

# PART ONE

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## CHAPTER ONE

### MARRIAGE OF DREAMS

"The dreams of nations, as of individuals, are important because they not only reflect, as in a distorting mirror, the real world, but sometimes react upon and influence it".  
Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne, 1958, p.228.

Australian soldier settlement following World War I was a costly experiment and an undeniable disaster in terms of the massive financial debts incurred by governments and by individuals. However, it was the human cost which guaranteed that forever the scheme would be deemed a failure. Two thirds of the men selected as soldier settlers had been gassed or wounded in the war and this made the hard physical work of clearing land and maintaining a farm extremely difficult. In the Mallee district of Victoria, the families who struggled to remain on their blocks faced five years of extreme drought in the first decade. While the men who simply walked away from their farms because of escalating debts also suffered. Many took years to dispel their anxiety and disappointment. For the most part, the scheme's failure was not due to any lack of dedication on the part of the families who opted for the land. "We were that keen ... it presented an opportunity for our future", a World War I soldier settler recalled of the settlers' hopes and dreams when taking up a block.<sup>1</sup> Tragically for many, their ambitions were shattered by financial hardship.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Big Country*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (hereafter ABC), Rural television documentary 'Land Fit for Heroes', A.1012 1862 C5112, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA).

Yet, with such strong belief in farming as a way of life and as a means of self-employment, it is little wonder that when World War I soldiers were surveyed in 1916 regarding their desire to settle on the land after demobilisation, a quarter eagerly accepted the proposal.<sup>2</sup> The Commonwealth Government was confident that anyone could be a farmer, given the chance. The soldiers were sure they could succeed despite the fact that just over half of the quarter had any previous farming experience.<sup>3</sup> The same measure of individual optimism was present when the Commonwealth Government embarked on land settlement as a repatriation measure yet again in 1945-60. Failure had not weakened their resolve to settle ex-servicemen on the land. Instead it made the politicians and bureaucrats even more determined to reach a successful outcome. This was surprising when many cases of personal tragedy and financial ruin were documented in evidence before royal commissions and select committees in South Australia (1919), Tasmania (1921), New South Wales (1922), Western Australia (1923) and Victoria (1925), as well as Mr Justice Pike's report on *Losses Due to Soldier Settlement* (1929).<sup>4</sup> This chapter seeks answers to the question, why did Australia embark on soldier settlement following World War I and II when it was questionable whether the financial outlay would be matched by political, economic and social gain?

F.W. Clarke, a member of the 1916 Royal Commission into Closer Settlement in Victoria, tried to warn society: "Will no experience teach us, will we for ever insist that the facts can, and must be made, to fit the theory"?<sup>5</sup> The historian Marilyn Lake tackled this same question and came to the conclusion that "Australians were not prepared to jettison their faith in rural development as the path to greatness".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> E. Scott, *Australia During the War*, Sydney, 1936, p.843; and *Report of the Conference of Representatives of the Commonwealth and State Governments and of the Federal Parliamentary War Committee*, 17-19 February 1916, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> 1916 Conference, *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> M. Lake, 'The Power of Anzac' in M. McKernan and M. Browne, ed., *Australia Two Centuries of War and Peace*, Canberra, 1988, p.214.

<sup>5</sup> F.W. Clarke, *The Age*, 23 February 1916, p.10.

<sup>6</sup> M. Lake, *Limits of Hope*, Melbourne, 1987, p.11.

Historical precedent provides some answers as to why Australia was determined to embark on land settlement. In ancient times every man was a soldier. When a skirmish broke out the Stone Age man put down his tools and went to help with the battle.<sup>7</sup> On his return, he simply went back to his tools and his everyday routine. But a gradual change occurred with soldiers returning to farming pursuits. The Old Testament talks of the Israelites "beating swords into plough shares and spears into pruning forks".<sup>8</sup> The Ancient Romans distributed land acquired as territorial gain to the men who fought in order to consolidate the victory and to provide incentive. For example, after the Roman victory at Patrae a large number of the men were rewarded with land in his new Roman colony.<sup>9</sup> A lapse in the reward system did occur during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain when thousands of men were ignored after wars "to be cursed as plagues of the nation".<sup>10</sup> Yet, despite a break with tradition in Britain, men have been encouraged to take up cultivation of the land following major wars throughout history.<sup>11</sup> So ingrained was the practice of land distribution in order to reward soldiers that there was seldom any attempt at re-establishment.<sup>12</sup>

The granting of land to the officer class of the military and navy in the early days of Australian white settlement guaranteed that soldier land settlement would be an inevitable consequence of World War I. A special set of unique circumstances encouraged this action soon after arrival in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

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<sup>7</sup> L.J. Pryor, *The Origins of Australia's Repatriation Policy*, MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1932, p.1.

<sup>8</sup> R.C. Wilson in C. Smith, ed., *Repatriation and Rehabilitation*, Australian Institute of Political Science, 1945, p.134.

<sup>9</sup> Pryor, *op. cit.*, p.3.

<sup>10</sup> Fortescue, *History of the British Army*, Vol. XII, p.577, cited in Pryor, *op. cit.*, p.4.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Rural Reconstruction Commission, Second Report, *Settlement and Employment of Returned Men on the Land*, Canberra, 1944, p.3; see also E. Milton, *Soldier Settlement in Queensland after World War I*, BA Hons thesis, University of Queensland, 1968, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Pryor, *op. cit.*, p.2.

Captain Arthur Phillip and succeeding governors were anxious to develop farm lands to reduce New South Wales' dependence on food supplies from Britain, to extend the settlement in order to make the colony more secure from attacks by Aborigines, and to encourage captains, lieutenants, ensigns as well as civil officers and superintendents to remain in the colony on a permanent basis.<sup>13</sup> Land and two convicts maintained by Government Stores were allocated as a reward for service in accordance with instructions from the Colonial Secretary.<sup>14</sup> He may have been influenced by the glowing terms with which Acting Governor Grose described the agricultural pursuits of the officers. "Their exertions are really astonishing" Grose claimed.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, if they continued at the same pace the officers would have "cultivation more than equal to a third of all that has ever been cleared in the colony".<sup>16</sup> Emancipists and free settlers also became eligible. However, without doubt, the colonial land grants were consistent with the grantee's "station in society" rather than any ability or needs.<sup>17</sup> Slowly the motivation for land grants changed, from a desire to stimulate food production in the colony, to a reward for service. An appetite for vast acreages, certainly by British standards, proved seductive to free settlers from the 1820s onwards, and many of these early settlers were military and naval officers who had served in the Napoleonic Wars. They were lured by the prospect of becoming "lords of thousands and tens of thousands of acres".<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See my Appendix I, Land Grants of Military and Naval Officers in New South Wales in 1801.

<sup>14</sup> This remained the method of distribution until the end of transportation and the beginning of self-government. Colonial Secretary to Grose, *Historical Records of Australia*, (hereafter HRA), Vol. 1, Series 1, 31 June 1793, p.442.

<sup>15</sup> Grose to Colonial Secretary, *HRA*. Vol.1, Series 1, 16 February 1793, p.416.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> A Lang, *Crown Land in New South Wales*, Sydney, 1973, p.102.

<sup>18</sup> N. Gray, *The Promised Land*, Scone Historical Monograph No.3, Scone 1975, p.8.

