Chapter 9

Personal Religion

For a religious faith to be vital and effective, it must relate to private needs and aspirations and help in a meaningful understanding of the world and the upholding of social values. The shortage of churches and clergy in colonial Australian made this need to find a personal religion even more pronounced. As Patrick O'Farrell has put it, the voyage to Australia was "a kind of pilgrimage - away from religion".[1] The voyage weakened and disrupted the familiar pattern of religious behaviour. The established patterns of life gave way to an extended sameness of routine on the ship, punctuated by perilous events such as storms or fires at sea. While the voyage weakened the connections with organised religion, it was able to strengthen private religion through the survival of the encounter with the deep and with the God of nature. As O'Farrell has expressed it in relation to the Irish emigrants, they had internalised and personalised "individual relations with a real, wonderful and powerful God whose existence in the world was made obvious - both to the very simple and the serious - by the voyage they had survived".[2] In their new situation a personalised religious faith could deal with the issues which were vital to their own wellbeing.

1.O'Farrell, P., *Letters from Irish Australia,1825 - 1929,* Sydney, 1984, p. 31
2. *ibid.*

Issues such as the pursuit of a religious life without clergy, the welfare of distant friends and relations, help in times of trouble and distress and how to spend Sunday in the bush. With their lives undergoing dramatic changes, colonists could also look for meaning in superstitions, dreams and premonitions.

The voyage away from organised religion was given impetus by the fact that the first real ceremony which most emigrants, whether convict or free, experienced on the voyage, was the traditional payment of homage to King Neptune on crossing the equator. The First Fleet did not fail to honour this tradition, with James Scott noting,

> the Usual Seremony Was perform'd, With those who had Not Cross'd the Line before - Which Was Ducking Lathering With tar Grase & Shav'd.[3]

On her voyage to Sydney in 1791, the convict Mary Talbot reported being dipped in a tub of salt-water by the sailors and tarred all over.[4] In 1828, Sarah Docker noted in her diary that when they crossed the line, the sailors, out of respect for her clergyman husband, only threw a tub of water over him. However, lenient treatment came at a price, and indignities could be avoided by paying a suitable cash tribute to Neptune's helpers. The Rev. Joseph Docker parted with one pound ten shillings.[5]

3. Scott, J., *Remarks on a Passage to Botany Bay,1787-1792,* Sydney,1963, p. 4
4. Quoted in Clarke,P. & Spender,D., *Life Lines:Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788 to 1840,* Sydney, 1992., p. 7
5. *ibid.,* p. 56

The administration of the saltwater sacrament was attacked by people such as the Quaker, James Backhouse, who condemned "those heathenish ceremonies, outrageous alike to Christianity and to civilisation".[6] Caroline Chisholm also sought to prevent any such ceremonies on emigrant ships which she had organised.[7] While the line-crossing ceremonies were mostly regarded as an amusing nautical tradition, the fact that they engendered such harsh words of condemnation from Backhouse and others suggests that they played some small part in breaking down the European religious order. After all, where else could a sailor be handsomely paid for tipping a tub of seawater over a clergyman?

The religious order was further undermined by the irregular manner in which religious services were held on board convict and immigrant ships. George Boyes noted the way in which a service was conducted for convicts by the captain and second mate of his ship in 1823:

> Rennelson [the captain] read the first lesson, the Epistle and two or three other pieces of the Morning Service in a strong North Country Dialect - quite unintelligible to some of the congregation - the effect of which was increased by certain droppings of the voice, sometimes a fifth at other a fourth and once he dropped a whole octave. [8]

The second mate added to the bewilderment of the congregation by

6. Denison,W., *Varieties of Vice-Regal Life,* Vol.1,London,1870, p. 7
7. Mackaness, G., [ed.], R.S. Anderson, *Australian Gold Fields Their Discovery Progress and Prospects*, Sydney, 1956, p. 19
8. Boyes Diary 7 September 1823, in Chapman, P. [ed.], *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes,* Vol. 1, 1820-1832, Melbourne, 1985, p. 130

declaring that "if we deceive our sins, God is faithful and just".[9] If the weather was rough or windy, services were cancelled. If captains and mates were not disposed to conduct services, the passengers were left to their own spiritual devices. In 1839 Anne Drysdale, for example, helped to pass the time by organising the children on board her emigrant ship into a choir. "I began to give the children lessons in church music; they sang Fenwick very well", she noted with some satisfaction.[10]

The voyage away from European religious order was also a voyage away from friends and relations. Personal faith was one way in which this gap could be bridged, in a spiritual sense at least. Prior to her departure from England, Elizabeth Macarthur reflected on this question in a letter to her mother in 1789:

> Do but consider that if we must be distant from each other, it is much the same, whether I am two hundred, or far more than as many thousand miles apart from you. The same Providence will watch over and protect us there as here. The sun that shines on you will also afford me the benefit of his cheery rays. [11]

Lieutenant Ralph Clark provides a good example of the anguish of separation from his wife and son, which found an outlet in a belief in the protecting and sustaining hand of God over his family. On his son's birthday in 1787 Clark was at sea with the First Fleet. He wrote in his journal,

9. *ibid.,* p. 131
10. A. Drysdale Diary, 25 November 1839, in Brown, P.L. [ed.], *Clyde Company Papers,* London,1952, Vol II, p.294
11. E Macarthur to Mrs Veale, 3 October 1789 in Macarthur Onslow,S.[ed.], *Some Early Records of the Macarthurs of Camden,* Sydney, 1914, p. 3

> I hope god will give him grace and that he will follow the Steps of his Virtious mother - god bless and preserve her - Keep her and our dear Sweet Boy in health and happiness. [12]

For Clark, religious thinking was centred on the family he had left behind. It was almost as if the Trinity was composed of God, his wife Alicia (Betsey) and young Ralph. In December 1787 he wrote,

> how good the Almighty has been to me to give me So Beautiful So good So Vertious a woman as you are Betsey - - I want word to praise your Vertious your are Surly ane Angle and not a woman ... god bless her and my dr. heavenly Boy. [13]

This was indeed a marriage made in heaven. On Alicia's birthday in 1788, Clark expressed his trust that God would continue to take care of her and thereby make him "the most happy and Blest man on the face of the earth".[14]

During his enforced residence at Norfolk Island as a result of the wreck of the *Sirius,* Clark did not sustain this passionate level of journal writing. The daily tedium of noting weather reports in his journal simply reflected his desire to be off the island. Despite his years in the colony and the acquisition of a convict mistress, his religious thoughts still tended to England and his family. When his ship was becalmed on the homeward voyage in 1792 he wrote in the manner of a returning Ulysses:

12. Fidlon, P. G. and Ryan, R. J. [ed.] *The Journal and Letters of Lt. Ralph Clark 1787-1792,* Sydney, 1981, p. 40
13. *ibid.,* p. 76
14. *ibid.,* p. 95

> little dose the gods know how much I long to get home otherwise they would take compassion on me and Send a fair wind to bring me to all that my heart holds dear on earth. [15]

The colonial experience had sapped the passion. God had become the rather impersonal gods who appeared indifferent to his situation, but his faith in his family sustained him. The desperate hopes that God would protect his family had given way, in this passage at least, to the hopes that the gods would provide a fair wind home.

That Clark was not an isolated and neurotic case is demonstrated by the letters of Thomas Watling who had been transported for forgery in 1791. Writing to his aunt he declared, "May that gracious Almighty, and every good angel protect you, and haste that happy moment that restores us together - when the prodigal shall throw himself at your feet".[16] Watling related how his moonlight wanderings in the Australian bush, where "arcadian shades, or classic bowers present themselves at every winding to the ravished eye", would bring tears to his eyes and a prayer for his loved ones: "God of the widow & the orphan, shield her helpless head, and shed abroad comfort and pious resignation in her agonised and solitary heart".[17] If there was any guilt borne by Clark or Watling, it would seem that it was a feeling that they were helpless to comfort and support the relations left behind. It is a

15. *ibid.,* p. 237
16. Mackaness, G. [ed], *Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay to his Aunt in Dumfries,* Sydney, 1945, p. 22
17. *ibid.* p. 24

guilt that the blood of Jesus could do nothing to remove. The only hope of a religious kind was that God the Father would do what they could not do in ensuring the well-being of their families.

John Macarthur, who was regarded as an enemy of religion in the colony, and was a personal enemy of the Rev. Samuel Marsden, showed a similar concern for God's protection and help for his family during the period which he spent in exile in England as a result of his role in the Rum Rebellion against Bligh. In May 1810, for example, he concluded this letter to Elizabeth declaring that "my prayers are almost unceasingly addressed to Almighty God for your health and happiness".[18] It could be suggested that such comments were mere conventional formalities in writing letters to distant relations, and that Macarthur had no real religious sentiments at all. However in a letter to Elizabeth, written in August 1810, he expresses unmistakably genuine religious views even though they are more consistent with his deist position than with the views of his evangelical opponents. He commended Elizabeth on the job she has been doing in managing his property and affairs in the colony. He saw the good effects on his business interests coming directly as a result of the "exemplary goodness" of his wife. It is for her personal virtues and her capacity in overcoming the cares and suffering of this life that Macarthur sees Elizabeth as worthy of God's favour:

> May God Almighty reward you both in this world and the next, and may the remainder of your life be free from those cruel cares and

18. J. Macarthur to E. Macarthur, 3 May 1810, *H.R.N.S.W.*, Vol. VII, p. 370

sorrows that have chequered so many of the last ten years. [19]

George Boyes, although a much more orthodox Christian than Macarthur, exhibited the same tendency to promote the virtues of the wife he had left behind in England to an extraordinary degree. Writing to his wife from Van Diemen's Land in 1831 he observed that "there is probably no incense so grateful to the Supreme being as the sincere prayers of a wife and a mother asking the blessings of heaven for herself, children and absent husband". [20] Going further he remarked on the efficiency of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for obtaining grace, and compared it with the virtues of his wife as a means to grace: "I hope the supplication of the wife as well as the exemplary manner in which she discharges all her duties may be influential in propitiating the Almighty for her sinful husband".[21] It is interesting to note that the editor of Boyes' diaries and letters, Peter Chapman, is anxious to assure readers that this comment represented merely a temporary deviation from his truly pious nature caused by Boyes' "stay in the Antipodes" which "imperceptibly weakened his faith".[22] Such comment reflects the problem of atternpting to impose orthodox definitions of religion upon the colonial mind. Boyes' comment regarding his wife's "exemplary" virtue, when seen in relation to similar comments from Clarke and Macarthur, can be understood in a valid, if unorthodox, religious context, as being a personal means of dealing with the problems of voluntary or

19. J. Macarthur to E. Macarthur, 3 August 1810, in Macarthur Onslow, *op.cit.*, p.203
20. Chapman, *op.cit.*, p. 472
21. *ibid.*
22. *ibid.*

involuntary separation from wives for whom they felt a deep emotional attachment. The virtues of the wives on the other side of the world would assure them that the protection which their husbands could not give would be provided by God. The feelings of guilt and inadequacy engendered by the vast separation could be dealt with if wives were seen as being angels or of such virtue that they could intercede with God on behalf of their absent husbands. Just as orthodox religion had no way of dealing with the projection of romantic emotional ties beyond the grave, so it had no way of dealing with the sense of guilt and helplessness of those who, as a result of crime, public duty or the pursuit of profit, found themselves half a world away from their families.

Parents left behind could also be a source of anguish and an object of supplication to God. Birthdays were particularly prone to encourage thoughts of home and parents. A birthday poem published in the *Sydney Gazette* in 1808 highlights this sense of distress, even if in a somewhat overwrought manner, the author being described as a gentleman of a "rather melancholy turn of mind":

> "E'en now, e'en now' methinks I see
> A reverend mother on her bended knee,
> Imploring blessings on a luckless son,
> That o'er his head revolving years may run;
> That he may his former peace regain
> And leave this world, free from all worldly pain.
> Bless her, ye Powers from every evil save -
> Bless her, oh ! doubly bless her, God I crave!

