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Civilisation or Extinction

The Destiny of the Aborigines in the
White Australian Imagination, c.1880-1939.

Thesis submitted by

Russell McGregor, B.A.(Hons)

March 1993

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
the Department of History and Politics
James Cook University of North Queensland.

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19 March 1993

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the intellectual underpinnings of the belief, widely held in nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia, that the Aborigines were doomed to extinction. In the process, it explains how the prediction pertained to a category of persons which was much more narrowly defined than that which is today designated 'Aboriginal'. From this, it goes on to examine the declining credibility which was awarded to the notion of inevitable extinction, particularly in the period between the two World Wars.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Australian Archives, Canberra
AAAS	Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science
AAL	Australian Aborigines' League
ABM	Australian Board of Missions
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ANL	Australian National Library
ANRC	Australian National Research Council
ANZAAS	Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science
APA	Aborigines Progressive Association
APNR	Association for the Protection of Native Races
A-S&APS	Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society
CMS	Church Missionary Society
<i>CPP</i>	<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper</i>
JCU	James Cook University
<i>NTDB</i>	<i>Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography</i>
PROSA	Public Records Office of South Australia
RAI	Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland
SAMAA	South Australian Museum Anthropology Archives
UAA	University of Adelaide Archives

I declare that the thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references given.

~~Russell McGregor~~

19/3/93
19 March 1993

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INTRODUCTION

Since the history of Aboriginal-European relations first became established as a respectable academic enterprise, practitioners have tended to focus either on the facts of frontier conflict and dispossession, or on the actions of administrators and other agents of the state. More recently, attention has turned to examining the ways in which an Aboriginal identity was forged, and the impediments which were encountered in that process. Little scholarly effort has been devoted to explicating the values, assumptions and ideas which informed white Australian attitudes toward the indigenous inhabitants. Insofar as such themes have been dealt with, historians appear to have been more concerned with adjudicating on the morality or correctness of ideas from the past than with elucidating the contexts in which they once held credibility. Often, in what has passed for histories of 'racial ideas' in Australia, the methodology seems to have consisted of little more than combing the literature for all available derogatory references to the Aborigines, and re-assembling them on the page without regard for the context in which they were originally articulated. The end result has been a litany of denigration, rather than an explication of why it may have been that such views were held by persons in the past. This thesis offers such an explication.

In this work, I explore the ways in which the two concepts of race and progress shaped white Australian understandings of Aborigines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More specifically, I examine how the entanglement of race with progress fostered the belief that Aborigines were doomed to extinction, and how that belief gradually lost credibility as the two concepts were tentatively disentangled. The terms 'race' and 'progress' have since fallen into disrepute, although I suggest that the ideas still remain alive and well, not only in the popular imagination but also in more learned circles, even - perhaps especially - among those who explicitly disavow them. In the period under consideration, race and progress were more respectable

concepts, which had not been forced to masquerade under the various guises which they wear today. Indeed, it would seem reasonable to suppose that at the time, race and progress were regarded not as concepts at all, but as facts. Admittedly, in the period after World War One there was a diminution of faith in progress, and at the same time the old certainties of racial science came under question. Yet the displacement of these constructs, which had long been taken for granted, was not accomplished easily or smoothly. By examining the slow, hesitant and faltering steps by which race and progress were rearranged in white Australian representations of the Aborigine, I endeavour to show that the writings of the time cannot be lightly dismissed as mere expressions of racial antipathy, or of a desire to maintain social dominance, or of a need to reinforce economic exploitation. All these elements may have been present; so too, I suggest, was an aspiration to improve the lot of those who were considered disadvantaged. Put simply, people who in the past worked to benefit the Aborigines were not fundamentally different to those who champion the cause today. They merely worked within different intellectual constraints.

The thesis focuses on the writings of anthropologists and administrators from around 1880 to 1939, although it has not been strictly confined within those years. Because the themes pertinent to this study can be traced back to a much earlier period, it begins with a Prologue which briefly sketches out some of the diversity of colonial opinion on the Aborigines in the first sixty years or so of European settlement. In Chapter One, which examines the construction of evolutionary anthropology in Britain and Australia, the analysis becomes more detailed. Here, and throughout the thesis, I have adopted a broad working definition of 'anthropologist'. Within the term I include any person whose observations on the Aborigines appear to have been awarded scientific credibility, for example by being published in a recognised scientific journal. For most of the period covered by the thesis, there were no professional anthropologists in Australia, and even at its end, trained anthropologists were few and far between; a loose usage of the term has thus

been considered appropriate. Chapter Two continues with evolutionary anthropology, with particular reference to Baldwin Spencer. It also considers the administration of Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory, where Spencer was Chief Protector in 1912. Throughout the thesis, Aboriginal administration in the Territory is juxtaposed to contemporary anthropological writings. This is not, however, a study of the application of anthropology to administration. Rather, it is an exploration of the common intellectual contexts of both anthropology and administration.

Chapter Three takes up, and briefly sketches out, three themes which are examined more thoroughly in the following chapters. It also discusses the writings of humanitarian lobbyists and missionaries, who played a significant part in reshaping the destiny envisaged for the Aborigines. In Chapter Four, the focus is on the 'half-caste problem', which was in effect the obverse side of the coin of racial extinction. Chapter Five examines the faltering growth of the notion that Aborigines may be able to advance to the status of Australian citizens. For this purpose, the writings of A.P. Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, have been selected as appropriately illustrative. Chapter Six sketches out the diversity of opinion on the destiny of the Aborigines in the 1930s, before giving a more detailed analysis of the writings of one of the more distinctive anthropologists of the day, Olive Pink. The Epilogue takes a different focus. Whereas all previous chapters deal with writings about Aborigines, by white academics, administrators and humanitarians, the Epilogue examines writings by Aborigines, specifically, the major Aboriginal political activists of the 1930s.

In line with my endeavour to understand the past in terms of the ideas and assumptions which then had currency, the terminology of the past is freely employed throughout the thesis. Such words as 'progress', 'primitive', 'civilisation', 'savagery', 'advanced', 'backward', 'uplift' and 'degeneration' appear frequently in the work. So too do terms such as 'half-caste', 'full-blood', 'part-Aborigine' and 'mixed-blood'; as well as anthropological terms

like 'race', 'tribe', 'deculturation' and 'detrribalisation' which now have little tenability in scientific circles. Quotation-marks are not employed around such words except in quotation or, as in the preceding sentences, where the words themselves rather than their conceptual referents are the topics under consideration. In instances of the latter type, single quotation-marks are used, whereas quotations are designated by double marks. Lack of quotation-marks in no way indicates an endorsement of the conceptual world to which such terms pertained. It is simply that explanation of the past demands reference to contemporary terminology, and I would prefer to avoid the stylistic ugliness of a liberal peppering of quotation-marks. I have made no attempt to force the vocabulary of non-sexist language into explications of the texts examined, for it seems inappropriately anachronistic to impose the sensitivities of the late twentieth century upon writings from a different age. If Darwin wrote of the "descent of man", then I too refer to 'man' in discussing his ideas. The spelling of Aboriginal words has not been standardised; instead, I use whatever spelling was adopted by the writer under discussion. Thus, a well-known central Australian group is designated the 'Arunta' in Chapter Two in the context of Baldwin Spencer's writings, while in Chapter Six it is rendered the 'Aranda' following the usage of Olive Pink who is there under consideration. The few instances in which variant spelling is employed should cause no confusion, and the adoption of contemporary orthography may serve to highlight an important fact: This thesis is not a history of Aboriginal Australians; it is a history of the ways in which Aborigines were represented by white Australian anthropologists, administrators and humanitarians. The Epilogue is a partial exception.

It may be appropriate to conclude with a disclaimer. In no way do I suggest that the perspective offered here provides the only viable approach to the issues examined. In line with the fashionable doctrines of poststructuralism, I consider that such notions as a 'correct approach' or an 'accurate account' are illusory. That said, I hasten to add that this work does not conform to the affectation of rarefied intellectuality which appears to be

de rigueur in poststructuralist literature. Devotees may disagree, but in my view postmodernism (in its various guises) has not jettisoned the notion of an 'accurate account', still less that of a 'correct approach'. It has merely set up alternative canons of its own. This thesis conforms to more conventional historiographic prescriptions. From the collection, collation, careful scrutiny and analysis of as large a body of documents as possible, the historian may, I believe, formulate plausible interpretations of the past. This is not to embrace the notion that documentation comprises an empirical record of events, or that interpretations may be elevated to the status of authorised versions of the past. Rather, it is to work on the presumption that documents provide a record of statements which were made in the past, and that a task for the historian is to elucidate why those statements may have been made. One worthwhile approach is to consider them in the light of other surviving documentation. Thereby, plausible explanations of the past may be made. This thesis attempts no more than that.

PROLOGUE

THE ECLIPSE OF ANTIPODEAN ENLIGHTENMENT

Only a year after the arrival of the First Fleet at Botany Bay, Captain Watkin Tench published a brief "Description of the Natives of New South Wales".¹ In the opening paragraph he invited the reader "to contemplate the simple, undisguised workings of nature, in her most artless colouring".² That the Aborigines represented man in a state of nature, Tench seems to have felt no need to justify or explain. People who lived by hunting and fishing, naked and homeless, were simply presumed to approximate the natural condition of humanity. Admitting that his knowledge of the natives was fragmentary and incomplete, he recounted some of their customs and means of livelihood. Although the ethnography was somewhat rudimentary, the assumption that Aborigines were in, or close to, a state of nature was to enjoy a very long vogue. With the expansion of colonial enterprise to the antipodes, Europeans had discovered the best living exemplars of natural man.³

In his 1793 book, *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson*, Tench provided a more detailed and considered description of the natives. Here, the Enlightenment concept of savagery, as a stage in the early history of all mankind, was more salient than in his earlier brief account. So too was the Enlightenment notion that a savage people's failure to advance derived not

¹ W. Tench, "A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay" (1789) in *Sydney's First Four Years*, Sydney, 1961, pp.46-53. There were, of course, European descriptions of the Aborigines which pre-dated 1789. The first recorded English description was that of William Dampier in 1688; his depiction of "the miserablest People in the World" has been cited in numerous works. So too has Captain Cook's alternative vision of the Aborigines as noble savages who were "far happier than we Europeans". The relevant passages from both Dampier and Cook may be found in H. Reynolds, (comp.), *Dispossession: Black Australians and White Invaders*, Sydney, 1989, pp.97-98.

² Tench, "Narrative of the Expedition", p.46.

³ In the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, American Indians had been the usual choice of *philosophes* who sought to reify the concept of man in a state of nature; see R.L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, Cambridge, 1976, especially pp.37-67.

from innate deficiencies but from the lack of environmental stimuli to progress. Asserting both the savagery and the humanity of the Aborigines, Tench wrote:

If they be considered as a nation, whose general advancement and acquisitions are to be weighed, they certainly rank very low, even in the scale of savages. They may perhaps dispute the right of precedency with the Hottentots, or the shivering tribes who inhabit the shores of Magellan.... Though suffering from the vicissitudes of their climate, - strangers to cloathing: tho' feeling the sharpness of hunger, and knowing the precariousness of supply from that element on whose stores they principally depend, ignorant of cultivating the earth, - a less enlightened state we shall exclaim can hardly exist.

But if from general view we descend to particular inspection, and examine individually the persons who compose this community, they will certainly rise in estimation.... The behaviour of Arabanoo, of Baneelon, of Colbee, and many others, is copiously described; and assuredly he who shall make just allowance for uninstructed nature, will hardly accuse any of those persons of stupidity, or deficiency of apprehension.

To offer my own opinion on the subject, I do not hesitate to declare, that the natives of New South Wales possess a considerable portion of that acumen, or sharpness of intellect, which bespeaks genius. All savages hate toil, and place happiness in inaction: and neither the arts of civilised life can be practised, or the advantages of it felt, without application and labour.⁴

Two features of this passage are worthy of comment. In the first place, Tench clearly appreciated the distinction between generalisations about a people's way of life and assessments of the individuals who lived in that manner. This simple distinction was to become clouded with the later rise of a science of inherent racial attributes. Secondly, in associating savagery with indolence and civilisation with labour, Tench was in line with a prominent strand of Enlightenment thought. For the educated person of the eighteenth century, it was the application of labour to the production of the necessities and superfluities of life which set civilised man apart from the savage. More specifically, it was the cultivation of the soil which was the necessary badge of civilisation.

⁴ W. Tench, "A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson" (1793) in *Sydney's First Four Years*, p.281.

By the late eighteenth century, the Enlightenment idea of progress had crystallised into a conception whereby societies were assumed to follow a natural developmental sequence, from a stage of savagery, characterised by hunting as the mode of subsistence, to one of barbarism, characterised by nomadic pastoralism, to agricultural civilisation, through to commercial civilisation, distinguished by capitalist means of production.⁵ Both the French and the Scottish proponents of stadial theory defined the various stages according to mode of subsistence, though the Scots tended to give greater weight to economics as the motivating factor of progress.⁶ Accordingly, savages remained in the hunting stage because their societies had not been subjected to such pressures as over-grown population or inadequate lands over which to range, or because their environment offered no suitable animals and plants for domestication. But whatever the factors which impelled people to progress from one stage to the next - and this remained one of the more contentious and least well-defined aspects of Enlightenment stadial theories - the notion that there was a natural sequence of developmental stages was well established by the end of the eighteenth century.⁷ A key feature of stage theory was its interpretation of the superiority of one society over another in temporal terms. Europeans had long considered the civilised superior to the

⁵ For a detailed explication of Enlightenment stage theory see Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*. See also R.L. Meek, "Smith, Turgot and the 'Four Stages' Theory", *History of Political Economy*, vol.3, no.1, 1971, pp.9-27; R.L. Meek, "Introduction" to *Turgot on Progress, Sociology and Economics*, (trans., ed. R.L. Meek), Cambridge, 1973, pp.1-33; J.G.A. Pocock, "Gibbon and the Shepherds: The Stages of Society in the *Decline and Fall*", *History of European Ideas*, vol.2, no.3, 1981, pp.193-202; G.W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, New York, 1987, pp.10-19. Although in the scheme outlined above there are four stages, in many eighteenth century (and later) versions there were only three, the last stage of commercial civilisation being either omitted or merged with the preceding agricultural phase.

⁶ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.16. See also Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, especially, pp.68-130. The French *philosophes* tended to give greater emphasis to the advancement of reason as a causal factor in human progress, although they did not ignore the economic aspect; see for example Turgot, "A Philosophical Review of the Successive Advances of the Human Mind" and "On Universal History", in *Turgot on Progress, Sociology and Economics*.

⁷ See Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, pp.177-229.

savage.⁸ What was novel in the Enlightenment tradition was the supposition that savagery had given rise, through a natural sequence of progressive development, to civilisation.⁹

Tench's representation of the Aborigines was set within a framework of Enlightenment ideas of societal development. However, he had no time for that alternative Enlightenment vision, best represented by Rousseau, which held out the noble savage as an exemplar of human virtues. As an English gentleman, he was horrified by the "savage barbarity" with which Aboriginal men treated women.¹⁰ From this, he went on to declaim:

A thousand times ... have I wished, that those European philosophers, whose closet speculations exalt a state of nature above a state of civilisation, could survey the phantom, which their heated imaginations have raised: possibly they might then learn, that a state of nature is, of all others, least adapted to promote the happiness of a being, capable of sublime research, and unending ratiocination: that a savage roaming for prey amidst his native deserts, is a creature deformed by all those passions, which afflict and degrade our nature, unsoftened by the influence of religion, philosophy, and legal restriction: and that the more men unite their talents, the more closely the bands of society are drawn; and civilization advanced, inasmuch is human felicity augmented, and man fitted for his unalienable station in the universe.¹¹

Aborigines, he contended, were like all savages in being easily swayed by "the impulse of the moment"; among their negative qualities, "their levity, their fickleness, their passionate extravagance of character, cannot be defended".¹² The Aboriginal "form of government" was "strictly a system of *Equality*,

⁸ A good account of pre-Enlightenment ideas about savagery is provided by M. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Philadelphia, 1964. The concluding chapter of this work, which gives a convenient overview of the whole, has been reprinted as M. Hodgen, "Retrospect and Prospect in History" in R. Darnell (ed.), *Readings in the History of Anthropology*, New York, 1974, pp.364-79.

⁹ Earlier European conceptions of savagery had tended to take the opposite view, that savage peoples had degenerated from a formerly more civilised state; the dominating constructs here were the biblical idea of the Fall, and the notion of a classical Golden Age in the long-distant past; see Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.10-17. Stocking also pointed out that Enlightenment writers did not entirely jettison the notion of degeneration, but tended to entangle it with the idea of progress.

¹⁰ Tench, "Settlement at Port Jackson", pp.290-91.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.291.

¹² *ibid.*, pp.282-83.

attended with only one inconvenience - the strong triumph over the weak".¹³ Yet this lowly state of society was not equated with a bestial manner of life. On their religious ideas, Tench expressed his "firm belief, that the Indians of New South Wales acknowledge the existence of a superintending deity".¹⁴ Admitting that their spiritual beliefs were heavily laden with magic and superstition, he explained: "Until belief be enlightened by revelation, and chastened by reason; religion and superstition, are terms of equal import".¹⁵ Like all human thought, religious belief was subject to a process of improvement. On Aboriginal languages, Tench admitted the inadequacy and incompleteness of his understanding, but was confident that they were structured and expressive like any other human language. He noted the regular inflection of nouns and verbs, and the fact that noun cases and verb tenses were denoted, as in Latin, "by change of termination".¹⁶ The sounds of the Aboriginal languages he described as "sometimes mellifluous, and sometimes sonorous", although at other times "harsh and barbarous".¹⁷ The major deficiency he noted was the lack of numerals above four;¹⁸ but he did not, like so many later commentators, extrapolate from this any deficiency in the Aboriginal intellect. Possessing the distinctive human attributes of religion and language, Aborigines were undoubtedly members of the same human family as Europeans.

Tench entertained no doubt about the superiority of his own civilisation and the inferiority of Aboriginal savagery. Yet he perceived beneath these superficial differences a universal human nature. His account ended on a note resonant with the Enlightenment principles of reason, progress, and the unity of mankind:

¹³ *ibid.*, p.285; italics in the original.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.280.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.278.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.293.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.291-92.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.293.

[L]et those who have been born in more favoured lands, and who have profited by more enlightened systems, compassionate, but not despise, their destitute and obscure situation. Children of the same omniscient paternal care, let them recollect, that by the fortuitous advantage of birth alone, they possess superiority: that untaught, unaccommodated man, is the same in Pall Mall, as in the wilderness of New South Wales: and ultimately let them hope, and trust, that the progress of reason, and the splendor of revelation, will in their proper and allotted season, be permitted to illumine, and transfuse into these desert regions, knowledge, virtue, and happiness.¹⁹

Like Tench, Judge-Advocate David Collins came out to New South Wales on the First Fleet. Also like Tench, Collins set his account of the Aborigines within a framework of Enlightenment ideas of societal development, beginning with the remark:

We found the natives about Botany Bay, Port Jackson and Broken Bay, living in that state of nature which must have been common to all men previous to their uniting in society, and acknowledging but one authority.²⁰

Collins, however, better exemplifies the detached scientific observer of indigenous peoples. His remarks on the Aborigines were neatly arranged under various headings: "Government and Religion", "Stature and Appearance", "Habitations", "Mode of Living" and so forth, each dealing with the designated issue from as dispassionate a perspective as could be expected of an eighteenth century English gentleman.²¹ Acknowledging that Aborigines, as individuals, displayed the same diversity of character as other peoples, Collins described their disposition, taken as a whole, as "vengeful, jealous, courageous, and cunning".²² Although the characterisation was ambivalent, he concluded his account on a note of restrained hopefulness:

¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp.293-94.

²⁰ D. Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, (ed. B. Fletcher), Sydney, 1975, (1798), vol.1, p.452.

²¹ This is not to deny that his repugnance toward certain Aboriginal practices was expressed. Interestingly, the issue which called forth his loudest condemnation was the same as that which inspired Tench's most impassioned disapproval. "Is it not shocking", Collins pleaded, "to think that the prelude to love in this country should be violence? yet such it is, and of the most brutal nature". He went on to relate some details, omitting those "too shocking to relate"; *ibid.*, pp.463-64.

²² *ibid.*, p.498.

That they are ignorant savages cannot be disputed; but I hope that they do not in the foregoing pages appear to be wholly incapable of becoming one day civilized and useful members of society.²³

Yet ideas of a universal human nature and of a universal human capacity to attain civilisation were not the only intellectual currents to emerge out of the eighteenth century. The ancient concept of the Great Chain of Being enjoyed a resurgence, as an ordering principle of biology.²⁴ Traditionally, the Great Chain had been employed to express the plenitude of God's creation by arranging nature into a vast hierarchy, from inanimate matter through to the simple organisms and on to man at the apex, or perhaps beyond, to the angels. Each link on the Chain was differentiated from its neighbours by only small variations, so that the whole comprised a continuous scale expressive of the harmony of creation. As Europeans became increasingly familiar with the diversity of humankind - and with the anthropoid apes - the gap in the Chain between man and monkey was able to be filled in, with black races at the bottom of the human link, closest to the highest simian.

The idea of the Great Chain was familiar to some of the early Australian colonists. The naval surgeon, Peter Cunningham, included it in his musings on the status of the Aborigines; they were, he wrote:

lively, good-humoured, inquisitive, and intelligent, and are found to acquire the knowledge of reading, writing, &c., almost as expertly as Europeans. If their intellectual functions, then, are thus so far above debasement, how is it that the abject animal state in which they live, and their great and glaring deficiency in all the useful mechanical arts (in comparison with other savages), should place them at the very

²³ *ibid.*, p.513.

²⁴ For a history of the idea of the Great Chain see the classic work by A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, Cambridge, Mass., 1936. See also S. Gordon, *The History and Philosophy of Social Science*, London, 1991, pp.211-18; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.11, 16, 18.

zero of civilisation, constituting in a measure the connecting link between man and the monkey tribe?²⁵

Remarking on the physical appearance of the Aborigines, he noted that while the old women were "absolute frights", the young were "tolerably handsome"; he then answered his own rhetorical question:

We may, I think, in a great measure impute their present low state of civilisation, and deficiency in the mechanical arts, to the nature of the country they inhabit, the kind of life they lead, and the mode of government they live under.²⁶

Far from endorsing the idea that Aborigines were mere animals, Cunningham proclaimed their humanity, explaining their lowness on the material and social scale in environmental terms.²⁷ Elaborating his argument, he provided one of the finest antipodean expressions of the Enlightenment vision of human progress:

Civilisation depends more upon the circumstances under which man is placed than upon any innate impulse of his own, the natural inclinations of man tending toward the savage state, or that in which food is procured with the least possible effort; there being something so irresistibly captivating in a wild, roaming life of this description, that few who have made the trial ever relish civilised society thoroughly again. It is only necessity that urges mankind to congregate in fixed habitations, and raise their food by the sweat of their brow; for if it could still be procured in as easy a way by civilised Europeans as by our uncultivated tribes, the European woods would soon abound with creatures nearly as rude and idle as our natives....

²⁵ P. Cunningham, *Two Years in New South Wales; Comprising Sketches of the Actual State of Society in that Colony; of its Peculiar Advantages to Emigrants; of its Topography, Natural History, &c. &c.*, (2 vols in 1; ed. D.S. MacMillan), Sydney, 1966, (1827), p.202.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.202.

²⁷ By quoting out of context Cunningham's remarks on "the very zero of civilisation" and "the connecting link between man and the monkey tribe", a number of historians have misrepresented his views. See for example D.J. Mulvaney, "The Australian Aborigines 1606-1929: Opinion and Fieldwork; Part 1: 1606-1859", *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, vol.8, 1957, p.143; H. Reynolds, "Racial Thought in Early Colonial Australia", *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol.20, no.1, April 1974, p.47. Mulvaney (p.142) was particularly wide of the mark in claiming both that Cunningham "unconsciously anticipat[ed] some evolutionary extremists of later days" and that his account "bears witness that he believed anything of them, providing it was bad enough". Cunningham's sardonic style of writing may sometimes give this impression. Yet by setting the passage alluding to the Great Chain in the wider context of his statements on the Aborigines, it is clear that he was merely considering one of the many options available to a writer of his day; and it was an option which he rejected. In a later publication, *Dispossession*, pp.106-107, Reynolds acknowledged that Cunningham emphasised the "importance of the environment".

It is, I repeat, the necessity springing from over-grown population, and difficulty in obtaining food, except by artificial means, that first drives man into taking up a fixed abode; but here neither of these causes operates.²⁸

Cunningham maintained that the Aborigines could become civilised, although he cautioned that this may take generations, as "the wild feeling inherent in them must have time to wear out".²⁹ He may merely have toyed with the idea of the Great Chain; other colonists embraced it wholeheartedly.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, a science of race was under construction. In Linnaeus's taxonomy of 1735, humanity was divided into four races, distinguished by a combination of physical, psychological and social traits.³⁰ Drawing on the idea of the Great Chain, Linnaeus placed both human beings and the apes within the order Quadrumana.³¹ This classification, along with the idea of the Great Chain, was rejected by the leading late eighteenth century authority on racial taxonomy, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Although Blumenbach insisted that man was fundamentally distinct from all other animals, his studies were of *Homo sapiens* as a biological species; although he repudiated the Great Chain, he persisted in the hierarchical ordering of races.³² A similar stance was adopted by the eminent British ethnologist James Cowles Pritchard.³³ Both Blumenbach and Pritchard held to the religiously orthodox view that all races had descended from Adam and Eve. This monogenist perspective did not, however, entail a belief in racial equality. Fundamentally, all humanity was one; but upon that

²⁸ Cunningham, *Two Years*, pp.203-204.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.205. Cunningham seems to have held the view that savage propensities were somehow inherent to the Aboriginal nature, but were not ineradicable.

³⁰ See J.S. Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes to Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900*, Urbana, Ill., 1971, p.4; Gordon, *History and Philosophy of Social Science*, p.526.

³¹ See N. Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960*, London, 1982, pp.7, 9. In one of his posthumously published works, *The Cousins of Man*, Linnaeus described the apes as the "nearest relations of the human race"; cited in Lovejoy, *Great Chain of Being*, p.234.

³² See Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp.9-10, 12; Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution*, pp.4-6.

³³ See Stepan, *Idea of Race*, especially pp.29-46; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.47-53.

underlying unity, variations had been elaborated, and the races which embodied those variations could be ranked on a scale of worth.³⁴ More extreme views on racial inequality were propounded by the polygenists, who took the religiously unorthodox line that the fundamental and unbridgeable differences between races indicated that they were the products of separate creations.³⁵ In Britain, the monogenist viewpoint was dominant in racial science until at least the fourth decade of the nineteenth century. More moderate than polygenists in their stance on racial differences, monogenist theories still allowed ample scope for representing other peoples as inferior.

Barron Field, Judge of the New South Wales Supreme Court, endorsed Professor Blumenbach's "most philosophic division of the varieties of the human species" into the Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, Malayan and American races.³⁶ However, Field disputed the German anatomist's classification of the Australians with the Malayan race, claiming instead that:

The skull, the genius, the habits, of the Australians appear to me, as far as I have been able to investigate the subject, to have, in all of them, the degenerate Ethiopian character.³⁷

The revised classification was of considerable importance, for according to Blumenbach's theory the Ethiopian was a more degenerate type than the Malayan. Going one step further, Field bluntly asserted that "the Australian will never be civilized".³⁸ He was convinced that there was something inherent in the Aborigines' constitution which predisposed them to the life of

³⁴ Blumenbach's theories provide a convenient illustration. In his system, a common Caucasian ancestor had given rise, by a process of degeneration, to the American and Mongolian races in one direction, and the Malayan and Ethiopian races in another; the Mongolian and Ethiopian were the lowest, or most degenerate, of the five races; the Caucasian was the highest. See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.26. See also D.J. Cunningham, "Anthropology in the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol.38, 1908, p.26.

³⁵ See Stepan, *Idea of Race*, especially pp.1-10, 29-31, 40-46; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.12, 18, 26-27, 49-50, 64-69.

³⁶ B. Field, "On the Aborigines of New Holland and Van Diemen's Land" in B. Field (ed.), *Geographical Memoirs on New South Wales*, London, 1825, p.196.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.197.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.224.

the "hunter and fisher".³⁹ Although the nature of this innate quality was not clearly explained, he did allude to the Aborigines' lack of certain mental qualities necessary for the attainment of civilisation: "They have quick conceptions, and ready powers of imitation; but they have no reflection, judgement or foresight."⁴⁰

Phrenology played a significant part in fostering the notions that Aboriginal mental powers were limited and their prospects for improvement slight.⁴¹ Although phrenology had a meliorative element, its principles displayed an overt biological determinism, perhaps most of all when applied at a group, rather than an individual level.⁴² The populariser of phrenology in the English-speaking world, George Combe, studied Australian skulls, concluding that their brains were "distinguished by great deficiencies in the moral and intellectual organs". It was impossible to civilise the Aborigines as the "organs of reflecting intellect, Ideality, Conscientiousness and Benevolence" were "greatly inferior in size".⁴³ There was no lack of colonial commentators who agreed with, and elaborated upon, these ideas.⁴⁴ On the other hand, there were those who condemned such manifestly materialistic doctrines. The missionary Lancelot Threlkeld fulminated against phrenology:

The fashionable philosophy of the day, speculating on the intellectual powers of the Aborigines, as manifested in the Bumps of the Brain, is a splendid specious fallacy leading away the mind from the hope of the influence of God's holy spirit regenerating the Heart opening the eyes of their understanding, and turning them from darkness to light,

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp.202-03.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.225.

⁴¹ For accounts of the popularity and respectability of phrenology in early nineteenth century Australia, see M. Roe, *Quest for Authority in Eastern Australia 1835-1851*, Melbourne, 1965, pp.161-62; G. Nadel, *Australia's Colonial Culture: Ideas, Men and Institutions in Mid-Nineteenth Century Eastern Australia*, Melbourne, 1957, pp.139-42.

⁴² For an account of the principles of phrenology see Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp.21-22; on pp.23-28 Stepan provided an analysis of how phrenology fed into the growth of a science which emphasised fixed racial attributes.

⁴³ G. Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, Edinburgh, 1828, p.164, cited in Reynolds, "Racial Thought", p.50.

⁴⁴ See R.H.W. Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists: Aborigines and Colonial Society in New South Wales in the 1830s and 1840s*, Sydney, 1974, pp.85-92; Reynolds, "Racial Thought", p.50; Reynolds (comp.), *Dispossession*, pp.107-10.

from the power of Satan unto God; and instead of depending as christians, on the promised divine secret influence of the Holy Spirit, this specious science, contemplates only the accumulation of matter in the formation of the brain, the depositions of bone in the various corresponding concavities and convexities of the skull, sets aside a positive declaration, to assume an hypothesis, amusing in theory, but dangerous in practice.⁴⁵

Threlkeld may have repudiated scientific materialism; but missionaries of his stamp were themselves not innocent of peddling derogatory images of the Aborigine.

Traditionally, the Christian view emphasised the unity of humankind, as all were eligible for the grace of God. Evangelicals of the early nineteenth century, however, dwelt upon the innate sinfulness of man and on the consequences of the Fall. The majority of early colonial missionaries were Evangelicals.⁴⁶ The Wesleyan Reverend William Walker encapsulated the pessimism of the Evangelical outlook in his statement that Aborigines were "the progeny of him who was cursed to be 'a servant of servants to his brethren'".⁴⁷ Emphasising the fallen state of man, Evangelicals interpreted the lowly condition of the Aborigines as the outcome of their degeneration. After observing some rock engravings on the central New South Wales coast, Threlkeld reflected:

It is evident from these very engravings upon the rocks that the aborigines have degenerated ... There may possibly be ruins of very ancient buildings lying hid in Australia, which remain to be discovered by some future traveller, who, if unprejudiced against the aborigines, may find out many remnants of an ancient people ...⁴⁸

Such musings were not confined to the Evangelicals. In the early nineteenth century, widespread credibility attached to the notion that Aboriginal society

⁴⁵ L. Threlkeld, "The Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines, Lake Macquarie, for MDCCCXXXVIII" in N. Gunson (ed.), *Australian Reminiscences and Papers of L.E. Threlkeld*, Canberra, 1974, vol.1, p.148; see also Threlkeld's "Reminiscences of the Aborigines of New South Wales, 1825-1826" in the same volume, p.50.

⁴⁶ See Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists*, pp.74-76; Gunson, "Introduction" to Gunson (ed.), *Reminiscences and Papers of L.E. Threlkeld*, vol.1, p.9.

⁴⁷ Cited in Gunson, "Introduction", p.9.

⁴⁸ Threlkeld, "Reminiscences of the Aborigines of NSW, 1825-1826", pp.59-60.

illustrated not the original condition of man but the ultimate depths of human degradation.

In his 1846 *Remarks on the Probable Origin and Antiquity of the Aboriginal Natives of New South Wales*, the colonial magistrate William Hull utilised both Enlightenment stage theory and the concept of savagery as regression.⁴⁹ In Hull's version of stadial theory, societies could move down the snake of degeneration, as well as up the ladder of progress.⁵⁰ The Aborigines, in his view, had declined from a formerly more civilised state to one of wretched savagery, impelled on their downward course by the power of irrational superstition. Indeed, the central thrust of Hull's argument was to demonstrate the potency of superstition as a degenerative force. Thus he rejected the biological explanations for Aboriginal inferiority which had then come into vogue, along with the notion, derived from the Great Chain, that they were a connecting link between man and monkey. Such ideas he considered both derogatory to the blacks and an impediment to a true understanding of humanity.⁵¹ If his own account emphasised how "low in moral degradation [and] intellectual power" the Aborigines had sunk, he nonetheless insisted that they must be remembered as having once occupied "a higher relative position as regards mankind".⁵² Hull held out no hope that they would ever regain it.

For those colonists who maintained a belief that Aborigines could become civilised, there were more pressing reasons to refute the notion that the race was by nature inferior and bestial. Robert Dawson, manager of the

⁴⁹ See P. Turnbull, "A Forgotten Cosmogony: William Hull's *Remarks on the ... Aboriginal Natives*", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.24, no.95, October 1990, pp.207-20. Turnbull also pointed out the significance of Masonic lore in Hull's interpretation.

⁵⁰ According to Turnbull, Hull probably derived this variant of stage theory from the nineteenth century Scottish cleric, George Oliver; see *ibid.*, pp.209-10. In classic Enlightenment stadial theory, societies moved in one general direction only - upward - although a limited or temporary regression could be allowed.

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, pp.212-14.

⁵² Cited in *ibid.*, pp.210, 212.

Australian Agricultural Company, was adamant that Aborigines were "capable of civilization", and advocated that "experiments" be made to prove the point.⁵³ He continued:

If, however, they are not, as *some* assert, of the same creation, and therefore a different species of humanity; or if, as others think, they are only a third, fourth, or fifth link in the same creation, and the nearest of all to the monkey or the orang-outang tribe, and therefore incapable of enjoying the same state of intellectual existence as themselves, all experiments would be useless.⁵⁴

Dawson added that "happily for the natives all their white brethren do not entertain these degrading and absurd opinions".⁵⁵ But many did. A decade after Dawson wrote, the great colonial explorer and imperial administrator, George Grey, put forward his proposals for civilising the Aborigines.⁵⁶ Grey explained that although the laws and customs of the Australians were "barbarous", the people themselves were nonetheless capable of advancement: "for many races who were at one period subject to the most barbarous laws, have, since new institutions have been introduced amongst them, taken their rank among the civilized nations of the earth".⁵⁷ Realising that civilising efforts could be successful only if Aboriginal ability and adaptability were acknowledged, he repudiated the many accounts which "most unfairly represented [them] as a very inferior race, in fact as one occupying a scale in the creation which nearly places them on a level with the brutes".⁵⁸ He added that "some years must elapse, ere a prejudice so firmly rooted as this

⁵³ R. Dawson, *The Present State of Australia; A Description of the Country, its Advantages and Prospects, with Reference to Emigration: and a Particular Account of the Manners, Customs and Condition of its Aboriginal Inhabitants*, London, 1830, (Facsimile edn, Alburgh Harleston, Norfolk, 1987), p.330.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.332; italics in the original.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.332.

⁵⁶ G. Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia during the years 1837, 38 and 39*, London, 1841; see especially vol.2, pp.220-24. In Grey's grand imperial vision, it was the duty of the European nations - or more specifically of the English - to convey civilisation to the savage peoples of the world. This fitted into a still grander conception of human progress under the guiding hand of Divine Providence. According to Grey, it had been Providentially willed that the Aborigines "should until a certain period remain in their present condition"; that "certain period" began in 1788.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.377.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.367.

can be altogether eradicated".⁵⁹ His hopefulness that the prejudice would be uprooted was misplaced; far from losing ground, it became more and more firmly entrenched.

By the time Dawson and Grey wrote, they had to counter not only the racial theories of the day but also the pragmatic argument that all previous endeavours to civilise the Aborigines had failed. Within the first year of colonisation, Captain Phillip had attempted to civilise a local Aborigine, Arabanoo; after some initial success in inculcating English manners and language, Arabanoo died of smallpox. Phillip's next experiment was scarcely more encouraging. One of the subjects, Colbee, ran away; the other, Bennelong, after becoming sufficiently civilised to visit London, developed an excessive fondness for rum and relapsed into tribal ways after his return to the colony.⁶⁰ In the very first years of the nineteenth century the Reverend Samuel Marsden attempted to civilise two young Aboriginal boys by raising them with his own family. They learned to read and write, but disappointed Marsden with their lack of filial devotion.⁶¹ Perhaps it was for this reason that he came to the conclusion that "nothing can be done"⁶² to civilise the Aborigines, for "however young when taken by the Europeans, [they] will not submit to any Restraint, as soon as they can range the woods".⁶³ In 1814 Governor Macquarie established a Native Institution at Parramatta, for the purpose of "Educating, and bringing up to Habits of Industry and Decency, the Youth of both Sexes".⁶⁴ He also attempted to induce the Aborigines to adopt the habits of settled agriculturalists by making grants of land available to them, along with instruction in the requisite skills. Neither attempt was

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.367.

⁶⁰ See Gunson, "Introduction", pp.9-10.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.10.

⁶² Marsden, 24.2.1829, cited in *ibid.*, p.11.

⁶³ Marsden, 31.5.1827, cited in *ibid.*, p.11.

⁶⁴ Macquarie to Bathurst, 8.10.1814, cited in J. Woolmington (ed.), *Aborigines in Colonial Society: 1788-1850: From 'Noble Savage' to 'Rural Pest'*, Melbourne, 1973, p.22.

attended with success.⁶⁵ Alluding to this history of failure, Barron Field wrote:

We have now lived among the [Aborigines] for more than thirty years and the most persevering attempts have always been made, and are still making, to induce them to settle, and avail themselves of the arts of life; but they cannot be fixed, nor is it possible by any kindness or cherishing to attach them. They have been brought up by us from infancy in our nurseries, and yet the woods have seduced them at maturity, and at once elicited the savage instincts of finding their food in the trees, and their path through the forest, - propensities which civil education had only smothered. They have been removed from their native country, and in a foreign land have they robbed and run away from their fosterer and only protector.⁶⁶

For Field, all this was evidence of their inability to ever become civilised.

Yet there were those who maintained that these failures derived not from Aboriginal deficiencies but from defects in the methods employed. Cunningham argued that the major problem with Macquarie's Institution lay in segregating the native from the white children. He advocated instead that Aboriginal children should be housed in Orphan Asylums, "where, mixing with a numerous population of white children, they will gradually imbibe their ideas, and manners and customs too".⁶⁷ By the 1820s, those who still believed that the Aborigines could be civilised held widely differing opinions on how it should be attempted. Some commentators insisted that Aboriginal advancement would best be served by their immediate employment in socially useful roles. Others argued for their temporary segregation from white society, shielding them from its vices until they had been sufficiently inculcated with its virtues.⁶⁸ There were those who claimed Christianisation to be the necessary first step toward civilisation. The Assistant Protector of Aborigines at Port

⁶⁵ See Gunson, "Introduction", pp.11-12; Woolmington (ed.), *Aborigines in Colonial Society*, pp.22-33.

⁶⁶ Field, "On the Aborigines of New Holland", pp.224-25. The remark about Aborigines running away from their fosterer in a foreign country probably referred to one of the Aboriginal boys whom the Reverend Samuel Marsden raised in Sydney, and who ran away from him in Rio de Janeiro; for an account of this incident see Gunson, "Introduction", p.10.

⁶⁷ Cunningham, *Two Years*, p.205.

⁶⁸ For an account of these opposing views see Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists*, pp.62-70.

Phillip, James Dredge, regarded instruction in the Christian religion as the "only *infallible* plan for effecting their civilization".⁶⁹ Others put their faith in secular reforms. George Grey maintained that civilising the Aborigines depended on their being made amenable to British law; in his view, Christian conversion was a noble and necessary duty, but the law came first.⁷⁰

By the 1820s the question of whether Christianity should precede attempts to civilise, or *vice versa*, was being debated within colonial missionary circles.⁷¹ Although there were exceptions, the dominant view within the clergy was that Christianity must come first. Commentators of more secular outlook were more likely to assert the alternative option. Peter Cunningham, for example, argued that changes in the form of government and in the means of subsistence were essential before any higher religious ideas could be inculcated.⁷² The Polish explorer, Paul Strzelecki, was more forthright, proclaiming that "since the first dawn of human history, the civil organisation of society has preceded its religious and moral instruction".⁷³ Criticising the missionaries for their attempts to introduce a religion which had no meaning within the context of Aboriginal society, he argued that:

the holy doctrine which the missionaries preached to the aborigines sapped the foundations of their normal government, and its dissolution followed. The voice of Christianity, of disinterested, spiritual religious faith, was rendered ineffectual by civil disorganisation.⁷⁴

Yet while Strzelecki depicted the Aborigines in humane terms, he was not hopeful that any method would successfully bring about their civilisation; "it

⁶⁹ J. Dredge, *Brief Notices of the Aborigines of New South Wales*, Geelong, 1845, p.45; italics in the original.

⁷⁰ See Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, vol.2, pp.366-78.

⁷¹ See J. Woolmington, "The Civilisation/ Christianisation Debate and the Australian Aborigines", *Aboriginal History*, vol.10, part 2, 1986, pp.90-98.

⁷² Cunningham, *Two Years*, pp.203-205.

⁷³ P.E. Strzelecki, *Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, London, 1845 (Facsimile edn, Adelaide, 1967), p.349.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.349.

will be easier", he declared, "to bring the whites down to the level of the blacks, than to raise the latter to the ideas and habits of our race".⁷⁵

Ultimate pessimism in the Aborigines' capacity to advance found expression in the idea that they were doomed to inevitable extinction. In this view, the coming of civilisation to Australian shores, far from leading the indigenes to a higher social state, could result only in their demise. Interestingly, the earliest colonial commentators, like Tench and Collins, made no reference to the possibility of extinction, despite the fact that they witnessed the terrible decimation of the Port Jackson tribes in the first smallpox epidemic of 1789. The growth of an expectation of extinction correlated closely with declining faith in Aboriginal abilities to become civilised. Barron Field expressed his sentiments on the "extermination of the simple race of Australia" in verse:

Yet deem not this man useless,
But let him pass, - a blessing on his head!
...
May never we pretend to civilize,
And make him only captive!
Let him be free of mountain solitudes;
And let him, where and when he will, sit down
Beneath the trees, and with his faithful dog
Share his chance-gather'd meal; and, finally,
As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
So in the eye of Nature let him die!⁷⁶

Field was certainly not the last to pen romantic verses on the passing of the Aboriginal race. And he was not alone in arguing that with extinction their ultimate fate, the Aborigines could be most kindly treated by leaving them to their accustomed ways.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.355; italics in the original.

⁷⁶ Field, "On the Aborigines of New Holland", pp.228-29.

⁷⁷ Field was contradictory on this point. Only sentences before the quoted verses he wrote: "Let us continue to them the chance of receiving the comforts of civilization and the blessings of religion, as an indemnification for the new vices and diseases which they imbibe from us too readily"; *ibid.*, p.228.

By the 1830s the doomed race concept had gained a more secure place in the colonial imagination. There were those like George Grey who held out against it,⁷⁸ but for the majority of colonial commentators there appears to have been something irresistibly attractive in the notion of inevitable Aboriginal extinction. For writers like Threlkeld and Hull, who believed the Aborigines to be the debased remnants of a formerly civilised people, extinction could be regarded as the end point of the degenerative process. Threlkeld maintained that not only had the Aborigines degenerated, but they would "continue so to do, until the few remaining individuals shall have become extinct, like many other portions of the human family, who are now no more".⁷⁹ If this implied that Aborigines were on the road to extinction before the colonisation of their country, Threlkeld did not deny that the European presence was a contributing factor.

In his overview of contemporary attitudes toward Aborigines, William Westgarth provided a representative selection of the various factors which were commonly adduced to explain the trend toward extinction:

The causes of this gradual extinction appear to be tolerably ascertained; their own mutual wars; their hostile encounters with the whites; the diseases and vices of European society, unusually destructive in their effects, from irregularity in the mode of life, and the want of proper medical treatment; the common practice of infanticide; and, more remotely, perhaps, by the gradual disappearance of various animals used as food, and of other sources of their support.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Grey wrote of the demise of the Aborigines as only one of a number of possibilities; and one which could be averted if appropriate steps were taken; see Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions*, vol.2, p.367.

⁷⁹ Threlkeld, "Reminiscences of the Aborigines of NSW, 1825-1826", pp.59-60. For Hull's views on Aboriginal extinction see Turnbull, "Forgotten Cosmogony", pp.216-17.

⁸⁰ W. Westgarth, *A Report on the Condition, Capabilities, and Prospects of the Australian Aborigines*, Melbourne, 1846, p.6; for Westgarth's more detailed explication of these causes see pp.6-14. This brief book provides a good summary of contemporary educated colonial opinion on the Aborigines and their prospects for civilisation. Although Westgarth steered clear of an unequivocal statement on the incapacity of Aborigines to become civilised, his sentiments tended in this direction.

Yet to many inquiring minds, physical causes alone seemed inadequate to explain so awesome a process as racial extinction. Herman Merivale, lecturing at Oxford in the 1840s, remarked on the inadequacy of these materialistic explanations, claiming that there were "deeper and more mysterious causes at work; the mere contact of Europeans is fatal to him in some unknown manner".⁸¹ In similar vein, Charles Darwin recorded in his journal in 1836 that as well as the "several evident causes of destruction" of the Aborigines, there appeared "to be some more mysterious agency generally at work".⁸²

According to many, the "mysterious agency" was the hand of God. Giving evidence before a Select Committee of the Legislative Council of Victoria in 1858, William Hull explained that "it is the design of providence that the inferior races should pass away before the superior races ... since we have occupied the country, the aborigines must cease to occupy it".⁸³ Less reverently, Peter Strzelecki described prevailing colonial opinion on the matter:

Those in whose eyes the question of decrease and extinction has assumed all the mournful solemnity and interest which it merits, have inquired into the nature of that invisible but desolating influence, which, like a malignant ally of the white man, carries destruction wherever he advances; and the inquiry, like an inquest of the one race upon the corpse of the other, has ended, for the most part, with the verdict of, 'Died by the visitation of God'.⁸⁴

Despite the sarcasm, Strzelecki adhered to the notion that the Aborigines were doomed to inevitable extinction.

In attempting to fashion an adequate explanation for the process, Strzelecki provided one of the more comprehensive early nineteenth century accounts of the doomed race idea. He noted that various writers had

⁸¹ H. Merivale, *Lectures on Colonization and Colonies: delivered before the University of Oxford in 1839, 1840 and 1841*, new edn, London, 1861, p.540.

⁸² C. Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of the Various Countries visited by H.M.S. Beagle, under the Command of Captain Fitzroy, R.N., from 1832 to 1836*, London, 1839, (Facsimile edn, Bruxelles, 1969), p.520.

⁸³ Cited in Mulvaney, "The Australian Aborigines 1606-1929", part 1, p.144.

⁸⁴ Strzelecki, *Physical Description of NSW*, pp.343-45.

attributed the decline of the Aboriginal population "to the want of evangelical instruction, to oppressive governments, to intemperance, to European diseases, to wars with fire-arms, &c". However, the inadequacy of such explanations was demonstrated by the fact that all attempts to remedy these problems had tended merely "to increase, rather than diminish, the evils complained of".⁸⁵ Strzelecki claimed instead that the cause of the decline lay not in an "increased rate of mortality", but in a "decrease of births".⁸⁶ The available facts, he argued:

render it evident *that their longevity has not been abridged, that the rate of mortality has not increased, but that the power of continuing or procreating the species appears to have been curtailed.*⁸⁷

The "most remarkable" aspect of this decline in fertility was that after having sexual intercourse with a European male "the native female is found to lose the power of conception on a renewal of intercourse with the male of her own race, retaining only that of procreating with the white men".⁸⁸ In describing this phenomena, Strzelecki was reduced to such adjectives as "mysterious" and "occult". Resuming a more sedate tone, we went on to remark that the impact of venereal disease would be still more devastating, as it led to "absolute sterility in the native female".⁸⁹

Two aspects of Strzelecki's explanation are worthy of further comment. The first is his emphasis on sexual intercourse as the most potent cause of the Aboriginal demise. A linkage between the means of human reproduction and the mechanisms of racial extinction was to persist through the many and varied renditions of the doomed race idea, long after the specifics of Strzelecki's theory had been discredited. The second and related issue concerns what was meant by racial extinction. Strzelecki's version actually required the production of half-caste offspring; and if other commentators

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.345.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.346.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.346; italics in the original.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.347.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.347.

were not necessarily as explicit as this, it was nonetheless the case that the propagation of people of mixed descent in no way ran counter to the doomed race idea. It was not predicted that the Aborigines would leave no descendants at all; merely that they would leave none of the full descent. Drawing together the themes of sexual license as a cause of extinction, and of extinction as the fate only of the "pure aborigines", Threlkeld explained:

The Aborigines of this part of the world, not only of Australia, but of all the Islands in Australasia also are becoming extinct without exception, whether Christianized or heathen. In the former state the females amalgamate with the Europeans, and the customs of the latter are so abominably cruel that they destroy themselves by their wicked practices, and in a generation or two more the pure aborigines of these parts will be numbered amongst the numerous extinct nations of which we read in sacred scripture, whose languages are lost there being no record preserved.⁹⁰

For the Godly, the existence of half-castes may have been a standing rebukē to the moral standards of many colonists; but they were never seen as evidence against the idea that the Aborigines were doomed to die out.

Lack of comprehensive demographic data appears to have been no impediment to the firm conviction that the demise of the Aboriginal race was inevitable. For some limited areas, accurate statistics on the Aboriginal population were compiled.⁹¹ Beyond that, population details were not - indeed could not be - known. Casual observation doubtless revealed that with the expansion of European settlement, the Aboriginal population diminished, sometimes rapidly. But observed population decline is very different to a prediction of inevitable extinction.⁹² The doomed race idea, it seems, drew its

⁹⁰ Threlkeld to Richard Cull, 25.6.1856, in Gunson (ed.), *Reminiscences and Papers of L.E. Threlkeld*, vol.2, p.299.

⁹¹ Threlkeld, for example, in the 1830s provided "Returns of Aboriginal Natives, taken at Lake Macquarie", in which individuals were named and enumerated; see Gunson (ed.), *Reminiscences and Papers of L.E. Threlkeld*, vol.2, pp.365-70.

⁹² Among recent attempts to assess the rate of Aboriginal depopulation in early colonial Australia, Noel Butlin's was particularly controversial; see N.G. Butlin, *Our Original Aggression: Aboriginal Populations of Southeastern Australia, 1788-1850*, Sydney, 1983; N.G. Butlin, "Macassans and Aboriginal Smallpox: The '1789' and 1829' Epidemics", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.21, no.84, April 1985, pp.315-35; J. Campbell, "Smallpox in Aboriginal Australia: the early 1830s", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.21, no.84, April 1985, pp.336-58. Whatever the validity of these empirical

major sustenance from sources other than hard demographic data. At a popular level, the Aboriginal death toll which was consequent upon their dispossession could be conveniently explained away as an inevitability of nature or of the Divine plan. Yet the condoning of acts of violence was not the only morality which could be extracted from the terrible prospect of racial extinction.

Many of the most eloquent proponents of the doomed race idea were men of strong humanitarian views, who were horrified by what they saw of the brutal treatment of Aborigines. Barron Field was disgusted by the notion that blacks could be killed merely because they were members of an inferior race.⁹³ Strzelecki believed that because the Aborigines had "the sentence of extinction stamped indelibly upon their foreheads", it was incumbent upon the government to render that process "less painful".⁹⁴ This, he thought, could best be done by the honest declaration of the Aborigines as a conquered people, by leaving intact the traditional tribal organisation, and by providing the people with regular and adequate rations.⁹⁵ His humanitarian romanticism is evident in the words he claimed to be the wishes of the "remaining few" Aborigines:

'Leave us to our habits and customs; do not embitter the days which are in store for us, by constraining us to obey yours; nor reproach us with apathy to that civilisation which is not destined for us; and if you can still be generous to the conquered, relieve the hunger which drives us in despair to slaughter your flocks and the men who guard them. Our fields and forests, which once furnished us with abundance of vegetable and animal food, now yield us no more; they and their produce are yours. You prosper on our native soil, and we are famishing!'⁹⁶

Threlkeld provides a fine example of a philanthropic adherent to the doomed race idea. As a missionary he spent thirty-five years of his life ministering to

reconstructions, the central feature of the doomed race idea was not population decline but the inevitability of extinction.

⁹³ Field, "On the Aborigines of New Holland", pp.227-28.

⁹⁴ Strzelecki, *Physical Description of NSW*, pp.348-49.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.349.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.355-56.

both the spiritual and the physical needs of the Aborigines. He was appalled by the violent treatment meted out to blacks on the frontiers of settlement, and took a prominent part in bringing the infamous Myall Creek massacre, and similar punitive expeditions, to official attention.⁹⁷ Threlkeld held a hope that a small number of Aborigines may be "called to the acknowledgment of the truth as it is in Jesus", before the race entirely passed away.⁹⁸ But that they would entirely pass away, with or without Jesus, he was quite confident.

The doomed race idea was neither merely a sop for disturbed consciences nor an empirical demographic prediction. More than anything else, it was a manifestation of ultimate pessimism in Aboriginal abilities. As the Enlightenment vision of universal human progress faded, as attempts to civilise and convert failed, and as racial attitudes hardened, it came to be considered that the best that could be done for the Aborigines was to protect them from overt injustice and brutality - for the short time they had left upon this earth. If, as increasingly came to be taken for granted, the Aborigines were incapable of attaining the status of civilisation, they were equally incapable of living within a civilised community.

⁹⁷ See for example Threlkeld to Judge W.W. Burton, 8.2.1839, in Gunson (ed.), *Reminiscences and Papers of L.E. Threlkeld*, vol.2, pp.275-77; see also Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists*, pp.41-46.

⁹⁸ Threlkeld, "Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines Lake Macquarie, for MDCCCXXXVIII" p.148.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CREATION AND ANNIHILATION OF PRIMITIVE MAN

If the tendency of the Enlightenment was to make humanity subject to natural laws, the trend of early nineteenth century racial science was to render those natural laws biological. Since its inception, the scientific study of race had embedded man in the processes of nature. Monogenists like Blumenbach and Pritchard relied heavily on the natural sciences of biology and anatomy in their endeavours to prove the unitary origins of mankind.¹ Over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, racial science drifted more toward a polygenist perspective, and with this came an increasing proclivity to regard social and cultural differences as causally related to biological differences.² Nancy Stepan has described the shift in British racial science between 1800 and 1860 as involving:

a change from an emphasis on the fundamental physical and moral homogeneity of man, despite superficial differences, to an emphasis on the essential heterogeneity of mankind, despite superficial similarities. It was a shift from a sense of man as primarily a social being, governed by social laws and standing apart from nature, to a sense of man as primarily a biological being, embedded in nature and governed by biological laws. It was a move away from an eighteenth century optimism about man, and faith in the adaptability of man's universal 'nature', towards a nineteenth century biological pessimism, and a belief in the unchangeability of racial 'natures'....
In short, a shift had occurred in which culture and the social behaviour of man became epiphenomena of biology.³

Naturalism, and the assumed link between biological and cultural attributes, were to be bequeathed to the generations of anthropologists who followed Darwin.

¹ See Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp.xiii-xiv, 5-19, 31-35; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.48-53.

² See Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp.20-46; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.47-53, 62-69.

³ Stepan, *Idea of Race*, p.4.

A thoroughgoing polygenism, positing the separate creation of fixed races or species of mankind, may not have been so readily compatible with the Darwinian hypothesis. But polygenism was far more than merely speculation about the ultimate origins of human diversity; as George Stocking has pointed out:

From a broader point of view ... polygenism and monogenism can be regarded as specific expressions of enduring alternative attitudes toward the variety of mankind. Confronted by antipodal man, one could marvel at his fundamental likeness to oneself, or one could gasp at his immediately striking differences. One could regard these differences as of degree or of kind, as products of changing environment or immutable heredity, as dynamic or static, as relative or absolute, as inconsequential or hierarchical.⁴

He added that considered "in these terms, polygenist thinking did not die with Darwin's *Origin of Species*".⁵ It was not merely that post-Darwinian anthropologists inherited the notion that humanity could be subdivided into a number of races; more than that, they persisted in the view that racial differences were fundamental and fixed, that racial types were stable over time. Evolutionary anthropologists continued to reify races, regarding them not merely as convenient classificatory tools but as actually existing entities of the natural world.⁶

⁴ G.W. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*, New York, 1968, p.45. Herbert Odom, in "Generalizations on Race in Nineteenth-Century Physical Anthropology", *Isis*, vol.58, part 1, no.191, Spring 1976, pp.5-18, adopted a similar interpretation of the monogenesis versus polygenesis debate.

⁵ More rigorously polygenist theories also persisted after the publication of the *Origin*. James Hunt set up the Anthropological Society of London in 1863, partly because his polygenist views were at odds with majority opinion within the existing Ethnological Society of London. Stocking provided a revealing account of these two Societies and their differing orientations toward race in *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.239-57. The Ethnological Society retained some polygenist members, most notably John Crawford; for his ideas, with specific reference to the racial distinctiveness of the Australian Aborigines, see J. Crawford, "On the Vegetable and Animal Food of the Natives of Australia in reference to Social Position, with a comparison between the Australians and some other Races of Man", *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, vol.6, 1868, pp.112-22; see also J. Crawford, "On the Classification of the Races of Man according to the Form of the Skull", *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, vol.6, 1868, pp.127-34.

⁶ For detail on the scientific reification of race, and on the typological orientation of racial studies, see Stepan, *Idea of Race*, especially pp.xvii-xix, 47-110; Odom, "Generalizations on Race", pp.5-18; Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, pp.46-68.

Contemporary racial thought was one intellectual current on which evolutionary anthropology drew. The idea of progress was another. In the first half of the nineteenth century, conjectural histories in the style of the Scottish Enlightenment had passed out of fashion.⁷ The Enlightenment concern with reconstructing the course of human progress on the grand scale was displaced by a more utilitarian desire to ensure the continuation of social and economic development.⁸ But this entailed no diminution of faith in the reality of progress. That faith grew stronger in Britain with each passing decade, to be epitomised by the Crystal Palace exhibition of 1851.⁹ When, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the fashion for conjectural reconstructions of the human past was revived under the guise of evolutionary theory, Britain was a very different place to what it had been a century before. In the heyday of its imperial might and in a period of rapid industrialisation, the reality of progress could be taken for granted. As Stocking remarked:

for several decades after 1851, civilization in Britain was not so much a problem as an assumption. Insofar as it was problematic, the primary question was no longer how to accomplish it or defend it, but rather to explain its development, and why it was that not all men had shared equally in the process.¹⁰

In answering the latter question, the concept of race was combined with the idea of progress. The Enlightenment tradition of societal development and the post-Enlightenment science of race were harnessed together in evolutionary anthropology, to explain both the course of human progress and the source of human differences.

⁷ See J.W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory*, Cambridge, 1966, especially pp.10-23, 49-64.

⁸ Burrow, in *Evolution and Society*, argued that Utilitarianism was the major intellectual force which pushed aside the Enlightenment tradition of conjectural history. Stocking pointed out some of the strengths and weaknesses of this argument in *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.9-45. See also J.W. Stocking, "Some Problems in the Understanding of Nineteenth Century Cultural Evolutionism" in Darnell (ed.), *Readings in the History of Anthropology*, pp.407-25; P.J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past*, Oxford, 1989.

⁹ Stocking used the Crystal Palace as a metaphor of Victorian self-confidence in progress; see *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.1-6. It had earlier been used for a similar purpose by J.B. Bury in his classic study, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth*, New York, 1955, pp.324-33.

¹⁰ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.45.