Pryor states that although John Macarthur was the forerunner of a long line of military settlers, that these pioneers were soldiers was very largely accidental. He claims that it was not the policy of the British Government to make special provision to enable its retired officers to settle in Australia.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, military and naval men were accustomed to life in the colonies, and were not daunted by distance and isolation from Britain. Many sought life away from Britain where they could enjoy an enhanced social status such as Michael Goodsir, formerly a surgeon in the Royal Navy and retired on half pay.<sup>20</sup>

The problem of what to do with old soldiers already in the colonies, particularly when the cost of shipping them back to England was considerable, induced Governor Macquarie in 1810 to form a company of Royal Veterans. They were allocated light duties in country areas as well as the towns. However, the experiment was a failure and in 1817 Governor Macquarie had to admit that they were "generally quite worn out through long service, age or infirmities".<sup>21</sup> The Veterans were disbanded in 1823, only to be reformed in 1826. Yet again it proved disastrous, with Governor Darling reporting this second group as "the most drunken, disorderly, worthless set of fellows [who] ever existed".<sup>22</sup> He was instructed to reduce the size of the Veterans and to try and induce as many men as possible to remain in the colony and settle on the land.

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<sup>19</sup> Pryor, *op. cit.*, p.177.

<sup>20</sup> Archives Office of New South Wales (hereafter AONSW), Reel 1132 - 29/5237.

<sup>21</sup> *Historical Records of New South Wales* (hereafter HRNSW), Vol.7, pp.458-9, cited in M. Hungerford, *Bilpin The Apple Country*, Richmond, 1995, p.37.

<sup>22</sup> *HRA*, Series 1, Vol. XV, p.884, note headed 'They have so totally failed', cited in Hungerford, *ibid.*, p.38.

Generally, the conditions were attractive to the men. The Governor would provide farming implements and an issue of rations which excluded spirits. If the man was married he would be allocated a log hut and a cow.<sup>23</sup> However, there were objections to the bonded period of seven years' residency on the block. Twelve applicants each took up 100 acres of land on the Mount Tomah Road near Bilpin in New South Wales in 1830 with a bond of only three years. However, by 1839 all the allotments were vacated and left idle, although only two veterans lost their land in the bonded period because of non-residency.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, this sample was disadvantaged by age and the location of the farms. Nevertheless, it does reinforce the notion that the placement of current or retired military personnel on farms was seen as a natural consequence to their working life, and that a link between the military and the land was established in the very early days of white settlement.<sup>25</sup>

When World War I enlistments gathered on the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East they consisted of armies of civilians; young men who had left occupations, or who had dreams for their future. This contrasted with the Middle Ages where the officer was a warrior and was called to follow his lord.<sup>26</sup> In 1915 the Commonwealth did not accept automatically the financial responsibility for re-establishing the volunteers and dependants into civilian life. No governmental provision had been made for the soldiers of colonial governments sent to the Boer War in 1899. At this time Patriotic Funds, with contributions by benefactors and generous citizens, helped the ex-servicemen. Yet again, in the early days of World War I, Patriotic Funds burgeoned with admirable intent but with little co-ordination.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>25</sup> Lang, *op. cit.*, p.422. See also *HFNSW*, Vol.4, 'land grants and stock of officers', pp.648-9.

<sup>26</sup> Pryor, *op. cit.*, p.1.

Supervision of the funds commenced at a state level. As the war dragged on, it became clear that the large amounts raised by the funds needed a central organisation so that administrative costs did not take most of the money raised. World War I provided unique circumstances because of the large number of volunteer participants. Therefore the Commonwealth was forced to accept that the moral and financial liability for a comprehensive repatriation policy incorporating physical rehabilitation for the injured, job provision and training, pensions and homes must rest with the central government. By 1917, Senator Millen spoke enthusiastically about the Commonwealth's responsibility:

When we speak of repatriation we mean an organised effort on the part of the community to look after those who have suffered ... there should be a sympathetic effort to reinstate a civilian life to all who are capable of such reinstatement.<sup>27</sup>

Due to the complexity of a dual system of government in Australia, a Conference of Commonwealth and State Governments and of the Federal Parliamentary War Committee was called in Melbourne in February 1916, to examine the problems of re-establishment and re-employment of ex-servicemen. Many countries turned to industrialisation as a means of employment after the war. Australia's recommendation at the February conference that the Governments of the Commonwealth and the states "co-operate" in a scheme for settling the returned soldiers on the land was hardly unexpected.<sup>28</sup> Australia was a settler society, and considered that encouragement of agricultural and grazing pursuits by owner farmers was the primary method by which economic progress could be made.

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<sup>27</sup> CPD, Vol.82, July 1917, p.184.

<sup>28</sup> *Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Conference of Representatives of the Commonwealth and State Governments and of the Federal Parliamentary War Committee in respect of the Settlement of Returned Soldiers on the Land*, Melbourne 17-19 February 1916, p.57.

The rhetoric of parliamentarians was converted into action when reports of land settlement already devised by other countries were known. Indeed, Germany was ready to implement land settlement schemes on her new boundaries in the style of Ancient Rome.<sup>29</sup> Britain had introduced a scheme which was in operation already. Even New Zealand had legislation in place so that it could take immediate action at the end of the war. Joseph Cook told the House with some desperation "here, after nearly two years of war, we are only beginning".<sup>30</sup> He feared that Australia would be left behind in comparison with the rest of the world. It was especially disconcerting for Australians to acknowledge that a small country like New Zealand has shown initiative in this regard.<sup>31</sup> But there was also a great deal of national pride behind the warning. The Federation was a mere fifteen years old and there was a bold desire to be seen by the rest of the world as vigorous, generous and innovative. In addition, there was pressure to have an Australian settlement scheme with conditions, equal to or better than, those of schemes proposed by other countries because of a national cringe concerning Australia's convict beginnings.<sup>32</sup> Cook endeavoured to stimulate positive action by claiming to the House that "this is a rich community, and we can well afford to treat these men liberally and generously".<sup>33</sup> Some feared that unless the scheme was exceptional, few would be attracted to the land and this would be detrimental to the country's potential growth.<sup>34</sup> However, Cook reassured the members opposite that if 10 percent of the men could be placed on the land it would be a great achievement.<sup>35</sup> This proved to be a very popular sentiment, and implementation of soldier land settlement in Australia was assured.

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<sup>29</sup> *CPD*, Vol. 79, 20 May 1916, Joseph Cook, p.8133.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> New Zealand's legislation was enacted in 1915 (hereafter NZ). However, it must be remembered that NZ had a central government.

<sup>32</sup> Cook alluded to a "scandal which has stained our history".

<sup>33</sup> *CPD*, Vol. 79, 20 May 1916, p.8134.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, J.E. Fenton, pp.8134-5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8134.



The arguments already presented concerning the historical tradition of rewarding the military with land and Australia's acceptance of its primary producing role are not difficult to grasp. However, infinitely more elusive is the influence of 'cultural baggage' brought from the old world and accepted by the new. The early years of white settlement coincided with the Romantic Movement in Europe, a time when poets and writers revered the countryside as a place for spiritual redemption. William Wordsworth claimed in his poem *Ruth* that beauty and spiritual freedom resided in the natural world:

Before me shone a glorious world  
Fresh as a banner bright, unfurl'd  
To Music sudc enly:  
I looked upon those hills and plains  
And seem'd as if let loose from chains  
To live at liberty.<sup>36</sup>

The notion of 'goodness' associated with country living was embraced by Australians and their governments in an endeavour to establish a more stable society. It was accepted, despite the fact that the Australian bush could be harsh and unforgiving. But gradually, the nobility of country living became part of the national dreaming. This reverence for country life was so strong that it did not seem out of place when in 1916 the *Sydney Morning Herald* waxed lyrical:

If a man has an eye and a sense for the inner beauty and charm of the little simple things of life ... it is quite likely he will be able to derive a great deal of pleasure and sweetness and contentment of mind from the skilful turning of his furrows in the fruitful earth.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> W. Wordsworth, 'Ruth: or the Influences of Nature', *The Golden Treasury*, F.T. Palgrave, ed., London, 1948, p.283.

<sup>37</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, (hereafter *SMH*), 19 February 1916, p.20.