The poem concludes with the hope that the son shall meet his mother again beyond death and also "another who was dear to me". [23] While the author of the poem devotes some of the early lines to the sinfulness of the colony and Jesus' death as being for the benefit of sinners, he had no doubt about the effectiveness of the pleas of a virtuous mother to intercede for him.

This concern for the welfare of parents, and mothers in particular, is to be found throughout the period under discussion. In 1829, for instance, John Helder Wedge wrote in his journal while on a surveying expedition in Van Diemen's Land,

> This day is the anniversary of my birth ... in asking for a continuance of Thy Mercies, I do it more particularly for My Father and Mother, and I earnestly entreat that Thou will be to them a strong tower and protect them from further adversity now in the evening of their days. [24]

Writing of his experiences in the early 1850s John Chandler, the goldfields carter recorded his anguish over his mother which set him on the path to reforming his life:

> My poor mother's word came before my mind, and I wondered if she could see me, and know what a wicked boy I was. I wondered if she was in Heaven. ... I felt so awful wicked that I thought God would not hear me; so in my ignorance I prayed that if my mother was not in

23. *Sydney Gazette,* 25 September 1808
24. Crawford, Hon. Mr Justice, Ellis, W.F. and Stancombe, G.H. [ed.], *Diaries of John Helder Wedge 1824-1835,* Hobart, 1962, p. 44

Heaven, that God would take her there. [25]

Chandler was later a very orthodox member of the Particular Baptists in Melbourne, but it is clear that his path to salvation began with a deep sense of guilt in relation to the word of his mother rather than the word of the Lord. A complex religious psychology had connected his mother's safe arrival in Heaven with his own salvation.

While Christmas was supposedly the celebration of Christ's birth, it was more importantly a powerful reminder that the colonists, whether convict or free, were still members of a wider community, as thoughts turned inevitably towards family and friends in England, Scotland, Ireland or wherever home was thought to be. As Ken Inglis has noted,Christmas "could bring on the most intense yearning for the old land and the loved ones". [26] Recording his Christmas at sea with the First Fleet in 1787, Arthur Smyth wrote in his journal, "I never call'd to mind my Relations & Friends with such Sensations as I now do - - being so many thousand leagues from them; nor did I ever more Cordially drink to their health than now". [27] Another officer sailing in the fleet, Ralph Clark, wished himself home to be with his wife and son; "O God Grant that I was at home with you to eat of your Goose and Apple Piy for I shall have only a poor dinner here".[28] After the wreck of the *Sirius*

25. Chandler,J.,*Forty Years in the Wilderness,* Melbourne,1990, pp.63 -64
26. Inglis,K., *The Australian Colonists,* Melbourne, 1974, p.106
27.Fidlon, P. G. [ed.], *The Journal of Arthur Bowes Smyth: Surgeon Lady Penrhyn, 1787-1789,* Sydney, 1979, p. 50
28. Fidlon and Ryan, *op.cit.,* p. 81

left Clark marooned on Norfo k Island, his thoughts for Christmas 1790 were even more miserable:

> this being Christmas day I wish a merry merry Christmas to all the world - - the most poorest person in England will be better off this day than any of us here for they will all be able to get Small bier with there dinner ... doe gooc Gorgon come and take use away from this place.[29]

Clark's misery would have been much increased if he had known that the *Gorgon* had struck an iceberg the day before and was a wreck in the Southern Ocean.

This sense of Christmas cheer modified by the separation from family is a persistent one. The journal entry for Christmas Day 1834 made by the commandant of Port Arthur, Charles O'Hara Booth, reflects Clark's mood.

> As father of the Bachelors all assembled at my board - kept it up to a respectable hour ... enjoyed ourselves - but still the thoughts of Home would come to mind and cause a gloom, at not being able to assemble with the good folks.[30]

29. *ibid.*, p. 176
30. Heard, D. [ed.], *The Journal of Charles O'Hara Booth,* Hobart, 1981, p. 189

This mood may account for the fact that excessive drinking was a feature of the celebrations. One observer of colonial life noted, "The prevailing vice of drunkenness among the lower orders is perhaps more resolutely practised at this season than any other". [31] It would also appear to have been more leniently treated by the authorities at Christmas. It may be difficult to find any religious significance in the Christmas drinking bouts but at least for those at sea, some measure of faith was called for. Keeping a diary of her voyage from Scotland to Port Phillip in 1840 Anne Drysdale expressed her relief at the ending of the festive season since only the 2nd Mate was deemed to be sober, a fact which prompted her to write, "Mercifully the wind was aft, & drove [the ship] before the wind, as there was none to manage it".[32] This comment calls to mind Joseph Banks' remark on the goodness of God in preserving the *Endeavour* when all on board were drunk for Christmas 1769. It would seem that there was at least one occasion in the year when the God of the wind and waves was called upon to help those who could not help themselves.

While Christmas turned thoughts to absent relatives and friends, it also provided an opportunity for strengthening social ties within the colonies. By the 1840s a number of community strengthening activities had been established which were associated with the Christmas season. Writing

31. Meredith, Mrs C., *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales,* Sydney, 1973, p.128
32. Brown, *op.cit.,* Vol. II, p. 307

about the colonial Christmas of 1844, John Cotton reported, "This being holiday time, we have had races, regattas, balls etc. I spent my Christmas Day, being then in Melbourne at the beach". [33] The beach seems to have been a popular destination for Christmas for those who could get to it. A child's perspective is given by George McCrae, who was thirteen years old when he described his Christmas Day in 1846, "After breakfast we had prayers and Papa read a sermon to us. We walked to the beach. ... Willie and Tom between them speared a dozen of toad fish".[34]

* * *

Colonial life presented many difficult situations with which settlers had to cope. They were often without the traditional supports of extended families or community. Women in particular found themselves under severe pressure in relation to family health and childbirth. While Elizabeth Macarthur found the company of the clergyman's wife, Mary Johnson, a relationship in which she "could reap neither profit or pleasure", [35] this did not mean that she was an opponent of religion. Faced with the possibility of the death of both her husband and baby son, Edward, on the voyage to New South Wales in 1790, she found a source of strength in her faith in God: "Alone, unfriended, and in such a situation, what do I not owe to a merciful God for granting me support and assistance in these severe moments of affliction". [36] She

33. Mackaness,G.,[ed.] *The Correspondence of John Cotton 1842-1849,* Sydney, 1978, p.13
34. McCrae, H., *Georgiana's Journal, Melbourne 1841-1865,* Sydney, 1966, p. 239
35. Quoted in Clarke,P. and Spender,D. [ed.], *Life Lines, Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788 to 1840,* Sydney, 1992, p. 22
36. E. Macarthur Journal, 1790 in Macarthur Onslow, *op.cit.,* p. 14

felt that the child's survival was a direct result of God's care for him, commenting that , "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb"[37]. Where midwives and doctors were scarce, trust had to be placed in God, even when babies died. On the loss of a baby on her voyage to Australia, Sarah Davenport wrote: "i had what was caled purmature labour and that babe was throne in the sea i was Dumb with grief i thought my tryals was heavy but i cryed unto God to help me for my childrens sake" .[38]

The bush could be as fatal a place for childbirth as the voyage to Australia. After the death of her newborn child, Penelope Selby wrote to her mother in 1851 from her Port Phillip District farm that, "with God's blessing I am once more in a fair way of being strong again". She expressed a bitter disappointment at the baby's death, but there is no sense of guilt directed at herself or anger at God. Rather there was the search for a medical reason for the baby's death (an enlarged liver) and the acceptance that, in the circumstances, "it was better that he was taken soon than that he should have lived even a few months".[39] Again God is seen as merciful, supportive and making things turn out for the best, even if it causes some grief, as in this case.

These cases illustrate a reliance on God in moments of crisis, but they should not be dismissed as simply a faith of last resort. Without an

37. *ibid.*, p. 15
38. Quoted in Frost, L., *No Place for a Nervous Lady,* Sydney,1984, p. 242
39. *ibid.*, p. 184

underlying belief in the essential goodness and justice of God, faith would be unlikely to emerge in a crisis situation. Elizabeth Macarthur did not forget her faith in God when times were good. Commenting on the prosperity which was evident by 1815, she wrote,

> Few of mine I am certain when I married thought that either of us had taken a prudent step. I was considered indolent & inactive; Mr Macarthur too proud & haughty for our humble fortune or expectations, & yet you see how bountifully Providence has dealt with us. [40]

She has no sense here of God rewarding them for lives of pious devotion, which of course they did not lead. Rather God had showered goodness upon them despite their indolent and haughty beginnings.

Penelope Selby also remembered God in good times although her comment reflects the reality that on a farm in the bush good times might be very short lived:

> My friends tell me I am growing young ... My only fear now is of anything happening to dash the cup of happiness from our lips, but we are in the hands of a Higher Power and must put our faith in Him.[41]

40. Quoted in Frost, *op.cit.,* p. 29
41. *ibid.,* p. 181

By contrast, Sarah Davenport did not appear to have any good times during the late 1840s and early 1850s. Nevertheless she maintained an optimistic faith in God's provision for her family, which was comforting because her husband was a weak and inept provider. At one time she was desperate for a few pounds to follow her husband to the goldfields, and took the view that God would provide it: "i did feel as calm and assured that some one wold bring me something we reac and sang some of the Psalms when a knock came to the dore". Two women turned up to repay a kindness by offering her three pounds. She concluded her description of the incident by declaring, "i thank God for his goodness". [42]

God was seen as making a timely intervention in a variety of ways which had little connection with any orthodox doctrine but nevertheless provided personal outcomes which strengthened individual faith in His goodness James Hassall related the tale of a Goulburn merchant who bought up wheat at one and six a bushel and stored it until the next drought. He refused fifteen shillings a bushel in the drought but then read in the Bible a verse from Proverbs which said that those who withheld corn should be cursed and those who sell blessed. He immediately sold at fifteen shillings. Soon after, several ship loads of grain arrived in the colony and wheat price plunged.[43] This type of belief in providential goodness is also strongly shown by John Dunmore Lang. Like so many colonists he brought with him fond memories of his mother. His confidence in undertaking a mission to

42. *ibid.*, p. 259
43. Hassall,J., *In Old Australia* Brisbane, 1902, p. 77

New South Wales was bolstered, he claimed, not only by the gospel but by a sentiment from an old Scottish song which his mother had often repeated to him, "We have been provided for, ain sae will we yet". [44] An example of this provision in Lang's view was the fact that Lang's brother, whom he regarded as a Jacob who had stolen his birthright to his father's property, died childless. This meant that Lang's children inherited their grandfather's estates, "worth at least thirty thousand pounds". Lang commented, "Divine Providence has remarkable ways and means of making compensation in such cases".[45] Whether one wishes to see this case as the working out of natural justice, or a piece of Calvinistic retribution for a sinful brother, belief in a God who organises events so that one's children inherit vast wealth is as unorthodox as the belief that God could assist a grain speculator to make a handsome profit by a timely word of admonition from scripture.

