

## Chapter 3

### The Hand of Providence

In October 1804 the *Sydney Gazette* reported the capsizing and sinking of a vessel named the *Lady Barlow* in Sydney Harbour as the result of a sudden storm. In the report, credit was given to Providence for the fact that only one life was lost, that of a lascar. The fact that the storm had struck while the crew were all on deck and the convict working party, which had been in the hold, were on shore for dinner was regarded as providential. On the other hand, the escape of a young woman from below decks was seen as “lucky” in that she was near a port-hole, and then “fortunate” in that there was someone with a boat nearby to pick her up since she could not swim. [1] The language of the report is a useful guide to the way in which events were given meaning in the early colonial period.

The ideas of providence as they are manifest during ocean voyages have been described. In this case providence was seen as exercising control over the forces of nature and the timing of the storm which ensured the positive outcome of a minimum loss of life. The entirely random and essentially insignificant decision concerning where the girl located herself

1. *Sydney Gazette*, 21 October 1804

was simply considered a matter of luck and the fact that someone happened to be there with a boat was her good fortune. The Indian sailor who drowned was merely the victim of a misfortune. In modern usage the terms “lucky” “fortunate”, and “providential” may be used in an interchangeable manner since they may all be taken to mean the same thing. The *Macquarie Dictionary* includes among its definitions of “fortunate” the term “lucky”. For “lucky” it includes the term “fortunate”. For the word “providential”, it includes both “lucky” and “fortunate”. The most significant collapse of meaning for the present discussion is in the term “providential”. It may be one reason why there has been a failure to recognise the importance of providential thinking in the period under consideration and consequently excessive emphasis on the idea of a secular society. In his book, *The Secularisation of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Owen Chadwick suggests that one of significant features in the development of a secular outlook at the end of the nineteenth century was the decline in Calvinism owing to the decline in the belief in Providence.[2] To illustrate his argument he refers to reports of the sinking of the British warship, H.M.S. *Captain*, in 1870, the *Deutschland* in 1875 and the *Titanic* in 1912. While the *Captain* produced reactions which suggested that God was in some way working out a mysterious providential purpose, and the *Deutschland* produced the Hopkins’ poem on the theme of suffering and death, the sinking of the *Titanic* produced no theology of Providence. In this last case the response of the clergy was to condemn the excess of faith in materialism but there was no

2. Chadwick, O., *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1975, p. 262

suggestions of judgments of God. The hand of Providence had been distanced from the disaster. [3]

In his study of the sociology of religion, *The Social Reality of Religion*, Peter Berger highlights the significance of religion in creating a meaningful world structure and maintaining that meaning against the forces of chaos: "religion is the audacious attempt to conceive the entire universe as humanly significant". [4] This is a useful insight in attempting to understand the religious thinking of ordinary people in colonial New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land who faced circumstances in which they could be overwhelmed and destroyed by the forces of chaos. One such situation was the peril of shipwreck which anyone coming to the colonies, either voluntarily or otherwise, had to face. The hand of Providence was much in evidence to those in peril upon the ocean, and in helping new arrivals cope with the problems which threatened to overwhelm them in a strange land. The fact that the term "providence" is the most common metaphysical term employed in press reports, personal letters and journals, and in popular colonial literature of the period under discussion must be taken seriously and not dismissed as just a quaint, old fashioned expression meaning "lucky".

The apparently universal acceptance of the intervention of Divine Providence in the saving of the *Sirius* from disaster in 1789 reflected a religious attitude common to the eighteenth century. There was the clear belief that God acted through natural forces, aided by the best efforts of

3. *ibid.*

4. Berger, P., *The Social Reality of Religion*, Harmondsworth, 1969, p.37

humanity, to preserve human life. Even when the *Sirius* was wrecked at Norfolk Island, the faith in Providence was not shaken because the ship went aground in such a manner as to allow the supplies to be saved. Survival was subsequently assured by the providential supply of a vast quantity of mutton birds. During the first half of the nineteenth century there are numerous reports of the intervention of Providence in saving life in the case of shipwrecks and accidents at sea but there is no sense of judgment when life is lost, as the following examples illustrate. In April 1805, the cutter, *Nancy*, was wrecked near Jarvis Bay. After fears that the vessel would be smashed to pieces against the cliffs of St George's Head, it went aground on a small beach. The *Gazette* reported,

To this interposition of providence alone is to be attributed rescue of the people from a melancholy fate, one of whom, Richard Wall, a native of Exeter, was unfortunately lost. [5]

On his first return voyage to England in 1834, John Dunmore Lang saw the hand of Providence working to save his life at sea by allowing the small boat which his party had taken to an island to be swept away, for otherwise the party would "have all been swamped and lost in attempting to reach the ship in her from the small island in that tremendous night".[6] In 1837 Captain Edward Tregurtha of the *Henry* recorded in his log an instance of rescuing a member of an exploration party who was being pursued by Aborigines as night was falling and a storm was rising. On reaching the ship just before the

5. *Sydney Gazette*, 5 May 1805

6. Lang, J.D., *Reminiscences of My Life and Times* (1878), [ed. D.W.A. Baker] Melbourne, 1972, p.53

storm burst he wrote, "Mr Hopkins gave utterance to an audible prayer thanking God for our deliverance which was most providential".[7]

These instances could be multiplied many times from reports, journals and letters but they they are sufficient to illustrate the continuity of the tradition of providential intervention to secure a good end. It is interesting to note that in the case of the rescue of a party of fools who had set off for a picnic in a boat much too small for their numbers on Sydney Harbour in 1803, their escape from drowning is put down to a fortunate accident. The boat capsized while they were close to shore "by which early accident the lives of the Pleasurists were in all probability preserved".[8] While sensible people caught up by the forces of nature could look to providential intervention for their preservation, fools had to chance their good fortune.

The dangers of the sea in the era before the development of steam power were such that a belief in the goodness of Providence was necessary to provide the courage to undertake long ocean voyages. Some sense of this confidence is found in a satirical song which George Boyes heard sailors singing during a storm on his voyage to England from Hobart in 1832:

And often we seamen hear  
How men are killed or undone  
By overturns of carriages -  
By thieves or fires in London.

7. Brown,P. [ed.], *Clyde Company Papers*, London, 1952, Vol. II, p. 77

8. *Sydney Gazette*, 14 August 1803

We know what *risks* all landsmen run  
 From Noblemen to Tailors,  
 Then Bill let's thank providence -  
 That you and I are sailors. [9]

One of the major danger spots on voyage between Britain and New South Wales was Bass Strait with its rocky islands. Some indication of the peril is given by Anne Drysdale in her diary written on board the *Indus*, bound for Port Phillip in 1840:

It was an awful night, the sea breaking over the Poop; all the passengers walking about in terror, wearying for day light. When it came, there were high rocks to which we were drifting broadside on.[10]

The captain, "with the greatest coolness", navigated the ship out of danger but the storm did not abate and the next evening, the ship was drifting in towards King Island. The diary entry continued, "we must trust in Providence, but thank God the wind began to moderate about 8 O'clock, which allowed us all to go to bed and sleep". [11]

While Providence was credited with yet another intervention to save the *Indus* from disaster on King Island, what was the response when such intervention did not take place and disaster occurred? On the night of

9. Chapman, P. [ed.], *The Diaries and Letters of G. T. W. B. Boyes*, Melbourne, 1985, p.578

10. Brown [ed.], *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 336

11. *ibid.*

Sunday, 3 August 1845, the hand of Providence did not intervene as the emigrant ship, the *Cataraqui* was wrecked on King Island with the loss of 406 lives, producing Australia's worst maritime disaster. The reports of the disaster do not mention Providence. There is no search for a meaning behind these tragic deaths. There is no suggestion of a hidden purpose. There are lessons to be learned, but they are not moral or spiritual ones. The lessons were of a purely practical nature and it appears that the deaths could only be given meaning if the practical lessons led to improved safety for shipping. The reason for the wreck, in the opinion of the *Sydney Morning Herald* correspondent, was "a gross error in judgment of her ill-fated captain" for the sake of saving a few hours. A debate on sea-worthiness and hull construction was begun as the rapidity of the break up of the *Cataraqui* was a point of contention. It was claimed that "every year above a thousand human beings are drowned by the system [of construction] whose lives might easily have been preserved". [12] The *Port Phillip Herald* commenced its description of the disaster by stating that the tragedy highlighted the "imperative necessity of constructing light houses on the shores of Bass' Straits" to avoid similar peril to for other seafarers "as those who have thus been sacrificed". [13] The Goulburn River district squatter, John Cotton, may have read the press reports quoted above as he wrote to his relatives in England:

the cause of the wreck appears to have been some neglect or carelessness on the part of the captain. ... Lighthouses are at length

10. Brown [ed.], *op.cit.*, Vol. II p. 336

11. *ibid.*

12. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 September 1845

13. "Dreadful Shipwreck of the *Cataraqui*", in Ingleton, G. [ed.], *True Patriots All*, Sydney, 1988, p. 237

to be erected along the coast which it is hoped will be the means of saving others from meeting a watery grave off these shores. [14]

The response to the loss of life was to give meaning to the “sacrifice”, but it carried no metaphysical implication. That there should be any such reflection on a divine judgment was specifically rejected by Henry Savery, the convict author of Australia’s first novel, when he included a shipwreck episode in *Quintus Servinton* (1830-31). He regarded the idea that those involved in a general calamity, that is, the shipwreck, should see themselves under some judgment as “a species of superstitious feeling”. [15] While he was prepared to see God’s power displayed “as he rides upon the storm”, Savery considered it too presumptuous of any man to think that such displays should be directed at his own miserable sins. He declared directly to his readers,

Those who have a proper sense of the Supreme Being, well know it to be inconsistent, either with his goodness, or his relative connection with the children of men, to involve many in any measure of punishment, that may particularly bear as such, upon one or two. [16]

The idea of a divine judgment had not been rejected but it could not justly apply to a general disaster. Classical Calvinism would have no theological difficulty in dispatching a ship carrying a reprobate to the bottom of the ocean as a moral lesson to the elect. But in a society which was in urgent

14. J. Cotton to W. Cotton, September 1845, Mackaness, G. [ed.], *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, Part II, Sydney, 1978 p. 24

15. Savery, H., *Quintus Servinton*, Brisbane, 1962, p.324

16. *ibid.*



need of free settlers such ideas could only appear as nonsense. Reckless captains and poor navigational aids were a much more reasonable explanation.