Primitivity and the Progress of Science

The central thrust of *The Origin of Species* was to explain, without recourse to the hand of God, how the observed diversity of life on the planet could have come about. For this purpose, the idea of progressive development had only a minor part to play; but a part nonetheless, at least as a rhetorical strategy to convince the reader.¹¹ Biological evolution was an optimistic creed, Darwin explaining that:

As all the living forms of life are the lineal descendants of those which lived long before the Cambrian epoch, we may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence, we may look with some confidence to a secure future of great length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress toward perfection.¹²

In the *Origin*, scant mention was made of the evolution of humanity, the most significant passage being in the concluding paragraphs where Darwin explicitly linked his hypothesis to the theories of the pre-eminent mid-nineteenth century philosopher of progress, Herbert Spencer. Darwin announced:

In the future I see open fields for far more important researches. Psychology will be securely based on the foundation already well laid by Mr. Herbert Spencer, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation. Much light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history.¹³

When Darwin published at length on human evolution, with *The Descent of Man* in 1871, he again made reference to the theories of "Our great philosopher, Herbert Spencer".¹⁴ But by this time evolutionary theory had gained widespread acceptance, and Darwin had to hand a great many works within an evolutionary framework upon which to draw, notably those by John

¹¹ For an elucidation of the rhetorical structure of Darwin's argumentation see J.A. Campbell, "Charles Darwin: Rhetorician of Science" in J.S. Nelson, A. Magill and D.N. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs*, Madison, Wisc., 1987, pp.69-86.

¹² C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, London, 1971, (1859), pp.461-62.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.462. For a good, brief exposition of Spencer's theories see Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, pp.179-227.

¹⁴ C. Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, London, 1871, (photo-reproduction Princeton, N.J., 1981), vol.1, p.101.

Lubbock, Alfred Russell Wallace, T.H. Huxley, and E.B. Tylor.¹⁵ Far from these works being merely derivative of Darwin's theory, it was to them that Darwin turned to buttress his own account of human evolution.

Although Darwin placed the idea of evolution on a firm scientific footing, his theory of natural selection did not win universal acceptance as the primary factor in the evolutionary process.¹⁶ But whatever factor was put forward as the engine of evolution, one ingredient was essential to the process - time. In a sense, time replaced God as the creator of organic diversity. In the mid-nineteenth century, and quite independently of the rise of Darwinism, the temporal limits for the existence of the earth and its inhabitants were being pushed further and further back, making a biblically-based chronology increasingly untenable.¹⁷ Earlier in the century, discoveries of stone implements in association with the fossil remains of extinct fauna had led some to speculate on the vast antiquity of man.¹⁸ However as Jacob Gruber has convincingly argued, it was not until 1858, with the discoveries at Brixham Cave in southern England, that general scientific credibility was awarded to the notion that humanity had a very long prehistory. Although the significance of these findings was quickly overshadowed by the controversy which was generated by the publication of *The Origin of Species*, the establishment of the antiquity of man was of great importance to the emergence of anthropology

¹⁵ Other writers, such as John McLennan and Henry Maine, could also be mentioned. However, the four cited above - as well as Darwin himself - will be focussed upon here, because each of them expressed themes which are pertinent to the present study, all were utilised by Darwin in the *Descent of Man*, and taken together they provide a representative picture of what Stocking has dubbed "classical evolutionism". Another figure who will be examined in this brief survey of late nineteenth century evolutionary thought is the American, Lewis Henry Morgan, who was an early influence on anthropology in Australia.

¹⁶ For good accounts of the diversity of late nineteenth century scientific opinion on the mechanisms of evolution see P.J. Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth*, Baltimore, 1988; P.J. Bowler, *Theories of Human Evolution: A Century of Debate, 1844-1944*, Oxford, 1986; and P.J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, Berkeley, 1984.

¹⁷ See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.69-74.

¹⁸ See J. Gruber, "Brixham Cave and the Antiquity of Man" in Darnell (ed.), *Readings in the History of Anthropology*, pp.385-87.

as a science, for it provided a new dimension to human existence.¹⁹ Contemporary anthropologists were well aware of the significance of extending the frontiers of time. In arguing the plausibility of the theory that man and ape shared a common ancestry, T.H. Huxley pointed out that "if any form of the doctrine of progressive development is correct, we must extend by long epochs the most liberal estimate that has yet been made of the antiquity of Man".²⁰ John Lubbock asserted that evolutionary theory demanded the origin of man to be dated much earlier than the commonly accepted geological teachings would suppose.²¹ Alfred Russell Wallace argued that the theory of natural selection would "enable us to place the origin of man at a much more remote geological epoch than has yet been thought possible".²²

However, it was one thing to assert that Darwinian theory posited the enormous antiquity of man; it was quite another to have solid evidence of that antiquity. By the 1860s the temporal scale had expanded enormously, but there were no archaeological or geological finds which directly supported a theory of the gradual development of man from an ape-like ancestor.²³ The limited available human fossil material, such as the crania from Engis and Neanderthal, did not reveal the sorts of anatomical changes which could be expected according to Darwinian theory. Faced with a paucity of empirical evidence, the mid-nineteenth century champions of evolution adopted two basic expedients. One was to assert that the fossil evidence was there; it had

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, pp.389-403.

²⁰ T.H. Huxley, *Man's Place in Nature*, Michigan, 1959, (1863), p.184.

²¹ J. Lubbock, *Pre-Historic Times, as Illustrated by the Ancient Remains and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages*, 2nd edn, London, 1869, pp.376-412.

²² A.R. Wallace, "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man deduced from the Theory of 'Natural Selection'", *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol.2, 1864, p.clxvi.

²³ See F. Spencer, "Prologue to a Scientific Forgery: the British Eolithic Movement from Abbeville to Piltdown", in G.W. Stocking (ed.), *Bones, Bodies, Behaviour: Essays on Biological Anthropology*, Madison, Wisc., 1988, pp.86-92; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.146-50.

merely not yet been unearthed.²⁴ The other was to fill in the fossil gap with the established racial hierarchy. Thus was the Great Chain of Being reinstated into science.²⁵

T.H. Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature* conjured up a secularised version of the Great Chain, in which the similarities between ape and man indicated not the plenitude of God's creation but common biological descent.²⁶ Huxley discussed "the relations of man to the lower animals", carefully pointing out the numerous anatomical, physiological and psychological similarities which became all the more striking as he moved up the hierarchy of the animal kingdom to the apes. He concluded that "the structural differences which separate Man from the Gorilla and the Chimpanzee are not so great as those which separate the Gorilla from the lower apes".²⁷ Nonetheless, there was still a gap "between man and even the highest apes", and it would be "no less wrong than absurd to deny the existence of this chasm; but it is at least equally wrong and absurd to exaggerate its magnitude".²⁸ Huxley could refer to no creature, alive or extinct, which could fill the chasm between man and ape. He could only remark that the absence of evidence of transitional forms was common in biology.²⁹ The Engis and Neanderthal crania, he observed, did not "take us appreciably nearer to that lower pithecoïd form, by the modification of which [man] has, probably, become what he is".³⁰ In the course of his discussion of the fossils, Huxley pointed out certain similarities

²⁴ See for example Huxley, *Man's Place in Nature*, p.184; Lubbock, *Pre-Historic Times*, p.412. The expectation that fossil evidence for human evolution would be found, in the form of the remains of creatures intermediate between man and the apes, fed into the fossil-hunting enthusiasm of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with such finds as Java Man and Peking Man as well as such forgeries as Piltdown Man.

²⁵ Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, p.113.

²⁶ Huxley, *Man's Place in Nature*; see especially pp.125-32.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.123.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.123. On p.122 he pointed out that "the difference in weight of brain between the highest and the lowest men is far greater, both relatively and absolutely, than that between the lowest man and the highest ape".

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.124.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.183.

between Neanderthal and Australian Aboriginal skulls. His remarks were cautious, by no means indicating the identity of the two; still less that the Aborigine could be regarded as a missing link. Yet the clear implication of his comparison was that the Aborigines did embody peculiarly primitive anatomical features.³¹

In an aptly titled paper, "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man deduced from the Theory of 'Natural Selection'", delivered to the Anthropological Society of London in 1864, Alfred Russell Wallace addressed the problem of human riation from an evolutionary perspective. Endeavouring to reconcile the entrenched controversy between monogenists and polygenists, he explained:

how the two opposing views can be combined so as to eliminate the error and retain the truth in each, and it is by means of Mr. Darwin's celebrated theory of 'Natural Selection' that I hope to do this, and thus to harmonise the conflicting theories of modern anthropologists.³²

Wallace argued that since some early form of proto-man had developed the distinctively human attribute of intellect, natural selection had ceased to operate on his physical characteristics, working only on his "social, moral and intellectual faculties".³³ This led on the one hand to the remarkable adaptability of the human species, and on the other to the permanent establishment of distinct physical varieties. Wallace explained that:

man may have been, indeed I believe must have been, once a homogenous race; but it was at a period of which we have as yet discovered no remains, at a period so remote in his history, that he had not yet acquired that wonderfully developed brain, the organ of the mind, which now, even in his lowest examples, raises him far

³¹ See *ibid.*, pp.178-183.

³² Wallace, "Origin of Human Races", pp.clviii-clix. Darwinian theory had quickly become associated with the monogenist camp, partly for its implication of a single evolutionary transition from primate to man, partly for the fact that Darwin, Wallace, Huxley and the other early evolutionists were liberal humanitarians in political outlook, opposed to the racial determinism of the polygenists. Thus in delivering his paper to the Anthropological Society, Wallace was venturing into enemy territory, for the Anthropological Society was firmly polygenist in outlook, and dominated by the ardent racial determinist James Hunt. See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.239-73.

³³ See Wallace, "Origin of Human Races", especially pp.clxii-clxvi.

above the highest brutes; - at a period when he had the form but hardly the nature of man, when he neither possessed human speech, nor those sympathetic and moral feelings which in a greater or less degree everywhere now distinguish the race. Just in proportion as these truly human faculties became developed in him would his physical features become fixed and permanent, because the latter would be of less importance to his well being; he would be kept in harmony with the slowly changing universe around him, by an advance of mind, rather than by a change in body.³⁴

The one bodily part which Wallace conceded to remain under evolutionary pressure was the head. Intellectual development and cranial development were interdependent, so as mental faculties improved, man's brain "would have increased in size and complexity and his cranium have undergone corresponding changes of form".³⁵ Unlike other animals, "man's *body* will have remained generically, or even specifically, the same, while his *head* and *brain* alone will have undergone modification".³⁶

According to Wallace's argument, physical differences of race were, in themselves, relatively superficial and inconsequential. Yet they were the external markers of deeper and more significant differences of intellectual, moral and social qualities. By transposing the doctrine of survival of the fittest from the corporeal to the intellectual realm, Wallace was able to explain the persistence of physical variations within the human species. At the same time he was led to suppose that in the struggle for survival, some races had acquired a higher morality, a greater intellect and a superior sociability.³⁷ These non-material attributes were permanently fixed to the physical embodiments of the race, the connection being provided by the brain, "the organ of mind".³⁸ By grounding mentality and morality on the same universal natural law as that which accounted for racial differentiation, Wallace

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.clxvi.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.clxviii.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.clxix; italics in the original. Under questioning from a rather hostile audience, Wallace provided a spirited defence of his position on the stability of all human physical characteristics except the head; see especially p.clxxx.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, especially p.clxii.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.clxxxi.

rendered the difference between savage and civilised as one not merely of attainment but also of capacity. Those who had not progressed, could not progress. Thus they must succumb in the human struggle for survival; Wallace explained that:

It is the same great law of '*the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*', which leads to the inevitable extinction of all those low and mentally undeveloped populations with which Europeans come into contact. The red Indian in North America, and in Brazil; the Tasmanian, Australian and New Zealander in the southern hemisphere, die out, not from any one special cause, but from the inevitable effects of an unequal mental and physical struggle. The intellectual and moral, as well as the physical qualities of the European are superior; the same powers and capacities which have made him rise in a few centuries from the condition of the wandering savage with a scanty and stationary population to his present state of culture and advancement, with a greater average longevity, a greater average strength, and a capacity of more rapid increase, - enable him when in contact with the savage man, to conquer in the struggle for existence and to increase at his expense ...³⁹

Darwin was favourably impressed by Wallace's paper.⁴⁰ Although its initial audience, the members of the Anthropological Society, were not so commendatory, Wallace had conceded a number of significant polygenist principles. In particular, his hypothesis maintained the notion of fixity of racial type; ever since a long-ago point of human riation, the physical types had persisted, largely unmodified over time.⁴¹ His argument also continued the tradition of linking physical attributes with mental, moral and cultural

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp.clxiv-clxv; italics in the original. It may be noted that Wallace's introduction of the physical superiority of the European at this point sits oddly against his assertion that human evolution had been almost entirely shifted from the physical to the intellectual realm.

⁴⁰ Stepan, *Idea of Race*, p.57. Wallace claimed that his paper "received the approval both of Darwin himself and of Herbert Spencer"; A.R. Wallace, *Social Environment and Moral Progress*, London, 1913, p.99.

⁴¹ Wallace's manner of argumentation exemplifies what George Stocking has termed "the persistence of polygenist thought in post-Darwinian anthropology", and what Nancy Stepan has noted as the tenacious adherence of racial scientists to the concept of stability of type, despite its apparent incompatibility with the notion of evolutionary change; see Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, pp.42-68; Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp.47-110. Later race scientists did not necessarily adhere to the specifics of Wallace's hypothesis; but they did, largely, adhere to a concept of racial types as bounded entities which moved at different rates along an evolutionary pathway.

characteristics; all clustered together as innate qualities of a race. Wallace's paper was a fine demonstration of the power of the theory of evolution, explaining not only biological diversification but also progress in the realm of intellect and morality.⁴² Moreover, as George Stocking has remarked, Wallace "shifted the focus of interest in the debate over anthropogenesis from the physical to the mental and social evolution of man".⁴³ Stocking added that other influences, most notably a resurgence of Christian degenerationist explanations of savagery, also contributed to this shift.⁴⁴ According to the degenerationists, natural selection could not account for the emergence of the distinctively human attributes of language, religion, law and morality, and therefore as an explanation of the origins of man the theory was invalid.⁴⁵ Among those who attempted to rebut these objections, John Lubbock was particularly vociferous.

The title of Lubbock's first major publication, *Pre-historic Times, as illustrated by Ancient Remains and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages*, is revealing of his own and his contemporaries' scientific assumptions. So too is the structure of the book. Lubbock began with the Bronze Age, then went backward in time through the Swiss lake-dwellers and Danish mound-builders to the "cave men". Following this was a chapter entitled "On the

⁴² Within a few years of delivering this paper, Wallace performed an about-face on human evolution, insisting that the unique moral and intellectual qualities of man could not be explained in terms of natural selection but could be accounted for only by supernatural intervention. Although this retreat from naturalism was no doubt connected with his conversion to spiritualism, Wallace seems also to have been concerned to establish a version of progressive development which did not demand the ranking of races in a fixed hierarchy. See Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp.70-77.

⁴³ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.149.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.149.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Wallace himself, late in life, came to adopt a similar view, at least as far as the moral qualities were concerned. By the time of his last-published book, *Social Environment and Moral Progress*, Wallace had wandered far from evolutionary orthodoxy, to the extent of claiming that the Australian Aborigines "may have been descended from much more civilised remote ancestors, and are thus an example of degradation rather than of survival" (pp.33-34). In making the point that moral progress did not depend on race, the great co-founder of the theory of evolution by natural selection was led back to the old Christian view that savagery represented a degeneration from the civilised state.

Antiquity of Man", in which he admitted that the available archaeological and geological evidence did not go anywhere near far enough back in time to provide confirmation of evolutionary theory.⁴⁶ To fill this enormous temporal gap; Lubbock devoted the following three chapters, totalling one hundred and twenty pages, to the "Modern Savages". Their way of life, he declared, would "throw light on the ancient remains found in Europe, and on the condition of the early races which inhabited our continent".⁴⁷ He explained that because of the paucity of hard empirical data about ancient man:

the archaeologist is free to follow the methods which have been so successfully pursued in geology - the rude bone and stone implements of bygone ages being to the one what the remains of extinct animals are to the other. The analogy may be pushed even further than this.... [I]f we wish clearly to understand the antiquities of Europe, we must compare them with the rude implements and weapons still, or until lately, used by the savage races in other parts of the world. In fact, the Van Diemaner and South American are to the antiquary what the opossum and the sloth are to the geologist.⁴⁸

What these surviving primitive people displayed was a starkly ignoble savagery, in which brutal practices, depraved rituals and irrational fears jostled together on the pages of Lubbock's book; it was a state in which man was driven by the uncertainties of his livelihood "to the dreadful alternatives of cannibalism or death".⁴⁹ Yet this was no exercise in gratuitous denigration. The evolutionary argument demanded that some people be demoted to a level which made plausible the hypothesis of the animal origins of humanity.

⁴⁶ Lubbock, *Pre-historic Times*, pp.376-412.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.417.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.416. For an elucidation of some of the connections between geology and anthropology in the latter half of the nineteenth century see H. Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945*, Cambridge, 1991, pp.43-44.

⁴⁹ For Lubbock's depiction of the lives of the Australians and Tasmanians in these terms see *Pre-Historic Times*, especially pp.426-40, 583-85. Even this bleak view of savagery was not enough, Lubbock remarking that: "Their real condition is even worse and more abject than that which I have endeavoured to depict. I have been careful to quote only from trustworthy authorities, but there are many things stated by them which I have not ventured to repeat; and there are other facts which even the travellers themselves were ashamed to publish"; *ibid.*, p.571.

Lubbock's second major publication, *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man*, was a more ambitious attempt to reconstruct the social progress of early man. It was comprised almost entirely of descriptions of "the social and mental condition of savages, their art, their systems of marriage and relationship, their religions, language, moral character, and laws".⁵⁰ But Lubbock had no difficulty in reasoning from these to the ways of primeval humanity, for "the condition and habits of existing savages resemble in many ways ... those of our own ancestors".⁵¹ Like other nineteenth century practitioners of the comparative method, he regarded customs, beliefs, rituals and so forth as discrete things, which could be extracted out of their social context and legitimately compared with those of other peoples widely separated in space and time.⁵² Thus *The Origin of Civilisation*, like his previous book, gives the appearance of an ethnographic jumble, with strange customs, cruel practices and peculiar beliefs from around the world thrown together on its pages. Behind the apparent confusion - and the overtly intruded moralising of a Victorian gentleman - there was an argument; or rather, three related arguments which Lubbock set out as follows:

That existing savages are not the descendants of civilised ancestors.
That the primitive condition of man was one of utter barbarism.
That from this condition various races have independently raised themselves.⁵³

For the evolutionist, it was essential to insist that human beings had raised themselves independently - according to their innate human propensities and without the assistance of the Deity - from savagery to civilisation. For the purposes of argumentation, it was equally essential to assume that some human beings had failed to achieve that self-elevation. By using the savage

⁵⁰ J. Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man: Mental and Social Condition of Savages*, 6th edn, London, 1902, (1870), p.xvii.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.1.

⁵² For further elucidation of the comparative method in evolutionary anthropology see Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, pp.69-90; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.145-85; Bowler, *The Invention of Progress*, pp.34-37. For explication of the comparative method in both pre-Darwinian and post-Darwinian thought, see Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, especially pp.10-23, 152-54, 232-47.

⁵³ Lubbock, *Origin of Civilisation*, pp.506-07.

racess for this purpose, the stages of human evolution were illuminated. By the same means, progress in civilisation was equated with the evolution of humankind.⁵⁴

Edward Burnett Tylor was a much more systematic theorist than John Lubbock. With his focus firmly on the single issue of the progress of mankind from savagery to civilisation, Tylor displayed more clearly than many of his contemporaries the resemblances between late nineteenth century evolutionary theory and late eighteenth century stadial theories.⁵⁵ Sounding rather like a latter-day *philosophe*, he maintained that the "office of ethnography" was "to expose the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction".⁵⁶ According to Tylor's "doctrine of survivals", the crude cultural remnants of an earlier stage of human evolution could be transmitted to successive stages, where they no longer served any useful purpose, but nonetheless remained entrenched.⁵⁷ Effectively, this meant that in the evolution of culture, unfit customs, practices and institutions could survive as well as the fit.⁵⁸ However non-Darwinian it may have been, the doctrine of survivals was a useful tool for evolutionary anthropologists. On the one hand, it offered an explanation for apparent anomalies in the course of human progress; on the other, it

⁵⁴ This form of argumentation, and the bald equation of social progress with human evolution, was perhaps most prominently displayed in the appendix to *The Origin of Civilisation*, pp.509-52, where Lubbock tackled the degenerationist arguments of Dr. Whately and the Duke of Argyll.

⁵⁵ See Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, pp.115-16; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.156; Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, pp.248-52. Stocking, in *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.163-64, remarked that Tylor "made a point of emphasizing that his argument had been developed independently of both Darwin and Spencer"; he added that Tylor's anthropology nonetheless had "its genesis in the Darwinian debate".

⁵⁶ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, (1873), vol.2, p.410, cited in Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, p.85.

⁵⁷ For elucidation of Tylor's "doctrine of survivals" see Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.162-63; Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, pp.240-41; A. Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion*, London, 1988, pp.80-81

⁵⁸ For elaboration of this point see Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, pp.97-98. Although Tylor's doctrine may seem distinctly non-Darwinian, Darwin himself commended Tylor's work; see Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.163-64. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin drew freely on Tylor's writings.

enhanced the comparative method by permitting the temporal frontiers to be pushed further back, so that a society like that of the Australian Aborigines could be assumed not only to be primitive, but also to embody still more archaic traits from an earlier stage of primordial man. Tylor admitted the limitations to knowledge about the long-distant past, remarking that: "Every attempt to trace back the early history of civilisation tends, however remotely, towards an ultimate limit" in the stone age, "a state of art and science somewhat resembling that of the savage tribes of modern times".⁵⁹ Although he was cautious to note that an exact equation could not be made between modern savages and primordial man, the former did provide a basis upon which it was "convenient to reason".⁶⁰ Conveniently, reasoning along these lines with the comparative method and the doctrine of survivals, the anthropologist could reconstruct the earliest stages of human progress.

In Tylor's enterprise of tracing the course of human evolution, it was essential to assume that human beings were everywhere subject to the same natural laws; thus he maintained that it was:

no more reasonable to suppose the laws of mind differently constituted in Australia and in England, in the time of the cave-dwellers and in the time of the builders of sheet-iron houses, than to suppose that the laws of chemical combination were of one sort in the time of the coal-measures, and are of another now.⁶¹

In supposing the "laws of mind" to be constant across all humanity, Tylor was consistent with the Enlightenment doctrine of the psychic unity of mankind.⁶² However, psychic unity did not imply cultural equality. Tylor had no doubt

⁵⁹ E.B. Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*, (ed. P. Bohannan), Chicago, 1964, (1865), p.239.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.239.

⁶¹ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol.1, cited in Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.161-62.

⁶² See Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, pp.115-116; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.158-60; Burrow, *Evolution and Society*, pp.242-51. In *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, p.115, Stocking pointed out that Tylor's *Primitive Culture* "may be considered in a sense a study in mental evolution", for he regarded social and cultural progress as dependent upon increasing use of the rational faculty. Bowler, in *The Invention of Progress*, p.36, made a similar point with general application to Tylor's work. Kuklick went still further, claiming that evolutionary anthropologists as a whole "understood the culture of a group as the psychology of its individual members writ large"; Kuklick, *The Savage Within*, p.83.

that in "order of culture" the Australian, Tahitian, Aztec, Chinese and Italian peoples marked an ascending sequence.⁶³ Moreover, he was disarmingly honest about the manner in which this cultural hierarchy was constructed, remarking that:

the educated world of Europe and America practically settles a standard by simply placing its own nations at one end of the social series and savage tribes at the other, arranging the rest of mankind between these limits according as they correspond more closely to savage or to cultured life.⁶⁴

Universal mental laws did not imply intellectual equality, for differences of cultural attainment reflected differences in mental capacity. In his 1881 publication, *Anthropology*, Tylor maintained that:

the history of civilization teaches, that up to a certain point savages and barbarians are like what our ancestors were and our peasants still are, but from this common level the superior intellect of the progressive races has raised their nations to heights of culture.⁶⁵

Although Tylor was concerned with questions of culture rather than of race, like other scientists of his day he assumed that intellectual - and therefore cultural - characteristics were linked to biological attributes. Comparing the brains of Europeans with those of Africans, he remarked on "a connection between a more full and intricate system of brain-cells and fibres, and a higher intellectual power, in the races which have risen in the scale of civilization".⁶⁶

By the time Darwin published at length on human origins, in 1871, he could comment that the "principle of evolution" had come to be "admitted by the greater number of rising men".⁶⁷ Nonetheless, he saw fit to attack the degenerationist explanation of savagery, at the same time presenting his own theory as both optimistic and progressive; he contended that:

⁶³ See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.162.

⁶⁴ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol.1, cited in Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.162.

⁶⁵ E.B. Tylor, *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization*, New York, 1894, (1881), p.75.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*; p.60.

⁶⁷ Darwin, *Descent of Man*, vol.1, p.229.

To believe that man was aboriginally civilised and then suffered utter degradation in so many regions, is to take a pitifully low view of human nature. It is apparently a truer and more cheerful view that progress has been much more general than retrogression; that man has risen, though by slow and interrupted steps, from a lowly condition to the highest standard as yet attained by him in knowledge, morals, and religion.⁶⁸

And, as he commented at the very end of the *Descent of Man*, the considerations contained therein offered "hopes for a still higher destiny in the distant future".⁶⁹ Darwin dispensed with a theological, but not with a teleological, interpretation of nature.

To demonstrate the tenability of the hypothesis that man was "the modified descendant of some pre-existing form",⁷⁰ Darwin drew upon evidence and argument from a diversity of disciplines: biology, anatomy, physiology, geology, archaeology, ethnology and ethnography were all called into service. Like Huxley, he pointed out the similarities of bodily structure between man and animals; but he went further than Huxley in attempting to demonstrate an intellectual and moral continuity between the two.⁷¹ From this he concluded that while there could be "no doubt that the difference between the mind of the lowest man and that of the highest animal is immense", the difference "is certainly one of degree and not of kind".⁷² In reasoning from similarity of attributes to commonality of origins, Darwin resorted to Lamarckian theories of use-inheritance and to non-adaptive evolutionary mechanisms. Admitting that in the *Origin* he had "probably attributed too much to the action of natural selection", he argued that the evolution of the human species would "have been greatly aided by the inherited effects of the increased use of parts" and that "various unimportant

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, pp.183-84.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, vol.2, p.405.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, vol.1, p.9.

⁷¹ See *ibid.*, pp.70-106.

⁷² *ibid.*, pp.104-05.

characters [would] have been acquired by man through sexual selection".⁷³ Doctrines of use-inheritance were particularly convenient for explaining how the rudimentary mental and moral attributes of animals had given rise to the high intellectual and ethical standards of mankind. So too, the practices of savage and barbarous races were useful in bridging the enormous moral and intellectual gap between ape and civilised man. The idea of social progress was explicitly linked to the theory of the animal ancestry of humanity, Darwin arguing that because "we have to consider the steps by which some semi-human creature has been gradually raised to the rank of man in his most perfect state", it was necessary to establish that "all civilised nations were once barbarous".⁷⁴

Perhaps nowhere in the *Descent* was the comparison of savage man with the animals more uncomplimentary to the former than in the rhetorical flourishes at the end of the second volume:

The main conclusion arrived at in this work, namely that man is descended from some lowly organised form, will, I regret to think, be highly distasteful to many persons. But there can hardly be a doubt that we are descended from barbarians. The astonishment which I felt on first seeing a party of Fuegians on a wild and broken shore will never be forgotten by me, for the reflection at once rushed into my mind - such were our ancestors. These men were absolutely naked and bedaubed with paint, their long hair was tangled, their mouths frothed with excitement, and their expression was wild, startled, and distrustful. They possessed hardly any arts, and like wild animals lived on what they could catch; they had no government, and were merciless to every one not of their own small tribe. He who has seen a savage in his native land will not feel much shame, if forced to acknowledge that the blood of some more humble creature flows in his veins. For my own part I would as soon be descended from that

⁷³ *ibid.*, pp.152-54. The significance which Darwin attributed to the non-adaptive mechanism of sexual selection is attested by the fact that in the work published in 1871, *The Descent of Man and Selection in relation to Sex*, three quarters of its pages were devoted to the latter topic, only one quarter focussing specifically on the former. Sexual selection was Darwin's preferred means of explaining the origins and persistence of the distinguishing physical markers of race, such as skin colour and nose shape. Like Wallace, he assumed that racial diversification had happened long ago, and since that time the race types had remained more or less stable.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp.180-81. On the latter point, Darwin merely sketched out the arguments for social evolution, referring his readers to the "full and admirable" accounts by John Lubbock, E.B. Tylor and John McLennan.

heroic little monkey, who braved his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper; or from that old baboon, who, descending from the mountains, carried away in triumph his young comrade from a crowd of astonished dogs - as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practices infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions.⁷⁵

Yet Darwin was a man of liberal humanitarian outlook, who was dismayed by the racial views of the polygenists and disgusted by such practices as negro slavery.⁷⁶ Scientific argumentation, however, demanded a savage of brutal propensities. There was no 'missing link' to hand, to bridge the gap between anthropoid ancestor and modern man, so savages had perforce to fulfil this role.

In terms reminiscent of the Great Chain of Being, Darwin admitted the existence of this gap, explaining that:

The great break in the organic chain between man and his nearest allies, which cannot be bridged over by any extinct or living species, has often been advanced as a grave objection to the belief that man is descended from some lower form; but this objection will not appear of much weight to those who, convinced by general reasons, believe in the general principles of evolution. Breaks incessantly occur in all parts of the series, some being wide, sharp and defined, others less so in various degrees ...⁷⁷

He went on to explain how the gap could be filled, using both the established hierarchy of races and the process of survival of the fittest - or rather its corollary, the extinction of the unfit. All these breaks, he argued:

depend merely on the number of related forms which have become extinct. At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races. At the same time the anthropomorphous apes ... will no doubt be exterminated. The break will then be rendered wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilised state, as we may hope, than the Caucasian, and

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, vol.2, pp.404-05.

⁷⁶ See G. Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought: The Interaction between Biological and Social Theory*, Sussex, 1980, pp.140-41.

⁷⁷ Darwin, *Descent of Man*, vol.1, p.200. Darwin's argument here is interesting, for he was suggesting that if the reader first put his or her faith in the "general principles of evolution", then problems with the supportive evidence would "not appear of much weight".

some ape as low as a baboon, instead of as at present between the negro or Australian and the gorilla.⁷⁸

A number of implications in the above passage are worthy of consideration. First, there was an assumption that the future course of human evolution was predictable; it would follow its accustomed path toward a higher state of civilisation.⁷⁹ Secondly, the primitivity of the savage races was seen to inhere in far more than merely their social and cultural characteristics; for they embodied, to a greater extent than did civilised people, features of humanity's anthropoid ancestry. In the third place, racial extinction was offered as supportive evidence for the evolutionary hypothesis; or rather, perhaps, it was proffered as an explanation of why that supportive evidence was lacking.

In the literature of classical evolutionism, the concepts of race and progress were both pressed into service to fill a major hiatus in the narrative account of the natural origins of man and his civilisation. The various races were rendered stages in a developmental sequence; but unlike the superficially similar scheme of the Enlightenment, in the evolutionary version it was a developmental sequence not only of society but also of biology. Human anatomy, mentality, culture and society all marched in step, within discrete racial units. By making the transition from savagery to civilisation an integral part of the evolution of the human species, the latter process was imbued with both meaning and direction. Human evolution was thereby cast into an

⁷⁸ Darwin, *Descent*, p.201. Again, the argumentative strategy deserves comment. Here, Darwin postulated that in human evolution, the lower types of man would become extinct. Yet in primate evolution, it was the higher apes which would suffer this fate, the lower types surviving. He offered no explanation for this anomaly.

⁷⁹ This is not to claim that Darwin conceived the evolution of man as nothing but the progress of civilisation; it is rather to note that he did make the latter an essential part of the former. For explication of Darwin's indebtedness to contemporary ideas of social progress see Jones, *Social Darwinism*, especially pp.18-24; Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, pp.113-15. In Bowler's works, Darwin tends to be portrayed as a somewhat unwilling accomplice of the progressivists; see for example *The Invention of Progress*, *Theories of Human Evolution*, and *The Non-Darwinian Revolution*. Be that as it may, Darwin's published writings did champion the cause of progress and did present human evolution as both directional and progressive. The claim, which has recently been recycled by Adam Kuper in *The Invention of Primitive Society*, that Darwin's theory did not imply progress or direction and that these elements were introduced by other evolutionary anthropologists, has little tenability.

altogether different shape from organic evolution. In the *Origin*, Darwin used the analogy of a growing tree of life, constantly putting forth new shoots and branches, to illustrate the process of speciation in the organic world. Human evolution, on the other hand, was not a process of diversification but one of development in a single direction, in which process some races had progressed further than others. Parallel lines of progress, of unequal length, rather than an ever-ramifying tree, best illustrates the late nineteenth century conception of human evolution.⁸⁰ George Stocking has pointed out that:

In contrast to animals, both mankind and the process of civilization seemed essentially to be one. What was therefore required was not an origin of cultural species but an evolution of human civilization - an explanation that was uniformitarian not only in process but in outcome.⁸¹

But it was not strictly uniform in outcome. Those races which had surged ahead in the evolutionary struggle would maintain the progress of civilisation; those which had stagnated, like the Australian Aborigines, were doomed to perish.

In the writings of the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, the notion that human evolution followed a single developmental sequence was particularly prominent. So too was his debt to Enlightenment stage theory, as indicated by the sub-title of his major work: *Ancient Society: or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization*.⁸² In reconstructing the "pathways of human progress from savagery to civilization"⁸³, Morgan posited seven distinct stepping-stones, rather than the three or four of the *philosophes*. They were, however,

⁸⁰ J.A. Barnes, in "Anthropology in Britain before and after Darwin", *Mankind*, vol.5, no.9, July 1960, p.384, pointed out the inapplicability of Darwin's tree analogy to the scheme of human evolution.

⁸¹ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.178.

⁸² Marc Swetlitz has pointed out that during Morgan's student days, "Scottish Common Sense philosophy pervaded the intellectual landscape of American universities"; M. Swetlitz, "The Minds of Beavers and the Minds of Humans: Natural Suggestion, Natural Selection, and Experiment in the Work of Lewis Henry Morgan", in Stocking (ed.), *Bones, Bodies, Behaviour*, pp.59-60.

⁸³ L.H. Morgan, *Ancient Society: or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilisation*, New York, 1877, pp.vi-vii.

elaborations of the Enlightenment stages, as his own outline of his scheme reveals:

- I. Lower Status of Savagery, From the Infancy of the Human Race to the commencement of the next Period.
- II. Middle Status of Savagery, From the acquisition of a fish subsistence and a knowledge of the use of fire, to etc.
- III. Upper Status of Savagery, From the Invention of the Bow and Arrow, to etc.
- IV. Lower Status of Barbarism, From the Invention of the Art of Pottery, to etc.
- V. Middle Status of Barbarism, From the Domestication of animals on the Eastern Hemisphere, and in the Western from the cultivation of maize and plants by Irrigation, with the use of adobe-brick and stone, to etc.
- VI. Upper Status of Barbarism, From the Invention of the process of Smelting Iron Ore, with the use of iron tools, to etc.
- VII. Status of Civilization, From the Invention of a Phonetic Alphabet, with the use of writing, to the present time.⁸⁴

For the purpose of charting the course of human progress, it was unfortunate that no living people remained in the Lower Status of Savagery. However there were still races in the Middle Status of Savagery; these were "the Australians and the greater part of the Polynesians".⁸⁵ In more detail, Morgan explained that:

The Australians rank below the Polynesians, and far below the American aborigines. They stand below the African negro and near the bottom of the scale. Their social institutions, therefore, must approach the primitive type as nearly as those of any existing people.⁸⁶

His theories were to be an important influence on early evolutionary anthropology in Australia.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, pp.12-13. Perhaps the major difference from Enlightenment stage theory was in Status VII, where instead of defining civilisation in terms of the development of agriculture, Morgan shifted the criteria from the mode of production of material goods to the mode of production of knowledge.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.10.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.51. For data about savages, Morgan relied heavily on ethnographic accounts of the American Indians, particularly the Iroquois, with whom he was personally acquainted. His data on the Australians was more limited; but the source of much of it was a reputable one: the Methodist missionary Lorimer Fison.

"The history of the human race is one in source, one in experience, and one in progress", Morgan declared.⁸⁷ But this assertion of a common human nature was qualified by an assumption of significant human differences, not only of achievement but also of ability. Running alongside his celebration of progress was a theory of cerebral evolution, whereby intellectual advancements led to the improvement and enlargement of the brain. In Lamarckian fashion he explained that:

With the production of inventions and discoveries, and with the growth of institutions, the human mind necessarily grew and expanded; and we are led to recognize a gradual enlargement of the brain itself, particularly of the cerebral portion.⁸⁸

Within each of the seven stages of progress there was a "uniformity" in the "operations of the human mind".⁸⁹ However, between the peoples in Stage II and those in Stage VII there was a vast gulf, not merely of social attainment but also of cranial and intellectual capacity. Thus Morgan could write that his seven-stage sequence "has been historically true of the entire human family, up to the status attained by each branch respectively".⁹⁰ The qualifying phrases were significant, for he held out little hope that those who still remained in the lower stages could ever ascend to the top.⁹¹ Social and cerebral evolution together had pushed some races far ahead in their quest for the Status of Civilisation; and Morgan had no doubts about which races these were. He asserted that:

From the Middle Period of barbarism ... the Aryan and Semitic families seem fairly to represent the central threads of this progress, which in the period of civilization has been gradually assumed by the Aryan family alone.⁹²

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.vi.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.37; see also p.61. For a detailed explication of Morgan's theories of mental and cerebral evolution see Swetlitz, "The Minds of Beavers and the Minds of Humans", pp.56-83; see also Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, pp.116-20.

⁸⁹ Morgan, *Ancient Society*, p.vi.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, pp.3-4.

⁹¹ See *ibid.*, p.viii; L.H. Morgan, "Prefatory Note" to L. Fison and A.W. Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai: Group Marriage and Relationship and Marriage by Elopement, drawn chiefly from the usage of the Australian Aborigines*, Melbourne, 1880, pp.2-3.

⁹² Morgan, *Ancient Society*, p.40.

If the pathway of progress was shared by all humanity, only the Aryan strode confidently along it; other races meandered, stumbled and fell. With characteristic self-confidence, Morgan proclaimed that:

The Aryan family represents the central stream of human progress, because it has produced the highest type of mankind, and because it has proved its intrinsic superiority by gradually assuming the control of the earth.⁹³

Morgan's scheme of human evolution may be regarded as a resuscitation of Enlightenment stage theory, with biological and racial considerations tacked on. Alternatively, it may be interpreted as part of the late nineteenth century revival of concern about the nature of progress, of which the Darwinian revolution was one manifestation. Perhaps both come to much the same thing.

A Stone Age Race in an Advancing Australia

The Origin of Species was available in Australia soon after its publication in England, and its theories quickly became issues of disputation in the colonies. Religious circles were among the more prominent arenas of debate, and as Walter Phillips has pointed out, there was a degree of respect and open-mindedness toward Darwinian theory amongst Protestant colonial churchmen in the 1860s and 1870s. Over the following decade, open-mindedness led increasingly into acceptance, albeit of a variety of evolutionary theory which retained a place for God as original creator.⁹⁴ In the field of social thought, Darwinism made an early impact in Australia, perhaps its first major manifestation being the 1863 publication *Plutology*, by the Professor of History and Political Economy at the University of Melbourne, W.E. Hearn. Thereafter, there was no lack of colonial books and articles promoting one variant or another of that broad spectrum of ideas which has been labelled

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.553.

⁹⁴ W.W. Phillips, "Religious Response to Darwin in Australia in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Australian Studies*, no.26, May 1990, pp.37-51. On the other hand, Ann Mozley, in "Evolution and the Climate of Opinion in Australia, 1840-76", *Victorian Studies*, vol.10, June 1967, pp.411-30, argued that at least until the late 1870s, Darwinism received very limited appreciation, and still less acceptance, in the colonies. However, Mozley's portrayal of the ultimate endorsement of Darwinism, as a victory of scientific rationalism over the forces of religious obscurantism, does justice neither to Darwin nor to his opponents.

Social Darwinism.⁹⁵ By the 1870s H.K. Rusden, secretary of the Royal Society of Victoria, was invoking the natural law of survival of the fittest to promote an extreme *laissez faire* doctrine; and shortly thereafter radicals and socialists were invoking the same law to buttress arguments for state intervention in economic matters.⁹⁶ While much of this social Darwinist literature did not directly address Aboriginal issues, it did serve to consolidate the connection between the theory of evolution and the idea of progress.

Interestingly, Darwinism seems to have been rather slow to make an impact on colonial anthropology. This appears all the more remarkable for the fact that Darwin, Huxley, Lubbock, Tylor and the other classic evolutionists freely cited the Australian Aborigine as an example of primitive man. Until at least the late 1870s there were few colonial attempts to apply evolutionary theory, in any systematic way, to the primitive peoples who were to hand. Indeed, many Australian writers of the late nineteenth century continued to offer degenerationist explanations of Aboriginal savagery.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ See C.D. Goodwin, "Evolution Theory in Australian Social Thought", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.25, 1964, pp.393-416. The applicability and viability of the term "Social Darwinism" has been the subject of considerable academic disputation; see for example Jones, *Social Darwinism*; M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*, New York, 1968, pp.122-30. R.J. Halliday, in "Social Darwinism: a Definition", *Victorian Studies*, vol.14, no.4, June 1971, pp.389-405, attempted to delimit the applicability of the term more closely. However, in my own view, 'Social Darwinism' is a useful term because it is somewhat nebulous. Darwinian ideas were utilised by social theorists from the left, right and centre, to buttress programs ranging from extreme *laissez faire* to total state collectivisation. The features common to all were the presumed connection, at least by analogy, between society and biology; the salience given to the natural law of survival of the fittest, whether at a group or an individual level; and a faith that this law provided a guide to progress.

⁹⁶ See Goodwin, "Evolution Theory in Australian Social Thought", pp.398-410. Goodwin also pointed out that, particularly from the 1890s, the state interventionists were ascendant in Australia; see pp.410-15. While Rusden championed extreme *laissez faire* in economic matters, he advocated extreme state intervention in human reproduction; his eugenic views were concisely set out in his aptly titled paper "The Survival of the Unfittest" in *Report of the Fifth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1893, pp.523-24.

⁹⁷ See for example G. Taplin, "The Narrinyeri" in J.D. Woods (ed.), *The Native Tribes of South Australia*, Adelaide, 1879, pp.119-22; T. Worsnop, *Prehistoric Arts, Works, etc of the Aborigines of Australia*, Adelaide, c.1897, especially pp.9-10; D. MacKillop, "Anthropological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of the Daly River, North Australia", *Transactions and Proceedings and Report of the Royal Society of South Australia*, vol.17, 1892-1893, especially p.263.

Typical publications of the day were the vast compilations of ethnographic data, collected by numerous individuals and organised on no coherent theoretical lines.⁹⁸ In one of these compilations, Brough Smyth's *Aborigines of Victoria*, there were two articles by the amateur scientist A.W. Howitt. The first, "Notes on the Aborigines of Cooper's Creek", originally written in 1871, was an uninspired recounting of peculiar customs, means of subsistence and sign language.⁹⁹ The second was strikingly different; it was an analysis of the "system of consanguinity and kinship of the Brabrolong tribe" as a stage in the evolution of marriage toward its highest, "monogamian" form.¹⁰⁰ Comparing these two articles, it seems that evolutionary theory lent, at the very least, coherence to Howitt's ethnographic investigations.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the capacity of evolutionary theory to render ethnographic data coherent may have been one of its major attractions, not only for Howitt but for a great many of his contemporaries as well.

Howitt had been converted to the evolutionary perspective in the early 1870s, through reading the standard British writers on the subject: Darwin, Lubbock, Tylor, Lyell, Galton.¹⁰² However the strongest influence on his

⁹⁸ See for example E.M. Curr (ed.), *The Australian Race: Its Origin, Languages, Customs, Place of Landing in Australia and the Routes by which it spread itself over that Continent*, 4 vols, Melbourne, 1886; R.B. Smyth (ed.), *The Aborigines of Victoria: With Notes relating to the Habits of the Natives of Other Parts of Australia and Tasmania*, 2 vols, Melbourne, 1876 (Facsimile edn, Melbourne, 1972). These works, perhaps, indicate something about the nature of colonial science, as an exporter of raw empirical data to a metropolitan theoretical manufactory - though the metaphor is of only limited applicability.

⁹⁹ A.W. Howitt, "Notes on the Aborigines of Coopers Creek" in Smyth (ed.), *The Aborigines of Victoria*, vol.2, pp.300-09.

¹⁰⁰ A.W. Howitt, "Notes on the System of Consanguinity and Kinship of the Brabrolong Tribe, North Gippsland" in Smyth (ed.), *The Aborigines of Victoria*, vol.2, pp.323-32.

¹⁰¹ For elaboration of this point see D.J. Mulvaney, "Patron and Client: The Web of Intellectual Kinship in Australian Anthropology" in N. Reingold and M. Rothenberg (eds), *Scientific Colonialism: A Cross-Cultural Comparison*, Washington, D.C., 1987, pp.64-66; D.J. Mulvaney, "Gum Leaves on the Golden Bough: Australia's Palaeolithic Survivals Discovered" in J.D. Evans, B. Cunliffe and C. Renfrew (eds), *Antiquity and Man: Essays in Honour of Glynn Daniel*, London, 1981, p.57.

¹⁰² D.J. Mulvaney, "The Ascent of Aboriginal Man: Howitt as Anthropologist", in M.H. Walker, *Come Wind, Come Weather: A Biography of Alfred Howitt*, Melbourne, 1971, p.291.

work was the American, Lewis Henry Morgan, to whose writings he had been introduced by the Methodist missionary Lorimer Fison.¹⁰³ In the late 1870s, Howitt and Fison collaborated in writing what was to be the first Australian classic of evolutionary anthropology, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, published in 1880. Morgan wrote a preface, in which he explained the significance of the researches of Howitt and Fison:

In a lower ethnical condition than the [American Indians, the Australian Aborigines] now represent the condition of mankind in savagery better than it is elsewhere represented on the earth - a condition now rapidly passing away, through the destructive influence of superior races. Moreover, it is a condition of society which has not hitherto been thought worthy of special scientific investigation, although it is one of the stages of progress through which the more advanced tribes and nations of mankind have passed in their early history, and although some of the more important institutions of civilized states must be sought, in their rudimentary forms, in this very condition of savagery in which they originated.¹⁰⁴

Although Fison and Howitt did not slavishly follow the doctrines laid down by the American theorist, they did adhere to a Morganian scheme of human progress. Fison was particularly forthright in his progressive assumptions, referring to evolution as "a steady progress toward the *individualizing of the individual*".¹⁰⁵ Following the evolutionary process, he wrote:

at length we come to the civilised man with his personal rights and possessions and his gospel of political economy teaching him that self-seeking on the part of the individual must result in the greater good of the greater number.¹⁰⁶

At the other end of the scale of progress were those whom the anthropologist studied.

Colonial anthropology was set on an institutional footing in 1888, with its inclusion as Section G at the first meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science. The assistant-secretary of the Royal Society of Victoria, Dr. John Wild, delivered the first paper, "Outlines of

¹⁰³ See *ibid.*, pp.289-96; Mulvaney, "Gum Leaves on the Golden Bough", pp.57-59; Mulvaney, "Patron and Client", pp.64-66.

¹⁰⁴ Morgan, "Prefatory Note" to Fison and Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, pp.2-3.

¹⁰⁵ Fison and Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, p.128; italics in the original.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.128.

Anthropology". It was an enthusiastic paean to the progress of civilisation, of colonial society and of modern science. Anthropology, he declared, was a new science which had originated in "the intense intellectual activity characteristic of the Nineteenth Century".¹⁰⁷ Distinguishing it from earlier inquiries into the human condition, anthropology was "strictly scientific", its object being the "critical examination of the intellectual and material progress of man from the earliest ages down to the present".¹⁰⁸ Already, the "apparently impenetrable curtain, which, until lately separated us from the life of the pre-historic races, has been lifted up", to reveal, "to our astonished gaze ... our remote ancestors slowly toiling up towards the stage of civilisation".¹⁰⁹ This revelation was the product both of the "spade and pickaxe" work of archaeologists in Europe and the Middle East, and of the "better acquaintance" which had been made with various "aboriginal tribes", including the Australians. The latter had "thrown much light upon the difficulties with which mankind had to contend at the beginning, and also upon the moral and intellectual conditions which appertain to the earliest stages of the human race".¹¹⁰

According to Dr Wild, the reality of progress had been validated by science. Anthropology revealed, he wrote, that although civilisation:

has been the outcome of a long struggle extending over thousands, and may be [sic] tens of thousands of years, we have evidence of a steady advance commencing with the first dawn of human life upon this globe, and that in spite of the numerous and terrible catastrophes which have overwhelmed one period of civilisation after another, the higher type of man, like the phoenix of the fable, has always sprung up again from its ashes in order to continue its course towards a still higher destiny.¹¹¹

Wild concluded his paper with a reference to the "wonderful progress" which had been made by the Australasian colonies, asserting that this "must react favourably upon all intellectual pursuits" and "contribute to the glory of a

¹⁰⁷ J.J. Wild, "Outlines of Anthropology" in *Report of the First Meeting of the AAAS*, 1888, p.442.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, pp.442-43.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.444.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp.444-45.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.446.

nation and secure for it an honourable place in the annals of the future".¹¹² Like Fison, Wild baldly equated evolution with progress. Like Fison too, he invoked the Aborigines as a counterpoint to the progress of his own society.

Fison was emphatic that all peoples "*have progressed*".¹¹³ However, while all were "on the way" toward a higher social stage, "we do not find them all in the same stage of the journey".¹¹⁴ Primitive people merely appeared to be in a condition of social stasis, "because their progress, like that of the so-called fixed stars, is imperceptible to us as we watch".¹¹⁵ Thus they provided the anthropologist with convenient windows onto the past; Fison maintained that:

We are indebted to the strong conservatism of savage tribes for this reproduction of the past. The savage, when once he has become *set*, so to speak, is a conservative of the conservatives. He encases himself ... in 'a hard shell of custom,' the main form of which is unalterable.¹¹⁶

In classic evolutionary fashion, Fison argued that it was disparities in the pace of progress that permitted the anthropologist to reconstruct human antiquity. The study of so primitive a people as the Australian Aborigines would shed an "astonishing light" on the process by which civilisation was attained by the more progressive races.¹¹⁷ Drawing on Tylor's theory of cultural survivals, Fison pointed out that:

Our own modern civilisation, too, is full of fossilised anomalies, which by the aid of savage custom can be traced back to a time when they were full of life.¹¹⁸

In the view of Fison and his fellow evolutionists, the primary purpose of the study of Aboriginal society was to promote a deeper understanding of Western civilisation.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.446.

¹¹³ L. Fison, "Anthropology: Address by the President" in *Report of the Fourth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1892, p.149; italics in the original.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.149.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.149.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.147-48; italics in the original.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.146-47.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.146.

Both Fison and Howitt claimed a connection between Aboriginal anthropology and classical studies. Howitt explained that examination of the "social life of savages" would:

- throw an unexpected light on the most obscure practices of antiquity - namely, on the mysteries of classical times whose origin has only been a matter for conjecture.¹¹⁹

Partly, this may have been an attempt to imbue the new science of anthropology with the respectability of the classics. More pertinently, however, it seems that classical times - especially ancient Greece - were seized upon because they represented a key stage in human progress: in Morganian terms, the transition from the Upper Status of Barbarism to the Status of Civilization. Aborigines were ranked well below the status of barbarism; yet therein lay their significance from an evolutionary perspective, for they represented a root stock of the tree which came to flower in Attic civilisation, and which more recently bore fruit in the form of modern Western culture.

According to Howitt:

in the varied series of social communities existing in Australian tribes, we may safely mark the gradual development of early society, which through savagery had led up, through the status of barbarism, to the present position of civilized man.¹²⁰

In his 1891 address to the Royal Society of Victoria he offered a revealing precis of his anthropological assumptions. Beginning with the assertion that Aborigines remained "in as nearly a primitive condition as it is possible to find in any part of the world",¹²¹ he explained that:

In Australia, if anywhere, one might expect to find primitive institutions preserved. The aborigines are in a low ethnic stage. They have been preserved until the settlement of their country by the white man through unknown periods almost wholly from contact with other races in a different stage of culture. Therefore, one might seek with good chances of success among them for, at the least, traces of the earlier form of the family and of society.¹²²

¹¹⁹ A.W. Howitt, "Address by the President [of Section G, Anthropology]" in *Report of the Third Meeting of the AAAS*, 1891, p.342; see also p.348. Fison made a similar remark in his "Anthropology: Address by the President", pp.145-46.

¹²⁰ A.W. Howitt, "Anthropology in Australia", *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*, new series, vol.3, 1891, p.20.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.14.

¹²² *ibid.*, p.18.

He then sketched out the early evolution of the family, from a state of unlimited promiscuity to one of "regulated promiscuity, such as is now found existing in many of the Australian tribes".¹²³ More advanced by millennia, monogamy was the practice of civilised people.

Into his account of social evolution, Howitt integrated an exposition of progress in science. Contemporary understandings of the evolution of the family, he claimed, had been reached:

by a series of stages, in each of which a certain advance was made upon previous hypotheses. This is indeed just that which one may observe in any of the sciences. Step by step data are accumulated as the horizon widens, and each advance establishes some part of the previous hypothesis, while it sweeps away those portions which have been based upon insufficient data.¹²⁴

He admitted that knowledge about the social organisation of Australian tribes was "still incomplete in many important details", and that new data may necessitate some modification of theory. But, he asserted:

I am satisfied it will be found that all information will fall into an orderly sequence of development from an undivided commune, with maternal descent, to a community in which individual marriage is completely established, together with a change of descent to the male line.¹²⁵

Such was Howitt's faith in the validity of the evolutionary perspective that he maintained that further scientific research could only serve to confirm it.

Among the tasks still remaining in Australian anthropology, Howitt pointed out the need for "investigations as to the racial affinities of our aborigines, including peculiarities or divergences of physical structure".¹²⁶ Although he was primarily an investigator of Aboriginal society and culture, he did devote some attention to matters of race. In 1898 he published a paper, "On the Origin of the Aborigines of Tasmania and Australia", which

¹²³ *ibid.*, p.19.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.19.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p.20.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.20.

reviewed a considerable body of the literature on this topic.¹²⁷ After discussing various hypotheses on Aboriginal origins and affinities, Howitt concluded that:

Of all the attempted solutions of this problem, that which has been offered by Sir W.H. Flower and Mr. R. Lydekker appears to me most nearly to fit in with the requirements of this case. They suggest that Australia was originally peopled by frizzly-haired Melanesians, such as the Tasmanians, but that there was a strong infusion of some other race, probably a low form of Caucasian Melanochroi.¹²⁸

Outside Australia, the Caucasian Melanochroi were represented by such people as the Dravidians of India, whose racial affinities with the Australians had earlier been suggested by T.H. Huxley.¹²⁹ If Aborigines were partly descended from a dark-skinned Caucasian sub-race, then they had affinities, however remote, with European people. For Howitt and his contemporaries, however, the salient scientific issue was not the Aborigines' distant racial kinship with whites, but their close analogy to primeval man. The "lowest of modern nomad tribes" were the Tasmanians, a Negroid race;¹³⁰ at the time Howitt wrote, there were none of full-descent surviving. The Australians, compounded out of the original Tasmanian Negroids and the later dark Caucasians, "were in a higher state of culture ... representing hunting tribes of the neolithic age".¹³¹ Science had to be content with these.

¹²⁷ A.W. Howitt, "On the Origin of the Aborigines of Tasmania and Australia" in *Report of the Seventh Meeting of the AAAS*, 1898, pp.723-58. This paper was reproduced verbatim, except for the introductory paragraph, as the first chapter of Howitt's monograph, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, London, 1904, pp.1-33. Apart from anything else, the paper provides a fine illustration of the complexity of contemporary racial science. With their adherence to a notion of the fixity of racial type, scientists dealt with the increasing evidence of human diversity by continually multiplying the number of racial and sub-racial categories. The eminent British anthropological authority A.C. Haddon alluded to this process; see A.C. Haddon and A.H. Quiggin, *History of Anthropology*, London, 1910, p.93.

¹²⁸ Howitt, "On the Origin of the Aborigines", p.749; see also pp.745, 750.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, pp.750-51. In 1870, T.H. Huxley had proposed the Australoid as one of the primary racial categories of humanity, including within it the Dravidians; see T.H. Huxley, "On the Geographical Distribution of the Chief Modifications of Mankind", *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, new series, vol.2, 1870, pp.404-12.

¹³⁰ Howitt, "On the Origin of the Aborigines", pp.729, 741, 750. Unlike many specialists in racial classification, Howitt does not appear to have clearly distinguished between Negroid and Negrito races.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, pp.729, 741.

In his paper "On the Origin of the Aborigines", Howitt pulled together data from a diverse range of fields - geology, palaeontology, philology, material culture studies, anatomy, ethnography - in order to answer a question which was fundamentally biological: to what other races were the Aborigines related? His approach assumed that language, customs, physique and technology all clustered together in discrete racial constellations. A still better Australian exemplar of this assumption was John Mathew, who utilised data on Aboriginal social organisation to buttress his theory on their racial affinities. Mathew argued that the Australians were a hybrid of a dark "Papuan" race and a lighter-skinned race of Dravidian affinities.¹³² As evidence, he pointed out that Aboriginal tribes were each divided into two "primary classes, or phratries", designated by terms which indicated a contrast of colour, such as eaglehawk and crow. These, he claimed, represented the original races, one brown, the other black, from which the Aborigines had descended.¹³³ The great British authority on racial taxonomy, A.H. Keane, wrote the introduction to Mathew's *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland*; he had nothing but praise for the ingenuity of Mathew's argument.¹³⁴

Within the evolutionary paradigm, studies of human society connected closely with studies of human biology. Perhaps there were symptoms of the disciplinary fission which was later to occur. Certainly, some scientists focussed on the examination of the human body, while others concentrated on

¹³² By Mathew's day, there was nothing novel about claiming a link between the Australian and the Dravidian races; it was a contemporary commonplace. He did, however, display some originality - and imagination - in the evidence which he adduced on this point. Mathew was at pains to point out that the lighter-coloured race was not identical with the Dravidian, but merely "akin" to it; he did, however, admit to sometimes using the word "Dravidian", without qualification, "*as a term of convenience*"; J. Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland: With an Inquiry concerning the Origin of the Australian Race*, London, 1910, pp.29, 31; italics in the original.

¹³³ J. Mathew, *Eaglehawk and Crow: A Study of the Australian Aborigines, including an Inquiry into their Origin and a Survey of Australian Languages*, London, 1899; Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes*, especially pp.25-66. On top of these two races, there was "a comparatively recent, slight infusion of Malay blood in the northern half of Australia"; Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes*, p.30.

¹³⁴ A.H. Keane, "Introduction" to Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes*, pp.xi-xix.

analysing customs, beliefs and social organisation. Yet there remained an assumption that these were ultimately linked together.¹³⁵ According to the tenets of classical evolutionism, all aspects of a human group evolved more or less concurrently, so that a race possessing primitive customs could be expected to also display archaic physical traits, an undeveloped intellect, a crude technology and other relics of a bygone era.¹³⁶ For the scientist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one of the most appealing features of evolutionary theory lay in its capacity to encompass the entire range of human attributes in a single bio-social law. Thus a specialist in kinship systems, like Howitt, could weave a racial theme through his analyses; while on the other hand a specialist in anatomy, like the Adelaide scientist Dr William Ramsay Smith, could write authoritatively on both Aboriginal physical characteristics and their cultural practices.¹³⁷

Dr Ramsay Smith proudly declared that "almost every part of the anatomy of the aboriginal is being examined and re-examined with the view of

¹³⁵ See Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution*, pp.110-32; Kuklick, *The Savage Within*, pp.75-89; A. Chase and J.R. von Sturmer, "'Mental Man' and Social Evolutionary Theory" in G.E. Kearney, P.R. de Lacey and G.R. Davidson (eds), *The Psychology of Aboriginal Australians*, Sydney, 1973, pp.3-6.

¹³⁶ The point was well illustrated in a paper by Charles Daley, "The Artistic Sense as Displayed in the Aborigines of Australia" in *Report of the Thirteenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1911, pp.427-36. Daley's focus was on the arts and crafts of the Aborigines; but he conceived these as fitting into a wider complex of primitive qualities, so that "the race itself [was], as far as mental endowments and physical qualities, almost on a parallel with the men" of the stone age.