Among the most frivolous accounts of the intervention of divine goodness is that of Georgiana McCrae's attempt to foil the local gossip's intent to spread a potentially compromising story about her. Despite being on friendly terms with the Anglican clergy, including Bishop Broughton, the Catholic priest, Father Geoghegan, and the Presbyterian minister, the Rev. James Forbes, she apparently found nothing odd in writing the following diary entry for 28 April 1844: "Prayed for rain, to prevent Mrs J. going to town ... and my prayer was granted". [46]

44.Lang, J. D., *Reminiscences of My Life and Times,* Melbourne, 1972, p.29
45. *ibid.*, p. 158
46. McCrae, *op.cit.*, p. 138

This cheerful optimism about timely intervention is also reflected in the novel, *Ella Norman,* where the heroine loses her job as a governess by taking the time to do the right thing by her sick friend:

> Did I not tell you in hospital ... that God would find me another home when I wanted one? I had *faith,* Mary; I felt it was my duty to act as I did. I did it , and left the rest to Him; and you see I was right. [47]

And what did she have faith in? It was not a faith in any formal religious doctrines but rather a faith that God would do the right thing by those who did their duty and whatever their conscience told them was right. The author, Elizabeth Murray, pursued the issue of personal religion more explicitly in her description of the heroine. Ella was described as "godly" rather than "religious". "To do what seems most right, and to leave the issue in the hands of God, was her godliness".[48] This idea is similar to that noted earlier in relation to survival at sea, where it was the responsibility of the captain and crew to do everything humanly possible and then rely on Providence. Murray suggested that her heroine had in fact an invisible but essential personal religion with which she was able to confront and overcome the difficulties which she faced in the colonial society of the early 1850s:

> In this Godless land, how necessary, how comforting was that trusting

47. Murray,E., *Ella Norman, or a Woman's Peril,* Melbourne, 1985, p. 339
48. *ibid.,* p.231

> childlike faith ... even without the semblance of religion in any of the external relations of life ... She did not talk Scripture. It might have been said she belonged to no church ... She never saw a clergyman but once - a Free Kirk Presbyterian - who had an "exercise" in the parlour, and asked for his subscription fee. [49]

Other characters in the novel are also shown as having better natures breaking through rough exteriors to reveal a semblance of what is essentially natural religion. Ella's bigoted Presbyterian employer is at one point described as having a deep personal struggle, "the promptings of a kindly nature warring against the prejudices of his creed".[50] Another character, Jock, who "made no pretence to religion" in his life on the goldfields, nevertheless had "all those grand principles of religion grafted on an original noble nature in his youth". [51] Jock revealed his true religion "after his rough fashion" by praying that "he might never lose an opportunity to help his fellow-creatures". [52]

Another area where the development of religious life took a highly personal direction was in private devotions and the problem of what to do on Sunday. The lack of clergy and churches and the isolation of bush communities compelled those with an inclination towards private devotions to do the best they could in the circumstances. In 1838, the Port Phillip

49. *ibid.*, pp. 213 -214
50. *ibid.*, p. 237
51. *ibid.*, p. 292
52. *ibid.*

squatter, George Russell, was lectured by his clerical brother, the Rev. Robert Russell on the importance of squatters mustering their men on Sundays and conducting a religious service for them: "I hope, my Dear George, that you do not value the world or its smile so highly as to deter you from the performance of duty".[53] That this duty was not embraced with any enthusiasm by many squatters is indicated in the comments on the question by John Cotton in 1844. He referred to the "unpardonable neglect" of duty that no clergyman had come around the district and complained that "every settler ... has to be his own priest", even reading the burial service when necessary.[54]

For religious enthusiasts like Jane Williams, being prevented from attending church by floods was no problem, as her journal for one such day in 1836 illustrates. Morning and evening prayers were conducted. She read accounts of Methodist history and gathered the female part of the family for a study of the last chapter of Revelations and the reading of a sermon. On retiring to her room and wrote out passages from the psalms and private prayers under various headings which she described as "a most delightful exercise". Finally she set off through the floods in the evening in an attempt to hear the Rev. Joseph Orton, the Wesleyan missionary.[55] While few would devote such zeal to religious exercises, it is interesting to note that she appears to have done all this not out of any sense of obligation or pious duty but because she genuinely enjoyed it.

53. Rev.R. Russell to G. Russell, 6 September 1838, Brown, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.165
54. Mackaness, *op.cit.*, Pt. II, p. 5
55. Brown, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 12

In literate families, religious exercises were given a double purpose in providing both reading and religious instruction for children. Annabella Boswell reported that her day in the schoolroom began with reading the Psalms of the day, and then reciting the collects, texts and hymns.[56] That the practice was common is suggested by the fact that a squatter's wife, Christina Parry, gave the same sort of description in relation to the education of her children in 1828. She was encouraged that her son Thomas was able to say "several of Watts' hymns very nicely".[57] Collections of sermons were very common and families could pick their favourite preachers to be read aloud on Sundays. [58] This also allowed those interested to be more critical of preachers than if they attended a full church service. George Boyes, for instance, was an avid but critical reader of sermons, making comments in his diary such as: "he [Dr Chalmers] is still verbose not always intelligible ... He certainly could not have owed any part of his fame to the first sermons in this book". [59]

The observance of Sunday could be ordered, to some extent, by regulation in urban areas, as had been attempted by the various orders relating to convicts attending church and later by Sunday observance ordinances, but in the bush it was again purely a matter of personal preference. In some situations there was a conflict of conscience over how the day should be observed, but the nature of bush life often determined the outcome. John Lhotsky noted that the isolated shepherds took Sunday as

56.Herman,M.[ed.], *Annabella Boswell's Journal,* Sydney,1981, p. 53
57. Quoted in Clarke & Spender, *op.cit.*, p.100
58. Quoted in Frost, *op.cit.*, p. 172
59. Chapman, *op.cit.*, p. 365

their day for tidying up and making social calls on each other, with particular interest being taken in the question as to who had some grog. [60] Similar use of Sunday for cleaning up, socialising or just resting was noted by observers on the goldfields Some religious services were held on the goldfields, but again, individuals could make their own arrangements. One digger at Mount Alexander commented, "On Sunday, when I was as glad of rest as any of the diggers, I read the church service to myself, and only went out a little in the afternoon". [61]

An observer on the Ophir fields in 1851 noted that the practice of ceasing work on Sunday was "apparently established by common consent". He described diggers taking time for a stroll in the bush in an "orderly and well dressed" manner. He also noted "two very decent looking women who had retired to a quiet spot ... apparently in devotion".[62] This is not to suggest that the goldfields were particularly devout places, but to highlight another situation in which the absence of the clergy and regular worship services should not be taken as a measure of the deficiency of religious activity and sentiment. The number of individual diggers or families who came to the goldfields with some sort of religious literature for their private use can never be known. As Elizabeth Murray suggested, there might have been all manner of invisible religious or "godly" sentiment under the rough exteriors.

For those living or working in the bush, the observance of Sunday could

60. Lhotsky, J., *A Journey From Sydney to the Australian Alps,* Hobart, 1979 p. 88
61. Mackaness, *Australian Gold Fields,* p. 41
62. Mackaness, G. [ed.], J. E. Erskine, *A Short Account of the Late Discoveries of Gold in Australia*, Sydney, 1957, pp. 49 - 50

cause practical problems as well as trials of conscience. A typical case is described by David Burn in his narrative of Sir John Franklin's expedition in the Tasmanian south-west wilderness in 1842. Torrential rain and a rising river made the construction of a canoe the only means to cross to the other side. Burn commented, "Such was the dilemma, and so urgent the necessity, that religious duty was forced to give place to manual labour".[63]

The demands of travel and work in the bush could erode good intentions with regard to the observance of Sunday. On his tour to the Bathurst district in 1815, Macquarie was careful to camp for the day on Sundays, "on account of keeping the day holy", and organising the whole company for divine service.[64] However the needs of the journey had taken priority by the time he recorded the events of his journey to the southern highland district in 1820. On Sunday, 22 October 1820, he noted in his journal, "We had great labour and difficulty in getting the baggage carts up to the top of the mountain."[65] This appears not to be an isolated case as the experience of John Helder Wedge shows When he commenced his surveying work in Van Diemen's Land in 1824, he was meticulous about carrying out his "duty" to read prayers for the members of his survey party, and made Sunday a day for rest and private devotions.[66] However by 1830 entries in his diary for Sundays in the bush had changed significantly: "Sun : 3 [January 1830] - Surveying, lost both my pencils during the day obliged to give up survey in consequence".[67]

63. Mackaness, G., [ed.], *The Australian Gold Fields,* p. 29
64. Macquarie,L.,*Journals of His Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1810-1822,* Sydney, 1979 p. 94
65. *ibid.,* pp. 149 - 150
66. Crawford, *op.cit.,* p. 11
67. *ibid.,* p. 59

There was a tendency to overlook Sunday observance even for clergymen who had become squatters, such as Joseph Docker. From 1829 to 1833 Docker was the rector of St Matthew's at Windsor, but he decided that farming offered better prospects. After farming in the Windsor district he took up a run on the Ovens River called Bontharambo in 1838. It was there that the missionary, James Dredge, found him in 1839. Dredge noted in his diary for Sunday, 9 June 1839:

> I enquired of the clergyman this morning if there would be any religious services, and was furnished with a negative. Indeed, poor man, this day, like all the rest, has found him a man of 'the world' - whose heart goes after gain. His engagements today have been with his flocks, his books the newspapers. [68]

Annie Russell highlighted this continuing situation for squatters in 1854:

> There is great deal of labour connected with a sheep station at present, & I am sorry to say that the Lord's day is very much neglected in the bush - particularly with those who have an overseer's work: they are called out about missing flocks &c. [69]

Some people working in the bush could even lose track of what day it was. Mary Jane MacGregor relatec how her husband was distressed to discover that he had been working on a Sunday. She asked the other

68. Journal of James Dredge, 9 June 1839, *H.R.V.,* Vol. 2B, Melbourne, 1983, p.702
69. Brown, *op.cit.,* Vol. IV, p. 116

workers what day it was but they did not know. The cook informed her that "their was no Sunday after we crossed the line".[70] A similar incident is related by James Hassall who told the story of a farmer busy with his hoe until he was informed by passing friends that it was Sunday. When he heard this "he threw down his hoe in disgust, saying he had quite forgotten the days of the week".[71] Perhaps he had heard what Alexander Harris described as "a saying as common as possible, that no work done on the Sabbath-day prospers". [72]

The idea that some days were good for work, particularly of an agricultural nature, but others not, has a long tradition in popular religion. Good Friday for instance, was deemed an excellent day day for planting for those with small landholdings.[73] This may be one reason why in 1789 convicts were urged to spend the remainder of Good Friday, after divine service, working in their gardens [74] Despite the fact that the colony was experiencing food rationing, Collins reported sadly that very few convicts "were observed to be so profitably occupied".[75] Examples of the idea that Sunday work does not prosper may be found in the colonial record. Mary Jane MacGregor related how her husband argued with his employer over the demand that a wheat harvest commence on a Sunday. After much "very bad language" on the part of the employer the matter was resolved by the fact that heavy rain began to fall and the harvest had to be postponed.

70. Frost, *op.cit.,* p.268
71. Hassall, *op.cit.,* p. 48
72. Harris,A., *Convicts and Settlers,* Sydney, 1953, p. 128
73. Obelkevich,J., *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsay 1825-1875,* Oxford, 1976, p. 267
74. Collins, D., *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales,* Vol.1,Sydney,1910, p. 75
75. *ibid.*

Mary's husband had the last word by saying to the employer, "Well sir, man proposes, but God disposes". [76] Sarah Davenport related an incident of a similar nature on the goldfields. On her first Sunday at Mount Alexander it was raining, "but some neither minded the day nor the rain for goold was on the surface and it was very tempting". As a result of working on that day and in those conditions she concluded, "i believed some got coulds that they never got over but died throu that day". [77] It would seem that the observance of Sunday as a day of rest, provided that people knew when it was Sunday, owed more to notions of popular religion, and in particular the belief that working on Sunday was productive on no good result, than to the influence of sabbatarianism preached by the clergy and imposed where possible by regulation.