Such was Sydney's response to the wreck of the *Duncan Dunbar*. On the night of 20 August 1857 the *Dunbar* struck the rocks near the Gap at South Head while attempting to enter Sydney Harbour. Of the 122 passengers and crew there was only one survivor. The reaction recorded in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was initially one of shocked disbelief that such a thing could have happened, followed by the growing realisation of the magnitude of the loss as pieces of the ship, bits of cargo and bodies were washed up on various beaches around the harbour. Debate was started over the safety of Sydney Heads, the adequacy of navigation lighting, the improvements needed in the pilot service and the dangers of rivalry among sea captains. [17] The blame for the disaster was placed squarely upon Captain Green, "setting aside the principle of not speaking ill of the dead".[18] It was thought fitting that the captain had died with "those who perished by his mistake", not because it was a judgment upon him but because he would have been haunted by his error had he survived.[19] The disaster was not a judgment with any higher purpose. The *Sydney Morning Herald* summed up the event by stating, "The catastrophe has been felt as a colonial misfortune". [20] If there was any lesson to be learned it was again one of better navigational aids at the heads. A nautical correspondent claimed that if there was no attempt made to improve navigational safety

17. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 August 1857

18. *ibid.*

19. *ibid.*, 25 August 1857

20. *ibid.*

“the blood of the sufferers will be upon our heads and we shall become a bye-word and a disgrace among nations for our apathy”. [21]

The 1858 edition of *Moore's Almanac* referred to the wreck of the *Dunbar* and the sinking of the *Catherine Adamson* on 24 October 1857, in which 21 lives were lost at North Head, by stating that “Providence has visited this fair region with dire calamities”. [22] However the report does not sustain the idea of Providence imposing some type of divine moral judgment upon the colony. It arrives at the conclusion that

there is little doubt that both of these untoward events might have been easily avoided had it not been for the recklessness that captains acquire who have been in the habit of visiting our noble and capacious harbour. [23]

In the report of the mass funeral for the *Dunbar* victims, there was the expression of relief that the inquest had been completed and that the “Christian spirit of the country asserted its right in the forms of Christian burial”. [24] There is passing reference to the tragedy being part of God’s own “appointed purpose” but it is in a context of consolation for the fact that “the city has been involved in a shroud of mystery and regret” [25] and it does not amount to a call for moral or spiritual examination. There is no reflection

21. *ibid.*, 26 August 1857

22. *Moore's Almanac*, Sydney, 1858, p. 51

23. *ibid.*, p. 52

24. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1857

25. *ibid.*

on deeper meanings, only the optimistic hope that the dead “will all have their graves hallowed by the prayer of those who now, high in the hope of their future welfare, will hold their memory sweet and fragrant”. [26] Had all but one survived the wreck, Providence would have been credited with their escape. As all but one were lost, the tragedy was not a visitation of Providence but a sad and melancholy misfortune caused by human error. This did not represent a lack of belief in God but a lack of belief about the way in which God related to his creatures in terms of sending down punishments and misfortunes on the community. While all things may work towards some divinely appointed end, humanity was not without its part to play in achieving that end.

This last point is specifically made in by Charles Harpur in one of his early poems, *Theodic Optimism*. He begins by taking the theme that all things work together for good. However he is no Dr Pangloss. Humanity must play its part in the process:

But no man should less active be,  
 Believing thus - as not less free  
 To use his strength, skill, wit, to reach  
 The things attractive unto each:  
 And somewhat good will ever run  
 From all that's well designed and done,  
 Though out beyond our range it go,  
 (Because by God's hand prospered so)

26. *ibid.*

Or wide of what we aimed at - lest

*All should not be for the best . [27]*

Without human effort and vision there can be no guarantee that everything will turn out for the best. The tragedies of the *Cataraqui* and the *Dunbar* did not inspire the colonists to bow in humble submission to the mysterious dispensations of God, but rather to ensure that those who had been lost at sea should not have died without purpose. Improving maritime safety gave meaning to an otherwise meaningless loss of life.

The active participation and co-operation of humanity with providence is aptly illustrated in a conversation recorded at Government House at Parramatta in 1835 by Roger Terry, involving Peter Dillon and two Quaker missionaries, Backhouse and Wheeler. Dillon had a number of years experience as a trader in the Pacific Islands and was regarded as an expert on Fiji. On one occasion, following the massacre of some of his crew by Fijians, he had escaped death by capturing the chief priest and passing through the hostile native crowd with his musket at his captive's head; "By this dreadful expedient, we fortunately reached the boat. Being thus once more out of danger, we returned thanks to Divine Providence for our escape".[28] When Dillon advised the missionaries to land in Fiji armed with a brace of loaded pistols, a well charged double-barrelled gun and a sword and to take half a dozen similarly armed supporters if they wished to

27. Perkins, E. [ed.], *The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur*, Sydney, 1984, p.22

28. "Massacre at the Feejee Islands" in Ingleton, *op.cit.*, p.63

come back alive, Wheeler exclaimed. "Oh! that is impossible, as all my ways are 'ways of peace'. I am determined to land unarmed, placing my trust in Providence".[29] Dillon asserted his own belief in Providence but added, "if a set of black devils were approaching me with a design to kill and eat me, I should place my confidence in a double-barrelled gun and a brace of pistols". Therry observed that Dillon's faith in Providence was well founded since it was the weapons supplied by Providence which had been used effectively to ensure his safety. [30]

There is a clear distinction here between the attitude of the Quakers and that of Dillon. The Quakers were intending to do nothing to ensure their personal safety but to place their entire reliance on Providence. Dillon relied on Providence but also believed that he could contribute to the providential care by adding an assortment of weapons, apparently, "lest all should not be for the best".

Providence intervened in the form of a party of well armed and resolute young men to rescue Eliza Fraser who was being held captive by Aborigines after the wreck of the *Stirling Castle* on the Swain Reefs off the Queensland coast in 1836. The rescue party arrived, in the words of Eliza Fraser's narrative, "as if commissioned expressly for the purpose, from Heaven".[31] Through what was described as a remarkable instance of the interposition of Divine Providence the rescuers arrived just in time to save her from "one of

29. Therry, R., *Reminiscences of Thirty Years Residence in New South Wales and Victoria*, Sydney, 1972, p.179

30. *ibid.*, p. 180

31. "Shipwreck of the *Stirling Castle*", in Ingleton, *op.cit.*, p.179

the most alarming situations in which an unfortunate female could be placed". [32] In her narrative she describes the death of her husband but makes no suggestion regarding why she should have survived while he did not. He is simply described in the usual non-religious terms as "my poor, unfortunate husband".[33]

There was however some moral lesson to be learned from Eliza Fraser's experience. In her book, *A Mother's Offering to her Children*, published in 1841, Charlotte Barton tells the story of Mrs Fraser and leaves the children with a clear moral from the tale

We should never, my dear children, say that we cannot bear this, or that. It is impossible to set bounds to human endurance. Who can tell how much misery may be borne, and yet the sufferer live to tell it! - May a merciful God, graciously spare us, my children, from such trials! [34]

While there is the implication that God may allow trials to befall humanity, the emphasis of the moral is on the human capacity to bear suffering and survive. This is clearly an important quality for a convict and pioneering society living at the end of a perilous ocean voyage. It is to this quality which William Buckley, or at least his editor, John Morgan, attributed his survival in the bush for over thirty years after escaping from the convict camp at Port Phillip in 1803 and living with the local Aborigines. His life story tells how he

32. *ibid.*

33. *ibid.*, p.176

34. Barton, C., *A Mother's Offering to Her Children*, Brisbane, 1979, p.176

confronted “dangers which no man can describe - no, not even myself; although by the merciful providence of God, I surmounted them all”. [35]

These illustrations of the hand of Providence being assisted by well armed human agents date from the 1830s, and may be evidence of a waning belief in the self-sufficiency of Providence. However, evidence can be found of this outlook at an earlier period. In 1805 the *Sydney Gazette* reported on an attack by Aborigines on a vessel moored on the Hawkesbury River. The crew, who were sleeping, were disturbed by a noise on deck which was described as “the merest accident that could have been ordained by a protecting providence”. Despite this providential warning the report noted “even after the danger was discovered, without arms their resistance might have availed but little”. [36] Again there is the belief that survival depends on the overseeing kindness of Providence supported by resolute human action.

Natural disasters as well as maritime disasters could be regarded as visitations of Providence. However the colonial reports of serious floods on the Hawkesbury and Hunter Rivers reveal Providence acting to save life, not to destroy it. The loss and damage caused by the floods is ascribed to misfortune and bad luck, not to the hand of Providence. Reports of the Hawkesbury flood of 1809 mentioned Providence only in positive contexts and once more in association with human action. Government relief measures, such as sending extra convicts to assist flood victims, were

35. Morgan, J., *The Life and Adventures of William Buckley*, Adelaide, 1967, p.5

36. *Sydney Gazette*, 15 September 1805

37. *ibid.*, 4 June 1809

expected to prevent further evils under the “blessing of Divine Providence”.[37] The rescue of people in danger of drowning was reported as a partnership between the human and divine: “I cannot omit to mention the indefatigable exertions of Messers Thompson and Biggers, to whom, under the direction of Divine Providence, many are indebted for their lives”.[38] Where lives were lost the victims of the flood were described as merely “unfortunate”. The death of eight people was described simply as being “a truly melancholy instance”.[39] Lieutenant Governor Paterson described the flood as an “unhappy” and “unfortunate event”[40], apparently seeing no divine retribution for the overthrow of Governor Bligh.

While the hand of Providence was conspicuously absent from the *Dunbar* disaster in 1857, it was nevertheless clearly evident in assisting with the rescue operations in Maitland during the Hunter River flood of that year. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported the dramatic rescue of three Wesleyan missionaries and their families from the Mission House. A rescue boat capsized and the occupants had to be helped out clinging to lifelines. Shortly after the last person was dragged to safety the Mission House collapsed into the torrent. “A more providential escape can hardly be imagined”, the *Herald* noted. [41]

The essential good will of Providence in its dealings with humanity is reflected in the reaction of Europeans to dangerous, life threatening situations encountered in the colonial experience. These situations included

38. *Sydney Gazette*, 6 August 1809

39. *ibid.*

40. Paterson to Lord Minto, 9 July 1809, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. VII, pp. 192-3

41. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 August 1857



being struck by lightning, being confronted by potentially hostile Aborigines, being lost in the bush or being caught in a dangerous surf. The theme of the essential goodness of Providence is clearly set by a report of a lightning strike which appeared in the *Sydney Gazette* in 1804. Commenting on the escape from death of two small children in a house struck by lightning the paper commented,

when we reflect upon the innumerable benefits bestowed by an all-gracious and wonder-working Providence, it is our duty in silent adoration to acknowledge and admire the Eternal Goodness.[42]

When Government House at Parramatta was struck by lightning in 1820 the reaction of the press reporter and Governor Macquarie were the same. The *Sydney Gazette* reported on the providential escape from death or injury of Mrs Macquarie and her son who were having breakfast in a room "which was the only one in the house not visited by this scourge".[43] Macquarie, who was "providentially" absent on a tour of the western district of New South Wales, noted the report of the incident in his journal and concluded with the comment, "through the interposition of Divine Providence, no injury was done to any living creature. How thankful I ought to be to God for this escape, and I am devoutly so'. [44] It apparently did not occur to Macquarie that the fact that Government House was struck by lightning in the first place may have signalled some judgment or ill omen in relation to his administration of the colony. The incident was simply understood in relation

42. *Sydney Gazette*, 5 February 1804

43. *ibid.*, 11 November 1820

44. Macquarie, L., *Journals of His Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1810-1822*, Sydney, 1979, p. 166

to its happy outcome. Here is further evidence of the comfortable and optimistic attitude towards the activity of Providence.

On his journey down the Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers in 1829-30, Charles Sturt and his party encountered large numbers of Aborigines on the banks of the Murray and feared an attack. However after a dispute between tribesmen as to what course of action to follow, an attack did not occur. When Sturt discovered that there were, according to his estimate, over six hundred Aborigines in the group, he described the party's escape as due to the "almost miraculous intervention of Providence in our favour".[45] Sturt took the opportunity to note that this was one of a number of instances in which "the merciful superintendence of that Providence to which we had humbly committed ourselves, was strikingly manifest".[46] However it is useful to note that on the occasion when the skiff in which they were towing their supplies overturned and sank in the Murrumbidgee, with potentially fatal consequences for the expedition, Sturt uses the language of fortune and luck to describe the situation. The recovery of some of the stores was a matter of good fortune while the place where the accident occurred was referred to as an "unlucky spot".[47] Once again the good is ascribed to Providence whereas the things that go wrong are looked at in terms of misfortune.