Many of the images of virtue attached to country living were an inheritance from pre-enclosure Britain. The enclosure of common land in Britain resulted in social upheaval, and there was a mass exodus of small farmers from the land who were forced to seek work and reside in the newly emerging industrial towns of the early 1800s. Indeed, by mid-nineteenth century in Britain, only about 10 percent of farms were worked by land owners with the remaining 90 percent of land under tenant occupancy.<sup>38</sup> A great deal has been written about the deplorable working conditions endured in the mines and factories, the exploitation of child labour and the crowded and unhealthy lifestyle of the towns. Little wonder that the tranquillity and the lost heritage of farm ownership were mourned and pre-industrial Britain was glorified.

Inextricably linked with the agrarian tradition was the notion of yeomanry, and its incontrovertible association with progress and human virtue. Lake states that the definition of yeomanry has evolved over time. However, by the nineteenth century in Britain and Australia it came to mean exclusively "small freeholders".<sup>39</sup> Acceptance of the yeoman philosophy in Australia was brought about by the need to strengthen the moral fibre of Australian society. It appealed to the administration which sought the perceived benefits of the family farm as an instrument in the creation of a well-structured society. The yeoman was acknowledged as hard working, honest and reliable, "the ideal man and the ideal citizen".<sup>40</sup> In addition successful yeomanry required a strong and healthy wife who was not afraid of hard work. She was encouraged to give birth to numerous children because they were required as labour for the family farm. Nevertheless, the concept of yeomanry provided benefits; and it gave the family a home as well as a freehold business.

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<sup>38</sup> Lake, *Limits of Hope, op. cit.*, p.12.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>40</sup> Derek Parker, *An Assessment of Stanthorpe Soldier Settlements 1915-1930*, BA Hons thesis, UNE, 1982, p.2.

The benefits which yeomanry would bring to the Australian colonies had been recognised by Governor King in the early days of his administration when he claimed them as "bone fide" settlers.<sup>41</sup> But colonial land became threatened by the action of squatters like Dr Robert Townson who took land beyond his entitlements in 1822. His example was copied by many other pastoralists and stockmen, so that by 1850 the title of squatter became "synonymous with pastoralism".<sup>42</sup> For over a century, successive legislative attempts to break large land monopolies were not entirely successful.<sup>43</sup> For instance the Free Selection Acts of the 1860s did not substantially increase the number of permanent settlers on the land while the closer settlement policies of the early twentieth century provided mixed results.

Soldier land settlement, in reality an extension of closer settlement, was adopted despite the fact that the Royal Commission on Closer Settlement (Victoria) published conflicting findings in their final report of 1916. While the report stressed that many civilian settlers were struggling to remain on their farms, it went on to state with conviction that "the taxpayer looks to parliament to secure a prosperous and contented yeomanry".<sup>44</sup> Society in general refused to acknowledge the disadvantages of small holdings and that twentieth century Australia was very different from the world immortalised by the dreams of the common man.

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<sup>41</sup> *HRA*, Vol. 1, No.4, p.309, cited in Paul Ashton and Kate Blackmore, *On the Land*, Sydney, 1987, p.122.

<sup>42</sup> D. Denholm, 'Squatting', *Australians: A Historical Dictionary*, G. Aplin, S. Foster and M. McKernan, ed., Sydney, 1987, p.378.

<sup>43</sup> McQuilton, *ibid.*, p.80. The Free Selection Acts of the 1860s and the Closer Settlement Acts passed in all states of the Commonwealth by 1907. See Introduction.

<sup>44</sup> *Royal Commission on Closer Settlement*, Victoria, Final Report 1916, p.72.

When A.E. Wright wrote to the *SMH* in 1945 questioning the viability of the small farmer, the New South Wales Minister for Lands, J.M. Tully firmly endorsed accepted government policy: "the creation of a class of yeoman farmer, elevated from the employee status to farm ownership, is in the national interest".<sup>45</sup> Indeed, large land holders were considered the enemy of progress. Those who took exception to this Labor viewpoint were confined to those with considerable land investments.

In general, the society failed to acknowledge the disadvantages of small holdings. For over a century, legislative attempts to break large land monopolies had not been entirely successful. For example, the Selection Acts of the 1860s did not substantially increase the number of permanent settlers on the land, while the closer settlement policies of the early twentieth century resulted in an unacceptable level of economic and social failure. Society in general did not seek change and they refused to acknowledge that twentieth century Australia was very different from the world immortalised in memory. By the late 1960s it was difficult to achieve middle class independence in the new capitalist world of agriculture. The dream was a paradox when land monopolies were in the hands of financial institutions.<sup>46</sup> Yet the concept of yeomanry was enmeshed into the psyche of Australians and was extremely influential in society's acceptance of land settlement after both world wars.

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<sup>45</sup> *SMH*, 9 October 1945, p.2.

<sup>46</sup> B. Fitzpatrick, 'The Big Man's Frontier and Australian Farming', *Agricultural History*, Vol.21, No.1, 1947, p.12.

So great was the exultation of the independent smallholder that yeomanry converts failed to recognise the ominous warning signs that agriculture and pastoralism would require large amounts of capital in the future.

Popular acceptance of the romanticised folklore, the myths and legends of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an influential determinant in the decision to instigate a soldier land settlement scheme. David Kent defines a legend as a story "which acquires a popular acceptance verging upon belief".<sup>47</sup> Traditionally, most legends are created over a long period of time. However, the Australian experience differs in this regard with its legends having a short period of general acceptance.<sup>48</sup> Mythology which emerged from the nineteenth century contained subtle messages which the community embraced: for example, the heroic pioneer and the stoic character of the native born Australian from the bush. The term pioneer initially referred to colonial settlers following white settlement whether they lived in the town or the country. But there was a shift in meaning by the twentieth century, and the label pioneer was used in reference to farmers who first worked the land.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> D. Kent, *The Anzac Book and the Anzac Legend: C.E.W. Bean as Editor and Image-Maker*, *Historical Studies*, Vol.21, No.84, April 1985. The definition of 'myth' in the Oxford Dictionary is a "tale embodying especially ancient popular belief or idea".

<sup>48</sup> J.B. Hirst, 'The Pioneer Legend', *Historical Studies*, Vol.18, No.71, 1978.

<sup>49</sup> The poem 'Pioneers' by A.B. Paterson refers to the explorers who pushed out and settled on the land. He claims they were the "founders of our nation's life ...".

At the end of the nineteenth century reverence for the pioneer provided ordinary people with a 'common hero'. The pioneer's enemy was the harsh environment, and the men and women surviving hardship and privation in order to establish a farm were admired for their gritty determination. The pioneers were depicted as confined to their land, battling to control their environment. These ideas were cemented into the consciousness of a nationalistic society in the late 1880s and 1890s by the writers, poets and painters of the period. This was a time of "growing into harmony with the Australian earth"; reaching a point of acknowledgement followed by an acceptance that the continent of Australia was unique.<sup>50</sup> It was also a period of self congratulation and celebration that this tiny white population had survived Australia's environmental hostility and convict beginnings. With nationalistic fervour the writers and poets of the period spread their message in weeklies like *The Bulletin*, *The Boomerang* and *The Worker*.<sup>51</sup> A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson and Henry Lawson were prolific contributors to *The Bulletin*, and their verse, ballads and short stories were widely read, particularly in country areas.<sup>52</sup> Paterson searched for ideas from the old colonial ballads and the stories communicated by oral repetition. He glorified his characters who demonstrated their particular spirit of individualism as the result of an adventurous frontier experience. For instance, 'The Man from Snowy River' in Paterson's verse represented the quintessential pioneer.

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<sup>50</sup> V. Palmer, *The Legend of the Nineties*, Melbourne, 1954, pp.9-20.

<sup>51</sup> *The Bulletin* was founded in 1880 by J.F. Archibald and John Haynes. Originally it was a folded broadsheet, the familiar "red" cover being introduced at a later date. It was successful and known as 'the Bushman's bible'. The founders envisaged a paper that would be significant in promoting the arts and in setting a high political standard.