¹³⁷ There were, nonetheless, specialists who seldom, if ever, ventured outside their own speciality. For example, the anatomists J.T. Wilson and J.F. Flashman, both of Sydney, published a great deal on Aboriginal anatomy, with reference to their racial classification, but appear never to have published any material on Aboriginal society or culture. It need hardly be added that non-Australian physical anthropologists were far more likely to deal exclusively with anatomical matters, for they had to hand only bones and other tissue remains. Very few specialists in Aboriginal customs and social organisation failed to remark on their racial characteristics. Perhaps R.H. Mathews came close to this; but if the concept of race was not salient in Mathews' publications, it did make an appearance. A comprehensive list of Mathews' numerous published articles may be found in his "Ethnological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of New South Wales and Victoria", *Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol.38, 1904, pp.376-81. Despite these qualifications, the generalisation still holds, that until about the First World War the biological and the socio-cultural approaches to anthropology interacted freely; as will be discussed in Chapter Three below, after the War the two approaches tended to drift apart rather than to sharply fracture.

discovering keys that will open up the secrets of human origin and racial affinities".¹³⁸ His own anatomical specialisation was in Aboriginal dentition.¹³⁹ But anthropology was to him far more than merely teeth and bones. In an address as president of the Anthropology Section of the 1913 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, he proclaimed:

Anthropology comes into touch with all things human. For it deals with man's body and mind, and all that these include and imply; with his physical structure and bodily functions; with his intellect, emotions and will; with his languages, religions, customs, social conditions, habits, instincts, appetites, and activities. It deals with all human peoples, past and present, with everything in the Universe that is related to man or that influences him in any way, and with the manner and extent of the influence.¹⁴⁰

The intelligent practical application of this comprehensive science would promote the future progress of humanity.¹⁴¹ Anthropology was the modern, scientific route to human self-understanding. He opened his 1913 presidential address enthusiastically:

The injunction of the oracle, 'Know Thyself,' written over the gates at the temple at Delphi, has been accepted as the text of all religions, and the motto of all philosophies. Expressed in modern scientific thought-currency, it is 'Study Anthropology.' Anthropology, in helping man to know himself, is concerned with the questions - What are we? Whence are we? How are we? For it deals with man, present day man, individually and in bulk, with the rock out of which he was hewn or the pit out of which he was digged, and with the process of the making or the moulding.¹⁴²

Like Howitt and Fison, Ramsay Smith included classical allusions in his appeals for the advancement of anthropology.

¹³⁸ W.R. Smith, "The Place of the Australian Aboriginal in Recent Anthropological Research" in *Report of the Eleventh Meeting of the AAAS*, 1907, p.558.

¹³⁹ See for example *ibid.*, pp.559-65; W.R. Smith, "Notes on Aborigines of the Northern Territory of South Australia", *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, vol.27, 1907, pp.56-59.

¹⁴⁰ W.R. Smith, "Australian Conditions and Problems from the Standpoint of Present Anthropological Knowledge" in *Report of the Fourteenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1913, p.367.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp.375-87. Smith supported a moderate eugenic platform, which gave considerable weight to environmental influences; he rejected what he termed "negative eugenics", which entailed such expedients as "euthanasia of the unfit; sterilization of the unfit; and the medical regulation of marriage".

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p.366.

Aborigines had a special part to play in the promotion of human self-understanding, for as Ramsay Smith explained:

Centuries ago, nature 'side-tracked' a race in Australia. At the present time, despite some drawbacks or interference from outside, that race remains, to a large extent, in primitive conditions. It is capable of casting light on the evolution of human races in a way, and to an extent, that probably no other can equal. It gives us the key, from a study of present customs, to the origin and meaning of the mythology of the Greeks and the Romans, and of mythology generally. It supplies us with data regarding the bodily variations occurring in primitive races, and the place and value of variations in estimating the zoological stratum or horizon to which races belong. Its customs supply us with materials for a critical study of the origin and development of folk-lore, art, writing, language, mental emotions, morality, religion, marriage.¹⁴³

Ramsay Smith himself ranged across this diverse field of anthropological inquiry, although anatomical matters were his primary area of expertise.¹⁴⁴ Summing-up the results of decades of research into physical anthropology, he declared that "the Australian aborigines have furnished the largest number of ape-like characters. The more one investigates the truer does this statement prove to be".¹⁴⁵

Ramsay Smith's remark was a revealing one. Scientists did indeed investigate Aborigines on the presumption that their studies would uncover "ape-like" or primitive characteristics. In turn, their findings served to reinforce the already existing scientific image of the Aborigine as the archetypal primitive man. Locked into an evolutionary paradigm, anthropology did not seek to investigate whether Aborigines were primeval forms of humanity. That was already known. Rather, it sought to discover from Aborigines what the primeval forms of human society, customs, beliefs, mentality and physique really were. These findings could then be incorporated into more elaborate theories tracing the evolutionary development of

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p.374.

¹⁴⁴ For a good example of his omnivorous anthropological appetite see his "Notes on Aborigines of the Northern Territory", pp.51-63.

¹⁴⁵ Smith, "The Place of the Australian Aborigine", p.574. The same statement was made in his article "The Aborigines of Australia" in *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, no.3, 1901-1909, p.158.

mankind. By the late nineteenth century, data from the antipodes was an essential ingredient of virtually every European theory of the course of human evolution.¹⁴⁶ Australia provided one of the foundation stones for coherent and intellectually satisfying theoretical edifices explaining, in terms of a natural law, the apparently awesome progress of man from ape-like ancestor to Anglo-Saxon.

Ramsay Smith's choice of terminology - "ape-like characters" - deserves further explication. He did not claim that Aboriginal people were "ape-like"; rather, that certain of their physical characteristics displayed, more overtly than those of any other race, the signs of humanity's descent from a simian ancestor. He qualified his own statement by remarking that "the simian features are not all concentrated in any single race".¹⁴⁷ Aborigines displayed more of them because of their primitivity. Further qualifying the connection between ape and man, he explained that "monkey or ape did not evolve man"; rather, "man, monkey, and ape were evolved from some ancestral form that was neither man, monkey, nor ape".¹⁴⁸ As a convinced evolutionist, Ramsay Smith firmly embedded humanity in the processes of nature. In classic evolutionary fashion, he used Aborigines to shed light on the route by which humanity had arisen from non-human progenitors. But he was adamant that Aborigines had crossed the divide, that they were fully human. He concluded his 1907 address to the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science with a vigorous rebuttal of the notion that Aborigines were bestial savages, adding:

I cannot close this paper without saying that I am sure that you who know the aboriginals have found them, as I have, fond of their children, kind to the aged and infirm, generous, grateful, apt to learn, good at mechanical work, equal in ability to white school children with whom they are educated, of unimpeachable honesty in things

¹⁴⁶ For two examples in which the Aborigines were given a particularly prominent place, see H. Klaatsch, *The Evolution and Progress of Mankind*, (ed. and enlarged by A. Heilborn; trans. J. McCabe), London, 1923; W.J. Sollas, *Ancient Hunters and their Modern Representatives*, 3rd edn, London, 1924.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, "The Place of the Australian Aboriginal", p.574.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.565.

entrusted to them, cheerful under difficulties, of unruffled good temper - even in free, romping fights, and sometimes displaying remarkable shrewdness and a keen sense of the humorous or the ridiculous.¹⁴⁹

The eminent scientist even acknowledged that "Mrs. Gunn, in *The Little Black Princess*, has given a truer picture of the Australian aboriginal than is to be found in the latest half dozen books professing to deal scientifically with the subject".¹⁵⁰

Two German anthropologists, Hermann Klaatsch and Otto Schoetensack, took a stronger line on the supposed similarities between Aborigines and the anthropoid ancestors of mankind. Klaatsch was an Associate Professor of Anatomy at the University of Heidelberg. In 1904 he arrived in Australia to begin a three year period of research into Aboriginal racial origins and affinities. Before he came out to the antipodes, he had already formulated his theory of the "Australoid roots of mankind", and his journey appears to have been motivated by a desire to confirm his academic speculations with observations in the field.¹⁵¹ He travelled widely around the country, examining Aborigines and collecting specimens in northern and western Queensland, the Northern Territory, the Kimberleys, the south-west and southern Australia, including Tasmania.¹⁵² First and foremost however, he was an anatomist and his major work in the English language dealt, appropriately, with the skull of the Australian Aborigine.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.575.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.575.

¹⁵¹ See H. Klaatsch, "Some Notes on Scientific Travel amongst the Black Population of Tropical Australia in 1905, 1905, 1906" in *Report of the Eleventh Meeting of the AAAS*, 1907, p.577; B. Stehlik, "Hermann Klaatsch and the Tiwi, 1906", *Aboriginal History*, vol.10, part 1, 1986, pp.59-61.

¹⁵² Klaatsch provided a comprehensive account of his expeditions in "Some Notes on Scientific Travel", pp.577-91. A summary of what appears to have been the same lecture was published as "Australian Aborigines: Lecture by Dr. Klatsch [sic]", *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*, 1906-1907, pp.xxvi-xxvii. Stehlik detailed his travels in "Hermann Klaatsch and the Tiwi", pp.61-64.

¹⁵³ H. Klaatsch, "The Skull of the Australian Aboriginal", *Reports of the Pathological Laboratory of the Lunacy Department of NSW*, vol.1, part 3, 1908, pp.43-167. Klaatsch's 1907 AAAS paper, "Some Notes on Scientific Travel", was much more lightweight and chatty. His other specialist works were published in German; see

According to Klaatsch, the Aboriginal skull was "closer to [that of] the common ancestor of man and anthropoids than that of any other races [sic]". Furthermore, "the positive anatomical facts are overwhelming in emphasis of the fact that the Australian aborigines are a relic of the oldest type of mankind".¹⁵⁴ In Klaatsch's theory, a single anthropoid species "gave rise to palaeolithic man of the northern continents and to the ancestor of the Australian".¹⁵⁵ Distantly, Europeans and Aborigines were related. But whereas "palaeolithic man of the northern continents" had subsequently progressed out of the stone age, the Australians remained there. It was not that the Aborigines had made no progress at all; "in certain directions" they had "undergone a development parallel with that of the palaeolithic races of the European Stone Age".¹⁵⁶ However, the rate of evolutionary change was slow in this continent, remote from the pressures which elsewhere had impelled humanity on its upward course. Thus, while the Aborigines were fully human, they displayed more plainly than any other people the outward signs of humanity's descent from an anthropoid ancestor.¹⁵⁷ Therein lay their value to science.

Although an anatomist, Klaatsch drew freely on the evidence of Aboriginal technology, customs and way of life to buttress his theory. In his study of the Aboriginal skull, after numerous pages of detailed description and measurement of osteological characteristics, he switched to remark on "the striking similarity between the state of culture of palaeolithic man and the Australian aboriginal".¹⁵⁸ In classic evolutionary fashion, he equated the

Stehlik, "Hermann Klaatsch and the Tiwi", pp.61, 76. His major monograph work, *Der Werdegang der Menschheit und die Entstehung der Kultur*, was incomplete at the time of his death. It was edited and enlarged by his colleague, Professor Adolf Heilborn, translated into English by Joseph McCabe, and published in London in 1923 under the title *The Evolution and Progress of Mankind*.

¹⁵⁴ Klaatsch, "The Skull of the Australian Aboriginal", p.164.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.162; also p.163.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.162.

¹⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, especially pp.151-64.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.160.

remnants of stone age European culture with existing practices of the Aborigines:

My own experiences of the ethnographical condition of the Queensland natives, as compared with the scientific results of my travels in Germany, Belgium, France, the north of Spain, and south of England, when I visited the old places of culture regarding the stone implements and rock paintings of the European diluvial people, have given me the opportunity of stating with even greater emphasis than before, that in the living aboriginal of Australia, we find preserved one of the oldest stages of mankind.¹⁵⁹

He insisted that Aboriginal culture was palaeolithic, not neolithic, explicitly linking this to his claim that the bearers of that culture were anatomical relics of early humanity.¹⁶⁰ By the time Klaatsch wrote, anthropologists working in the field had found Aboriginal culture to possess a considerable degree of complexity. Sensing that this may pose something of a problem for his theory of relic man, he suggested that:

it is very possible that many of the tribes in the interior and on certain of the smaller islands have remained in a very primitive condition for countless ages past, and have never become acquainted with the complicated observances and customs, as for instance are described in the excellent work of Spencer and Gillen.¹⁶¹

For Klaatsch's theory, it was necessary to render the Aborigines as primitive as possible; and as primitive in as many attributes as possible.¹⁶² Data concerning their anatomy, technology, language, economy, customs, beliefs and observances were all grist to the mill.¹⁶³

Klaatsch expressed general agreement with Otto Schoetensack's hypothesis, "that Australia by itself is probably the continent where the last

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.160.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, pp.161-62.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.161. For an account of "the excellent work of Spencer and Gillen" see Chapter Two.

¹⁶² Nonetheless, a sympathetic appreciation of the Aborigines as people did pervade at least some of his work, albeit the somewhat patronising sympathy of a self-confidently superior European gentleman. See Klaatsch "Some Notes on Scientific Travel", pp.577-91; and Stehlik's translation of his "Account of an Expedition to Melville Island in 1906" in Stehlik, "Hermann Klaatsch and the Tiwi", pp.65-76.

¹⁶³ This omnivorous approach was best displayed in his posthumous publication, *The Evolution and Progress of Mankind*, in which he drew heavily on his Australian researches to exemplify the earliest stages of humanity's upward course.

transition from the ancestral pithecoïd stage to the genus homo took place".¹⁶⁴ Like Klaatsch, Schoetensack constructed his theory on the foundations of Aboriginal primitivity. In his only article in the English language, Schoetensack deployed evidence on the physical, social, cultural and psychological characteristics of the Aborigines to bolster his proposition that Australia was "the original home of man".¹⁶⁵ Conditions on this continent were favourable for the evolution of a primate form into *homo sapiens*, he argued, for the non-threatening marsupial fauna encouraged proto-man to "develop into the primitive hunter", and "the inter-mixture of forests and wide plains" fostered the evolution of a species equally at home on the ground as in the trees.¹⁶⁶ He devoted one and a half pages and three illustrations to explaining Aboriginal tree-climbing abilities, as evidence of a supposed closeness to ancestral forms of humanity.¹⁶⁷ Schoetensack admitted that:

It would, of course, be unreasonable to expect the Australians of the present day to have remained in point of physical development on the level of the common root-stock of all the human races.¹⁶⁸

Yet they did remain "in the stone age, and more exactly in the Palaeolithic than in the Neolithic period".¹⁶⁹ And in the accepted evolutionary formulation, stone age ways were practised only by stone age bodies, for "the distinctive development of man's physical characteristics went hand in hand with that of the intellectual ones".¹⁷⁰ Schoetensack took to an extreme the notion that Aboriginal cultural practices embodied survivals from the pre-human stage of their evolution. He maintained that the "primitive character of

¹⁶⁴ Klaatsch, "The Skull of the Australian Aboriginal", p.160.

¹⁶⁵ O. Schoetensack, "The Importance of Australia for the Evolution of Man from an Inferior Type", *Science of Man and Australasian Anthropological Journal*, vol.4, no.11, 27 December 1901, pp.187-89; vol.4, no.12, 22 January 1902, pp.205-207; vol.5, no.1, 22 February 1902, pp.11-14; vol.5, no.2, 22 March 1902, pp.23-25. Throughout this article, Schoetensack frequently cited the work of Hermann Klaatsch.

¹⁶⁶ Schoetensack, "The Importance of Australia", *Science of Man*, vol.4, no.11, p.187, and vol.5, no.2, p.24.

¹⁶⁷ Schoetensack, "The Importance of Australia", *Science of Man*, vol.5, no.1, pp.12-14. He also remarked on "the powerful climbing instinct still found in European children" as an indication of the persistence of "ancestral characteristics".

¹⁶⁸ Schoetensack, "The Importance of Australia", *Science of Man*, vol.4, no.11, p.188.

¹⁶⁹ Schoetensack, "The Importance of Australia", *Science of Man*, vol.4, no.12, p.206.

¹⁷⁰ Schoetensack, "The Importance of Australia", *Science of Man*, vol.5, no.2, p.24.

the Australians" was "proved by certain features of their sexual habits", especially "the concentration of their sexual intercourse upon a particular part of the year, which is a remnant from their animal stage of development".¹⁷¹

The journal in which Schoetensack's paper was published, *Science of Man and Australasian Anthropological Journal*, was a vehicle for exceptionally enthusiastic expressions of eugenics, progressivism and racial theorising. Its editor, who also wrote most of its articles, was Dr Alan Carroll, a man of eclectic - or eccentric - anthropological tastes. Drawing heavily on continental European as well as British intellectual currents, Carroll displayed his erudition as freely as his enthusiasm. Anthropology, in his vision, ranged across the entire spectrum of human abilities and attainments.¹⁷² Wisely used, the science of man would promote the progress and prosperity of humanity - or at least, of its favoured races.¹⁷³

Carroll was perhaps the best Australian exemplar of racial science in its rococo phase. The British people alone, he maintained, were comprised of seventeen distinct races, each of which contributed its own physical, psychological and cultural qualities to make the blend the world's most successful "conquerors, colonisers, traders-navigators".¹⁷⁴ Racial determinism was highly salient in the *Science of Man*; "the race question", Carroll declared, "is the great, and most important one in building up a nation".¹⁷⁵ So too was

¹⁷¹ Schoetensack, "The Importance of Australia", *Science of Man*, vol.4, no.12, p.206.

¹⁷² See for example "Objects, Purposes and Proposed Operations of the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia", *Science of Man*, vol.3, no.7, 22 August 1900, p.109.

¹⁷³ For examples of Carroll's enormous faith in the potential of anthropology to improve humanity see his "Foreword" to *Science of Man*, vol.1, no.1, 21 February 1898, pp.4-6; and "The Practical Uses and Benefits to all People of Applying Anthropological Procedures", *Science of Man*, vol.1, no.2, 21 March 1898, p.43.

¹⁷⁴ *Science of Man*, vol.2, no.3, 21 April 1899, p.41.

¹⁷⁵ "The Political Importance of the Race Question, or Problem", *Science of Man*, vol.2, no.5, 21 June 1899, pp.76-77; underlining in the original. In another article in the same issue, "The Rise and Fall of Races", pp.85-86, Carroll asserted that: "Race histories are more important than those of nations, as it depends upon the characteristics of the races of which a nation is composed as to whether the nation shall reach to, and successfully maintain, a supreme position, or whether it shall cease

the old polygenist idea that humanity comprised a number of separate species, conveniently colour-coded as black, brown, red, yellow and white.¹⁷⁶ In an argument reminiscent of Wallace's theory of racial formation, though more extreme in its implications, Carroll contended that since the long-ago point of human speciation, "the species and the race types" had become "fixed".¹⁷⁷ As an evolutionist he acknowledged that:

all who believe in Darwin's developmental theory, recognise that species change by very prolonged evolution and development into new or fresh species or the origin of species has no meaning, as it is now understood by all capable of understanding the ideas of Darwin. The species of man arose in the remote times by slow developments the same as all other species of animals, but for all the ages since then, some of them while isolated and uncrossed or not hybridised have retained their specific differences.¹⁷⁸

But Carroll was no conventional Darwinist.¹⁷⁹ In his scheme, degeneration loomed as large as progression.¹⁸⁰ The only way in which the fixed racial and specific types could give rise to changing populations was by interbreeding;

to exist".

¹⁷⁶ Carroll's clearest account of his human classificatory scheme was in his article "Proposed Classification and Description of the Species, Races, Families and Varieties of Mankind", *Science of Man*, vol.4, no.4, 21 May 1901, pp.66-67; vol.4, no.5, 22 June 1901, pp.74-76; vol.4, no.6, 22 July, pp.101-103; vol.4, no.7, 21 August 1901, pp.111-12; vol.4, no.8, 23 September 1901, pp.131-32; vol.4, no.9, 22 October 1901, pp.150-51; vol.4, no.11, 27 December 1901, pp.180-82; vol.4, no.12, 22 January 1902, pp.194-96. As the title of the article indicates, to cope with the proliferation of races Carroll further sub-divided them into families and varieties.

¹⁷⁷ This argument recurred frequently in the pages of the *Science of Man*; a good precis is provided by Carroll's article "The Species of Mankind and the Different Races and How Permanent they are", *Science of Man*, vol.1, no.11, 21 December 1898, p.235. It may be noted that while Carroll insisted on the division of mankind into five distinct species, he frequently used the term "race" to designate a group which in other contexts he claimed to be a species.

¹⁷⁸ *Science of Man*, vol.4, no.4, 21 May 1901, p.67.

¹⁷⁹ It is doubtful if he could be regarded as a Darwinist at all; Carroll did draw upon Darwinian theory, but only as one amongst a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives.

¹⁸⁰ In the *Science of Man* probably more words were devoted to the spectre of degeneration than to the promise of progress. For summary accounts of Carroll's degeneration theories see "The Peoples of the World Becoming Degenerate", *Science of Man*, vol.7, no.4, 23 May 1904, pp.56-57; and "Ceaseless Development or Degeneration", *Science of Man*, vol.9, no.2, 1 February 1907, pp.24-25. Classical evolutionary writers like Lubbock, Tylor, Wallace and Darwin did allow a place for regression; but it was severely limited, and the general trend of human evolution was conceived as progressive. Carroll was certainly not alone in giving prominence to degeneration; it was a stock-in-trade of eugenic literature.

and the blend could be either beneficial, as in the case of the British, or degenerative, as in the case of Aboriginal-white "mongrels".¹⁸¹ Eugenic reform was necessary if the dangers of degeneration were to be avoided. Yet while Carroll was in many respects a eugenic extremist, he allowed, like the majority of Australian eugenicists, a considerable role for environmental influences.¹⁸² According to his theory, the "original race types" possessed a "potency" which was quite independent of the individual human embodiment of the type.¹⁸³ Over generations of racial crossing, the progeny would tend to revert to the characteristics of one of the ancestral types in its hereditary composition; which type would become manifest depended on environmental circumstances. In one of his more lucid passages, Carroll explained that:

No race ever changes until it is mixed with another race, and then, unless the mixture is continually repeated, the descendants from such mixtures will in each generation pass back to one of the race types from which it has sprung, and which, that is, will depend upon the environment.¹⁸⁴

To ensure that humanity - or at least the white species of it - was kept true to the path of progress, it was essential to both regulate reproduction and ameliorate social and economic circumstances.

¹⁸¹ A good example of this argument, which was hammered home again and again in the pages of the *Science of Man*, is provided by "The Injuriousness of Mixed Parentage of Incompatible Races", *Science of Man*, vol.3, no.8, 22 September 1900, pp.137-38.

¹⁸² For analyses of the Australian eugenics movement, pointing out its environmental element, see C. Bacchi, "The Nature-Nurture Debate in Australia, 1900-1914", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.19, no.75, October 1980, pp.199-212; S. Garton, "Sir Charles Mackellar: Psychiatry, Eugenics and Child Welfare in New South Wales, 1900-1914", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.22, no.86, April 1986, pp.21-34. See also M. Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought*, St Lucia, 1984. There were also staunch hereditarians amongst Australian eugenicists; Mary Cawte dealt with this element in her article "Cranometry and Eugenics in Australia: R.J.A. Berry and the Quest for Social Efficiency", *Australian Historical Studies*, vol.22, no.86, April 1986, pp.35-53.

¹⁸³ See for example "Why do We Measure Heads and Faces", *Science of Man*, vol.1, no.12, 21 January 1899, pp.252-53.

¹⁸⁴ "The Race Problem", *Science of Man*, vol.2, no.7, 21 August 1899, p.119.

All this may have been too heady a brew for the majority of Carroll's scientific colleagues in Australia.¹⁸⁵ Yet Carroll's scientific progressivism was merely an extreme version of the standard ideas and assumptions which informed other anthropological writers of the time. Notions of progress, of racial type and of a linkage between the two, were expressed - in more muted terms - by men like Howitt, Baldwin Spencer, Ramsay Smith, as well as by the lesser figures who made their contributions in books or in the papers of learned societies.¹⁸⁶ Carroll may have been more immoderate than most in both his celebration of progress and his dread of degeneration. Yet few, if any, of his peers doubted that the white race was at the vanguard of progress, and there it would and should remain.¹⁸⁷ Elucidating the impelling factors of progress was Carroll's central endeavour. To do this, he needed to investigate the nature of man prior to his progress into civilisation.

"To all who are studying the circumstances and conditions under which primitive men existed, nowhere can this be done better than in Australia", Carroll proclaimed, adding that:

It is impossible to doubt that what we now see transpiring among the blacks of Australian tribes was similar to what was existing among the neolithic and palaeolithic men of Europe, Asia and Africa previous to

¹⁸⁵ It is noteworthy that none of those who are today remembered as major figures of Australian anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - Howitt, Fison, Baldwin Spencer, F.J. Gillen, W.E. Roth and the like - ever published in the *Science of Man*. The only exception to this rule was R.H. Mathews, who did contribute to the journal; Mathews, however, was an amateur ethnographer, and although prolific, was not among the front-rank scientists of his day. Yet Dr Alan Carroll was no scientific pariah. He was president of the Anthropology Section at the first meeting of the AAAS. And while his journal failed to elicit contributions from eminent anthropologists, it did attract the patronage of an impressive list of public figures.

¹⁸⁶ For more moderate renditions of the tunes hammered by Carroll - race culture, eugenics and the value of anthropological science - see R. Hamlyn-Harris, "Some Anthropological Considerations of Queensland and the History of its Ethnography", *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*, vol.29, 1917, especially pp.4-10.

¹⁸⁷ For an interesting variant on the argument that the white race must remain in the vanguard of human progress see C.H. Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, London, 1894.

their attaining to civilisation, agriculture, and the more advanced modes of life.¹⁸⁸

In their bodies as well as in their mode of life, Aborigines displayed the features of a primeval stage of development. Their vertebral structure, teeth, jaws, crania and other physical attributes all bore witness to "the primitive character of these Australian men".¹⁸⁹ More extravagantly, Carroll claimed that the "manner in which the Australian blacks can grasp and pick up their spears and other things with their feet", and "the way they climb trees with their toes as well as their hands", exhibited characteristics which were "also seen in the anthropoid apes".¹⁹⁰ In the enthusiastic pursuit of primitivity, survivals from the human and pre-human past could be found almost anywhere the inquirer cared to look.

In modern Australia, the contrast between primitivity and progressiveness was stark; according to Carroll:

The idea that all men are equal is one of those errors that will soon be corrected by a residence and observations in Australia, for on the one hand will be seen the savage aborigines, and on the other the civilised white people. These two varieties of peoples differ from each other in all essential particulars. One of them is from a black race, the others from white ones. The blacks have been for thousands of years roaming over the plains and forest lands of Australia, and have died without leaving any buildings, gardens, farms or erections of a permanent character. The whites have only been here for little more than one century and have everywhere given evidence of their presence by what they produced of houses and other buildings, or farms, orchards, gardens, with all that pertained thereto.¹⁹¹

Aborigines had domesticated no animals and cultivated no plants; this, in Carroll's view, derived not from any deficiency in the indigenous fauna and flora, but from the fact that both "physically and mentally the blacks and the

¹⁸⁸ "Comparisons of Primitive Men with Australian Blacks", *Science of Man*, vol.2, no.10, 21 November 1899, pp.199-200.

¹⁸⁹ "The Ethnology of the Australian Blacks", *Science of Man*, vol.1, no.4, 21 May 1898, p.78. See also the articles under the same heading in vol.1, no.2, 21 March 1898, pp.28-29; vol.1, no.3, 21 April 1898, p.56.

¹⁹⁰ "The Ethnology of the Australian Blacks", *Science of Man*, vol.1, no.4, 21 May 1898, p.78.

¹⁹¹ "Savages, and Civilised Men", *Science of Man*, vol.6, no.2, 21 March 1903, p.34.

whites were in all things unlike".¹⁹² "The blacks," he emphasised, "*never* by their own unaided inventions or efforts rise into civilised conditions".¹⁹³ And he held out no hope that they could, even with the aid of the white man; for blacks lacked the intellect necessary for this attainment. Following a familiar argument of the day, Carroll claimed that:

The young blacks from infancy to youth learn any lessons as quickly as the whites, but then the sutures of the cranium are ossified, and the power to learn and keep pace with the whites is then lost.¹⁹⁴

It was not only the Australian Aborigines who suffered from this premature closure of the cranial sutures; all members of the black species of mankind, according to Carroll, displayed the same peculiarity.¹⁹⁵

The low cranial capacity of Aborigines had long been taken to indicate an inferior intellect, and this easy equation was to hold credibility well into the twentieth century. In *The Modern Psychology*, the anatomist R.J.A. Berry provided a convenient chart of the cranial capacities of various types of people, including "the evolutionary backward Australian aboriginal".¹⁹⁶ Berry used the Aborigines to exemplify an arrested state of mental development, as adults of the race possessed merely "the cerebral development of the 13-year-old schoolboy".¹⁹⁷ He cautioned, however, that the correlation applied only

¹⁹² *ibid.*, p.34.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, p.34; italics in the original.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.34.

¹⁹⁵ See for example "The Blacks were the First Races of Men", *Science of Man*, vol.8, no.5, 15 September 1906, p.4. See also "Cranometry - And the Increase of the Cranium in Various Races of Men and Brain Developments", *Science of Man*, vol.2, no.2, 21 February 1899, pp.26-27; here, Carroll argued that the improvement of intellect depended not only on the potential of the brain to increase in size but also on "the brain material already there developing into higher forms of organisation". Blacks were deficient on both counts.

¹⁹⁶ R.J.A. Berry, *The Modern Psychology*, Melbourne, 1921, pp.31-32.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.32-33. For further discussion of the equation of adult Aboriginal mentality with the minds of white children, see Chase and von Sturmer, "'Mental Man' and Social Evolutionary Theory", especially pp.7-9. However, Chase and von Sturmer failed to point out that this equation fitted into contemporary recapitulation theory, according to which the individual, in the process of maturation, passed through stages corresponding to stages in the evolutionary past of the species. Thus white children, as they matured, passed through a phase which corresponded to the savage stage in their racial ancestry. See S.J. Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*, Cambridge, Mass., 1977.

at a group and not at an individual level.¹⁹⁸ He acknowledged too, that intelligence depended not only on crude cranial capacity but also on the degree of physiological development of the "supra-granular layer" of the brain.¹⁹⁹ On this score also, Aborigines were deficient, Berry claiming that after the age of puberty their brains displayed a "lack of development of the supra-granular layer".²⁰⁰ He insisted on the validity of the propositions "that mind is dependent on number of neurones, and that the greater the number of neurones the larger the brain and the greater the intellect".²⁰¹ Small brains, as in the case of the Aborigines, indicated diminutive intellects. An ardent eugenicist, Berry's primary concern in *The Modern Psychology* was to demonstrate the need for regulation over the lives of the mentally inferior members of society - the lower classes, criminals and others who led a "thrifless and shiftless life".²⁰² Aborigines were not the focus of the study; they merely provided illustration of unprogressive intellects.

Few scientists would have disagreed with the assessment of the celebrated amateur ethnographer F.J. Gillen, that of all the races of mankind the Australian black was "the lowest in human intelligence".²⁰³ Yet it had to be admitted of the Aborigines that, in the words of John Mathew, "in all matters relating to their own mode of life they showed enough intelligence to promote their individual interests and provide for their limited necessities".²⁰⁴ He added that "they were unreflective and averse both to abstract reasoning and sustained mental effort", and were also "very deficient in inventiveness".²⁰⁵ It was in those mental faculties most essential for social

¹⁹⁸ Berry, *The Modern Psychology*, p.27.

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.38.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.38.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.32.

²⁰² See *ibid.*, especially pp.32-33. For further elucidation of Berry's eugenic ideals see Cawte, "Cranometry and Eugenics in Australia", pp.35-53.

²⁰³ South Australia, Legislative Council Select Committee on the Aborigines Bill, 1899, *Minutes of Evidence and Appendices*, p.100.

²⁰⁴ Mathew, *Two Representative Tribes*, p.76.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*, pp.76-78.

progress that Aborigines were held to be deficient. Aboriginal survival skills, their tracking and bushcraft, could be conceded to be equal, even superior, to those of white people; for these were regarded as the products merely of instinct or of sensory acuteness - animal-like attributes which the European, in his upward course into civilisation, had outgrown. In his discussion of the instinctive component in Aboriginal behaviour, W.L. Cleland, President of the Royal Society of South Australia, remarked:

As an illustration of how savage man acts in common with many animals and birds in a way which more civilised peoples have lost may be mentioned the power of travelling to and reaching distant places without any apparent guidance.²⁰⁶

He went on to claim that this "power of unerringly travelling to a given place" was not an expression of "conscious intent", for it was possessed equally by savages as "by other members of the animal world".²⁰⁷

Cleland went to the extent of claiming even Aboriginal ritual and ceremony to be expressions of "unconscious cerebration", or instinct. "We possibly err", he suggested, "in attaching a too high mental or intellectual value to the rites and customs" of the Aborigines. It was "an error into which we do not fall in considering the many wonderful acts and habits of various animals".²⁰⁸ After discussing the "engineering skill" of the beaver, and the "talent for practical sociology" of the honey-bee, he explained that:

it is conceivable that organisms would respond in varying ways to the constant action of stimuli. It is possible in this way to see how by a slow process of evolution the gradual adjusting of the nervous cellular structures with their dendrites or branches under persistent stimuli of a given character may lead to a condition of unconscious cerebration, having all the appearance of conscious intent. We may all admire and appreciate the mechanical skill of these rodents, and the ethical effects of some of the customs of these insects, and of this species [Australian Aborigines] of the genus homo, but it is another matter, and a probably unwarranted assumption, to attribute the same power of intellectual appreciation to these beavers, honey-bees, or aborigines, either now or in the remote past, that we ourselves

²⁰⁶ W.L. Cleland, "President's Address", *Transactions and Proceedings and Report of the Royal Society of South Australia*, vol.22, 1897-1898, p.247.

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.247.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.246.

possess. That these three types of animals should have responded to stimuli in an apparently intelligent manner may be considered as evidence of the high quality of their primary nervous structure, but not necessarily as evidence of conscious volition of adapting means to an end.²⁰⁹

These speculations fitted into a broader argument against the notion that Aborigines were a "degenerate or retrogressive race". To establish their status as true representatives of primordial man, Cleland pushed their supposed similarities to mere animals further than most contemporary scientists were prepared to do. He also took to an extreme the idea that human behaviour had its roots in instinct, in the case not only of Aborigines but also of other races. He suggested, for example, that:

If the theory may be allowed that the rites and customs of the Australian aborigines are the results of unconscious cerebration resulting from the action of a succession of stimuli on a certain pre-disposed nervous organisation, may it also be conceded that a similar underlying strain of nervous organisation exists also in the Semitic races.²¹⁰

This was prompted by the observation that both Aborigines and Semites practised circumcision.

While Cleland pushed Aborigines toward a status of animality, he also pushed mere animals toward a human-like status. In a remarkable passage, which reads more like the musings of the seventeenth century scientist Edward Tyson²¹¹ than the argumentation of a late nineteenth century president of a colonial Royal Society, Cleland compared the orang-utan of the Malay region with the indigenes of Australia. The orang-utan, he wrote:

probably represent a primordial type of the Mongolian centre, judging from their portraits. In such a case they could hardly have any anthropological associations with the aborigines of Australia. There are, however, some habits which show a strange similarity in the two races. One is the manner of obtaining fire by rapidly rotating two dry pieces of wood together. Another is a mode of burial in which a

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.247.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.249.

²¹¹ In 1699 Tyson made an anatomical comparison between a "pygmie" (in fact a chimpanzee) and man; see Stepan, *Idea of Race*, p.7. For an account of Tyson's study by one of Cleland's contemporaries, see Cunningham, "Anthropology in the Eighteenth Century", pp.15-16.

lateral chamber is made at the bottom of the grave into which the corpse is laid ... A third example relates to a common practice of the orang-utan and a tradition of the Australian aborigines. The orang-utan are inveterate smokers, and if for any reason they have to desist, the partly-consumed rolled tobacco leaf is stuck in a hole in the lobule of the ear ready for future use.²¹²

The Aborigines, he continued, also had traditional stories in which their ancestors carried "small articles of value in perforations of the lobule of the ear similar to the orang-utan plan".²¹³ In this apparently bizarre comparison, Cleland merged animal into human, in an attempt to validate the proposition of their common evolutionary origins.

Cleland's speculations were a long way from the more sedate postulations of men like Howitt, Fison and Ramsay Smith. Yet the extravagant theorising of scientists like Cleland and Carroll does highlight some aspects of evolutionary thought around the turn of the century. For one thing, it demonstrates the lengths to which scientists could go in attempting to fill the gap between animal and human. If the majority of anthropologists placed Aborigines on the human side of the divide, they nonetheless located them closer to an anthropoid ancestor than any other variety of mankind; and Cleland could almost close the gap by simply blurring the distinction. Another feature which was taken to an extreme by writers like Cleland and Carroll was the evolutionary distance between Aborigines and white people. Universally, it was assumed that whites were in the vanguard of progress, Aborigines in the depths of primitivity. If the assumption of the progressiveness of the white race was not equally salient in all anthropological writing, it was nonetheless

²¹² W.L. Cleland, "President's Address", *Transactions and Proceedings and Report of the Royal Society of South Australia*, vol.23, 1898-1899, p.302. It is possible that Cleland was here using the name "orang-utan" to designate some forest tribes of the Malayan region; the name does translate from the Malay as 'wild man'. However, by the time Cleland wrote, 'orang-utan' had acquired, in English, its present usage, referring to the anthropoid ape, *Pongo pygmaeus*. If Cleland had intended to use the word in a radically different sense, it may be expected that he would have explained his usage; he did not. Alternatively, he may simply have been ignorant of the then accepted meaning of the term; this, however, is unlikely to have been the case of a scientist of some repute. In all probability, Cleland was referring to the orang-utan ape.

²¹³ *ibid.*, p.302.

the case that the primary purpose of studying the Aborigines was for the light they could shed on the path by which the favoured race had progressed into civilisation. Australia had retained a relic form of humanity; and with the long isolation of the continent now broken, the living reality of stone age man was made accessible to scientific scrutiny. The time available to the scientists, however, was short.

Extinction of the Unfittest

Aboriginal extinction was a corollary of their primitivity. A race so undeveloped and immature could not possibly survive in competition with the superior and progressive Europeans, any more than the dinosaur could survive into the age of mammals. Having stagnated for untold ages in an evolutionary backwater, the Aborigines now had the modern world thrust suddenly upon them. And the outcome of that encounter was, to the majority of late nineteenth century scientists, self-evident. James Barnard, Vice-President of the Royal Society of Tasmania, opened his paper at the 1890 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science with the assertion:

It has become an axiom that, following the law of evolution and survival of the fittest, the inferior races of mankind must give place to the highest type of man, and that this law is adequate to account for the gradual decline in numbers of the aboriginal inhabitants of a country before the march of civilisation.²¹⁴

By this time, the prediction of Aboriginal extinction was anything but novel. Yet there was some novelty in the explanatory devices employed, with the natural law of survival of the fittest replacing Divine Providence as the cornerstone of the doomed race idea. If this was in some ways little more than a dressing-up in the newly fashionable language of evolutionary theory, the fashionable dress did lend the respectability and certainty of science.

As for the empirical evidence to support the prediction of inevitable extinction, it was not much different at the end of the century to what it had

²¹⁴ J. Barnard, "Aborigines of Tasmania" in *Report of the Second Meeting of the AAAS*, 1890, p.597.

been fifty or eighty years before. No comprehensive demographic data was available and no detailed demographic studies were conducted. The scientists who confidently pronounced on the impending doom of the Aboriginal race were empiricists to a man. Yet hard empirical data on the Aboriginal population was lacking, apart from a limited number of localised tabulations, such as for mission stations and government reserves. Colonial censuses sometimes ignored, sometimes estimated, the Aboriginal population; at times those in settled districts or those working for Europeans were enumerated; on other occasions they were not.²¹⁵ This, combined with changing definitions of who was to be included in the category 'Aboriginal', made the census data inadequate - even irrelevant - as a guide to population trends. Moreover, what census data was available did not unequivocally indicate a race plummeting toward extinction. For example, the Queensland census of 1881 suggested an Aboriginal population for the colony of 70,000, admitting that this was "a very crude estimate". Five years later the Aboriginal population was estimated at a mere 20,000; while in 1901 the figure was revised upward to 26,670.²¹⁶ The only definite conclusion that could be reached from these sorts of figures was that a lot of guesswork was involved.

Of course, the collection of detailed population statistics would have been a daunting and difficult task, and the analysis of population trends the labour of many years. No one attempted to do so. It might be expected that the lack of such vital statistics would at least counsel some caution in prediction. Yet caution was lacking in the bold and confident assertions of imminent racial extinction. Anecdotal evidence of population decline abounded. Much of it could be reduced to the formulae: 'there used to be lots of blackfellows around here and now there aren't many' or 'there's King Billy, the last of his tribe'. But from population decline to inevitable extinction

²¹⁵ See L.R. Smith, *The Aboriginal Population of Australia*, Canberra, 1980, especially pp.1-54.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.131.

required a long imaginative leap, with no detailed empirical evidence to bridge the gap.

In 1876 the doom of at least one race was confirmed, with the death of Truganina.²¹⁷ The Tasmanians, who were ranked even lower, more primitive, than the Australians, had become extinct. Claiming the Tasmanians to be the "known reality" of "man of the Lower Stone Age"²¹⁸, Tylor lamented their loss to science:

Looking at the vestiges of a people so representative of the rudest type of man, anthropologists must join with philanthropists in regretting their unhappy fate ... We are now beginning to see what scientific value there would have been in such a minute careful portraiture of their thoughts and customs.²¹⁹

The interests of academic analysis aside, almost all scientific accounts of the Tasmanians which were published around this time were tinged with a sentimental regret at their passing.²²⁰ All freely acknowledged that violent acts by Europeans, as well as disease, alcohol and destitution, played a part in the process. Yet attempts to ameliorate their condition were held to be even

²¹⁷ Lyndall Ryan has noted that Truganina was not in fact the last full-blood Tasmanian; that distinction belonged rightly to a woman named Suke on Kangaroo Island, who out-lived Truganina by twelve years; see L. Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, St Lucia, 1981, p.220. Nonetheless, the death of Truganina did come to symbolise the extinction of the Tasmanians. For an insightful discussion of the significance attributed to Tasmanian extinction by the British evolutionists, see Stocking's aptly titled epilogue "The Extinction of Paleolithic Man" in *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.274-83.

²¹⁸ E.B. Tylor, "Supplementary Note" to H.L. Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania*, 2nd edn, Halifax, 1899, (Facsimile edn, Hobart, 1968), p.ix.

²¹⁹ E.B. Tylor, "Preface" to Roth, *Aborigines of Tasmania*, p.vii.

²²⁰ See for example J.W. Agnew, "The Last of the Tasmanians" in *Report of the First Meeting of the AAAS*, 1888, pp.478-81; Barnard, "Aborigines of Tasmania", pp.597-611; Roth, *Aborigines of Tasmania*. Especially notable are James Bonwick's two books, *The Last of the Tasmanians: Or the Black War of Van Diemen's Land* and *Daily Life and Origin of the Tasmanians*, both published in London in 1870. Bonwick adhered to the notion that the extinction of the Tasmanians was an inevitability, but he had no doubt that their lands had been unjustly taken from them by the whites, and in the process the Tasmanians had been the victims of the grossest of cruelties. His sympathetic portrayal of the Tasmanians sounds at times like a late nineteenth century resurrection of the noble savage: "The Tasmanian was no creature of civilisation; and, therefore, while wanting some of our elevation of morals, and while even guilty of crimes of violence, he had not acquired those refinements of commercial fraud and city vices which thrive with modern improvements"; *Daily Life and Origin*, p.13.

more potent contributors to their demise, as if mere contact with civilisation was fatal. Ling Roth tersely expressed the prevalent view:

The very efforts made for their welfare only served to hasten on their inevitable doom. The white man's civilisation proved scarcely less fatal than the white man's musket.²²¹

Commentators of the day were well aware that people of mixed Tasmanian and other descent still lived on the Bass Strait islands.²²² The assertion that the Tasmanian race had become extinct in no way indicated an ignorance, or an attempted concealment, of the existence of these people. Rather, it followed logically from the contemporary conception of a race as a discrete and bounded entity. Mixed-bloods could not be included in the category 'Tasmanian Aborigine', for inclusion demanded that the individual possess all the characteristics supposedly distinctive to the race. The extent to which this could be taken was well illustrated in Appendix G to Ling Roth's book on the Tasmanians, in which he challenged a claim that Mrs. Fanny Cochrane Smith, still living in the late 1890s, was the "sole survivor of her race". Roth denied neither the existence of Mrs Smith nor her Aboriginal Tasmanian descent. But, he asserted, she was of "mixed blood", hence "we cannot consider her a true Tasmanian aboriginal".²²³ The manner in which Roth reached his conclusion about Mrs Smith's mixed ancestry provides a good illustration of the nineteenth century faith in fixed racial types. Quite simply, he compared photographs of Mrs Smith (taken "full face, three-quarters and profile") with similar photographs of Truganina ("who was a pure blood aboriginal without any doubt"). The fact that Mrs Smith's features differed from Truganina's in certain respects was taken as proof of the former's racial impurity.²²⁴ From the perspective of Roth and his contemporaries, the production of mixed-blood offspring was far from a means by which the Tasmanians might survive; it was a cause of their

²²¹ Roth, *Aborigines of Tasmania*, p.5.

²²² See for example *ibid.*, pp.175-77; Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*, pp.307-23.

²²³ Roth, *Aborigines of Tasmania*, p.lxxxvii.

²²⁴ *ibid.*, pp.lxxxiv-lxxxvii.

destruction.²²⁵ The extinction of the Tasmanians referred not to the demise of all persons of Tasmanian Aboriginal descent, but to the disappearance of a supposed racial entity. Similarly on the mainland, only full-bloods were doomed to extinction.

The extinction of the Tasmanians lent some credibility to the expectation that the Australians would soon suffer the same fate; and the former was freely used to buttress the latter. Yet it was one thing to suggest that what had happened in Tasmania could, plausibly, occur on the mainland. It was quite another to assert that it inevitably would.

While the empirical evidence of imminent extinction was thin, so too the scientific pronouncements on how this process would be accomplished were notable more for their vagueness than for their precision. Charles Darwin had devoted a section of *The Descent of Man* to "The Extinction of the Races of Man" - he believed that the Australians were high on the list. After discussing the impact of introduced diseases and alcohol, the inability of savages to change their habits and their lack of motivation, he was forced to conclude that "the gradual decrease and final extinction of the races of man is an obscure problem".²²⁶ Later explanations by his followers were seldom any more perspicacious. In Australia, scientific treatment of the mechanisms of extinction was at best perfunctory. Insofar as any attempt was made to explain the physical process of dying out, Australian anthropologists generally followed Darwin, citing disease, drink, drugs and the demoralisation which followed the vices of civilisation. Plausible as all these may have been as causes of population decline, there remained a wide gap between that and inevitable extinction.

²²⁵ In this connection, Bonwick even revived a rather diluted version of Strzelecki's theory of the inability of Aboriginal women to reproduce their own kind after giving birth to a half-caste; see *Last of the Tasmanians*, pp.386-89; *Daily Life and Origin*, pp.136-37.

²²⁶ Darwin, *Descent of Man*, vol.1, pp.236-40.

One of the more comprehensive attempts to explain the mechanisms of Aboriginal extinction from an evolutionary perspective was also one of the earliest. Howitt devoted five pages of *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* to an explication of the projected extinction of the Kurnai of Gippsland and of the indigenous inhabitants of the continent in general. The diminution in numbers of the Kurnai, he wrote:

is only in accordance with previous experience as to the fate of this aboriginal race when brought into contact with the white man throughout Australia, and it is only a further instance of a general experience of that which is going on all over the world, with greater or less rapidity, under similar contact of savage coloured races with the civilised white races.²²⁷

Howitt was not shy of admitting the role of violence: "In Australia, this extinction of the aborigines commenced with its first settlement. It may be stated broadly that the advance of settlement has, upon the frontier at least, been marked by a line of blood".²²⁸ However, he noted that violence could not account for the "continuing extinction" of such groups as the Kurnai, for whom frontier bloodshed was, in the 1880s, a thing of the past. "It is clear, therefore," he wrote, "that some other causes must be in operation. To say, as often is said, that these causes are mysterious, is only to say that we are ignorant of their nature".²²⁹

Attempting to lift this veil of ignorance, he explained that before white settlement the Kurnai were "in accord" with their environment, a state of equilibrium which was upset by the European intrusion. Civilised vices were given prominence, Howitt maintaining that the Kurnai:

only adopted some of the habits of the white men; but with these they also adopted some of the vicious habits of the new comers. They fell, it may be said, not only without a struggle, but voluntarily into the fatal enticements of intoxication; their women fell, not only into intoxication, but into fatally vicious connections with the worst of the white men. This reacted again upon the tribe, for, with these newly-acquired evil habits, newly-acquired evil diseases were introduced. In

²²⁷ Fison and Howitt, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, pp.181-82.

²²⁸ *ibid.*, p.182.

²²⁹ *ibid.*, p.183.

addition safeguards to health, which had become through custom part of their nature, were no longer regarded.²³⁰

Further elaborating the theme of disruption to the natural equilibrium, he alleged that:

the dying out of this tribe has been the result, not of some mysterious cause, but of the cumulative influence of many and various causes, all arising out of altered surrounding conditions to which either the aborigines must become adapted, or under which they must become extinct. If the aborigine could have become physically and mentally such as a white man, he would have been in equilibrium with his new surroundings. If his physical and mental nature had been able to become modified with sufficient rapidity to come into equilibrium with the changed conditions, he could have survived. But the former alternative is self-evidently an impossibility, and probably the strength of hereditary physical and mental peculiarities has made the latter also an impossibility. The consequence has been that he is rapidly and inevitably becoming extinct.²³¹

Howitt endorsed the idea that Aborigines differed innately from Europeans in their mental as well as their physical attributes, and that the mental peculiarities of the former were, if not entirely ineradicable, at least sufficiently fixed that they could not be altered in the short term. His explication of extinction was predicated on the notion that each race embodied a particular constellation of relatively stable physical, mental and cultural attributes. In the case of the Aborigines, those attributes were primitive; hence the race could not survive in the modern world.

Howitt concluded his explanation by remarking that some descendants of the "half-blood" would survive, although he anticipated that "the number will be small, and in such a case become absorbed into the general population."²³² Racial extinction clearly did not imply that the Aborigines would leave no descendants at all. Rather, it meant that a pure Aboriginal race, embodying the full constellation of physical, mental and cultural peculiarities, would cease to exist.

²³⁰ *ibid.*, pp.183-84.

²³¹ *ibid.*, p.185.

²³² *ibid.*, p.186.

As a physical cause of extinction, the vices of civilisation had long been given prominence, and the Aborigines had long been considered peculiarly susceptible to the enticements of drugs and alcohol, sexual promiscuity and prostitution. Evolutionary scientists maintained the tradition. Lorimer Fison described the "rum-saturated natives in the neighbourhood of our towns" who had "so far profited by the teachings of the higher civilization as to make money by the prostitution of their women".²³³ Drunkenness and prostitution, with its attendant evil of venereal disease, were combined into a composite picture of the degradation which preceded extinction. As morally upright citizens of the late Victorian age, scientists were well aware of the darker side of civilised progress: vices which loomed even larger than those of the primitive black man and which would sweep away whatever moral virtue the latter possessed. Howitt lamented that:

The aborigines in all parts of Australia where settlement is in progress, are more or less rapidly dying out, and even where this is least apparent, the contact of the white man destroys the primitive structure of their society, and modifies their beliefs. Indeed, in all parts of Australia the native race is doomed to destruction sooner or later; contact with the white race is fatal; the aborigines lose the original savage virtue, and acquire instead our vices which destroy them.²³⁴

In the early colonial period, vice had been located primarily among the convicts; by the end of the century it was to be found in the lower classes and, especially in northern Australia, amongst Asiatic aliens.

Opium was regarded as an even greater scourge than alcohol. Howitt claimed the "rapid extinction" of the Queensland blacks to be due in large measure to opium abuse.²³⁵ Hermann Klaatsch remarked on the "state of decay" of the Aborigines in north Queensland "owing to the introduction of opium by the Chinese".²³⁶ The visiting Norwegian naturalist Carl Lumholtz,

²³³ *ibid.*, p.30.

²³⁴ Howitt, "Anthropology in Australia", p.22.

²³⁵ Howitt, *Native Tribes of South East Australia*, p.xiii.

²³⁶ Klaatsch, "Some Notes on Scientific Travel", p.578. See also "Australian Aborigines: Lecture by Dr Klatsch [sic]", p.xxvi.

who believed that within "a few generations" the Aborigines "will have disappeared from the face of the earth", described the situation in central Queensland in the 1880s:

- ... The degeneration and demoralisation of the natives, which are an inevitable result of the march of civilisation, are already far advanced even in this part of Australia. The natives become more indolent, and they lose their former self-reliance and independence after they acquire the habit of relying on what they can get from the white man. They spend most of their time near the stations and villages, where they are able to obtain liquor and opium, for which the Chinese immigrants soon give them a taste. I cannot conceive a more disgusting sight than a camp of such ragged, impudent blacks marked by all the vices of civilisation.²³⁷

He continued with a vivid description of "a most disgusting scene", redolent with "the smell of opium", with "natives pale as death itself" sitting around their fires.²³⁸

While scientists made a connection between immorality and extinction, philanthropists could be even more strident in their condemnation of the deadly poison of civilised vices. And no better example could be found of a philanthropic adherent to the doomed race idea than the redoubtable Daisy Bates. In a lecture delivered to Governor-General and Lady Northcote in 1907, the concerns which were to dominate Bates's life were already clearly apparent. It "should never be forgotten", she declared, "that we are dealing with a dying race".²³⁹ "All that can be done is to render their passing easier", Bates insisted, "and for this reason if for no other, no effort should be spared on their behalf as long as they remain with us".²⁴⁰ A large part of her lecture was devoted to the "sexual trouble" which "will never be stamped out as long

²³⁷ C. Lumholtz, *Among Cannibals: An Account of Four Years' Travel in Australia and of Camp Life with the Aborigines of Queensland*, London, 1889, (Facsimile edn, Firle, Sussex, 1979), pp.363-64.

²³⁸ *ibid.*, p.364.

²³⁹ D. Bates, Notes for a lecture delivered to the Governor-General and Lady Northcote, p.8, Bates, Daisy Mary, Papers, ANL Ms.365, (hereafter Bates Papers, ANL), items 88/118-141. According to the AIATSIS catalogue, this lecture was given at the Karrakatta Club in Perth in 1907.

²⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.2.

as the native women are contiguous to white or coloured men".²⁴¹ Aboriginal settlements should always be located away from towns, because:

If any native settlement whatever be contiguous to a township, drunkenness and immorality will follow not because the whites frequent the settlement as [sic] because the township is so easy of access to the native.²⁴²

Bates advocated the "strict segregation" of Aborigines "on native reserves far removed from any white settlement", and severe legal penalties for white and coloured men found guilty of "cohabitation with a native woman".²⁴³ Not that any of this would save the race from extinction; it would merely render their passing easier.

According to Bates, the northern pearling districts were the scenes of the greatest debauchery of all. The "inducements of unlimited food and drink held out to the natives by the coloured crews of the pearling luggers" drew the former out of the mission stations and into vice. She described the scene at Sunday Island and Beagle Bay:

during the laying up season of the pearling boats every able-bodied man and woman left the missions to join the coloured crews, many of the men taking their young promised wives - not yet arrived at the age of puberty - with them to take part in the horrible license.²⁴⁴

Bates maintained that "the natives themselves are the willing accomplices of the Manilla men", both sexes eagerly seeking the "gratification of [their] passions".²⁴⁵ Partly, this licentious state of affairs was due to the breakdown of the old rules of marriage; partly, it derived from traditional custom itself, which permitted sexual license. More generally it derived from the susceptibility of primitive races to the seductive lures of immorality, Bates arguing that:

as in the most civilised countries immoral forces have to be continuously dealt with, so amongst these most primitive peoples,

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.18.

²⁴² *ibid.*, p.18.

²⁴³ *ibid.*, p.19.

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.19.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp.19, 23.

these forces are also strongly in evidence, the more strongly because of their primitiveness.²⁴⁶

Drunkenness and debauchery were part cause, part symptom, of the Aboriginal demise; but the fundamental reason for their extinction lay in the fact that they were a primitive race. The Aborigines of southern Australia, she declared:

are from their very primitiveness and inability to assimilate the new civilization, so rapidly passing out of existence.

The Northern natives are disappearing more slowly but none the less surely - the Northern Coastal natives number units now where less than forty years ago they numbered hundreds and although their term of existence may be lengthened through the strain of foreign blood, so to speak, that is in them their ultimate extinction also is but too certain.... To save and civilize the race we are supplanting is an impossibility, for they are physically uncivilizable, and are inevitably doomed to perish.²⁴⁷

She added the rider that "intermarriage with whites" allowed the possibility of the Aborigines leaving some descendants.

In citing primitivity as the root cause of Aboriginal extinction, Bates was in accord with majority scientific opinion. The prevalent view was that primitives, when brought into contact with civilisation, degenerated to a still more savage state, by losing their limited native virtues and acquiring nothing but additional vices. Frequently, this notion was more implied than explained; but in characteristic fashion Dr Allan Carroll articulated it clearly:

Since the whites have resided here the blacks have ceased to practise their Bora rites and ceremonies, and their ancestral laws and customs, and instead of advancing they have retrograded to a still lower degree of savagery.²⁴⁸

Not only were the Aborigines incapable of progress, they were fundamentally incompatible with civilisation; and if forced to endure its touch they would

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.18.

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.2; underlining in the original. By a "strain of foreign blood" Bates was presumably referring to the widespread notion that the northern coastal Aborigines had a small element of Malay ancestry; this infusion of the blood of a somewhat higher race would apparently slow the process of extinction.

²⁴⁸ *Science of Man*, vol.6, no.2, 21 March 1903, p.34.

merely slide further down the social scale to a point where survival itself was impossible.

A more elaborate explanation of racial extinction was put forward by W.L. Cleland. He contended that the demise of the Aboriginal race was due to its "non-plasticity" of type, which made it incapable of surviving outside the primordial forests and plains of this ancient continent. The starting point for this argument was the claim that the Aboriginal race was an early divergence from the main line of human evolution; the formation of the race had taken place shortly after *homo sapiens* had separated from the simian line of development.²⁴⁹ The "premature budding away or divergence from the parent anthropological branch prior to a more perfect general evolution" meant that the Aborigines "were less humanised at the time of their separate evolutionary parting".²⁵⁰ Because of their geographical isolation, the Aborigines were also a very pure race, which according to Cleland was disadvantageous in the struggle for survival. He maintained that:

From a national point of view pure breeds are anything but desirable, and it is only those raceless masses - of which the British are an excellent example - the survivors and products of past anthropological baptisms, that ever rise to world wide renown and influence.²⁵¹

The Aborigines' "general isolation from other human races" had served to protect them from the sharper edge of the struggle for survival. At the same time, "the various local isolations brought about by the physical features of the continent" were of insufficient evolutionary force to produce "different sub-types amongst the Australians themselves".²⁵² The Aboriginal race was thus

²⁴⁹ Cleland, "President's Address", 1898-99, pp.300-01. See also W.L. Cleland, "Factors Producing Uniformity of Type amongst Australian Aborigines", *Transactions and Proceedings and Report of the Royal Society of South Australia*, vol.24, part 2, 1900, pp.176-85.

²⁵⁰ Cleland, "President's Address", 1898-99, p.305.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.304.

²⁵² *ibid.*, p.305. Cleland did refer to evolution as a "force" which worked through nature, impelling organisms toward a more perfect state; see "Factors Producing Uniformity of Type", pp.183-84.

primordial, pure and remarkably uniform; these features resulted in its "non-plasticity" of type. Cleland maintained that:

It is evident that if any race is to be progressive, it must have a capacity for adapting itself to any changes of the environment, and also to being able to form fertile hybrids with any other invading races.... [E]verywhere we find that when a primordial type of man is brought in contact with more vitalised or plastic types it speedily appears to melt away and become extinct. The more primitive and purer the type the less is its chance of becoming modified by crossing with other types.²⁵³

The conclusion was inescapable: "no longer protected by isolation, [the Aborigine] must shortly entirely disappear from the face of the earth, for he is an anachronism and archaic".²⁵⁴ Although the detail of Cleland's elaborate argument may not have met with universal scientific approbation,²⁵⁵ its general thrust, that extinction was the inevitable outcome of innate primitivity, certainly had the imprimatur of science.

However, racial extinction most commonly appeared in the scientific literature as a bald statement of fact, unaccompanied by any explanation of how or why it would occur. Indeed, its most common accompaniment was not an explication of process, but a plea for research to be conducted promptly, before this most primitive of races vanished forever. Lost scientific opportunities in Tasmania served as a reminder. Howitt highlighted the urgency of anthropological investigation:

Wherever there are savage races in existence, and where they are disappearing before the white man, no time should be lost in recording all that can be learned about their ceremonies before the knowledge of them is lost for ever.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Cleland, "President's Address", 1898-99, pp.304-05. Cleland implied that mixed-bloods, as well as full-bloods, could not survive into the future, as they were not fully fertile. Although some credibility attached to this view, it was not representative of majority scientific opinion at the time.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.307.

²⁵⁵ The contemporary academic respectability of Cleland's argument must be open to some doubt, for in the same paper as he expounded his theory of extinction due to non-plasticity of type, he also presented his description of orang-utans, making fire, burying their dead, smoking tobacco and keeping a wad of the same in a perforation of the ear-lobe.

²⁵⁶ Howitt, "Address by the President", p.343.