Charles O'Hara Booth, commandant of the Port Arthur penal settlement in the 1830s, does not indicate whether or not he regarded himself as

45. Sturt, C., *Two Expeditions into the Interior of Southern Australia*, London, 1833, p. 107

46. *ibid.*

47. *ibid.*, pp.78-79

unlucky but his lack of bush skills saw him lost in the bush on Tasman Peninsula in 1834 and again in 1838. On the first occasion he became lost while visiting convict work gangs and wandered for several days before stumbling across a familiar location and giving thanks to “Heaven once more for a narrow escape”.<sup>[48]</sup> If there was a lesson to be learned, Booth failed to take notice of it and found himself in an even more desperate situation in May 1838. He was lost in wet and freezing conditions, without food and unable to make a fire. He decided he could do nothing but “resign myself to that great and good Providence that always watches over us”.<sup>[49]</sup> After several days of exposure Booth heard the sound of a search party but was too exhausted to attract their attention. He thought that he had been left to his fate “but Omnipotent Providence had ordained otherwise”.<sup>[50]</sup> His hunting dogs attracted the attention of the rescuers and thus saved his life. Again there is no attempt to see meaning in being lost for a second time. To have died in the bush would have been yet another melancholy misfortune. Providence is seen as intervening simply as an act of grace in response to the life threatening situation in which Booth found himself. Threatened with chaos and death he turned to his faith in Providence. His rescue simply confirmed his faith.

Even when Providence was tested by rash behaviour, and in spite of the example of foolish boaters on Sydney Harbour, it could still provide protection in a life threatening situation, as Annabella Boswell found in 1844, when the unseen hand was involved in a surf rescue. Annabella and

48. Heard, D. [ed.], *The Journal of Charles O'Hara Booth*, Hobart, 1981, p. 187

49. *ibid.*, p. 224

50. *ibid.*, p. 225

her cousin Dido decided to go for a swim at the beach at Port Macquarie despite a huge surf. "I cannot think what possessed us, or where my small portion of common sense had flown to; it really was a tempting of Providence". [51] Dido was washed off the rocks. Annabella and her mother plunged into the surf to rescue her but found themselves in difficulties. A large wave flung Dido in their direction and washed them all in shore, which enabled them to struggle back to the beach. Watching the sea that evening Annabella reflected that she had "deep cause of thankfulness that we were not drowned. Assuredly we had no part in saving ourselves". [52]

As Annabella's case of tempting Providence demonstrates, there was a sense that Providence acted for good, regardless of the merits of those in peril. No doubt she learned a practical lesson about surfing but it was a lesson about common sense, not morality or spirituality. It was essentially a survivors' creed which gave personal significance to their escape from the forces of chaos threatening to destroy them. Describing his hero's escapes from death, Henry Savery clearly indicates that there was nothing in the conduct of his fictional hero, Quintus Servinton, which merited the intervention of Providence on his behalf. Quintus was twice rescued from "the power of the destroying angel" by "a Providence whom he had too much neglected and despised". [53]

The idea is again to be found in Elizabeth Murray's novel of life on the Victorian goldfields, *Ella Norr an*, published in 1864. One of the characters

51. Herman, M., [ed.], *Annabella Boswell's Journal*, Sydney, 1981, p. 83

52. *ibid.*, p.86

53. Savery, *op.cit.*, p.282

whom Ella meets puts his escape from an alcoholic death down to the fact that his gentlemanly taste for wine prevented him from drinking the vile “poisonous spirits” which were sold on the goldfields. He adds the comment that, “Providence watches over some of us in a mysterious way - a way we do not deserve; and it often puzzles me when I think of myself”.<sup>[54]</sup>

This type of situation was not a mystery to John Chandler who claimed to have experienced similar undeserved protection while working as a carter between Melbourne and the goldfields in the early 1850s. He was able to give it a positive theological explanation which is absent from the reports of most non-clerical writers. In his youth Chandler was a good but reckless horseman who experienced a number of “narrow escapes”. He believed that God was keeping him safe because “He determined to save me, for He watched over my path when I was Satan’s blind slave and sported with death”.<sup>[55]</sup> The sense of God’s protection for Chandler was related to his Calvinist theology as a member of the Particular Baptists. However for those who were not anything in particular, the sense of God’s protection and goodwill appears just as strong. While Calvinists may have considered the reprobate beyond the protection and goodwill of Divine Providence, the supposed reprobate continued to believe that he enjoyed that blessing.

Providence has been shown mainly as a power for producing good, especially in situations of life-threatening peril. There is some sense of moral judgment to be found in reports of providential action, but in non-clerical writing it remains a secondary consideration. In 1803 a group of

54. Murray, E.A., *Ella Norman, or a Woman’s Peril*, Melbourne, 1985 , p.224

55. Chandler, J., *Forty Years in the Wilderness*, Melbourne, 1990, p.22

convicts set out from Castle Hill with a week's supplies and the intention of making their escape to China, which they believed to be on the other side of the Blue Mountains. Only one of the convicts survived, being found in the bush in a state of complete exhaustion and "within a few hours of eternity".[56] The *Sydney Gazette* interpreted what it called the convict's providential survival as an "awful admonition" to any other convicts who might be tempted to follow the same escape route of which "nothing but inevitable death must be the final event".[57]

After concluding her account of Eliza Fraser and the wreck of the *Stirling Castle*, Charlotte Barton highlighted the moral of the story for her young readers and listeners, which was that we should never be despondent because God can extricate us from the "greatest of calamities". By way of a final comment she adds, "These trials are intended as a punishment for some and a lesson for all". [58] The theme of punishment is of less significance than the details of the providential escapes. The overriding concept is one of timely divine intervention for good. In both the case of the runaway convicts and the case of Eliza Frazer it is the moral lesson and not the punishment which is the real focus of attention. The reader learns that convicts should not attempt to run away to China and that people should keep their chins up in difficult circumstances. There is little sense of punishment falling upon the wicked as a result of the righteous wrath of God. The lessons to be learned have little to do with any matter of theological substance. The final scene of James Tucker's comedy, *Jemmy Green in*

56. *Sydney Gazette*, 26 June 1803

57. *ibid.*

58. Barton, *op.cit.*, pp. 182-183

*Australia* (c.1845), highlights this trivial approach to the issue of providential retribution. The play is based on the misadventures of a new chum, Jemmy Green, who finds himself to be easy prey for a variety of colonial swindlers. However his fortunes are restored in the end and he delivers the following lines to conclude the play:

And after all, I may thank heaven for what has happened, since  
a few days of adversity has read me a lesson I shall never forget.  
And moreover, I've been done so wery brown that I shall never  
be half so Green as I have been. [59]

In the novel, *Ella Norman*, the heroine who is a governess to a bunch of wild bush children, falls off her horse during a mad gallop across the local goldfields with her pupils. The children ride off heedlessly leaving Ella, covered in mud and scratches to struggle to the local hotel for help. By this unlikely event she is brought face to face with her childhood friend who had become the proverbial slave to the demon drink. As Ella approaches the hotel, she thinks, "Oh, if I can do any good! Perhaps God has sent me to her door to do it! Perhaps this fall is a punishment to me for hesitating so long!" [60]

Both Jemmy and Ella are portrayed as learning lessons from the hand of a higher power, but in neither case is there any serious theological implication. Jemmy learns not to buy up-country real estate from Sydney

59. Tucker, J., *Jemmy Green in Australia*, Sydney, 1955, p. 82

60. Murray, *op.cit.*, p.125

con-men and Ella is made to think about her tardiness in helping a friend in distress. Just as in the cases of escaping to China and keeping one's chin up, there is nothing which has any bearing on the central issues of the Christian faith. They raise neither the question of repentance nor the question of salvation. Compared with the emphasis on the interposing goodwill of Providence which is found in the colonial historical record, the concept of punishment is very weak. Providence was seen more in the positive role of a teacher of useful moral lessons than as a power judging and punishing the sins of the colonies.

These attitudes stand in stark contrast to the clerical views on providential judgment and human suffering. In his advice to convicts, the Rev. C.P.N. Wilton sought to perpetuate the Puritan tradition which William Paley had supported in the interpretation of illness. One of the prayers which he recommended for the sick read as follows:

I confess O Lord that my grievous sins and iniquities have brought me to this state of sickness and that the greatest torment I could suffer would not be too great for what I deserve. .... while my body is suffering under sickness may this affliction be the means of bringing health to my soul .... without thy blessings the best medicine must be useless. [61]

That punishment should lead to repentance is also the theme taken up by

61. Wilton, C.P.N., *Twelve Plain Discourses Addressed to Prisoners of the Crown*, Sydney, 1834, p. 89



Archdeacon McEncroe, in reflecting on his time as Catholic priest on Norfolk Island:

To the Almighty it seems fit to collect a multitude of his prodigal children on this secluded spot of earth, for the purpose of chastising them for their sins, and of reclaiming them from their evil ways by that salutary chastisement. [62]

These concepts were promoted in evangelical literature such as the story of *The Unhappy Transport, or the Sufferings of William Dale*, published in 1821. The young hero had fallen into the company of loose living idlers and had joined the “backsliders from the paths of religion and honesty”. [63] He stayed out late, visited public houses, disobeyed his parents and after turning to crime found himself a convict in New South Wales. His sufferings and the ministrations of a “kind and pious clergyman” eventually brought him to a “just sense of the wickedness of his past life”. [64]

In reality it seems more likely that convicts would regard their sufferings as sufficient to justify themselves before God, rather than as a cause for repentance. The concept of Providence afflicting people in a way which called for repentance seems to have been marginal in popular thinking, and therefore appeals made to convicts, or to most other colonial residents, based on the idea would find little sympathy.