See *Australians: A Historical Dictionary*, Aplin, Foster & McKernan, ed., p.61.

<sup>52</sup> They were both born in the country. Lawson was born near Grenfell, New South Wales and Paterson at Narrambla, though he grew up in the Yass district of New South Wales.

But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head,  
And he swung the stockwhip round and gave a cheer,  
And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed,  
While the others stood and watched in very fear.<sup>53</sup>

The public loved Paterson's verse with its images of romance and nostalgia. Likewise, they took to Henry Lawson's prolific work which contrasted with that of Paterson. Whereas Paterson praised the pioneer and glorified the countryside, Lawson challenged his nostalgia with a cynical truthfulness sustained by professional rivalry. His work confronted the hostility of the Australian bush, claiming that anyone contemplating a life in that desolate environment must be deranged. For example, when writing about a recent foray into the country he stated: "Sunny plains! Great Scott! - those burning wastes of barren soil and sand".<sup>54</sup> Although Lawson's writing often contained bleak references to the Australian bush, the result of his realism was a general reinforcement of the notion that the harshness of country life created a unique Australian, a person who was capable of almost super-human effort and able to endure unspeakable deprivation. So although the two writers held very differing attitudes, the effect of their public controversies was identical. Namely the work of both men led to the exaltation of the pioneer. Paterson and Lawson were obviously not alone in their focus on Australia, but their influence was immense. They prepared the path for future writers with their definition of Australian life and its heroes, as well as providing the right environment for a general acceptance of the new frontiersmen, the soldier settlers of World Wars I and II.

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<sup>53</sup> W. Stone, ed., *The Best of Banjo Paterson*, Sydney, 1977, p.34.

<sup>54</sup> Henry Lawson 'Up the Country' cited in L. Cronin, ed., *A Camp-Fire Yarn Complete Works 1885-1900*, Sydney 1984, p.228.

In tandem with the literary birth of the "noble bushman" were the artists of the 1890s who began painting the Australian countryside.<sup>55</sup> Many portrayed the land as gentle and romantic. Yet often there was a sense of isolation and loneliness. Fred McCubbin's 'Pioneer' provides a good example of this theme with the husband and wife set apart from each other, independently sober and reflective in two of the three glimpses we have of their world. The timber is dense and dark which intensifies their separation from the world and each other. Nevertheless, the painting's overall message reflects praise for the fortitude of these individuals who have to endure such hardship in order to tame the Australian bush.<sup>56</sup>

In the early twentieth century other writers took up similar themes to those of Paterson, Lawson and the 1890s artists.<sup>57</sup> It is little wonder then that when the soldiers returned from the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East, land settlement was deemed the most suitable reward for their sacrifice and an ideal method of rehabilitation for the repatriated men. During their months on Gallipoli in 1915 the valour of the volunteer forces had become legendary at home and at the battle front.

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<sup>55</sup> R. Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne, 1958, pp.221-5. The Heidelberg School of Young Impressionists included artists such as Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Charles Conder and Fred McCubbin.

<sup>56</sup> F. McCubbin's art work 'The Pioneer' was completed in 1904 and was purchased for the National Gallery of Victoria in 1906 by the Felton Bequest.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Furphy, *Such is Life*, 1903; Bernard O'Dowd, *The Bush*, 1912; C.J. Dennis, *Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, 1915 (sold 87,000 copies in Australia and NZ); Barbara Baynton, Miles Franklin, Henry Handel Richardson and Christopher Brennan.