In Australia, the urgency was especially pressing, prompting Howitt to exhort his fellow countrymen:

to set earnestly to work to record all that can yet be learned as to the customs and beliefs, the arts of peace and war, of probably the most primitive race now existing of mankind.²⁵⁷

His colleague Lorimer Fison lamented that the "tribes are rapidly dying out, and with them is perishing information of the highest anthropological value".²⁵⁸ Ramsay Smith railed against the apathy of a public unimpressed by the scientific wonders of Australia: "The primitive pages are here in abundance, but only for a little while. The Sibylline books are presented open to us as a gift; and, as a people, we can't be bothered".²⁵⁹ In similar vein, Dr Hamlyn-Harris, President of the Royal Society of Queensland, complained of the paucity of scientific investigations into the "remaining native tribes".²⁶⁰ Time was short, he urged, as the "hour for Queensland will soon have struck, for the native is passing at an appalling rate". To record what remained of this stone age people, Hamlyn-Harris declared, was "a duty ... to future generations".²⁶¹

This constant recitation of the urgent need for scientific investigation smacks at times of academic special pleading, for money and resources to be made available for the scientists to conduct the relevant research. Self-interest of another kind may also have intruded - the self-interest of an invading people who wished to absolve themselves of blame by portraying the fate of the vanquished as the inevitable outcome of a natural law. At its most extreme, frontier settlers did attempt to wash their bloody hands in the waters of evolutionary theory. But the notion that it was morally justifiable to go about shooting blackfellows did not necessarily inhere in the doomed race idea; and scientists, along with many other adherents to the idea, reviled such

²⁵⁷ Howitt, "Anthropology in Australia", p.22.

²⁵⁸ Fison, "Anthropology: Address by the President", pp.151-52.

²⁵⁹ Smith, "Australian Conditions and Problems", p.374.

²⁶⁰ Hamlyn-Harris, "Some Anthropological Considerations of Queensland", pp.10-11.

²⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.35.

acts in the strongest terms.²⁶² If a morality was to be extracted from racial extinction it was the much grander moral law of progress.

The doomed race concept derived its strength from the way it dovetailed neatly into contemporary preoccupations and presuppositions about the nature of civilisation and man. Progress was a law of nature, and those who had failed to elevate themselves would necessarily be swept aside in the universal struggle for survival. If the prospect of the extinction of an entire race was not one which a Victorian gentleman or gentlewoman could contemplate with complete equanimity, there was nonetheless a positive side to the picture. For the extinction of the unfit was merely the obverse of that beneficial law of survival of the fittest which guaranteed the constant elevation and improvement of mankind. Darwin himself had assumed Australian Aboriginal extinction to be an inevitable accompaniment of a general advance in civilisation.²⁶³ Alfred Russell Wallace took the idea much further, to a utopia where only the progressive races remained; he enthused:

If my conclusions are just, it must inevitably follow that the higher - the more intellectual and moral - must displace the lower and more degraded races; and the power of 'natural selection', still acting on his mental organisation, must ever lead to the more perfect adaptation of man's higher faculties to the conditions of surrounding nature, and to the exigencies of the social state. While his external form will probably ever remain unchanged, except in the development of that perfect beauty which results from a healthy and well organised body, refined and ennobled by the highest intellectual faculties and sympathetic emotions, his mental constitution may continue to advance and improve till the world is again inhabited by a single homogenous race, no individual of which will be inferior to the noblest specimens of humanity. Each one will then work out his own happiness in relation to that of his fellows; perfect freedom of action will be maintained,

²⁶² A few examples will suffice: Carl Lumholtz was disgusted by the brutality of settlers and Native Police in North Queensland; see Lumholtz, *Among Cannibals*, pp.372-76. F.J. Gillen (who will be discussed in the following chapter) was instrumental in removing from the Alice Springs district an enthusiastic practitioner of the frontier law of the gun, Constable Willshire; Gillen even tried to prosecute the police officer for the murder of Aborigines; see D.J. Mulvaney and J.H. Calaby, 'So Much That is New': *Baldwin Spencer, 1860-1929: A Biography*, Carlton, Vic., 1985, p.125. Daisy Bates was perhaps the most vociferous exponent of the view that because the Aborigines were doomed to perish, they must never be mistreated.

²⁶³ See Darwin, *Descent of Man*, vol.1, p.201.

since the well balanced moral faculties will never permit any one to transgress on the equal freedom of others; restrictive laws will not be wanted, for each man will be guided by the best of laws; a thorough appreciation of the rights, and a perfect sympathy with the feelings, of all about him; compulsory government will have died away as unnecessary (for every man will know how to govern himself), and will be replaced by voluntary associations for all beneficial public purposes; the passions and animal propensities will be restrained within those limits which most conduce to happiness; and mankind will have at length discovered that it was only required of them to develop the capacities of their higher nature, in order to convert this earth, which had so long been the theatre of their unbridled passions, and the scene of unimaginable misery, into as bright a paradise as ever haunted the dreams of seer or poet.²⁶⁴

The end of the evolutionary process was utopia, but the journey there was not an easy one, requiring the extinction of all the lower and unprogressive races.

The imputation of an ultimate purpose to the evolutionary process reached perhaps its most extreme form in the writings of the eugenicists. The prominent British biometrician and eugenicist, Karl Pearson, asserted that:

The struggle [between races] means suffering, intense suffering, while it is in progress; but that struggle and that suffering have been the stages by which the white man has reached his present stage of development, and they account for the fact that he no longer lives in caves and feeds on roots and nuts. This dependence of progress on the survival of the fitter race, terribly black as it may seem to some of you, gives the struggle for existence its redeeming features; it is the fiery crucible out of which comes the finer metal.²⁶⁵

As an example of the "masterful human progress following an inter-racial struggle", Pearson cited the case of Australia, where a "lower race" had given way to "a great civilisation".²⁶⁶ One inhabitant of that great civilisation, H.K. Rusden, articulated an extreme social Darwinist argument:

The survival of the fittest means that might - wisely used - is right. And thus we invoke and remorselessly fulfil the inexorable law of natural selection (or demand and supply), when exterminating the

²⁶⁴ Wallace, "Origin of Human Races", pp.clix-clxx. Throughout his life, Wallace maintained a utopian vision of the evolutionary process, although after his conversion to a more spiritualist outlook the more narrowly racially deterministic elements, including the inevitable extinction of the lower races, were dropped from the picture. See for example his last published book *Social Environment and Moral Progress*.

²⁶⁵ K. Pearson, *National Life from the Standpoint of Science*, London, 1901, p.24.

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.23.

inferior Australian and Maori races, and we appropriate their patrimony as coolly [sic] as Ahab did the vineyard of Naboth, though in diametrical opposition to all our favourite theories of right and justice - thus proved to be unnatural and false. The world is better for it; and would be incalculably better still, were we loyally to accept the lesson thus taught by nature, and consistently to apply the same principle to our conventional practice.²⁶⁷

A doctrinaire eugenicist, Rusden would brook no compromise on the principle that those who deserved to survive were the fittest.

Not all scientists were as sanguine as Wallace in their expectations of evolutionary progress; and not all were prepared to endorse the extremes to which Pearson and Rusden took the notion of struggle for survival in human societies. But all agreed that without the stimulus of conflict and struggle a race would stagnate, as the Aborigines had in this quiet quarter of the globe. All agreed too, that the struggle for survival, which necessitated the elimination of unfit and inferior specimens of humanity, tended ultimately toward the improvement and uplift of the species.²⁶⁸ Struggle for survival was the necessary means by which the pathway of progress was swept clean of all inferior and outmoded forms of humanity.

Moreover, the extinction of certain races was an outcome which was to a large extent predetermined by the argumentative strategies of evolutionary anthropology. By making human evolution a directional process, the goal of which was civilised man, the notion of fitness in the human species could be interpreted as fitness for civilisation. A race, which after untold millennia remained in the stone age, thereby demonstrated its unfitness for that

²⁶⁷ H.K. Rusden, "Labour and Capital", *Melbourne Review*, vol.1, 1876, p.68; cited in Goodwin, "Evolution Theory in Australian Social Thought", p.399.

²⁶⁸ Greta Jones, in *Social Darwinism*, pp.5-9, has pointed out that by using struggle for survival in this way, evolutionists were adhering to a pre-Darwinian conception of the term. Before the publication of the *Origin*, notions of struggle for survival and survival of the fittest had widespread currency, explaining not transmutation of species but the means by which a species was kept true to its type while constantly striving upward toward its ideal form. Opponents of Darwinism also employed the concept of struggle for survival in this sense; see for example J. Crawfurd, "On the Theory of the Origin of Species by Natural Selection in the Struggle for Life", *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, vol.7, 1869, especially p.29.

attainment. At the same time, by linking together physical, mental, moral and cultural advancement under a single bio-social law, evolutionary theory rendered attainment an indicator of capacity. A race which had not progressed could not progress. Unable to fit themselves to a higher evolutionary stage, the doom of the Aborigines was sealed.

Yet no theory is entirely seamless, least of all in the social sciences. And scientists are influenced by far more than merely logical deduction from their own theoretical precepts. Around the turn of the century, a notion that extinction may not be inevitable was tentatively sounded. Hermann Klaatsch ended his address to the 1907 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science with a plea for "a more enlightened treatment of the Australian aboriginals" on both scientific and humanitarian grounds.²⁶⁹ Although he made no definite assertion on the capacity of the race to survive, he did hint that survival was a possibility if the Australian people and the Australian government adopted appropriate methods.²⁷⁰ At an earlier meeting of the Association, the president of the Anthropology Section, John Forrest, had referred to:

a great duty we owe to [the Aborigines] and to Australia, not only to try to preserve the race from extinction, but also to preserve their history, laws, habits, traditions, and languages, as far as is possible, and there is still sufficient time to do this as regards the interior of the continent.²⁷¹

Although the expression was ambiguous, it was at least implied that an attempt to preserve the race was worth making. More boldly, Dr Ramsay Smith, in his article on the Aborigines for the 1909 *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, declared that:

²⁶⁹ Klaatsch, "Some Notes on Scientific Travel", p.591.

²⁷⁰ Interestingly, in the summary of Klaatsch's address which was published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*, 1906-07, p.xxvii, these hints were expressed in more definite terms: "It would, he said, be a great pity to allow [the natives of Port Darwin] to die out. They were able to work, and of them it could be safely said that they had a future".

²⁷¹ J. Forrest, "Presidential Address in Section G Anthropology" in *Report of the Second Meeting of the AAAS*, 1890, p.162.

The problem of what to do with the race, the most interesting at present on earth and the least deserving to be exterminated by us, and the most wronged at our hands, is not a difficult one to solve, were a solution really desired.²⁷²

He gave no indication of whether he believed that a solution really was desired, still less what that solution might be. Nonetheless, his remark plainly indicated that Aboriginal extinction was not an inevitability of nature but a possibility which could be averted by human intervention.

Although many churchmen and missionaries adhered to the doomed race idea, others refused to accept that extinction was a law of God or of nature. The Reverend Donald MacKillop, a Jesuit missionary to the Aborigines of the Northern Territory, was one of the latter. The chances of Aboriginal survival, he estimated, were "ten to one against", not because of any "unfitness on the side of the aborigines" but "because the Anglo-Saxon race is what it is".²⁷³ He predicted that:

Proud in its present superiority, that race [the Anglo-Saxons] will remember the lessons of history only when an invading people shall have meted out to it the justice which it has shown to the helpless blackman. A hundred years, perhaps hundreds, may pass; but with the teeming millions of Asia at our door, who shall say no day of retribution will come upon Australia?²⁷⁴

In MacKillop's view, whatever fate was to befall the Aborigines was a matter of human responsibility, not the outcome of the inexorable workings of a natural law. If they were to survive, they must become Christian and civilised; MacKillop believed the Aborigines to be capable of both attainments.²⁷⁵ To ensure that they did so, he adopted a missionary policy of gradualism, which entailed a respect for traditional custom, law, language and belief, and the

²⁷² Smith, "The Aborigines of Australia", p.175.

²⁷³ D. MacKillop, "Anthropological Notes on the Aboriginal Tribes", p.264. MacKillop's uncomplimentary remarks on the Anglo-Saxon race may have been influenced by the fact that he was himself of highland Scottish descent.

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.264.

²⁷⁵ He also opposed the evolutionary interpretation of Aboriginal culture, arguing the degenerationist line that the race had once been "very much higher in the social scale than we now find it"; *ibid.*, p.263.

step-by-step dismantling only of those elements which he considered to be in direct conflict with the Catholic faith.²⁷⁶

More optimistic than most, Archibald Meston declared that the implementation of his "carefully considered plan" would result in the "improvement and preserving from extinction of that unhappy race", the Australian Aborigines.²⁷⁷ "The 'Doomed Race' theory", he proclaimed, "is relegated to its deserved oblivion".²⁷⁸ This was sheer rhetoric; at the time Meston wrote, the doomed race idea was in its heyday. His proposals for Aboriginal preservation harked back to early colonial schemes for their civilisation, and Meston himself admitted as much.²⁷⁹ The problem, he explained, derived from the fact that the "hunter of the Stone Age cannot be suddenly transformed into an industrious farmer".²⁸⁰ And industrious farming was the future envisaged for the Aborigines. Earlier attempts to raise the Aborigine in the scale of civilisation had failed, because those who tried had:

overlooked the fact that the Australian native is primitive native of the Stone Age, separated from the men who came to instruct him by many thousand years of cumulative civilisation; that the pupil was the base, and the teacher the apex, of a pyramid that has been building since savage man made the first stone implement far back in the long-forgotten unrecorded morning of the human race. The attempt to civilise the aboriginal in a year, or in ten years, or in the lifetime of one generation, meant a hopeless effort to pass him by some magical transformation through all the stages that have occupied civilised man for countless ages.²⁸¹

What was required was a "gradual transition" over the course of several generations, until the Aborigines could "settle in the agricultural stage, useful to themselves and mankind".²⁸² Although hedged around with some

²⁷⁶ For further detail on MacKillop see the entry in *NTDB*, pp.194-95; see also T. Austin, *Simply the Survival of the Fittest: Aboriginal Administration in South Australia's Northern Territory 1863-1910*, Darwin, 1992, pp.54-62.

²⁷⁷ A. Meston, *Queensland Aborigines: Proposed System for their Improvement and Preservation*, Brisbane, 1895, p.3.

²⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.3.

²⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, pp.3-4, 22-25.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.25.

²⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.24.

²⁸² *ibid.*, p.25.

qualifications, Meston's proposal consisted essentially of a revival of Enlightenment stage theory, and of an Enlightenment vision of progress in which Aborigines could share.

CHAPTER TWO

AN EMINENT EVOLUTIONIST AND A POLICY OF PROTECTION

Pre-eminent among Australia's evolutionary anthropologists, Walter Baldwin Spencer combined theoretical coherence with ethnographic comprehensiveness. His major books on the Aborigines, most of them written in collaboration with F.J. Gillen, display a richness of detail on the lives of those whom he regarded as a stone age people.¹ Although a staunch adherent to the evolutionary perspective, he seldom allowed theory to obtrude overtly in these major ethnographic texts.² His studies were premised on the assumption of Aboriginal primitivity; his books were written as empirical accounts of the way of life of Aborigines.

Spencer received his university education in the 1880s, a time when evolutionary ideas still retained some of the freshness of originality, but had become well established in British academic circles. As a biology student at Oxford, he not only became a convinced evolutionist but was also introduced to anthropology, attending a series of lectures by Tylor and assisting in moving the vast Pitt-Rivers ethnographic collection.³ In 1887 Spencer came to Australia to occupy the foundation chair of biology at the University of Melbourne, a position he retained until his retirement in 1920. Although it was as an anthropologist that Spencer acquired fame, his anthropological research was squeezed into a very heavy work-load as university lecturer and administrator, museum director and patron of the arts.⁴

¹ See W.B. Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, London, 1899 (reprinted New York, 1968); W.B. Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, London, 1904; W.B. Spencer, *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia*, London, 1914; W.B. Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People*, 2 vols, London, 1927.

² Evolutionary theory was far more salient in his shorter journal articles and conference addresses. In the texts cited in the previous footnote, overt theorising was generally confined to the introductions and prefaces.

³ See Mulvaney and Calaby, 'So Much that is New', pp.58-60.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.2.

His biology and his anthropology were informed by a common set of evolutionary assumptions. Making a close analogy between the fauna of Australia and its human inhabitants, Spencer opened the preface to his final book, *The Arunta*, with the assertion:

Australia is the present home and refuge of creatures, often crude and quaint, that have elsewhere passed away and given place to higher forms. This applies equally to the aboriginal as to the platypus and kangaroo. Just as the platypus, laying its eggs and feebly suckling its young, reveals a mammal in the making, so does the aboriginal show us, at least in broad outline, what early man must have been like before he learned to read and write, domesticate animals, cultivate crops and use a metal tool. It has been possible to study in Australia human beings that still remain of the culture level of men of the Stone Age.⁵

To Spencer, Australia was a huge museum of antiquated forms of life. And it is not surprising that as the director of a real museum - the National Museum of Victoria - he had the Aboriginal exhibits relegated to the natural history section.⁶ This did not indicate that Spencer believed the Aborigines to be mere animals - he entertained no such idea. Rather, it reflected a convinced evolutionist's assumptions about what was scientifically significant. The shared attribute of Australian fauna and Australian Aborigines was not animality, but primitivity.

The Biologist as Anthropologist

Although Spencer was probably interested in the Aborigines before coming to Australia, it was as a member of the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia in 1894 that he first made their acquaintance. Spencer was employed as the expedition's biologist and photographer, but during the months spent in the field his interests turned more and more to anthropology. W.A. Horn had sponsored the expedition partly because he considered that "it was the duty of some one to obtain accurate information as to the manners, customs, superstitions, etc., of the primitive races which inhabited the

⁵ Spencer and Gillen, *The Arunta* vol.1, p.vii.

⁶ Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much That is New*, p.247. See also W.B. Spencer, *Guide to the Australian Ethnological Collection exhibited in the National Museum of Victoria*, 3rd edn, Melbourne, 1922.

continent of Australia".⁷ Professor Edward Stirling was recruited as the anthropologist, but it was to be Spencer, not Stirling, who built an anthropological career on the foundations of the expedition. At this time, Spencer was already expressing ideas which were to recur throughout his work: a scepticism toward missionary activity, an opinion that Aboriginal abilities were limited, and a belief in their inevitable demise. In his report on the Horn Expedition, he maintained that:

To attempt as has been tried at Hermannsburg [Lutheran Mission] and elsewhere to teach them [the Aborigines] ideas absolutely foreign to their minds and which they are utterly incapable of grasping simply results in destroying their faith in the precepts which they have been taught by their elders and in giving them in return nothing which they can understand. In contact with the white man the aborigine is doomed to disappear: it is far better that as much as possible he should be left in his native state and that no attempt should be made either to cause him to lose faith in the strict tribal rules, or to teach him abstract ideas which are utterly beyond the comprehension of an Australian Aborigine.⁸

Although Spencer's anthropological writings at this time were pedestrian, he did make two significant discoveries on the Horn Expedition. One was Frank Gillen, an amateur and omnivorous ethnographic collector on whom Spencer came to rely heavily for information about, and introductions to, Aborigines. The other was the Northern Territory.⁹ From Spencer's day to the present, the Territory has been a favoured haunt of anthropologists; for it was there, remote from the civilisation of Australia, that the true primitive could be found.¹⁰

In 1896 Spencer returned to the Centre to conduct more detailed investigations with Gillen among the Arunta and surrounding tribes. The outcome was the 1899 publication, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*. It

⁷ W.A. Horn, "Introduction" to W.B. Spencer (ed.), *Report on the Work of the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia*, London, 1896, part 1, p.viii.

⁸ W.B. Spencer, "Through Larrapinta Land: A Narrative of the Expedition", in Spencer (ed.), *Report on the Horn Scientific Expedition*, part 1, p.111.

⁹ All four of Spencer's major anthropological texts dealt with Northern Territory tribes.

¹⁰ The Territory's only rivals in this regard were the Kimberleys and Cape York Peninsular, which also shared the relevant attributes.

was a detailed ethnography which ranged from social organisation to spiritual beliefs to the manufacture of weapons, and which included the most comprehensive collection of Australian ethnographic photographs that had been published to date. Underlying the ethnographic description was the assumption that the Aborigines of the central deserts were a stone age race, as they had been "shut off from contact with other peoples" and thereby deprived of "the stimulus derived from external sources".¹¹ Such a conception was commonplace; yet it is indicative of the persistence of the degenerationist explanation of Aboriginal savagery that Spencer felt obliged to devote a paragraph to its refutation:

It is sometimes asserted that the Australian native is degenerate, but it is difficult to see on what grounds this conclusion is based.... It is true that there has not been any strongly marked upward movement, but on the other hand, with possibly a few exceptions which might have been expected to occur now and again in particular cases ... any movement which there has been in social matters has been clearly in the direction of increasing their complexity, and there is, at all events, no evidence of the former existence of any stage of civilisation higher than the one in which we now find them.¹²

Primitive they may have been, but Aborigines were not depicted by Spencer and Gillen as brutal or bestial; rather, they claimed, "the life of the Australian native is, for the most part, a pleasant one".¹³

The pleasant life, however, was restricted to those who had so far escaped the degrading influences of civilisation. Spencer and Gillen noted that in the southern parts of Central Australia:

where they have been long in contact with the white man, not only have their numbers diminished rapidly, but the natives who still remain are but poor representatives of their race, having lost all or nearly all of their old customs and traditions. With the spread of the white man it can only be a matter of comparatively a few years before the same fate will befall the remaining tribes.¹⁴

¹¹ Spencer and Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, p.54.

¹² *ibid.*, p.54.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.54.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.7

The coming of white settlement introduced "a disturbing element into the environment"; this resulted in the "strict moral code, which is certainly enforced in their natural state", being "set on one side, and nothing is adopted in place of it".¹⁵ With the decay of the old traditions, "vice, disease, and difficulty in securing the natural food ... rapidly diminish their numbers".¹⁶ The introduction of clothing, too, had a detrimental influence, and the cumulative effect of these factors was that:

no sooner do the natives come into contact with the white men, than phthisis and other diseases soon make their appearance, and, after a comparatively short time, all that can be done is to gather the few remnants of the tribe into some mission station where the path to final extinction may be made as pleasant as possible.¹⁷

As scientists, Spencer and Gillen emphasised the urgency of research, as the "time in which it will be possible to investigate the Australian native tribes is rapidly drawing to a close".¹⁸

Sir James Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough*, had been instrumental in finding a publisher for *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*. Thereafter Spencer maintained a close intellectual friendship with him and relied to some extent on the patronage of the notable Cambridge scholar.¹⁹ Both men had a particular interest in the development of spiritual and religious beliefs, as key aspects of social evolution. By the late 1890s Frazer had formulated his theory of the sequential evolution of human thought, from magic to religion to science.²⁰ Spencer concurred with this view, advising Frazer that:

I feel more than ever convinced that, judging from our Australian tribes as a fair sample of savages, your theory of magic preceding religion is the true one.²¹

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp.7-8.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.8.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.17-18.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.vii.

¹⁹ See Mulvaney, "Patron and Client", pp.72-73.

²⁰ See R. Ackerman, *J.G. Frazer: His Life and Work*, Cambridge, 1987, pp.153-58; Frazer to Spencer, 28.11.1898, in R.R. Marett and T.K. Penniman (eds), *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence with Sir J.G. Frazer and Others*, Oxford, 1932, pp.41-42.

²¹ Spencer to Frazer, 23.7.1902, in Marett and Penniman (eds), *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, p.75.

Indeed, Spencer's own writings on Central Australian beliefs and ceremonies had provided a major inspiration for Frazer in his originally devising the developmental sequence.²² Aborigines were located in the magical stage; Spencer seldom, if ever, designated Aboriginal beliefs as "religious". This in no way entailed a denial of the complexity of Aboriginal spiritual belief and ritual; their complexity was the very stuff of Spencer's writings. Although he assumed the primitivity of Aboriginal beliefs, he did not equate primitivity with simplicity.²³

On the origins of religious ideas he was drawn into controversy, in which the main protagonists were Frazer and Andrew Lang, with Spencer behind the lines bringing up ammunition for his patron. Lang had been an advocate of the orthodox evolutionary explanation for the origins of religion, but in the late 1890s he defected, arguing that a concept of the Deity may have derived not from the natural unfolding of human mental traits but from actual Divine Revelation. His apostasy stemmed, at least in part, from his finding evidence of monotheism among the Aborigines, who according to evolutionary orthodoxy ought not to possess such advanced beliefs.²⁴ A clear exposition of Aboriginal belief in the "All-Father Byamee" was set out in Mrs Langloh Parker's 1905 publication *The Euahlayi Tribe*.²⁵ Lang contributed an

²² Ackerman, *Frazer*, p.157.

²³ It may be added that Frazer's attitudes toward the sequential improvement of thought, from magic to religion to science, held an element of ambiguity. In his biography of the Cambridge theorist, Ackerman has pointed out that in Frazer's view religion was a necessary stepping-stone along the evolutionary path, but in some ways magic had more in common with science and the aims of the magician were more laudable than those of the priest. Both the magician and the scientist strove for mastery over nature - in the Victorian view, a self-evidently admirable objective - although only the latter had a correct appraisal of the natural laws. If the magician's attempts were foredoomed to failure, he at least tried to control his own destiny, whereas religion led to an attitude of servility and deference to the will of all-powerful gods. See *ibid.*, p.158. Whether Spencer shared these equivocations, I have been unable to ascertain.

²⁴ For accounts of Lang's later theories see *ibid.*, pp.151-53, 170-75; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.320

²⁵ See K.L. Parker, *The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia*, London, 1905, especially pp.4-10. Lang admitted to substantial editorial intervention in this chapter ("Introduction", p.x), though there can be little doubt that the detail about

introduction to the book, in which he took the opportunity to attack Frazer's theories and, more circumspactly, Spencer and Gillen's arguments. On the basis of their social organisation and ritual observances, Lang claimed that the Euahlayi were "less advanced" than Spencer and Gillen's Arunta. Yet the former had at least the "germs" of a monotheistic faith.²⁶ As acrimonious as the dispute became, both sides agreed that Australia was the place to look for archaic forms of the religious life.²⁷

Among the most primitive of supernatural beliefs was totemism, a topic to which Spencer devoted a considerable proportion of his books and articles. At the 1904 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science he explained that:

There can be little doubt but that of all people amongst whom totemism may still be studied the Australian aborigines are the most primitive or backward race, and therefore it is amongst them that we must look for ideas concerned with the significance of an institution which seems to have played an important part in the early development of the human race.²⁸

And the most primitive of the Australians were those like the Arunta, living in the central deserts. Spencer wrote:

Taking all the various beliefs into account, I am inclined to think that we meet with the most primitive ones, in regard to the ceremonial and magical aspects of totemism, in the tribes which occupy the secluded centre of the Australian Continent.²⁹

Euahlayi monotheism was genuinely Mrs Parker's research. The existence or otherwise of a belief in supreme gods (including Byamee) amongst the Aborigines had been a matter of speculation since the early nineteenth century.

²⁶ A. Lang, "Introduction" to Parker, *The Euahlayi Tribe*, pp.xiii-xv.

²⁷ In correspondence with Frazer, Spencer roundly castigated Lang for, amongst other things, using Spencer's own data to buttress the primeval monotheism argument; see Spencer to Frazer, 23.7.1902; Spencer to Frazer, 19.8.1902; Spencer to Frazer, 9.12.1903; all in Marett and Penniman (eds), *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, pp.75, 76, 95-97. Lang also drew on A.W. Howitt's work, much to the latter's dismay; for the dispute between these two men see Walker, *Come Wind, Come Weather*, pp.243-52.

²⁸ W.B. Spencer, "Totemism in Australia" in *Report of the Tenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1904, p.376.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.423.

The same idea was expressed in the second major Spencer and Gillen publication, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, which dealt with the Aborigines living north of the Centre, as far as the Gulf of Carpentaria. Comparing these northerly tribes with those of the central deserts, they maintained that it was:

very difficult to avoid the conclusion that the central tribes, which, for long ages, have been shielded by their geographical isolation from external influences, have retained the most primitive form of customs and beliefs.³⁰

Spencer and Gillen were fortunate indeed that their initial researches had been amongst the most primitive tribes of the most primitive race on earth.³¹

The Aborigines, according to Spencer, were "the most backward race extant", revealing "to us the conditions under which the early ancestors of the present human races existed".³² Since they "never had to contend with any higher race", they had developed along their "own lines without the impetus given by competition with other peoples".³³ In an address given as the president of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in 1921, Spencer elaborated on this theme of Australia as an evolutionary backwater. Both its mammalian fauna and its human inhabitants, he postulated, shared a unique "original complex" of attributes, analogous to, but distinct from, those in other parts of the world. He explained that:

This has led, without any outside influence, to the development, on the one hand, of mammalian forms, along lines parallel to those pursued in regard to fundamental features by higher forms in other parts of the world, but controlled, at the same time, by some factor or combination of factors that has determined the retention of their marsupiality. On the other, it has led to the independent development of a race of human beings along lines parallel to those pursued by

³⁰ Spencer and Gillen, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, p.xii.

³¹ In correspondence with Frazer dated 7 June 1902, Spencer wrote that "the really most primitive" were the Kaitish tribe, "which, curiously, inhabits the country right in the very centre of the continent"; Marett and Penniman (eds), *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, pp.70-71.

³² W.B. Spencer, "The Aborigines of Australia", in G.H. Knibbs (ed.), *Federal Handbook Prepared in Connection with the Eighty-Fourth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, Melbourne, 1914, p.33.

³³ *ibid.*, p.33.

other early races of humanity elsewhere, but always again controlled by some factor or combination of factors that has prevented them from developing into anything higher than men of the stone age.³⁴

This theory of Australian evolution may have contained an incipient notion of divergent evolutionary trends. But it was a notion which he did not - indeed could not - develop.³⁵ The important point about Australian evolution was not its distinctiveness - although that to be acknowledged - but that it ran parallel to evolution elsewhere, and had been retarded at an earlier stage. An emphasis on divergent trends, rather than parallel lines, would undermine the entire evolutionary anthropological enterprise. Aborigines had to be different; but they also had to be sufficiently similar to Europeans to serve as examples "illustrating an early stage in the development of mankind and affording us an insight into certain beliefs held and customs practised by our far-away ancestors".³⁶ Spencer depicted the workings of evolution as:

one long process of gradual development, some forms halting on the way or branching off, as it were, sideways; others, incapable of carrying on the struggle, turning back and degenerating; others, with endless travail, ever straining upwards.³⁷

In human evolution, upward was the path of success. Those races which deviated or stalled were doomed.

Although Spencer was by profession and training a biologist, his anthropological interests were in the social and cultural, rather than the physical, attributes of Aborigines. Physical characteristics were not entirely

³⁴ W.B. Spencer, "Presidential Address to the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science" in *Report of the Fifteenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1921, p.lxxxix; see also pp.lviii, lxii.

³⁵ Spencer did advance a theory of specialised lines of development at the level of individual tribes. "There is no such thing", he wrote, "as an all-round 'primitive' tribe. One group of tribes such as the Dieri and Urabunna may have retained a more primitive form of organisation than another group such as the Arunta and Kaitish, but at the same time the latter may be more primitive in regard to other matters". Spencer to Frazer, 8.9.1903, in Marett and Penniman (eds), *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, p.93. The same idea was elaborated in a letter to Frazer dated 22.9.1903, in *ibid.*, pp.93-94. The degree of primitivity or advancement alluded to here, however, was very limited; taken as a whole, the Aborigines remained "the most backward race extant".

³⁶ Spencer, "Presidential Address to the AAAS", p.lviii.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.lviii.

neglected; they were allocated a chapter, or at least a section of a chapter, in each of his anthropological texts; but they comprised only a very minor part of his writings. He and Gillen did collect anthropometric data, though they were careful to note that all measurements "were taken on the living subject".³⁸ They did:

not attempt to obtain any skulls, for the simple reason that while the desecration of native graves might have enabled us to secure a few, it would at once have put a stop to work in other branches which we have been as yet more anxious to study than to obtain anthropometric data. To have opened native graves would have meant the closing of sources of information with regard to habits and customs.³⁹

Socio-cultural research had higher priority, for as Spencer pointed out: "So long as any aborigines or their skeletons remain, they may be studied from a somatological point of view".⁴⁰ Their culture and society, unlike their skeletons, could not be put in glass cases. The primitivity which lent Aboriginal culture its unique value to science also meant that the time available for research was short. Spencer explained that:

The more primitive a race is, the more rapidly does it lose, or modify, its old customs and beliefs, when it comes in contact with a higher civilisation and there are very few parts of Australia now left in which it is possible to study the aboriginal in his natural state.⁴¹

Cultural dissolution came first; but Spencer clearly expressed the view that the bearers of a primitive culture would themselves become extinct.

He maintained that in any encounter between a high and a low race, the "weaker and less cultured would certainly be exterminated by the stronger and more highly cultured".⁴² In a 1914 article on the Aborigines he took this argument to the extreme of virtually denying the possibility of miscegenation, contending that:

³⁸ Spencer and Gillen, *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, Appendix A, facing p.766.

³⁹ Spencer and Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, Appendix C, facing p.642.

⁴⁰ Spencer, "Presidential Address to the AAAS", pp.lviii-lix.

⁴¹ Spencer, *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory*, p.41.

⁴² Spencer, "Presidential Address to the AAAS", p.lxxx.

Of one thing I think we may feel quite sure, and that is that if we have two savage races, whom we will call A and B, and if one is on a higher level of culture than the other, has better weapons and is generally more capable, there is not the slightest chance of any men of the lower level, say B, mating with women of the higher level A. Nor is there much likelihood of a man of the higher race mating with a woman of the lower. As a matter of fact it is most probable that the lower race would be exterminated.⁴³

It is extraordinary that Spencer could make such a claim, considering that, as Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory only eighteen months before, he had spent a great deal of time and energy trying to stop men of the higher (European and Asian) races mating with women of the lower (Aboriginal) race.⁴⁴ This anomaly aside, Spencer persistently depicted human history as a series of collisions between discrete racial entities, from each of which one race emerged victorious both physically and culturally.⁴⁵ Yet racial blending was possible. Citing Professor Berry's researches,⁴⁶ he argued that it was "probable" that the Australian was a "blend, but between what races it is thus a blend is a matter of conjecture only".⁴⁷ Conjectural racial histories of this kind were not Spencer's forte. On those few occasions when he ventured into the field of racial origins and affinities, his theories were even more tangled and convoluted than the speculations of the specialists.

⁴³ Spencer, "Aboriginals of Australia", p.35.

⁴⁴ See the section headed "The Anthropologist as Administrator" in this chapter. The passage quoted above appeared in the context of refuting John Mathew's theory that the Australians were a blend of a Negrito and a Dravidian race. Nonetheless, the argument was advanced at a generalised level. In an earlier publication he and Gillen had advanced the more moderate proposition that: "When two savage peoples at anything like a decided different level of culture come into contact, there is hardly likely to be any true amalgamation. The men of the lower grade have no chance of marrying into the higher grade, but on the other hand their women are lawful prey to the men of the stronger group"; *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, pp.16-17.

⁴⁵ See for example Spencer, "Presidential Address to the AAAS", pp.lxxvii-lxxxv.

⁴⁶ Spencer did not specify his source in his reference to Berry, but the information seems to have been derived from R.J.A. Berry, A.W.D. Robertson and K.S. Cross, "A Biometrical Study of the Relative Degree of Purity of Race of the Tasmanian, Australian, and Papuan", *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, vol.31, 1910-1911, pp.17-40.

⁴⁷ Spencer, "Aboriginals of Australia", p.35. It may be noted that this argument appeared on the same page as the passage quoted above on the unlikelihood of miscegenation between races on different cultural levels. Presumably, although Spencer did not specify this, the races which blended to form the Australian were on much the same cultural level.

While Spencer took for granted the primitivity of the Aborigines, he also considered that a civilised community had a duty of care toward those who were unable to meet its demands. At the 1921 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science he argued that white Australians had two responsibilities in regard to the Aborigines; one was:

to protect them, as far as possible, not only from us, but from themselves, in the new environment that we have created for them, and with which, left to themselves, they are totally incompetent to cope.⁴⁸

It was also a duty, rather than an indulgence, to:

study as carefully and intensively as possible, their customs and beliefs, and all that is included under the term of their culture, because they stand further back in time record amongst human races than any other people still existing; they represent the last surviving relic of a really primitive stone-age people.⁴⁹

A sense of urgency attached to the latter of these, for according to Spencer "it can only be a matter of comparatively a few years before they are extinct ..."; but he added the rider: "... or the surviving remnants of the tribes have lost all knowledge of their original habits and customs".⁵⁰ Did he mean that only the culture, and not necessarily the people themselves, would become extinct? Or did he merely mean that racial extinction would take more than just a few years? In a later section of this chapter Spencer's equivocation on the doomed race idea will be discussed, in the context of his role as Special Commissioner and Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory in 1912. Before doing so, it is appropriate to sketch out some of the conditions and problems which the Melbourne professor would encounter and attempt to resolve in that remote part of Australia.

An Untamed Territory

On 9 September 1839 John Lort Stokes, Lieutenant on HMS *Beagle* on a survey of the northern Australian coastline, discovered a fine harbour,

⁴⁸ Spencer, "Presidential Address to the AAAS", p.lxxxix.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.lxxxix.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.lxxxix.

naming it, after a friend and former ship-mate, Port Darwin.⁵¹ Stokes had a vision of civilising the wilderness, including that area which was to become known as the Northern Territory. He believed too, that the grand imperial enterprise imposed a responsibility on the colonising power, to provide and care for the aboriginal natives of the country.⁵² Throughout the period of South Australian administration of the Northern Territory, from 1863 to 1910, attempts were made on both counts, to develop its tropical province and to civilise the Aborigines living there. More usually than not, the attempts floundered. Pastoral stations were founded, mining fields opened, maritime industries established, but all on a rather precarious economic footing. Towns were minuscule - Darwin in 1911 had a population of 1300, half of whom were Chinese - community services minimal, the white population sparse and predominantly male.⁵³ Civilising the wilderness still had a long way to go when the Commonwealth government assumed control in 1911.

As in most parts of Australia, the progress of civilisation in the Territory, limited as it was, involved the shedding of a good deal of Aboriginal blood.⁵⁴ Aboriginal interests were seldom permitted to take precedence over the demands of economic development. By the 1880s, and possibly before, Aborigines were playing a part in that economic development, as workers in the pastoral industry, a role which was to increase in importance over the following half-century.⁵⁵ In parts of the Territory a quasi-feudal system developed on the pastoral stations, with the managers dispensing provisions and protection in exchange for Aboriginal labour, and exercising a stern paternal discipline over the resident work-force. With the South Australian

⁵¹ A. Powell, *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory*, 2nd ed, Carlton, Vic., 1988, p.45; *NTDB*, p.275.

⁵² Powell, *Far Country*, pp.45, 109; *NTDB*, p.276.

⁵³ See Powell, *Far Country*, pp.74-112.

⁵⁴ See Austin, *Simply the Survival of the Fittest*, especially pp.9-27; G. Reid, *A Picnic with the Natives: Aboriginal-European Relations in the Northern Territory to 1910*, Carlton, Vic., 1990, pp.61-127; Powell, *Far Country*, pp.124-34.

⁵⁵ See Austin, *Simply the Survival of the Fittest*, especially pp.42-47; Powell, *Far Country*, pp.128-29, 134. See also A. McGrath, *'Born in the Cattle': Aborigines in Cattle Country*, Sydney, 1987.

government showing only limited and sporadic interest in Aboriginal welfare, the development of this sort of unofficial protectorship met with little impediment. There were official protectors, mostly police and other government officers, and some of them, like Frank Gillen, took their protectorship seriously; always, however, it was only one amongst a multitude of other duties.⁵⁶

In the late nineteenth century, missionaries took up the challenge of bringing the word of God to the Northern Territory. The Jesuits established missions near Palmerston and in the Daly River region, while the Lutherans founded Hermannsburg in Aranda country in the central desert. Both these early groups of missionaries attempted to proselytise in the local Aboriginal languages.⁵⁷ They also conducted ethnographic investigations among those whom they sought to convert.⁵⁸ Probably, the missions served as effective buffers between Aborigines and the rough edge of European advancement. But in their central task of converting the heathen, they had little success. The last Jesuit station was abandoned in 1899; and although the Lutherans persisted, they scarcely prospered.⁵⁹

In the closing year of the nineteenth century, Government Resident and Judge of the Northern Territory, C.J. Dashwood, drafted a Bill for the

⁵⁶ See Austin, *Simply the Survival of the Fittest*, pp.64-69.

⁵⁷ Pastor Kempe, the founder of Hermannsburg, compiled the first written grammar and dictionary of the Aranda language; his linguistic work was extended by his successor, Carl Strehlow. See W. McNally, *Aborigines Artefacts and Anguish*, Adelaide, 1981, pp.12-22; *NTDB*, pp.164-66, 282-84. For an account of the work of the Jesuits see the entries for Donald MacKillop and Anton Strele in *NTDB*, pp.194-95, 284-84. See also Reid, *A Picnic with the Natives*, pp.128-42; Austin, *Simply the Survival of the Fittest*, pp.54-62.

⁵⁸ The ethnographic observations of the Jesuit missionary Donald MacKillop have already been alluded to in Chapter One. The claims of the Lutheran, Carl Strehlow, about Aranda religious beliefs were seized upon by Andrew Lang to buttress his arguments for Aboriginal monotheism, thus earning Strehlow the personal animosity of Baldwin Spencer, in addition to the latter's already existing misgivings about the Lutheran mission. See Mulvaney and Calaby, *'So Much that is New'*, pp.392-95; Spencer to Frazer, 9.12.1903, in Marett and Penniman (eds), *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, pp.95-97.

⁵⁹ Powell, *Far Country*, p.136.

protection of Aborigines. As in the Queensland Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897 on which it was modelled,⁶⁰ Dashwood's Bill offered protection through authoritarian control. Passage of the Bill was blocked in South Australia's upper house, and a Select Committee of the Legislative Council was appointed to examine its provisions. One witness called before the Select Committee was Frank Gillen. He considered that although the Bill was "a generous attempt to benefit the condition of the blacks", if passed it would be "a great calamity" to them.⁶¹ Some provisions were unworkable, others too severely authoritarian.⁶² Despite Gillen's involvement in Aboriginal welfare, he bluntly informed the Select Committee that: "There is only one thing to be done with our Australian blacks ... You cannot do any more than make their path to extinction as pleasant as possible".⁶³ Although this was quite the orthodox view of the day, Gillen strayed far from scientific orthodoxy in his explication of the process of extinction:

I do not think the presence of the white man has anything to do with it. Scientific investigation goes to show that the aboriginal race began to decay many years before the white man set foot in Australia.... [C]ontact with the Malay race who traded on the north coast of Australia many hundreds of years ago, and their system of sexual promiscuity at certain times brought about the spread of [syphilis] ... I think syphilis alone is responsible for the decay of the Australian aborigines.⁶⁴

Gillen did not divulge his scientific sources, but it is unlikely to have been his friend and mentor Baldwin Spencer, who never publicly endorsed any such monocausal explanation of Aboriginal extinction.

The Bill's drafter, Government Resident Dashwood, also expressed agreement with the doomed race idea:

There is little room for doubt in my opinion that the advent of the white race in the territory will, in course of time, result in the total

⁶⁰ S.A. Select Committee on the Aborigines Bill, 1899, *Minutes of Evidence*, pp.4, 111.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.94.

⁶² *ibid.*, pp.94-101.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.96.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.99.

extinction of the black race, as has been the case in the southern colonies. History seems to point to the conclusion that this result would follow even were the native amenable to civilising influences; but he is not ...⁶⁵

Perhaps the provisions of the Bill were a massive exercise in smoothing the pillow of a dying race. But it was not for this reason that it failed to become law. The pastoral lobby had considerable influence in parliament, and their interests were best served by the existing *laissez faire*.⁶⁶

Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, officials in the Northern Territory continued to press the need for legislation to regulate the relations of Aborigines with Europeans and Asians. In October 1905 Government Resident Herbert proposed a Bill for the Protection of Aborigines, noting that its central features should be:

Firstly - the checking of the supply of opium to the Aborigines, which, if achieved, will tend to lessen immorality - and Secondly - the regulation of employment and removal from place to place of Aborigines, which will have a tendency in the same direction.⁶⁷

Two years later he again urged the necessity of "protective legislation", in particular from "the point of view of morality".⁶⁸ In 1908 Dr Cecil Strangman, Protector of Aborigines, concluded his report to the government by pointing out that:

an Act for the better protection of the Aborigines is urgently necessary, and if matters are left as at present the problem will gradually solve itself by the practical extinction of this race in all but the unsettled districts of the Northern Territory.

A proposed Act containing many of the salient features of those in force in Queensland and Western Australia ... would if brought into force, ameliorate their condition to a considerable extent.⁶⁹

Regulation of employment and repression of inter-racial sexual activity remained the paramount official concerns throughout the final decade of

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.110.

⁶⁶ See Austin, *Simply the Survival of the Fittest*, pp.85-92; Powell, *Far Country*, p.127.

⁶⁷ Herbert to Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 2.10.1905, PROSA, GRS 1, 402/1905.

⁶⁸ Herbert to Min. NT, 5.10.1907, PROSA, GRS 1, 402/1905.

⁶⁹ C. Strangman, Report on Northern Territory, c. February 1908, PROSA, GRS 1, 175/1908.

South Australian administration. Of the two, employment was the easier to regulate, although prevailing Territorian conditions of remoteness and paucity of government facilities did impose some problems. Suppressing sexual activity was more difficult, and officials were perplexed over how to frustrate, by legislation, acts which normally took place in some degree of privacy. They had many reasons for wishing to do so.

The sexual issue led off in a multiplicity of directions: the half-caste problem, venereal disease, the doomed race, violent conflict, Asiatic vices, alcohol and opium abuse, prostitution, unstable domestic arrangements, racial impurity, and plain old-fashioned revulsion against carnal immorality. All these themes recurred throughout the correspondence of Northern Territory officials, frequently so inextricably intertwined that it is difficult to discern what the central problem was perceived to be. For example Police Sub-Inspector Clode informed the relevant minister that at White Range near Arltunga there were a number of:

Black lubras living with white men, these people have families of halfcasts [sic] growing up who are properly fed and clothed, But this may not last for long as probably the man may leave for some other State, in which case he would leave the Lubra, and, Children, who would then be thrown upon the burden of the State. This shows a very immoral State of Affairs.⁷⁰

Whether the immorality inhered in the sexual relationship or in the anticipated desertion, or both, he did not explain.

In 1905 Government Resident Herbert complained of "many instances of Europeans and Asiatics living a life of immoral intercourse with Aboriginal and half caste women". Referring to those who conducted their immorality within relatively stable domestic arrangements, he admitted that:

the lot of some of the women is better and happier than it would otherwise be. At the same time the fact cannot on that ground alone be defended.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Clode to Min. NT, 4.12.1905, PROSA, GRS 1, 574/1905.

⁷¹ Herbert to Min. NT, 2.10.1905, PROSA, GRS 1, 402/1905.

He added:

The foregoing class of immorality in connection with Aboriginal women, is far more easily controlled and checked than the, to my mind, infinitely more damnable practice of occasional prostitution procured in the more settled districts by the bribes of liquor and opium.⁷²

Drink and drugs had a "fearful effect" on the Aborigines, and prostitution fostered the spread of venereal disease, with disastrous consequences for female fertility.⁷³ In his 1908 report on the Aborigines, Cecil Strangman explained his objections to inter-racial sexual encounters, running the gamut from moral disgust to the allegation that wherever "outrages have been committed by natives against Europeans it seems that the eternal lubra question was at the bottom of it".⁷⁴ The most serious problem, in Strangman's view, was the spread of gonorrhoea. He maintained that:

This disease more than any other factor is gradually and insidiously leading to the extinction of the aboriginal race in the Northern Territory. Its effects are slight in the male compared with the terrible havoc it plays with the reproductive portion of the genital organs in the female leading to permanent sterility and a consequent decline in the birth rate.⁷⁵

Unlike Gillen, with his claim about the Malay origins of syphilis, Strangman insisted that gonorrhoea "has been introduced and is mostly spread by Europeans".⁷⁶ He railed against the disgraceful behaviour of certain white men in the Territory, who regarded "dosing a lubra" as a huge joke, rather than as the tragic cause of racial extinction.⁷⁷

While the sexual misdeeds of white men loomed large in official correspondence those of Asians were singled out for particular condemnation. Herbert referred with disapproval to a "growing desire amongst the Asiatic population to make wives of Aboriginal women".⁷⁸ He acknowledged that

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*; also Herbert to Min. NT, 5.10.1905, PROSA, GRS 1, 402/1905.

⁷⁴ Strangman, Report, c. February 1908, PROSA, GRS 1, 175/1908.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Herbert to Min. NT, 22.1.1908, PROSA, GRS 1, 166/1908.

Asian men provided for their wives and treated them "fairly well"; but, he insisted, it was necessary to "preserve the women for men of their own tribe".⁷⁹ Herbert proposed that:

mixed marriages between Asiatics and Aboriginal women should be strongly discouraged even to the extent of forbidding such marriages. If this is not done and such marriages become the vogue ... it will not be long before the tribes nearer the larger settlements become extinct. Looking at the subject in a practical light and even putting aside questions of humanity and sentiment - it is better for the country to have full blood natives in future years than half caste Asiatics.⁸⁰

Senior officials in Darwin strongly argued the need for legislation granting them the power to prohibit undesirable mixed marriages.⁸¹ Despite their lack of such legal power, they did their utmost to supervise marital choices. When a Malay named Pablo advised Protector Strangman of his desire to marry an Aboriginal woman named Judy, inquiries into the circumstances were made by local police officers, and Pablo's wishes were "answered with an emphatic negative".⁸² Yet when a white man, Frederick Vickman, advised of his intention to marry a three-quarter-caste Aborigine named Nana, police inquiries were again made as to the woman's age and willingness, and Herbert could "see no objection to the proposed marriage".⁸³ However, race was not the only - and perhaps not the major - considerations in these two cases. In the former, Judy's Aboriginal husband was demanding her return, whereas in the latter, Nana does not appear to have had any other husband; she was also four months pregnant.

Referring to the sexual misdeeds of both white and Asian men, Herbert maintained that the "most harmful result of such intercourse is the comparatively numerous half caste offspring resulting therefrom".⁸⁴ In

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.* Herbert seems to have been suggesting that "full blood natives" may have had a future in the country, provided they were not destroyed by miscegenation.

⁸¹ *ibid.* Strangman, Report, c. February 1908, PROSA, GRS 1, 175/1908. W.G. Stretton, Protector of Aborigines, to Gov. Res., 19.8.1909, PROSA, GRS 1, 566/1909.

⁸² See correspondence in PROSA, GRS 10/16881.

⁸³ See correspondence in PROSA, GRS 10/16877.

⁸⁴ Herbert to Min. NT, 2.10.1905, PROSA, GRS 1, 402/1905.

Strangman's view, increasing numbers of half castes were becoming one of the Territory's "most difficult native problems".⁸⁵ He complained that:

The children of the European, the Malay, the Chinaman, the Manillaman, the Fijian and the Jap by aboriginal mothers are to be met with in all civilised districts and as these unfortunate beings inherit the vices of both races, and are trusted by neither, their lot is anything but enviable.⁸⁶

An inheritance of vice was commonly attributed to half-castes at the time; but Strangman did not consider the inheritance to be ineradicable. He continued:

This half bred race is the one that would be benefited most by the establishment of properly conducted mission stations, as they have the sense and readiness of mind necessary to help themselves if protected from the vices of their progenitors.⁸⁷

Strangman did not specify whether the inheritance of vice was biological or social; perhaps he made no clear distinction between the two.

After years of pleading from its officers in the north, the South Australian government finally passed a Northern Territory Aborigines Act on 7 December 1910.⁸⁸ It was closely modelled on the Aboriginal Acts of Queensland (1897) and Western Australia (1905). The major provisions of the 1910 Act concerned the regulation of employment,⁸⁹ the declaration of reserves⁹⁰ and the restriction of sexual relations between races.⁹¹ The Chief Protector and his sub-protectors were given greater authority to intrude into the lives of Aborigines and certain categories of part-Aborigines.⁹² Less than a month after the enactment of legislation, control of the Northern Territory passed into the hands of the Commonwealth government, which thereby acquired, for the first time, responsibility for a significant number of

⁸⁵ Strangman, Report, c. February 1908, PROSA, GRS 1, 175/1908.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ "The Northern Territory Aborigines Act, 1910": An Act to make Provision for the better Protection and Control of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Northern Territory, and for other purposes, no.1024 of 1910 (South Australia).

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, Sect.23-33.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, Sect.13-21.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, Sect.22, 42-45.

⁹² *ibid.*, see especially Sect.9.

Aboriginal people. The 1910 Act became the basis for Commonwealth administration of the indigenous inhabitants of the Territory.⁹³

There is every reason to believe that the Commonwealth government took its new Aboriginal responsibilities seriously. Equally, it is clear that other matters were regarded as being of greater moment. Under South Australian control the Territory had never prospered, and the Commonwealth was determined that its new acquisition would languish no longer. A new era of development lay ahead; or so it was hoped.

In the condition in which it was inherited by the Commonwealth, the Northern Territory could stand as evidence for the theory that the white race could never thrive in the tropics. In the early twentieth century it was widely believed that in the enervating environment of the tropics, the white race would degenerate.⁹⁴ Ever taking an extreme line, the *Science of Man* in 1911 published an article entitled "Are We Turning Black: A Northern Territory Problem".⁹⁵ A more conventional version of the argument that the white race was congenitally unadaptable to a tropical climate was put forward by Matthew MacFie at the 1907 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science. Citing "the collective testimony of numerous high authorities", MacFie maintained that:

the world is divided into color-zones, and that *each climate is exactly suited by natural law to the particular human racial type evolved under its influence, but cannot be adjusted to any other.*⁹⁶

⁹³ "Aboriginals Ordinance, 1911": Ordinance no.16 of 1911, *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, no.2, 8 January 1912, pp.15-20.

⁹⁴ For an analysis of the acclimatisation debate, in the wider context of British and American racial science, see N. Stepan, "Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places" in J.E. Chamberlin and S.L. Gilman (eds), *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, New York, 1985, pp.98-104.

⁹⁵ *Science of Man*, vol.12, no.11, 1 March 1911, pp.209-10.

⁹⁶ M. MacFie, "How can Tropical and Sub-tropical Australia be Effectively Developed?" in *Report of the Eleventh meeting of the AAAS*, 1907, pp.597-599; italics in the original. MacFie's "high authorities" ranged from "Herbert Spencer, England's greatest philosophic thinker" to "Mr C.B. Shaw, a trustworthy citizen".

The inhospitability of the tropics did not mean that the white race had no place there at all. MacFie envisaged "large tropical and sub-tropical agricultural undertakings promoted by white capitalists and superintended by men of the same race", but worked by "colored labor".⁹⁷ For the latter, he suggested "the natives of New Guinea" or Kanakas or Indians; not a mention was made of utilising the existing indigenous people, whose skin colour eminently qualified them for working under the tropical sun. Perhaps he considered them unreliable workers; perhaps he considered that they would soon be extinct; perhaps he did not consider them at all.

Dr Ramsay Smith attended MacFie's address in 1907, and in the ensuing discussion he pulled apart the latter's arguments, point by point.⁹⁸ The previous year, Ramsay Smith had carried out investigations on behalf of the South Australian government into the health and future prospects of the white inhabitants of the Northern Territory. The tenor of his report was optimistic, Ramsay Smith claiming that as "regards both climatic conditions and the non-occurrence of preventable diseases, the Territory is highly favored".⁹⁹ The Aboriginal population was not a major source of contagious disease; and in any case they were "in common with natives elsewhere ... disappearing".¹⁰⁰ He acknowledged that acclimatisation demanded both physical and mental effort; but the human organism was adaptable, for its evolution was predominantly dependent upon cerebral functioning.¹⁰¹ He also thought it appropriate to:

conclude with a caution. In Australia, and especially in tropical Australia, we are dealing with people - I mean white people - whose physical surroundings are very different from those in which the bodily organisations they inherit and the moral code they profess to adopt were evolved; and the results of climatic influences on the bodily organisation are too often evidenced in the less fettered exercise of

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.611; also pp.594-600, 606-10.

⁹⁸ See *ibid.*, pp.612-16.

⁹⁹ W.R. Smith, *Report on Hygiene in the Northern Territory of South Australia*, Adelaide, 1906, p.8.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.8.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, pp.1-2,8.

various passions, and in moral or immoral actions and modes of life that appear to be very different from those they would probably have exhibited in their original homes.¹⁰²

In the torrid zone, licentiousness grew lushly.

A key figure in the scientific promotion of a tropical white Australia was Dr Anton Breinl, working out of the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine in Townsville.¹⁰³ When the Commonwealth government appointed its team of scientific investigators to assess the conditions and prospects of the Northern Territory, Breinl was chosen as medical researcher. His "Report on Health and Disease in the Northern Territory" was a careful and detailed analysis in which he emphasised the need for further research into the influence of local climatic conditions on the constitution of the white man.¹⁰⁴ Although he offered no definite pronouncement on the viability of white settlement in the Territory, his report took a generally favourable view of prevailing health conditions. On the whole, the white population showed "a comparative freedom from disease, if Malaria be excepted"; and malaria, he added, could be controlled. The Aborigines, too, generally enjoyed "fairly good health".¹⁰⁵ "The reason for the slow and tardy increase of the population of the Territory", he wrote, was "not due to the prevalence of disease, but must be sought in another direction".¹⁰⁶

Health, and the suitability of a tropical land for white settlement, were not the only matters on which the Commonwealth sought information when it acquired the Northern Territory. Breinl was accompanied by a geologist, W.G.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.8.

¹⁰³ See L.J. Harloe, "Anton Breinl and the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine" in R. MacLeod and D. Denoon (eds), *Health and Healing in Tropical Australia and Papua New Guinea*, Townsville, 1991, pp.35-46. A more complete account of Breinl's career can be found in L.J. Harloe, *White Man in Tropical Australia: Anton Breinl and the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine*, unpublished BA (Hons) thesis, JCU, 1987.

¹⁰⁴ A. Breinl, "Report on Health and Disease in the Northern Territory", *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, no.1, March 1912, pp.32-54.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p.53.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.53.

Woolnough, a veterinary pathologist, Dr J.A. Gilruth, and an anthropologist, Professor Baldwin Spencer. Together, they comprised the Preliminary Scientific Expedition to the Northern Territory, whose task was to assess the prospects for development of its human, pastoral and geological resources.¹⁰⁷ The Commonwealth was determined to obtain the best available scientific advice on how to foster the progress of its new acquisition.¹⁰⁸ Although generally restrained in style, the Report of the Preliminary Scientific Expedition gave grounds for optimism about the future of the Territory. At times, optimism overcame scientific reserve, as when Gilruth enthused that:

the possibilities will prove to be enormous and almost unlimited, when with the certainty of secure tenure of land under any reasonable conditions, both brains and muscle, with capital, will readily be found to develop this great possession.¹⁰⁹

He cautioned that this envisaged prosperity depended upon the employment of scientific methods of agriculture and pastoralism.¹¹⁰

On the Aborigines, the Preliminary Scientific Expedition reported without such optimism.¹¹¹ It noted that "natives in the immediate vicinity of settlements are for the most part demoralised" and warned that it was "absolutely essential that they should everywhere be prevented from coming into contact with the Chinese, whose influence on them is wholly evil".¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ "Report of the Preliminary Scientific Expedition to the Northern Territory: Summary of Report", *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, no.1, March 1912, pp.3-14. Agricultural potential was separately investigated by another expert, W.S. Campbell, although this matter also received some attention from the Preliminary Scientific Expedition.

¹⁰⁸ Baldwin Spencer played a large part in both promoting and organising this flurry of scientific investigation; see Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much that is New*, pp.265-68.

¹⁰⁹ J.A. Gilruth, "Report on Domesticated Animals in the Northern Territory", *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, no.1, March 1912, p.31.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.31.

¹¹¹ Apart from the brief section on the Aborigines in the "Preliminary Scientific Expedition: Summary of Report", Baldwin Spencer also published a more detailed anthropological dissertation, based on his observations as a member of the Preliminary Scientific Expedition; see W.B. Spencer, "An Introduction to the Study of Certain Native Tribes of the Northern Territory", *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, no.2, April 1912.

¹¹² "Preliminary Scientific Expedition: Summary of Report", p.8.

Attempts to civilise the Aborigines, according to the Report, "must be concerned mainly with the children, for it is practically impossible to civilise without demoralising the adults who have grown up, accustomed from their earliest childhood to a nomad life, and are unfit for anything else".¹¹³ The scientists anticipated that the two recently established missions at Roper River and Bathurst Island might "yield good results"; but they were equivocal on this point, remarking that:

The children can be taught to earn their livelihood, and will gradually lose the capacity of obtaining a food supply for themselves in the bush as the wild natives do, and with this they will lose also the desire to lead a roaming life, which can only result, if the country be settled, in their demoralisation.¹¹⁴

Anticipating that demoralisation would come sooner rather than later, the Report concluded by stating that for both humanitarian and scientific reasons studies of the various tribes "should be undertaken without delay".¹¹⁵

Implementation of the 1910 Aborigines Act required the appointment of a Chief Protector, and the position was advertised in early 1911, attracting a dozen applicants including Daisy Bates and Archibald Meston.¹¹⁶ Most, including these two, were rejected on the grounds of inadequate qualifications, as the post combined the duties of Chief Medical Officer and Chief Protector of Aborigines. In April 1911 the position was offered to Herbert Basedow, an Adelaide doctor, geologist and anthropologist. Basedow fully endorsed the integration of medical and Aboriginal administrations. In December 1910 he had written to Atlee Hunt, Secretary to the Department of External Affairs, on the need for "more kindly consideration" of the "Aborigines question", remarking in particular that: "Medical examination and control seem to me essentials that so far have been practically overlooked".¹¹⁷

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.9.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.9.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.10.