62. O'Farrell, P. [ed.], *Documents in Australian Catholic History*, Vol. I, London, 1969, p.77

63. Anderson, H. [ed.], *Farewell to Old England*, Adelaide, 1964, p. 93

64. *ibid.*, p. 95

Shorn of its retributive aspect, the colonial doctrine of Providence was able to provide hope in time of crisis, but it was exposed to the problem of becoming merely an optimistic fatalism. The designs of Providence were often seen as beyond the grasp of the human mind, being simply too inscrutable to understand. George Boyes reflected this outlook when facing a voyage from Hobart around Cape Horn during winter in 1832. He commented that, "We are enabled to take so limited a view of our own good that we are constantly wrong even upon the most simple calculations".[65] Consequently events which seemed to be tending to an unfortunate outcome often turned out for the best after all. Henry Savery stated the idea explicitly: "the mind of man, tired and exhausted with conjectures, sinks at length, into an admission of the truly Christian principle, that, 'Whatever is, is right'." [66] Despite Savery's claim, the view that "whatever is, is right" is more of a principle from the shallow end of Leibniz's philosophy than a truly Christian one. It is the principle ridiculed in Voltaire's *Candide* through the character of Dr Pangloss. Leibniz argued that the evil encountered in the world was merely there to heighten the contrast with that which was good and so make the world the best of all possible ones. Bertrand Russell has noted that this philosophy, contained in the work, *Theodicee*, was dedicated to the Queen of Prussia, whose serfs were forced to suffer evil so that she could enjoy the greater good. [67] This is clearly a philosophy which could find plenty of practical application in the penal colonies of New South

65. Chapman, *op.cit.*, p. 533

66. Savery, *op.cit.*, p. 210

67. Russell, B., *A History of Western Philosophy*, London, 1984, p.571

## Wales and Van Diemen's Land.

With the beginning of the gold rush in 1851, there was a sense that society was being turned upside down. Servants abandoned their masters, sailors left their ships and shepherds abandoned their flocks to pursue the dream of spectacular riches. The values which were previously applied to becoming wealthy, such as hard work, temperate habits and the blessings of Providence, no longer appeared to be related to success on the goldfields. Hours of diligent work might be repaid with nothing but blisters and aching limbs while another prospector could pick up a valuable nugget at the first attempt. Where the values of reward for effort ceased to exist there was little place for any explanation of individual success except luck. Indeed, luck appears to have been one of the attractions in gold prospecting. In a miner's letter written in 1852, this opinion is clearly stated: "I cannot help thinking that the uncertainty of gold-finding is one of its principal charms". This particular charm had its negative side, in the writer's opinion, as he went on to complain that gold mining was "destroying all industry by making our labouring population gamblers" [68] After a less than prosperous sojourn on the goldfields, Antoine Fauchery reached a similar conclusion, writing, "The mine, say the oldest miners 'is a lottery', and they alone are right; especially when they add that you get too many bad tickets in this lottery". [69] He considered that luck was particularly whimsical in whom it smiled upon: "It

68. Mackaness, G.[ed.], R. S. Anderson, *Australian Gold Fields , Their Discovery, Progress and Prospects*, Sydney, 1956, p.14

69. Fauchery, A., *Letters From a Miner in Australia*, Melbourne, 1965, p.68

smiles upon him who mocks it, and remains implacable towards so many others who beseech and pursue it". [70] It seemed as if there were a "law of fate" which ensured the most foolish found the most wealth so that it would slip through their fingers most easily: "Fortune is already far away, fortune and its wings, which have carried it off to another dupe, and there it does its malicious conjuring trick again".[71] If luck did not smile upon a party of miners, there was nothing that could be done but to accept the inevitable conclusion mentioned in a letter from a miner at Mount Alexander diggings in 1852: "We at last came to the conclusion that we were an unlucky party and resolved to separate". [72]

Seeking the interposing hand of Providence on the goldfields was not appropriate for there was no conceivable pattern or purpose in who did or did not strike it rich as far as the ordinary prospector was concerned. This did not preclude everyone from seeing significance in the apparently chance events of the goldfields. John Chandler was able to see "the Lord's hand" in a modest success at prospecting by one of his friends since the funds were used to bring out the successful miner's brothers and sisters who eventually married members of the prospecting party or became part of their church group.[73] This was taking the long view. Miners usually had much more short term objectives and thus had to rely on luck. As one prospector wrote in 1852:

I never shall give up gold digging till I have made enough to live

70. *ibid.*, p.73

71. *ibid.*, p.74

72. Mackaness, *Australian Goldfields*, p.15

73. Chandler, *op.cit.*, p.43

like a gentleman - say 10,000 pounds, I think that will do. . . .

You may say I am very lucky compared with many. I have seen five men make 12,000 pounds in two days. What do you think of that?

Many others have been almost as fortunate.[74]

There was no room for a providential intervention in plans such as these. The only reference to God was in relation to preserving his health so that he could benefit from the good luck which he was clearly expecting.[75] Another miner who had been working the diggings at Bendigo expressed himself in similar terms: "If I get my health and strength you will see me home in three years, or else I must be very unfortunate".[76]

If, as Owen Chadwick has suggested, a decline in belief in Providence can be an indicator of the process of secularisation, the colonial experience in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land provides evidence of that process in operation in the gold rush era. However the sense of Providence which is in evidence from the earliest years of the colonies bears little relation to the doctrines of Calvin as perpetuated in the evangelical tradition or to classical Catholic doctrines of Divine Providence. It was more in tune with the ideas of Swedenborg whose Divine Providence had elected all of humanity for salvation and none for damnation. It is a sense of Providence as an agent providing temporal protection and rescue from life threatening situations. When ships were in peril, Providence was seen to intervene by causing wind-shifts, the moderation of storms or the provision of a

74. Mackaness, *Australian Goldfields*, p. 14

75. *ibid.*

76. *ibid.*, p. 33

convenient place to be washed up on shore. Often the saving of a ship was seen as a co-operative effort between the captain and crew on the one hand and Providence on the other. In those cases where the vessel and the lives of those on board were lost, it was not seen as a judgment or a punishment, but rather as merely a misfortune. It was then the captain or a lack of navigational aids which caused the wreck, not the wrath of God. As Henry Savery suggested, the very notion that the innocent should be involved in a punishment of the wicked was rejected as being unworthy of a just God. When disaster struck there was some comfort in the idea that a higher and mysterious purpose was being worked out and in the belief that the sufferers would be accepted in Heaven. However the only meaningful way in which the loss of life could be understood was in highlighting the need for improved maritime safety. If all things were to turn out for the best, then human effort had to be applied to assist the fulfilling of divine purpose.

As John Macquarrie and Charles Birch have pointed out, the belief in Providence arises out of experience rather than from acceptance of a doctrine or from theological speculation. Those who experienced escapes from life-threatening situations were able to reflect on their experiences and to see the hand of Providence at work. The concept of Providence was a positive one because it was the reflection of the experience of survivors. What final thoughts passed through the minds of those who perished cannot be known. For the survivors, the deaths of others were simply unfortunate. Misfortune could be interpreted as a judgment but it was more likely to be seen as the bearer of a useful lesson. While the clergy saw suffering as demanding a response of repentance, the ordinary colonial resident apparently preferred to see a moral rather than a specifically religious

lesson to be learned. Misfortune could be regarded as part of a mysterious plan but such views tended towards a type of fatalism. However, providentialism provided a more optimistic outlook than simply resigning oneself to one's fate.

The whole notion of providential reward and punishment was rendered meaningless by the experiences of ordinary people on the goldfields. Only the concept of luck could make sense of who did and who did not strike it rich. Gold mining was a gamble without pattern or reason in the outcome.

The combination of the concepts of a protective and kind Providence and of an optimistic view that things will turn out for the best and that fortune and luck plays a part in determining the course of events, made the central concepts of the Christian faith in relation to salvation essentially irrelevant to the popular religious understanding of the Australian experience. There was no need for repentance and the seeking of the means of grace in either the sacraments or the atoning blood of Christ in a society which was laying the foundations for that distinctly Australian metaphysical proposition, "She'll be right, mate".

## Chapter 4

### An Impossible Mission

With a significant element of the colonial population apparently convinced that they were under the kindly protection of Divine Providence, regardless of their spiritual enthusiasm or moral rectitude, the clergy were placed in difficult position. How could they relate in a meaningful way to this new society? There appeared to be an excellent opportunity to preach the Gospel or administer the grace of the sacraments to sinners, who were seen to be in particular abundance in the convict colonies. But were the Gospel and sacraments the aspect of religion which most interested the colonial population? Where could there be a meeting of the minds?

Among his few references to the colonial clergy in his *Bicentennial History of Australia*, John Molony, perpetuates the “flogging parson” tradition. The sympathies of the reader are sought for young Paddy Galvin, given 300 lashes “at the behest of Samuel Marsden”, having refused to provide information regarding the suspected plot of the United Irishmen in 1800. The language used helps create sympathy for Paddy as “the skin and blood fell from him”, and loathing for his tormentors.[1] Such images have a long history which has created an unfavourable stereotype of the colonial

1. Molony, J., *The Penguin Bicentennial History of Australia*, Ringwood, 1987, p. 29



clergyman. In fact and fiction the clergyman, especially in his relations with convicts, has been held up to contempt and ridicule. The case of the Rev. William Bedford being confronted with convict women slapping their bared posteriors to disrupt his preaching in 1838 may have left the parson "horror struck" but it would leave most people highly amused.[2]

A similar scene involving a parson and women convicts occurs in *Ralph Rashleigh*. Again there is disorder at the female factory and the parson ends up with a pannikin of hot porridge stuck on his head while the "matron and her toadies" attempt to rescue him from "the wilder women". [3] The description of the parson leaves little doubt about the role model which inspired the character: "one of the most active of the magistrates, a clergyman, very short and fat ... a figure inviting the derision of the type of women whom he had come to placate".[4] Based on a large volume of such evidence Grocott came to the conclusion the attitudes of convicts and ex-convicts "ranged from apathy, through cynicism and distrust, to violent hostility". [5] The clergy had failed and paid the price for what Manning Clark described as "serving the material interests of the English governing classes".[6]

However, rather than dismiss them as failed public servants and moral police, it is more appropriate to ask what possible hope of success did they have? Not much, according to Marsden's son-law, the Rev. James Hassall:

2. Skemp, J.R., *Letters to Anne*, Melbourne, 1956, p.12
3. Tucker, J., *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh*, Sydney, 1970, p. 149
4. *ibid.*, p. 148
5. Grocott, A. *Convicts, Clergymen and Churches*, Sydney, 1980 p. 280
6. Clark, M., *A Short History of Australia*, New York, 1963, p. 23

“Can a gaol chaplain do any good in a religious point of view? I should have to reply that he does not generally find himself able to achieve that end”. [7]

The difficulties of the clergy in dealing with the convicts have been well documented by Grocott. Their achievements must be assessed in a wider context than that of the reform of the convicts. Were the expectations with which clergy and missionaries came to the colonies in any way realistic? What sort of people were they and did they have the personal qualities needed for making an impression in the colonial situation? How were they regarded by non-convict colonists? Were they on an impossible mission?

The English evangelicals who supported the efforts of the early colonial chaplains had high expectations of great blessings and outpourings of the Holy Spirit upon the new colony. Henry Venn wrote enthusiastically to his daughter in 1786, telling her how Johnson was favoured with being the means to spread the Gospel to the other side of the world, where

“the wilderness shall become a fruitful field”, and all the savageness of the Heathen shall be put off, and all the graces of the spirit shall be put on ... All heaven will break forth in that song of praise, “Allelujah”. [8]

Johnson overcame his fears and reservations about undertaking the responsibility as the chaplain with the First Fleet with “the hopes and prospects of being rendered useful in the reformation of those poor and abandoned people”, his confidence that God would protect him and the

7. Hassall, R., *In Old Australia*, Brisbane, 1902 p. 116

8. Macintosh, N.K., *Richard Johnson, Chaplain to the Colony of New South Wales*, Sydney, 1978 p. 41

“prospects of a glorious reward hereafter”.<sup>[9]</sup> He clearly shared the vision of his sponsors that he was coming to save souls and to successfully encourage holiness of life. Comments by Tench and Collins on his activities suggest that he sought to remain faithful to that calling. Tench noted that Johnson was distributing books to convicts which were “at once tending to promote instruction and piety”.<sup>[10]</sup> Collins reported the opening service in the first church in the colony on 25 August 1793, where Johnson’s sermon was “intended to impress the minds of his audience with the necessity of holiness in every place”.<sup>[11]</sup> At the opening of the church at Kissing Point in 1800, Johnson was still stressing the theme of the spiritual life. One of the congregation, Rowland Hassall, reflected on the sermon preached by Johnson: “I found some searchings of the heart that proved useful to me in the Divine life”.<sup>[12]</sup>