**25 (a)**

Frederick McCubbin 1855-1917 Australia

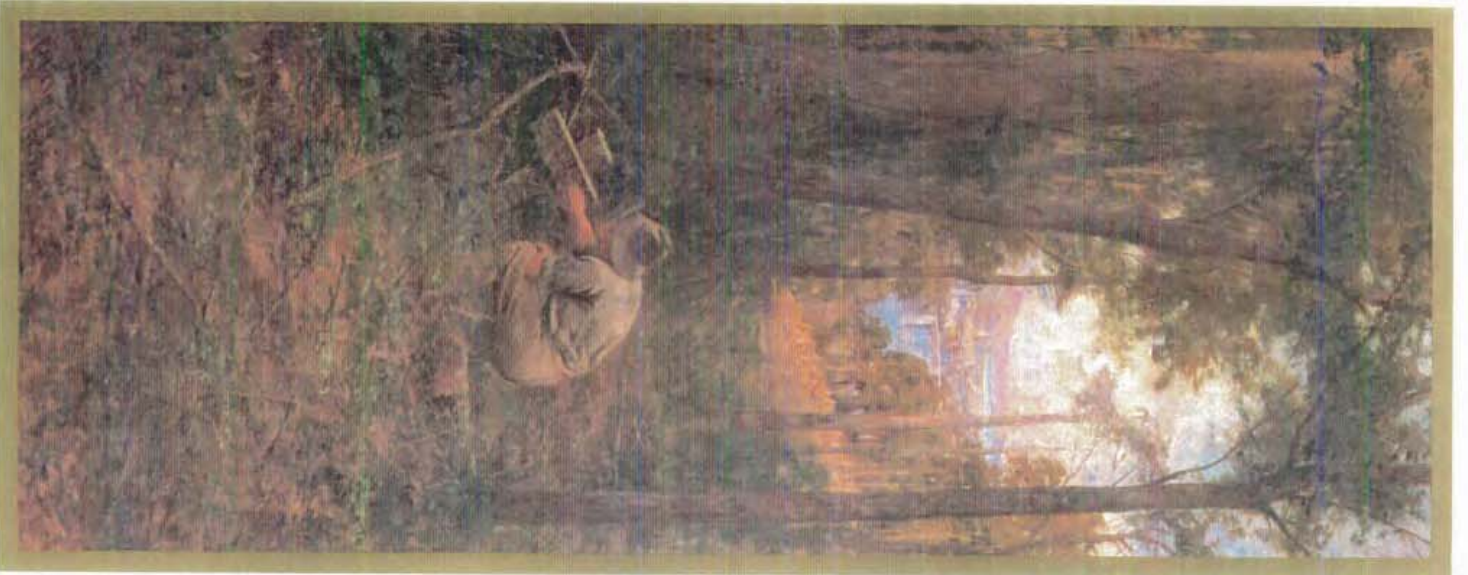
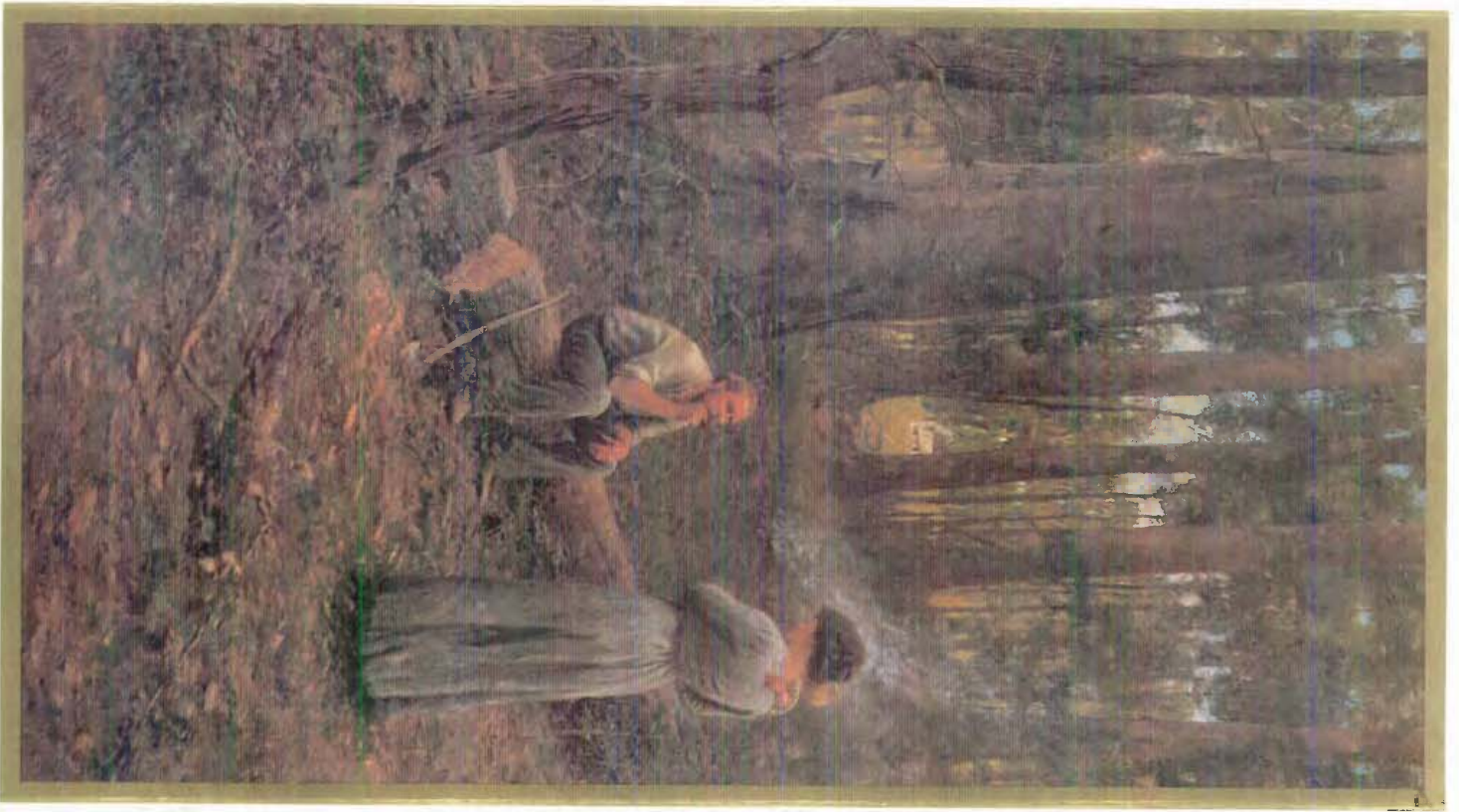
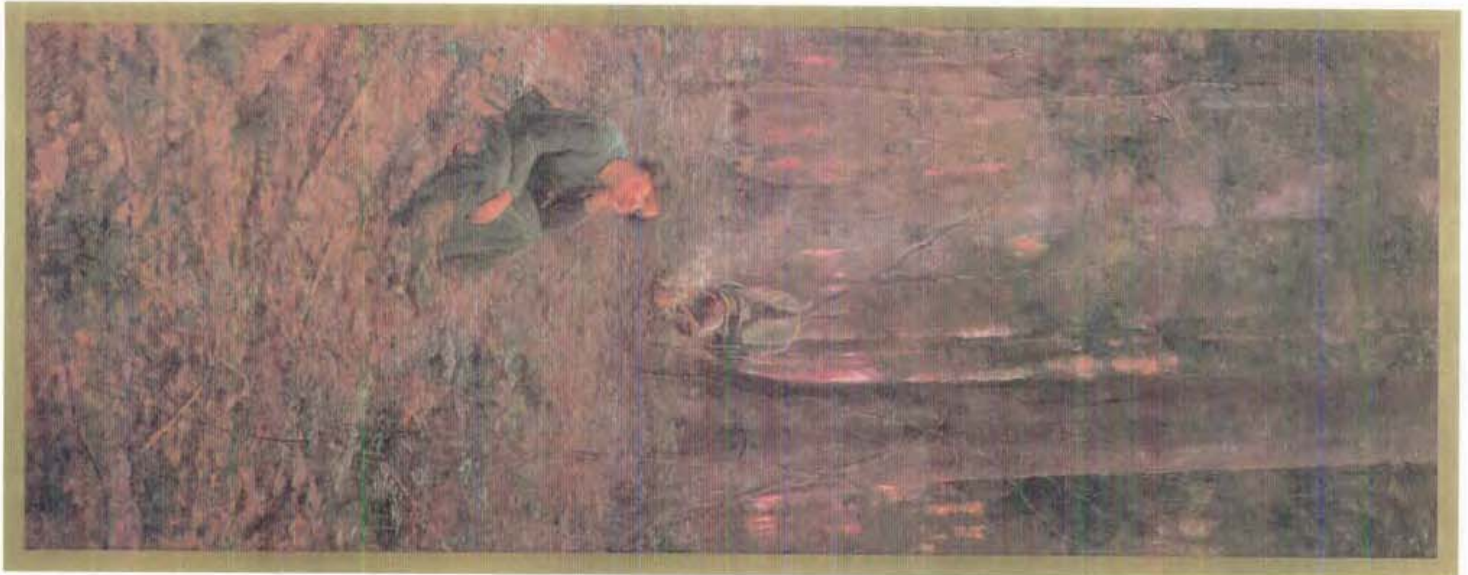
**The pioneer 1904**

oil on canvas (triptych)

223.5 x 86.0 cm; 224.7 x 122.5 cm; 223.5 x 85.7 cm

Felton Bequest, 1906

**National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne**



In addition the official historian, C.E.W. Bean, had recognised that many of the characteristics accorded to bush pioneers such as the ability to endure hardship and stoic independence were held in common with the diggers.<sup>58</sup>

Generally it has been acknowledged that Bean popularised the Anzac Myth because of his work as writer and editor of the *Official History of the War*. However, historian David Kent pointed out that *The Anzac Book* created by Bean as a commemorative publication had greater influence due to its popular appeal, and to its large circulation amongst the troops and the families at home during the war.<sup>59</sup> The troops liked what they read: the image of the tough soldier who battled adversity with a sense of humour. The families of the soldiers were bolstered by Bean's editorial blend of pathos and satire in the stories, poems and illustrations. They were relieved and proud that their soldier and, Australian soldiers collectively, were portrayed as heroic. Bean was extremely sensitive to the need for a morale boost on the home front as slowly the injured men returned to relate the trauma of their service overseas. Even more important was the fact that the new Federation desperately required heroes.<sup>60</sup> The Anzac Legend which Bean created held wider repercussions for the community as it conveniently combined the dreams of past and present. The arcadian paradise of country living, the nobility of the yeoman farmer and the strength of the pioneer fused the romance of the past with the present glory of a nation proven in battle. Soldier land settlement was a natural consequence of this fusion, a marriage incorporating the dreams of the common man with those of the bureaucracy.

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<sup>58</sup> C.E.W. Bean, cited in K.S. Inglis, 'The Anzac Tradition', *Meanjin*, March 1965, p.28. Bean preceded by fifty years Russel Ward's book *The Australian Legend* which stated that the Australian character was set in the very early days of the colony.

<sup>59</sup> D. Kent, 'The Anzac Book', *op. cit.*, p.388. The first edition was sold prior to publication and the First Anzac Division ordered 36,000 copies of the first print.

<sup>60</sup> R. White, *Inventing Australia*, Sydney, 1981, p.127.

Many other issues current in the society of 1915 led to land settlement for returned soldiers. For example, there was an acknowledged urgency about filling the empty spaces of Australia, as in 1911 there was a static population of only four and a half million people.<sup>61</sup> Alarm had been expressed at the turn of the century when it was found that households were deliberately restricting their family size. Governments believed that this posed a defence threat to the whole nation. Australians feared that they might be inundated with 'red' or 'yellow' hordes from the north unless white settlers were encouraged to reside in country areas. In addition, there was an urgent need for a re-distribution of population into rural areas in order to balance the ever increasing urban drift. Consequently, parliamentarians were convinced that a land settlement scheme would provide the ideal environment for the families of a new nation. What greater gift to those who risked their lives in war?

