) of his new route."

Thus an American trader anticipated by several months the first British tea ships (the First Fleet transports) to use the new all-season route. It was open to all and this vindicated the decision of the British government to establish a base at (or near) Botany Bay. The quality of the new port was a further, though fortuitous, vindication. As a port it was no better than three New Zealand sites which Cook had proved. For ship timber it was far worse; its water supply was barely adequate, but its situation alone made it far more valuable for the China trade than any port in New Zealand. The Derwent River was then unknown. The charting of Bass Strait made Port Jackson beyond question the best port for ships bound for Canton.

It has often been remarked that convicts who escaped by land and were recaptured thought they could make their way to China. This has been cited to show their ignorance of geography. Those who seek to interpret history by legends might infer that on the outward journey they heard from the sailors of the marvels and wealth of Canton to which they were bound.



In interpreting actions we must look for evidence of intentions and the conditions in which these were formed. That Port Jackson was a key point in the trade of the Pacific Ocean has been made clear by events of two centuries. That British, French, Americans and Russians were then seeking wealth there is also clear. To the British such resources as the food supplies of Tahiti and Hawaii, the flax and timber of New Zealand and Norfolk Island, the sandalwood of Fiji, the furs of Alaska were of value because of their relation to the tea trade with Canton.

That some of these did not measure up to the "dazzling hopes" may be true. We are concerned with intentions; in 1786 it was not clear that in the coming war the British would be able to keep open the Baltic trade and forestall the French in Capetown and Ceylon.

The one expectation that did pay off abundantly was whaling. It was also the only trade which grew in its own right, producing for British markets, not Canton. For forty years it was dominated by British and colonials. That this was due to the bases they held is beyond question. That it played a big part in the successful revolt of the Spanish South American colonies is also well known. That the sealers were the leaderless legion that pioneered all extensions of settlement around the coasts and into the islands of the southern ocean is too much neglected. Professor Manning Clark makes perfunctory reference to whaling merely recording the five whalers of the Third Fleet but nothing earlier than that. Though hailed as an "imaginative historian" he leaves nothing to the reader's imagination on how seals were butchered, giving more space to gory details than to commercial aspects.

How and why those five whale ships got into the Third Fleet is left to the reader's imagination. Yet the events that led to this as well as the later story are abundantly recorded in British, Australian, New Zealand and American archives. The "glorious Enderbys" were in the oil business in London, in association with the forbeas of Lord Hawkesbury, before Abel Tasman was born. They were the merchant financiers of the Nantucket fishery, the pioneers of the Southern (Sperm) Whale Fishery, the arch importers of defecting Loyalists from the American colonies, the head of the London pressure group which broke into the exclusive privileges of the East India Company. Architects of their own fortunes, the first in the whale fishery off Japan, into the Seychelles, leaving their name on Pacific Islands and even on the elusive Antarctic continent, they rose with the British fishery and their fortunes declined with it. Their best epitaph is in a chapter of Melville's "Moby Dick", yet in Australian history, where it seems that nothing is important that happened outside the three-mile limit, except the religious beliefs of Spaniards who never

saw Australia, the name does not rate a mention. There is scope for Imaginings in guessing why a grandson of Samuel Enderby, Jr., first achieved fame as "Chinese Gordon".

The parallel of Botany Bay and Freetown should have been treated in more detail. The same platitudes about reform and philanthropy, the same commercial objects and the same social condition of the human work force assembled — their crime was vagrancy derived from poverty; the purposes they served were the needs of a mercantilist state. There was nothing unique about Botany Bay, except its situation. In every new settlement, as at Penang with Chinese coolies, Bencoolen in Sumatra with Malay slaves, Meares at Nootka also with Chinese — in every case the necessary condition was a tied work force. As it was also in the Navy. The difference with the convict force was not that they were white. Indeed there were some blacks among them. Negro slaves could be taught crude hoe culture for sugar and cotton growing; most of the white convicts spoke English, most of them had had experience in the donkey work of dockyards and some evidence has been adduced that they were trained in Port Jackson as sawyers and shipwrights.

That Botany Bay was intended to provide services and supplies to ships and crews is quite clear. From this viewpoint all our early history makes sense. From the Getting Rid of Crime view nothing makes sense — especially that firm resolve to settle Norfolk Island as well as Botany Bay.



## Appendix

# The Tench Appraisal and a French Commentary

*Voyage a la Baie Botanique par le capitaine Watkin Tench  
chez Letellier Paris 1789.*

IN the introduction Tench writes: "Some have seen most dazzling hopes and greatest advantages for the mother country in the project and its execution; others have pretended it was an imprudent action opposed to sound politics and reason, that the colony would become a heavy burden..." The introduction is dated July 10th, 1788.

Note that he had written his account quickly and sent it by one of the returning transports, showing an expectation that there was a demand for such a work. That the publishers thought it worth while to bring out in 1789 a Paris edition shows an unusual public (commercial) interest in a purely penal colony.

In Chapter XVII, page 164 of this edition, translated, Tench sums up in this way: "One could charge the author with presumption if he sought to penetrate the intentions of the government, but he hopes that without attracting any reproach he can submit his opinion to his readers relative to the advantages Great Britain may derive from it.

"If the intention was merely to make the place the receptacle of bandits and criminals, the situation, distance and nature of the country make it more suitable than any other.