Rowland Hassall also had a mission. Having been forced to flee Tahiti, the London Missionary Society expected him to further the objects of the Society in New South Wales. For that purpose the Society sent an authority for Governor Hunter to draw up to two hundred pounds on its treasury for the purpose of “the conversion and civilisation of the heathen”.<sup>[13]</sup> While the missionaries were attending to this task they were also instructed to undertake the education and religious instruction of the children of convicts and poor settlers. This task might not be as glamorous as preaching, but

9. *ibid.*, p. 37

10. Tench, W., *Sydney’s First Four Years*, [ed. L.F. Fitzhardinge], Sydney, 1961, p. 40

11. Collins, D., *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, Sydney, 1910, p. 192

12. Hassall to L.M.S., 29 September 1800, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. IV, p. 210

13. L.M.S. to Hunter, October 1799, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. III, p. 731

since it required “more self-denial, patience, and humility” it was “at least as fair a proof of true missionary spirit”. [14] Furthermore the Society told them it would be “extremely injurious to your spiritual prosperity and impede your usefulness”, if they did not find work to support themselves and their families in the colony. [15]

The early clergy and missionaries may not have been aware that they were, in the Manning Clark interpretation, supposed to be serving the material interests of the English governing classes. They were however well aware of the expectations imposed upon them by the spiritual interests of the evangelical section of those classes. They were expected to encourage a movement of the Holy Spirit to sweep the colony and thus to lay the foundation for the triumph of the Kingdom of God in the Pacific. They were expected to convert the Aborigines and any other heathen peoples and introduce them to the benefits of civilisation. They were to set up schools and provide religious instruction. In return for these services they would be paid wages which would not compromise their missionary spirit. Writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1792, William Wilberforce expressed the quintessential views of the spiritual English governing classes. He claimed that a sense of religion was urgently needed in New South Wales, as such a sense would make the colonial profligates “temperate and orderly, and domestic and contented”. [16] He stressed the need for more clergy and teachers to provide religious instruction, but the teachers should have small salaries; “I say small salaries, because if you were to give large ones improper people would accept the situations”. [17]

14. L.M.S. to Missionaries at Sydney, October 1799, *ibid.*, pp. 731 - 732

15. *ibid.*

16. Wilberforce to Archbishop of Canterbury, 7 August 1792, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. I, Pt. 2, p. 634

17. *ibid.*

There was a strong belief that the people best suited to spreading the Gospel and giving religious instruction were humble people, possessing piety and zeal, but not having a particularly good education. On his return to England, Johnson gave his opinion on the qualities needed for effective clergymen in New South Wales. They should be persons of “plain habits, and who humbly yet zealously devote their time and talents in the discharge of their clerical duties”. Those of “refined tastes, or profound learning” were deemed unsuitable.[18] In 1807 Marsden stressed the importance of personal piety in anyone who sought to minister in the colony.[19] He continued to look for this quality throughout his ministry, writing in 1833: “We are very much in want of pious ministers ... None but pious men will be of any service in such a society as ours”. [20] The Church Missionary Society, the evangelical missionary arm of the Church of England, held strongly to the view that missionaries to uncivilised countries should be humble artisans.[21] It was thought that they would relate better to savages than university educated men, and that their trades could be usefully applied in the places to which they were dispatched. It was fortunate that the missionaries from Tahiti had some trades since the London Missionary Society was clearly not prepared to support them. As Jean Woolmington has pointed out, this policy was a mistaken one, as the “humble artisans” merely used their supposed superiority to the “savages” as a means to promote their own feelings of self-worth and, in the Australian context, to denigrate

18. Mackaness, G.[ed.] *Some Letters of Rev Richard Johnson B.A.*, Sydney, 1954, p. 51

19. Marsden, 21 November 1807, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. VI, p. 382

20. Murray, I., *Australian Christian Life from 1788*, Edinburgh, 1988, p. 45

21. Woolmington, J., “ ‘Humble artisans’ and ‘untutored savages’”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 13, 1985, pp. 49 - 61

Aboriginal culture.[22] In 1849 John Cotton commented on the way that a Roman Catholic priest visited his station without “much refinement of manners”, tucking into a plate of mutton chops on a Friday. This incident prompted Cotton to think that such unrefined clergy were more effective in the bush since they could relate to the common people more easily. He reflected that “the clergymen of the Church of England do not go so much amongst the lower class of people as those of other sects. Is this from their generally having received a better education?” [23] By the end of the nineteenth century the mission societies had realised their mistake. However the error was clear to John Dunmore Lang long before then. Commenting on the policy as it applied to New Zealand he remarked:

of all the missionary artisans who were sent out by the Church Missionary Society to effect civilisation [of the Maoris], the missionary blacksmith, who could mend [a Maori's] broken musket, and thereby enable him to commit murder upon his fellow-man, was in reality the only one whose talents commanded his unfeigned respect. [24]

While evangelicals and their missionary societies laid stress on qualities of piety and humility and sought to recruit clergy, missionaries and teachers with these qualities, it is doubtful that such characteristics would assist a person to succeed in the colonial situation. An excess of humility, meekness and piety could be a decided disadvantage. While Broughton commended the moral character of one of his clergymen he had to appeal to Governor

22. *ibid.*

23. Mackaness, *op.cit.*, Pt.III, p. 45

24. Lang, J.D., *Reminiscences of My Life and Times*, Melbourne, 1972, p.173

Darling in 1830 not to consider him for appointment as chaplain in Newcastle, because "Mr Vincent is not likely to command attention or conciliate general esteem".[25] James Hassall noted an incident involving the same clergyman when he was appointed to Sutton Forest. As he arrived to pay a visit at a place called Cookaburra a group of drunk young rowdies put him back on his horse facing the tail and sent him on his way.[26] Hassall also commented on the Rev. G. Napoleon Woodd, who found himself so unsuited to riding and bush work that he took an appointment to St Peter's at Cook's River, because he "would be so much nearer to England".[27] After the Rev. George Gregory drowned while trying to swim the flooded Molonglo River in 1851, a parishioner, Mary Mowle, described him as "a simple minded fellow and well-meaning man, an excellent preacher and a most promising clergyman".[28]. This may have been a case of speaking well of the dead, as she had previously noted in her diary "Asked Mr Gregory to tea & found him here when we came back - slow stupid evening, Mr G. being a regular ninny". [29]

Lack of suitability for the colonial situation was not a problem confined to the lower ranks of the clergy. Commenting on the resignation of Archdeacon Scott in 1827, Darling commended him for being amiable and well disposed, but made the telling remark, "He does not possess sufficient character for this place".[30] He made a similar comment about Father Daniel Power, a

25. Broughton to Darling, 18 January 1831, *H.R.A.*, Series 1, Vol. XVI, p. 30

26. Hassall, *op.cit.*, p. 76

27. *ibid.*, p.71

28. Clarke, P., *A Colonial Woman: The Life and Times of Mary Braidwood Mowle*, Sydney, 1990, p. 135

29. *ibid.*, p. 113

30. Darling to R.J. Wilmot Horton, 26 March 1827, *H.R.A.*, Series 1, Vol. XIII, p. 190

Catholic priest, sent to replace Father John Therry who had been struck off the government payroll as the official Catholic chaplain:

Besides being unfortunately addicted to drinking to excess, his Character was not of that description to give weight to the Situation he held, and his Artful opponent [Therry] immediately saw and took advantage of this Circumstance. [31]

Governor Bourke made the same sort of remarks about Power's successor and Therry's next opponent, the Rev. Christopher Dowling. In 1832 he noted that while Dowling was an excellent clergyman, he had "neither the animal spirits nor address sufficient to withstand the impetuosity of Mr Therry". [32]

It was not only the Anglicans and Catholics who had problems in finding men of "sufficient character for the place". Lang had considerable difficulty in finding appropriate Presbyterian ministers. It seemed to him that the main consideration of Presbyterian clergy in a decision to take up a colonial ministry was the question, "Have you any prospects in Scotland?"[33]

To illustrate the difficulty of finding men of suitable character for the colonial church Lang wrote an imaginary conversation between two apostles, James and Paul, about filling a vacancy in "Antioch". In answer to the question about his prospects in "Judea", Paul replies that he has no

31. O'Farrell, P. [ed], *Documents: in Australian Catholic History*, Vol.1, London, 1969, Vol. I, p. 14

32. *ibid.*, p. 16

33. Lang, *op.cit.*, p. 208



chance because there are too many preachers, he is out of favour with local authorities and what is more, "I am a plain-spoken man, not possessed of what are called popular talents; in addition to which, my personal appearance is so much against me". However even this apostle was reluctant to take up the position in Antioch unless he was paid sufficient to "lead about a sister - a wife, as well as our brother Peter, the apostle of the circumcision".[34]

Lang's early recruits to the mission in "Antioch" were a great disappointment to him. The Rev. Thomas Thomson was compelled to resign his position at Bathurst for intemperate conduct while the Rev. John Cleland was described by Lang as "merely an addition to our company of drunkards".[35] A charge of "gross intemperance" was also brought against the Rev. John Garven by Lang. Garven was accused of attempting to shoot his convict servant while he was drunk. The servant escaping injury when the musket misfired. [36] The Presbytery which heard these charges did not discipline Garven. The meeting was chaired by Cleland who was under the influence of alcohol at the time [37] The 1830s also saw difficulties in Hobart where the Rev. Archibald Macarthur had created a scandal with his unorthodox ministry of "holy kissing". The matter came to a head when Margaret Turnbull, the wife of Governor Arthur's private secretary, became the object of Macarthur's passionate advances, and his "assault on her virtue" was reported to the Governor. [38] Lang arrived in time to declare Macarthur's position vacant.

34. *ibid.*, p. 209

35. *ibid.*, p. 97

36. Baker, D.W.A., *Days of Wrath : A Life of John Dunmore Lang*, Melbourne, 1985, p. 124

37. *ibid.*

38. *ibid.*, p. 121

Whatever their faults, these clergymen do not fit the stereotyped image of colonial evangelicals. Like Johnson, they took the risk of undertaking a ministry on the other side of the world and came with a similar burden of expectations. They were often selected for qualities of humility and piety which were not necessarily an advantage in the abrasive society of early colonial New South Wales. When it was clear that impossible expectations could not be met, it was not difficult to fall into self-doubt and, like many other colonists with disappointed expectations, to take solace in drink. Discouragement could come as easily from governors as from convicts or bush rowdies. On a visit to Fort Arthur, Sir William Denison expressed his lack of confidence that the penitentiary system could ever produce reformation in the convicts because it would be necessary to work on each case individually. To achieve reform by preaching would, he considered, "require a man of talent, zeal, and energy, such as is seldom or never met with". [39]

Just how quickly this process of self-doubt could take place is illustrated by the diary of the Rev. William Bates who sailed from Glasgow to Melbourne in 1858. While he set out with the disadvantages of poor health and a failed romance rather than a sense of missionary zeal, his voyage undermined the props of his faith. Sunday observance was disregarded by most passengers. What Bates described as one "sabbath evening's impiety" ended with another clergyman being locked in the water closet by some young men who had tied the closet door handles together with rope.[40] He was exposed to

39. Denison, W., *Varieties of Vice-Regal Life*, London, 1870, Vol.1 pp. 40-41

40. Quoted in O'Farrell, P. [ed.], *Letters from Irish Australia*, Sydney, 1984, p.23

unseemly literature, card playing, profane language and the rejection of his views on teetotalism. By the time he reached Australia he was experiencing “the misery of feeling that one’s virtues are rootless”. He summed himself up in the third person, writing,

there was a lean bewiskered son of the church, who was going to Australia but he wasn’t sure to what part, to do he didn’t well know what. He was weak in body and not over strong in mind. We found out that some lass had jilted him and hence the voyage. [41]

Bates was indeed a humble and pious person, but he was defeated before his colonial ministry began.