Disasters suffered by pleasure parties on a Sunday were sometimes interpreted as judgments. However colonists made little connection between sin and the enjoyment of sporting and social events, even when they were held on Sundays. James Hassall related the story of an expedition to caves in the Shoalhaven gorges on a Sunday. Unfortunately, the cavers, who were on a ledge, disturbed some bats. This caused their candles to be extinguished and the man with the steel for striking the flint dropped it in the darkness. "One of them said that judgment had fallen on them for their Sabbath breaking. Other began praying for deliverance". Hassall suggested that "may be their prayers were answered, for the precious steel was found, an inch from the edge of the precipice". [78] However Sunday outings were

76. Frost, *op.cit.*, p. 269
77. *ibid.*, p. 262
78. Hassall, *op.cit.*, p. 85

usually more pleasant and less guilt ridden than this. Georgiana McCrae, for example, gives a description of a Sunday's activity in 1845 in which religion and pleasure did not conflict:

> A tranquil morning. After sermon [read at home] we all set out to climb the mountain ... There the view was beautiful: on one side of us the sea as far as one might look, on the other side, Port Phillip Bay. [79]

Nor did she show any sense of guilt about being unable to attend a church service owing to the effects of the Squatters' Ball the night before. [80]

While Mary Mowle and her family attended church as often as was possible, she was as enthusiastic as anyone in the Monaro district in attending the local race meeting and ball in 1851. [81] Balls, race meetings and other sporting activities were essentially community building events in colonial society and consequently could not be looked upon by most people as activities inspired by the Devil to lure his victims from the narrow path of righteousness. Maybe it was attitudes such as these which prompted George Boyes to write to his wife in 1831, "I do not see that marbles open a shorter cut to the gallows than many other games - Whist for instance - Many men begin playing it from an early age and after a long life die comfortably in their beds". [82]

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79. McCrae, *op.cit.*, p. 194
80. *ibid.*, p. 144
81. Clarke, P., *A Colonial Woman: The Life and Times of Mary Braidwood Mowle,* Sydney, 1990, p. 127
82. Chapman, *op.cit.*, p. 45

The belief systems of traditional societies are a mixture of ideas from both formal and popular religion, the latter usually being expressed as superstitions rather than doctrines. Close knit communities such as fishing villages could have a highly developed set of superstitions which regulated both work and social life. In the colonial context much of the occupational belief could not be transferred to the bush as people turned their hands to new occupations and new social situations. Nevertheless it was impossible to leave behind all the superstitions which were part of the culture from which they came. Comparing the beliefs of the Aborigines with those of some convicts and sailors in his boat party, Collins recorded how the Europeans had mocked an Aboriginal for expressing the belief that if they roasted fish they would not have the wind needed to return to Sydney Cove. When the wind proved to be against them, they abused the Aborigine and attributed the contrary wind to his influence.[83] John Fulton, the native- born son of the Rev. Henry Fulton was particularly critical of the superstitions which were being imported, especially by the Highland Scots and Irish: "It would be a matter of supererogation to enter into a detail of divers *balderdash* still firmly imprinted ... in the craniums of Scotia's and Erin's Sons".[84] By way of a practical demonstration of the folly of superstition, Fulton set out to prove that the town of Castlereagh was not haunted by the ghost of a drummer who had been laid to rest without the full military honours due to him. Armed with a "waddie" he sat on the soldier's grave until he figured out the the drumming sound which had been attributed

83. Collins, *op.cit.*, p.325
84. Atkinson,A., & Aveling,M.[eds], *Australians 1838,* Sydney, 1988, p. 422

to the ghost was being carried across of series of ponds from the Windsor band. [85]

There are numerous examples of these superstitions. The decision of Sir Henry Browne Hayes to import a load of soil from Ireland to spread around his home at Vaucluse was taken in the belief that "St Patrick so managed matters that no snake could ever live on or near Irish soil". [86] Annabella Boswell described Hallowe'en complete with bagpipers and fortune-telling which involved dropping egg whites into a glass of water. "The fortune-teller is then supposed to see in the glass any initials that may be appropriate, besides other remarkable objects, such as a church or a ship". [87]

For those either compelled to leave home by the law or deciding to emigrate to the Australian colonies, the future was uncertain. Henry Savery provided some predictions for the future at the birth of his fictional hero, Quintus Servinton. He included a scene where the hero's father meets a gypsy fortune-teller who warns of dangers of sudden violent death and great reverses of fortune awaiting Quintus, although the hero was assured of a happy old age.[88] That was more of an assurance than real life could provide. Gypsy fortune-tellers were seldom met with in bush clearings, but dreams and premonitions could be taken as omens of things to come, even byclergymen. Before they were taken over by Freudian psychology,

85. *ibid.*, p. 423
86. McMahon, *op.cit.*, 311
87. Herman, *op.cit.*, p. 70
88. Savery,H., *Quintus Servinton,* Brisbane, 1962, p. 3

dreams were a significant part of popular religion, providing an encounter with the supernatural which was not available in Christianity. [89] Dreams of warning and premonitions of death were deemed to be of particular significance.

Ralph Clark provides an insight into the significance attached to dreams. The fears generated by not receiving a letter from his wife are reflected in his dreams recorded while the First Fleet was at anchor at the Cape of Good Hope: "dreamt last night I was at my Beloved woman's Burial - oh my God what a dream - oh that I could have a letter from my Alicia".[90] Fears for other friends also found expression in dreams: "dreamt last night that I Saw Reynolds in a Boat that he was waving his hat to me poor fellow I hope that ther is nothing the matter with him".[91]

David Collins exhibited a fascination with premonitions, giving a number of examples of deaths which followed a premonition expressed by the victim. Francis Hill, a midshipman on the *Sirius* was reported as having a premonition of being lost in the bush for a few days. Collins commented, "His conjecture was more than confirmed; he lost himself forever".[92] On another occasion he reported on the death of David Burton, a botanist and surveyor who went shooting "with that sensation of the mind which is called presentiment, having more than once observed that he feared some accident would happen". [93] He accidentally shot himself and died on the

89. Obelkevich, *op.cit.*, p. 293
90. Fidlon and Ryan, *op.cit.*, 1981, p. 60
91. *ibid.*, p. 53
92. Collins, *op.cit.*, p.66
93. *ibid.*, p. 143

thirteenth day of the month. A third case involved the death by drowning of two convict women and a baby, of which one of the victims had a premonition.[94] However, since the baby was the only sober person in the boat, little recourse to the powers of the supernatural was required to predict a fatal outcome.

Both Samuel Marsden and John Dunmore Lang recorded dream incidents, although Marsden's instance was of a more trivial nature than that of Lang. Marsden prefaced his story by the disclaimer that "I do not believe much in dreams". His daughter, Elizabeth, had been awaiting the arrival of some bonnets and told her parents that she had dreamt that they would soon be delivered. "Mrs Marsden and I smiled much at her dream. However, it so happened that the event corresponded with the dream".[95] The next day news of the bonnets arrived. In 1830 Lang had a dream in which he saw his father on the deck of a ship and he was "afterwards strongly impressed with the belief that he was then going down".[96] His father was lost at sea between Newcastle and Sydney when the coastal vessel on which he was travelling sank.

Real life and literature found an interesting parallel in the confession of the axe murderer, John Lynch, and a story published by John Lang, both in 1842. Prior to killing one of his victims, an old woman, Lynch said that she told him about a dream she had the night before:

94. *ibid.,* p. 172
95. Mackaness, G. [ed.], *Some Private Correspondence of Rev. Samuel Marsden and Family, 1794-1824,* Sydney, 1942, p. 72
96. Lang, *op.cit.,* p. 80

> she thought she had ar infant child, and that she had seen this child horribly mangled and covered with blood. I hated this old woman, for she used to toss cups and balls, and could foretell things. [97]

In the corresponding fictional account in John Lang's story, *Frederick Charles Howard,* the hero similarly confronts an old woman outside a bushrangers' hideout. When she realises that a shoot-out will soon follow she breaks down and cries:

> God rest your soul, Betsey! - it was all for the best! - I knew when *you* died - I always said so - that our luck was gone, and our day was done. I had a bad dream too last night, full of tears and dogs and blood. [98]

The level of public interest in the topic of whether or not dreams had any prophetic meaning can be seen from the large turn out for the opening of the Sydney Debating Society's 1842 season where the subject was argued to a full house over three nights. The speakers put their cases based on the concepts of general and particular providence, Biblical examples, Shakespeare and common sense. The house finally voted that dreams are not prophetic, but as the correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted, there were many abstentions from the vote.[99] The Debating Society's activities cannot provide any quantitative guide to popular opinion

97. Therry, R., *Reminiscences of Thirty Years Residence in New South Wales and Victoria,* Sydney, 1974, p. 197
98. Lang, *op.cit.,* p. 119
99. *Sydney Morning Herald,* 23 May 1842

on the subject of the prophetic nature of dreams but at least it does demonstrate that the question was one of significance in the period under consideration. Superstitions, dreams and premonitions were expressions of fear and uncertainty about the future. They were another means to deal with the anxieties generated by the life crisis of making the transition to a new land and a new society. They were remnants of the traditional cultures which could be clung to, like the idea of the Presbyterian colonials that the older sister should wear green stockings when the younger one married.[100] Why it should have been so may have been a mystery, but it helped to provide a sense of order. Some sense that there was a pre-determined order which could be relied upon was also provided by astrological information which first appeared in the *Australiasian Almanac,* published in 1822. A significant use of colonial almanacs of the era was for weather prediction. The phases of the moon could be both a guide to expected weather conditions and also of personal significance for those who believed that their lives and destiny were determined by the phase of the moon at the exact time of their birth.[101]

For those who longed for a radical change there were always prophets to be found predicting a liberation of one sort or another. Collins reported the sensation created in the colony among the convicts by the prophecies of "a poor old Scotch woman" who prophesied that a squadron of French frigates would attack the settlement and liberate the convicts. "The rapidity with which this ridiculous tale circulated is incredible", he commented.[102]

100. Herman, *op.cit.,* p. 96
101. Perkins, M.," 'An Era of Great Doubt to Some in Sydney': Almanacs and Astrological Belief in Colonial Australia", *Journal of Religious History,* Vol.17, No.4, December 1993, p.470
102. Collins, *op.cit.,* p. 377

Prophecy regarding the coming millennium was provided by John Wroe who arrived in Sydney in 1843 to promote his Christian Israelite cause. One of the theological problems which had to be faced by colonial enthusiasts for the second coming was the practical problem of being gathered in Jerusalem in conformity with texts such as Isaiah 66:20: "And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord". The Mormons solved the problem essentially by shifting the focus of the return first to Zion, Missouri, and then to Salt Lake City. Consequently those converted by Mormon missionaries were encouraged to leave for the United States. Wroe had a simpler solution to this problem of theological geography to offer his Sydney audience:

> Do you suppose you will have to cross the ocean to Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay; for as a man's body is convulsed by fits, so this planet will be convulsed in the same way, till all the islands of the sea become one, and Jerusalem be in the centre of it. [103]

Earlier in 1843 a comet had appeared which some feared would result in the sort of convulsions which Wroe was predicting. Annabella Boswell recorded its passage and the consternation it produced: "We hear that some people in Port Macquarie firmly believe that the world is coming to an end".[104] She had mixed emotions about the comet, taking pleasure in watching its beauty in the night sky while at the same time having "an indescribable dread of it".[105] However her aunt reassured her that there had been many false

103. Quoted in "Our First Chance of Kingdom Come", *Push from the Bush*, No. 19, April 1985, p. 61
104. Herman, *op.cit.*, p. 58
105. *ibid.*.

prophecies regarding comets and the end of the world. Bishop Broughton also appears to have felt the need to dampen down millennial expectations in 1843. On a visit to Melbourne in October he was noted as preaching on the subject of the timing of the millennium not being revealed to man, "Nay! Not to the angels in heaven". [106]

John Chandler notes the continuing fascination with the subject of the millennium among some of the Baptist splinter groups in Melbourne in the early 1850s. Of one of these prophets of the Second Coming who had nominated the day, Chandler wrote,

> He kept a diary, and on that day he would not have his cows milked or anything else done, but it did not come off as he expected. I never heard what excuse he made for his mistake, but I have not the least doubt he was a good man. [107]

The voyage to Australia was certainly a voyage away from organised religion. The bush life, coupled with the shortage of clergymen, did nothing to encourage the growth of organised religion in the colonies. But it did not follow that religion was of no importance to individuals in coping with the personal crises of transportation or emigration and establishing themselves in a new and potentially hazardous country. Thrown upon their own spiritual resources, they sought God's help and protection for their relations half a

106. McCrae, *op.cit.*, p. 113
107. Chandler, *op.cit.*, p. 58

world away, pursued their own spiritual lives with the assistance of their own choice of religious literature, found their own definitions of what it was to be religious, fell back upon remnants of popular religion and superstition to help make sense of the world, and confronted their own fears and anxieties through dreams and premonitions to which some supernatural agency was connected. For some there was the hope that their lot would be transformed by the arrival of the Millennium.