Delegates to the 1916 Conference of Commonwealth and State Governments were swayed by the argument that soldier land settlement provided the best solution to the social, economic and political problems posed by the returning diggers. This was despite poignant reminders of failed small farms in the immediate past. Still, the high visibility of the returned men wandering the streets with their potential to threaten law and order meant that they had to be placed somewhere, and quickly.<sup>62</sup> Grave fears were held that the city could not absorb enough returned men as high unemployment rates prevailed in Australia throughout the course of the war.

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<sup>61</sup> *Australians: Historical Statistics*, Vamplew, ed., Sydney, 1987, p.127.

<sup>62</sup> *CPD*, 20 May 1916, J.M. Fowler, p.8140, and Lake, *Limits of Hope*, *op. cit.*, p.32.

It was also a time of trade union unrest. Even though government departments and a number of private firms had promised to re-employ their staff on their return to Australia, many believed that there would be a large shortfall in the number of jobs available.<sup>63</sup> Considerable pressure from the community encouraged the Commonwealth to announce its policy measures in 1916, when land settlement was recognised as the major re-establishment programme.<sup>64</sup> "We must help our brave boys and not have them downhearted after what they have done for our freedom and liberty".<sup>65</sup>

The introduction of soldier land settlement was an inevitable consequence of World War I because of a marriage between the individual's dream and the governments' dreams. Soldier settlement accommodated bureaucratic aspirations. It provided a legitimate unemployment scheme which would facilitate the redistribution of a growing Australian urban population into country areas. Further, the nation would benefit from the growth of yeomanry, as families in the possession of a freehold business accorded a middle class status were considered highly desirable. The soldiers shared these aspirations. They had accepted the mythology associated with the pioneer and the nobility of farm work as a way of life. Ex-servicemen were promised land in return for their service to the nation and they anticipated their reward. This was based on the premise that land for soldiers was a legitimate expectation after war. Accordingly, the dream of land became a reality.

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<sup>63</sup> Confidential letter from G.H. Knibbs, Federal Statistician to Senator E. Millen, Australian Archives (hereafter AA) A.2479 17/1050.

<sup>64</sup> E.R. Walker, *The Australian Economy in War and Reconstruction*, New York, 1947, p.198; and Lake, 'The Power of Anzac', *op. cit.*, pp.195-8.

<sup>65</sup> Letter to the Minister for Repatriation from Mr J.A.S. Pearting, Bagshot, Victoria, 22 August 1918, AA. A/2485 A/18 (C/185).

## CHAPTER TWO

# MEN, MONEY AND MARKETS: THE IMPERIAL BOND

"The land and the men who cultivate it are the Empire's two greatest assets; they must be brought together and organised if we are to recuperate from the effects of the war". C. Turnor, *Land Settlement for Ex-service Men in the Oversea Dominions*, London, 1920, p.8.

The legacy of old world values, combined with a national acceptance of the new Australian mythologies, were important influences leading to the adoption of soldier land settlement in Australia after World War I. However, there was another impetus of greater impact. The fact that Britain expected the dominions to undertake land settlement for national and British ex-servicemen was an extremely potent force. From the British standpoint, empire migration provided distinct economic, political and social advantages. It would complement and build the imperial bond. In return the dominions believed that they would benefit from improved defence, economic development and racial vigour. Anglo-Saxon Australians, in common with their counterparts in Canada, South Africa and New Zealand feared their racial heritage "would be diluted". Australians were apprehensive about a perceived future influx of Asian hordes from the north, Canada sought to neutralise southern European immigrants, and South Africa wanted a better balance between Afrikaner and British citizens.<sup>1</sup> Therefore an imperial link, "underpinned by racial exclusion", economic security and development, provided a powerful influence on Australia's decision to undertake soldier settlement for their own men as well as for British ex-servicemen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> K. Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes: Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire Between the Wars*, Manchester, 1994, p.15.

<sup>2</sup> A. Offer, *The First World War An Agrarian Interpretation*, Oxford, 1989, p.3.

While many Australians accepted the universal benefits of soldier settlement for their own soldiers, the New South Wales government was reticent when it came to extending the same privileges to British men. It recognised the responsibilities and risks associated with undertaking land settlement for the Commonwealth. Accordingly, Premier W.H. Holman believed it was unrealistic to imagine that large numbers of British soldiers could be settled in addition to the local lads.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Australia's economic dependency on Britain removed any qualms that the state premiers might have had about extending Australian settlement rights to British ex-servicemen. A shortage of loan monies during the war had forced Britain to restrict available funds to the Commonwealth Government, and the states were not unmindful that it would require British loan monies to fund settlement and infrastructure to service the proposed scheme. Therefore the states were forced to heed the direction of Prime Minister Hughes when he clarified Australia's financial position in regard to settlement:

I should like to get this matter quite clear. Our chances of getting money largely depend upon the extent of the facilities we will offer British soldiers to take up land in Australia ... It is desirable that there should be no limitation. It will not do for us to say that we can deal with only a few British settlers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> P. Pierce, 'Rider Haggard in Australia', *Meanjin*, Vol.36, No.2, 1977, pp.204-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Report of the Conference between the Commonwealth and the States, 1917*, p.68.

The Prime Minister recognised the necessity for a public affirmation of state policy which gave equal status to British ex-servicemen in any local scheme so that loan funds could be secured. The message was clear; no imperial settlement meant little funding for Australian soldiers and sailors, and no money for infrastructure. State acquiescence came with the proviso that adequate and increased funding was a vital factor in any co-operative outcome. Meanwhile the Colonial Office had to accept that the scheme would require an enormous amount of capital, and that many of the proposed programmes would waste a great deal of money.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the yeoman mystique over-rode these doubts, and it was affirmed that any problems associated with land settlement for their men in Australia would be overcome.

Australians acknowledged that they lived in a settler society which was a producer of primary commodities, and this determined their position within the Empire. Australia supplied the raw products which were sent to Britain in exchange for their manufactured goods. This was the established trading bond between the two countries, and therefore pressure for the development of land was accepted as a natural consequence of that relationship. It was a cosy state of affairs, and one which suited both parties. Australia was dependent on British loan monies while Britain in return gained economic muscle. A continuation of the *status quo* was accepted by Australia and Britain as an essential path to achieving imperial economic harmony.

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<sup>5</sup> K. Fedorowich, 'Society Pets and Morning Coated Farmers: Australian Soldier Settlement and the Participation of British Ex-servicemen 1915-29', *War & Society*, Vol. 8, No.2, October 1990, p.49.



"To oppose such a strategy was anti-Empire, and branded one a disloyal subject of the King".<sup>6</sup> However, historian Kent Fedorowich draws attention to the fact that politicians and bureaucrats failed to recognise that the imperial relationship was slowly evolving into something new. The cosy relationship which Britain thought it could reinforce and strengthen by British migration was "quietly dissolving as the dominions continued to expand and intensify their own industrial base".<sup>7</sup> World War I had facilitated change. Cut off from its traditional trading partners, Australia was forced to expand its secondary output. At the end of the war the factories continued to produce, thus eliminating any possible return to their former state.<sup>8</sup> But the "grand design of Empire economic harmony ... was threatened by such developments".<sup>9</sup>

Only a handful of Federal politicians recognised this trend. J.E. West, Labor Member for East Sydney, suggested that any soldier land settlement scheme "should be combined with action in the direction of aiding our secondary industries".<sup>10</sup> The *Melbourne Age* in an editorial said that "commitment to such dubious assumptions neglected the far more serious position of secondary industry".<sup>11</sup> However, by the 1920s there was bi-partisan parliamentary acceptance of the notion which encapsulated the British empire. "Men, Money and Markets" was what Australia required proclaimed Prime Minister S.M. Bruce when speaking to a committed audience of the Royal Agricultural Society in Sydney in April 1925.