¹¹⁶ See correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 12/2149.

¹¹⁷ Basedow to Hunt, 30.12.1910, AA, CRS A1, 1911/110.

Shortly after his appointment, but before his arrival in Darwin, Basedow proposed a scheme for effective "Aboriginal Protection and Control" which required "some ready means of permanent individual identification". "Each Aboriginal", he insisted, "must have his own and private mark which will be registered in the Government records of the Aborigines Department".¹¹⁸ After discussing various means of making this mark, which he rejected as impractical, he came to his own proposal:

A slight lesion of the superficial skin will be all that is necessary. This can be done in an absolutely painless way and without disfigurement. The space occupied by the mark need not exceed one or two square inches and would be chosen in quite an inconspicuous position.¹¹⁹

The Commonwealth government was in favour of increased protection and control; but permanent scarification was going too far. The Acting Secretary of the Department of External Affairs tersely informed Basedow that "the Minister is unable to approve of the suggestion."¹²⁰ Nonetheless, Basedow's proposal was symbolic of what Commonwealth protection would bring to the Aborigines of the Northern Territory - increased intrusion into, and control over, their lives.

Basedow arrived in Darwin on 17 July 1911. Forty-five days later he departed, after tendering his resignation. The office of Chief Protector of Aborigines under the Commonwealth administration did not get off to a good start.

Although Basedow accomplished very little during his brief sojourn in Darwin, investigations into the condition of the Aborigines were commenced by four new appointees to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs: Inspectors J.H. Kelly and J.T. Beckett and Medical Inspectors Dr M.J. Holmes and Dr S.R. Burston. On 11 August 1911 Holmes and Burston submitted their

¹¹⁸ Basedow to Acting Min. Ext. Aff., 6.5.1911, AA, CRS A1, 11/8705.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.* Basedow claimed justification on the grounds that bodily scarification was a traditional Aboriginal practice.

¹²⁰ Acting Sec. Ext. Aff. to Basedow, 13.5.1911, AA, CRS A1, 11/8705.

Medical Report on Aborigines in the Daly River district. Although remarking on the presence, amongst other diseases, of syphilis and "a chronic scaly skin condition" they reported that in general the blacks in this area were in a fairly good state of health and nourishment.¹²¹ Despite this, the Aboriginal population seemed to be in decline. Burston and Holmes proffered an explanation:

A noticeable feature is the comparatively small number of children in the camps. This appears to be due to the practice of abortion and prevention of conception which we have reason to believe is very prevalent amongst the lubras in these tribes. As far as can be ascertained the abortion is produced purely by external manipulation of the abdomen and it is said that the measures employed usually result in sterility and a complete breakdown of the constitution of the lubra upon whom the abortion has been produced. Certainly many of the lubras early become physical wrecks. This practice of abortion is in our opinion a more potent factor in causing the gradual extinction of these races, than actual constitutional diseases.¹²²

They also claimed that abortion and contraception were not traditional practices. Holmes and Burston explained that on reaching puberty, the Aboriginal woman was "hired out" to the Chinese, "and for several months she becomes a slave to the sexual desires of these unprincipled aliens by whom she is in due course discarded a complete physical and moral wreck". It was, they wrote:

probably at this time that lubras first learn the practice of abortion and prevention of conception and at the same time become addicted to the opium habit. They are henceforth useless for the propagation of their kind.¹²³

Holmes and Burston's report was in the long tradition of attributing Aboriginal extinction to inter-racial sexual activity. They did not, however, proclaim extinction to be inevitable.

¹²¹ M.J. Holmes and S.R. Burston, Medical Report on condition of aborigines inspected in Daly River district, 11.8.1911, AA, CRS A1, 12/10964. They also remarked on the "commonness of foot deformities, usually in the direction of a reversion to the prehensile type of toes", but made no comment on its possible evolutionary significance.

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ *ibid.*

Inspectors Kelly and Beckett concurred with their medical colleagues, claiming that not only had Aboriginal women been "ruined physically and morally" by the Chinese, but the "unrestricted association of the blacks with the Asiatic residents of Darwin has debased and rendered them vicious, cunning and untrustworthy".¹²⁴ Kelly and Beckett acknowledged that:

among the Chinese residents of the Northern Territory are some whose reputations are above reproach and who treat the aboriginals employed by them in an exemplary manner, but even these Chinese admit the great harm which has been done the aboriginals by the more unscrupulous Asiatics.¹²⁵

They admitted too that even in areas without an Asian presence, the "ancient customs" and "tribal ceremonies" were "dying out". According to Kelly and Beckett, the "more intelligent" Aborigines "accept the changed times as inevitable".¹²⁶ They proposed that for those Aborigines whose traditional way of life had been shattered, suitable land should be set aside, "where they might be taught to assist themselves to be largely independent," growing their own crops and raising their own stock. Claiming Aboriginal endorsement of this proposal they wrote:

Most of the aboriginals able to converse intelligently upon the subject appear to be hopeful that the Government will assist them with plantations and stock in manner referred to and give them a chance to improve their conditions.¹²⁷

Despite their observations on the decline of the race, Kelly and Beckett's report suggested that their plight was not beyond remedy. A viable future for the Aborigines lay in their elevation to the status of pastoralists and agriculturalists.

The implementation of the 1910 Act and the investigations of the various Inspectors were not greeted with universal approbation by white Territorians, accustomed as they were to a more free hand with the blacks. In his Report for 1911, Acting Administrator S.J. Mitchell alluded to "the

¹²⁴ J.H. Kelly and J.T. Beckett to Chief Protector, 11.8.1911, AA, CRS A1, 12/10964.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

antagonism that certainly exists to the Act", and expressed a hope that the new Chief Protector could, as well as improving the condition of the Aborigines, overcome much of this animosity.¹²⁸ The new Chief Protector was Professor Baldwin Spencer, who was not a man to be diverted from his task by mere public opinion.

The Anthropologist as Administrator

On 15 January 1912 Baldwin Spencer arrived in Darwin to take up the duties of Special Commissioner and Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory. Shortly before his arrival, the Aborigines Ordinance of 1911, which Spencer had a hand in drafting, came into force, extending the powers of the Chief Protector considerably beyond those granted under the Aborigines Act of 1910. Spencer departed Darwin almost a year later, on Christmas Day 1912, and immediately began to draft the submission which was to be published as his "Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory".¹²⁹ It embodied an account of his work as Chief Protector and his recommendations for future Aboriginal administration in the Territory. Although it was designated "preliminary", a sequel was never published.

Nowhere in the "Preliminary Report" was the doomed race idea expressed. Spencer did refer to population decline amongst the Aborigines:

One thing is certain and that is that in all parts where they are in contact with outsiders, especially with Asiatics, they are dying out with great rapidity.¹³⁰

But he did not indicate that this demographic trend was irreversible. Indeed, his report was infused with a spirit of restrained hopefulness about the future

¹²⁸ "Report of the Acting Administrator for the Year 1911", *CPP* no.54 of 1912, p.5.

¹²⁹ W.B. Spencer, "Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory" in "Report of the Administrator for the Year 1912", *CPP* no.45 of 1913, pp.36-52.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p.41. Immediately before this statement he estimated the total Aboriginal population of the Territory to be "more nearly 50,000" than the previously accepted figure of 20,000. He apparently saw no inconsistency between this massive upward revision of the estimated population and the claim that they were rapidly dying out.

of the Aborigines. Perhaps the absence of the doomed race concept merely reflected bureaucratic practicalities. It may not have been expedient for the expert anthropologist-cum-administrator to admit that he, like anyone else, was unable to avert the fate which awaited the race. Yet the idea of inevitable extinction also made no appearance in his private journal and correspondence in this period.¹³¹ A fortnight before he was appointed Chief Protector, Spencer remarked in a letter to James Frazer that:

The Commonwealth Government is about to undertake measures for the settlement of the Northern Territory, which means that the aborigines will very rapidly become 'civilised', that is, will lose their old customs and beliefs.¹³²

No mention was made of their losing their lives.

It is unlikely that the proposals set out in Spencer's Preliminary Report were merely an indulgence in the philanthropic enterprise of smoothing the pillow of a dying race. Devotees of pillow-smoothing, like Daisy Bates, tended to be exceptionally clamorous and dogmatic on the inevitability of the Aborigines' demise. Throughout the "Preliminary Report", Spencer referred to the "preservation" of the Aborigines, their "uplifting", and the need to acknowledge a "national responsibility" for their future. The proximate source of these notions may have been contemporary humanitarian bodies, but not of the sentimentally tragic Daisy Bates kind.

When the Northern Territory first came under Commonwealth control, the entry of the national government into Aboriginal administration inspired a degree of enthusiasm amongst humanitarian, missionary and scientific

¹³¹ In the extensive collection of Spencer's papers held by AIATSIS (Spencer, W.B., Papers, Ms.71 [hereafter Spencer Papers]), I could find no statement which could be construed as an endorsement of the concept of inevitable extinction in any of his correspondence or journal entries for the year 1912. In the Australian Archives files, I found no reference to the doomed race idea in any of Spencer's official correspondence from his period as Chief Protector. Both the AIATSIS and the AA files were approached with the deliberate intention of searching out such references.

¹³² Spencer to Frazer, 13.9.1911, in Marett and Penniman (eds), *Spencer's Scientific Correspondence*, p.120.

bodies.¹³³ Archdeacon C.E.C. Lefroy was one of a number of philanthropists who had earlier argued for federal control over Aboriginal affairs. At the meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in January 1911, only days after the transference of the Territory to Commonwealth control, Lefroy presented a paper entitled "The Future of the Australian Aborigines". In his rendition of the Aborigines:

they were gentle and moral beings. Their tribal and family laws and customs are of considerable ethical value. As for intellectual power, they certainly can acquire European ways with marvellous rapidity. Their non-progression, or retrogression, in the past thousands of years is due to unfavourable environment. Australia in its natural condition is an inhospitable land. Its glorious climate encourages a day to day existence, and supplies no stimulus to its native inhabitants.¹³⁴

Since the coming of Europeans, the Aboriginal population had been reduced by three-quarters, through "cruelty, negligence and the communication of disease and moral corruption".¹³⁵ But the trend could be reversed, and the way to do so was by:

making the whole of the remnant a national responsibility under national control. Ample reserves should be set apart for them, stocked with cattle and otherwise industrially developed, and on these reserves humane and statesmanlike efforts should be made for the uplifting of a race which was Australian long before we were.¹³⁶

Lefroy's paper was received enthusiastically by the assembled scientists, and the General Council of the Association resolved: "That an organised scheme for the future of the Australian aborigines be formulated and submitted for the consideration of the Federal and State Governments".¹³⁷ Among the committee members who were to draft this scheme were Professor Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen. It would be implausible to suggest that by this

¹³³ See Mulvaney and Calaby, *'So Much that is New'*, p.274.

¹³⁴ C.E.C. Lefroy, "The Future of the Australian Aborigines" in *Report of the Thirteenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1911, p.453.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.454.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p.454. Another paper at the same conference also included a plea for "the Federal Government to fully protect the interests of the surviving tribes throughout the States"; Daley, "The Artistic Sense as Displayed in the Aborigines of Australia", p.435.

¹³⁷ "Resolutions Passed by the General Council" in *Report of the Thirteenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1911, p.lviii.

single incident Spencer was converted to the view that the doom of the race could be averted. But it would not be implausible to suggest that he shared in the contemporary mood of cautious optimism.

Spencer's proposals in his "Preliminary Report" were premised on his assumptions about the nature of social progress. Having "no idea whatever of the cultivation of crops nor of the domestication of animals", the Aborigine was "far lower than the Papuan, the New Zealander or the usual African native".¹³⁸ This, combined with their "nomadic instinct", posed a hindrance to Aboriginal advancement.¹³⁹ Yet they could be raised in the scale of civilisation, Spencer asserting that:

when once they have been shown how to do it then they are quite competent under supervision to undertake cultivation. Doubtless as time goes by they will be able to do the work on their own initiative.¹⁴⁰

He vehemently repudiated the popular allegation that "the natives have no morality" as "entirely untrue". Their moral code, he wrote:

is a very different one from ours and certainly permits of and sanctions, practices which, in some cases, are revolting to us, but there are others ... which it is a serious mistake to interfere with until we can give them something better and something that they can understand.¹⁴¹

Gradualism, and cautious intervention in the traditional moral order, were the hallmarks of Spencer's scheme.

Spencer's proposals were also premised on his assessment of Aboriginal character. They could, he maintained, be loyal, generous, even altruistic. He recounted a few instances in which blacks had saved the lives of whites, including the case of a chained Aboriginal suspect, Neighbour, who had rescued his arresting constable from a flooded river, and the case of a young half-caste girl, Cissy McLeod, who rescued her mistress when the latter

¹³⁸ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.37.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p.37.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.37.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.39.

fell into the shark and crocodile infested waters of Darwin Harbour.¹⁴² The anecdotes may have been sentimental in style and patronising in tone, yet their intent was clearly to demonstrate the essential humanity and humaneness of the Aborigines. They were, however, a race of humanity who had not quite grown up. Spencer explained that:

The aboriginal is, indeed, a very curious mixture; mentally, about the level of a child who has little control over his feelings and is liable to give way to violent fits of temper, during which he may very likely behave with great cruelty. He has no sense of responsibility and, except in rare cases, no initiative.... It must be understood, however, that in proportion to the narrow sphere of their actions, there is as great a mental difference amongst aboriginals as amongst whites in their wider sphere.¹⁴³

If they were not just all of a piece, they were nonetheless characteristically child-like. These people of undeveloped intellect and unrestrained passions now faced "a civilisation that they do not understand and from which they need protection".¹⁴⁴ Spencer would provide the latter, and, he hoped, the foundations for an appreciation of civilisation as well.

Spencer was highly conscious of his own superiority; he could be arrogant, patronising, authoritarian and self-righteous. He was an elitist. If the hand of his authoritarian paternalism fell heaviest on the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Territory, this reflected not only his assessment of the race as primitive and child-like, but also the practical limitations to his administrative and legal powers. He gave every indication that he wished to whip the entire population of the Territory, black, brown, white and yellow, into shape. Nine days after arriving in Darwin he wrote:

Of course I am running up against a certain number of people but this cannot be helped ... I have a fairly free hand and can do what I think is best. My second in command Mr Beckett is a first rate man as

¹⁴² *ibid.*, pp.40-41. In the case of Cissy McLeod, Spencer was instrumental in having her awarded the Bronze Medal of the Royal Humane Society for her action; see correspondence in AA, CRS A3, NT 13/10029.

¹⁴³ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.41. This passage was repeated, verbatim, in one of his major anthropological publications, *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory*, p.38, as were a number of other passages from the "Preliminary Report".

¹⁴⁴ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.39.

keen as possible but my position enables me to do a good deal more than he could before I came up and the people are realizing that the Government means business.¹⁴⁵

Certainly Spencer meant business.

He apparently relished the exercise of authority, reporting with satisfaction that he had:

the power to order any police officer to arrest a native and do with him or her what I think best. At the same time I can take any native from under the control of a white man if I think that the latter is not treating him properly.¹⁴⁶

And if existing legal powers were not sufficient, then the law could be changed. He noted in his journal entry for 2 February 1912:

I am just beginning to feel my way and am quite enjoying this new experience of administrative work though legal technicalities are very annoying but it is interesting to try and find some way round them.¹⁴⁷

Efforts by some of Darwin's white residents to obstruct Spencer's plans merely strengthened his resolve. When some white employers opposed his introduction of a permit system for Aboriginal servants running errands to Chinatown, he predicted that they would:

soon find that they are making a mistake. Our chief enemy is the editor of the local newspaper - a surly conceited fellow - and I am just waiting for the time when he will come bump up against us. Before this happens I hope to have the chance of quietly showing him the error of his ways but if he will not take a hint it will be so much the worse for him.¹⁴⁸

Self-righteous and arrogant as he was, Spencer was far exceeded in these characteristics by his friend J.A. Gilruth, who arrived in Darwin in April 1912 to assume the duties of Administrator. Gilruth's imperious style had some part to play in his recall, seven years later.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ W.B. Spencer, Journal of first months of Spencer's residence in NT during 1912, Spencer Papers, box 1, item 5, (Hereafter Spencer, Journal), entry for 24.1.1912.

¹⁴⁶ Spencer, Journal, 30.1.1912.

¹⁴⁷ Spencer, Journal, 2.2.1912.

¹⁴⁸ Spencer, Journal, 15.2.1912.

¹⁴⁹ "Report on Northern Territory Administration, Mr. Justice Ewing, 16th April 1920", CPP, no.28 of 1920. For an account of Gilruth and his administration see Powell, *Far Country*, pp.144-60; NTDB, pp.118-19; F.X. Alcorta, *Darwin Rebellion, 1911-1919*,

As Gilruth found to his cost, public opinion amongst the white residents of Darwin carried some political weight; and Spencer, however much he may have wished to do so, did not attempt to impose his will upon white society to the same extent, or with the same directness, as he did upon the Aborigines. In racially stratified Darwin, Chinese and other Asians occupied intermediate positions on the social scale, and correspondingly intermediate positions in the hierarchy of power. On them, Spencer was able to impose restrictions and prohibitions which would have been impossible to inflict upon whites. At the bottom of the scale were the Aborigines, the objects of protection, on whom there was no question that regulation and control should be strict and comprehensive. Intersecting this racial stratification, sometimes in awkward ways, was a class hierarchy; and Spencer was highly conscious of class. His distaste for white "drunken loafers" and unionists was freely expressed, perhaps never more vividly than in his simple expression of disgust on visiting a hotel in Pine Creek: "I don't mind most things but I cannot stand watching the public-house loafer eating his meals".¹⁵⁰ Despite his vehemently anti-Asian sentiments, he acknowledged the existence of higher class Chinese merchants, who were "very good people" and who "uniformly treated the natives in their employ with kindness".¹⁵¹ However, in his proposals for Aboriginal protection, Spencer neglected distinctions of class in favour of a more straightforward allocation of rights and restrictions on the basis of race.

For white Territorians, the main area which Spencer attempted to regulate was their employment of Aborigines. The 1910 Act and the 1911 Ordinance specified that Aborigines could be employed only under license; Spencer advocated tightening up both the provisions of the legislation and its policing.¹⁵² Licenses were not specific as to the individual Aborigine

Darwin, 1984.

¹⁵⁰ Spencer, Journal, 17.2.1912.

¹⁵¹ Spencer, Journal, 9.2.1912; Spencer to Min. Ext. Aff., 8.2.1912, AA, CRS A1, 12/10964.

¹⁵² Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.44; Spencer to Min. Ext. Aff., 8.2.1912, AA, CRS A1, 12/10964.

employed, but were merely general permits granting a designated person the right to take on Aboriginal workers. Spencer recommended no change to this, apparently agreeing that legislative control over employment should extend only so far as ensuring that employers of Aborigines were fit and proper persons. He did, however, suggest that some licenses should be conditional, granting the licensee the right to employ only male Aborigines.¹⁵³ He also advocated that employment permits should never be granted to hoteliers, presumably to protect Aborigines from the moral contagion of grog and the public-house loafer.¹⁵⁴ The payment of money wages should not be insisted on in the pastoral districts, as the existing system whereby the stations provisioned employees, dependents and kinfolk was appropriate to the circumstances. "In the case of aboriginals working for white people in settled districts", however, "a definite wage should be paid and a portion of this handed to a Protector for investment in the aboriginal's name".¹⁵⁵ In the long term, Spencer envisaged a gradual over-all introduction of cash wages as "the aboriginals become civilised".¹⁵⁶ These conditions and restrictions on the white employment of Aboriginal labour were scarcely severe. That some Territorians objected is indicative only of the fact that previously there had been virtually no effective restriction at all. Spencer took for granted the desirability of economic development in the Territory; he wished to ensure that Aborigines played an acknowledged role in that development, so that one day they may come to share in its benefits.

One group which he thought had no legitimate role to play in the Territory's economic development was the Chinese. He had to admit, however, that they were economically successful. After witnessing the Chinese New Year celebrations at Pine Creek, he wrote:

Picturesque as they look I would like to deport the whole lot of them because with their opium and spirits they ruin the blacks and are

¹⁵³ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.44.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.44.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.47.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.47.

doing no good to the country. If only the white men here were half as industrious as the Chinese this would be a great country.¹⁵⁷

Spencer was heir to a long Australian tradition of vilification of the Chinese, and to a long tradition among anthropological commentators of attributing the direst of consequences to contact between Aborigines and Asiatic aliens. Referring to Darwin, he wrote: "The Chinese are a great curse here. They get hold of the natives and give them opium and sundry vile concoctions that they call whiskey".¹⁵⁸ "Nothing", he declared, "is more patent than the rapid degeneration of the native in contact with Chinese".¹⁵⁹ Expanding on this point, and apparently borrowing from the reports of Holmes and Burston, he explained that after being "loaned" to an Asian, the "lubber ceases to bear children, abortion being undoubtedly practised in many cases, and becomes a physical wreck".¹⁶⁰ However, he continued, in "regard to intercourse between the whites and aboriginals, there is no such physical degradation of the lubras".¹⁶¹ Why this should have been so, he did not explain, although it could be inferred that it was because white men neither provided opium nor procured abortions. In Spencer's account, the lustful, drug-peddling Chinaman was the most potent degenerative influence on the Aborigines.

With this image of the Asian, and with the assumption that they had no legitimate role to perform in northern development, Spencer attempted not so much to control contact between Asians and Aborigines as to prohibit it. On 8 February 1912, he had Darwin's Chinatown proclaimed a "Prohibited Area" for Aborigines.¹⁶² Explaining his motivations to the Minister for External Affairs, he claimed that "the source of the greatest evil" was "Chinese and Malays [who] provide the natives with opium and liquor" in order "to obtain

¹⁵⁷ Spencer, Journal, 18.2.1912.

¹⁵⁸ Spencer, Journal, 30.1.1912.

¹⁵⁹ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.43.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.43.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.43.

¹⁶² He later proclaimed prohibited areas in the Chinese quarters of Pine Creek and other mining fields; see *ibid.*, p.42.

possession of the lubras for immoral purposes".¹⁶³ To "keep apart" the two races was "the most important matter that has to be dealt with in regard to Aborigines living in proximity to settlements"; therefore, he declared, "the regulations relating to prohibited areas will be enforced drastically".¹⁶⁴ Despite pleas from the "better class" of Chinese merchants, whom he acknowledged treated their Aboriginal employees well, he refused to relax his ban.¹⁶⁵ He did, however, compromise in a way which highlighted his anti-Asian bias. When it was pointed out that some white employers required their black servants to run errands to Chinatown, he instituted a system of controlled access for Aboriginal employees carrying numbered brass identity discs.¹⁶⁶

The declaration of a prohibited area merely debarred Aboriginal entry into an Asian community; it did nothing to stop Asians going to the Aborigines. It was partly to resolve this problem that Spencer established a compound at Kahlin Beach, where Aborigines could be kept under surveillance, away from the debasing influence of the town, and where the entry and egress of people could be controlled.¹⁶⁷ He chose the location personally, "a beautiful spot" on the beach about one and a half miles from the centre of Darwin. His selection of this site, where low cliffs abutted onto the beach, was motivated by what he considered to be the traditional camping arrangement of the local Larrakia people, who were "divided into two sections one of which always lives on the seashore and the other on higher ground". He had, Spencer observed, "respected their old traditions and they are quite satisfied".¹⁶⁸ It is difficult to reconcile this nod toward tradition with his frequently reiterated statement that the Larrakia and other fringe-dwelling

¹⁶³ Spencer to Min. Ext. Aff., 8.2.1912, AA, CRS A1, 12/10964.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.* See also Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.42.

¹⁶⁵ Spencer, Journal, 9.2.1912.

¹⁶⁶ Spencer, Journal, 15.2.1912.

¹⁶⁷ Spencer, Journal, 20.1.1912; Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.42.

¹⁶⁸ Spencer, Journal, 20.1.1912.

Aborigines had long since "lost all their old customs and beliefs".¹⁶⁹ Spencer's statements on the extent to which the fringe-dwellers had retained their traditional culture were contradictory, even within the Preliminary Report. On one page he baldly asserted that it had been entirely "lost"; on another he wrote: "Even amongst semi-civilized natives on the outskirts of civilization their old customs carry more weight than the laws of the white men."¹⁷⁰ Whether they were completely deculturated, or only partly so, depended on the needs of the argument.

Spencer's other consideration in choosing Kahlin Beach was the need of the white residents of Darwin for Aboriginal labour.¹⁷¹ The compound had to be sufficiently close to town to allow the inmates to travel daily to and from work; but it had to be sufficiently distant to stop the spread of moral contagion from Chinatown in particular. The Kahlin Compound was intended exclusively for the Larrakia; for Aborigines of other tribes a separate settlement was built, a little further out of town. Spencer advocated that all town blacks, except for a small number who lived under the roof their approved employer, should reside in one or the other of these compounds.¹⁷² He also proposed the enforcement of a curfew, whereby any Aborigine or half-caste found within the town limits after dark, without a "special permit", could be incarcerated.¹⁷³ Within the compounds, discipline was to be strict, although initially at least, he suggested that Aborigines themselves could play a part in the maintenance of order. When the compounds were in the process of being built, he advised the Minister that:

An attempt will be made to introduce more order and cleanliness with the new camps than has prevailed in the old ones and with this end in view it is proposed to select two or three 'boys' who can be trusted

¹⁶⁹ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.42, also p.48; W.B. Spencer, *Wanderings in Wild Australia*, London, 1928, (reprinted New York, 1967), vol.2, pp.611-12.

¹⁷⁰ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", pp.42, 46.

¹⁷¹ Spencer to Min. Ext. Aff., 8.2.1912, AA, CRS A1, 12/10964.

¹⁷² Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.48.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p.48.

and appoint them as officer [sic] of the Camp, giving them some simple uniform as a mark of distinction.¹⁷⁴

However, the proposed appointment of Aboriginal officers appears not to have been implemented, and no mention was made of it in the "Preliminary Report".

Spencer also suggested the employment of black hospital orderlies, as part of an attempt to induce Aborigines to utilise medical facilities by making the hospital environment as familiar and as non-threatening as possible. He advocated that:

In each hospital there should be special provision made for treating aboriginals apart from white patients. The services of intelligent half-castes could probably be secured as attendants. This provision need only be on a very simple scale, the wards taking the form of tents or bush shelters. The conditions in fact approximating as nearly as possible to their own native camp and open air life only under hygienic conditions.¹⁷⁵

Although he paid some attention to disease and its treatment, Spencer, unlike his predecessor Basedow, did not regard Aboriginal protection as primarily a medical matter. He had both Medical Inspectors of Aborigines transferred to the general medical staff, so that their services could be "utilised for the benefit of whites as well as aboriginals", although it was understood that the services of one would be "especially at the call of the Aboriginal Department".¹⁷⁶ A range of medicinal drugs and training in first-aid for Protectors would, he considered, normally provide an adequate level of health care.¹⁷⁷ However, "from the point of view of the welfare of both the aboriginal and white population", the prevalence of venereal disease constituted a more serious problem. For its treatment he predicted that:

there will be no other course open but to follow the example of Western Australia and establish lock-hospitals for men and women to

¹⁷⁴ Spencer to Min. Ext. Aff., 8.2.1912, AA, CRS A1, 12/10964. He also referred to this scheme in private correspondence with Atlee Hunt; see Spencer to Hunt, 19.1.1912, Hunt, Atlee, Papers, ANL Ms 52, (hereafter Hunt Papers), series 18, item 1036.

¹⁷⁵ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.45.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.45.

which, if necessary, they can be forcibly removed and where they can be detained until cured.¹⁷⁸

Authoritarian control again provided the answer.¹⁷⁹

Spencer's regime entailed a considerable extension of official control over the part-Aborigines of the Northern Territory.¹⁸⁰ Half-castes were, he thought, as much in need of protection as full-bloods, since:

The mother is of very low intellectual grade, while the father most often belongs to the coarser and more unrefined members of higher races. The consequence of this is that the children of such parents are not likely to be, in most cases, of much greater intellectual calibre than the more intelligent natives, though, of course, there are exceptions to this.¹⁸¹

If not quite Aboriginal in race, they were more or less Aboriginal in character, Spencer remarking that:

it may be said that though the half-castes belong neither to the aboriginal nor to the whites, yet, on the whole, they have more leanings towards the former; certainly this is the case in regard to the females.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁷⁹ Spencer did not specify that the lock-hospitals were to be exclusively for Aboriginal patients, though this could be inferred from his report. In the case of Western Australia, which he cited, lock-hospitals were for Aborigines only; see M.A. Jebb, "The Lock Hospitals Experiment: Europeans, Aborigines and Venereal Disease", *Studies in Western Australian History*, vol.7, December 1984, pp.68-87.

¹⁸⁰ Compared to Section 3 of the Northern Territory Aborigines Act, 1910, the provisions of the Aborigines Ordinance, 1911, marked a significant widening of the categories of persons of mixed descent who came within the terms of reference of Aboriginal legislation.

¹⁸¹ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", pp.46-47. Spencer evidently considered Billy Shepherd, a half-caste servant of the Government Resident (later of the Administrator), to be such an exception, referring to him as "a first rate fellow", "worth any two ordinary white men"; Journal of Spencer's 1911 Commonwealth Expedition, entries for 27.1.1911 and 7.7.1911, Spencer Papers, box 2, item 9. Nonetheless, Billy Shepherd came firmly under the control of the Aborigines Department, even to the extent of the Department taking charge of his son Robert; see Spencer to Min. Ext. Aff., 9.4.1912, AA, CRS A1, 12/9487; this letter is in the handwriting of Chief Inspector J.T. Beckett, but signed by Spencer.

¹⁸² Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.46.

Quadroons, on the other hand, he regarded as "belonging to the white population".¹⁸³ Somehow, with the accession of this extra strain of white blood, the individual crossed the racial divide.

Basedow had advocated the removal of all half-caste children from Aboriginal camps, and their placement in a special institution. Spencer agreed with the first part of this. "No half-caste children", he insisted, "should be allowed to remain in any native camp".¹⁸⁴ He acknowledged that "it may seem cruel to separate the mother and child"; but, he asserted, "it is better to do so" than to leave the child in Aboriginal squalor.¹⁸⁵ However, Spencer rejected the second part of Basedow's proposal, the creation of a special half-caste institution. He reasoned that an institution would:

tend to indicate the recognition by the Government of mixed marriages and, more especially, of irregular intercourse between the white and black races both of which must be discountenanced as much as possible.¹⁸⁶

He argued that since half-castes were in attributes and intellect like Aborigines, "the best and kindest thing is to place them on reserves along with the natives".¹⁸⁷ This may, at first sight, appear to have rendered the proposed separation of mother and child not merely traumatic, high-handed and inhumane, but pointless as well. However, in Spencer's scheme, all the residents of reserves, full-blood and half-caste, were to receive education and training, uplifting them into a higher stage of civilisation. Half-castes were to be singled out for the special - and no doubt for mother and child, deeply distressing - treatment of maternal separation. But Spencer saw no need for a

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p.46. This would seem to indicate that by the term "half-caste" Spencer specifically meant people of half Aboriginal and half other descent, although in contemporary usage the term did cover a wider range of people of recognisably Aboriginal ancestry. Spencer himself in *ibid.*, p.46, pointed out the need for "a more clear definition of a half-caste"; he did not provide one.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.47. Spencer to Sec. Ext. Aff., 6.11.1911, AA, CRS A1, 11/18824.

¹⁸⁵ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.47.

¹⁸⁶ Spencer to Sec. Ext. Aff., 6.11.1911, AA, CRS A1, 11/18824.

¹⁸⁷ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.47. Spencer did specify in this instance that he was referring to "half-castes other than the children of legally married men and women".

special training institution for them, since all reserve Aborigines were to receive instruction in civilisation.

Quite early in his career as Chief Protector, Spencer was forced to retreat, temporarily, from his opposition to a special half-caste home. In March 1912 he closed down the Plymouth Brethren Mission, which had housed eight half-caste boys, thus creating a need for alternative accommodation. Spencer suggested the erection of a half-caste home as a temporary expedient.¹⁸⁸ Acting Administrator Mitchell rejected the suggestion, and the Department soon made other arrangements.¹⁸⁹ Correspondence relating to the incident does, however, cast a revealing light on Spencer's attitudes and personality. He had no time for fundamentalist Christian missionaries of the Plymouth Brethren type, recording in his journal that:

There was a Plymouth Brother kind of mission station here kept by a Mr and Mrs Barry. Mr B. is a minute, ignorant, narrowminded creature whose one idea is that anyone who is in any way associated with the R.C. Church is absolutely immoral and damned for ever. He came into my office the other day and I never heard any man speak as he did. I felt inclined to turn him out of the office. He spent his time reviling the Convent here.... His own [mission] house is as higger-mugger and unsatisfactory as possible. He himself is a little miserable undersized being.¹⁹⁰

In official correspondence concerning Mr Barry and his mission, Spencer indulged less in personal vilification but remained strong in his condemnation.¹⁹¹ His main complaints were that Mr Barry had "little control" over the children in his care, and that the education they received was "wholly upon a religious basis", with no academic or industrial

¹⁸⁸ Spencer to Acting Admin., 7.3.1912, AA, CRS A1, 12/9487.

¹⁸⁹ Acting Admin. to Min. Ext. Aff., 13.3.1912; Chief Inspector of Aborigines to Spencer, 8.4.1912; both in AA, CRS A1, 12/9487.

¹⁹⁰ Spencer, Journal, 2.4.1912.

¹⁹¹ In private correspondence with Atlee Hunt he was less restrained than in his official communications with the same man in the role of Secretary of the Department of External Affairs. In a letter to Hunt dated 15.4.1912 Spencer referred to Mr Barry as "a poor feeble little worm of a creature"; Hunt Papers, series 18, item 1042.

content.¹⁹² Spencer was not opposed to all missions. Although he was born into a strict Nonconformist family, and later lapsed into agnosticism, he believed the Roman Catholic missions to be superior to those of all other denominations.¹⁹³ He was impressed by the efforts of Father Gsell, who attempted to bring the word of God to Bathurst Island, in the Tiwi language and with minimal disruption to the Tiwi way of life.¹⁹⁴ The Darwin Convent, which cared for a number of half-caste children, he described as "a well organised and most satisfactory place - with everything spic and span and clean".¹⁹⁵

The care of half-castes was one of Spencer's concerns; preventing their procreation was awarded much greater importance. In his vehement opposition to inter-racial sexual intercourse, misgivings about miscegenation were prominent. The sexual improprieties of both white men and Asians, he demanded, "must be stopped".¹⁹⁶ Yet in his attitude toward white sexual misdeeds, Spencer adopted a degree of leniency and forbearance which was lacking in his condemnation of the lustful Asiatic. On the topic of white frontiersmen he wrote:

It must be said very frankly that the absence of any women other than aboriginals in outlying districts is the chief reason for so many complaints in regard to the prostitution of aboriginal women, and so long as the absence of white women is a feature of the Territory, so long will it be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to put an end to this serious evil.¹⁹⁷

If a large influx of white women was necessary, there would seem to have been little hope of curtailing the "serious evil", at least in the short term. Spencer himself declared that: "Until Darwin and the Territory is [sic] a little more civilized women had better stay away unless they like a rough life",

¹⁹² Spencer to Acting Admin., 1.3.1912; Spencer to Min. Ext. Aff., 9.4.1912; both in AA, CRS A1, 12/9487.

¹⁹³ Spencer to Hunt, 15.4.1912, Hunt Papers, series 18, item 1042.

¹⁹⁴ Spencer, Journal, 25.3.1912, 2.4.1912.

¹⁹⁵ Spencer, Journal, 2.4.1912.

¹⁹⁶ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.43.

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.43.

adding that he felt "very sorry" for the wives of government officials, who were forced to endure the privations of life in Darwin, let alone those of the outlying districts.¹⁹⁸ Nonetheless, he expressed a theme which was to be repeated time and again over the following three decades:

The presence of married people and families scattered over the country would have a wonderful influence for good, and it would be of the greatest advantage if preference were given to married people amongst the settlers on the lands that will soon be thrown open and in the selection of all such officials as police officers.¹⁹⁹

For those whose duties demanded close contact with Aborigines, marriage was essential; Spencer insisted that:

*It is most important that all Protectors should be married men and emphatically no one except a married man should be the Superintendent of a reserve or native station or settlement.*²⁰⁰

Despite the italics, Spencer did not adhere to his own recommendation. During his term of office, Joe Cooper, a buffalo shooter on Melville Island, was appointed to the position of Sub-Protector of Aborigines.²⁰¹ Cooper may have been a bushman of legendary proportions, and he may have given invaluable assistance to Spencer in his anthropological investigations amongst the Tiwi.²⁰² But his marriage to Alice, an Iwaidja woman, was recognised by neither Church nor State.²⁰³

Spencer had legal authority to permit or prohibit the marriages of Aboriginal women. This power was conferred on him on 24 January 1912.²⁰⁴ Before that date, Spencer set himself up as an unofficial marriage bureau,

¹⁹⁸ Spencer, Journal, 29.1.1912.

¹⁹⁹ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.43.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.43; italics in the original.

²⁰¹ See correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 12/627.

²⁰² For an account of Joe Cooper see *NTDB*, pp.61-62; Mulvaney and Calaby, 'So Much that is New', pp.269-72. In his Journal entry for 8.3.1912, Spencer described Cooper as "a regular father to the natives". He was also the biological father of a number of half-caste children.

²⁰³ Alice and Joe were legally married in 1917, five years after his appointment as protector; *NTDB*, p.62.

²⁰⁴ Sec. Ext. Aff. to Acting Admin., 24.1.1912, AA, CRS A1, 12/1283.

dispensing advice - or commands - to those whom he regarded as his inferiors.

Two days after stepping off the boat at Darwin Harbour he was visited by:

a man and his lubra ... who weren't getting on well together. She preferred to attach herself to a Malay and as he objected there were troubles in the family. As they could not possibly agree the only thing to do was to separate them. I explained to the man that it was no good always fighting and that the best thing to do would be for him to give her up. It ended up by his agreeing to 'chuck'em altogether' and she walked off in one direction and he in another. A kind of divorce made easy.²⁰⁵

Some weeks later, after the authority to authorise marriages had been conferred, he described an incident in which he:

had a Japanese and a black lubra up. The former wants to marry the latter but I talked to him and told him it could not be allowed. He took it very philosophically but evidently the lady was not keen on going back to her lawful husband.²⁰⁶

Spencer appears to have felt no qualms about intervening in the personal, domestic and sexual lives of others. He knew what was best for them.

Although Spencer stated that "inter-racial marriages should not be permitted",²⁰⁷ he recognised that an immediate and total prohibition would be inappropriate. Until such times as Aboriginal affairs had been brought firmly under official control, he was prepared to permit such marriages "under very exceptional circumstances".²⁰⁸ On 7 February 1912 he forwarded to the Minister for External Affairs a list of six couples for whom permission to marry had been granted. In all cases the women were full-blood or half-caste Aboriginal, while the men comprised two British, one German, two Filipinos and one Chilean. Spencer explained that:

In each case careful inquiries have been made and permission to marry granted because:

1. The man and woman have been living together for years as man and wife.

²⁰⁵ Spencer, Journal, 17.1.1912. Whether the woman subsequently lived with the Malay was not recounted, though it would have been a relationship of which Spencer disapproved.

²⁰⁶ Spencer, Journal, 7.2.1912.

²⁰⁷ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.43.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.43.

2. In some cases children have been born and when such is the case, have been adequately looked after by their parents.
3. In all cases the refusal of permission to marry and consequent separation of the parties concerned would mean destitution or a life of prostitution for the woman.²⁰⁹

However, he clearly indicated that after these remnant irregular unions from the days of *laissez faire* had been formalised, inter-racial marriages should be totally prohibited.²¹⁰

Spencer was vested with inordinate powers over the lives of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Territory; to a lesser degree he could also intrude into the activities of its European and Asian residents. He wielded this power with determination, self-confidence, even self-righteousness. In his "Preliminary Report", he advocated the extension of official control into even more minute details of Aboriginal lives. Yet this was neither a gratuitous exercise in domineering nor merely an attempt to keep the black under the heel of the white man. Spencer took white supremacy for granted. Control was the means, not the ends. Systematic and comprehensive control over Aboriginal lives was the means by which a primitive race could be protected from the potentially fatal influences of civilisation. Protection was intended to achieve two basic aims. The first, and more straightforward, was preservation. If, as was held in both scientific and popular circles, racial contact led to racial extinction, then preservation could be achieved only by prohibiting that contact; or, where prohibition was not practicable, by closely delimiting it. Decades of *laissez faire* had left the Aborigines a decaying and demoralised race. Decades of writers, learned and popular, had rendered them a doomed race. Spencer's "Preliminary Report" carried some hope that the decay and demoralisation could be arrested, and thus the doom averted.

Under the umbrella of protectionist policies, Aborigines were to be uplifted to a higher stage of civilisation. This was the second, more long term

²⁰⁹ Spencer to Min. Ext. Aff., 7.2.1912, AA, CRS A1, 12/3519.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*; Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.43.

goal of Spencer's recommendations. Survival and social progress went hand in hand, as did the alternatives, extinction and social decline. Spencer argued that any scheme for "preserving and uplifting" the Aborigines should be "a national responsibility ... under the control of the Commonwealth Government".²¹¹ By this he did not mean that the Commonwealth should assume control over the Aborigines in the various states; merely that the betterment of the Aborigines of the Northern Territory could best be effected by a government department having that specific duty, rather than by well-meaning individuals or missionaries. Although he was prepared to grant the latter a subsidiary role in rendering assistance, Spencer was a firm devotee of centralised administrative control.²¹² His ambitious schemes of social engineering left no other option.

In his proposals for social elevation, Spencer divided the Aborigines of the Territory into two groups:

- (a) aboriginals living in and about townships, and employed in the latter; (b) those living more or less in their wild state, and leading a nomad existence.²¹³

The former were the easier to deal with. All Aborigines in this category were to be gathered into compounds, each of which would have its own school and its own gardens, in which those residents not otherwise employed would work. Aborigines in the compounds would be introduced to the use of money, although their wages, along with other aspects of their lives, would remain to a large extent under the control of the Superintendents.²¹⁴

The care and uplift of Aborigines in category (b) demanded greater effort and expense. Spencer maintained that:

in view of the settlement of the country for which provision is now being made, there is no other practicable policy but that of the

²¹¹ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.48.

²¹² *ibid.*, p.48.

²¹³ *ibid.*, p.48.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.48.

**establishment of large reserves, if the aboriginals are to be preserved,
and if any serious effort is to be made for their betterment.**²¹⁵

On the issue of large reserves, he and the pastoralists did not see eye to eye, for reserves were to occupy potentially productive land. Spencer outlined the "three essential requirements" of the reserves:

(1) They must be of large size, so that different parts, if necessary, can be occupied by the members of different tribes, or groups of tribes. (2) They must be of such a nature as to provide sufficient water and abundant native food supplies and be suitable for agricultural or pastoral work. (3) They must be so located as to deal with groups of tribes that are allied in their customs and are more or less friendly.²¹⁶

He advocated the abolition of the existing ten small reserves and their replacement with seven large ones, totalling seven thousand square miles. On each reserve, Aborigines were to be trained in some productive enterprise, although in Spencer's view the options were limited to agriculture or pastoralism or, in the case of Bathurst Island, forestry.²¹⁷ Reserves were to be stocked, equipped and staffed at public expense, although ultimately they were to become self-supporting.²¹⁸

Education of the young was the cornerstone of Spencer's civilising scheme. Both the compounds near towns and the reserves in remote regions were to have schools, staffed by trained teachers. "The teaching", he wrote, "should be of a very simple character; it should include reading, writing, the elements of arithmetic and singing", for the last of which he claimed Aborigines had a special aptitude.²¹⁹ "Moral training should be given in the schools on the simplest and broadest lines possible"; but, he continued:

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp.48-49; bold face in the original.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.49.

²¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.49-50. Interestingly, he made no suggestion for the provision of training in mining or maritime industries, despite the fact that Aborigines were already working in these fields and some reserves were ideally located for enterprises along such lines. Perhaps mining was regarded as unsuitable because of the notoriously nomadic habits of its practitioners, and maritime industries because its work-force was predominantly Asian. Perhaps the options were limited by the assumption that elevation in civilisation demanded the cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.50.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.50.

The primary object ... must be to train the natives in industrial habits. Until such time as they acquire these habits there is no chance whatever of raising them from their present condition.²²⁰

To attempt to change the attitudes or moral values of the older people in any systematic way, Spencer wrote, would "be merely wasting time and energy"; thus it was:

absolutely essential that all efforts should be directed towards the training of the younger generation. The children must be withdrawn from the native camps at an early age. This will undoubtedly be a difficult matter to accomplish, and will involve some amount of hardship, so far as the parents are concerned; but if once the children are allowed to reach a certain age and have become accustomed to camp life, with its degrading environment and endless roaming about in the bush, it is almost useless to try and reclaim them.²²¹

If, on the other hand, they were to be housed, educated and trained from a young age, they would "gradually lose the longing for a nomad life" and come to appreciate the benefits of a settled and civilised existence.²²²

There was nothing new in the idea of gradually weaning the young from savagery, through training in industry and cultivation of the intellect. There was nothing novel about separating child from parent, so that the former could grow into civilisation without the retarding influence of the latter. These were the commonplaces of efforts to civilise, going back to the writings of Peter Cunningham and the school of Governor Macquarie. Did the expert anthropologist, with his vast field experience and his specialist scientific training, have nothing new to offer? Perhaps his major contribution was a blueprint for society which entailed a degree of control beyond anything suggested by those writers from Australia's convict past.

What, then, of the doomed race idea, which had long subverted any notion that civilising the Aborigines was a plausible prospect? Perverse as it may seem, it was vilification of the Chinese and other Asians which allowed

²²⁰ *ibid.*, p.50.

²²¹ *ibid.*, p.50.

²²² *ibid.*, p.50.

Spencer to side-step the inherent fatalism of the doomed race idea. Throughout his Chief Protectorship, Asians were specified as the major source of drink and drugs, disease and dissolution, which portended the demise of the race. The contribution of whites was played down. Asians, conveniently, could be regulated and restricted in ways which would have been impossible to impose upon the white population. Saving the Aboriginal race was plausible, because controlling the Asian was possible. As an academic anthropologist, Spencer attributed racial extinction to the workings of an inexorable law of nature. As a practical administrator, death and degradation amongst the blacks was best put down to Chinamen.

Protecting a Primitive People

For most of his sojourn in Darwin, Baldwin Spencer lived as Gilruth's guest in Government House. Another resident was the governess, Elsie Masson, future wife of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. In 1915 she published her observations of life in the north under the title *An Untamed Territory*. Her remarks on the Aborigines had much in common with those of Spencer.²²³ On the future survival of the race, she shared Spencer's ambivalent attitudes, expressing them with greater literary flair:

Must the native of the Territory die out as he has done in the South? So far the same conditions that led to his extinction there are to be found here. White man's drink, white man's diseases, neither of which he has the stamina to withstand, have already begun their work of degeneration. It seems as if nature were determined that the race, which has not toiled by slow ways to civilisation, made mistakes, given sacrifices, shall not be fit to accept its benefits and shall only perish of it. If the blackfellow attempts to leap at one bound the chasm of ages, he will fall and be annihilated. So far the white man has reached out no hand to help him, but only tossed across to him, from his side of the gulf, a stick of tobacco, a box of matches, and a bottle of grog. Now he has suddenly realised his duty towards the race whose land he has taken, and is doing his best to build a bridge for the black man by

²²³ See E.R. Masson, *An Untamed Territory: The Northern Territory of Australia*, London, 1915, especially pp.149-59.

which he may cross in safety. It remains to be seen if it can be done.²²⁴

Building bridges to civilisation, however, was not first on the government's list of concerns.

In his Report for 1912 Gilruth gave fulsome praise to the "valuable advice" which had been tendered by the Chief Protector:

The difficult problem of the control, utilization, and advancement of the largest portion of our population - the aborigines - has received during the past year the special attention of the greatest authority on the subject, Professor Baldwin Spencer, of the Melbourne University.²²⁵

Spencer's advice on the control and utilisation of Aborigines met with a favourable response from politicians and bureaucrats; his proposals for their advancement were given low priority.²²⁶ Spencer's successor as Chief Protector was W.G. Stretton, a Territorian of long standing and former Special Magistrate at Borroloola. Although Stretton lacked Spencer's academic credentials, he did have a particular interest in the Aborigines, having earlier published his ethnographic and linguistic observations in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*.²²⁷ After Stretton, between 1914 and 1927, the Chief Protectors were H.E. Carey, R.J. Evans, N. Waters and G.V. Dudley, none of whom had any particular interest in, or aptitude for, the position. Even if they had, it is unlikely that they could have devoted much energy to the advancement of Aborigines, for these men were, respectively, Government Secretary, Government Accountant, Police Inspector and Commissioner of Police; Aboriginal administration was tacked on to their

²²⁴ *ibid.*, pp.150-51. Masson, like Spencer and numerous other commentators, in some contexts attributed the demise of the race to contact with the Chinese, but in a more general context attributed racial extinction to contact with the white race.

²²⁵ "Report of the Administrator, 1912", p.12.

²²⁶ See Comments on Spencer's recommendations, by P.M. Glynn, Min. Ext. Aff., c.November 1913; A.S. Smallholme, Ext. Aff., memo, 13.1.1914; both in AA, CRS A3, NT 14/403. "Outline of Policy by the Honorable P.M. Glynn, Minister for External Affairs", *CPP* no.30 of 1914, pp.17-18.

²²⁷ W.G. Stretton, "Customs, Rites, and Superstitions of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Gulf of Carpentaria, with a Vocabulary", *Transactions and Proceedings and Report of the Royal Society of South Australia*, vol.17, 1892-93, pp.227-253.

already onerous official duties. Aptly foreshadowing the nature of Aboriginal administration over the following decade, Carey remarked in his first report as Chief Protector that:

The record for the past year is rather that of keeping in existence the organization laid down by Professor Spencer and Mr. Stretton, than attempting any new development.²²⁸

New developments in the Northern Territory were certainly sought by both government and administration; but not new developments in the Aboriginal field. Progress in the pastoral, agricultural and mining industries took precedence over fanciful schemes of building bridges for Aborigines to cross into civilisation. However, high hopes of economic development soon diminished, as one ambitious enterprise after another fell in the dry dust of the north.²²⁹ Numerous factors were blamed for this: Commonwealth parsimony, the War, bolshevism, autocratic administration, the timidity of private enterprise and, not least, nagging doubts about the suitability of the white race to the tropics. Despite the work of Anton Breinl and others, the viability of a white race in a tropical land remained an issue of scientific disputation through to the 1930s. In his first Annual Report, Gilruth warned:

One of the chief obstacles to the white development of the Territory, and especially to the introduction of white women and children, may prove to be the hostility shown by a very large section of the medical profession to the attempted development of any part of the world's tropics by white labour, and the insistence that no tropical climate is suitable for white women and children.²³⁰

Gilruth disputed the wisdom of these medical authorities. Yet as late as 1937, the Board Appointed to Inquire into the Land and Land Industries of the Northern Territory reported that although white men could live and work without ill-effect in the tropics, with white women "it is different".²³¹ So

²²⁸ H.E. Carey, "Report on Aboriginal Department", 1915, in "Report of the Administrator for the Year 1914-15, *CPP* no.240 of 1914-15, p.24.

²²⁹ For an overview of the first two decades of the Northern Territory under Commonwealth control, see Powell, *Far Country*, pp.138-89.

²³⁰ "Report of the Administrator, 1912", p.1.

²³¹ "Report of the Board of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Land and Land Industries of the Northern Territory of Australia, 10 October 1937", *CPP* no.4 of 1937-40, p.71.

vulnerable was the weaker sex to the debilitating effects of a tropical environment that the Board recommended a slight relaxation of the White Australia policy, to allow Darwin's womenfolk the benefits of Chinese gardeners and domestic servants.²³²

Whether white women could thrive in the tropics was a matter of debate; that few came to the Territory was a fact. Throughout the various Administrators' reports there was a persistent complaint of the paucity of white women. Apprehension over this gap in the demographic composition of the Territory grew out of two concerns. One, reflecting a distinctly masculine and utilitarian view of female sexuality, was that in the absence of women of their own race, white men would seek carnal gratification in the blacks' camps. The other, reflecting an equally utilitarian view of the reproductive role of women, involved the need to populate a northern White Australia.

One of the Commonwealth's first developmental schemes entailed the extension southwards of the existing, very limited, railway lines, eventually to link up to Adelaide. In his 1913 report, Gilruth looked hopefully ahead to the tremendous stimulus this would give to the local economy. He also looked with trepidation on the stimulus it would give to sexual immorality:

The possible effect on our non-moral native population of a large number of single men engaged in railway construction cannot be contemplated with equanimity, while the results to the men themselves, in a country where venereal diseases are too common, may be deplorable.²³³

By the time of his next report, railway construction had begun, and Gilruth observed that within a few months his "apprehensions were fulfilled".²³⁴ At the same time, large scale private enterprise came to Darwin, in the form of an abattoir and meat-freezing works owned and operated by the multi-national Vestey's company. Construction of the meat-works, like that of the

²³² *ibid.*, pp.72-73.

²³³ "Report of the Administrator for the Year 1913", *CPP* no.13 of 1914, p.6.

²³⁴ "Report of the Administrator, 1915", p.6.

railways, was delayed by the onset of war and, according to Gilruth, by "the prevalence of labour disputes (which have been almost chronic)".²³⁵ These impediments to progress in no way diminished official anxieties about the influx of hundreds of single white men into a land where black women were "the only outlet for the men's sexual energies".²³⁶

The spread of venereal disease was a major concern. In the dying out of the Aboriginal race, venereal diseases had long been considered one of the most potent factors; and this consideration occasionally surfaced in official correspondence.²³⁷ The paramount concern, however, was with the health of the white population - or rather, perhaps, with the economic health of the Northern Territory. A thriving white community was the desired goal, not a population of poxed proletarians, whose affliction impaired their industrial efficiency and whose very presence was a standing rebuke to the reputation of the Territory.²³⁸ Inspector Beckett claimed that it was:

a fact that mothers in other states, alarmed by the unenviable reputation earned by Darwin through the pernicious intercourse of white men with black women, refuse to allow their sons to come here. Unless some wholesome effort is made to bring about an improvement this will in a marked degree tend to retard the progress of the Northern Territory and a class of men will congregate whose very presence will deter the settlement of respectable families with children.²³⁹

By 1915, fear of venereal disease had reached plague proportions. Early in that year the Government Medical Officer at Pine Creek reported:

After a considerable experience of the Australian Bush, I have no hesitation in stating that the Northern Territory is the worst part of Australia, outside the large cities, for venereal diseases. The reason of this state of things is the practically uncontrolled intercourse that goes

²³⁵ "Report of the Administrator for the Years 1915-16 and 1916-17", *CPP* no.31 of 1917-18, p.6.

²³⁶ Gov. Medical Officer, Pine Creek, to Admin., 9.1.1915, AA, CRS A3, NT 16/608.

²³⁷ See for example J.T. Beckett, Chief Inspector of Aborigines, memo, January 1916, AA, CRS A3, NT 16/608.

²³⁸ Gilruth to Min. Ext. Aff., 25.1.1916, AA, CRS A3, NT 16/608.

²³⁹ Beckett, memo, January 1916, AA, CRS A3, NT 16/608.

on amongst the white men and lubras, who are prostitutes without an exception when in contact with whites.²⁴⁰

His sentiments were echoed by almost all local officials. Within the Commonwealth bureaucracy, moves were afoot to draft an ordinance prohibiting inter-racial sexual activity, as a means of limiting the spread of disease.²⁴¹ Although in 1917 the Acting Chief Health Officer, Dr Leighton Jones, reported that venereal diseases were "not nearly so widespread as believed",²⁴² this did little to allay concern.

Considering that the root of the problem lay in the predominance of single men, Gilruth suggested that "perhaps a bagnio (licensed or unlicensed)" should be established in Darwin.²⁴³ On the other hand, the Reverend J.R.B. Love, who toured the Territory in 1913 and 1914, considered that the churches had a duty to raise the moral character of white bushmen to enable them to resist the allurements of carnal indulgence.²⁴⁴ Chief Inspector Beckett argued for legislative impositions on the sexual conduct of white men, stating that:

Though, as a Protector of Aborigines, I have always held that the white man should be well able to look after himself, it is very plain that there is a large section of the male community of Darwin which, coming into contact with Aborigines, is quite unable to do so. These men, in the interests of the white community, require to be protected against their own unbridled passions quite as much as do the Aborigines who are practically forced to pander to them.²⁴⁵

However, when additional restrictions were imposed, they applied to Aborigines only. In early 1916 the entirety of Darwin, except the Kahlin Compound, was declared a prohibited area. Aborigines were allowed into the

²⁴⁰ Gov. Medical Officer, Pine Creek, to Admin., 9.1.1915, AA, CRS A3, NT 16/608.

²⁴¹ Between March 1915 and June 1918, numerous memoranda on the need for such an ordinance were exchanged between the Department of External Affairs and the Attorney General's Department; see AA, CRS A1, 33/503.

²⁴² H.L. Jones, "Report of the Acting Chief Health Officer for Two Years ending 30th June, 1917", in "Report of the Administrator, 1916 and 1917", p.36.

²⁴³ Gilruth to Min. Ext. Aff., 25.1.1916, AA, CRS A3, NT 16/608.

²⁴⁴ J.R.B. Love, *The Aborigines: Their Present Condition as seen in Northern South Australia, the Northern Territory, North-West Australia and Western Queensland*, Melbourne, 1915, pp.20-21.

²⁴⁵ Beckett, memo, January 1916, AA, CRS A3, NT 16/608.

town only with a written permit, and only on the legitimate business of their licensed employers. Aborigines found in the prohibited area after dark, and without a written permit, were liable to arrest.²⁴⁶ These drastic measures, Gilruth hoped, "may mitigate the evil" of sexual immorality and consequent spread of venereal diseases; he held out no expectation that they would stop it.²⁴⁷

To further regulate inter-racial sexual activity, Section 53 of the Aborigines Ordinance of 1918 stipulated that:

Any person (except an aboriginal or half-caste not living with his wife) who -
(a) habitually consorts with a female aboriginal or half-caste; or
(b) keeps a female aboriginal or half-caste as his mistress; or
(c) unlawfully has carnal knowledge of a female aboriginal or half-caste,
shall be guilty of an offence.²⁴⁸

This did little to alleviate the perceived problem, for it failed to address the issue of casual sexual liaisons, which were considered to be the source of greatest harm to the Aborigines.²⁴⁹ The major achievement of the 1918 Ordinance was to tighten administrative control over Aborigines. Chief Protector Carey was particularly pleased with the fact that it gave him authority to command any Aborigine to "remain in such an institution [as the Kahlin Compound] until given permission to leave". This, he considered, would make such places "more reformatory" and would "prove of much service in treatment of venereal disease".²⁵⁰ For those in authority, however, control was never adequate; in his first report as Acting Chief Protector of

²⁴⁶ Gilruth to Min. Ext. Aff., 25.1.1916, AA, CRS A3, NT 16/608. Carey, "Aboriginal Department [Report for Two Years ending June 1917]", in "Report of the Administrator, 1916 and 1917", pp.45-46.

²⁴⁷ Gilruth to Min. Ext. Aff., 25.1.1916, AA, CRS A3, NT 16/608.

²⁴⁸ "Aborigines Ordinance, 1918": Ordinance no.9 of 1918, *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, no.87, 13 June 1918, Sect.53.

²⁴⁹ Sub-section (c) of Sect. 53 of the 1918 Ordinance would appear to have been redundant, as unlawful carnal knowledge (with a person under the age of consent or rape) was, by definition, already an offence. For a discussion of this point see the Department of Home Affairs memo, 19.2.1932, in AA, CRS A1, 36/6595.

²⁵⁰ Carey, "Report by the Chief Protector of Aborigines", 1918, in "Report of the Administrator for the Year ending 30th June 1918", *CPP* no.129 of 1917-18-19, p.44.