It would be a mistake to take the sentimental view that all the convicts, settlers and prospectors really had godly hearts of gold under their rough exteriors, but it is equally wrong to see them all as practical atheists for whom religion was of no account. Despite the lack of organised religion, there was a strong element of personal religious belief at work helping people cope with their experiences of life in the Australian colonies. Individuals could invent their own religious outlooks from a diversity of cultural elements. In many respects, the individualised approaches to religious belief were not orthodox in a Catholic or Protestant sense, but they were meaningful in the colonial context.

Chapter 10

Birth, Death and After

The clergy may have been regarded by colonials as being of marginal significance in convict reform, a menace to the creation of a national education system and their nuptial blessings an optional preliminary to a long-term sexual and family relationships, but they were regarded as important in discharging the sacraments of baptism and of burial. The difficulties of the voyage to Australia, high rates of infant mortality, inadequate medical services by modern standards and the hazards of colonial life all meant that death was an ever-present reality. The forced and voluntary leaving of family members on the other side of the world to come to Australia meant in many cases that there was no possibility of meeting again in this world. Consequently there was the psychological need to believe that they would meet again in another and better place. In the context of these factors colonial Australians, like their friends and relations in Britain, looked to baptism and Christian burial as the surest way to a happy reunion with friends and relations beyond the vale of death, although this did not constitute the sole reason for these rituals, with social custom being important to free settlers.

In his discussion of the religious attitudes of convicts and ex-convicts, Grocott concluded that, despite the fact that most of them had their children

baptised, it was unlikely that they attached much religious significance to the sacrament.[1] If he was referring to the contending religious views of the High Churchmen, who saw baptism as the washing away of original sin and regenerating the soul, and the Low Churchmen, who regarded the sacrament as being one of incorporating the person into the body of the church, Grocott may be correct. However if he regards this enthusiasm for baptism as complying with mere formalities then he has failed to recognise the nature of the popular belief regarding baptism among colonists of all classes. In the popular mind baptism was the essential prerequisite to a Christian burial and it was also necessary as a naming ceremony. As James Obelkevich has pointed out in his study of popular religion in rural England in the nineteenth century, it was a case of the non-theological popular view supporting and reinforcing the official clerical view in relation to the importance of baptism, even if there was a difference in interpretation of the sacrament. [2]

A view of the importance of baptism can be found from the beginnings of the historical records of colonial Australia. Before the First Fleet sailed Ralph Clark wrote urgently to summons the Rev. Johnson to come aboard the convict transport *Friendship* to baptize "one of the Convict children [who] will not live until the morning" [3] The marine sergeant, James Scott, took the first available opportunity to have Johnson come on board his

1. Grocott, A., *Convicts, Clergymen and Churches,* Sydney,1980 p.28
2. Obelkevich, J.,*Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875,* Oxford, 1976, p. 272
3. Fidlon,P.G. and Ryan,R.J.[ed], *The Letters and Journal of Lt Ralph Clark 1787 -1792 ,* Sydney, 198- p.247

transport to baptise his daughter born while the fleet was at anchor in Rio de Janiero.[4] This same urgency to have children baptised who had been born at sea is reflected in entries in Knopwood's journal. On 12 January 1820, for example, he noted that he went on board the convict transport *Dromedary* and "xtiand [christened] 4 children belonging to Capt. Cruise company which were born in the passage".[5]

Giving evidence before a Parliamentary Committee on Transportation, Johnson claimed that in his experience, the convicts and ex-convicts were "perhaps more regular than some parishes in England in having their children baptized".[6] Bligh supported Johnson's claims. When asked if there was any advantage to be obtained by settlers and convicts having their children baptized, Bligh replied, "None but their own principles ... I found that people would naturally bring their children to be baptized".[7] The statistical evidence is not so impressive as the claims made for baptism by Johnson and Bligh, but, given the lack of a religious presence in many places, statistical evidence in itself is not necessarily the most reliable guide to popular sentiment.[8] The apparently popular concern with baptism mentioned by Johnson and Bligh is also to be found in the 1830s and 1840s. In a memorial to the British Government written in 1835 the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge noted,

4. Scott, J., *Remarks on a Passage to Botany Bay 1787 - 1792,* Sydney, 1963, p. 14
5. Nicholls, M., [ed.], *The Diary of Reverend Robert Knopwood 1803-1838,* Hobart, 1977, p. 321
6. Evidence to Select Committee on Transportation, 1812 *British Parliamentary Papers: Crime an Punishment: Transportation,* Vol.I Shannon, Ireland, 1969.
7. *ibid.,* p.39
8. Atkinson, A., & Aveling, M. [eds , *Australians 1838,* Sydney, 1988, p. 80

> Many children die unbaptized; and the apprehension of being deprived of Christian burial is found to prevail to a painful extent among the Colonists, who are at a distance from the stations. [9]

Writing of his experiences as a *locum tenens* at St Peter's Church, Cook's River, in the 1840s, the Rev. James Hassall declared that he had never had to deal with a worse class of people than the fishermen and charcoal-burners who inhabited the "wild and godless" area between the Cook's and George's rivers. Nevertheless they still called upon Hassall's services for the baptism of their children.[10]

While the clergy did not recognise baptism as the sole necessary qualification for salvation, it was apparently regarded as sufficient by many. In his discourses directed at convicts the Rev. C.P.N. Wilton attacked the notion that baptism was sufficient:

> Some of you perhaps because you were so baptised have never thought once about the Bible, taking it for granted that the fact of having been named as Christians was quite sufficient to save you.[11]

The need for prompt baptism was conveyed to children by Charlotte Barton in her book, *A Mother's Offering to her Children.* In reply to a child's question of why an Aboriginal child had not been buried in the church yard, the mother says:

9. Lord Glenelg to Bourke 30 November 1835, *H.R.A.,* Series I, Vol. 16, pp. 211-12
10. Hassall, R., *In Old Australia* Brisbane, 1902, p. 67
11. Wilton,C.P.N., *Twelve Plain Discourses Addressed to Prisoners of the Crown,* Sydney, 1834, p.1

> She was not a Christian, my dear. Jane had neglected to have her christened; though she told me she had intended it. Another melancholy instance of *procrastination.* Oh! my children! how very, very fatal is the habit of putting off from day to day what should be done immediately. [12]

Christenings were as much social as religious events, with the best bowl from a tea set having on occasion to serve as the font.[13] Even places with a bleak tradition such as Port Arthur could rise to the occasion. In 1833 the commandant, Charles Booth, "Mounted the Pink, in honour of the Christening of Charlotte,Sarah,Harriet Lempriere", and in the evening organised "a 'scald party' on a very respectable scale for a Penal Settlement".[14] Booth had taken the trouble to ensure that his own children had been baptised before he left the West Indies, although like many in the Australian colonies, he had neglected to marry their mother.[15] Christenings were also an opportunity to continue traditions of home. Annabella Boswell recorded one such event where "all who could possibly come" turned out for a christening on the homestead verandah, performed in Gaelic by the Presbyterian minister from Hartley. The child was given the "pretty Highland name" of Ian. [16] Jokes at the expense of the officiating clergymen were apparently not unknown as Annabella relates the obviously much travelled joke about a clergyman who mistook the child's name. When the respectful sponsor stated the name as "Lucy, sir", the irate clergyman

12. Barton, C., *A Mother's Offering to Her Children,* Brisbane, 1979 p. 213
13. McCrae,H., *Georgiana's Journal,* Sydney, 1966, p.58
14.Heard,D.[ed.],*The Journal of Charles O'Hara Booth,* Hobart, 1981, p.163
15. *ibid.,* p. 16
16 Herman, M.,[ed.], *Annabella Boswell's Journal,* Sydney,1981, p. 37

declared that he would christen no child Lucifer but would give the child a proper Christian name. He baptised her George Washington. [17] While it is clear that convicts and settlers did not necessarily regard baptism in the same theological light as the clergy, baptism was still regarded as a important element in popular religious culture, particularly as it related to ideas of Christian burial and the life to come.

Some investigation of colonial attitudes towards death and dying has been carried out by Marian Aveling (now Quartly).[18] She has noted the clerical habit of using funeral sermons as a means of urging those present to repent since "they too might be called at any moment".[19] The Rev. Robert Knopwood provides a typical instance in describing the funeral service for an accident victim, the text of which was, "For the living know that they shall die":

> The whole of the family of the decesd [sic.] brother and friend were at church and scarce a dry eye in the church when I mentioned the dreadful accident and the uncertainty of human life. [20]

The same sentiments were expressed by the Rev. George Piggot writing to the family of a military officer who had died unexpectedly in 1834: "I cannot but hope and pray that to us all, his friends as well as his relatives, this

17. *ibid.*, p.150
18. Aveling, M., "Death and the family in nineteenth century Western Australia", P.Grimshaw, C.McConville &E. McEwen [ed.], *Families in Colonial Australia,* Sydney, 1985
19. Atkinson & Aveling, *op.cit.*, p.424
20. Nicholls, *op.cit.*, p.490

sudden summons to his Maker may prove a warning to prepare ourselves".[21] Death provided an opportunity for the clergy to raise matters with ordinary people which may have been difficult at other times. William Thomas, a missionary and an Aboriginal Protection officer, related a meeting with a timber cutter in a bush camp where he was extended the traditional bush hospitality. In discussion Thomas found that his host had recently arrived in the colony and had lost three of his four children on the voyage, which gave Thomas "an opportunity of giving him a little Christian advice".[22]

Epitaphs were an ideal place to stress the message of preparation for death. The "warning from the grave" tradition of epitaph writing dates back to at least 1640, and there are numerous variations upon it to be found in colonial graveyards. One example from St John's cemetery, Parramatta, dating from 1840 is sufficient to illustrate the genre:

> Consider reader when you look
> How suddenly this soul was took
> And see that thou prepared be
> Least death show'd come so quick on thee. [23]

That such inscriptions had an effect on people is illustrated by an 1853 entry in the diary of Mary Mowle who was experiencing increasing anxiety about

21. Brown,P.L.,[ed.] *Clyde Company Papers,* London, 1952, Vol. I, p.211
22. Journal of William Thomas, 11 June 1839, *Historical Records of Victoria,* Vol. 2B, Melbourne, 1983, p.529
23. Gilbert, L.,*A Grave Look at History,* Sydney, 1980, p.88

surviving another pregnancy. She noted how she went for a drive after her doctor had been to see her and stopped at the graveyard where she wandered among the tombstones "pondering upon the uncertainty of life".[24]

The association of death with the urgent need for repentance can be found in the colonial record outside the urgings of the clergy. Collins reports that when Phillip's convict huntsman, McEntire, realised that wounds inflicted upon him by Aborigines would prove fatal, he "began to utter the most dreadful exclamations, and accuse himself of the commission of crimes of the deepest dye; accompanied with such expressions of his despair of God's mercy". [25] William Noah recorded numerous deaths of convicts on the transport *Hillsborough* . Noting the death of Thomas Brown he wrote, "he was a good Cristian & to his Last prayd to his Blessd redeamer to forgive him his sins". [26] In literature, the unfortunate Ralph Rashleigh is at one point seized by a band of smugglers who propose to lynch him on the spot. Like McEntire he is overcome by the fear of judgment at the prospect of having to face God in a couple of minutes, "with a daring crime as his last significant achievement". [27]

However it would be a mistake to look at colonial death and dying simply in terms of the fear of death and judgment prompting repentance, even if this tended to be the dominant theme in the clerical interpretation of death. In

24.Clarke, P., *A Colonial Woman: The Life and Times of Mary Braidwood Mowle,* Sydney, 1990, p. 200
25 Tench, W., *Sydney's First Four Years,* Sydney,1961, p.206
26.Noah, W., *Voyage to Sydney in the Ship Hillsborough 1798-1799* , Sydney, 1978, p.54
27. Tucker, J., *The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh,* Sydney, 1970, p. 25

looking at accounts of colonial deaths, epitaphs and the expectations of life after death, a much more diverse and hopeful picture emerges.