"If they propose to make a commercial centre of it, I fear it offers only a small part of the advantages they first thought could be derived. The New Zealand hemp, on which we had based most dazzling hopes, does not grow, at least in the places visited, and even in Norfolk Island, where we thought ourselves certain to obtain it in abundance, not a single blade has been found. The plan to furnish the East Indies with naval stores in case of war is therefore impossible, the hemp being completely lacking and the quality of the timber being so bad that none can be drawn from here. If it were possible to transport the magnificent trees of Norfolk Island this would be a great advantage but the nature

## APPENDIX : THE TENCH APPRAISAL

of the fringes ("bandes") of this island makes it absolutely impossible to dream of trying this.

"If enough troops were sent out, in a few years I don't doubt we could produce enough grain for our own support. But to do this the limit must be extended. If these reinforcements are sent, the mother country would still have to supply us with all necessities for a long time. Experience has shown that the hope of soon having enough animals for our own supply is chimerical and absurd. If Great Britain neglects to supply us regularly, the loss of the colony would be the inevitable result.

"Speculators who might wish to come here to seek fortune should reflect maturely on what I have just said. Those who let themselves be deluded by dazzling hopes and who come here to amass wealth would be cruelly deceived. The great distance of the country, the nature of its products, the difficulty of intercourse with other parts, will justify my assertion too well. For men on the other hand with modest fortune who are not desirous of augmenting it by a *limitless trade*, for those who seek a quiet retreat in happiness and peace, I think the continent not without attraction." (Present writer's italics.)

The French edition adds a *Recit historique*, pps. 177-259, which begins: "The resolve taken by the English government to send a colony to the distant lands of the southern ocean having keenly aroused public curiosity and the general question being: 'What advantage does the nation expect from such an establishment?', we believe that in offering a true account of the successive discoveries of the extensive coasts and giving certain details of the products and *situation* relative to other discoveries of Cook, we shall not only satisfy the curiosity of speculators but also demonstrate the value of an enterprise which *extends the commerce* of Britain to the most remote lands." (Then follows a summary of the discoveries from de Quiros and Tasman to Cook.)

On page 259 the account concludes: "When we consider the great number of inhabited islands that the English ships have visited under the protection of an enlightened monarch, the plan of a substantial permanent settlement in the southern continent in order to be in a situation to form and maintain commercial relations with their inhabitants, must appear very wise and very advantageous. As Botany Bay is the place chosen for the execution of the plan, we shall conclude by setting out some details of the advantages that may be drawn from the new colony.

"Whoever will take the trouble to examine the chart of the discoveries of the late Captain Cook will see that there is a great expanse of ocean from the Bay to the archipelago of islands



called New Zealand, situated towards the southern part, which are only 400 leagues; to the north-east and at nearly the same distance are the New Hebrides. Near these in the same latitude are the Friendly Islands, the Society Islands and the Marquesas. The passage from these to the Sandwich Islands is not more than 800 leagues and the *situation* of the colony is very favourable for forming there a depot for the trade in skins of the sea-otter, which is carried on between Nootka Sound and Cook's River on the coast of America and the islands of Japan and the empire of China. This point of reunion will make possible the perfecting of the discoveries that have been made hitherto in this part of the world — a project that the late Captain King had strongly in mind.

"Its nearness to New Guinea and the adjacent islands can lead to the forming of settlements which would put England in possession of a share in the spice trade, a trade the Dutch East India Company has monopolised for two hundred years.

"In case of war with Spain the cruisers that will be sent from Botany Bay, if they don't totally destroy, will disturb at least the very important trade between the Philippines and Acapulco; besides causing alarm and desolation in the colonies on the west coast of South America.

"According to the earlier details, the country around Botany Bay appears to offer real advantages. The soil is capable of being improved and the sea affords fish and if one objects that animals are scarce one can point out that by communication with tropic islands one can easily obtain pigs, not only for the subsistence of colonists but for breeding. Most navigators have assured us that islands east of Borneo are well stocked with horned cattle and especially wild cattle: one could bring these and breed them at Botany Bay, Port Jackson and their environs, and in a few years these two kinds of animal would suffice to supply fresh meat, not only to the settlers themselves but also to the crews of those ships which call in or trade there." (*Present writer's italics.*)

NOTES ON THE ABOVE :

1. Tench was a marine and therefore not qualified to assess the importance of nautical (and commercial) matters.
2. The alleged absence of "hemp" on Norfolk Island is a gross error but excusable; the first settlers were looking for something like European hemp. That modern historians should have repeated his error shows an incredible ignorance, as the false report was quickly amended.
3. The Norfolk Island pines — this is a point made by no others, that it was impossible, even had they been suitable, to

ship them to dockyards in one piece. Such large, long timbers were loaded through "bow ports" cut through the planking and replanked after loading the cargo. This could be done only in sheltered harbours. With ships riding at anchor in a Pacific swell, head to wind and sea, it could not be done. Nor, under such conditions, could spars 3 feet thick and 70 feet long be shipped as deck cargo.

4. Neither Tench nor the commentator mention whaling. This shows in Tench an ignorance of commercial matters — Capetown was a whalers' port when the First Fleet was there. Whales were seen on passage. Yet his interest in "speculators" did not extend to such as the Enderbys, whose interest was so much in the mind of Lieutenant King.

On such matters, it is understandable that the French comment also is silent.

5. The French appraisal closely parallels the plans, made in 1784, of Maitra and Sir George Young, and Mr. Anon., all made to ministers but not published. It is possible that these were known in Paris; more possible that the criticisms of the Botany Bay plan, by Dalrymple and others, were known. In any case, it shows a Parisian appraisal of commercial aspects very similar to that made in 1802 by Peron from Sydney.

We are left with three possibilities: that historians have not read them, that they have read them without understanding them or that they have understood them but rejected them as evidence on the general proposition that commercial matters have no historical significance.



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