<sup>6</sup> D. Clark, 'Australia: Victim or Partner of British Imperialism?' in E. Wheelwright and K. Buckley, ed., *Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, Sydney, 1975, p.65.

<sup>7</sup> Vernon C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, Toronto, 1957, pp.177-95 and D. Kennedy, 'Empire Migration in Post-War Reconstruction: the Role of the Oversea Settlement Committee', *Albion*, XX, 1988, pp.403-19, cited in Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p.193.

<sup>8</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, p.63.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *CPD*, 20 May 1916, p.8139.

<sup>11</sup> *Age*, 17 April 1916, cited Pierce, *op. cit.*, p.204.

Earlier in the year he had addressed the Imperial Conference on the mutual benefits which would be derived from British immigrants, British loan money and British access for Australian primary commodities.<sup>12</sup> From the Australian point of view, British immigrants would help fill the empty spaces, increased loans would allow infrastructure development and expansion in agriculture would lead to prosperity.

The concept of empire migration for ex-servicemen was not new. British humiliation after the Anglo-Boer War had "jolted an overconfident and complacent people" and had resulted in a great deal of national circumspection.<sup>13</sup> A rapid growth of philanthropic organisations to reform and regenerate British soldiers was a direct consequence of this period. In 1909 the Naval and Military Emigration League (NMEL) was founded which undertook the resettlement of former military men.<sup>14</sup> It endeavoured to look after the welfare of poverty stricken men and provide information concerning employment and land settlement prospects. But it worked under a restrictive budget and had to overcome the British government's policy of neutrality on the subject. This was adopted because of defence concerns in the event of a future European war. Nevertheless, by 1914 when NMEL's operations ceased, a total of 2,388 men, women and children emigrated, mostly to Canada.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Argus*, 9 April 1925, cited in F. Crowley, ed., *Modern Australia in Documents*, Melbourne, 1973, pp.400-2. The Prime Minister first endorsed the slogan at the Imperial Conference prior to April 1925.

<sup>13</sup> Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p.14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18, also K. Fedorowich, 'The Migration of British Ex-servicemen to Canada and the Role of the Naval and Military Emigration League, 1899-1914', *Histoire sociale*, Vol. XXV, May 1992, p.76.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

Few had chosen farms, preferring instead life in the towns and cities. In the year 1913, 314 subsidised ex-servicemen arrived in Canada with only twenty nine taking up farming.<sup>16</sup> Of this number, only a very small percentage of the ex-servicemen stayed on the land for a sustained period. Clearly, the policy of encouraging the military to take up land in the Dominion of Canada had failed miserably. But philanthropic organisations retained a commitment to the welfare of veterans in the years between 1901 and 1916, and their solution to military poverty remained firmly entrenched in empire migration and land settlement.

When the Royal Colonial Institute (RCI) initiated discussions in 1914 with the British Colonial Secretary Lewis Harcourt on land settlement for soldiers in the dominions, he believed their lobby to be "premature, inopportune and mischievous".<sup>17</sup>

But the President of the RCI, the fourth Earl Grey, was not intimidated. He was deeply committed to the welfare of unemployed soldiers and concerned about their capacity to disrupt society when abandoned after war.<sup>18</sup> Spurred on by interim reports of the Dominions Royal Commission in February 1916 which recommended that an increase in the population of the dominions would benefit Britain through reciprocal trade, the RCI sent Sir Henry Rider Haggard to the prosperous white dominions of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada.<sup>19</sup> His task was to ascertain current opinion concerning the possible inclusion of British ex-servicemen in dominion schemes for land settlement. He also represented the Dominions Royal Commission which gave his mission a semi-official status in the Australian states.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> PRO, CO 532/82/26960, minute by Macnaghten, 12 June 1915, cited by Fedorowich from J.A. Schultz, 'Finding homes fit for heroes: the Great War and empire settlement', *Canadian Journal of History*, XVII, 1983, p.102, cited *ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>18</sup> K. Fedorowich, 'Enthusiastic but Extravagant' in C. Bridge, ed., *New Perspectives in Australian History*, London, 1990 p.130.

<sup>19</sup> The final report of the Dominions Royal Commission warned that emigration might deplete Britain's manpower.

Haggard had already been to Australia three years previously as an investigative member of the Dominions Royal Commission. At that time he had sought information on Australia's natural resources, trade, commerce and communications.

Meanwhile Australia's Governor General, Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, was asked to report on Haggard's mission. Munro-Ferguson was not convinced about the viability of soldier settlement due to Australia's immature Federation and a complex situation with state sovereignty. He was fearful also that British ex-servicemen would find the pioneering life in Australia too tough.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, he honestly believed that the situation was "discouraging", particularly when emigration might attract the wrath of militant trade unions.<sup>21</sup>

Much to the surprise of Munro-Ferguson and the Colonial Office, Haggard's trip achieved its objective.<sup>22</sup> Haggard cabled the good news to the RCI from Adelaide in May 1916 that Australia presented an "open door" for British ex-servicemen. Subsequently, he was greatly encouraged by state legislation which contained a clause providing that the conditions of settlement applied to Australian and British ex-servicemen equally.<sup>23</sup> This was of great symbolic significance in Australia. Following the 1916 Conference and state commitments to British ex-servicemen there was no turning back. Britain did not question whether Australia would introduce a scheme for local soldiers, sailors and aviators. It was expected that the scheme would be introduced to fill the empty lands, and that this scheme could include British nationals under a system of patriotic co-operation for mutual benefit. This unquestioned expectation by Britain, together with the need for British loan funding, were the main factors leading to land settlement for ex-servicemen.

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<sup>20</sup> Fedorowich, 'Society Pets and Morning Coated Farmers', *op. cit.*, p.40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, and Fedorowich, 'Enthusiastic but Extravagant', *op. cit.*, p.133.

<sup>22</sup> The response varied. Tasmania had promised land for 300 British ex-servicemen, Queensland a million acres of dairy and agricultural land on the condition that railway construction was achieved and there was a limited response from New South Wales.

<sup>23</sup> Pierce, *op. cit.*, p.206

Haggard's mission resulted in a breakthrough in the impasse between the RCI and the Colonial Office. Australia's prompt acquiescence to British ex-servicemen was encouraging to the new Colonial Secretary, Walter Long, who believed that emigration was a worthwhile policy.<sup>24</sup> He established an Empire Settlement Committee under the chairmanship of former Australian Governor General, Lord Tennyson, in early 1917, comprising representatives from Britain, the dominions, state and provincial governments.<sup>25</sup> The committee was to recommend what sort of central body was required to supervise and assist post-war emigration and to report on practical methods of settling the men in the dominions.<sup>26</sup> It was established at the same time as the Dominions Royal Commission issued their final report recommending that assistance should be given to ex-servicemen to "select, purchase and settle on the land".<sup>27</sup> The committee was able to grasp these basic principles and translate them into their policy for free passage to the dominions and the provision of capital for various schemes.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, the permanent officers of the Colonial Office were reticent to implement change, and agreed with a further clause in the Dominions Royal Commission Report that extreme caution should be taken when embarking on schemes for ex-servicemen. Not only would emigration deplete the supply of trained men in a defence crisis, but also it would remove workmen from Britain.

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<sup>24</sup> Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, p.30. Long became Colonial Secretary in December 1916.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.30-1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>28</sup> BPP, Cd.8462, *Dominions Royal Commission Final Report*, 1917, pp.83 and 92-4, cited in Fedorowich, *ibid.*

Once again a leadership change in the Colonial Office proved advantageous to land settlement. In January 1919 Lord Milner was appointed Colonial Secretary, and with his "disciple and close confidant" Leo Amery as Under Secretary, he worked tirelessly to achieve their shared vision in land settlement.<sup>29</sup> Amery argued in favour of empire settlement when debating the Empire Settlement Bill of 1922.