In describing the population of the Mount Alexander goldfields in her novel, *Ella Norman*, Elizabeth Murray mentions the local clergy:

half a dozen clergymen of different denominations, good men some of them, but none of ir tellectual superiority to grapple with their work, their object being simply to earn bread for themselves and families.[42]

This comment highlights another important factor in assessing the role of the clergy. Whether or not they were winning the battle against the powers of darkness, they had to make a living. Small salaries might have encouraged humility but they did not feed children. From the beginning of the European

41. *ibid.*, p. 26

42. Murray, E., *Ella Norman, or a Woman’s Peril*, Melbourne, 1985, p. 53

settlement clergy and missionaries often found themselves either compelled or tempted to take up freely available land and to turn their hands to agriculture. Despite the fact that he came on an evangelical mission, Richard Johnson soon became one of the colony's most successful farmers. To ease his conscience on this point John Newton wrote to him in 1796,

Methinks I see you, like Abraham and Isaac, whom the Lord blessed.  
You have flocks, if not herds, chickens and pigs, and ducks, and, I  
suppose, men servants and women servants. [43]

Marsden has often been criticised as a person "whose spiritual duties took second place to his secular pastoralism as a pioneer grazier".[44] Such allegations have traditionally been designed to bring the "flogging parson" further into disrepute. The antagonistic tone of A.G.L. Shaw's comment is unmistakable: "That holy man, Reverend Samuel Marsden, was interested in his animal flock as well as his human one".[45] Such criticisms fail to address the question as to how else was he supposed to support his family and keep up appearances in a society where status was based on landholdings and where clerical salaries and allowances were paid erratically, and sometimes not at all.

During the 1820s there was considerable correspondence between Archdeacon Scott, the New South Wales governors and the British Government over what was, or was not, due to Anglican clergymen in

43. Newton to Johnson, 27 August 1796, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol.III, p. 90

44. Editor's introduction, Holt, J., *A Rum Story: The Adventures of Joseph Holt Thirteen Years in New South Wales (1800-1812)*, [ed. O'Shaughnessy, P.], Kenthurst, 1938, p. 20

45. Shaw, A.G.L., *The Story of Australia*. London, 1983, p. 53

relation to land and allowances. The success of a claim by the Rev. Robert Cartwright for 900 pounds in back pay and 1,280 acres of land encouraged the Rev. William Cowper and the Rev. Richard Hill to pursue claims against the Government. Cowper submitted a bill for 1058 pounds 1 shilling,[46] while Hill sought compensation for “the disappointment and actual losses, I have sustained in my endeavours to improve my Income by taking possession of the Glebe, from which I was led to expect considerable emolument”. [47] Poor pasture, distance from Sydney, and the activities of marauding bushrangers were all quoted as reasons for compensation. Questions of widows’ entitlements and land grants to children were also raised. Rather than move swiftly to remove the financial burdens on the reverend gentlemen the Government was more inclined to conduct an investigation into how Cartwright got away with 900 pounds and 1,280 acres. [48]

Archdeacon Scott attempted to improve the financial lot of his clergy by proposing a scheme which related payment to years of service and the size of the population served, with a bonus of 1,280 acres per five years of service. That this scheme would have made all clergymen into graziers did not seem to worry Scott. He pointed to Father Therry who only received 100 hundred pounds a year as Catholic chaplain but who “by some means or other ... has acquired considerable property” and who was not required to keep up appearances, “unlike the clergy of the established church”. [49] The debate over clergy salaries was resolved, as far as the Government was

46. Darling to Lord Goderich, 1 February 1828, *H.R.A.*, Series 1, Vol.XIII, p.753

47. *ibid.*

48. *ibid.*, p. 755

49. Darling to Lord Goderich, 11 February 1828, *H.R.A.*, Series 1, Vol.XIII, p.777

concerned, by the Church Act of 1836 which provided a formula for equitable distribution of funds between the various denominations. Under Scott's proposals the minimum payment to an Anglican clergyman was to have been 360 pounds with a maximum of 900 pounds, whereas under the Church Act the maximum amount payable from state funds was 200 pounds. Bourke thought this a suitable sum, as a "moderate stipend" would be sufficient for his support without making him "independent of his own exertions or the respect of his congregation". [50]. If a clergyman had a small and scattered rural congregation his government payment could be reduced to one hundred pounds. Even so Gipps complained to the British Government in 1839 that the payments to clergy were becoming a significant drain on colonial resources and he appealed for a pause in sending any more clergy to the colony, since "provision is already made for 89 Clergymen for a population of only 100,000 souls".[51] In these financial circumstances, and given the apparent ease with which money could be made from agriculture, it is not at all surprising that a number of clergymen should take an interest in supplementing their income by grazing activities.

While some clergymen such as Joseph Docker gave up the ministry for a life as a squatter, others sought to combine their religious and pastoral activities, with varying degrees of success. In 1830 Broughton admonished the Rev. F. Wilkinson for acting in a manner highly injurious to the public respect which ought to be "entertained for the Established Church and its ministers". Wilkinson was reported to have undertaken a "highly indecorous"

50. Woolmington, J. [ed.], *Religion in Early Australia*, Stanmore, 1967, p. 95

51. Gipps to Lord Normanby, 3 December 1839, *H.R.A.*, Series 1, Vol. XX, p. 409

droving expedition with his sheep and cattle. [52] One of the “humble artisans”, recruited by the Church Missionary Society, William Watson, was also at the centre of a dispute over his pastoral interests. His career as a missionary began in a situation of compromise as the C.M.S. wanted to send him as a teacher, while he wanted to be a preacher. To resolve the situation he was allowed to by-pass most of the training requirements for ordination as long as he went as a missionary to the Aborigines.[53] He was placed in charge of the Wellington Valley Aboriginal mission, and took the opportunity to use the mission lands to graze his own sheep and cattle. The local committee of the C.M.S. applied pressure to Watson to remove his livestock from mission land. A member of the committee, the Rev. William Cowper reported that there was “a long and painful correspondence” over the removal of Watson’s sheep and cattle from the mission and that when they were finally removed Watson “used much unpleasant language on the occasion”. [54] A more successful combination of clerical and pastoral activities was carried on in the 1840s by the Rev. John Lillie, a Presbyterian minister in Hobart. Rather than attempt to run his grazing interests himself, he used the expertise and good will of Presbyterian squatters in the Port Phillip district to manage his pastoral interests. An indication of his business activities is given in correspondence to George Russell:

It is Mr Lillie’s anxious wish to have these sheep put on a run in the new country, if possible an extensive one, his object being not so

52. Broughton to Wilkinson, 7 Sept 1830, in Woolmington [ed.], *op.cit.*, p. 20

53. Woolmington, J., “ ‘Humble artisans’ and ‘untutored savages’”, *op. cit.*, p.52

54. Gipps to Russell, 7 May 1840, *H.F.A.* Vol.XX, p. 616

much present gain as a desire that in the course of a few years the property might become valuable. [55]

Lillie later left the ministry and emigrated to New Zealand to develop pastoral interests there. Helping out the Presbyterian clergy was not without advantage to George Russell, as the provision of land for a church and manse and the appointment of a good minister was seen as a way to further develop settlement and thus increase the value of his property.[56] While the colony's most prominent Presbyterian minister, John Dunmore Lang, did not personally have land holdings, his family held extensive pastoral interests, which ended up in the hands of Lang's children.

Pastoral interests were not confined to the Protestant side of religion or to canny Scots in particular. At the time of his death in 1864 Father Therry still had over 4000 acres of land in his possession, despite having made significant dispersals during his last years. The profits from his pastoral interests funded charity work and church building, Therry being apparently unable to draw a clear distinction between what belonged to him and what belonged to the Church. Edmund Campion asserts that for many Catholics, Therry was the church. Thus his accounts were "a spider's trail" of cross lending and cross borrowing. [57] While Therry did not have any children to feed or social appearances to keep up, his pastoral interests provided a valuable source of funding to the Catholic Church. With the establishment of a proper church administrative system under Archbishop Polding, the

55. G.Fairbairn to G. Russell, 2 March 1846, in Brown [ed.], *Clyde Company Papers*, Vol.IV, London, 1968, p. 37

56. *ibid.*, p. 67

57. Campion, E., *Australian Catholics*, Ringwood, 1987, p. 19



pastoral interests of priests were deemed “most unseemly” and likely to endanger the sacredness of the priest’s character. As late as 1862 Polding was still attempting to curb grazier priests with the directive that “The possession of sheep is entirely forbidden”. [58]

In 1839, the Wesleyan missionary James Dredge, was in terrible circumstances and “dreadfully depressed in mind”. [59] He had been appointed Protector of Aborigines for the Goulburn River District and supplied with the barest necessities to set up his establishment. His wife was seriously ill from living in a tent and from being compelled to undertake domestic tasks for which her social background had not prepared her. His daughter’s prospects of getting a good education were regarded as hopeless. His circumstances were “entirely different from those we are taught to expect at home, and on the faith of which we came out”. [60] He felt that he could not resign and abandon “a truly righteous cause” but nevertheless he felt “Harassed and distressed beyond measure”. [61] However, somewhat like Robert Bruce, he recovered his spirits by the taking a lesson from watching his cat at play, which made him “ashamed of my mistrust in God’s providence”. [62] Several weeks later his duties took him to Bontharambo station. There he found the Rev. Joseph Docker providing comfortably for his wife, six children and a niece. But there appeared to be something amiss:

58. Archbishop and bishops to the clergy of Australia 1862, in O’Farrell [ed], *op.cit.*, 1969, Vol.1 p.103

59. Journal of James Dredge, 9 May 1839, *Historical Records of Victoria*, Vol. 2B, Melbourne, 1983, p. 428

60. *ibid.*

61. *ibid.*, p. 430

62. *ibid.*

how strange that in the family of a clergyman there should be the entire absence even of the form of religion - no reading the Scriptures - no grace before or after meat - no prayer. [63]

But was it so strange? Dredgæ needed only to look to his own experience. His circumstances and salary were indeed humble but he was not gaining much spiritual profit from it. His wife and children were in dire need. His task to protect the Aborigines of the Goulburn River district and convert them to Christianity might have been regarded as righteous cause but it was an impossible one. In colonial circumstances such as these it is hardly a matter of surprise that many clergymen found the pursuit of pastoral interests either attractive or necessary to supplement their incomes and support their families.

\* \* \*

In addition to bearing the burdens of unrealistic expectations and humble stipends, there were several other factors which made the lot of the colonial clergyman difficult. Particularly among Protestants, denominational discipline was weak and whether or not a preacher attracted a congregation was as much a matter of his personality as of his particular creed. Under the provisions of the Church Act the payment to the local clergy was related to having an established congregation. Thus there was pressure on clergy to keep up their own congregation numbers by defending their denomination against would-be poaching parsons. While denominational divisions

63. *ibid.*, p. 701

had been established, attempts by church leaders to lay down clear sectarian lines found resistance in the wider community. In the earlier period clergymen tended to be judged on their personal qualities far more than their denominational position. It was through these qualities, which had little to do with piety, that they were valued by ordinary people.