Aboriginals, W. Waters remarked on the "incomplete condition of the Aboriginal Ordinance now in force".²⁵¹

Paucity of staff and resources rendered the implementation of any legislation difficult. In 1917 the office of Chief Inspector of Aborigines was abolished, in "the interests of economy".²⁵² Thus the services of J.T. Beckett, the last remnant of the original Commonwealth Aboriginal Department and the only official who had retained a specific commitment to Aboriginal welfare, were lost. With the demands of the war in Europe and with local projects floundering, Aboriginal affairs were of small concern. Vestey's meatworks opened in 1917; after operating at a loss for three years, it closed down altogether, apart from a very short season in 1925.²⁵³ The one great industrial enterprise in Darwin had failed, and hopefulness about the economic future of the Territory was flagging. In the year in which the meatworks closed, the European population of the Territory dropped from 3,767 to 2,770.²⁵⁴ When F.C. Urquhart assumed the duties of Administrator in 1921, his first report was anything but encouraging. "The economic and industrial position in the Territory", he wrote, was "one of suspended animation"; business was "very depressed", mining "at a very low ebb", fisheries "practically stagnant", agricultural developments "negligible", and the pastoral industry "passing through a phase of depression".²⁵⁵

Urquhart, like Gilruth, was in the tradition of the authoritarian, quasi-imperial administrator. A former officer of the Queensland Native Mounted Police, his statements on Aboriginal issues were far more pragmatic than idealistic. Sexual liaisons, he declared, were:

²⁵¹ W. Waters, "Report of the Aboriginal Department", 1920, in "Annual Report of the Acting Administrator for the Year ended 30th June 1920", *CPP* no.119 of 1920, p.65.

²⁵² "Report of the Administrator, 1916 and 1917", p.4.

²⁵³ See Powell, *Far Country*, pp.152-53.

²⁵⁴ "Report of the Acting Administrator, 1920", p.34.

²⁵⁵ "Report of the Administrator for the Year ended 30th June 1921", *CPP* no.44 of 1922, pp.3-4.

practically the certain concomitant of the pioneering stage of the occupation of country inhabited by indigenous coloured natives by a white race. As the pioneering stage passes and the white population, especially the white female population, increases, the conditions which favour miscegenation gradually disappear, and a healthy public opinion against it finds such forcible expression that white men generally hesitate to incur the social odium involved, and the practice dies out. There are indications that, in some portions of the Territory, what I have called 'the pioneering stage' is beginning to pass, but, owing to the stagnancy of the white population, the process here will be a slow one, and it will be some time before any substantial improvement in this regard is apparent.²⁵⁶

Legal restrictions were of little service, he argued, for he could:

conceive of no legislation less drastic than such as would be intolerable to any Australian community that would be effective in putting an end to the present prevailing miscegenation, and since this cannot be stopped it only remains to do the best that is possible for the unfortunate products of it.²⁵⁷

Others at the time took a different view. A parliamentary committee reporting on the Northern Territory in 1922 advocated that "stringent regulations be framed dealing with the interference by white men with native women, and that such regulations be rigidly enforced".²⁵⁸

In Spencer's original proposal, the Kahlin Compound was to provide both a refuge for the protection of Aborigines and an appropriate environment for their advancement. Its protective function continued to be acknowledged, in word if not always in deed. Its envisaged role in uplifting the Aborigines was quietly neglected, at least as far as full-bloods were concerned. In 1923 a Committee of Inquiry into Matters connected with the Native Compound received advice and opinion from both government officials and private Darwin residents; no one espoused the view that civilising the full-

²⁵⁶ "Report of the Administrator for the Year ended 30th June 1924", *CPP* no.1 of 1925, p.7.

²⁵⁷ "Report of the Administrator for the Year ended 30th June 1922", *CPP* no.14 of 1923, p.8. Efforts at doing "the best that is possible for the unfortunate products" of miscegenation will be discussed in Chapter Four.

²⁵⁸ "Report by the Sectional Committee of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works on Various Matters appertaining to the Territory, other than the Proposed North-South Railway", *CPP* no.65 of 1922, p.3.

bloods was one of the institution's functions.²⁵⁹ The chairman of the Committee of Inquiry, T.J. Worgan, indicated that in his view the compound existed merely as a convenient place of residence for town blacks and as a base for the provision of medical services.²⁶⁰ Secretary of the Home and Territories Department, A.S. Smallholme, did allude to protection - especially of morals - as an essential function of the Compound.²⁶¹ But like everyone else, he made no mention of uplifting or civilising the full-bloods.

In 1913 a school was opened at Kahlin Compound, with an initial enrolment of sixteen half-caste and nine full-blood children.²⁶² Over the years, numbers of full-blood children at the school declined, while numbers of half-castes rose. By 1925 there was only one full-blood Aboriginal child attending the Compound school.²⁶³ In that year, all other schools in the Northern Territory had a full-blood enrolment of nil.²⁶⁴ Statistics for 1926 indicate that even the solitary Aboriginal scholar of the previous year no longer attended.²⁶⁵ School enrolments of full-blood children throughout the Territory remained nil until 1929, when two attended the Kahlin Compound school.²⁶⁶ Schooling had been an essential plank in Baldwin Spencer's scheme for uplifting the Aborigine.

²⁵⁹ On the other hand, a great deal of discussion was devoted to the need to civilise the half-castes. See the various items of correspondence and the 100 pages of transcript of evidence taken by the Committee of Inquiry in AA, CRS A452, 52/284.

²⁶⁰ Worgan to Admin., 19.7.1923, AA, CRS A452, 52/284.

²⁶¹ Smallholme, memo, 4.9.1923, AA, CRS A452, 52/284.

²⁶² W.G. Stretton, "Report on Aborigines Department, 1913" in "Report of the Administrator, 1913", p.32.

²⁶³ V.L. Lampe, "Report on Education Department", 1925, in "Report of the Administrator for the Year ended 30th June 1925", *CPP* no.27 of 1926, p.12.

²⁶⁴ These statistics refer to government-funded schools; they leave out of account the various missions on which some Aborigines were educated.

²⁶⁵ Lampe, "Report on Education Department", 1926, in "Report of the Acting Administrator for the Year ended 30th June 1926", *CPP* no.101 of 1926-27, p.13.

²⁶⁶ Lampe, "Report on Education Branch", 1929, in "Report on the Administration of North Australia for the Year ended 30th June 1929", *CPP* no.50 of 1929-31, p.7.

Spencer's recommendations on the creation of reserves got off to a very shaky start. In 1914 P.M. Glynn, Minister for External Affairs, characterised the proposed reserves as "suggestions rather for the future than for immediate policy".²⁶⁷ Not until 1920 was there any substantial increase in the area of reserved land in the Territory, when Acting Administrator Staniforth Smith expanded the total from 2,333 to 32,897 square miles.²⁶⁸ By far the largest part of this increase came from the declaration of the vast Lake Amadeus Reserve, which granted Aboriginal occupation of 21,875 square miles of desert in the far south-west of the Territory. In support of his actions, Smith cited the "able and well considered recommendations of Sir Baldwin Spencer", which he had "endeavoured to carry out ... in their entirety".²⁶⁹ In one significant respect, however, Smith departed from Spencer's recommendations. The latter had stipulated that each reserve should be staffed by a superintendent, matron and school teacher, who would provide education, vocational training and assistance in uplifting the Aborigines into civilisation. Most of the 1920 reserves lacked such personnel, Smith arguing that:

It would not be advisable or necessary to erect buildings on these reserves and appoint Superintendents, Matrons and School Teachers, the objective being to provide a sanctuary for the native population, or, in other words, mitigate the apparent harshness of the decision that all native lands shall become Crown lands.²⁷⁰

As was the case with many of Spencer's recommendations, the element of protection was partially implemented; uplifting the Aborigine was ignored.

In his 1920 report, Smith referred to three reserves, Oenpelli, Daly River and Batchelor, which had "buildings erected and married superintendents to look after the welfare of the natives"; none had school teachers on the staff.²⁷¹ These reserves had all been established for some

²⁶⁷ "Outlines of Policy by Glynn", p.17.

²⁶⁸ "Report of the Acting Administrator, 1920", p.20.

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.19.

²⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.20.

²⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.20.

time, and claimed varying degrees of success in inculcating the desired values in their Aboriginal inmates.²⁷² Perhaps the most interesting - and certainly the most reported upon - was Oenpelli on the East Alligator River, whose superintendent was Paddy Cahill, one of the Territory's more notable bushmen.²⁷³ Cahill had met Baldwin Spencer in 1912, and the two travelled together on some anthropological research expeditions; they maintained a correspondence until Cahill's death in 1923.²⁷⁴ Shortly after Spencer's return to Melbourne, Cahill proposed in a letter to him that "the whole of the Australian natives" should be "placed under one head", suggesting that the head should be Baldwin Spencer himself.²⁷⁵ Spencer was equally impressed by the buffalo-shooting frontiersman. Indeed, it is likely that Spencer's recommendations on reserves for nomadic Aborigines were shaped, to some extent, by his observations at Oenpelli in 1912.²⁷⁶ Like Spencer, Cahill was ambivalent about the future prospects of the Aborigines.²⁷⁷ At times he expressed views which suggested that extinction could be their only fate; in 1915 he stated that "as far as the Kakadoo tribes are concerned, in a very few years, they poor people, will be a thing of the past".²⁷⁸ However, Cahill appears to have considered Aborigines capable of taking a place in the social and economic life of the country, provided white Australians were prepared to

²⁷² See Stretton, "Report, 1913", pp.32-33; Carey, "Report", 1915, pp.24-25; Carey, "Report", 1918, p.44.

²⁷³ For a history of Oenpelli to 1925, see P. Woodley, *The Best Laid Schemes: Government Policy Concerning the Aborigines in the Top End of the Northern Territory*, unpublished B.Litt thesis, ANU, 1982, pp.50-70.

²⁷⁴ Over twenty of these letters are held in the Spencer Papers, box 1, item 4. According to Spencer's biographers, Cahill was, next to Gillen, "Spencer's most important collaborator"; Mulvaney and Calaby, *So Much that is New*, p.301.

²⁷⁵ Cahill to Spencer, 30.10.1913, Spencer Papers, box 1, item 4.

²⁷⁶ Mulvaney and Calaby (*So Much that is New*, p.307) and Woodley (*The Best Laid Schemes*, p.58) both made this point. Spencer's recommendations, nonetheless, went considerably beyond anything that Paddy Cahill was doing at the time.

²⁷⁷ In correspondence with Spencer dated 18.11.1916, Cahill wrote: "I beleave [sic] in doing all that I can for the natives, but their future frightens me"; Spencer Papers, box 1, item 4.

²⁷⁸ Cahill to Spencer, 11.3.1915, Spencer Papers, box 1, item 4. It may be surmised that if he believed that the relatively well protected Kakadoo of Oenpelli would soon be extinct, the same fate awaited most other Aborigines, who lived in less favoured circumstances.

permit them to do so. It was on the latter point that his doubts were strongest.²⁷⁹

Cahill had occupied the Oenpelli area since the late 1890s. From 1913, when it became an Aboriginal reserve, he embarked on a number of ambitious agricultural and pastoral schemes, all relying solely on Aboriginal labour. By 1915 the Oenpelli dairy herd was thriving, to the extent of producing not only milk but also good quality butter.²⁸⁰ The station also grazed beef cattle, horses, goats and pigs in considerable numbers. Cahill put a great deal of effort into experimental agriculture, attempting - sometimes successfully - to grow crops such as cotton, sugar cane, peanuts, sisal hemp, citrus, almonds and annatto dye plant.²⁸¹ Gilruth seems to have looked upon the enterprise as much as an experimental farm as anything else; and as a more successful one than the official Demonstration Farms at Batchelor and the Daly River. However, he did acknowledge Oenpelli's stated purpose, reporting in 1917 that he was:

very favourably impressed with the general improvements, effected entirely by native labour under supervision ... The natives, whether belonging to the station or casual visitors, are happy and contented.... [T]he influence of the station is extending and many natives who formerly had never seen a white man are now becoming gradually acquainted with the best side of the white man's supremacy and discipline.²⁸²

The final word was significant. Like Spencer, Cahill believed that Aborigines could be transformed into settled cultivators and pastoralists only within a system of comprehensive control. Like his mentor, Cahill also believed that a firm hand should be exercised over the white inhabitants of the Territory.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Cahill to Spencer, 30.10.1913, Spencer Papers, box 1, item 4.

²⁸⁰ "Report of the Administrator, 1915", pp.12-13; Carey, "Report", 1915, p.24.

²⁸¹ P. Cahill, "Oenpelli Station", 1913, in "Report of the Administrator, 1913", p.38; P. Cahill, "Oenpelli Aboriginal Station", 1917, in "Report of the Administrator, 1916 and 1917", pp.51-52; P. Cahill, "'Oenpelli' Aboriginal Station, East Alligator River", 1918, in "Report of the Administrator, 1918", p.41.

²⁸² "Report of the Administrator, 1916 and 1917", p.14.

²⁸³ See for example Cahill to Spencer, 11.3.1915, in which he expressed his desire to take a "cat-o'-ninetails" to the editor of the *Northern Territory Times* and other disgruntled residents of Darwin; and Cahill to Spencer, 30.4.1915, in which he suggested that the

Vocational training, not only in stock work and agriculture but also in such skills as carpentry and saddlery, was an essential part of the regime at Oenpelli. Schooling was not. In correspondence with Spencer, Cahill expressed his misgivings about educating Aborigines, especially the girls. It would be "an injustice" to teach them "civilized habits, learn [sic] them to read and write cook and clean", and then allow them to marry an uneducated man.²⁸⁴ In his report for 1917 he explained that he had devoted "many hours of thought" to the "question of education" and had proposed the creation of a school to the local Aboriginal men; most of them were:

in favour of it, at least for the boys; but the idea seems to prevail that once a girl was taken in hand, taught to read and write, and the habits of the white people, she would become useless as a wife to the average black man. My own feeling is that, before we go in for educating any large numbers of boys or girls, we should have some place at which to put them when educated, so that they can earn a living for themselves and family. It would not be fair to the natives to educate them and let them find a living in the bush.... It is very nice to go to a school, children are lined up, and behave very nicely, sing little songs, and read chapters out of a book. When we get a few thousand of them to this pitch, what are we going to do with them, and where place them?²⁸⁵

No school was established.

Until 1921 Oenpelli managed if not to prosper at least to offer promise. Gilruth and Cahill regarded each other with mutual respect, even admiration.²⁸⁶ During Staniforth Smith's brief term of office, Oenpelli expanded from a small Aboriginal station of 20 square miles to a large reserve of 2,000 square miles. Under Urquhart's administration, Cahill's regime at Oenpelli came to an end. From the outset, Cahill had misgivings about Urquhart. In November 1921, only nine months after the latter's arrival, Cahill informed Spencer that he was "afraid that the natives are in for a rough time,

majority of Darwin's public servants should be placed "right up near the German firing line"; both in Spencer Papers, box 1, item 4.

²⁸⁴ Cahill to Spencer, 18.11.1916, Spencer Papers, box 1, item 4.

²⁸⁵ Cahill, "Oenpelli" 1917, p.50.

²⁸⁶ For Cahill's opinion of Gilruth see Cahill to Spencer, 11.3.1915 and 30.4.1915, both in Spencer Papers, box 1, item 4. Gilruth's high opinion of Cahill and his work was freely expressed in his various official reports between 1912 and 1918.

under the present Administration".²⁸⁷ In 1923, the year of Cahill's death, Oenpelli was transferred to the Stock Department. In his report for that year, Urquhart signalled agreement with the opinion of the Chief Inspector of Stock, that Oenpelli should be closed down, adding that he had "never been able to see that this establishment served any useful purpose" and the cost of its maintenance was "not justified".²⁸⁸ After protracted negotiations, Oenpelli was handed over to the Church Missionary Society in late 1925.²⁸⁹ In the process it shrank back to 200 square miles. Thus the last of Spencer's recommended reserves, run by the government for the uplift of nomadic Aborigines, disappeared.²⁹⁰ Other reserves remained; but none were staffed and equipped, at government expense, for the advancement and education of Aborigines.

Increasingly during the 1920s, the task of uplifting the Aborigines was handed over to various mission societies, against the earlier recommendation of Baldwin Spencer. At the 1924 festival of the Australian Board of Missions, Senator Pearce, Minister for Home and Territories, emphasised:

the Christian responsibility for the remnant that is left of the Australian aborigines, and stressed the point that the Government was the very last organisation to deal effectively with the problem of preserving and uplifting the native races.²⁹¹

These duties, he suggested, were best performed by the missions. Senator Pearce may well have believed what he said; but the government's devolution of responsibility onto the missions derived also from a desire to cut costs.²⁹²

²⁸⁷ Cahill to Spencer, 24.11.1921, Spencer Papers, box 1, item 4.

²⁸⁸ "Report of the Administrator for the Year ended 30th June 1923", *CPP* no.71 of 1923-24, p.8.

²⁸⁹ For an account of Oenpelli under missionary control, see K. Cole, *From Mission to Church: The CMS Mission to the Aborigines of Arnhem land 1908-1985*, Bendigo, 1985, pp.121-39.

²⁹⁰ Since it lacked a school, Oenpelli was never quite in line with Spencer's recommendations; it was, nonetheless, the closest thing in the Territory to what he had advocated in his "Preliminary Report".

²⁹¹ Australian Board of Missions: Progress Report of the Victorian Committee, August 1924, ABM Board Minutes, vol.2, series M4, box 2. I am indebted to my colleague Noel Loos for access to this document.

²⁹² See Woodley, *The Best Laid Schemes*, pp.67-68.

Indicative of the trend, in the early 1920s the number of missions in the northern part of the Territory doubled, from three to six.²⁹³

When Spencer visited the Territory for the last time in his life, in 1923, he produced a highly critical report on the longest established mission, Hermannsburg. He claimed that the methods employed by the Lutheran missionaries "have been mistaken, and their efforts have met with very little success", so that:

so far as the matter of making the native a more useful member of the community is concerned, they have been practically futile.... If the Mission were closed down tomorrow, not a trace would be left, apart from the buildings, of its previous existence and influence on the natives.²⁹⁴

There was a "practically entire absence of any teaching or training except on the religious side, the effectiveness of which is not apparent".²⁹⁵ "The industrial side", Spencer complained, "has been almost totally neglected", so that the mission black was "in no better position than his wild bush brother".²⁹⁶ In his view, a significant shortcoming was the missionaries' failure to teach Aborigines even the rudiments of cleanliness and tidiness.²⁹⁷ He alleged that Aboriginal women were kept in "what may almost be called the state of subjection", performing most of the heavy work and having little time for domestic pursuits.²⁹⁸ Although Spencer approved of strict control, he condemned the dormitories in which the children were locked at night, designating them "dungeons".²⁹⁹

²⁹³ C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Canberra, 1970, p.252.

²⁹⁴ W.B. Spencer, Report on the Half Castes and Aborigines of the Southern Division of the Northern Territory, with special reference to the Bungalow at Stuart and the Hermannsburg Mission Station, 1923, (Hereafter Spencer Report, 1923), p.21, AA, CRS A1, 30/1542.

²⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.21; also p.13.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.21.

²⁹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.10-11, 21.

²⁹⁸ *ibid.*, pp.12-13, 22.

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.22.

According to Spencer, Hermannsburg was a failure in terms of both its religious mission and its secular duty. He recommended that:

THE HERMANNSBURG MISSION STATION AND ABORIGINAL RESERVE BE TAKEN OVER BY THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT AND REORGANISED ON SUCH A BASIS THAT IT SHALL PROVIDE FOR THE MORAL, SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL TRAINING OF THE ABORIGINALS AND FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF THE OLD AND INFIRM.³⁰⁰

He suggested that the day-to-day running of the station should be entrusted to the Salvation Army, in view of the "complete religious, social and industrial organisation" of that body and of "the nature of its work and methods".³⁰¹ It was a neat compromise between a mission and a government station, with ultimate control vested in the government, while the mundane details of institutional organisation would be the responsibility of a religious body with a history of close involvement in the secular sphere. There was some support for the proposal from Senator Pearce and senior bureaucrats in his department, and from the Salvation Army itself. But it was never implemented, largely, it seems, because of considerations of cost.³⁰²

In 1928 the Commonwealth government appointed another expert to investigate Aboriginal administration in the Territory. This time, the expert was not a scientist but an administrator, J.W. Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aboriginals in Queensland. Bleakley's report, submitted early in 1929, in many ways echoed Spencer's advice of sixteen years before. Preservation and uplift could be achieved only through strict control over Aboriginal lives.³⁰³ Survival depended upon surveillance. The need for supervision of the sexual behaviour of Aboriginal women was given particular prominence.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.23; upper case and underlining in the original.

³⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.23.

³⁰² A.S. Smallholme, Home and Terr. memo, 2.11.1923; Submission by J.G. McLaren, Sec., Home and Terr., 9.11.1923, with attached note signed by Senator Pearce, 9.11.1923; both in AA, CRS A1, 30/1542.

³⁰³ "The Aboriginals and Half-Castes of Central Australia and North Australia: Report by J.W. Bleakley, 1928", *CPP* no.21 of 1929; see especially pp.35-40.

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*; see especially pp.9-10, 11, 39-40.

Although Bleakley maintained that an influx of white women "would do more to eliminate or reduce the moral abuses than all the laws", he nonetheless advocated both the extension and the better enforcement of legal decrees prohibiting "prostitution and moral abuses".³⁰⁵ Since Spencer's day, fears of a half-caste problem had expanded enormously in the white Australian imagination, and this was reflected in the greater space devoted to it in Bleakley's report.³⁰⁶

Like Spencer, Bleakley recommended the creation of large Aboriginal reserves, on which there should be no "unnecessary interference" with tribal life. Reserves would, however, equip Aborigines to deal with the "inevitable change" to their lives, "by educating the young to desire better social conditions and the settled industrial life".³⁰⁷ He differed from Spencer in proposing that the required "benevolent supervision" on reserves could best be effected by Christian missions.³⁰⁸ Acknowledging that there were some drawbacks to the mission system, Bleakley highlighted the practical benefits:

In the first place, the cost of management is less, and the missions can obtain the type of worker who undertakes the work from missionary, and not mercenary, motives and is likely to have more sympathy with the people.

The Government, with its tremendous task of developing the country, would be unwise to burden itself, and its already overtaxed machinery, with the worry of management of a number of charitable institutions.³⁰⁹

This difference aside, Bleakley's recommendations of 1929 and Baldwin Spencer's of 1913 had much in common.

Bleakley considered the paramount duties of Aboriginal administration to be the "shielding of the race from the evils of contact with the civilized races" and "the amelioration of the lot of those suffering from detribalization

³⁰⁵ *ibid.*, pp.9-11, 39-40.

³⁰⁶ *ibid.*, see especially pp.27-29. This aspect of Bleakley's report will be discussed in Chapter Four.

³⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.39; also pp.31-35.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*, pp.33-35, 39-40.

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.24.

and the tightening up of the machinery for moral protection".³¹⁰ That he could write of similar problems, and propose similar solutions, to those expressed by Spencer, is indicative of how little the latter's recommendations had been acted upon during the intervening decade and a half.

³¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.30.

CHAPTER THREE
ANTHROPOLOGY RENOVATED, OPTIMISM REVIVED
AND PROBLEMS RENEWED

While Spencer's schemes for the uplift of Aborigines came to little in practice, another of his proposals, for the establishment of a Department of Anthropology at an Australian university, met with more success. As allies in the cause, he had such local notables as the Melbourne Professor of Chemistry, David Orme Masson, as well as distinguished British anthropologists A.C. Haddon, W.H.R. Rivers and R.R. Marett. These men, along with other scientific luminaries of the day, gathered together at the 1914 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science which was held, for the first time, in Australia. It was there that lobbying for an Australian chair of anthropology was first placed on a formal basis.¹ The outbreak of war disrupted efforts in that direction, but after the conclusion of hostilities the push for the academic teaching of anthropology was resumed with zeal. At the prestigious Pan-Pacific Science Congress, held in Australia in 1923, the following resolutions were passed:

Recognizing the necessity for the immediate prosecution of anthropological research in Australia and Oceania, this Congress calls the attention of governments, Universities, patrons of research, and research foundations to the pressing and important need for this investigation....

The Congress urges that provision be made for the teaching of Anthropology in the Universities of Australia.²

There was some rivalry between the universities of Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide over which best deserved the Chair of Anthropology. Sydney was the victor, Australia's first department of anthropology being founded there in

¹ See N. Peterson, "'Studying Man and Man's Nature': the History of the Institutionalisation of Aboriginal Anthropology", *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1990, no.2, p.5.

² *Proceedings of the Pan-Pacific Science Congress*, Melbourne, 1923, vol.1, p.35.

1925 with the support of the Commonwealth government and the American Rockefeller Foundation.³

Particularly in the years after the First World War, a central plank in the lobbying for the institutionalisation of anthropology was its relevance to the administration of native races. The first post-War meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science resolved that:

there be urged upon the Federal Government the need for endowment of a chair of Anthropology, especially in view of its value in the government of subject races.⁴

This emphasis on practical relevance owed much to Australia's acquisition, in 1921, of a League of Nations mandate for the government of the former German colony of New Guinea. Indeed, in urging the need for the teaching of anthropology for practical administrative purposes, it was always Papua and New Guinea which were cited as the potential areas of application. Little consideration was given to the possibility of utilising the science in the administration of Australian Aborigines. The distinction was nicely illustrated in the *Proceedings of the Pan-Pacific Science Congress* of 1923, where, in suggesting that "provision be made for the teaching of Anthropology in the Universities of Australia", it was argued that:

The preservation, progress, and welfare of the native population of Oceania, which is a charge under the terms of the Mandates granted to the Commonwealth of Australia can best be carried out by a policy based on the investigation of native conditions, customs, laws, religion, and the like which is a study not merely of academic interest and importance, but points the way to a sympathetic method of dealing with and governing such peoples.⁵

³ See Peterson, "Studying Man and Man's Nature", pp.7-12. An alternative (Adelaide) interpretation of the circumstances surrounding the location of the chair at Sydney is provided by P.G. Jones, "South Australian Anthropological History: The Board for Anthropological Research and its Early Expeditions", *Records of the South Australian Museum*, vol.20, 1987, pp.72-75.

⁴ "Summary of Resolutions Affecting Committees of the various Sections", *Report of the Fifteenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1921, p.xxxiii.

⁵ *Proceedings of the Pan-Pacific Science Congress*, 1923, vol.1, p.40.

Study of the Australian Aborigines, on the other hand, does seem to have been merely of academic interest and importance; under this heading it was asserted that:

In view of the great and peculiar interest of the Australian aboriginals as representing one of the lowest types of culture available for study, of the rapid and inevitable diminution in their numbers, and of the loss of their primitive beliefs and customs when under the influence of a higher culture, the Pan-Pacific Science Congress suggests that steps should be taken, without delay, to organize the study of those tribes that are, as yet, comparatively uninfluenced by contact with civilization.⁶

Not a mention was made of the possibility of a scientific approach to the administration of Aborigines, merely of their scientific value as living specimens of stone age man.

The Evolution of Functionalist Anthropology

By the time of the establishment of the Chair of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, the winds of change had been blowing through the discipline for over a decade. The old evolutionary paradigm still persisted in archaeology and physical anthropology, not to mention the popular imagination; but as an academic approach to the study of human society it was passing out of fashion. In the early twentieth century diffusionist cultural theories enjoyed a fleeting vogue in Britain. Although one of the leading diffusionists was an Australian, Grafton Elliot Smith, this approach to the study of humanity failed to take root in Australia.⁷ A more enduring school was being built up by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski, both of whom had connections with Australia.⁸ In Radcliffe-Brown's case, those

⁶ *ibid.*, p.41.

⁷ For accounts of early twentieth century diffusionism see I. Langham, *The Building of British Social Anthropology: W.H.R. Rivers and his Cambridge Disciples in the Development of Kinship Studies, 1898-1931*, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 1981, pp.118-99; G.W. Stocking, "Radcliffe-Brown and British Social Anthropology" in G.W. Stocking (ed.), *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology*, Madison, Wisc., 1984, pp.138-43; Kuper, *Invention of Primitive Society*, pp.162-70; Kuklick, *The Savage Within*, pp.119-81, 256-64.

⁸ Radcliffe-Brown (then just plain Brown) had conducted investigations in North-Western Australia in 1910 and 1911, with the assistance of Daisy Bates. Malinowski had been 'interned' during the war by the Australian authorities, during which time he

connections were strengthened by his appointment as foundation Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney. Although a good deal of professional rivalry developed between him and Malinowski, both were instrumental in advancing the cause of the new social anthropology. And both agreed that the essential task of the science was to explain the inner workings of human societies, to elucidate the means by which the various components of a social mechanism fitted together into a functioning system.

The rise of the new social anthropology marked a shift from the diachronic perspective of evolutionary theory to the synchronic orientation of functionalism.⁹ Radcliffe-Brown and his followers turned scientific inquiry away from reconstructions of the past progress of humanity, toward a close scrutiny of the functioning of existing societies. While the evolutionists were seen as spinning speculative accounts of the early history of mankind out of fragmentary information acquired at second or third hand from missionaries and travellers, the new generation of anthropologists demanded a more empirical approach to the study of society. This points toward a second major difference of functionalism from the evolutionary tradition: an emphasis on field-work. Malinowski in particular was associated with the establishment of the methodology of participant observation as the essential starting point for anthropological research. Scientifically trained observers were expected to spend significant periods, perhaps a year or more, living amongst the people who were the subjects of study. A third difference from the older tradition was a stronger emphasis on the practical relevance of the discipline. Whereas evolutionary anthropology was directed at understanding the nature of man through the study of his evolutionary progress, functional anthropologists

conducted his major research work on the Trobriand Islands; he had earlier published a book, *The Family Among the Australian Aborigines: A Sociological Study*, based on library research. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Malinowski also had kinship connections with Australia, having married an Australian woman, Elsie Masson.

For detailed analyses of the emergence of the functionalist tradition in British anthropology see Langham, *The Building of British Social Anthropology*; Stocking (ed.), *Functionalism Historicized*; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.284-329; Kuklick, *The Savage Within*, pp.182-278 .

insisted that their studies were pragmatically useful in the administration of Empire.¹⁰

Although functionalism marked a re-orientation of the focus of anthropological inquiry and entailed a novel methodology, its practitioners inherited a good many assumptions from their evolutionary predecessors. While functionalists were critical of conjectural reconstructions of the course of human evolution, they advanced no critique of fundamental social evolutionary premises. Far from it. Late in life, Radcliffe-Brown described himself as one "who has all his life accepted the hypothesis of social evolution as formulated by [Herbert] Spencer as a useful working hypothesis in the study of human society".¹¹ It was simply that Radcliffe-Brown and his colleagues, in their efforts to make their discipline more scientific, eschewed speculation about an ultimately unknowable past in favour of empirical evidence about a presumed-to-be knowable present. Functional anthropology grew up in opposition to the diachronic approach of its evolutionary forebear, but not in opposition to the substantial evolutionary premise that human societies followed a developmental sequence, along which some societies had advanced further than others. Thus it was only too easy for the new anthropologists to adopt the same labels, and frequently to slip into the same conceptual world, as their predecessors. Some societies were more primitive - those were the ones anthropologists studied. Some societies were more

¹⁰ These three characteristics of British social anthropology have been taken from Langham, *The Building of British Social Anthropology*, pp.xiii-xvi. Langham listed as a fourth characteristic "the enshrining of kinship studies as plausibly the focal element in modern anthropological theory"; this aspect, however, is of no relevance to the present study. It may be added that in the three characteristics outlined above, evolutionary and functionalist approaches differed in emphasis but not in absolute terms. Field work had been an aspect of evolutionary anthropological work in Australia, most notably in the studies of Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen; although their methodology lacked the rigour demanded by Malinowski, it did entail extended periods in the field. The administrative relevance of anthropology was also asserted - or assumed - by a good many of the evolutionists; see Kuklick, *The Savage Within*, pp.14-20. In Australia, the best example is again provided by Baldwin Spencer, in his role of Chief Protector in the Northern Territory.

¹¹ A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Method in Social Anthropology*, Chicago, 1958, p.189, cited in Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.293.

advanced - those were the ones anthropologists came from. How humanity had progressed from one to the other, which had been the central concern of the evolutionists, was relegated to the realm of speculation, beyond scientific inquiry. But the primitivity of such societies as the Australian Aboriginal remained a taken-for-granted fact.

Like primitivity, the firmly established concept of race survived into the new social anthropology. The creation of social anthropology was symptomatic of the increasing professionalisation of the discipline; and the widening professional split in British anthropology, between its social and physical branches, probably contributed more to the persistence than to the challenging of racial ideas, at least in the short term.¹² In carving out the study of primitive societies as their own academic territory, social anthropologists left the study of racial differentiation and affinities to specialists in the field of physical anthropology. The fact that the former focussed their attention on social and cultural matters did not mean that they necessarily denied the existence of inherent racial differences; merely that the detailed consideration of such matters lay outside their own disciplinary boundaries. Disciplinary fission took place without any sustained critique of the concept of race.¹³ Social anthropologists used the term 'race' frequently in their writing; and if their usage was often loose, the accumulated meanings of over a century of racial science still clung to the word.

¹² For a detailed study of the decline of racial science in Britain and America, see E. Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars*, Cambridge, 1992. Barkan was undoubtedly correct in arguing that social anthropologists like Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski played a part in dethroning the concept of race; however, he acknowledged that this was accomplished slowly, by shifting the focus of anthropological inquiry rather than by direct assaults on racial science.

¹³ In America an attack on racial ideas had been launched long before, by Franz Boas in the closing years of the nineteenth century; see Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, pp.161-94. However, Boas's critique was in certain respects limited, and his school of American cultural anthropology appears to have exerted little influence on pre-World War Two Australian anthropology.

Disciplinary fission did occur, in Australian as in British anthropology. Yet it would be misleading to imply that there was a total divorce, that social anthropologists took no cognisance of developments in the field of physical anthropology.¹⁴ Radcliffe-Brown himself acknowledged that the physical side of the discipline - which he preferred "to denote as Human Biology" - was "an important branch of anthropology", concerned with the "laws of heredity, variation, and evolution in man".¹⁵ Although he considered eugenics premature in its attempts to apply a very limited understanding of heredity and variation to the improvement of the human species, he had no doubt that "Human Biology will ultimately lead to an applied science that will do much for the total welfare of mankind".¹⁶ What was first required was "the development of the pure science" of Human Biology, an enterprise in which Aboriginal bodies could play a significant part. Recalling the claims which had been made for over half a century, Radcliffe-Brown asserted that:

Australia, by its possession, in the aborigines, of a highly specialised variety of our species affords an opportunity for very important investigations in the field of Human Biology, an opportunity, however, which must be seized very soon, since, with the rapid disappearance of the race, in a few years it will have gone.¹⁷

Radcliffe-Brown's own functionalist studies may not have fitted into the findings of human biology in the same way as social and physical investigations dovetailed together within the evolutionary paradigm. Yet his espousing the cause of inquiry into the "highly specialised" physical features of the Aborigines was perfectly congruent with the activities of contemporary Australian physical anthropologists.¹⁸

¹⁴ Virtually every major published text on the social anthropology of the Aborigines, until perhaps the 1970s, included a resume of studies into their physical attributes and racial affinities, usually as an initial chapter. The first of these texts to be published, A.P. Elkin's *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, Sydney, 1938, provides an apt illustration; it will be considered in Chapter Five.

¹⁵ A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Applied Anthropology", *Report of the Twentieth Meeting of the ANZAAS*, 1930, p.268.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.268.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.268.

¹⁸ The Aborigines' biological specialisation to their environment was a major issue in physical anthropological research in the inter-war years, especially for the group based at the University of Adelaide. For a convenient summary of this line of research see

In Australia, the growing distinction between physical and social anthropology was exacerbated by geographical circumstance. Adelaide had been the home of a number of men whose scientific specialisation was in the physical attributes of the Aborigines. William Ramsay Smith was one of these, and another arrived in 1919, when the anatomist Dr Frederic Wood Jones became Curator of Anthropology at the South Australian Museum. In the mid-1920s, when Adelaide was lobbying the Rockefeller Foundation for the Chair of Anthropology to be established at its university, a number of local academics organised into a committee, which in 1926 was formalised as the Board for Anthropological Research of the University of Adelaide. The Chair went to Sydney, and social anthropology long remained its preserve. The Board for Anthropological Research retained physical anthropology as its field of investigation.¹⁹ Reflecting its focus of interest, membership of the Board was drawn mainly from the Anatomy and Pathology Departments of the University of Adelaide's Medical School, although some members were on the staff of the South Australian Museum. The Board did conduct some research into Aboriginal culture and society, but physical attributes and racial affinities were its primary concern.²⁰ Elsewhere in Australia, some physical anthropological studies were conducted, particularly at the universities of Sydney and Melbourne.²¹ But Adelaide dominated the field.²²

J.B. Cleland, "The Native of Central Australia and his Surroundings", *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australian Branch*, vol.35, 1933-34, pp.66-81.

¹⁹ For an account of the Board's work up to 1939 see Jones, "South Australian Anthropological History", pp.71-92. See also A.A. Abbie, "The Development of Anthropology in South Australia", *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia*, vol.8, no.9, November 1970, pp.7-11.

²⁰ See the list of publications, based on the Board's field expeditions between 1926 and 1939, in Jones, "South Australian Anthropological History", pp.88-92. See also Papers on Australian Anthropology by J.B. Cleland, UAA, RC 572.994 C62; Cleland served a long term as Chairman of the Board.

²¹ In 1929 the University of Melbourne acquired Frederic Wood Jones as Professor of Anatomy; two years before, he had left the University of Adelaide to take up a position in Hawaii.

²² For explication of one aspect of the Adelaide anthropologists' work, see Chapter Four.

Within physical anthropology, the evolutionary paradigm remained entrenched. Through to the Second World War, and afterward, scientific investigations into the physical characteristics of Aborigines were premised on their status as living specimens of primitive man. In 1937, for example, the American anthropologist W.W. Howells published a detailed *Anthropometry of the Natives of Arnhem Land*, in which he asserted, in classic evolutionary vein, that:

The Australians are a major race which represents an earlier stage in the development of *Homo sapiens* than does any other existing race. It has been preserved, with its primitive features, through stagnation and isolation.²³

Yet even this example may be used to illustrate the incompleteness of the split between physical and social anthropology. The data on which Howells based his analysis had been collected by the social anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner, an early protege of Radcliffe-Brown.²⁴ In Lloyd Warner's own social anthropological study of the Arnhem Landers, *A Black Civilization*, he included a summary of his anthropometric investigations, squeezed in as an appendix between "Murngin Sign Language" and "Murngin Myths".²⁵

Psychological studies of the Aborigines also retained an evolutionary orientation. The Adelaide anthropologists H.K. Fry and R.H. Puelleine began their article, "The Mentality of the Australian Aborigine", with the assertion:

The Australian aborigine, in common with the examples of his native flora and fauna, represents a biological species which existed for a long period apart from world competition. He may be expected, therefore, to exhibit primitive features representing a survival of

²³ W.W. Howells, *Anthropometry of the Natives of Arnhem Land and the Australian Race Problem*, Cambridge, Mass., 1937, pp.77-78.

²⁴ The title page of Howell's *Anthropometry of the Natives of Arnhem Land*, carries the statement: "Analysis and discussion by W.W. Howells; data collected by W.L. Warner". In Lloyd Warner's own book, he claimed joint authorship of the anthropometry paper; see W.L. Warner, *A Black Civilization: A Social Study of an Australian Tribe*, rev. edn, USA, 1958, (1937), p.518.

²⁵ W.L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, pp.518-519. Among pre-War studies of Australian Aborigines, this book was unusual in drawing upon the perspectives of both British social anthropology and American cultural anthropology. It is also noteworthy for its title, clearly indicating its author's sympathetic appreciation of Aboriginal society and culture.

anatomical and mental characteristics of a former era in the evolution of the more culturally developed human races of the present day.²⁶

A major contemporary text was S.D. Porteus's *The Psychology of a Primitive People*; in the preface, he explained that the significance of his investigations derived from the fact that:

here in Australia are the remnants of a Stone Age people, cut off, in all probability, from other racial contacts for thousands of years and universally considered as belonging in the most primitive stages of culture.²⁷

Although he expressed misgivings about the notion that Aborigines were primitive in all their attributes, he endorsed the idea that intellectually they were inferior to, and less developed than, Europeans.²⁸ According to Porteus's theory, Aborigines had "made considerable progress in specialised directions".²⁹ However, specialisation had been achieved at the expense, and to the detriment, of those intellectual traits which would have permitted their acquisition of a higher culture. Thus, he argued, Aborigines "are not unintelligent, but are certainly inadaptable to a civilised environment".³⁰

Porteus contended that:

wherever by geographical or other conditions a racial group has been segregated for a sufficient length of time, mental development is likely to become divergent, and if the isolation or partial isolation continues long enough, the differences may become fixed by natural selection so that it would take a great number of generations to modify the result. If the change of environment is sudden, such as is brought about by contact with greatly superior civilization, the divergent racial group may become extinct before adaptation is possible.³¹

²⁶ H.K. Fry and R.H. Puelleine, "The Mentality of the Australian Aborigine", *Australian Journal of Experimental Biology and Medical Research*, vol.8, no.3, 1931, p.153.

²⁷ S.D. Porteus, *The Psychology of a Primitive People: A Study of the Australian Aborigine*, New York, 1931, p.v. He added that in Australia, the psychologist "could measure the influence of nature, with nurture held as an irreducible minimum". In his rather lame justification for this proposition, Porteus displayed, more than anything else, the tenacity with which scientists held to the notion that man in a state of nature was not a figment of the philosopher's imagination, but a living reality.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, pp.199-200, 378-407; S.D. Porteus, "Mentality of Australian Aborigines", *Oceania*, vol.4, no.1, September 1933, pp.33-36.

²⁹ Porteus, *Psychology of a Primitive People*, pp.199-200.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.420. See also *ibid.*, pp.299, 378; Porteus, "Mentality of Australian Aborigines", p.33; S.D. Porteus, "The Psychology of a Primitive People", *Oceania*, vol.4, no.1, September 1933, p.109.

³¹ Porteus, *Psychology of a Primitive People*, p.379.

A combination of environmental and hereditary influences, mutually interacting, had led the Aboriginal race into a blind alley of specialisation.

In social anthropology, evolutionary theory was seldom as salient as in the physical branch of the discipline or in psychology. Similarly, the concept of race had less of a part to play in the new functionally-oriented studies. Yet if the notion of primitivity was beginning to become a little shaky, it was only a beginning. And if social anthropologists were turning away from racial explanations, they certainly had not entirely turned their backs.

One British anthropologist was particularly zealous his attempts to maintain a holistic science of man, integrating studies of culture into studies of race. George Henry Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers described himself as, "generally speaking", a functionalist anthropologist.³² But more than anything else, he exemplifies how readily old-fashioned racial determinism could be incorporated into new-fashioned functionalism. His special interest was in the depopulation of the Pacific islands. Noting that the rate of population decline varied according to the racial composition of the islands' inhabitants, he attributed this to their different "culture potentials". Although "culture potential" was the centrepiece of Pitt-Rivers' theories, it remained a somewhat nebulous concept. Essentially, it referred to the capacity of a race to adopt or adapt to an immigrant culture; and Pitt-Rivers clearly conceived "culture potential" not as a mere theoretical construct but as a real attribute of races. According to his theories, a race, in the course of evolution, could become so physically and psychologically attuned to a particular culture that it would be unable to adapt to any other, and in a situation of "culture contact" would die

³² G.H.L.-F. Pitt Rivers, *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races: An Anthropological and Psychological Study of the Laws of Racial Adaptability, with special reference to the depopulation of the Pacific and the Government of Subject Races*, London, 1927, p.10. This book was dedicated to his "friend Bronislaw Malinowski, D.Sc., to whose work and method [he] turned for inspiration".

out.³³ Miscegenation, by combining the "culture potentials" of a number of races, could lead to the creation of stocks which were "more adaptable to the changed cultural conditions", and thus more likely to survive.³⁴ The Australian Aborigines, according to Pitt-Rivers, were "fast disappearing", because they were racially adapted only to their own highly specialised "culture-forms" and they had not been sufficiently infused with white blood to raise their "culture-potential" to a level commensurate with civilisation.³⁵

Miscegenation, Pitt-Rivers argued, could contribute to the survival of a population, while at the same time destroying the essential racial character of a people. Race and population were two distinct, though related, things. He asserted that:

We often confuse the decline of a race with the decline of a population. The infiltration of alien stock may check the decline of population, while, at the same time, the racial elements continue to decline.³⁶

Like a great many scientists before him, Pitt-Rivers reified race as something which existed above and beyond the individual human beings who embodied the racial characteristics. He also held firmly to traditional evolutionary ideas, perhaps best illustrated in his exposition of the significance of psychological studies:

Modern psychology (in keeping with the scientific conception of ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny) has taught us that if we would learn more about our nature we must study our early origin; for however much we may have evolved, whatever superstructure of civilization we may have amassed, each one of us in our individual

³³ See Pitt-Rivers, *Clash of Culture*, especially pp.1-16; G.H.L.-F. Pitt-Rivers, "The Effect on Native Races of Contact with European Civilisation", *Man*, vol.27, January 1927, pp.2-10; G.H.L.-F. Pitt-Rivers, "On Method, Approach and Diagnostic Fallacies in dealing with the Problem of Depopulation in the Pacific" in *Report of the Seventeenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1924, pp.475-83.

³⁴ Pitt-Rivers, "Effect on Native Races", pp.3-4, 7-9. See also Pitt-Rivers, *Clash of Culture*, especially pp.86-114; G.H.L.-F. Pitt-Rivers, "Variations in Sex Ratios as Indices of Racial Decline" in *Proceedings of the Pan-Pacific Science Congress*, 1923, vol.1, pp.277-78.

³⁵ Pitt-Rivers, "Effect on Native Races", p.8; Pitt-Rivers, *Clash of Culture*, p.103; Pitt-Rivers, "Variations in Sex Ratios", p.275.

³⁶ Pitt-Rivers, "Effect on Native Races", p.4. See also, "On Method, Approach and Diagnostic Fallacies", p.483; *Clash of Culture*, pp.101-03.

development recapitulates the whole long life-history of the race. Moreover, however thick the layer of culture superposed upon us, the effect of our origin persist. Deep down behind the apparent maturity of adult manhood, the child and the palaeolithic savage still shape and instigate our motives. So in the study of our children, of neurotics, and of savages, we learn by analogy more of our early origin.³⁷

These racial and psychological ideas fitted into Pitt-Rivers' efforts to maintain a unified science of man. They were not essential parts of a functionalist approach, and few, if any, of his social anthropological colleagues displayed so overtly their conceptual inheritance from racial and evolutionary science. Pitt-Rivers may have been only a minor figure in the development of British social anthropology.³⁸ Yet his theories demonstrate the potential congruence between functional and racial approaches to the study of human society.

If Pitt-Rivers was out on a limb for the salience of his racial theory, he was entirely within the functionalist fold for his insistence on "the practical value of anthropology".³⁹ His own work on Pacific depopulation was intended to give some guidance to the colonial authorities in that region.⁴⁰ Radcliffe-Brown provided a more comprehensive - and more orthodox - account of the relationship between anthropology and administration, at the same time outlining the essentials of his own social anthropology; in the editorial introduction to the first issue of the anthropological journal *Oceania* he explained:

It is not intended that *Oceania* shall include in its pages discussions of the actual problems of administration. That is not properly the field for the scientist. But our policy will be guided by the desire to make anthropology of service in supplying the systematic knowledge that is necessary for the proper solution of those problems.

What is required for such purposes is not merely the knowledge that such and such a custom or belief exists in a certain region, but also an

³⁷ G.H.L.-F. Pitt-Rivers, "Some Problems in Mental Anthropology and the Problem of Civilization" in *Report of the Sixteenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1923, p.499.

³⁸ In the late 1930s, as the scientific consensus drew away from racial determinism, Pitt-Rivers remained firmly convinced of his racial theories, even to the extent of supporting Nazi Germany. He was held a political prisoner in England from 1940 to 1942. See Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, pp.291-93.

³⁹ See for example Pitt-Rivers, *Clash of Culture*, pp.12-16.

⁴⁰ See especially *ibid.*, pp.234-41.

understanding of its function. Any culture is an integrated system constituting an adaptive mechanism by means of which a portion of the human species secures for itself a possible and more or less satisfactory existence in a given environment. The function of any element of culture, of any institution or custom or belief is the specific part it plays in this adaptive system. By the function of a custom is meant then what it does, how it works, what is its exact place in the whole culture system of the tribe, what part it plays in the life of the people. Every people has its own collective life as a group, its social, economic, intellectual and spiritual life, and functional anthropology aims at studying that life in much the same way that the physiologist studies the life of an organism. Just as there are physiological laws to which organic life conforms, so there are laws to which the lives of people conform, and these it is the task of the anthropologist to discover. Social anthropology may be described as a morphology and physiology of society. Now the administrator and educator amongst native peoples are engaged in modifying a culture. Only when we have a fair understanding of how the culture works as a functioning system can we know how to set about producing any particular modification that may be desired or avoid bringing harm or even disaster to the people themselves by our interference.⁴¹

Motives behind this enthusiastic promotion of the practical value of social anthropology may well have been mixed. A new discipline claiming pragmatic relevance could expect better access to government funding than could one whose horizons were limited to the academy. Yet there is no reason to doubt that anthropologists like Radcliffe-Brown sincerely believed that their studies could benefit both the colonial rulers and the indigenous ruled. Before the Second World War, the best interests of the two were seen as by no means incompatible, and there was nothing incongruous in championing anthropology as a means of bridging the gap between administrator and native. Some, at least, of the great imperial administrators of the era welcomed the contribution that anthropology could make to their task.⁴²

In the post-War era of decolonisation, the close association between anthropology and imperialism became the subject of considerable soul-

⁴¹ A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Editorial", *Oceania*, vol.1, no.1, April 1930, pp.2-3. See also Radcliffe-Brown, "Applied Anthropology", pp.267-80.

⁴² See for example Lord Lugard, "Anthropology in Administration: Address at the Reception to Dominion Premiers and Delegates to the Imperial Conference: 10th October, 1930", *Man*, vol.30, December 1930, pp.213-15.

searching on the part of anthropologists.⁴³ Although the post-colonial critics often exaggerated the fidelity of the two parties, it can scarcely be doubted that there was an intimate relationship between functional anthropology and colonial administration. The historian of British social anthropology, Ian Langham, has remarked:

An anthropology with the avowed aim of uncovering the factors which kept societies in smoothly-functioning harmony, and a national colonial policy which imposed its will upon distant peoples by plugging into the indigenous political organisation, could not have been innocent playmates.⁴⁴

But the association here was between functionalism and a policy of indirect colonial rule, as in parts of Africa, where imperial authority and indigenous peoples remained geographically and culturally distinct. A similar administrative arrangement prevailed between Australia and its quasi-colonies of Papua and New Guinea. The Administrator of Papua, Sir Hubert Murray, acknowledged that it was the policy of indirect rule which benefited from the new anthropology, stating that:

The method of Indirect Rule has received reinforcement from anthropology, a late-comer among the sciences, and one which has rendered great service to native administration.⁴⁵

More bluntly, he declared that anthropology was "of service only where the indirect method [of administration] is adopted".⁴⁶ Undoubtedly, in colonial settings of this kind, the functional anthropologist had much to offer: he or she explained the social mechanics; the administrator operated the machine.

⁴³ See for example T. Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, London, 1973. For more recent analyses of the relationship between imperialism and anthropology see G.W. Stocking (ed.), *Colonial Situations: Essays in the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge*, Madison, Wisc., 1991.

⁴⁴ Langham, *The Building of British Social Anthropology*, p.xv.

⁴⁵ H.P. Murray, "The Trend of Native Administration", *Stead's Review*, 1 August 1930, p.5. Although Murray agreed that anthropology had relevance to native administration, he was wary of attempts by anthropologists to carve out too large a sphere of influence within colonial administration, and he was unsympathetic to a rigorously theoretical functionalist approach. See T. Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist: A Life of A.P. Elkin*, Sydney, 1985, pp.99-101; Kuklick, *The Savage Within*, p.49.

⁴⁶ H.P. Murray, "Address by the President: Ethnology and Anthropology" in *Report of the Fifteenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1921, p.167. See also H.P. Murray, "Indirect Rule In Papua" in *Report of the Nineteenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1928, pp.329-36.

In the very different Australian situation, where there was no question of indirect rule, where according to the anthropologists themselves the Aboriginal social mechanism either had already broken down or soon would, functionalism had rather less to offer.

Radcliffe-Brown himself admitted as much. In his editorial introduction to the first issue of *Oceania* he listed some of the research work then being undertaken into the "social organization of the surviving native tribes of Australia", remarking that:

These investigations are perhaps not of any immediate practical use, for the Australian aborigines, even if not doomed to extinction as a race, seem at any rate doomed to have their cultures destroyed.⁴⁷

He added that the research would "provide data of the very greatest importance for a comparative science of culture".⁴⁸ That, of course, had long been the purpose of Australian Aboriginal studies. In Papua and New Guinea, on the other hand, social anthropology served more immediate ends. In his article, "Applied Anthropology", Radcliffe-Brown explained how the science could be utilised in the administration of Papua and the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, with only a few passing references to "the rapidly disappearing Australian aborigines".⁴⁹ He praised the fact that Papua and the Mandated Territory each had a Government Anthropologist, and explained that his own department at the University of Sydney offered courses in anthropology which were attended by both junior cadets and senior officers of the administrations of these areas.⁵⁰ There was no suggestion that social anthropology had any such practical application within Australia. Indeed, Radcliffe-Brown declared himself "pessimistic as to the future of the aboriginals", for their culture and social organisation were too frail to withstand the alien impact.⁵¹ Like their evolutionary forebears, functional

⁴⁷ Radcliffe-Brown, "Editorial", *Oceania*, vol.1, no.1, p.3.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.3.

⁴⁹ Radcliffe-Brown, "Applied Anthropology", especially pp.271-78.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp.277-78.

⁵¹ "Some Aspects of the Aboriginal Problem in Australia", *The Australian Geographer*, vol.1, part 1, August 1928, p.69.

anthropologists regarded Aboriginal society as peculiarly fragile; it was as delicately balanced as a house of cards, the merest breath of the winds of change causing the whole frail edifice to collapse. Dr W. Lloyd Warner emphasised that:

all contact with our present civilisation is poison to the Australian aboriginal. The aboriginal has a well-understood code of community laws so finely constructed and balanced that any touch destroys that balance and carries destruction to the people themselves.⁵²

Therein lay the dilemma for the practical anthropologist.

Although Radcliffe-Brown focussed on Papua and New Guinea in his published articles on the practical application of anthropology, from as early as 1927 he recommended the appointment of an anthropologist to the Northern Territory administration.⁵³ No appointment was made, and in 1929 Radcliffe-Brown proposed more modestly that the Territory's Chief Protector of Aborigines should attend the "short course in Anthropology" which was offered to missionaries and officers of the Papuan administration.⁵⁴ Chief Protector Cecil Cook did so in 1930, reporting that the course provided "a desirable training at [sic] which more of the North Australian Protectors should attend".⁵⁵ Despite this, no other Northern Territory official undertook the course. Senior bureaucrats in the Department of Home Affairs were lukewarm about anthropological studies, suggesting that Northern Territory officials could attend the course only if they were already in Sydney on leave, and that it would be undesirable to send them south specifically for that purpose.⁵⁶ By this time, special anthropological training for officers of the

⁵² *ibid.*, p.67; italics in the original.

⁵³ J.C. Cawood, Government Resident at Alice Springs, opposed the suggestion, considering the appointment of a government geologist to be "of more vital importance"; Cawood to Sec., Home and Terr., 8.12.1927, AA, CRS A1, 31/2597. Both the Government Resident of North Australia, R.H. Weddell, and Chief Protector Cecil Cook supported the appointment of an anthropologist, provided he was made responsible to the Chief Protector; Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 7.1.1928; Weddell to Sec., Home and Terr., 7.1.1928; both in AA, CRS A1, 31/2597.

⁵⁴ Radcliffe-Brown to Sec., Home Aff., 8.2.1929, AA, CRS A1, 31/2597.

⁵⁵ H.A. Barrenger, Home Aff. memo: Anthropological Course for Northern Territory Officers, 17.6.1931, AA, CRS A1, 31/2597.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, with hand-written comments by J.A. Carrodus, 18.6.1931.

Papuan and New Guinea administrations was a matter of course, and a cause of much self-congratulation by the Commonwealth government. Radcliffe-Brown seems not to have been prepared to push the point regarding the Northern Territory. Perhaps he was himself not quite sure how anthropology could be made relevant to Aboriginal administration; perhaps he preferred to focus his efforts in areas where he had already carved out a niche. In any case, he resigned from the Sydney chair in December 1930.⁵⁷

Initially at least, the institutionalisation of anthropology in Australia and the functionalist leanings of the social branch of the discipline offered scant promise of any significant change in Aboriginal administration. Papua and the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, with their government anthropologists and their anthropologically trained patrol officers, became showcases for the good intentions and enlightened policies of the Australian government. Aboriginal administration remained in the rut of protection. It was not that Aborigines were neglected by social anthropologists at the University of Sydney. In 1930 Radcliffe-Brown published "The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes", which rapidly became a classic of functionalist anthropology.⁵⁸ By this time, field work in the new anthropological style had been carried out by Ursula McConnel and Donald Thomson in North Queensland, by W. Lloyd Warner in Arnhem Land, by A.P. Elkin in the Kimberleys and by C.W.M. Hart on Bathurst and Melville Islands.⁵⁹ By and large, however, this work was a salvage operation, detailing what was left or could be remembered of a unique Aboriginal culture before it vanished forever.

⁵⁷ For an account of the inglorious circumstances of Radcliffe-Brown's resignation, see Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, pp.98-103.

⁵⁸ A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, "The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes", *Oceania*, vol.1, no.1, April 1930, pp.34-63; vol.1, no.2, July 1930, pp.206-46; vol.1, no.3, October-December 1930, pp.322-41; vol.1, no.4, January-March 1931, pp.426-56.

⁵⁹ Radcliffe-Brown, "Editorial", *Oceania*, vol.1, no.1, p.3.

Decline of the Doomed Race

In the period immediately after World War One, the decline of indigenous populations in areas under European colonial control became an issue of considerable public and scientific concern. The anthropologist George Henry Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers was one amongst many scientists and public figures who addressed the issue of depopulation at the Pan-Pacific Science Congress, held in Australia in 1923.⁶⁰ Other contributors to the discussion of Pacific depopulation at the Congress included the Commonwealth Director-General of Health Dr J.H.L. Cumpston, the Director of the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine Dr R.W. Cilento, the Administrator of Papua H.P. Murray, and E.L. Piesse of the Prime Minister's Department.⁶¹ All these commentators regarded the decline of indigenous Pacific populations as a serious problem, but one which could be remedied by appropriate medical, administrative and legislative intervention. No paper dealt in similar vein with the decline of the indigenous population of Australia. Perhaps this merely reflected the preoccupations of the delegates to the Science Congress. Or perhaps it reflected the fact that in overthrowing the idea that Aborigines were doomed to inevitable extinction, science did not necessarily lead the way.

Certainly, by the 1920s there were Australian scientists who held the extinction of the Aborigines not to be inevitable. Yet in general, the scientific viewpoint could scarcely be characterised as optimistic. Herbert Basedow, for example, wrote in 1928:

⁶⁰ Pitt-Rivers' contribution was his "Variations in Sex Ratios as Indices of Racial Decline".

⁶¹ See the following papers in the *Proceedings of the Pan-Pacific Science Congress, 1923*, vol.1: E.L. Piesse, "Decline of Population in the Territory of New Guinea", pp.241-42; H.P. Murray, "The Population Problem in Papua - Lack of Direct Evidence; *a priori* Considerations", pp.231-40; and in vol.2: R.W. Cilento, "The Depopulation of the Pacific", pp.1395-99; J.H.L. Cumpston "The Depopulation of the Pacific", pp.1389-94; J.H.L. Cumpston, "Disease Distribution in the Pacific Basin", pp.1400-07. R.W. Cilento later published a book entitled *The Causes of the Depopulation of the Western Islands of the Territory of New Guinea*, Canberra, 1928. Apart from these Australian contributions, there was a wider British and European literature dealing with Pacific depopulation; see for example the collection of articles edited by the British anthropologist W.H.R. Rivers, *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia*, Cambridge, 1922.

The aborigines of Australia are fast vanishing.... Under present conditions, and unless the authorities (both federal and state) correct their own remissness, only an eleventh-hour miracle can save the natives from complete extinction.⁶²

A more definite note was sounded by the anatomist Frederic Wood Jones in his presidential address to the 1926 meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science:

At this period of the world's history, I imagine it is not incumbent on one addressing a scientific society to attempt to justify a plea on behalf of the aborigines' claim to continued existence. Nor shall I have regard for the opinions of that larger section which assumes that the passing of the Australian native is inevitable.

I would venture to submit that his racial fate is not inevitably sealed, and that the only way in which we may reasonably hope to save him, and, thereby, justify ourselves in the eyes of the world, is to establish properly organised and properly administered reserves for him.⁶³

Scientists, Wood Jones declared, would perform the "much needed work of investigation" into Aboriginal racial and cultural attributes; but it was the government which must "undertake their responsibility of preservation".⁶⁴

While scientists like Basedow and Wood Jones cried out for administrative reforms to secure the preservation of the race, administrators insisted on the need for science to come to their aid to achieve this goal. In 1926 the West Australian Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, argued that:

It is the day for scientific service, and science must yet take a hand in the regeneration of these people ... Indeed, seeing that we are dealing with a race of human beings, had scientifically trained minds taken a hand in all the past endeavour to ameliorate these people the result might have been very different, and thousands of pounds spent in

⁶² H. Basedow, "Editor's Foreword" to W. Robertson, *Coo-ee Talks*, Sydney, 1928, p.vii. On the following page Basedow explained that the "passing of our native inhabitants" would be "an irreparable loss" for three reasons: "the world would lose one of the most interesting and ingenuous peoples; Australia would lose an almost indispensable helpmate in her pastoral and other industries; and science would lose an important link in the chain of evidence which leads back to the dark age that rocked the cradle of all mankind".