There are a number of detailed descriptions of deaths from the colonial period written for the benefit of relations who were not able to be present but who were just as interested in the manner of the death as those family members who were at the bedside. This was the era of what Phillipe Aries describes as "the tame death". It was an important event, but it was "neither frightening nor obsessive". [28] Death was familiar and managed by the dying person and family members. It was not an event to be hidden behind hospital curtains and managed by health care professionals. Aries identifies a change in attitudes to dying at the end of the eighteenth century which tended to give a more significant role to the gathered relations in terms of their emotional response: "Emotion shook them, they cried, prayed, gesticulated".[29] Death had become more romanticised and the breaking of the emotional bonds between loved ones consequently more difficult. Out of this reluctance to break earthly bonds came the enthusiasm for the cemetery and the desire for the heavenly reunion. An examination of several diverse deaths will show that the fear of death and repentance were not central concerns of the narratives.

In giving an account of the deaths of his two daughters within several days from diphtheria in 1849, the southern highlands squatter, W.A. Brodribb, wrote only of his own grief and fortitude. He contrasted his own feelings with the current aspect of nature which seemed so bright that it

28. Aries, P., *Western Attitudes Towards Death,* Baltimore,1974, p.58
29. *ibid.*, p. 59

seemed to be laughing and mocking him.[30] His wife was also desperately ill at the same time, but they coped with the crisis "with Christian fortitude and resignation to the will of our heavenly Father". [31] There is no sense of judgment or guilt as a result of these deaths. There was only the fond memory of lost children. The tragedy had a natural explanation since the doctor had failed to diagnose the disease on his first visit. The same sense of resignation and fortitude is exhibited in the account of the death of William Russell, a Port Phillip district squatter, shortly after sailing from Melbourne in 1854. The account was written by his wife for family members to share in the bedside drama of the death at sea. The theme of the account is dying with trust in God and resignation to his will. After his wife had informed him that his condition was hopeless, she recorded with satisfaction that he "soon became composed & expressed submission to the will of God".[32] During his final hours his wife asked if he was longing to be gone but he rejected such suggestions as not being a right sentiment. He also considered that dreading the end was wrong and attempted to subdue any such feelings by relying on the hope that God would find him acceptable.[33] In the end his wife was "truly thankful for the peaceful dismissal God had granted him".[34] The account prompted another family member to write that William's "whole deportment throughout the severe ordeal was in beautiful keeping

30. Brodribb,W.A., *Recollections of an Australian Squatter 1835 - 1883,* Sydney, 1978, pp. 67 -68
31. *ibid.,* p. 69
32. J.Williams to Rev R.Russell July 1854,Brown, *op.cit.,* Vol. VI, p.135
33. *ibid.,* p. 136
34. *ibid.,* p. 137

with his general character". [35] It had been a beautiful death, at least from the relatives' point of view.

Tending the dying was a spiritual experience in its own right. It was an opportunity to participate in the process by encouraging fortitude and offering consolation and hope in God. In his fictional work based on his own experiences, *Settlers and Convicts,* the character Alexander Harris identifies with befriends an unfortunate "fallen woman" of the Rocks, taking it upon himself to make her passing as comfortable and decent as possible as she dies of influenza. "Oh, how tending the dying makes us love them", he reflected.[36] Having done what he could for the woman he mused upon the uplifting effect it had on him; "Forgetfulness of self is surely the gate into the divine places of the universe and thus this night, for a little while, I was allowed to walk with God". [37]

Themes of repentance and judgement were appropriate for the proper conduct of public executions which aimed to exhibit the power and justice of the state, but were of little use in making death in bed meaningful. Deathbed scenes gained their meaning from the display of hope or confidence in God demonstrated by patient suffering, the reaffirmation of family solidarity in the face of dissolution of family ties and the determination to uphold the memory of the departed person until the reunion beyond the grave. Of course there were many who died as the result of accidents and shipwrecks and who

35. Rev. R.Russell to G.Russell, 10 March 1855,*ibid.,* p. 253
36. Harris, A., *Convicts and Settlers,* Sydney,1953, p. 54
37. *ibid.*

were not given the opportunity of a 'beautiful" death. But, people could still die well even in such difficult circumstances. The colonial disinclination to see accidental death as a judgment of God, merely a misfortune, meant that victims of disaster could exit this life with the same submission to God's will and confidence in his mercy, exhibited by those dying in bed. Upon reading an account of the death of a woman passenger on the *Sovereign* wrecked in Moreton Bay in 1847, Annabella Boswell declared, "truly in contemplating her death though attended by such awful circumstances one is almost tempted to exclaim, may my last end be like hers". [38]

Those departing this life appear to have had some confidence in God, but it is important to ask what were the grounds of this confidence? If the more colourful descriptions of the moral and religious state of the colony were to be taken seriously, it would seem that almost everyone was headed for the fate of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah. However the residents of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land placed their hopes and confidence in God on grounds wider than the blood of Christ or the sacraments of the church. From the evidence of epitaphs and reports of deaths a number of grounds for expecting God's mercy can be found.

Commenting on the death of the seventeen-year-old wife of a naval officer in 1808, the *Sydney Gazette* noted with approval that, "Her disposition was amiable; her manners gentle; and her patient resignation during the whole period of her affliction , was almost unexampled".[39] For

38. Herman, *op.cit.,* p. 139
39. *Sydney Gazette,* 30 October 1808

these individuals death was seen as a release from their suffering. The act of patient and resigned suffering made them acceptable to God who, taking pity upon their suffering, took them unto himself. There are numerous epitaphs which express this idea, including the following portion of an 1836 inscription from the Sydney burial ground:

> Drugs did me no good
> Christ was my Physician
> Knew what way was best
> To ease of my pain
> He took my soul to rest. [40]

Many such inscriptions emphasised the long-term suffering of the departed soul by commencing with the words; "Affliction sore I long time bore". [41] The idea of release from suffering is common in reports of death. Reporting on the death of another member of the Russell family in 1838, Mrs Phillip Russell wrote that "poor Lizzy" had been very restless and delirious but had been released from her sufferings and admitted "to endless happiness". [42] The convict and murderer John Knatchbull expressed a similar belief regarding suffering and release in comments about a woman who had been kind to him, "She was a truly good woman, too good for this world; suffered seven years affliction, and at last the Lord took her to Himself". [43]

40. Johnson,K.,& Sainty,M. [eds], *Gravestone Inscriptions, N.S.W.*, Vol. I, Sydney, 1973, p.vii
41. Gilbert, *op.cit.*, 1980, p.106
42. Brown, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p. 137
43. Roderick, C., *John Knatchbull, From Quarterdeck to the Gallows*, Sydney, 1963, p. 76

The idea that souls, particularly those of children, were better off out of the world than in it was also common. In the case of the deaths of young children it served as a consolation. Ralph Clark commented on the death of a convict woman's baby with the words, "it departed this life at 2 oClock this morning poor thing it is much better out of this World than in it." [44] The same view is expressed by Jane Williams' mother writing to console her on the death of her baby, "the little innocent is inexpressibly happier than you could have made her here". [45] The sentiment is common on the headstones of children, the following example from 1839 being typical:

> Ere sin could blight or sorrow fade
> Death came with friendly care
> And snatched the opening bud to heaven
> To shade its blossoms there. [46]

In a poem on the death of his niece, Charles Harpur reflected on the idea that Heaven had been able to see into the future in which the child might have fallen victim to various evils. To prevent this and to preserve her innocence, the child had been taken by God:

> Then, pitying - ere thine azure eyes
> Saw evil - snatch'd thee to the skies. [47]

44. Fidlon and Ryan [eds], *op.cit.,* p. 49
45. Brown, *op.cit.,* Vol. I , p. 134
46. Dunn, J. *The Parramatta Cemeteries: St Patrick's,* Sydney, 1988
47. Atkinson & Aveling, *op.cit.,* p.426

In his discussion of Heaven and Hell written in the mid-eighteenth century, Swedenborg had made the point that getting into heaven was not as difficult as those of a more religious disposition wished to make out. He rejected the idea that spiritual exercises and renunciation of the world were of any benefit, "since everyone's life continues the same after death". Consequently the person who would aim for heaven "must needs live in the world and engage in duties and employments there, and by means of a moral and civil life receive the spiritual life".[48] As previously suggested, Swedenborg's religious inspirations were more likely to have been derived from long residence in eighteenth-century London rather than from short visits to Heaven. It appears that colonial thinking was similar to that of Swedenborg, not because he was widely read in the colonies, but because of its derivation from the same cultural background. Much was made on colonial tombstones of the departed person's civic and moral qualities, which were deemed to make them acceptable in the sight of God.