A feature of the diaries and journals of those colonial residents who were interested in religion during this period is the recording of visits to hear preachers of various denominations and to comment on their performance. George Boyes often attended both the Presbyterian and Anglican churches on the same day: "At the Scotch Kirk in the forenoon - Afternoon at St. David's".[64] He was also a critic of the clerical performance. Commenting on attending a service conducted by the Rev. Hugh Robinson for the first time in 1831, he wrote, "I had heard so much of his preaching that I felt perhaps rather disappointed".[65] In 1833 John Helder Wedge attended both a service conducted by Broughton and the Launceston Quakers' meeting. Of Broughton's sermon he noted, "According to my idea there was more of real Christian doctrine in this discourse than I ever before heard from any preacher of the Gospel".[66] Jane Williams was an avid attender of all manner of services and was a observant critic of the preachers. She regarded Lillie as a good preacher but his performance could be hampered through ill health, caused, according to one opinion, by using "a warm bath

64. Chapman, P. [ed.], *Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes*, Vol.1, Melbourne, 1985, p. 316

65. *ibid.*, p. 431

66. Crawford, Hon Mr Justice, W.F. Ellis and G.H. Stancombe [ed.], *Diaries of John Helder Wedge*, Hobart, 1962, p.61

too freely”. [67] Of a visiting Independent preacher whom she liked very much she wrote, “He is young & *very mild*; but the flow of his words is easy, clear & beautiful”. [68] The preacher, the Rev. Joseph Beasley of the Colonial Missionary Society, also found Mrs Williams’ company delightful for spiritual conversations and discussion of their favourite authors such as Byron. Perhaps there was a hint of something more than evangelical piety in her final comment on meetings with Rev Beasley: “Oh, then for the hour when ‘Spirit shall with Spirit blend’”. [69]

Another of Jane Williams’ favourites was the Anglican Rev. R. Davies of whom she wrote in 1836: “I have now heard all the most admired clergymen in the country & Mr Davies *I consider* far superior to any”. [70] While on a visit to Scotland in 1838 she attended Christmas mass at the Edinburgh Catholic church, since she found that there was no communion at the Presbyterian churches. There were no hard words about popery, as she noted in her journal that the music was “truly Heavenly” and the Catholic bishop preached “a very good & orthodox sermon”. [71] The importance of the preacher being able to attract a congregation by personal popularity rather than by denominational loyalty is illustrated by Annabella Boswell’s comments on the Presbyterians at Parramatta in the early 1840s. Services conducted by the Rev. Allan were poorly attended as he was regarded as “far from eloquent, and could not carry on an extempore service”. He was succeeded by the Rev. Tait who “was very popular” and consequently his

67. S. Russell to Rev. R. Russell, 20 March 1838, in Brown, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 144

68. Jane Williams’ Journal, 3 February 1837, in *ibid.*, p. 65      69. *ibid.*

70. *ibid.*, 13 November 1836, p. 38

71. *ibid.*, 29 December 1838, p. 181

church was "largely attended". [72] The diaries of Georgiana McCrae also show a lack of sectarian sentiment. Her record of social life in Melbourne in the early 1840s reveals good relations with Presbyterian, Anglican and Catholic clergymen. Despite being a member of the Anglican church she was a particular friend of Rev. Father Patrick Geoghegan, the Catholic priest.[73] The widespread nature of this lack of a rigid denominational commitment has been shown in Alan Atkinson's study of the development of Camden. In cases of mixed marriages, the parents made their own decisions about which denominations their children would be brought up in, sometimes mixing children between two denominations or in a few cases, trying to bring them up in both. The Chief Constable, for instance, had his son christened Patrick at the Catholic Church and Rowland in the Wesleyan chapel. [74]

While ordinary people may have enjoyed comparing preachers and rewarding good performers with their attendance, the church administrations were compelled by the provisions of the Church Act to seek to establish congregations and to count heads to qualify for the funding. In a situation where numbers were money, Christian charity could readily fall victim to sectarian sentiment. Situations were easily created where the values of humility and meekness gave way to sectarian aggression. Lang was quite specific in his belief that "there are occasions when this mild and gentle demeanour is ... unbecoming a minister of religion".[75]

72. Herman, M. [ed.], *Annabella Boswell's Journal*, Sydney, 1981, p. 46

73. McCrae, H., *Georgiana's Journal, Melbourne 1841-1865*, Sydney, 1966, p. 57

74. Atkinson, A., *Camden: Farm and Village Life in Early New South Wales*, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 165 - 166

75. Lang, *op.cit.*, p. 234

In a series of letters published in 1838 to encourage emigration, a correspondent related a visit to Bothwell where he attended a service conducted by the Presbyterian minister, James Garret: "The church is used on alternate Sabbaths, by the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians, which would seem to betoken a state of concord unknown in the maternal isle".[76] However a closer examination of local clerical sentiment casts some doubt on "the state of concord". Knopwood noted in his diary that he had preached in the morning and that the church was full and his sermon was "very much liked". In the afternoon he went to hear Garret preach and noted: "Such a preacher I never heard before so bad, and a very bad sermon; everyone said it was".[77] In the evening he dined with the Hobart Catholic priest, Father Philip Conolly. When the Church at Bothwell was to be opened in 1831 the Rev. Robinson "appeared in full array", according to Garret, in order to get in first. This resulted in the local magistrate locking Robinson out. Garret saw the hand of the Rev. Bedford at work in a plot against him.[78] The arrival of the Wesleyans in the district in 1836 caused a flurry of clerical activity. Jane Williams reported her pleasure in the fact that the Wesleyans were to visit the area once a month, and continued,

Another independent clergyman came up yesterday, & we hear the rural Dean is on his way up: it is quite curious that so many of *the order* should *happen* to come at the *same time* this way! [79]

76. Johnston, J.G., *The Truth: Consisting of Letters Just Received from Emigrants to the Australian Colonies*, Edinburgh, 1839, p.16

77. Nicholls, M. [ed], *The Diary of Rev Robert Knopwood*, Hobart, 1977, p.450

78. Brown [ed], *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p. 127

79. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 17

However she was not so pleased when the Wesleyans busied themselves in the attempt to undermine her local favourite, Davies. She wrote in a letter to her father in 1836, "the Wesleyans are acting very ill towards him here - trying every means to draw away the children from his school & the people from his church; but he is so much admired and liked that they will not succeed".[80]

While the clergy were pursuing their sectarian rivalries, there were a number of people who were not anti-clerical in a general sense, but who disapproved of the sectarian behaviour which was becoming more evident, especially after the Church Act came into effect. This may be seen particularly in relation to the way in which people reacted to the attitudes of Bishop Broughton. Charles Booth criticised Broughton for not coming ashore to visit Port Arthur in 1838, due to "some ridiculous Church pomps".[81] In 1843 Georgiana McCrae commented caustically about Broughton's "diatribe against the doctrines of Dr P.B. Geoghegan", even though she had a good social relationship with him and had commended some of his other sermons preached during his visit to Melbourne. Perhaps Broughton thought he had gone too far for popular good taste in attacking Geoghegan, as his next sermon "exonerated the Popish party from the blame for the Gunpowder Plot".[82] His inclination for attacking other denominations was also criticised by a Goulburn district grazier. Thomas Moore, in a letter to his relations in Ireland in 1845:

80. *ibid.*, p. 35

81. Heard, D.[ed.], *The Journal of Charles O'Hara Booth*, Hobart, 1981, p.226

82. McCrae, *op.cit.*, p.115

Our bishop Broughton is a talented man but like most of his class eaten up with pride and bigotry and his violent opposition to all other persuasions does our church no good. [83]

Annabella Boswell recalled the indignation of the Anglican minister of Port Macquarie in 1847 when he heard that Broughton refused to confirm some girls because "they had been seen in a Presbyterian church - a crime, in the opinion of such a High Church man, or Puseyite, as he must be". [84]

The Rev. James Hassall thought Broughton too strict a churchman for the colonial conditions, citing the case of refusing to baptise children in a bush church because there were not sufficient sponsors. One of the parents went outside and offered five shillings for any willing god-parents so that the baptism could proceed. "Little did the good Bishop suspect the harm he had done", commented Hassall.[85] In a similar sort of case he told the Rev. Henry Stiles that he should not marry a man to an Aboriginal woman since the marriage serviced assumed that both were Christians. Broughton advised Styles to go to Mudgee and convert the woman first. [86] Criticism of Broughton's manner lay behind an interesting dream which was recorded in 1849 by John Cotton. He dreamed that a new bishop had arrived and all of the clergy were accorded the same honours as the bishop. The bishop then delivered a sermon that everyone could understand, dressed in plain clothes and was "affable and pleasing in his manner". Finally everybody enjoyed drinking a special tea which left everybody "invigorated and

83. O'Farrell [ed.], *op.cit.*, p. 35

84. Morton [ed], *op.cit.*, p. 144

85. Hassall, *op.cit.*, p. 64

86. Broughton to Styles, 8 January 1840, Mitchell Library MS A299



cheerful”. [87] This was a dream which was not realised as the sectarian struggles became more intense.

While sectarianism was gaining ground with committed adherents of the various denominations, there was still considerable sentiment against it. As Denison commented in 1854, “the bitter feeling of animosity generated by the splitting up of the sects is a fearful evil”. [88] The absurdity of many sectarian claims is illustrated by the report of a visiting Protestant cleric in *Ford's Australian Almanac* for 1851, who claimed that “it can be shown from the writings of Roman Catholics themselves that St Patrick, the Patron Saint of Ireland, was a Presbyterian missionary”. [89]

Apart from the struggle between denominations, the clergy had to contend with struggles for influence within their own churches. Factional disputes could be as destructive to the Christian cause as sectarian struggles. This problem was not confined to any one denomination and could divide the laity from the clergy or split the clergy into factional camps as the following examples illustrate. In the mid 1830s Father Philip Conolly was under severe attack by his own Tasmanian Catholic laity for his unchristian conduct, neglect of religious instruction for the young and for “having accumulated a large fortune”. [90] Being a regular dining companion of Knopwood's would not have enhanced his reputation amongst those of a

87. Mackaness, *op.cit.*, Pt 3, pp. 48 - 49

88. Denison, *op.cit.*, p. 253

89. *Ford's Australian Almanac* Sydney, 1851, p.84

90. O'Farrell [ed], *op.cit.*, 1969, Vol. I, pp 24 - 25

more sectarian outlook. Presbyterian and Anglican ministers could also find themselves under attack from their congregations. In 1833 James Garrett was described as “out of the books of every man in the district” and his “stupid, headlong, foolish conduct”, which had seen him “over head & ears” in debt, was threatening to cost him his job.[91] The problems were resolved, not by the intervention of any ecclesiastical authority, but by the efforts of an old woman who went around the district using the persuasive techniques of the Scottish mother to put everyone back on speaking terms.[92] In 1843 the Anglican clergyman of Melbourne, the Rev. A. Thompson, was under attack for his lack of religious knowledge and for actions unbecoming of a clergyman. While Broughton declined to take action against him, some indication of why he was unpopular with a faction of his congregation was his “mixing with and encouraging the young bloods of the town”.[93] Splits were even common within small groups such as the Particular Baptists. Chandler noted an instance where the group he attended split over an interpretation of the work of the Holy Spirit. The promoter of the new doctrine was described as “a man who always liked to be wiser than his brethren” and the dispute ended with “the majority of the old members withdrawing”.[94]