So, then, send forth men and women to new conquests in the Dominions where they would win for themselves health and wealth, confidence and content, and winning these things for themselves, they would win no less for those who remained, and send the life blood of new trade, of new hope, of new vision of Empire pulsing through the veins of the old Mother Country.<sup>30</sup>

Ironically, the argument in favour of empire migration was not decided by visionary debate but by the sudden deterioration in the employment position which shocked Lloyd George and his Government. By March 1919 there were over 300,000 ex-servicemen receiving unemployment benefits and these disgruntled men placed a threat of insurrection over the society.<sup>31</sup> Very quickly, Lloyd George's lack of enthusiasm for empire migration was converted to swift action and, in April 1919, Amery announced in Parliament that from New Year's Day 1920, British ex-servicemen and women would be eligible for a free passage to the dominions for the duration of one year. This was later extended to 1922.

When the first British settlers arrived in Australia in 1920 they encountered similar economic conditions to those they had left behind. The states were attempting to settle the ex-servicemen on tiny blocks of land in an endeavour to ameliorate Australian unemployment and potential militancy. The predictions made to the Colonial Office in 1916 by Munro-Ferguson were accurate.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>30</sup> F.A. Bland, 'Development and Migration' in R.C. Mills, G.V. Portus, Campbell and Persia, ed., *Studies in Australian Affairs*, Sydney, 1928, p.50.

<sup>31</sup> Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, *op. cit.*, p.39.

The states maintained administrative control of land settlement leaving the Commonwealth to pay costs. The result was six differing schemes and six autonomous states undertaking settlement without an overall authority in control. As a consequence there was a lack of uniformity, which was detrimental to efficiency. But the main problems encountered were attributable to the undue haste required for implementation. The states could not accommodate the large number of Australians wanting settlement, let alone British ex-servicemen who were unfamiliar with the pioneering way of life and the vagaries of Australian weather.

There were many factors which made the scheme difficult for British settlers. The scarcity of shipping after the war hampered migration. Rivalry between states meant that recruitment offices were established in London and the wealthier states like New South Wales and Victoria were able to offer more than the less financial states. So keen to recruit ex-servicemen were the London offices of New South Wales and Victoria, that emigration was offered to British soldiers with acute health problems sustained as a result of their war service. Due to their poor health many men were prohibited from life on a farm. Indeed, sometimes their maladies would exclude them from work of any kind.<sup>32</sup>

Certainly, the Australian soldier placed on the land had an advantage over any British settler. The Australian usually had some knowledge of the uncertain climate, the harsh conditions together with an acceptance of dry land farming and grazing. Despite the fact that the Australian land mass was vast, the amount of suitable land for farming was scarce and British settlers tended to be allocated land of lesser quality than their Australian counterparts. When Haggard surveyed the states, South Australia had been one of the first to offer land. It was also the first state to draw back from its promise until domestic commitments were completed.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.163.

Within a few months of arrival, many of the British settlers started to recount the true picture of soldier settlement in Australia. Fedorowich documents many cases of disappointment and despair. William Fleming wrote that "Australia and Australia as advertised at home are two different countries".<sup>33</sup> S.G. Blythe wrote to the Premier of Tasmania seeking a way to return home: "it is hopeless for an ex-imperial soldier".<sup>34</sup>

A joint venture scheme with a private company Australian Farms Limited and the Victorian Government ended in scandal eliminating any optimism for British land settlement. The company wanted to attract the British ex-officer class from India who possessed capital. They were offered fruit-growing irrigation blocks of 15 acres, or sheep and wool production, with the promised return of between 500 and 1,000 pounds per annum.<sup>35</sup> It was a dreadful failure. First, the Victorian Government did not honour its part of the bargain and the land purchased was of poor quality. Subdivision was slow and an extra fee of 200 pounds payable to the Victorian Government was charged. They were able to withdraw from the venture because of an amendment to the Closer Settlement Act 1922. Yet the fact that the scheme had State Government involvement had been the main reason why the British military from India had been prepared to place their savings into the undertaking. Many of the promises did not materialise. The supervision was inferior, and the markets for wool and fruit were depressed thus reducing the amount of return promised.<sup>36</sup> Following the Victorian Government's withdrawal from the venture, it advertised its own land settlement scheme to attract British settlers.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.164.

<sup>34</sup> Blythe to Lee, 29 May 1922, cited in Fedorowich, *ibid.*, p.164.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.169.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.169-71.



Settlement commenced with a projected 2,000 settlers financed equally between the British and the Australian governments. According to Fedorowich, the scheme was an "absolute fiasco". Of 814 British settlers (1923-7), 75 percent of whom were ex-servicemen, 455 examined the land and decided not to go ahead with the venture after inspection.<sup>37</sup> Undoubtedly, the Victorian scheme created animosity towards Australian migration as a whole. The Victorian Government finally agreed to an enquiry, and in 1930 a Royal Commission was appointed. In its findings, the Royal Commission (1933) found that 294 complaints made by British settlers were justified from a total of 311 submissions.<sup>38</sup>

Australia gained more British ex-servicemen and their families than any other dominion. When the free passage scheme ended in late 1921, Australia had received 37,576 or 43 percent.<sup>39</sup> But Australian settlement presented more problems to the British Government than any other dominion because of its hasty implementation, lack of previous experience, no government was in absolute control and the land which was allocated was unsuitable and sold at an inflated cost.

Why was Britain so influential in Australia's decision to embark on soldier land settlement for local and British ex-servicemen? As discussed in Chapter One, historical precedent dictated to Britain that following a major war, land would be allocated to soldiers and sailors as a method of reward, as a means of establishing national ownership, and in the case of Australia, re-distributing the population to country areas and extending agricultural development. With Federation and World War I, Australia had sustained a measure of political and economic maturity.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.172.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.

<sup>39</sup> G.F. Plant, *Oversea Settlement*, London, 1951.

Nevertheless, its prosperity was dependent on primary production, and it was generally accepted that the improvement of large areas of empty land by yeomen farmers would benefit Australia's national growth and provide an economic boost for the Empire. To the Colonial Office and the Board of Trade, the supply of land in Australia appeared limitless. Therefore, it was never contemplated that Australia would reject the concept of soldier and settlement and the inclusion of British ex-servicemen seemed a logical extension of the imperial bond.

Australia's decision to implement a scheme for Australian soldier settlers determined that the scheme would be extended to British ex-servicemen. The funding for an Australian scheme was totally dependent on British loans. This proviso removed any choice the states may have wanted to exert until after the first loans were established. It must be remembered also that this was an extremely patriotic society: so great was Australia's allegiance to Empire that 330,000 young men had been sent across the world in its defence. It would be difficult to reject requests from the "Mother Country", especially when it was considered that Australia presented better opportunities for ex-servicemen on the land than those offered by other dominions.

The vision of an expanding Empire was adopted by both countries.

Although Australia's primary reason for accepting the British into their soldier settlement scheme was economic, there were other benefits which were acknowledged. Defence fears were constant in Australia with a large continent housing a mere five million people. There was an urgent commitment to increasing the population and this should be Anglo-Saxon in order to bolster the base racial strain against the perceived threat of Asian migration.

Undoubtedly, economic harmony was a strong motivation leading to settlement. Australia wanted development funds and recognised its position as a primary producer in an Empire where Britain exported manufactured goods. Both countries believed that they were inextricably linked by racial heritage, and that the imperial bond would ensure future prosperity. Soldier land settlement was an integral component of that abundance. Sadly, it failed to reach its objective and it remained to be seen how the land schemes for Australian ex-servicemen would fare.