The epitaph of Augustus Alt, who arrived with the First Fleet, commended him as a "compleat Gentleman and a Man who Never told an Untruth to the injury of Any Man". [49] Another First Fleet arrival, James Squire, was praised for his qualities as a husband and father and for this civic contribution in growing the first hops and opening the first brewery in the colony. [50] Thomas Reibey, husband of Mary Reibey, was eulogised on his tomb as being a person who "always supported a fair and upright character" and had been a devoted husband and father. [51] These few

48. Swedenborg, E., *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell,* London, 1958, p. 298
49. Cowell,J. & Best, R., *Where the First Fleeters Lie,* Sydney 1989, p.22
50. Johnson & Sainty, *op.cit.,* p.5
51. *ibid.,* p. xvii

examples could be multiplied hundreds of times over but they suffice to show the importance attached to the moral and civic character of the departed. Some epitaphs clearly suggest that it was virtue practised by the deceased that would ensure acceptance into eternal life. The tombstone of the First Fleeter, Thomas Arndell, extols his simple manners and upright conduct and concludes with the thought,

> Our life is short but to extend that span
> To vast eternity is virtue's work. [52]

The epitaph of the convict, John Hall, who died in 1843 on Norfolk Island, similarly highlights the importance of human virtue:

> Of Virtue truth & Christian love
> Here on this earth be given
> As passports to the realm above
> We trust he's now in HEAVEN [53]

This passion for extolling the civic virtues of the deceased is treated to gentle satire by Louisa Atkinson in her novel, *Debateable Ground.* Following the death of a particularly mean and grasping character, his wife feels compelled to write a becoming epitaph. The daughter suggests, "God be merciful to me, a sinner", but her mother rejects any such inscription, preferring phrases such as "charitable and upright". The widow's grief was dealt with by "directing those obsequies which were essential to her ideas of

52. Cowell & Best, *op.cit.,* p.52
53. Dalkin, R.N.,*Colonial Era Cemetery of Norfolk Island,* Sydney,1985 ,p.80

homage to 'departed worth'".[54]

The belief in the saving quality of civic virtue and personal morality is clearly demonstrated by the freemasons. In 1815 the Rev. Robert Knopwood noted a burial service for "Mr Lucas of Browns River ... He was a Mason and buried by the Brothers in Masonic form".[55] As one of the major functions of the lodges was to act as a benefit society, it was a duty of the masonic lodge to provide a proper masonic burial for any craft member who had died in their area regardless of what lodge he belonged to. That the principle operated in the colonies is demonstrated by the inscription on the grave of Hugh McDonald, Quartermaster of the 46th Regiment who died in 1819; "A Brother of the Mystic Tie Here Gives this Tribute to His Memory".[56] The Mystic Tie signified the obligations of friendship, and burial, to be extended to any Brother regardless of his place of origin or personal opinions. From McDonald's gravestone inscription it can be seen that masons also aimed to cope with lingering illness with patience and resignation. The discharge of the duty of providing a Masonic burial was one of the civic duties which would contribute to the acceptance of the mason before God. If the mason carried out his civic duties, acted in a moral manner and complied with whatever requirements were imposed by his religion, whatever it happened to be, he would "inherit that eternal city of God, where [he] will be

54. Atkinson,L., *Debateable Ground; or, the Carillawarra Claimants,* Canberra, 1992, p.33
55. Nicholls, *op.cit.,* p.213
56. Foster, A.G., *Church of England Section Devonshire Street Cemetery Sydney 1901,* ML B765, p.92

associated with a holy and happy fraternity of saints and angels, and enjoy the sweet communings of brotherly love for ever and ever". [57]

The question as to why a virtuous mason should die in his prime was addressed on the tombstone of Edward Quinn, who died in 1820:

Ah! why great Tyrant was it giv'n
To thee to sink such worth in dust
T'was my great Command from Heaven
To Raise the Worthiest Brother first. [58]

The idea that the worthiest of the masonic brothers should be the first to be raised on the day of the resurrection of the dead certainly suggests that it was moral conduct and civic virtue which were the key to eternal life, as far as masons were concerned. In this belief they would appear to have been in general agreement with a large segment of the colonial population. The kingdom of Heaven was seen to belong not to the righteous, but to the virtuous.

Thus the departing colonial soul was not without hope even if it was not washed by the blood of the Lamb nor held within the bosom of the church. Baptism assured the deceased a Christian burial. It was believed that their civic and domestic virtues would see them accepted into the kingdom of Heaven. The supposed innocence of children would assure them of a

57. Macoy,R., *A Dictionary of Freemasonry,* New York, 1989, p. 580
58. Foster, *op.cit.*, p.72

happy eternity. Patient and steadfast suffering prior to death would call forth God's pity and mercy upon the sufferer and assure them of a blessed relief from suffering in a heavenly abode. The clergy may have earnestly warned people of the horrors of hellfire and eternal punishment and urged repentance in the face of death but they were struggling against the tide of popular opinion. The Rev. Henry Stiles accurately summed up this opinion in a letter to Broughton in 1837, declaring, "If there be no future punishment, Death can have no terrors; and therefore man may live in the full enjoyment of sensual gratifications of every kind".[59] The friends of the Sydney butcher, Nathaniel Miller, who died in 1819, might well have given a hearty "Amen" to Stiles' analysis, for they inscribed Miller's tombstone with the following words:

> Nor Age nor Grief consign'd him to the Grave
> For he to neither ever was a slave
> But mirth & Friendship always was his pride
> Thus did he live - in hopes of Bliss he died. [60]

In the face of such non-theological, cheerful optimism all the preaching about judgment and punishment must come to nothing. Hell may have been the destination for the likes of Captain Logan, but it was not for friendly butchers, good husbands and fathers, honest tradesmen, civic minded gentlemen, devoted wives and mothers, children, afflicted sufferers and all of those who could be characterised by the traditional expressions "good blokes" or "jolly good fellows", no matter what the clergy said.

59. Stiles to Broughton, n.d. [1837] in Rev. H.T.Stiles, Papers 1832-1856, Mitchell Library, A269
60. Foster, *op.cit.,* p.25

And what was the "bliss" for which they hoped? The most universally expressed hope in the writings of non-clerical colonial residents is that of reunion with friends and family members from whom they had been separated by death or exile. This was not merely a colonial phenomenon but was a major theme in nineteenth-century popular thinking about death. As discussed in the first chapter, orthodox theologians and preachers, such as William Paley, had some difficulty in accommodating their Biblical faith to the popular demand for assurances of meeting departed friends and relatives in Heaven. Since the New Testament scriptures were written with the idea that the end was at hand, they provide no guide to the fate or welfare of the departed soul between death and the supposed final resurrection of the dead. Thus visions of Heaven have had to be supplied by the cultural aspirations of the various eras of European civilisation. The increasing emphasis on romantic marriage and on strong emotional ties within families, coupled with the growing influence of Swedenborg's highly anthropocentric heaven, saw the Heaven of static spiritual rapture give way to a new vision. This new vision of Heaven imagined, as the English scholar, Wheeler, puts it, "a place in which family reunions and 'the recognition of friends' are to be achieved after death, and (more radically Romantic) a site in which lovers are reunited as couples".[61] Such a vision of Heaven made it seem "more like a middle-class suburb in the sky than the city of God; less like the mystical marriage of Christ with his church than the consummation of erotic desire in an idealised form of safe sex". [62]

61. Wheeler, M., *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology,* Cambridge, 1990, pp. 120 -121
62. *ibid.*

The idea of the reunion of friends, lovers and family members after death can be found as early as 1599 in the preaching of the Lutheran, Philipp Nicolai, who was seeking to give consolation to members of his Westphalian congregation who had suffered the loss of family and friends in an outbreak of plague. [63] Scenes of heavenly reunions were common in eighteenth-century literature, but it was the work of Swedenborg which drew all the diverse ideas on the subject nto a systematic picture of spiritual progress, family life, friendship and love beyond the grave. For Swedenborg, "one life continued into the other, and death is merely transition".[64] While Paley could not in good conscience give his listeners and readers an unequivocal statement about reunions in Heaven, Swedenborg had no such reservations:

> I have often heard that those who have come from the world were rejoiced at seeing their friends again, and that their friends in turn were rejoiced that they had come. Very commonly husband and wife come together and congratulate each other. [65]

If the husband and wife were happily married on earth their happiness was increased in Heaven. If they had not enjoyed "a marriage made in heaven" as the popular saying went, they were able to separate and find a more

63. McDannell,C. & Lang,B. *Heaven - A History,* New Haven, 1988, p. 211
64. Swedenborg, *op.cit.,* 1958, p.276
65. *ibid.*

compatible partner with whom to spend eternity. [66]

The Rev. Samuel Marsden took comfort from the basically scriptural idea that his lack of Christian "company and conversation" in the colony would be remedied by his future meeting of the "saints of every clime and every nation" in glory, a prospect which made his colonial "inconveniences and separation easy and tolerable".[67]. However his wife, Eliza was closer to the popular view in her reaction to the loss of her young son Charles, who died as a result of a carriage accident. She wrote to relations in England expressing her feelings of guilt at wishing the child back into "this troublesome world" and stating her hope that "though he cannot come to me I may meet him in that place where sin & sorrow and sighing are forever done away". [68]. Similar expressions of hope are found in the diary of Sarah Broughton, wife of Bishop Broughton. On learning of the death of her mother in England she gave thanks to God that her mother's death had not been painful and expressed the hope of meeting "my dear Father & all we love on earth in a better world'. [69] In 1856 George Suttor reflected on the good life he had led in the colony of New South Wales and expressed the hope that he would die surrounded by the members of his family and be

66. *ibid.*
67. Elder, J. R. [ed.], *The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden,* Dunedin, 1932, p.29
68. Clarke, *op.cit.,* p.42
69. Mackaness, G.[ed.],*Memoirs of George Suttor,* Sydney, June 1948, p.72

united in Heaven with "those beloved and departed and affectionate beings who have gone before me". [70]

Friendship as well as family ties could be renewed. Sir Richard Bourke wrote to Roger Therry in a parting letter of 1849 expressing his distress that he could see "no prospect of our intercourse being renewed on this side of the grave". [71] The fact that Bourke was an Anglican and Therry a Catholic did not seem to pose any problem in Bourke's mind in relation to their meeting in the hereafter. It would seem from a deathbed scene from Alexander Harris' novel, *The Emigrant Family,* that even non-Christians could look forward to the reunion of the dead. The dying Jewish shopkeeper is calling for his dead wife, Rachael, while his daughter of the same name attends to him. She offers him the words of comfort; "We shall meet with your other dearer Rachael somewhere else, you know, by and bye".[72].

The reunion of lovers was of particular heart-rending interest to the partner left to mourn in this vale of sorrows. Showing that even the commandant of Port Arthur had a sentimental side, Charles Booth wrote on the death of "Dearest Phoebe" in 1836, the girl whom he wished to marry: "but she poor dear Girl is in a better world - she has fled (her Blessed Spirit) to realms of eternal Bliss - Amiable - Virtuous - everything that could be

70. Clarke, *op.cit.,* p. 47
71. Therry, R., *Reminiscences of Thirty Years' Residence in New South Wales and Victoria,* Sydney, 1972, p. 188
72. Harris, A., *The Emigrant Family,* Canberra, 1967, p. 326

desired - Would that I were with Her".[73] Harpur gives the theme a highly melodramatic treatment in his play, *The Tragedy of Donohoe.* When Donohoe murders the heroine's fiancee, William, the poor girl becomes demented and delivers lines including: "Heaven is full of angels - he is among them - see, see them flitting about the white clouds ... I'll catch one and knot it around me, and it shall fly away with me to William". [74] A more controlled expression of these sentiments is given by Jane Williams, who relates a dream about her dead husband which she experienced in 1837. They were alone and embracing in some beautiful place "that seemed like Heaven". When she awoke she felt her husband's loss all the more acutely. She was comforted by the thought that, if they were to meet again in Heaven "how exactly did this dream shadow forth what might most probably pass between my beloved Husband & myself". To divert her mind from the "delightful madness" of these visions she directed her thoughts "to Religion".[75]

A popular theme for early colonial novels was the quest by the devoted wife to find a husband torn from her by the arm of the law, either justly or unjustly. John Lang's *Legends of Australia* (1842) reflects the popular view on heavenly reunion in the melodramatic meeting of husband and wife in the colony: "'This is a meeting', said Isabella in the tone of a maniac: 'This is a meeting I feared we should never have, - but in heaven! God be thanked, I

73. Heard, *op.cit.,* p. 199
74. Harpur, C., *Stalwart the Bushranger,* St Lucia, 1987, pp. 109 -110
75. Jane Williams' Journal, 12 October 1837, in Brown, *op.cit.,* Vol.II, p. 99

am not a widow'". [76]

In considering his own epitaph, the advocate of natural religion, Charles Harpur, reflected the popular view of life after death and the feeling that whatever lay beyond, eternal torment was not part of it:

> he did his dying and now lies here with one of his sons, in the hope of meeting in some place better fitted to make them happy, and to keep them so, than this from which they have departed. And even if all that now remains of them is what remains below, - it is still well: inasmuch as in that case, they are safe from all malignity, whether proceeding from God or Devil, that would any further afflict them. [77]

While the clergy may have sought to present a fearsome Devil, the figure of the Devil does not appear in a particularly threatening manner in colonial literature. Of course, bushrangers in literature were much given to exclaiming oaths such as "Now by hell and the Devil".[78]. In other contexts, the Devil is seen as either non-threatening to ordinary, decent people or in the context of comedy. In Frank MacNamara's poem *The Convict's Tour of Hell,* Satan appears as positively helpful to convicts by redirecting them to Heaven and tormenting only those who ran the convict system. In the poem *The Genius and the Ghost*, written by William Forster, the Devil appears to Governor Gipps and urges him to act oppressively against local discontent.