Disputes could also involve broader groups within denominations. Lang attacked his leading rival in the colonial Presbyterian church, the Rev. John McGarvie, as “a broad churchman of the lowest caste” [95] and McGarvie’s

91. Brown [ed], *op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 173 - 174

92. *ibid.*, p. 203

93. McCrae, *op.cit.*, p. 111

94. Chandler, J., *Forty Years in the Wilderness*, Melbourne, 1990, p. 31

95. Lang, *op.cit.*, p. 162

supporters as morally worthless individuals.[96] Thanks to this type of approach, by 1855 there were four separate Presbyterian churches, Lang's Synod of New South Wales, the Synod of Eastern Australia, the Synod of Australia and the inaptly named United Presbyterian Church. Similarly in 1859 the Catholic newspaper, *Freeman's Journal*, lamented that at a time when Protestant schemes against the influence of the Catholic Church were afoot, the "whole Catholic community is at present disturbed and agitated by intestine quarrels".[97] In attacking the influence of Abbot Gregory and his faction the journal declared,

They taunt us with schism. They will not parley with us, or listen to our complaints, but shroud themselves beneath the robes of dignity and office, and will accept no terms but ... unqualified and blind obedience. [98]

Such was Denison's despair at trying to deal with religious disputes over issues such as education that he declared, "I belong neither to High Church or Low Church, Broad Church or Narrow Church, looking upon all as equally wrong in placing stumbling-blocks in the way of the simple believer in Christ". [99] Perhaps he was able to find a superior level of brotherhood and charity as a member of the Odd-Fellows Lodge. Colonial author, Elizabeth Murray summed up the apparent abandonment of Christian charity in favour of factional dispute in the 1850s in one sentence; "Close the Bible until we

96. Lord J.Russell to Gipps, 7 September 1839, *H.R.A.* Series 1, Vol. XX, p.317

97. O'Farrell [ed], *op.cit.*, 1969, Vol. I, p. 191

98. *ibid.*, p. 193

99. Denison, *op.cit.*, p. 233

have settled ourselves according to our own laws". [100]

\* \* \*

For the clergyman or missionary the colonial situation was not an easy one. Sent to the other side of the world with unrealistic expectations and low stipends, they found themselves confronted by a convict population which was generally unsympathetic if not hostile to organised religion. They had to attract and hold a congregation through personal popularity, and to defend their congregations from other denominational soul poachers. They may have been faced with the temptation to take up farming or grazing to assist their family and to keep up appearances. Given these situations it is no surprise that some clergymen took to drink or squatting. Nor is it surprising that the qualities of meekness, piety and humility were not those likely to ensure success in colonial Australia. It was often the abrasive, the tough, the conceited and the enterprising clergy, who were the ones who stamped their mark on the development of the Australian churches, at the price of deep sectarian division.

However, in the wider community it was neither the values of humility and piety nor sectarian vigilance which won general respect. In the final analysis it was the values of a deistic outlook on religion which judged the worth of clergymen. A tolerant common sense and a willingness to help others in their moment of need was seen as much more important than piety or sectarian position.

The popular parson, the Rev. Robert Knopwood set this standard early. Unlike Johnson or Marsden he did not come with any evangelical illusions about his task. He was the English country parson translated to Van Diemen's Land. While he discharged his clerical duties in the manner expected of him, he was more interested in a life of sports and conviviality than one of prayer and humility. Henry Savery gave a favourable, if slightly eccentric, impression of Knopwood in his sketches of life in Van Diemen's Land published in 1829. He is shown there as a "kindred soul" interested in fox hunting and exclaiming "yeoix, yeoix! tantivy, tantivy!" [101]. That Knopwood came somewhere near Savery's concept of a good clergyman is shown by the way he develops the character of the ideal clergyman in *Quintus Servinton*. His Rev. Burton is a man who has a strong belief in the character building influence of sports, and who believed that playing cards, dancing and the theatre were not bad in themselves and could be freely enjoyed as long as they did not lead one into bad company nor cause one to neglect social duties. He was a believer in Watts' remark, "Religion never was designed to make our pleasures less".[102] James Dredge noted the popularity of such a preacher in 1839. One of his fellow missionaries was reported to have made a good impression with some ungodly young men by drinking brandy with them before and after preaching, and smoking his pipe "with the best of them".[103] However he was as horror struck at this behaviour from a Wesleyan preacher as the respectable citizens of Melbourne were with Thompson's consorting with the "young bloods". The fictional Burton was also a believer in toleration. He explains to Quintus that

101. Savery, H., *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land*, Brisbane, 1964, p.58

102. Savery, H., *Quintus Servinton*, Brisbane, 1962, p. 106

103. Journal of James Dredge, 3 February 1839, *H.R.V.*, Vol. 2B, p. 422

The very essence of Christianity ... is charity or liberality as you might term it. I fully go along with Pope in his two celebrated lines : -

For modes of faith let senseless bigots fight  
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right. [104]

The theme of toleration as a religious virtue is an element in the novel, *Debateable Ground; or, The Carillawarra Claimants*, written by Australia's first native-born woman novelist and naturalist, Louisa Atkinson (1834-72). The story was serialised in the *Sydney Mail* in 1861. The minister in the novel was shown as a man for whom any deviation from orthodoxy was intolerable and whose "narrow mind clogged the wheels of his usefulness".[105] He is contrasted with Paul Baron, his rival for the affections of the local heiress. Baron was an original thinker who had developed his own religious opinions and who was "deep in learning, preaching sermons by everyday's life, tolerant, cool, not free of contempt for the pastor's cry of *credo*".[106] The object of these gentlemen's affection, Amina Roskell, is provoked by their rivalry to exclaim, "Oh! Clemency, we all need more love of Christ, to make us less intolerant".[107]

The sentiments expressed by Savery and Atkinson in their novels find support in *Ford's Australian Almanac* of 1851: "The religion of Christ is

104. Savery, *Quintus Servinton*, p. 105

105. Atkinson, L., *Debateable Ground; or, The Carillawarra Claimants*, Canberra, 1992, p.115

106. *ibid.*, p.94

107. *ibid.*, p.102

peace and good will - the religion of Christianity is war and ill-will". [108] It is interesting to note that one of the qualities which made Davies the particular favourite of Jane Williams was that he was "so *liberal* minded a son of the church". If there were more like him, she thought that the Wesleyans would have "no followers among the educated class of people".[109]

A variety of evidence suggests that for a number of people, personal kindness was more important than sectarian beliefs. The labourer's wife, Sarah Davenport, who migrated to Australia with her family in the 1840s, mentions clergymen only in the context of acts of kindness. Before her emigrant ship cleared the English channel it was wrecked. While waiting for another ship she went to the local church. The parson preached from the text in Acts relating to Paul's ship wreck. She was deeply moved by his acts of charity towards the shipwreck victims: "i have never forgot his kindness and work of Love among us how he exorted us and strove to comfort us his words has struk in my memory in the wild bush like an echo". [110] When she and her family arrived n the colony, they set out on a number of journeys up country looking for work, and later for gold, and fell in with some rough travelling companions along the road. On one occasion she met up with an aged gentleman leading a lame horse:

i soon saw thair was a kind of awe or restrain manefest among our travelling company, i could not tell why we chattered away upon

108. *Ford's Australian Almanac*, 1851, p. 142

109. Jane Williams to father, 5 November 1836, in Brown, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 35

110. Quoted in Frost, L., *No Place for a Nervous Lady*, Sydney, 1984, p. 241

religion history and other things till we camped at night ... i was surprised to hear them call him reverend it was reverend Terry he travelled with us till mid day next day i was sorry to part with his company as while he was with us there was peace [111]

Therry was well known for his acts of charity and his ability to provide comfort and encouragement to the people he met along the road in his own extensive travels. Therry combined all the abrasive and egotistical characteristics which were necessary for coping with the clerical life in New South Wales with the common touch of charitable conduct. For this all his other faults could be overlooked by ordinary people. Those sent out as his superiors who had to sort out his hopeless accounting methods could be painted as the villains. This notion was highlighted by one of his eulogists who claimed that by acts of charity and kindness Therry won the hearts of most people. His enemies were the men in power. [112]

A similar sentiment was expressed in relation to a Presbyterian minister whom Penelope Selby, a settler in the Port Phillip District, came across. She was impressed by two characteristics. He gave her son some useful school books, which she thought was very kind since she was much in need of them; and he had "less of the bigot in him than any of his class I had met".[113] The act of kindness in the provision of books gained the Rev. James Hassall a convert from the Catholic church. A prisoner was refused books by his priest so he converted to the Church of England because

111. *ibid.*, p.249

112. O'Farrell [ed], *op.cit.*, 1969, Vol.I, p. 12

113. Frost, *op.cit.*, p. 171



Hassall was known to have a good supply. He was provided with grammar and arithmetic texts, but not religious tracts.[114] Despite his attachment to the Particular Baptists, John Chandler recognised that acts of charity and kindness stood above doctrinal purity. Referring to the kindness shown by a doctor to his family by providing free treatment when they could not pay, he attacked the cold hearts of the pure in doctrine:

Many of our good people would condemn him as a free-willer. I notice that these condemners sit at home and take care of themselves; they love them that agree with them in all things, but there is no going to the Magdalene's. [115]

Acts of charity and kindness were also looked upon with favour by those on the goldfields. The French miner, Antoine Fauchery, had the good fortune to meet a priest whom he described as, "Catholic, Apostolic and Roman, and French". He won Fauchery's admiration because "He gave me information, advice, encouragement, and moreover did not talk to me about Hell". [116]

On a more serious and dramatic note Raffaello Carboni contrasted the response of the Catholic and Protestant clergy to the attack by troops on the miners at the Eureka Stockade on Sunday, 3 December 1854:

Catholics! Father Smyth was performing his sacred duty to the dying, in spite of troops who threatened his life ...

114. Hassall, *op.cit.*, p. 112

115. Chandler, *op.cit.*, p. 53

116. Fauchery, A., *Letters from a Miner in Australia*, Melbourne, 1965, p. 36

Protestants! spare us in future with your sabbath cant. Not one of your ministers was there, helping the digger in the hour of need. [117]

The moral order which applied to convict reform also applied to judgments about the moral qualities of the clergy. They were judged by the quality of their actions and not by their humility and piety. Acts of kindness and charity were deemed to reflect the nature of Christ more effectively than sermons about sin and eternal punishment. Elizabeth Murray made the point quite explicitly:

Oh, if loud preachers ... would only believe that a few well-applied words, a few deeds performed in the true spirit of Christianity, have ten times the efficacy of their vainglorious denunciations of evil. How often are we struck with the unreality of those harangues ... delivered by sick-beds, and of the ecstatic joy, or remorse, or repentance of the patient! How little we know of this in real life. [118]

The spiritual Napoleons of Clapham may have thought that they could conquer the world through the preaching of the Gospel by humble and pious men, on salaries which would not compromise their spirituality. In real life the success of the missionaries and clergy were judged by their characters and their actions as well as their preaching ability. The difficulties of the colonial environment turned some into drunks, some into squatters, some into bigots and some into legends, while most just did the best they could. In

117. Carboni, R., *The Eureka Stockade*, Melbourne, 1975, p.101

118. Murray, *op.cit.*, p. 261

seeking to establish denominational discipline churchmen were working against some powerful, underlying values of the colonial society. The anti-clerical attitudes of convicts and ex-convicts were part of the problem, but of major significance was cultural pervasiveness of natural religion with its optimistic providentialism.