⁶³ F.W. Jones, "The Claims of the Australian Aborigine" in *Report of the Eighteenth Meeting of the AAAS*, 1926, pp.507-08.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.519. The views of Wood Jones and other advocates of absolute segregation will be discussed in Chapter Six.

useless effort made available for further attempts on better lines. Those placed in charge of native affairs in the future should receive that scientific training which will enable them to make an intelligent study of the race ...⁶⁵

Neville claimed that a combination of scientific understanding and wise legislation had already, in the 1920s, made major steps toward preservation of the Aborigines.⁶⁶ Yet Neville's own views on the Aborigines were at odds with contemporary scientific assumptions. Drawing on the old idea of savage degeneration, he explained that:

Left to itself the extinction of the aboriginal race would probably have been as inevitable as it has so far been through contact with whites throughout Australia, a condition for which the operation of the tribal laws and practices would have been largely responsible, and the fact that the aborigines have never discovered how to till the soil or preserve the fruits of the earth to their use, but the process would doubtless have been longer.⁶⁷

Old-fashioned as this perspective may have been, it did lead Neville to suppose that Aborigines could survive if they abandoned their traditional customs and adopted the settled ways of cultivators.⁶⁸ Although he admitted exceptions, he was dubious of the capacity of the majority of Aborigines to attain the "more advanced grades" of civilisation.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, their demonstrated competence in making some social progress proved that the race was both "worth preserving" and capable of preservation.⁷⁰

Another prominent Chief Protector of the inter-war period, J.W. Bleakley of Queensland, also held the demise of the race not to be inevitable. Referring to North Queensland he wrote:

⁶⁵ A.O. Neville, "The 'Native Question'", in *Science in Western Australia*, Perth, 1926, p.98.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.99.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.99. Despite his claim that Aborigines were on the path to extinction before the colonisation of their country, Neville freely acknowledged that European violence and disease had exacted a heavy toll; see *ibid.*, pp.91-96; A.O. Neville, "Relations between Settlers and Aborigines in Western Australia", *The Western Australian Historical Society: Journal and Proceedings*, vol.2, part 19, 1936, pp.10-46.

⁶⁸ Neville, "The 'Native Question'", p.97.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.97.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.97.

Where it has been possible to save portion of their own country and establish aborigines there, a distinct improvement has resulted. Far from dying out, they have apparently recovered and prospered, for under the protected conditions of the institutions a decided increase in the birth rate has been shown. In several places it exceeds the death rate, and practically everywhere the decay has been stemmed. This increase is not, as claimed by the sceptics, accounted for by the propagation of half-castes.⁷¹

Like almost all other experts of the day, Bleakley believed that this positive outcome could be achieved only in an environment of protection, which meant in practice that the lives and activities of Aborigines had to be strictly regulated and controlled. It was on this assumption that he based his 1928 report on the Northern Territory. Bleakley held to the view that Aborigines possessed limited abilities and still less initiative; however he also maintained that:

given sympathetic consideration and benevolent assistance over the difficult period of transition, there is ample encouraging evidence that these interesting people, often regarded as incurably nomadic, can adapt themselves to the settled civilised life and prosper as a self-respecting and happy race.⁷²

As was becoming increasingly fashionable, Bleakley asserted that anthropological expertise "would be of important value ... in future policy and administration".⁷³ But like so many of his contemporaries, he was unable to specify how anthropology and administration could be effectively harnessed together.

While scientists and administrators did make a contribution to the growing hope that Aborigines could be saved from extinction, the most vocal affirmations of faith in their survival were heard from humanitarian lobby groups. In the late 1920s and early 1930s a number of new Aboriginal welfare organisations sprang up, adding their voices to those of already-established bodies such as the Association for the Protection of Native Races, based in

⁷¹ J.W. Bleakley, "The Aborigine Passes: the Evidence of North Queensland", *Stead's Review*, 1 November 1930, p.32.

⁷² *ibid.*, p.34.

⁷³ "Bleakley Report, 1928", p.31.

Sydney, and the Adelaide-based Aborigines' Friends' Association.⁷⁴ A Melbourne-based body, the Citizens' Education Fellowship, later renamed the Victorian Aboriginal Group, was typical of the new humanitarian organisations. Formed in 1930, it lobbied the Federal Government for the implementation of policies "to arrest the decay of this interesting and lovable people", the Australian Aborigines.⁷⁵ It was white in membership and its platform was strongly infused with a spirit of Christian philanthropy. Most groups had some connection with the various churches, although a number of avowedly secular organisations also took up the Aboriginal cause. The Communist Party of Australia, for example, adopted a fourteen point program in 1931, calling for justice for the Aboriginal people.⁷⁶ Women's organisations, such as the Australian Federation of Women Voters and the Women's Non-Party Association of South Australia, were also active lobbyists, particularly on the need for stricter moral protection of Aboriginal women.⁷⁷ Exhortations to preserve the Aboriginal race did not come only from within Australia. From the late 1920s, the British-based Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society intensified its lobbying of the Commonwealth Government.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ The Association for the Protection of Native Races had virtually run out of steam by the early 1920s, at least as far as lobbying on behalf of the Australian Aborigines was concerned. It was galvanised into renewed action in 1927 by the publicity given to the East Kimberley massacre of the previous year; the momentum was maintained especially by its secretary, the Reverend William Morley. The Kimberley massacre, along with continuing acts of 'spectacular injustice', probably also provided a major impetus behind the creation of other Aboriginal lobby groups. See A. Markus, *Governing Savages*, Sydney, 1990, pp.158-72; Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, pp.288-304.

⁷⁵ A.N. Brown, Hon. Sec., Citizens' Education Fellowship, to PM, 12.6.1930, AA, CRS A431, 48/961. This substantial file contains the correspondence of the Citizens' Education Fellowship and the Victorian Aboriginal Group with the Commonwealth government between 1930 to 1948.

⁷⁶ See Markus, *Governing Savages*, pp.159-60.

⁷⁷ See for example B. Stephens, Hon. Sec., Women's Non-Party Association of SA, to Senator J.A. McLachlan, 2.12.1927, AA, CRS A461, E300/1, (the same correspondence may also be found in AA, CRS A1, 32/9788); C.M.T. Cooke, "The Status of Aboriginal Women in Australia", *Proceedings of the Second Pan-Pacific Women's Conference*, Melbourne, 1930, pp.127-37.

⁷⁸ See the substantial files AA, CRS A431, 48/273, parts 1, 2 and 3: Anti-Slavery and Aboriginal Protection Society - Aboriginal Matters, April 1928 - December 1948.

While most lobby groups were exclusively white in membership, there were exceptions. The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, formed in New South Wales in the mid-1920s, had a substantial Aboriginal membership, although its Organising Secretary and prominent spokesperson, E. McKenzie Hatton, was a white woman of strong Christian philanthropic leanings.⁷⁹ In 1925 William Harris founded the Native Union of Western Australia, whose members, all of Aboriginal descent, lobbied for rights equal to those of white people.⁸⁰ The South Australian Aborigine David Unaipon did not form a group of his own, but his views were given considerable publicity by the Aborigines' Friends' Association. Unaipon argued that Aboriginal survival depended upon their elevation to civilisation and their conversion to Christianity, maintaining that:

Civilization has come to my people so suddenly that they have not been able to adapt themselves to it. Evolution is a process which takes time....

If some sort of reserve were possible, in which only the good influences of civilization could be felt, a new civilized race could be built up. With a gradual process of introducing Christianity and all the best civilization can give, the aborigine would come up fully developed. It might take two generations, perhaps more, but eventually we would be able to take our stand among the civilized peoples.⁸¹

Significantly, it was missionaries whom Unaipon singled out as notable for their "good influence" on the Aborigines.⁸²

⁷⁹ See for example E.McK. Hatton to PM, 22.3.1921, AA, CRS A1, 21/6686; E.McK. Hatton to PM, 8.10.1925, AA, CRS A1, 25/23976.

⁸⁰ See Markus, *Governing Savages*, pp.175-76.

⁸¹ D. Unaipon, *Australian Aborigines*, Adelaide, c.1930. This booklet consists of fourteen pages of photographs and only one page of text, headed "An Aboriginal pleads for his Race", by Unaipon. The text was later published in another Aborigines' Friends' Association booklet, J.H. Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, Adelaide, 1934, p.16. In both publications Unaipon was designated a "Full-blooded Member of the Narrinyeri Tribe". In a 1937 publication by the Association, Unaipon's status was raised to "Chief of the Warrawaldi Tribe, and a full-blooded representative of the Native Race"; see D. Unaipon, "The Aboriginal Viewpoint" in J.H. Sexton, *An Extensive Survey of Australian Aboriginal Problems*, Adelaide, 1937, p.11. This elevation of status probably owed something to the Association's (and Unaipon's) desire to counter the more radical Aboriginal political groups which had sprung up in New South Wales and Victoria by the late 1930s; these latter groups will be discussed in the Epilogue.

⁸² Unaipon, *Australian Aborigines*; also Unaipon, "The Aboriginal Viewpoint", p.11.

More than anyone else, it was Christian missionaries who had maintained some faith in the Aborigines' prospects for survival, even when majority white opinion leaned heavily toward the doomed race idea. In 1915 the Presbyterian missionary J.R.B. Love asserted that:

Whatever may be the case in the south of this Continent, work for the Aborigines in the centre and north of Australia is not merely a question of smoothing the pillow of a dying race. It is a question of training and utilising good material in the form of men and women, in a land that wants men and women to develop it. It is a question of rescuing and uplifting boys and girls who, under present conditions, are most certainly doomed to a life of vice, sloth and disease, and of starting them in life equipped to take their places as useful men and women.⁸³

Perhaps it was Love's Protestantism that prompted him to advocate work and utility as the Aborigines' road to salvation. Some years later, he explained that the Aborigines had:

a fascinating primitive way of life which has collapsed and is rapidly passing away before the coming of the white man's civilisation; mendicancy, disease and degradation too often show their influence. The advance of white civilisation is a good, an inevitable, part of humanity's progress. The passing of the aborigine is a lamentable tragedy.⁸⁴

But it was not an unavoidable tragedy. By their adoption of Christianity and a settled life of labour, the race could not merely survive but also prosper.⁸⁵ As well as work and the word of God, Love demanded some sensitivity in the missionary enterprise. He believed that proselytising should be conducted in indigenous languages. He was an accomplished linguist and a competent amateur ethnographer,⁸⁶ who advocated the integration of the Christian faith

⁸³ Love, *The Aborigines: Their Present Condition*, p.32. At this early stage of his career, Love expressed some misgivings about Aboriginal abilities, remarking that: "It would be foolish to argue that all men are equal. The blackfellow is inferior and must necessarily remain so, but he is by no means so inferior as to be unable to rise above the level of a working animal"; *ibid.*, p.29. In his later publications, he steered away from such claims.

⁸⁴ J.R.B. Love, "What the Missions are Doing", *Stead's Review*, 1 October 1930, p.15.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, pp.15-16.

⁸⁶ See for example J.R.B. Love, "Mythology, Totemism and Religion of the Wo'rorra Tribe of North-West Australia" in *Report of the Twenty-Second Meeting of the ANZAAS*, 1935, pp.222-31.

into the traditional culture and the retention of those Aboriginal customs and ceremonies which were not in direct conflict with Christian teachings.⁸⁷

Although many of Love's views were idiosyncratic, he did share his colleagues' belief that the mission, on which Aborigines could be isolated from the debasing aspects of Western civilisation, provided the most appropriate environment for their conversion. It was also the best environment for their preservation.⁸⁸ The Reverend J.S. Needham, Chairman of the Australian Board of Missions, maintained that "the Aborigines can be saved by a policy of efficient segregation, under religious influence, and in no other way".⁸⁹ In more detail he explained that:

It seems to be an undoubted fact that the population is decreasing, and yet where the native is out of contact with the white the population is more or less stationary, and on almost every Mission Station for which I have been able to obtain the figures there is a gratifying increase. In very few of the Government Settlements is this increase to be found....

I maintain that the reason for the better state of affairs on the Mission Stations is due to the policy of segregation. The Black is not ready to live side by side with the white.⁹⁰

Needham was an Anglican of liberal outlook, quite prepared to accept a place for anthropological expertise in missionary endeavour.⁹¹ Missionaries of Christian fundamentalist persuasion, perhaps best represented by the United Aborigines Mission, had little time for anthropology and still less for ideas like Love's on the integration of Christianity into the traditional culture. Yet the fundamentalists too, stoutly maintained that the religious mission provided

⁸⁷ See J.R.B. Love, *Stone Age Bushmen of To-Day: Life and Adventure among a Tribe of Savages in North-Western Australia*, London, 1936, especially pp.212-20.

⁸⁸ See for example Love, "What the Missions are Doing", pp.15-16.

⁸⁹ J.S. Needham, *Report on the Aborigines of Australia*, Sydney, c.1924, p.9.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.7.

⁹¹ For a lengthy exposition of Needham's views see his book, *White and Black in Australia*, London, 1935; the first chapter of this book was a twenty-five page contribution by A.P. Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney.

best opportunities not only to save Aboriginal souls but also to preserve their lives.⁹²

In 1929, the Reverend Needham and two members of the United Aborigines Mission were among many representatives of missions and associations interested in the welfare of Aborigines who attended a conference called by the Minister for Home Affairs to consider Bleakley's Report and Recommendations on the Northern Territory.⁹³ By and large, there was agreement that Bleakley was on the right track. The Reverend W. Morley, who represented the Association for the Protection of Native Races at the conference, later remarked that his Association "welcomed the report of Mr. J.W. Bleakley ... as embodying a scheme of suggested reforms which promised a great improvement in the control and care of this unfortunate race".⁹⁴ From London, the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society expressed agreement with Bleakley's recommendations, "especially on the subject of half-castes and the treatment of women".⁹⁵ These various philanthropic groups were in no way dismayed by Bleakley's attribution of racial deficiencies to the Aborigines. Within the limits set by prevailing racial assumptions, Bleakley

⁹² The intense religiosity of the United Aborigines Mission was amply displayed in the pages of its official journal, *The United Aborigines' Messenger*. In all issues from vol.3, no.1, August 1931 to vol.9, no.12, December 1941, the vast majority of its articles concerned spiritual matters, with very little discussion of social issues; however, the latter did occasionally surface. For example in vol.6, no.6, 1 June 1938, p.3, an article was published refuting the anthropologist Donald Thomson's suggestions for preserving the Aborigines, and insisting that only missionary methods could achieve that end.

⁹³ Conference of Representatives of Missions, Societies, and Associations interested in the Welfare of Aborigines to Consider the Report and Recommendations submitted to the Commonwealth Government by J.W. Bleakley esq., convened by the Minister of State for Home Affairs of the Commonwealth of Australia, Hon. C.L.A. Abbott: Report of Debates, (Hereafter Conference of Representatives, 1929), AA, CRS A1, 33/8782.

⁹⁴ W. Morley, "The Half-Caste Aborigines of North Australia: A Foreword" in *The Half-Caste Aborigines of North and Central Australia: Suggestions towards Solving the Problem*, Sydney, c.1930, p.4. As late as 1938 the APNR was still supporting the recommendations in the Bleakley Report; see "Review of the Chief Protectors' Conference at Canberra, April, 1937: With Comments and Criticism from the Viewpoint of the A.P.N.R.", *The Aborigines Protector*, vol.1, no.5, June 1938, p.13.

⁹⁵ T. Buxton, Hon. Sec. and J. Harris, Parliamentary Sec., A-S&APS, London, to PM Scullin, 14.11.1930, AA, CRS A431, 48/273, part 1.

allowed scope for a degree of Aboriginal - and especially part-Aboriginal - advancement; it was that key issue to which the philanthropists clung.

At the 1929 conference on the Bleakley Report, the single exception to the general consensus was an elderly Adelaide gentleman, Colonel J.C. Genders, secretary of the Aborigines' Protection League of South Australia. Past experience, he declared, has demonstrated that "our system of control has been disastrous; it is time we recognised that we cannot take over an intelligent people and tell them how to run their own business".⁹⁶ Reporting on the conference a little later, Genders was loud in condemnation:

The conference did not sufficiently recognise that the methods of the past were admittedly fundamentally wrong, that no amount of patching them up would prevent the rapid extinction of the Aborigines, that we are wrong in seeking to impose our civilisation on the native and to substitute our mind and our methods for those he has acquired over countless ages. Progress, not necessarily on our lines, must come from within, not without.⁹⁷

He had "no hesitation in saying that if we speed up our work on the methods adopted in the past we shall hasten the extinction of the Aboriginal".⁹⁸ He also maintained that at the conference: "Surely there should have been a strong representation of the Aborigines themselves (the people most deeply concerned) from the many educated Aborigines there are in Australia, but, strangely, this appears to have been entirely overlooked".⁹⁹

Until 1925, Genders had been a member of the Aborigines' Friends' Association. His break with the Association was prompted, according to Genders himself, by its members' unwillingness to consider his far-reaching proposals for Aboriginal welfare.¹⁰⁰ Forming his own Aborigines' Protection League, he quickly obtained the support of a number of prominent

⁹⁶ Conference of Representatives, 1929, AA, CRS A1, 33/8782.

⁹⁷ J.C. Genders, *The Aborigines Protection League*, Adelaide, 1929, pp.1-2.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.4.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.1.

¹⁰⁰ J.C. Genders, *The Australian Aborigines*, typescript dated 4 January 1937, J.B. Cleland Collection, SAMAA, AA 60, Acc.233, (hereafter Cleland Collection).

Australians. By September 1926 the provisional committee of the League included the medical scientist, anthropologist and member of state parliament Dr Herbert Basedow, the anatomist and anthropologist Dr Ramsay Smith, the feminist Constance Ternent Cook, the classicist Professor Darnley Naylor, the Commonwealth minister P. McMahon Glynn and the Aboriginal spokesman and inventor David Unaipon.¹⁰¹ In 1927, the League submitted a petition, with 7000 signatures attached, to the Commonwealth House of Representatives. It called for the creation of a "Model Aboriginal State", which would be:

ultimately managed by a native tribunal as far as possible according to their own laws and customs but prohibiting cannibalism and cruel rites. In the meantime such assistance, as may be necessary, to be given, the greatest care to be exercised that only those of the highest ability and the very fullest sympathy should be selected for this work. Provision to be made that ultimately the Government may be conducted by aborigines, and that it would be possible at some future time that the Administrator himself could be a native.¹⁰²

Fundamentally, it was a proposal for the segregation of Aborigines on large reserves on which they could "work out their own salvation".¹⁰³ Nonetheless, "their own salvation" demanded at least the temporary assistance and administration of whites, and Genders appears to have entertained no doubt that Aboriginal development would be along Western economic lines. The petition referred to the provision of "agricultural instructors", and in a later paper Genders added assistance in marine industries, mining, the raising of "fur bearing animals" and the "transport and marketing of produce".¹⁰⁴

Genders vehemently refuted the notion that Aborigines were inevitably doomed to die out. Their high rate of mortality, according to the petition, was due to well-meant but misguided policies, apathy on the part of the majority of white Australians, and instances of cruelty and oppression.¹⁰⁵ While

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Petition for a Model Aboriginal State, cited in M. Roe, "A Model Aboriginal State", *Aboriginal History*, vol.10, part 1, 1986, p.41.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p.41.

¹⁰⁴ Genders, *The Australian Aborigines*, Cleland Collection.

¹⁰⁵ Petition, cited in Roe, "Model Aboriginal State", p.40.

acknowledging the "noble work" of philanthropists, Genders considered that too often the Aborigine had been treated as "a brainless, helpless child, incompetent to own any land or work out his own destiny".¹⁰⁶ Advocating a more positive assessment of the race, he wrote:

The opinion so generally held that the Australian native is the lowest type of humanity in the world is now found to be quite erroneous. On the contrary he does not belong to any negro race and has been proved to possess great mental powers, ability to quickly learn, and can be taught agriculture, engineering, carpentering, &c., while there are already a number of native Christian clergy.¹⁰⁷

By implementing his proposals, Genders asserted, the remaining Aborigines could be built up "into a virile and progressive race".¹⁰⁸

Residence in the projected Model State was to be entirely voluntary; but those Aborigines who chose to live outside it "would come under the white man's laws".¹⁰⁹ For them, a good deal of authoritarian paternalism was still called for - in their own interests. The petition included the clause:

That, with regard to Aborigines who come into contact with white people, the regulations and supervision should be tightened up so as to prevent to a greater extent the blighting influence of immoral Europeans and others.¹¹⁰

It is unclear whether regulation and supervision were to be tightened most on Aborigines or on Europeans or equally on both. However, the following clause was unequivocal:

That natives who have no regular approved employment or are hangers on to the fringes of civilization should be removed far away from possible contaminating contacts.¹¹¹

For all the radicalism of his proposals for Aboriginal autonomy, and for all his insistence on their capacities and achievements, when it came to the fringe-dweller, Genders retreated to the conventional cry of control.

¹⁰⁶ Genders, *The Australian Aborigines*, Cleland Collection.

¹⁰⁷ Petition, cited in Roe, "Model Aboriginal State", p.41. In denying that Aborigines were Negroid, Genders appears to have been alluding to a common scientific idea of the time, that they were racially related to the Caucasians; see Chapter Four.

¹⁰⁸ Genders, *The Australian Aborigines*, Cleland Collection.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Petition, cited in Roe, "Model Aboriginal State", p.41.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

The necessity of an Aboriginal entitlement to land was prominent amongst Genders' proposals.¹¹² In the writings of Mary Bennett it was awarded still greater salience. She declared that "the whole culture and social organisation of the Aborigines as well as their material welfare [was] based on land ownership"; therefore "land, taking the Aboriginal boundaries, [should] be allotted in perpetuity to the surviving tribes".¹¹³ Perhaps her heightened awareness of the significance of land was due partly to her background and upbringing: she was the daughter of a North Queensland pioneer squatter of strong humanitarian leanings, and as a girl she spent some time amongst the Aborigines who lived on Lammermoor Station.¹¹⁴ In addition, as demonstrated by her 1930 publication *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, she was familiar with the latest anthropological research, including that of Radcliffe-Brown and A.P. Elkin.¹¹⁵ However, as a devout Christian she gave the scientific ideas a rather idiosyncratic treatment.¹¹⁶

The originality of Bennett's perspective was well illustrated in her explanation of the decline of the Aboriginal population and of white Australia's responsibility to halt it; she contended that:

The natives are not unfit, they are only not competitive. Our aggressiveness has been acquired in the competition of warring types for the Old World, but this competition was absent from remote Australia until we unwisely introduced it. The communal tribal system of the natives, which is so well suited for peace and for enacting their simple and strict communal laws, is not suited for warfare. Our great opportunity for co-operating with them is a Divine commission carrying blessings for them and for us. They can survive only if we are

¹¹² See for example Genders, *The Aborigines Protection League*, pp.2, 4-5.

¹¹³ M.M. Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, London, 1930, p.10. The quoted passage from Bennett followed almost exactly the wording of a motion put by Genders at the 1929 conference; see Genders, *The Aborigines Protection League*, p.2. It may also be noted that Bennett, like Genders, was unusual amongst writers of her day in regularly capitalising the initial letter of the word 'Aborigine'.

¹¹⁴ See M.M. Bennett, *Christison of Lammermoor*, London, 1927.

¹¹⁵ Her book was studded with references to anthropologists, including not only Radcliffe-Brown and Elkin but also Baldwin Spencer, A.W. Howitt, W. Ramsay Smith and H. Basedow

¹¹⁶ Bennett seems to have been distinctive in being both anthropologically well-informed and closely associated with a fundamentalist Christian mission, Mount Margaret in the West Australian desert.

righteous, and civilisation will not be whole without them; in essentials they are in no way inferior to us. But if instead of co-operating with our natives we persist in competing against them, then assuredly they will go down before our competitiveness.¹¹⁷

She acknowledged that the majority of white Australians still adhered to a belief in the inevitable extinction of the Aborigines.¹¹⁸ Refuting this deeply-entrenched assumption was one of her major concerns. She prefaced her book with Dr Ramsay Smith's statement from the 1909 *Commonwealth Year Book*:

The problem of what to do with the race, the most interesting at present on earth, and the least deserving to be exterminated by us, and the most wronged at our hands, is not a difficult one to solve, were a solution really desired.¹¹⁹

Each clause of this statement was taken as one of her chapter headings. Unlike Ramsay Smith, Bennett spelled out a solution to the problem of population decline. Along lines similar to Genders, she advocated that Aborigines still living in a more or less tribal state should be granted large inviolable reserves, on which they could be assisted to develop a large degree of autonomy.¹²⁰ She maintained that:

If the Aborigines are not to be destroyed, they should not be dispossessed nor subjected to a system that is alien to them, but they should be secured in the possession of their tribal territories and encouraged to adapt to new needs all that is best in their traditions under their own leaders, under the form of government that they can understand, the direction of their day to day affairs by the tribal council of their own choosing.¹²¹

She allowed for divergent trends of social and political development, noting that "there are other kinds of civilisation and other kinds of democracy" apart from the Western model.¹²²

Despite her advocacy of a degree of Aboriginal autonomy, Bennett insisted that if there was any conflict between traditional ways and Western

¹¹⁷ Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, p.75.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp.10-11.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.7.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, especially pp.128-42.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.140.

¹²² *ibid.*, p.139. On p.15 she referred to "Aboriginal civilisation" in the present tense.

values, the former had to give way. In correspondence with another Christian philanthropist, Miss Helen Baillie, she strongly endorsed the notion that Western concepts of human rights should take precedence over "certain practices" of the Aborigines, in particular those involving the "ownership" of women by men.¹²³ In 1934, she became embroiled in a dispute with A.P. Elkin over the latter's alleged encouragement of sorcery and ritual mutilation at the Mount Margaret Mission at which Bennett worked.¹²⁴ At first sight, it may appear difficult to reconcile Bennett's advocacy of Aboriginal quasi-autonomy with her involvement in the Christian fundamentalist Mount Margaret Mission, with its piously paternalistic superintendent, R.S. Schenk.¹²⁵ It seems that she envisaged the retention of no more than the relatively superficial aspects of traditional life-ways, providing a surface colouring of indigenous culture upon settled and Christian Aboriginal communities.

Moreover, Bennett expected that Aboriginal development would follow the stages of progress which had become entrenched in the Western imagination since the time of the Enlightenment. She opened her book *The Australian Aborigine as a Human Being* with an explanation of why it had been "impossible for people to be pastoralists, agriculturalists or city-builders" in the natural environment of Australia, with its lack of plants and animals suitable for domestication.¹²⁶ However, under the changed conditions wrought by white colonisation, not only could the Aborigines become herders and cultivators, they inevitably would if given the chance. Once granted "indefeasible possession of their tribal territories", they would "work out their own salvation". To Bennett, this meant simply that the Aborigines "would

¹²³ Bennett to Baillie, 24.3.1934, A.P. Elkin Personal Archive, University of Sydney Archives, P130, (hereafter Elkin Archive), box 68, item 1/12/144.

¹²⁴ See Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p.134.

¹²⁵ A good insight into the running of the mission and into the outlook of its founder is provided by R.S. Schenk, *The Educability of the Native*, Perth, c.1940. M. Morgan, *A Drop in a Bucket: The Mount Margaret Story*, Box Hill, Vic., 1986, provides a history of the Mission from a sympathetic insider's viewpoint.

¹²⁶ Bennett, *The Australian Aborigine as a Human Being*, pp.13-33.

evolve gradually in their own way through the pastoral and agricultural stages of culture".¹²⁷ The Enlightenment model of stadial development still, in the inter-war years, commanded widespread assent and respect. Increasingly, the trend was to admit the possibility of an Aboriginal ascent through the stages.¹²⁸

Even the mundane pronouncements of the statisticians carried a hint of cautious hopefulness about the survival of the Aborigines. By the 1920s, statistical data on the Aboriginal population was becoming a little more comprehensive and reliable.¹²⁹ Yet if the statisticians made some suggestion that Aboriginal survival may be possible, their statements on this score could scarcely be characterised as confident. The 1924 *Official Year Book* offered some limited grounds for hope, stating that:

Until a comparatively recent period, the problem of preserving the Aboriginal race from extinction was considered to be almost impossible of solution. As soon as the aboriginals came in contact with the white man's civilization, their numbers commenced to decline, and continued to decrease notwithstanding the measures taken for their protection. Dr. Ramsay Smith, in an article supplied to the Commonwealth Official Year Book for 1909, expressed the opinion that the race could be preserved if there really was a desire to preserve it, but past experience apparently points to the contrary. The results obtained in Queensland and to a less degree in Western Australia during later years by the united efforts of missionaries and Governments show that success in civilizing the natives can be achieved if they are controlled from childhood. Also, the aboriginal births now exceed the deaths in many places.¹³⁰

A more reassuring note was sounded by the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics in its Aboriginal census for 1927. Citing census data for

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.140-41.

¹²⁸ For further elaboration of this point, with particular reference to the works of the anthropologist A.P. Elkin, see Chapter Five.

¹²⁹ The collection of census data on the Aboriginal population, on an official national and annual basis, was commenced in 1924 by the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics with the assistance of the state statisticians, protectors of Aborigines and the police. The Bureau noted that: "Figures had been collected before that date in the different States and for the Commonwealth but an annual Census had not been attempted"; Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Census of Aborigines*, 30 June 1935, AIATSIS, fp 1101.

¹³⁰ *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, no.17, 1924, p.960.

the previous three years, it noted that the "figures for full-bloods suggest that the decline of true aboriginals has been arrested". The Bureau went on to warn that "it would, however, at the present stage of statistical inquiry be unwise to draw conclusions from such figures".¹³¹

Between 1925 and 1934, census figures on the full-blood Aboriginal population of Australia remained fairly constant. In the latter year, there was a significant downward revision. This had nothing to do with actual population decline; rather:

In 1934 a complete check was made of most of the outlying stations in Western Australia and the Northern Territory and, as a consequence of these special investigations, the figures for 1934 showed a marked decrease on those recorded for 1933.¹³²

Although the demographic data may have been becoming more accurate, estimation remained almost as common as enumeration. The anthropologist Professor Frederic Wood Jones remarked in 1935 that the "official figures for the present aboriginal population of Australia can be regarded as little better than a guess".¹³³ As late as the census of 1939, the figures for Western Australia included "10,000 full-blood aboriginals estimated to live outside the influence of Europeans".¹³⁴ In the same year, it was noted that there had

¹³¹ Aboriginal Census, 30th June 1927, AA, CRS A461, G300/1. The idea that the Aboriginal population may have been stabilising was reflected in official statements on the Northern Territory around this time. A document headed *Aboriginals: Commonwealth Government's Policy in Respect of North and Central Australia*, included the statement: "There is no evidence of any serious decrease in the aboriginal population of the Territories"; AA, CRS A1, 37/70, part 1. This document was unsigned and undated, but it appears to have been drafted around 1930 by J.A. Carrodus, then Chief Clerk in the Department of Home and Territories, and Dr Cecil Cook, Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Territory. It was subsequently revised and updated. Another (probably later) version of the same policy statement may be found in ANL, N 572.99429 AUS. In the ANL version, the statement on Aboriginal population, quoted above, was omitted.

¹³² Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Census of Aboriginals*, 30 June 1936, AIATSIS, fp 609. See also Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Census of Aboriginals*, 30 June 1937, AIATSIS, fp 1100.

¹³³ F.W. Jones, "The Aborigines of Australia" in *The Book of Melbourne, Australia, 1935*, Glebe, N.S.W., 1935, p.119.

¹³⁴ Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Census of Aboriginals*, 30 June 1939, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, Part 3.

been a "small increase" in the full-blood population, according to the figures available to the Commonwealth Statistician.¹³⁵

Table 1, taken from the official census of 1939, provides a convenient summary of the statisticians' data over an eighteen year period from 1921. Disregarding the hiccup in 1934, the figures for full-bloods would appear to indicate only a gradual rate of decline. Even if the trend could be extrapolated through to final extinction, there was little in the available empirical evidence to suggest that the process would be rapid. Another trend shown in the table is that the slight decline in the full-blood population was more than compensated by a rapid rise in half-caste numbers, so that if the two were added together the total population of persons of Aboriginal descent was gradually increasing. The foundations of the doomed race idea were in no way shaken by this observation, for the prediction of extinction pertained to full-bloods only. Yet it did give many white Australians cause for concern.

From Doomed Race to the Half-Caste Problem

Though declining in popularity the doomed race idea still retained many adherents throughout the inter-war years. Donald Mackay, an experienced bushman who had accompanied Herbert Basedow on some of his exploratory researches, remarked in the Report of his Aerial Survey Expedition to Central Australia in 1930:

As we all know the Australian stone age man is doomed [;] here and in the Western Kimberlies he is making his last feeble stand against the advance of civilisation. Within 50 years the Australian native will be as extinct as the Mastadon [sic] that once roamed the vast Central areas of our great continent.¹³⁶

In a letter published in *Stead's Review* in 1930, another man with "many years of practical experience" with the Aborigines, Michael Sawtell, explained that:

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Report of Mackay Aerial Survey Expedition, Central Australia, May-June, 1930, p.6, in Reports of the Mackay Exploring Expeditions, 1926-1930, Mitchell Library, A 1758-1.

CENSUS OF ABORIGINALS - 30TH JUNE, 1939.
AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL AND HALF-CASTE ABORIGINAL POPULATION.
1921 TO 1939

30th June	Full-blood				Half-caste				Total Aboriginal Population
	Adults	Children	Total	Percentage on Total Aboriginal Population %	Adults	Children	Total	Percentage on Total Aboriginal Population %	
1921	46,723	12,048	58,771	82.31	7,931	4,699	12,630	17.69	71,401
1928	48,044	12,619	60,663	78.29	9,763	7,055	16,818	21.71	77,481
1929	49,078	12,723	61,801	78.80	9,450	7,179	16,629	21.20	78,430
1930	49,167	12,567	61,734	77.62	10,213	7,584	17,797	22.38	79,531
1931	46,676	12,225	58,901	75.60	10,923	8,091	19,014	24.50	77,915
1932	47,345	12,374	59,719	75.68	10,891	8,305	19,196	24.32	78,915
1933	47,321	12,780	60,101	75.53	10,999	8,468	19,467	24.47	79,568
1934	42,955	11,893	54,848	71.93	12,040	9,359	21,399	28.07	76,247
1935	42,492	11,886	54,378	70.44	12,800	10,017	22,817	29.56	77,195
1936	41,950	11,748	53,698	69.59	13,137	10,324	23,461	30.41	77,159
1937	41,306	11,529	52,835	69.81	13,596	10,354	23,950	31.19	76,785
1938	40,487	10,892	51,379	67.52	13,988	10,730	24,718	32.48	76,097
1939	40,482	11,075	51,557	66.72	14,275	11,437	25,712	33.28	77,269

Source: AA, CRS A461, A300/1, Part 3.

Because the native cannot understand the complexity of our civilisation he is doomed to extinction. I respectfully suggest to my fellow white Australians that it is our duty and responsibility to make that dying as humane as possible.¹³⁷

Another letter in the same issue of *Stead's Review*, by the former Inspector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory J.T. Beckett, gave a slightly different account of racial extinction, claiming that:

The Australian aborigine when understood is a friendly human being of bright intelligence. But the brutality of civilisation counteracts its virtues when imposing its relentless demands upon the uncivilised; the civilised savage is pitiless and inconsiderate, and the weakest must succumb.

The end is in sight, and the next generation will grieve over the extermination of the Australian, as the past generation shed crocodile tears over the annihilation of the Tasmanian.¹³⁸

Although Beckett argued that the decline of the race was not the outcome of an immutable natural law, but was due to "past and present iniquities wrought upon the aborigines of Australia", he saw no reason to expect their future survival.¹³⁹ By the 1930s, a new cause of the Aboriginal demise had been added to the list - tourism. A writer under the pseudonym "Miriltkna" asserted that:

It has been proved, all too conclusively, that white man contact of every kind is fatal to our aboriginal population. All classes alike have condemned themselves, whether official, missionary or social. To these agents of destruction must now be added the tourist, possibly the more deadly because he is unconscious of his fatal influence.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ M. Sawtell, "Westralian Experience", *Stead's Review*, 1 October 1930, p.17. In later writings, Sawtell was more explicit in noting that extinction was to be the fate of full-bloods only. By the end of the decade he had become one of the more prominent white lobbyists for Aboriginal citizen rights, but only for those of mixed descent; see M. Sawtell, "A Plea for the Aboriginal: Absorption in the White Race", *The Aborigines Protector*, vol.1, no.2, June 1936, pp.7-8; Sawtell to Elkin, 19.2.1940, Elkin Archive, box 68, item 1/12/144. Writing as the chairman of the Committee for Aboriginal Citizenship in 1940, he insisted of the "real full blood bush aborigines" that: "Nothing can be done with them. The best, most humane, kindest and most scientific course is to allow them to end their days in peace"; Sawtell to Ed., *Darwin Standard*, 8.5.1940, Elkin Archive, box 68, item 1/12/144.

¹³⁸ J.T. Beckett, "Aboriginal Slaves", *Stead's Review*, 1 October 1930, p.17.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, pp.16-17.

¹⁴⁰ 'Miriltkna', "Motor Car Mob Stuff!", *Stead's Review*, 1 September 1930, p.26.

The tourist trade, he insisted, was "only another way of earning death, racial death", for all forms of contact with civilisation "slays the aborigine as a race".¹⁴¹

In the scientific literature of the inter-war years, the notion persisted that Aboriginal extinction was, if not inevitable, at least highly probable. At the same time, scientists became increasingly explicit in making the point that the prediction of extinction applied to full-bloods only. In the introduction to his 1928 article "Disease amongst the Australian Aborigines", the Adelaide anthropologist and medical scientist J.B. Cleland remarked that "the same fate that has overtaken the Tasmanian aborigines seems likely soon to overtake the Australian aborigines". He was careful to specify that "of the distinctive Tasmanian race, pure-blooded individuals have long disappeared", only half-castes remaining.¹⁴² With greater explicitness, he stated that:

The pure-blooded Australian aborigine is fast dying out. Already over very large areas in the settled parts he has entirely disappeared. With the march of civilization only a few years will see, in all probability, the complete disappearance of pure-blooded natives.¹⁴³

Cleland had no doubts about the future survival of mixed-bloods.¹⁴⁴ And if he rendered the disappearance of full-bloods probable rather than inevitable, extinction remained the expectation. With only a faint note of caution, a 1931 report of the Board for Anthropological Studies of the University of Adelaide included the remark:

The Australian native is fast coming under European influence, and once that happens he may be said to be doomed. His customs fall into desuetude; his physical well-being suffers; disease is apt to take hold of him; and his extinction is probably inevitable.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.26.

¹⁴² J.B. Cleland, "Disease amongst the Australian Aborigines", *Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, vol.31, no.5, 1 March 1928, p.53.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p.53.

¹⁴⁴ He was to become one of the more enthusiastic promoters of schemes to breed out the colour, as a solution to the rising half-caste problem; see Chapter Four.

¹⁴⁵ Field Anthropology in Australia, Typescript in Folder labelled "Cockatoo Creek Report 1931", UAA, Board for Anthropological Studies, Correspondence and Reference Files, series 213, item 7.

There was no 'probably' in Daisy Bates's version of extinction. There was, on the other hand, a great deal of sentimentality. From her camp at Ooldea in the South Australian desert, she wrote to the editor of the *Australasian* in 1926:

I've had two deaths amongst my native friends within the week and I expect another poor fellow will pass on in a day or two. While I am really glad that they are passing from a world in which they have no place I sorrow with those who remain - their grief is so genuine, so primitive and so poignant.... Truly a dying people whom no effort can save.¹⁴⁶

In similar vein Bates continued to write, through to the publication of her aptly titled book, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, convinced that nothing could be done for the Aborigines except "to make their passing easier".¹⁴⁷ She believed that she made a contribution to this philanthropic enterprise, ministering to the Aborigines in the camps she set up along the Transcontinental Railway Line. She had far more ambitious schemes in mind.

In 1929 Bates sent her "Suggestions for the Betterment of Aborigines and Castes" to the Minister for Home Affairs, C.L.A. Abbott.¹⁴⁸ "Betterment" did not imply survival, merely a more pleasant exit from this world, for she could not, Bates wrote, "too deeply stress the fact that the aborigines are a dying race".¹⁴⁹ Her scheme involved the appointment of a High Commissioner for Natives and Native Areas, who had to be - she constantly reiterated this point - "an English gentleman".¹⁵⁰ What the blacks needed, she insisted, was:

¹⁴⁶ Bates to Editor, *Australasian*, 27.7.1926, Daisy Bates Collection, LTL Ms.7987, (hereafter Bates Collection, LTL), box 595, envelope 3, folder B.

¹⁴⁷ D. Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime spent among the Natives of Australia*, London, 1944, p.243.

¹⁴⁸ D. Bates, Suggestions for the Betterment of Aborigines and Castes, (hereafter Bates, Suggestions), forwarded with covering note to Min. Home Aff., 21.6.1929, AA, CRS A1, 35/1066. The same document may be found in Bates Collection, LTL, box 595, env.4, folder B, where it is entitled "Suggestions for the better [sic] of Aborigines and Castes", and has a pencilled note: "To be handed to the Ed the Argus". Pagination in the LTL version differs from that in the AA file; the pagination here referred to is that in the AA copy.

¹⁴⁹ Bates, Suggestions, p.1, AA, CRS A1, 35/1066.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.1, and following pages.

a King's man, one of England's best. His knowledge of anthropology may be slight or great, it is his personality that will count, and his wise and tactful overlordship will be welcomed by these children of the dawn.¹⁵¹

He must, she declared, be a "British Empire Maker", a "British 'Pukka Raj'", a gentleman "in the British and best meaning" of the word, and "preferably an Anglican". According to Bates: "To place a British gentleman over [the Aborigines] is to give them the greatest, and the only, chance they will ever have of making something of their lives".¹⁵² In another document she suggested the "appointment of such a man as Gordon, Nicholson, Lugard (Empire builders all of them) to take over the entire control of the Australian natives".¹⁵³ Apart from her evident adoration of English gentlemen, her insistence on the need for a gentleman-imperialist of the old school derived from her very low opinion of Aboriginal intellect, initiative and ability. In Bates's view:

The aborigines need a benevolent autocratic discipline. Their lives must be regulated for them as the lives of children are regulated.¹⁵⁴

Certainly, her proposals entailed no lack of autocracy and regulation. Aborigines were to be gathered into reserves, where their lives were to be controlled down to the minutest detail, to a far greater extent than even Baldwin Spencer had suggested.¹⁵⁵ But unlike Spencer, she held out no hope that this authoritarian apparatus would contribute to their survival.

Explaining the process of extinction, Bates mixed together evolutionism and degenerationism. In some passages she argued in classic evolutionary vein that:

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, pp.1, 5, 11.

¹⁵³ D. Bates, *Australian Natives and Advancing Civilisation*, n.d., (probably late 1932 or 1933), Bates Papers, ANL, section xiii, items 64/504-511.

¹⁵⁴ Bates, *Suggestions*, p.23, AA, CRS A1, 35/1066.

¹⁵⁵ She advocated, for example, that for their moral protection, a "diary of the women and girls' movements should always be kept"; *ibid.*, p.9.

the natives died out as they are dying and will die out, the clash of the two extremes of culture - palaeolithic and twentieth century - bringing about this inevitable result.¹⁵⁶

Yet it was not only culture clash which caused their demise; cultural degeneration, especially amongst the desert tribes, had set them on this path long before the European incursion. In particular, the decline of the laws which regulated marriage and sexual intercourse "had begun centuries before the white man had entered Australia".¹⁵⁷ Expanding on this point she wrote:

Centuries before the white man came to Australia there had been a breakaway from the tribal marriage laws of the Kimberley tribes - marriage laws so simple and universal throughout Australia that they were kept and upheld by all other Australian natives except those who first made the breakaway and their descendants now living within [the desert areas].

This fact isolated them and kept them within their boundaries, living in promiscuity throughout the centuries, degenerating more and more as the decades and centuries went by.¹⁵⁸

For Bates, the unrestrained licentiousness of the Aborigines was nothing short of an obsession; it figured prominently as a cause of their extinction.

Another degenerate practice which Bates highlighted was cannibalism. "Every one of these central natives was a cannibal", she claimed, and "[h]uman meat was their favourite food".¹⁵⁹ After allegations of a massacre of Aborigines in the East Kimberley had been confirmed by a Royal Commission in 1927, Bates sought to refute the Commissioner's findings by claiming that the charred teeth and bones which comprised the major evidence, "may have been the remains of a cannibal feast and not a murder".¹⁶⁰ Cannibalism fitted into a wider context of Aboriginal degeneration, Bates explaining that:

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.18; also p.14.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁵⁸ Bates, *Australian Natives and Advancing Civilisation*, Bates Papers, ANL, section xiii, item 64/505.

¹⁵⁹ Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, p.195.

¹⁶⁰ Bates to Editor, *Australasian*, 29.4.1928, Bates Collection, LTL, box 595, env.3, folder C. For detail of the Kimberley massacre and its aftermath see P. Biskup, *Not Slaves, Not Citizens: The Aboriginal Problem in Western Australia, 1898-1954*, St Lucia, 1973, pp.84-95.

Through the ages of their being these wild creatures have made Central Australia a desert. They have neither sown nor planted, only destroyed grass and herbage and tree and food plant. When the plant foods went and the trees were destroyed the rainfall lessened and the water holes dried up, and so - in the centuries - the groups had to venture into areas beyond their own desolated lands and kill and eat each other. Both adult and infant cannibalism prevailed amongst all these circumcised aborigines who occupied the central areas from time immemorial, and cannibalism is intensifying in these latter days.¹⁶¹

Savagery, for Daisy Bates, was far from noble. The Aborigines of her imagination spent their time either in loafing or in devouring and debauching each other. In a civilised Australia, such people had no place.

Bates's ideas were as old-fashioned as the Victorian costume she persisted in wearing until the end of her days. Autonomous degeneration, as an explanation for Aboriginal customs and behaviour, had long since been discredited by the evolutionists; and by the 1920s, evolutionary anthropology was itself being superseded by the doctrines of functionalism. Even evolutionary anthropologists like Howitt and Spencer, who regarded Aboriginal culture as a primeval relic, did imbue it with order and structure. Bates rendered Aboriginal lives into an anarchy of carnal and cannibal lust.¹⁶²

Daisy Bates certainly had her supporters. She was created a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1933, and her proposals were taken seriously - though not acted upon - by senior Canberra bureaucrats.¹⁶³ She commanded the respect even of people whose views

¹⁶¹ Bates, *Suggestions*, p.4, AA, CRS A1, 35/1066.

¹⁶² However, Bates's ethnographic accounts have acquired a degree of respectability in some modern anthropological circles; see for example Isobel White's introduction to D. Bates, *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*, (ed. I. White), Canberra, 1985, pp.1-35. Bates's earlier ethnography, especially from Western Australia, may have been less condemnatory than her later outpourings. Her strident denunciations of Aboriginal carnality and cannibalism seem to have been most salient in her writings from the Ooldea period, when she spent most time actually living with the Aborigines. Participant observation did not always lead in a Malinowskian direction.

¹⁶³ See for example the two memoranda, dated 9.8.1933 and 13.8.1933, by J.A. Carrodus, Sec., Home Aff., AA, CRS A1, 35/1066.

conflicted sharply with hers. The Secretary of the Aborigines Uplift Society, A.P.A. Burdeau, who had no doubt that the Aborigines could both survive and become civilised and who campaigned energetically for the granting of citizenship rights, commended her book *The Passing of the Aborigines* as essential reading for all who wished to understand "life in the primitive state".¹⁶⁴ Some humanitarian groups and individuals were more critical; few, if any, were disrespectful. The Reverend W. Morley, Secretary of the Association for the Protection of Native Races, perhaps came closest. He was affronted by Bates's grisly descriptions of cannibal feasts, which he claimed existed only in her own imagination. In March 1930, he asked Herbert Basedow if he would be prepared "to authoritatively deny the truth of her statements" about the prevalence of cannibalism amongst the Aborigines.¹⁶⁵ When John Murray, publisher of *The Passing of the Aborigines*, requested Morley and his Association to assist in publicising the book, he curtly replied that he would not, because:

our work is for the welfare and uplift of our Australian Aborigines, and not for promoting the financial success of books which may be written about them.

Apart from this there is so much in the book that is unconvincing in general statements apart from any supporting evidence particularly in her allegations of cannibalism among the natives of Central Australia. Nearly the whole of the allegations are based on hearsay.¹⁶⁶

Morley had no time for the fatalism of Daisy Bates. Degradation and death were in his view not inevitable, but the consequences of inappropriate policies and practices - including the activities of Bates herself. He maintained that:

Mrs Bates undoubtedly did much good work in ministering to the natives who were attracted to her camp. The pity is she was there to so attract them from their own country. It was the undoing of a crowd of natives who became derelict, and debased.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ *Uplift: The Official Organ of the Aborigines Uplift Society*, vol.1, no.5, March 1939, p.15. Burdeau did, however, contradict Bates's central dogma, by noting that while the "aborigines are passing as a primitive people", others "are coming into the full white culture".

¹⁶⁵ Morley to Basedow, 3.3.1930, Association for the Protection of Native Races, Records, University of Sydney Archives, S55, (Hereafter APNR Records).

¹⁶⁶ Morley to Murray, 21.2.1939, APNR Records.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

As vociferously as Bates pronounced on the impending doom of the race, she freely acknowledged that half-caste numbers were rising dramatically. From her perspective, the increasing number of people of mixed descent was unshakeable evidence of looming racial extinction.¹⁶⁸ There was nothing novel in this, for since it had first been propounded, the prognosis of extinction had applied to full-bloods only. What was novel in the inter-war years - not only in Bates' writings but across the spectrum of commentary on the Aborigines - was a far greater explicitness on this point. Whether adhering to the doomed race idea, like Daisy Bates, or opposing it, like William Morley, commentators agreed that rising numbers of half-castes constituted a growing problem. And the same commentators simultaneously portrayed declining numbers of Aborigines as equally a problem; they differed only on whether or not it could be remedied. The decline of the Aboriginal race and the rise of the half-caste problem were, in effect, opposite sides of the same coin. In one of the first published scientific studies of the half-caste problem, Professor Griffith Taylor and F. Jardine predicted that with "the rapid diminution of the numbers of fullbloods" in New South Wales, and the "accompanying rise in the numbers of half-castes", the former would be extinct within forty years, their place taken by the latter.¹⁶⁹ More than a decade later, the Australian National Missionary Conference made a similar prediction: "The time is not far off when the Aboriginal problem will be almost entirely a half-caste one".¹⁷⁰

In his 1927 publication, *Non-Britishers in Australia*, the Melbourne academic J. Lyng gave some account of population trends amongst the Aborigines, concluding that:

¹⁶⁸ See for example D. Bates, *Treatment of the Aborigines, Contributing Factors to their Extinction*, Rough Notes, n.d., Bates Papers, ANL, series xiii, item 64/513.

¹⁶⁹ G. Taylor and F. Jardine, "Kamilaroi and White: A Study of Racial Mixture in New South Wales", *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW*, vol.58, 1924, pp.272-73.

¹⁷⁰ Australian National Missionary Conference, 1937, *Report*, Sydney, 1937, p.63.

the outlook for the blacks as a race is anything but bright. But while the full-blooded aboriginals are declining, the numbers of half-castes, quadroons and octoroons are increasing.¹⁷¹

Lyng recognised that the fading away of the Aboriginal race did not spell the end of Australia's problems with its indigenous inhabitants, for the numerous and growing half-caste progeny constituted a potential threat to White Australia.¹⁷² He explained the changing complexion of the problem:

Little by little [the Aborigines] lose their energy, virility, and whatever racial pride they once possessed; they become indolent and apathetic towards life, and guard with less jealousy than formerly their womenfolk from associating with the whites. Half-caste children from the stations at intervals drift into the camps, grow up and replace the full-blood individuals, till, in the course of time, there are few aboriginals beyond the half-castes left in the district.¹⁷³

Although Lyng did not unequivocally assert the extinction of the Aborigines to be inevitable, he specifically linked their decline to the procreation of half-castes. Some observers were more forthright in making the connection.

After an inspection of conditions in northern and central Australia in 1928, the Adelaide physician Dr W.D. Walker reported that:

The advent of the White man sounds the death knell of the blackman - if not in this generation, in the next - and all that survives him is a pitiable horde of half-castes.¹⁷⁴

Dr Walker had spent fifteen months travelling around central and northern Australia before submitting his report on the Aborigines to the Minister for Home and Territories.¹⁷⁵ It was a damning indictment of the neglect of Aboriginal interests in the outback. The standard of health of those who lived "around the fringes of civilized settlements and on the various stations" - but not of the "wild Aborigines" - was appalling, a fact which Dr Walker

¹⁷¹ J. Lyng, *Non-Britishers in Australia: Influence on Population and Progress*, Melbourne, 1927, p.204.

¹⁷² *ibid.*, pp.204-05.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p.203.

¹⁷⁴ W. Walker to Min. Home & Terr., 28.8.1928, (hereafter Walker Report, 1928), p.2, AA, CRS A1, 28/10743.

¹⁷⁵ His report was neither commissioned nor welcomed by the Commonwealth government or the Northern Territory administrations; see J.G. Cawood, Gov. Res., Alice Springs to Sec., Home Aff., 11.4.1929, AA, CRS A1, 28/10743.

illustrated with copious and gruesome photographs.¹⁷⁶ Partly it was disease and malnutrition which were responsible for the decimation of the population; partly it was their absorbing "more of the white man's vices than of his virtues".¹⁷⁷ But Dr Walker explicitly made the growth of half-caste numbers not merely a symptom but also a cause of the Aboriginal demise.

According to Walker, it was "truly said that Necessity is the father and Blackgins the mothers of half-castes".¹⁷⁸ Far too many of the men of the outback, including government officials, were single, and as Dr Walker explained:

A man constantly without the company of white women and always in the company of Aborigines, gradually loses his finer feelings, and becomes not merely immoral, but unashamedly unmoral.¹⁷⁹

Thus it was essential to attract white women to the outback, a feat which could be accomplished only through the provision of adequate medical services.¹⁸⁰ Apart from the beneficial effects this would have on local white men and on the development of the north, he contended that: "As more white women come into the interior, the half-castes will diminish in numbers *pari passu*".¹⁸¹ White women, it seems, could make their contribution to saving the Australian race by coupling in intimate (though presumably lawful) union with outback males. Even this, however, was not enough to ensure Aboriginal survival.

Though his humanitarian concern cannot be doubted, as a scientist Dr Walker adopted a conventionally impersonal view of the Aborigines, remarking that:

¹⁷⁶ Walker Report, 1928, pp.6-8, plus accompanying photographs, AA, CRS A1, 28/10743.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp.4-5.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, pp.5-6.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.4. This claim is rather surprising in view of the fact that on the previous page Walker had carefully explained that the vast majority of the total half-caste population of Australia were to be found in the densely populated southern states.

Here we have a living Ethnological Museum where anthropologists may still study one of the earliest of Human Races - a veritable man of the Stone age almost as he was in the beginning.¹⁸²

For both humane and scientific reasons, the race was worthy of preservation; however, he added:

It seems axiomatic that the Australian Aborigines must eventually follow the American Indians and other primitive races and ultimately die out, unless reserves are set aside for them and strictly preserved as such.¹⁸³

Unlike Daisy Bates, Dr Walker maintained that strict segregation could ensure survival, although only of those untouched by the contagion of civilisation. He could, he wrote, "see no way of preserving those detribalised Aborigines already in contact with our civilisation".¹⁸⁴ Only the uncontaminated primitives had a chance, and only through the declaration of large reserves with almost total prohibition on the entry of whites; he proclaimed:

Thus would very many full-blood Aborigines be preserved in their natural state, unaffected by civilization, and governed by their own customs without interference.¹⁸⁵

As for half-castes, Walker had no doubts about their survival. Their rapid increase constituted "One of the big problems of the Interior"¹⁸⁶ and had to be stopped, or at least slowed, in the interests of black and white alike.

Dr Walker's report nicely illustrates the dichotomy between the Aboriginal problem and the looming half-caste problem. The former concerned the difficulty of ensuring the survival of a race whose hold upon life was remarkably tenuous. The latter entailed the dilemma of limiting the

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.3. Dr Walker had no sympathy for the Aborigines Protection League's proposal of a Model Aboriginal State, describing it as "the pious hope of misguided enthusiasts". On his envisaged reserves, the primitives would remain primitive. The only white people whom he thought fit to enter the reserves were scientists and medical personnel, although their rights to entry were more implied than explained.

¹⁸⁶ This was the caption on one of Walker's photographs; see Plate 6, photograph numbered 51, in Chapter Four below.

numbers of a people whose rate of increase was equally remarkable. Yet the two were causally related, the declining rate of birth of full-blooded individuals being, at least partially, the outcome of an increasing birth-rate of half-castes.

In her discussion of the sexual improprieties of white men in frontier districts, the feminist writer Constance Ternent Cooke put the matter tersely: "as white settlement advances, so the full-blood native population decreases, whilst that of the half-caste increases".¹⁸⁷ Cooke's advocacy of the appointment of women as protectors and police in the Northern Territory was based on her assumption that only they could adequately regulate the sexual activities of Aboriginal women and thereby limit the procreation of half-castes.¹⁸⁸ Her colleague from the Women's Non-Party Association of South Australia, Blanche Stephens, urged that "in order to prevent the further degradation of native women and consequent in-crease [sic] of the half-caste population, certain precautions should be taken".¹⁸⁹ These precautions entailed the extension and stricter enforcement of existing regulations prohibiting inter-racial sexual activity. A member of the Australian Federation of Women Voters and of the Victorian Women's Citizen Movement, Mrs Jones, was equally enthusiastic for both tighter regulation and women's participation in the process. In discussing the half-caste problem at the 1929 Conference of Representatives of Missions, Societies, and Associations interested in the Welfare of Aboriginals, Mrs Jones proclaimed:

The question of the half-caste is a big problem because the aboriginal woman is behind all the troubles which have been mentioned here today. We want to help that woman ...¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Cooke, "Status of Aboriginal Women", p.130.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp.130, 135-37. Other humanitarian groups urged the appointment of female protectors for the same reason. The Anti-Slavery and Aboriginals Protection Society was particularly insistent on this point; see correspondence in AA, CRS A431, 48/273, Part 1. The Association for the Protection of Native Races took a similar line; see correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 36/6595.

¹⁸⁹ B. Stephens to Senator J.A. McLachlan, 2.12.1927, AA, CRS A461, E300/1.

¹⁹⁰ Conference of Representatives, 1929, AA, CRS A1, 33/8782.

And help, for feminists as for male philanthropists, meant control. The feminist writers were prepared to accept that men, in an official capacity, should monitor the sexual activity of white males in outback regions. However, the supervision of black women's sexual behaviour was also necessary, and for this they considered white women best qualified.

Constance Cooke's depiction of traditional Aboriginal society was somewhat ambivalent. However, she entertained no doubt that its "worst" aspect was the "treatment of women" by men, explaining that:

The women have no social status in the tribes; they have no rights at all, and may be described as the 'burden bearers'....

Girls are often betrothed in infancy to old men who take possession of them at about twelve years old.

There are very cruel and often revolting practices in connection with initiation ceremonies and marriage rites; and some tribes practice polygamy.¹⁹¹

Cooke acknowledged that in the days before colonisation, Aboriginal social and cultural practices had served the race well; but the coming of the white man had led to the undermining of the native moral code, while male attitudes of ownership toward their women were retained. The result was prostitution, disease and half-castes, for "the woman was the black man's 'chattel', and after contact with whites, he became demoralized enough to barter her even for a bottle of drink".¹⁹² In this interpretation, it was males both black and white, in combination with an inappropriate social system, who were responsible for racial degeneration and the half-caste problem. Aboriginal women were the powerless victims of male lust and male domination. To be saved, they had to be taken in hand by their white sisters.

The Reverend J.H. Sexton, President of the Aborigines' Friends' Association, went further in claiming a role for gender inequity as a cause of the half-caste problem. He claimed that traditional Aboriginal practices had to

¹⁹¹ Cooke, "Status of Aboriginal Women", p.129.

¹⁹² *ibid.*, p.130.

take their share of blame for miscegenation and consequent "decline of the race", arguing that:

So long as the oldest men in the tribes are mated with young lubras there can be no proper continuity of the species.... The white man is by no means free from serious blame, but blacks are to blame too, for the full-blooded aborigines would not die out if proper marriages were arranged so that young people could be mated according to nature instead of leaving it to the old, decrepit men to endeavour to perpetuate the race. That is to some extent, too, an explanation of the coming of half-caste children, for young, passionate, vigorous lubras, with instincts unsatisfied, readily associate with bushmen and prospectors in the wilds of Australia.¹⁹³

It followed that if the race was to survive, Aborigines had to be led away from their traditional marriage practices, "to remove these hindrances to their perpetuity".¹⁹⁴ Whites, too, had to shoulder a heavy responsibility for the decline of the Aboriginal race; under the heading "The Half-caste Problem", Sexton declared that:

We have done a great wrong in contaminating a fine race. It is in my judgement a thorough disgrace to Australia that there should be over 20,000 half-castes in this country.... Our duty, surely, should be to preserve as long as possible the integrity of the few remaining tribes in Australia. Whatever we may do now, the full-blooded native is declining and passing away. As a matter of fact, he withers away before the touch of our civilization.¹⁹⁵

Half-castes did not wither away in this manner; they were procreated by the touch of civilisation.