76. Lang, J., *Legends of Australia, Frederick Charles Howard,* Canberra, 1989, p.128
77. Ackland, M., *Charles Harpur: Selected Poetry and Prose,* Ringwood, 1986, p. 977.
78. Tucker, *op.cit.,* p.167

However the purpose of the Devil is to produced good not evil, by provoking a virtual war of independence which would advance the cause of colonial self-government.[79] (In 1859 Forster became Premier of New South Wales.) A Devil with an interest in the welfare of departed convicts and the advancement of colonial self-government was not one to terrorise colonials into repentance. Rather thar being in the lake of fire and brimstone, the Devil was more at home in comedy lines such as the following from *The Currency Lass,* "He's postin' headlong to the devil! There's something unchristian in wearin' one's Sunday clothes on a week day". [80]

As Obelkevich has pointed out, a character with such familiar popular names as Old Nick or the Owd Lad, is not to be expected to generate feelings of unequivocal revulsion.[81] In the journal of Georgiana McCrae, for instance, the only mention of the Devil appears in an 1844 entry, where he appears again in an amusing context with a sudden wind storm which caught members of her family on their way home from church described as "strong enough to blow the Devil's horns off". [82].

It would seem that by the 1820s the Devil was not even deemed sufficiently frightening to make children tell the truth. In a court case involving the sexual assault of a girl in 1789, the victim was asked what would happen if she told a lie "Go to the Devil", was her reply. However by the 1820s the character of the Bogey-man had been introduced to more

79. Neilsen,P.,*Australian Satir cal Verse,* Ringwood, 1986, pp. 45 -47
80. Geoghegan, *op.cit.,* p. 9
81. Obelkevich, *op.cit.,* p. 276
82. McCrae, *op.cit.,* p. 123

effectively terrorise children into telling the truth and complying with parental wishes. [83] Apparently the Bogey-man, a dark and dirty character who lurked in dank cellars or came down chimneys to take bad children away, was more menacing than a character with horns and a pointy tail.

Like baptism, questions of ultimate survival beyond death were interwoven with the rituals of death. Ceremonial was regarded as important to ensure that the dead did rest in peace. The story of the supposed ghost of the drowned soldier who was not buried with the correct military honours (Chapter 9) is an example of the importance attached to doing funeral rites correctly. From the beginning of the settlement this concern is evident. The death of Captain John Shea in February 1789 provided the first opportunity for a military funeral in the colony. John Easty described the event as being carried out "in Miliantary form very Neat and handsom".[84] Ralph Clark showed considerable concern for the proper burial of the remains of a runaway convict after he brought in the head for identification: "The surgeons wanted for me to give them the skull, but I would not. I told them that I should carry it back and collect the rest of the Bons and Bury them at the Head".[85] Reflecting on the state of the colony in 1834, John Lhotsky, deplored the lack of clergy to perform the correct burial rites in the bush; "Be it known that hundreds, nay thousands of christians, and British christians

83. Crawford, P., "Children's Beliefs", *Push from the Bush,* No.11, November 1981, pp. 61 -65
84. Easty, J., *Memorandum of the Transactions of a Voyage From England to Botany Bay, 1787-1793,* Sydney, 1965, p. 10
85. Fidlon and Ryan, *op.cit.,* p. 110

too, are dying in this (officially!) rich Colony like brutes and are buried like brutes". [86] If the value of humanity was to be upheld, then humans must be buried with the proper dignity and ritual to distinguish them from the beasts. Alexander Harris gave a description of such a bush burial in *The Emigrant Family.* He contrasted the feeble efforts of the dead man's companions with nature which was left to do the mourning while they departed for the wake:

> A man who but for the excitement of the commencing carouse would not have aspired to the office, read, or attempted to read the service for the dead; ... all other obsequies were left to the winds, and the long tresses of fibres that the Australian oak puts forth ... these sung on their low plaintive wail through the night, and do evermore when the wind visits them. [87]

Despite the rough bush company in which the deceased character was placed in the novel, his companions were seen to be under some moral obligation to attempt to conduct a funeral without the assistance of a clergyman. The feeble effort of the humans is made up for by nature which takes on the role of mourning for the dead.

Where Aborigines died on or near squatters' runs, the Europeans were content to see them buried according to their own customs. However when Aboriginal deaths occurred on a mission station the missionaries felt obliged

86. Lhotsky, J., *A Journey From Sydney to the Australian Alps,* Hobart, 1979, p. 133
87. Harris, *The Emigrant Family,* p. 150

to provide some sort of Christian burial even though the deceased were classified as heathens. In 1839 William Thomas recorded his feelings and actions in relation to the death of an Aboriginal woman who went by the name of Tully Marine, at his mission camp on the Yarra River. He spent the evening of her death keeping a vigil, smoking his pipe and meditating on "the wondrous dealings of Providence among nations and peoples". Rather than see a heathen soul condemned to hell, Thomas referred to the passage in Romans where Paul refers to those who had no knowledge of Christ, as being judged by their own laws "and stated that the poor unfortunate heathens here came in for a benefit (although ignorant of Christ) of His precious blood as children not capable of comprehending". [88] He continued by pointing out that this did not apply to Europeans who had better repent. While adding this typical piece of funeral oration rhetoric, Thomas was admitting the possibility of the operation of natural religion working to the salvation of Aborigines who lived a moral life according to their own laws and understandings. As the district Aboriginal Protector he may well have been more sympathetic to Aborigines than other missionaries who saw no redeeming features in Aboriginal society or culture. Even so, his comments would tend to reflect the reluctance on the part of colonials to believe that any reasonable human being, Aboriginal or otherwise, should be consigned to eternal punishment. While visions of hell and judgment may have been tolerated in the pulpits of religious enthusiasts, they were decidedly out of place at the graveside.

The increase in the emotional ties which could be projected beyond

88. Journal of William Thomas, 28 May 1839, *H.R.V.*, Vol. 2B, Melbourne, 1983, p. 527

death were reflected in the importance placed on attractive graveyards and tombstones. On the death of Andrew Thompson, Macquarie wrote,

> The spot Mr Thompson's remains are buried in is most beautifully and happily selected ... Having remained there for nearly an hour, we took our leave of our departed friend's tomb which we intend to improve and render more elegant & conspicuous as a tribute of regard and friendship for his memory. [89]

Similar sentiments are to be found in James Martin's reverie inspired by the Sydney burial ground which appeared in 1838 in *The Australian Sketchbook*. He noted the importance given to the natural setting which adorned the last resting place of departed relatives which helped those left behind "to think of the form we have loved, with those refined associations which it awakened when blooming before us, in youth and beauty".[90] Martin believed that the tender remembrance of the dead showed that those who could be "so tremblingly awake to the recollections of departed worth, must also be moral and religious in themselves". Louisa Atkinson provides an explicit instance of this sentiment in *Debateable Ground*:

> Long since the white stone had borne the records of *that* mother's virtues, but her remembrances hung like a guardian angel above her first born and wooed her upwards; and these memories educated [Amina's] soul and prevented it growing narrow and worldly. [91]

89. Macquarie, L., *Journals of His Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1810-1822* Sydney, 1979, pp. 27 - 28
90. Martin, J., *The Australian Sketchbook,* Sydney, 1838, p. 133
91. Atkinson, *op.cit.,* p.1

Martin also recognised the adornment of graves by "simple nature" as an appropriate way to alleviate the mind of the terror of death.[91] Archbishop Polding seems to have been in agreement with some of Martin's views as his directive on cemeteries of 1861 called for

> some ordinary neatness and good taste in laying out the grounds, so that they may express somewhat of the cheerfulness of Christian hope whilst they soothe the grief of the mourner. [92]

The poet, Charles Harpur saw nature as providing the only appropriate place for burial:

> Bury him - bury him in a time-hewn cave,
> On some lone Cape where the perpetual wave,
> Forever rising to to the wind's long roar,
> Beats a loud dirge upon the sounding shore. [93]

Just as nature could reflect the greatness, purpose and providence of God, so it could be seen as mourning over the lonely grave of the poet or the bushman, providing an aid to comfort mourners and also as symbolising the cheerful hope of renewing the ties of family, friendship, and for some, masonic brotherhood, beyond the grave.

91. Martin, *op.cit.*, p. 134
92. O'Farrell, P.[ed.], *Documents in Australian Catholic History,* Vol. 1, London, 1969, p. 126
93. Perkins, E. [ed.], *The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur,* Sydney, 1984, p.60

While death was attended with due solemnity, it should not be thought of as being without some humour in the colonial context. In 1803 there was some mirthful correspondence to the editor of the *Sydney Gazette,* concerning a settler who had attempted to commit suicide as a result of his "amiable partner" eloping with another man, who, "to add to [the settler's] mortification, wore a wooden leg". [94] A touch of black humour was given to a convict burial story when the supposedly dead convict was revived by the bump of being dropped into the grave. When he cried out that he was still alive the overseer replied; "Damn'd your eyes, you wretch. You will die tonight and we will have the job of bringing you back". [95] A similar case of mistaken death, given added humour by the fact that the supposed deceased was named Abel Death, resulted in a court case over who was to pay the six pounds ten shillings spent on spiritous liquor and tobacco consumed at the wake, held on the recommendation of Mr Death's doctor.[96] Class differences in relation to some of the refined etiquette of mourning, as distinct from general ideas about death, were highlighted by George Boyes' comment that his servant declined to wear a mourning suit which Boyes gave him on the death of Boyes' aunt. Instead he wore out his other suit first and then took to wearing the mourning suit, "and now goes to Church, to muster and to private parties in Public houses in deep mourning".[97] That the solemnities of the funeral rituals could be turned into black humour merely highlights the real significance which these events usually had.

94. *Sydney Gazette* 17/24 April 1803
95. Fauchery, A., *Letters from a Miner in Australia,* Melbourne, 1965, p. 41
96. Therry, *op.cit.,* pp. 321 -323
97. Chapman [ed.], *op.cit.,* pp 454 - 455

As in a number of areas of popular colonial belief, there was no necessary connection between the orthodox faith of the particular denominations and the religious notions on baptism, death and the afterlife held by a large segment of the community. Even a woman of impeccable Christian faith such as Jane Williams was not above indulging in the "delightful madness" of imagining the physical reunion with her departed husband upon the beautiful plains of Heaven. The clergy were not irrelevant or a menace to popular belief but an essential part of the process by which the infant could be assured of a Christian burial if it survived to adulthood, or acceptance into Heaven if it died in childhood. Christian burial at the end of a useful and moral life was sufficient to persuade most people that the door to Heaven would be open to them. Preachers could say whatever they liked about judgment, punishment and hellfire, but friendly butchers like Nathaniel Miller were headed for the bliss of the reunion in the sky. Death was seen by the clergy as an opportunity to preach repentance to the living, but for most people it was a time to dwell upon the good qualities of the deceased with appropriate affecting sentiments, regardless of whether they were expressed in the wearing of a mourning suit or in drinking oneself unconscious at a wake.