If he agreed with the Reverend Sexton in little else, Professor Frederic Wood Jones shared the view that miscegenation was, for the Aborigines, one of the surest routes to "racial death".¹⁹⁶ It was, Wood Jones claimed, "a physiological fact that the reproduction rate of the aborigines who have come

¹⁹³ Sexton, *An Extensive Survey*, p.6.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.6. In advancing this argument, Sexton revealed how far he was from regarding Aborigines as children of nature; it was Western forms of marriage and the family, not Aboriginal, which were most in tune with nature.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁹⁶ See for example Jones, "Claims of the Australian Aborigine", pp.498-507; F.W. Jones, "Today: The Mission and the Half-Caste", *Stead's Review*, 1 September 1930, pp.23-26; F.W. Jones, *Australia's Vanishing Race*, Sydney, 1934, pp.38-40; Jones, "The Aborigines of Australia", p.119.

into contact with civilisation falls in a remarkable way". Admitting that there were "many factors" involved in this phenomena, he laid emphasis on the fact that in the outback the majority of white men were single, and white women were few.¹⁹⁷ As a result, half-castes were being born in place of full-bloods. No friend of the Christian missions, Wood Jones claimed that they had done little to help the Aborigines, and much to promote the half-caste problem. After castigating the missions for their failure in the spiritual, educational and vocational fields, he asked:

Are the mission stations even preserving the aborigine as we would preserve an animal, by maintaining a pure stock and, at lowest estimate, breeding from it? Again, the answer is an unqualified negative. A negative that must be followed by the unpleasant corollary that the chief attainments of the missionary stations in the direction of aboriginal eugenics is the breeding of a half-caste population.¹⁹⁸

He went on to enumerate the births and deaths at various South Australian missions, pointing out the vast preponderance of half-castes over full-bloods. Summing up his dim view of missionary achievement, Wood Jones declared that he failed "to see any sort of justification for a belief that salvation for the Australian native can ever lie in this direction".¹⁹⁹

The connection between miscegenation and the decline of the Aboriginal race was only one facet of the half-caste problem; and in the eyes of many, not the most important. At a practical level, there was the problem of what could and should be done with the ever-increasing numbers of people of mixed descent. Beyond that, there was a growing realisation that the descendants of a dying race may continue to haunt a White Australia for generations.

¹⁹⁷ Jones, "Claims of the Australian Aborigine", pp.506-07.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.504. The same uncomplimentary assessment of the missions may be found, in abridged form, in his article "The Mission and the Half-Caste", pp.23-26.

¹⁹⁹ Jones, "Claims of the Australian Aborigine", p.504.

The Problem of the Half-Caste

In the early part of the twentieth century, the term 'half-caste problem' was freely bandied about in scientific and official discussion. Rising numbers doubtless contributed to the prominence awarded to the problem. The 1924 *Official Year Book* recorded a national increase in half-caste numbers from 9,878 in 1911 to 11,579 in 1921.²⁰⁰ The 1927 census put half-caste numbers nationally at 15,468, remarking that this figure "may be considered fairly reliable".²⁰¹ So, throughout the 1930s, numbers continued to rise: 22,817 in 1935; 23,461 in 1936; 23,950 in 1937.²⁰² As numbers grew, statisticians remarked more fully on the high average annual rate of increase. The census for 1939 summed up the situation:

Since 1901 the half-caste aboriginals have more than trebled their numbers, having increased from 7,370 persons in that year to the present population of 25,712. The rate of growth has been consistently maintained, there being 10,113 in 1911, 12,630 in 1921 and 19,014 in 1931. Since 1901 the half-caste aboriginals have been increasing at a consistently higher average annual rate than the white population.²⁰³

But numbers alone explain little. What was the 'problem'? And who, for that matter, were 'half-castes'? The second of these questions is the easier to answer, and even it is not straightforward.

Legislatively, half-castes were defined slightly differently in the relevant acts of each state.²⁰⁴ The Northern Territory Aboriginals Ordinance of 1918 offered the following definition:

²⁰⁰ *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, no 17, 1924, p.960.

²⁰¹ Aboriginal Census, 30.6.1927, AA, CRS, A461 G300/1. The reliability of these figures is of small consequence here; the relevant issue is that contemporaries believed numbers to be rising rapidly. Half-castes could of course be enumerated fairly accurately, as most of them lived in settled parts of the continent. If there was any unreliability in the figures, it would appear to derive largely from differing understandings of who should be included in the category 'half-caste'.

²⁰² Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Census of Aboriginals*, 30 June 1935, 30 June 1936, 30 June 1937.

²⁰³ *Census of Aboriginals*, 30 June, 1939, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3.

²⁰⁴ For a contemporary overview of the various legislative definitions, see J.H. Sexton, *Legislation Governing the Australian Aborigines*, 2nd edn, Adelaide, 1935, especially p.9. For a later analysis of the issues see J. McCorquodale, "The Legal Classification of Race in Australia", *Aboriginal History*, vol.10, part 1, 1986, pp.7-24.

'Half-caste' means any person who is the offspring of parents, one but not both of whom is an aboriginal and includes any person one of whose parents is a half-caste.²⁰⁵

According to this circular definition, half-castes would continue to beget half-castes throughout endless generations. To add to the confusion, certain categories of half-caste were included within the definition of the term "Aboriginal".²⁰⁶ In the Territory, as elsewhere, the tendency during the inter-war years was to encompass an ever-widening group of persons of mixed descent within the terms of reference of Aboriginal legislation.²⁰⁷ However, at the federal level - that is, in the laws of the Commonwealth apart from those pertaining specifically to the Northern Territory - the situation was quite different. Since Attorney-General Deakin had ruled in 1901 that half-castes were not "aboriginal natives" within the meaning of Section 127 of the Constitution, the rule followed for determining a person's eligibility for the Commonwealth franchise and social welfare payments was that those in whom the Aboriginal blood preponderated were "aboriginal natives", while those of fifty percent or less Aboriginal blood were not.²⁰⁸ Thus, a person who was literally half-caste was not an Aborigine, and was, in theory at least, entitled to many of the rights and benefits of the white citizen.²⁰⁹ The fifty percent dividing line was, however, merely a legal convenience. Persons of fifty percent or more white descent may not have been Aborigines for Constitutional or Commonwealth legal purposes; but responsibility for them was shrugged aside onto the states, to define and deal with as they wished.

²⁰⁵ "Aboriginals Ordinance, 1918", part 1, section 3.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ This tendency was perhaps most pronounced in Western Australia, culminating in the Native Administration Act of 1936; see Biskup, *Not Slaves, Not Citizens*, pp.140-96.

²⁰⁸ Detail on Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal eligibility for the Commonwealth franchise and social welfare benefits can be found in AA, CRS: A1, 28/1706; A1, 34/4190; A1, 35/3951; A431, 49/1591; A431, 50/597; A432, 29/220; A432, 29/4352, file no. 4; A432, 30/2016; A461, N382/1/1; A571, 13/9458; A571, 38/883.

²⁰⁹ Their rights to these entitlements were, however, circumscribed in other ways. For example, in regard to pensions and maternity allowances, those persons of any degree of Aboriginal descent who lived on state reserves or received state welfare were deemed ineligible for the Commonwealth benefits; see the correspondence in AA, CRS A461, N382/1/1.

The 1926 Statistical Conference in Perth defined half-castes according to both percentage of blood and manner of life; it determined:

(a) That for the purposes of statistics of Australian aboriginal population, persons of mixed blood living with aborigines shall be classed as half-caste aborigines, whatever the degree of the white strain. (b) That persons of mixed blood not living with aborigines shall be included as half-caste if the strains are approximately equal; as full blood if the predominant strain is aborigine; and not included at all if the predominant strain is white.²¹⁰

Despite the efforts of bureaucrats, legal draughtsmen and statisticians to define the term, 'half-caste' remained a rather loose category. The 1937 National Missionary Conference reported that "the name half-caste is used to include people with black blood, though not necessarily 50 per cent."²¹¹ Paul Hasluck noted in 1936 that:

The term 'half-caste', it should be explained, in practice has come to mean almost any person with a strain of aboriginal blood who does not pass in the community as a white person.²¹²

It was as good a working definition as any.

On the nature of the problem, there were many renditions. In one prevalent version, it was held that persons of mixed descent found a place with neither parent race, and were unacceptable to both. Ramsay Smith asserted that the "great difficulty" with half-castes was that they had "no family life, or social place, or legal position with either the blacks or whites".²¹³ The Reverend W. Morley maintained that half-castes were "disowned and despised alike by black and white races".²¹⁴ His close namesake, N.M. Morley, president of the Aborigines' Uplift Society of Western Australia, claimed the half-caste to be "as much a pariah in the sight of the natives as he is in the

²¹⁰ Cited in Cooke, "Status of Aboriginal Women", p.128.

²¹¹ Missionary Conference, 1937, *Report*, p.63.

²¹² P. Hasluck, *Our Southern Half-Caste Natives and their Conditions*, Perth, c.1938, p.1. The articles in this booklet were originally published in the *West Australian* newspaper in July 1936.

²¹³ Smith, "The Aborigines of Australia", p.175.

²¹⁴ Morley, "The Half-Caste Aborigines of North Australia", p.3.

greater self-righteousness of ourselves".²¹⁵ Reporting on his tour of the Northern Territory in 1932, the Minister for the Interior Archdale Parkhill remarked that the half-caste "has no country, no race, and nobody wants him".²¹⁶ The Reverend T.T. Webb, a Methodist missionary to Arnhem Land, explained that:

The half-caste is forced into his unprivileged position mainly by a crushing sense of inferiority which arises out of the fact that he belongs to no race.... He has no racial home, and so is compelled to drift derelict, despised, and unwanted; the sport of circumstance; with no racial traditions, and completely without racial or family support.²¹⁷

In this conception, it was the half-castes' lack of clear racial allegiance which rendered them a problem.

More simply, the problem was that half-castes were not white. It was the threat posed to the ideal of a White Australia, more than any other single factor, that fostered fear of a growing half-caste menace. By the 1920s, the major source of half-caste increase at the national level was not inter-breeding between white and black, but reproduction within half-caste communities. J. Lyng observed that because these coloured enclaves were breeding faster than the general white population, "the idea of the White Australia ideal eventually being shattered from within cannot be dismissed as altogether absurd".²¹⁸ He explained that the White Australia ideal was founded not on ideas of racial purity, but on the notion that the racial composition of the nation must be controlled in the way "most conducive to human progress".²¹⁹ A profusion of the primitive traits of the Aborigine could not be other than detrimental. In her academic defence of a White Australia, Myra Willard further explained that the policy was based not so much on antagonism toward coloured people

²¹⁵ N.M. Morley, "The Problem of the Half-Caste: A Plea for Understanding", *The Aborigines Protector*, vol.1, no.2, June 1936, p.5.

²¹⁶ Report of a Tour [of the Northern Territory] by the Hon. A. Parkhill, Min. Int., 31.8.1932, AA, CRS A1, 34/3449.

²¹⁷ T.T. Webb, *A Future for the Half-Caste*, Sydney, c.1940, p.4.

²¹⁸ Lyng, *Non-Britishers in Australia*, pp.204-05.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.5.

themselves, as on the belief that national, social and political unity depended on a large degree of racial homogeneity.²²⁰ It was a belief that Willard herself firmly held. National cohesion and national progress could both be put at risk by the growth of a substantial coloured community within Australia. Thus the half-caste problem was, in many ways, distinct from the Aboriginal problem, for only persons of mixed descent posed a threat of this kind to the national ideal.

There were endless variations on the theme of the half-caste threat to Australian nationhood. A particularly unusual rendition was given by Daisy Bates. In her view, half-castes were not merely undesirable in themselves, they also represented part of a Roman Catholic plan to dominate the nation; she claimed that:

So many of even the National Parliamentarians hesitate to touch the real thing - the breeding of these castes in the Caste Missions - because 90% of the latter are run by RCs and everybody but me seems to be afraid of the RCs ... Consider the fourhundred castes at the Point Macleay (S.A.) Mission, the 'hundreds' that A.O. Neville (W.A.s Chief Protector) tell me are now at Broome Beagle Bay and elsewhere - think of the ease with which they can be moulded into Irish-Australian RC politics. The RC's intend to gain Australia - Cardinal Moran said that nearly 40 years ago - Mannix, Kelly of Sydney, Clune of W.A. and more especially Duhig of Queensland have all their armies constantly at work.²²¹

If the generality of half-castes were unreliable and uncivilisable, the Roman Catholic ones were worse. "Needless to say", she remarked:

the Broome Caste Missions are R.C. and hence the menace is quadrupled - the offspring of these offscourings of the world are evil to look at, evil in thought word and deed. No foundation for good citizenship in any one of them.²²²

This sectarian view of the half-caste problem may have been idiosyncratic. Yet it does highlight the fact that the problem was conceived not only in narrowly

²²⁰ M. Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy*, Melbourne, 1923. Willard's argument was premised on the contemporary assumption that cultural, social and political traits were somehow linked to physical racial traits.

²²¹ Bates to Editor, *Australasian*, 24.9.1926, Bates Collection, LTL, box 595, env.3, folder B.

²²² *ibid.*

racial terms but also as part of a wider complex of issues and difficulties which faced the nation.

More conventionally, Bates considered the problem of the half-castes to derive from their incapacity to adopt a civilised lifestyle. She declared that:

It must not be overlooked that the half-caste problem is a problem, that in every mission the castes are increasing, that they do not seem to absorb citizenship with its responsibilities though they receive the ordinary State School education. They do not later work or trade or business [sic] with a view of becoming self supporting and self sustaining, marrying and bringing up their family independent of Mission or other help. There seems to be no fundamental character.²²³

With this pessimistic view of half-caste potential, her major concern was to stifle their procreation. In 1926 she announced:

What I really want is and what the Gov't should give like a shot is a Dameship, a Commonwealth J.Pship and a Commission to apply my methods universally of [sic] the prevention of halfcastes.²²⁴

She proudly claimed that while she lived at Ooldea, very few mixed-race children were born, a fact which she attributed to the high moral influence exerted by the "presence of a gentlewoman".²²⁵ In the concluding sentences of *The Passing of the Aborigines*, she lauded her own efforts to "keep the dreaded half-caste menace from our great continent".²²⁶ Bates did, however, admit that there were exceptions to the general rule of half-caste undesirability. She recounted a wonderfully sentimental tale about a half-caste girl named Adelina, who had the good fortune to be fathered by an English gentleman "of birth and breeding".²²⁷ Summarising her story in a letter to the editor of the *Australasian*, Bates remarked that:

It was one of the most interesting psychological cases I've ever come across. The father was of gentle ancestry ... and the girl had all the

²²³ Bates, *Treatment of the Aborigines, Contributing factors to their Extinction*, Rough Notes, n.d., Bates Papers, ANL, series xiii, item 64/513.

²²⁴ Bates to Editor, *Australasian*, 24.9.1926, Bates Collection, LTL, box 595, env.3, folder B.

²²⁵ Bates, *Suggestions*, p.16, AA, CRS A1, 35/1066; Bates, *Australian Natives and Advancing Civilisation*, [1932 or 1933], Bates Papers, ANL, section xiii, item 64/509.

²²⁶ Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, p.243.

²²⁷ D. Bates, "Adelina - Half-Caste", *Australia*, August 1923, pp.44-48.

qualities and [?] of the women of her fathers [sic] family and even their pride of bearing and carriage and their most refined intelligence, yet had the half-caste color and [?]. A most unique case.²²⁸

Unique indeed, for her depiction of the generality of half-castes was anything but complimentary.

According to one school of thought, the half-caste was not merely uncivilisable but also inferior to both parent stocks, as the cross between black and white was by nature dysgenic. Around the turn of the century, Dr Allan Carroll had argued that half-castes were "worse than the pure blacks in many particulars"; the "crossed offsprings" of races so disparate as white and black Australians were "degenerates in several ways" and were "in no respects reliable or worthy of preservation".²²⁹ Carroll claimed that:

All half castes have been held in disfavour with both races from whom they have sprung, and justly so, as it was perceived how much worse they were than either of their parents.²³⁰

A similar argument, though in more temperate language, was advanced by Professor J.W. Gregory in his 1925 book, *The Menace of Colour*. He considered that in the cross between "two widely distinct races ... the inferior qualities ... may be emphasised in the progeny".²³¹ Admitting that this principle had not yet been "definitely established", he nonetheless considered that there was sufficient evidence in its favour to advocate a prohibition on miscegenation between the primary races, "in the interest of the future of mankind".²³²

The notion of hybrid inferiority was most commonly expressed in the allegation that half-castes inherited all the vices of their progenitors and few

²²⁸ Bates to Editor, *Australasian*, 14.6.1918, Bates Collection, LTL, box 595, envelope 3; [?] designates an illegible word in the manuscript.

²²⁹ *Science of Man*, vol.3, no.8, 22 September 1900, p.137.

²³⁰ *ibid.*, p.138. See also *Science of Man*, vol.3, no.7, 22 August 1900, pp.111-12.

²³¹ J.W. Gregory, *The Menace of Colour: A Study of the Difficulties due to the Association of White and Coloured Races, with an Account of Measures proposed for their Solution, and Special Reference to White Colonization in the Tropics*, London, 1925, p.228.

²³² *ibid.*, pp.228-42.

of their virtues. In his book on the White Australia policy, D. Hastings Young explained that "the blending together of the white man with the yellow or black man produces a hybrid stock, which inevitably results in the production of all the vices of each, but with few of the virtues of either".²³³ Referring specifically to the Northern Territory, J.S. Litchfield of Darwin wrote in August 1930:

Half-castes, almost without exception, are more degraded than the blacks for they have the evil tendencies of both black and white intermingled and intensified. It is an almost hopeless task to try and uplift them.²³⁴

The tenacity with which this idea gripped the white Australian imagination was attested by A.P. Elkin, who remarked in 1945 that:

Perhaps one of the toughest 'racial myths' to explode is that of the viciousness of 'half-castes'; they are said to inherit biologically the vices of both stocks, but not their virtues.²³⁵

Lending further support to the presumption of inherited vice, it was commonly believed that the white progenitors of half-castes were men of the lowest type.

Yet there was a countervailing view, that half-castes were inherently superior to full-bloods and more adaptable to civilisation. In the inter-war years, this view acquired more widespread credibility. Perhaps the simplest expedient in arguing for the social advancement of half-castes was to assert that their proportion of white blood gave them both a capacity and a right to assume a place in a civilised society. In 1934 the Reverend J.H. Sexton claimed that:

The old idea was that the half-caste embodied only the vices of his white and black progenitors. It is now seen that virtues appear as well in his composition. Therefore, a modification of the old view is necessary, for experience has shown that the admixture of blood gives a half-caste a superiority over his darker brother.... He is the white

²³³ D.H. Young, *A White Australia: Is it Possible: The Problem of the Empty North*, Melbourne, 1922, p.28.

²³⁴ J.S. Litchfield to Sec., S.P.C.C., 11.8.1930, Elkin Archive, box 67, item 1/12/142. I am unable to determine what the initials S.P.C.C. stood for.

²³⁵ A.P. Elkin, "Race - Our Tragic Myth", *Social Horizons*, July, 1945, p.85.

man's child, and should receive a training to make him a useful member of the community.²³⁶

This argument entailed no challenge to established ideas of racial inheritance; it merely shifted the focus from the inheritance of vice to the inheritance of virtue. In similar vein, the Reverend T.T. Webb maintained that:

While all of them have something of the character and outlook of their aboriginal mothers, and are to that extent handicapped in an attempt to find a place among us, it is also true that they have inherited something of the character and outlook of their white fathers, and so are, in some measure, fitted for inclusion in our communities.²³⁷

The idea that an infusion of white blood improved the breed was not novel; but it did become more and more prominent in the 1920s and 1930s.

There were those who claimed the unfortunate condition of the half-caste to be the outcome of social environment, not of biology. M.M. Bennett argued that the problem derived from half-caste children growing up without proper family life, love or guidance.²³⁸ In a series of articles published in 1936, Paul Hasluck discussed the difficulties faced by Western Australia's half-castes as matters of social, educational and economic disadvantage, not of racial inheritance.²³⁹ Many others argued a similar line. From an environmental explanation of disadvantage, it followed that under appropriate conditions half-castes could be transformed into responsible citizens.

Yet there were few Australians in the 1920s and 1930s who could shrug aside the firmly entrenched notion that racial inheritance comprised a significant part of an individual's make-up. If the climate of opinion was shifting toward an acknowledgment that half-castes may have a place in civilised society, the assumption remained that their inherited racial qualities

²³⁶ J.H. Sexton, "The New Policy Reviewed", in Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, p.6.

²³⁷ Webb, *A Future for the Half-Caste*, p.3.

²³⁸ Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, pp.118-19.

²³⁹ Hasluck, *Our Southern Half-Caste Natives*.

posed an impediment. In its account of the half-caste problem, the Australian National Missionary Conference *Report* of 1937 listed:

The Main Disabilities From Which They Suffer.

Their chief handicaps are:-

1. Colour prejudice.
2. Hereditary-blood influences.
3. Inferiority complex.
4. Poverty.
5. Lack of vocational training.²⁴⁰

It further explained that deleterious "hereditary-blood influences" could derive from both the Aboriginal and the white elements in the half-castes' ancestry.²⁴¹ According to the missionaries, these impediments were not insuperable; it was possible to "civilise the half-caste", provided they were first converted to the truths of the Christian faith.²⁴² A similar *melange* of social and racial impediments to the advancement of mixed-bloods was proffered by Dr E. Kent Hughes in an article published in the *Aborigines Protector* in 1937. He asserted of half-castes that:

Their mentality and capabilities depend a good deal on the type of white blood that is in their veins. The most constant traits that they seem to have inherited from their black forefathers are the roving spirit and the spirit of fatalism, accepting all that comes to them without protest. They are, on the whole, honest and grateful, and have an intense love for their children; but they have little initiative, and most of them have the outlook and interests of the average fourteen-year-old white child.²⁴³

The remainder of his article was devoted to the social handicaps under which they laboured; and the whole was informed by an assumption that the solution to the problem lay in their "absorption into our national life".²⁴⁴

Over the inter-war years, the idea that half-castes could be elevated into civilisation gained a firmer grip on the white Australian imagination. This may have derived partly from the fact that for the resolution of the problem

²⁴⁰ Missionary Conference, 1937, *Report*, p.68; bold face in the original.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp.67-70.

²⁴² *ibid.*, pp.70-71.

²⁴³ E.K. Hughes, "The Present Conditions of Aborigines and Half-Castes in Northern N.S.W.", *The Aborigines Protector*, vol.1, no.4, June 1937, p.14.

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp.14-17.

there were few options other than the incorporation of half-castes into the wider community. They could not be deported, like South Sea Islanders; they could not be denied entry into the country, like Chinese; but their numbers continued to grow. Yet however loudly it was asserted that half-castes had a capacity for civilisation, there remained the problem of how to ensure that they attained it.

CHAPTER FOUR CIVILISATION BY BLOOD

In the Northern Territory, legal restrictions were imposed on inter-racial sexual contacts partly in an endeavour to stifle the procreation of half-castes. Little success attended the effort. In 1922 Administrator Urquhart observed that it was a "discreditable fact ... that the number of half-castes in the Territory is increasing, and so far as can be seen must inevitably for many years yet continue to increase".¹ From an estimated 244 at the time of the Commonwealth's assumption of control, half-caste numbers in the Territory had reached 624 by the time of Urquhart's statement, and climbed to 800 according to Bleakley's report six years later.² Bleakley himself remarked that "how to check the breeding" of half-castes was a "most difficult problem".³ For its solution, he recommended the "strict enforcement of laws for protection and control of female aboriginals" and the encouragement of an "immigration of white women into the Territories".⁴ But as others at the time pointed out, legislation was a poor prophylactic against fornication. In a lengthy critique of Bleakley's proposals, Chief Protector Cecil Cook asserted that:

It is not practicable to impose morality by regulation. The result would be to increase the number of technical offenders without diminishing the evil.⁵

As for an increased immigration of white women, Cecil Cook shared the prevalent view that it would be desirable; but in 1929 it seemed a distant prospect.

¹ "Report of the Administrator, 1922", p.8.

² *Official Year Book*, 1924, p.960; Aboriginal Census, 30.6.1927, AA, CRS A461, G300/1; "Bleakley Report, 1928", p.27.

³ "Bleakley Report, 1928", p.27.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.29.

⁵ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 11.6.1929, AA, CRS A431, 46/3026. Gov. Res. Weddell concurred with this view, stating that it was "impossible to make men moral by legislation"; Weddell to Sec., Home Aff., 10.6.1929, AA, CRS A431, 46/3026.

Bleakley was well aware that prohibitions on procreation addressed only one aspect of the half-caste problem; there remained the difficulty of determining "how best to deal with those now with us".⁶ Long before he handed down his recommendations, some effort had been made toward uplifting the half-castes of the Northern Territory. Half-hearted as such attempts may have been, they contrasted with the almost entire absence of any such effort on behalf of full-bloods. In the task of uplifting the half-castes of the Northern Territory, institutional care by either church or state was almost the only strategy employed, at least until Cecil Cook became Chief Protector in 1927. Child welfare organisations in Australia had long been aware that institutionalisation was not an ideal means of moulding healthy, well adjusted citizens.⁷ Nonetheless, institutions accommodated the vast majority of Australian children who were classified as neglected, orphaned or delinquent.⁸ Quite apart from their racial origins, half-caste children could conveniently be slotted into one of the relevant categories.

Elevation by Extraction

The disproportionate number of half-castes relative to the white population in the Alice Springs district was remarked upon by many observers.⁹ There, in 1914, the Territory's first exclusively half-caste institution was founded, in a tent near the police station. Subsequently, the accommodation was upgraded to galvanised iron sheds, dubbed the Bungalow, and in 1915 the Stuart school teacher, Mrs Stanley, took the position of

⁶ "Bleakley Report, 1928", p.27.

⁷ At the 1909 Congress of Workers among Dependent Children, for example, the statement that institutional care should be avoided wherever possible was greeted with applause; *Dependent Children: Interstate Congress of Workers*, Adelaide, 1909, pp.8-9.

⁸ See R. van Krieken, *Children and the State: Social Control and the Formation of Australian Child Welfare*, North Sydney, 1992, especially pp.84-132.

⁹ See for example Love, *The Aborigines: Their Present Condition*, 1915, p.21; J.T. Beckett, "Report on Aborigines", 1915, in "Report of the Administrator, 1915", p.28; A.G. Price, *The History and Problems of the Northern Territory, Australia*, Adelaide, 1930, p.27.

matron.¹⁰ Until her retirement in 1929, Mrs Stanley provided the inmates of the Bungalow, as well as the much smaller numbers of white children in Alice Springs, with some sort of education.¹¹ Reading, writing, arithmetic and singing were taught, as well as instruction in sewing and other domestic duties for girls, although no vocational training was provided for boys.¹² Baldwin Spencer remarked that the children were "greatly interested" in their school work; they could "write and read very well", while their "singing was quite pleasant to listen to".¹³ Like all other visitors, Spencer was favourably impressed with the efforts of Mrs Stanley, reporting that she had managed the Bungalow "as well as it could have been under existing circumstances".¹⁴ The final clause was significant, for visitors were unanimous that existing circumstances at the Bungalow were appalling.

Originally designed to house 12 children, by the time of Spencer's inspection the Bungalow accommodated 60, and 5 years later had 70 inmates.¹⁵ Sleeping arrangements were cramped, heating during the cold winter nights inadequate, the water supply distant, toilet and washing facilities insufficient, and the whole was located immediately adjacent to a hotel.¹⁶

¹⁰ A history of the early years of the Bungalow can be found in H. Basedow, *Medical Report upon Aborigines of the Lower Northern Territory, 1920*, (hereafter *Basedow, Medical Report, 1920*), AA, CRS A3, NT 22/2805; *Spencer Report, 1923*, AA, CRS A1, 30/1542.

¹¹ In 1924, for example, Mrs Stanley taught 4 white and 36 half-caste children; F.J. King, "Report of the Education Department for the Year ending 30th June 1924" in "Report of the Administrator, 1924", p.22. This disproportion was typical of Alice Springs school enrolments during the 1920s.

¹² Basedow characterised the education as "elementary"; he observed that the boys, on leaving the Bungalow, readily found work on pastoral stations, although the employment prospects for girls were not so bright; *Basedow, Medical Report, 1920*, AA, CRS A3, NT 22/2805.

¹³ *Spencer Report, 1923*, pp.4-5, AA, CRS A1, 30/1542.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.18. Similar comments were made by Herbert Basedow (*Medical Report, 1920*, AA, CRS A3, NT 22/2805) and Dr Walker (*Report, 1928*, p.10, AA, CRS A1, 28/10743).

¹⁵ *Spencer Report, 1923*, p.3, AA, CRS A1, 30/1542; *Walker Report, 1928*, p.10, AA, CRS A1, 28/10743.

¹⁶ *Spencer Report, 1923*, pp.1-3, AA, CRS A1, 30/1542; *Basedow, Medical Report, 1920*, AA, CRS A3, NT 22/2805; *Walker Report, 1928*, pp.10-11, AA, CRS A1, 28/10743.

The last point drew particular condemnation, for it placed the half-caste girls in grave moral danger from drunken white men. In 1920 Herbert Basedow argued the need for protecting the inmates from debasing influences:

The dangers of so closely associating men who have been drinking with half-caste females at or near the age of adolescence need not be here commented upon.... The Bungalow is admirable in principle, and the removal of half-caste infants (some of whom are nearly white) from the natives' camps is highly desirable, but Alice Springs township was badly chosen as the site. There are several places in the environment which would afford such advantages as distance from the main track and the temptations associated with it, facilities for water conservation, agriculture and stock-breeding.¹⁷

Two years later a Parliamentary Standing Committee reported with characteristic bluntness, that the:

Native compound or 'Bungalow' at Alice Springs must be removed from its present position contiguous to the hotel. A proper building should be erected at a suitable distance from the township, and the children taught the value of cleanliness and some useful occupation. The girls should be taught the rudiments of household duties.¹⁸

By this time the Administrator was F.C. Urquhart, who took the half-caste problem more seriously than any of his predecessors. In 1922 he wrote a report on the issue for the Minister for Home and Territories, in which he explained that:

The solution [to the half-caste problem] depends to some extent on the general policy to be adopted towards them whether they are to be allowed to remain at the developmental stage of their coloured parentage and so gradually form a kind of helot class which will continue for a few generations and then disappear ... or whether an attempt is to be made to raise them to the status of their white parents with the view to their eventual absorption in the white population.¹⁹

He assumed "that the latter rather than the former policy would be the one favoured by the Government".²⁰ For "the social development of these

¹⁷ Basedow, Medical Report, 1920, pp.24-25, AA, CRS A3, NT 22/2805.

¹⁸ "Report by the Sectional Committee", 1922, p.1.

¹⁹ Report by Mr. F.C. Urquhart on Half-Caste Problem of the Northern Territory, 1.8.1922, AA, CRS A1, 30/1542.

²⁰ *ibid.*

people", Urquhart continued, "some degree of education and training" was necessary, and:

a centrally situated, well equipped and above all efficiently staffed training institute is an absolutely essential factor to the success of the policy. The training should include the formation of character by means of reasonable discipline and by the force of example on the part of the staff ...²¹

Apart from "ordinary elementary education [sic]", half-caste boys should receive vocational training "in station and farm work [and] the simpler manual trades such as farriery, saddlery, carpentry and blacksmithing", while girls should learn "domestic duties generally, plain cooking and sewing and some instruction in hygiene [sic] and the care of children".²² While Urquhart's scheme mirrored prevailing assumptions about appropriate gender roles, it was founded also on a confidence in the capacity of half-castes to adhere to Western social norms, to become, at least to an extent, civilised.

Urquhart had hoped that Hermannsburg Mission might be turned over to use as a half-caste institution. According to the Administrator, this scheme failed because the missionaries:

flatly and absolutely refused to have anything at all to do with the half castes, the Revd. Strehlow expressing the opinion that they are a hopeless people to deal with and much inferior to the full blooded aboriginals.²³

In its place, Urquhart recommended the establishment of a "training institute" two miles out of Alice Springs. Before making a decision, the Department of Home and Territories sought the advice of an "eminent authority", Professor Baldwin Spencer.²⁴

The eminent authority concurred with the "opinion of all competent judges ... that the half castes are capable of reaching a higher stage of

²¹ *ibid.*; underlining in the original.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ J.G. McLaren, Sec., Home and Terr., memo, 23.3.1923, with annotation by Senator G.F. Pearce, Min., Home and Terr., 23.3.1923, AA, CRS A1, 30/1542.

development than the pure-blood blacks".²⁵ To ensure that they did so, he recommended the establishment of a half-caste station, occupying 1,000 square miles of productive land, equipped with dormitories, bathrooms, dining hall; school, a smithy, carpenter's shop, saddlery room and other facilities to provide a "training in industrial and domestic work".²⁶ Spencer seems not to have learned - or did not care - that the administration was interested in Aboriginal uplift only if it could be done cheaply. For his proposed station, with a projected seven staff, the annual salary bill alone was estimated at 1,275 pounds; the existing Bungalow was staffed at a cost of 285 pounds per annum, plus rations for Aboriginal workers.²⁷

In contrast to his recommendations from Darwin a decade before, on this occasion Spencer insisted that "it would be a fundamental mistake and most prejudicial to their welfare to place [half-castes] on a station along with full blooded aboriginal children".²⁸ To avoid the debasing influences of the "native camp", contact between half-caste and full-blood should be kept to a minimum, and "THE HALF CASTES MUST BE ENCOURAGED TO MARRY AMONGST THEMSELVES".²⁹ In his Preliminary Report of 1913, Spencer had claimed that half-castes had "more leanings" toward the Aboriginal side of their ancestry.³⁰ However, in 1923 he emphasised the significance of their white inheritance. The latter report was illustrated with a number of photographs, which demonstrated:

²⁵ Spencer Report, 1923, p.18, AA, CRS A1, 30/1542.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp.19-20.

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.1, 20.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.19. It is unclear why Spencer changed his mind on this issue. Perhaps it was because the Bungalow housed many children of one quarter or less Aboriginal descent, whereas numbers in this category appear to have been few in Darwin in 1912. Perhaps it was because whatever faith Spencer once had in the capacity of full-blood Aborigines to progress had since faded.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.19; upper case and underlining in the original. Spencer may not have intended a total prohibition on contact between full-blood and half-caste; on p.3 of his report he referred, with apparent approval, to the fact that the inmates of the Bungalow were "not allowed to go into the native camps, but their mothers can and do visit them".

³⁰ Spencer, "Preliminary Report", p.274.

more than any words could express, that the children are entirely different from the true blacks, in fact it would be difficult, in the case of some of the quadroons especially, to distinguish between them and white children.³¹

Three of these photographs are reproduced here as Plates 1, 2 and 3.

Five years later, when Dr W.D. Walker visited central Australia, the Bungalow remained in as unsatisfactory a condition as before and even more overcrowded. Walker illustrated his report with photographs depicting the dreadful conditions within this "shameful structure". (See Plates 4, 5 and 6). They provide an interesting counterpoint to Spencer's photographs of the same institution. While Spencer was highly critical of the inadequate facilities provided by the Bungalow, his photographs were deliberately constructed to emphasise the essential humanity of its inmates - and their approximation to white standards. Walker's photographs, on the other hand, were designed for another polemical purpose: to depict the inhumanity of the institution itself. The individual was lost in the crowd. Even where Walker's subjects were single human figures, they appeared as types rather than as human personalities. The differences in photographic representation reflected differing views of the half-caste problem.³² For Spencer, half-castes were people whose problems needed to be addressed. For Dr Walker, half-castes were a problem, the solution to which was to "prevent the continual increase in their number".³³

Three months after Dr Walker submitted his report, the half-caste institution was moved 29 miles out of Alice Springs township to Jay Creek. The move was prompted neither by Walker's allegations nor by Bleakley's report which was submitted around the same time. The government had been considering the move for some years, and was impelled into action when

³¹ Spencer Report, 1923, p.19, AA, CRS A1, 30/1542.

³² It may be added that Spencer was a photographer with technical skill and considerable artistic sensitivity; Walker was a taker of snapshots.

³³ Walker Report, 1928, pp.4-5, 12, AA, CRS A1, 28/10743.



Half caste man and woman with their child. This man speaks English well, is most capable in dealing with stock & quite equal to taking his place amongst white workers. The photograph does not do justice to the half caste woman.

Plate 1. Baldwin Spencer Photograph,
with original caption. (AA, CRS A1, 30/1542)



No 4. Girl at the Bungalow.

Plate 2. Baldwin Spencer Photograph.

(AA, CRS A1, 30/1542)



Plate 3. Baldwin Spencer Photograph:
Boy at the Bungalow. (AA, CRS A1, 30/1542)



43. Neither Black nor white - unwanted and with neither Birthright nor Heritage.
The plight of the half caste is a sorry one and an urgent problem in the interior.



44. A chubby little half caste. Life is but an unhappy existence for such as these when once their childhood is over.



45. Some of the occupants of the Alice Springs "Bungalow". These kiddies are all half castes and Quadroons. Some are almost white (see photo 51).
The dark half caste woman on the right is herself the mother of 2 of these. Thus have the original 14 half castes in this shameful structure now increased to 70.

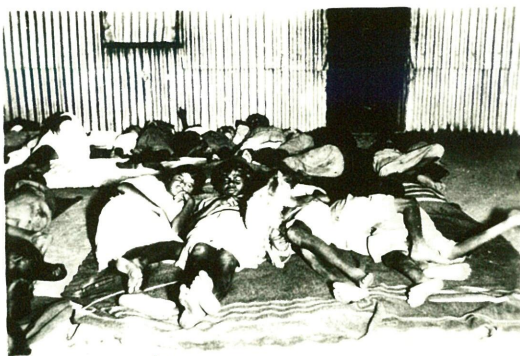
Plate 4. Page 15 of Dr Walker's Report.

(AA, CRS A1, 28/10743)

46. Flashlight photograph. 10 p.m. 15/1/28.
Half caste children asleep at Alice Springs Bungalow. The whole 70 of them sleep on the ground in an area about 10 yards by 7 (i.e. 6ft by 1ft 6 ins for each). A whole family sleeps on 1 blanket as in this picture.



47. Same place 10 p.m. 15/1/28.
This place is a disgrace. Male and female sleep alongside one another just as close as sardines in a tin. They sleep in the same clothes as they have on all day long. It is an impossibility for them to all lie down within the place. If it rains they must go inside and stand up.



48. Another flashlight view of the Alice Springs Bungalow. Their ages vary from birth to 25 years. Babies are born in the open amongst this tangled mass of half-white, half-black, humanity without any privacy whatever. The females are "common property" within 30 yards of the hotel. A 10ft fence should be erected around this place without delay, and it should be locked at sundown. It is high time that they were removed and decently housed at a safe distance.

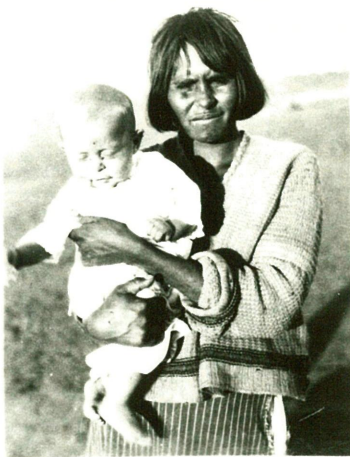




49. Half caste children at the Alice Springs Bungalow having their "daily tub". Were it not for the kindly ministrations of Mrs. Standley (who, I believe has no official status) the present cleanly and happy state of these children could not be maintained under the existing extremely unsatisfactory conditions.



50. Half Caste children at the Alice Springs Bungalow having breakfast, which consists of Bread and Treacle and a mug of tea - Dinner and Tea - ditto -. The only addition to their menu is a stew of potatoes and 1 goat (about 30 lbs of meat) between the 70 of them every 2nd day. This place is a reproach to the Department responsible for its surveillance.



51. One of the big problems of the Interior. She is the mother of this child - very few of the pioneers who have spent many years in the Interior without the company of white women can claim not to be the fathers of half castes. Given an aerial medical service at Alice Springs more white women would be found in the interior and consequently more white children and less half-castes.

construction workers on the North-South Railway were approaching Alice Springs; the threat to half-caste morals was considered too great.³⁴ Jay Creek was designated a "temporary expedient", and conditions there quickly became the target of as much criticism as those at the old Bungalow had been.³⁵ It had earlier been proposed that a new half-caste institution should be the responsibility of the Australian Board of Missions. This arrangement fell through after the submission of the Bleakley Report, the Board considering that Bleakley's terms did not allow sufficient scope for the missionaries to fulfil their Christian duty.³⁶ A later offer to undertake the care and education of Central Australian half-castes was made by the Roman Catholic Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.³⁷ Despite the cost, Central Australian half-castes remained the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government.

Half-caste administration in the Top End followed a somewhat different course. Until 1923, half-castes were accommodated along with full-bloods in the Kahlin Compound, although the former did receive an elementary education which was generally denied the latter. As early as 1915, Chief Inspector J.T. Beckett pointed out that educational efforts were in need of "much extension" if half-castes were to be given "a fair start on the road to a civilised life".³⁸ He also maintained that their progress into civilisation required them to be extricated as young as possible "from the thralldom of the

³⁴ PM to Bishop of Willochra, 30.8.1929, AA, CRS A461, F300/1. Home and Terr., memo, 15.8.1928; Cawood, Gov. Res., Central Australia, to Sec. Home and Terr., 2.11.1928; P.E. Deane, Sec. Home Aff., memo, 22.8.1929; all in AA, CRS A659, 39/1/996. "Report on the Administration of Central Australia for the Year ended 30th June 1929", *CPP* no.12 of 1929-31, p.6.

³⁵ See for example W. Morley, Hon. Sec., APNR, to A. Blakeley, Min. Home Aff., 25.8.1930, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 36/6595. Morley to Blakeley, 23.11.1929, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/996. Extract of a letter dated July 31st. 1929, written by Rev. W.M. Davies, Rector of Port Lincoln, AA, CRS A461, F300/1.

³⁶ J.A. Carrodus, Home and Terr., memo, 21.11.1928; W.J. Clemens, Home and Terr., to Bleakley, 30.11.1928; Bleakley to Sec., Home and Terr., 7.12.1928; Clemens to Rev. J.S. Needham, Chairman, ABM, 24.12.1928; Needham to Min. Home Aff., 4.4.1929; all in AA, CRS A659, 39/1/996.

³⁷ Apostolic Delegate, Sydney, to Min. Home Aff., 9.12.1929, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/996.

³⁸ Beckett, "Report", 1915, pp.27-28.

tribe".³⁹ A great many of the half-caste inmates of the Compound had, in fact, been taken as very young children from Aboriginal camps.⁴⁰ Once in Kahlin, however, they continued to associate with full-blood Aborigines, including in some cases at least, their own mothers. Responding to criticism from Senator Newland on this score, Gilruth retorted that it was both natural and proper for children to associate "with their parents or at least the only parent, the mother, who takes the slightest interest in them".⁴¹

In 1923 the question of whether half-castes should be segregated from full-bloods was given prominence by the Committee of Inquiry which was appointed to investigate matters connected with the Darwin Aboriginal Compound.⁴² The Committee of Inquiry found public opinion in Darwin to

³⁹ *ibid.* In putting forward these views, Beckett provided a clear explanation of the observed lowly status of the half-caste in purely environmental terms; he insisted that in the appropriate social setting, part-Aboriginal children would grow into respectable and responsible citizens.

⁴⁰ Frequently the police performed this duty, although it was also done by private individuals. In 1915 the Presbyterian missionary J.R.B. Love referred to a "growing practice" on the part of whites on the pastoral stations "to send the half-caste children in to the care of the Aborigines Department in Darwin". He did not explain why; presumably, they did not want the evidence of their sexual activities to remain on the premises; see Love, *The Aborigines: Their Present Condition*, p.46.

⁴¹ "Notes by the Administrator, Dr. J.A. Gilruth, on speech delivered in the Senate by Senator Newland, on 27th September, 1916", *CPP* no.380 of 1914-15-16-17, p.5.

⁴² Consideration was also given to the possibility of establishing an institution exclusively for half-caste girls, as they were held to be particularly susceptible to immoral influences. See Gov. Sec., Darwin, to Sec., Home and Terr., 5.4.1923, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A452, 52/284. See also "Report by the Sectional Committee", 1922, p.1.

be overwhelmingly in support of segregation.⁴³ Summarising the evidence, the committee members stated:

General opinion ... is emphatically in favour of both the male and female half-caste being separated from its aboriginal parent at an early age so that it may be reared in a more healthy and elevating environment than is possible when it grows up in daily touch and association with the full-blooded natives....

The present system of allowing both male and female half-castes entree to the Aboriginal Compound, and allowing them to associate freely with the full-blooded natives we think highly undesirable as it inevitably tends to bring the half-caste down to the level of the native. By tactfully gaining the confidence of the half-caste boys and girls, as could be done by a strict and sympathetic disciplinarian, much would be done to create a favourable and happy atmosphere that would give the half-caste a fair [sic] start along the road of a civilised life.⁴⁴

A fair start, for the committee members, did not mean anything too ambitious. For half-castes, "education should be very elementary", the girls learning "plain sewing and domestic duties" while the boys would be "prepared and interested in some trade of an industrial and practical nature". This, according to the committee, would give them "similar opportunities as [sic] other civilised children".⁴⁵

Although Urquhart endorsed the proposed separation of half-caste children from full-bloods, he opposed the committee's recommendation that

⁴³ See Transcript of Evidence of the Committee of Inquiry into Matters connected with the Native Compound, Darwin, AA, CRS A452, 52/284. Of the 48 witnesses examined, only two explicitly opposed the segregation of half-caste from full-blood. One was Charles Dempsey, the gaoler at Fannie Bay, who insisted that the "half-caste must go with the black" as any attempt to assimilate them into white society would strike "at the very root of the White Australia policy" (Transcript, p.93). The other was Joe Cooper, Baldwin Spencer's former host on Melville Island, who recited "the old saying that blood is thicker than water" (p.78). It may have been in Cooper's own case; he was unconventional in both acknowledging paternity of, and providing a good education for, his own half-caste son Reuben. Cooper's answers to almost all the questions posed by the Committee of Inquiry were out of step with majority Darwin opinion. Apart from these two, a number of witnesses claimed to be unable or unwilling to express an opinion on the question.

⁴⁴ T.J. Worgan (Chairman), F.G. Burt and E.W. Pearse (Committee members) to Admin., 19.7.1923, AA, CRS A452, 52/284.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

the half-caste institution be located five to six miles outside Darwin.⁴⁶ The secretary of the Department of Home and Territories concurred with the Administrator, on the grounds that distance would both impose additional expense and inhibit adequate surveillance of the inmates.⁴⁷ A half-caste institution was duly established, immediately adjacent to the house of Mr and Mrs MacDonald, Superintendent and Matron of the Kahlin Compound, who also assumed the duties of supervising and educating the half-caste children. It was within the residential area of Myilly Point. Immediately, complaints from local residents began. On 11 October 1923 a petition was sent to the Administrator, alleging that half-castes were an undesirable influence on white children and that their presence constituted a danger to health.⁴⁸ Many who signed this petition had four months previously informed the Committee of Inquiry on the Aboriginal Compound that they were in favour of a half-caste institution, as a means of elevating these people above the level of their full-blood progenitors.⁴⁹ It seems that for the good residents of Darwin, uplifting the unfortunate half-caste was all very well, provided it did not happen next door.

The Half-caste Home remained at Myilly Point until 1939. Long before that time, it suffered the problems of its counterpart at Alice Springs: severe overcrowding and grossly inadequate facilities. It was merely an ordinary Darwin house, designed to accommodate a single family. Less than two years after its opening, the Acting Superintendent of the Compound, H.S. Giles

⁴⁶ Urquhart to Sec., Home and Terr., 4.7.1923, AA, CRS A452, 52/284, (this letter appears to have been incorrectly dated; in view of its contents, 4.8.1923 would seem a more likely date).

⁴⁷ A.S. Smallholme, Home and Terr., memo, 4.9.1923, AA, CRS A452, 52/284.

⁴⁸ Petition to the Administrator, 11.10.1923, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

⁴⁹ Whereas in the earlier inquiry general opinion emphasised the capacities which followed from the white element in the half-castes' ancestry, the October petition included the remark that "it is a recognised fact, unfortunate though it may be, that half-castes in their habits and outlook have very much more in common with full-blooded aboriginals than with whites"; Petition, 11.10.1923, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

complained that it was "overcrowded", with 37 inmates.⁵⁰ By 1929 numbers had risen to 88;⁵¹ and in 1931 to 105.⁵² After official lobbying for some years, a new half-caste institution, for boys only, was opened in September 1931 at Pine Creek.⁵³ Again it was merely a house, cheaply refurbished for the purpose of accommodating and educating half-caste boys.⁵⁴ Accommodation at Pine Creek was never quite adequate, but overcrowding was not given a chance to become too severe. In May 1933, the institution closed, its inmates being sent either back to Darwin or to the new Home at Alice Springs.⁵⁵

Darwin Aborigines of mixed descent were educated either at the Kahlin Compound school or, after 1923, at the Half-caste Home itself. A small minority attended the regular Darwin school.⁵⁶ At the Half-caste

⁵⁰ H.S. Giles, "Report on Kahlin Compound, Darwin", 1925, in "Report of the Administrator, 1925", p.14.

⁵¹ C.E. Cook, "Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines", 1929, in "Report on the Administration of North Australia, 1929", p.8.

⁵² "Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory for the Year ended 30th June 1931", *CPP* no.14 of 1932-34, p.4. The Chief Protector's official report for the same year gave the number of inmates as 77 (Cook, "Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines", 1931, in *ibid.*, p.7). However, in view of the fact that later in the year 38 half-caste boys were sent to Pine Creek, leaving 65 girls in Darwin, Weddell's figures would appear more reliable. See "Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory for the Year ended 30th June 1932", *CPP* no.124 of 1932-34, p.5; and Cook, "Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines", 1932, in *ibid.*, p.9.

⁵³ For the lobbying efforts see R.H. Weddell, Gov. Res., Darwin, to Sec., Home Aff., 10.6.1929; C.E. Cook, to Gov. Res., Darwin, 11.6.1929; both in AA, CRS A431, 46/3026. Cook to Deputy Gov. Res., Darwin, 25.2.1931, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A659, 40/1/7551. H.S. Giles, Superintendent, Kahlin Compound, Extract of Report to Chief Protector, 21.6.1927; Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 4.7.1927; both in AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

⁵⁴ P.E. Deane, Sec., Home Aff., to Sec., Dept of Works, 11.5.1931, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/7551. At this time cost was an even bigger consideration than usual, as these were Depression years.

⁵⁵ Cook, "Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines", 1933, in "Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory for the Year ended 30th June 1933", *CPP* no.203 of 1932-34, p.9.

⁵⁶ See the various reports of the Education Department for the 1920s, published in *CPP*. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, there was a popular demand in Darwin for the racial segregation of the public school. However, the objection of the parents was to the presence of Chinese and other Asian children, not to part-Aborigines. This may have been merely a reflection of the numbers; Chinese pupils outnumbered white; part-Aborigines were a very small minority. See V.L. Lampe, Head-Teacher,

Home, instruction conformed to the regular school curriculum, the girls receiving additional training in domestic duties.⁵⁷ Although schooling was conducted by a qualified teacher, the physical setting was less than professional; it was on the verandah of the Half-caste Home. Even after the number of pupils had been reduced by the transfer of boys to Pine Creek, School Inspector Moorhouse complained that teaching conditions were "very difficult owing to lack of space and suitable furniture".⁵⁸ The Northern Territory administration may have had some commitment to the education of half-castes; but only if it could be done cheaply.

Considerations of cost were uppermost in government attempts to devolve increased responsibility for half-castes upon missionary bodies. In 1917 the Chief Protector of Aborigines and the Church Missionary Society made arrangements for the care and education of half-castes to be undertaken at the Roper River Mission.⁵⁹ Seven years later, the part-Aborigines at Roper River were sent to a new mission at Groote Eylandt, to better isolate them from the influence of full-bloods.⁶⁰ By 1926 Groote Eylandt had 45 part-Aboriginal inmates who, according to Superintendent Warren, had "the advantage of complete segregation from the blacks", helping them "to take their place among white people".⁶¹ Attempting to expand its activities, in August 1925 the Church Missionary Society offered to undertake

Darwin Public School, to Gov. Sec., Darwin, 4.9.1925, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 38/10188.

⁵⁷ C.L. Fox, Inspector of Schools, "General Report on Schools in the Northern Territory", 1925, in "Report of the Administrator, 1925", p.12; "Report of the Administrator, 1924", p.8.

⁵⁸ P.W. Moorhouse, Report of Inspection of Kahlin Half-Caste School, 1931, AA, CRS A1, 37/1544.

⁵⁹ H.E. Carey, Chief Protector, to A.R. Ebbs, Sec. CMS, 16.8.1917, AA, CRS A3, NT 17/2913.

⁶⁰ H.E. Warren, "The Church Missionary Society of Australia and Tasmania: Report for 1925", in "Report of the Administrator, 1925", p.14.

⁶¹ H.E. Warren, "Report on Roper River and Groote Eylandt Mission Stations", 1926, in "Report of the Acting Administrator, 1926", p.14.

the care of all half-castes then in Darwin.⁶² Even more ambitiously, in February 1927 it advised the government that it was "prepared to receive, care for, train and educate all halfcastes in the Northern Territory at Groote Eylandt Mission Station for ten shillings a week each".⁶³ The Home and Territories Department was interested, although it was thought best to limit consideration to those half-castes in the Top End.⁶⁴

The Government Resident of North Australia, however, was "strongly opposed to the suggestion" of the Church Missionary Society. He considered that the girls were "better cared for" at the Half-caste Home than at any mission. Besides, their removal to Groote Eylandt would deprive the white women of Darwin of "the only efficient domestic help available", and the mission could not train the boys in their appropriate vocation, stock-work. Moreover, the mission proposal was uneconomical, for against their requested subsidy of 10 shillings per child per week, the Darwin Home cost the government only 6 shillings.⁶⁵ Other objections were raised from Darwin, including Chief Protector Cook's claim that sending them to Groote Eylandt would "deprive the girls of their liberty and all opportunity of future citizenship".⁶⁶ The bureaucrats in Melbourne were still prepared to negotiate; so were the missionaries. By the middle of 1928 the Society had dropped the requested subsidy to 7 shillings and 6 pence, making it a much more attractive proposition.⁶⁷ However, by this time, Bleakley's investigations were under

⁶² Note headed Deputation - Monday 24th August 1926, signed by Senator Pearce, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

⁶³ G.A. Chambers, Federal Commissioner, CMS, to Min. Home and Terr., 26.2.1927, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

⁶⁴ Davoren, Home and Terr., memo: Control of Half-castes at Darwin, 22.4.27; Davoren, memo: Care and Education of Half-castes in North Australia, 26.5.1927; both in AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

⁶⁵ R.H. Weddell, Gov. Res., Darwin, to Sec., Home and Terr., 3.5.1927, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

⁶⁶ L.H. Giles (quoting Chief Protector Cook) to Sec., Home and Terr., 3.7.1928, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

⁶⁷ J.G. McLaren, Sec., Home and Terr., memo: North Australia, Care of Half-castes, 8.6.1928, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

way, and the Society was advised that no decision would be reached until his report had been handed down.⁶⁸

Although Bleakley was favourably disposed toward missionary efforts, he expressed some misgivings about the policies adopted at Groote Eylandt, in particular that of "segregating the half-castes from both white and black".⁶⁹ In his view, part-Aborigines belonged either with the white or the black, depending on their proportions of blood. The important distinction, he insisted, was "between the different breeds".⁷⁰ Those "with 50 per cent. or more aboriginal blood or of alien blood" could not "be fairly classed with the quadroon or octoroon".⁷¹ A "preponderance of white blood" entitled those in the latter categories "to be given a chance to take their place in the white community".⁷² On the other hand, Bleakley claimed:

the half-caste of 50 per cent. or more aboriginal blood, no matter how carefully brought up and educated, will drift back to the aboriginal, where naturally he finds the atmosphere most congenial to him.⁷³

This category should not be neglected, but should be civilised along with the full-blood population. Their future, according to Bleakley, lay in becoming "members of a protected and civilised aboriginal community".⁷⁴ To this end, they should:

certainly be rescued from the degradation of the camps and given the benefit of education and training, but will be happier if raised to this

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ "Bleakley Report, 1928", p.24.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.28. Bleakley's advice on the half-caste problem was sent to the Department of Home and Territories in July 1928, six months before the publication of his report. See Bleakley to Sec., Home and Terr., 17.7.1928, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/996. The wording of the relevant sections of his published report followed this letter almost verbatim.

⁷¹ "Bleakley Report, 1928", p.28.

⁷² *ibid.*, p.29; see also pp.17, 28.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.17; see also p.28.

⁷⁴ J.W. Bleakley, "The Control and Care of Half-caste Children in Queensland", in *The Half-caste Aborigines of North and Central Australia*, p.11. This short article by Bleakley was prompted by the APNR's considerations of his report on the Northern Territory.

civilisation in company with the young aboriginals of his own generation.⁷⁵

In this, as in other respects, Bleakley echoed Baldwin Spencer's advice of fifteen years before.⁷⁶

According to Bleakley, it had always to be borne in mind that part-Aborigines were "human beings with a conflicting mixture of the civilised and the savage".⁷⁷ Because of their greater inheritance of civilisation, quadroons and octoroons had superior capacities, and should not be too rigidly controlled "so as not to hamper unduly their upward progress".⁷⁸ Nonetheless, a degree of supervision was still essential; and to "avoid the dangers of the blood call, employment should be found where they will not come into contact with aboriginals or aboriginal half-castes".⁷⁹ Those of half or more Aboriginal descent, in whom the "blood call" was so much stronger, had to be bound down more tightly by protective regulations. Bleakley acknowledged that within this category there were some of "superior type", who demonstrated a "desire and capacity for raising themselves"; they should be given the opportunity to do so. He added that as "the superior type would probably be less than 10 per cent, to legislate for the whole on that small minority would only be courting certain failure".⁸⁰ From where he had plucked the figure of ten per cent, he gave no indication.

It was for his administrative experience and practicality that Bleakley was chosen to conduct an investigation into Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territories. Unlike Spencer before him, and Elkin after, he was not an

⁷⁵ "Bleakley Report, 1928", p.28.

⁷⁶ However, Bleakley's report was not in line with Spencer's 1923 recommendations in regard to the Bungalow.

⁷⁷ Bleakley, "Control and Care", p.11. Although he clearly implied that civilisation and savagery were qualities which were transmitted through the blood, he also allowed some scope for environmental influences.

⁷⁸ "Bleakley Report, 1928", p.29.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.29.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.28.

academic but a public servant who had risen through the ranks. His commonsense - as opposed to academic or erudite - approach to Aboriginal issues is apparent not only from his 1928 report, but also from his other contemporary writings.⁸¹ His orderly official outlook is also well illustrated in the photographs he took in the course of his investigations.⁸² (See Plates 7-12). His subjects were always lined up as neatly as possible, facing straight toward the camera - although this orderly arrangement could obviously not always be maintained by the very young children. Even where there were only two subjects, they were still lined up parallel to the camera lens and looking straight ahead (see Plate 11). Occasionally, as in Plate 12, he may have come close to capturing individual human qualities; but any such effect was totally negated by the caption: "European Afghan Chinese Half-caste types - Groote Eydt." If Baldwin Spencer's half-caste photographs were portraits, and Dr Walker's propaganda, Bleakley's seem to belong in a distinctive category of public service photography.

While the Commonwealth government adopted a characteristically supine posture on its receipt of the Bleakley report, senior officials in Darwin were openly hostile. The Chief Protector who had been appointed in 1927, Dr Cecil Cook, was a man of strong opinions and commanding presence, who wielded a very sharp bureaucratic pen. In memorandum dated 11 June 1929 Cook neatly and concisely refuted all of Bleakley's substantial claims, except those in line with his own views.⁸³ He not only condemned the inadequacy of Bleakley's proposals, but also alleged that in Bleakley's home state of Queensland the half-caste was "left to his fate amongst the remnants of his

⁸¹ See for example his "Control and Care", pp.7-12; Bleakley "The Aborigine Passes: the Evidence of North Queensland", pp.32-34; J.W. Bleakley, "The Aborigines: Past and Present Treatment by the State", in Needham, *White and Black in Australia*, pp.38-62.

⁸² Some photographs were published with his report; a more comprehensive collection of photographs, taken or collected in the course of Bleakley's investigations, are located in AA, CRS A263, NN.

⁸³ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 11.6.1929, AA, CRS A431, 46/3026. See also Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 1.3.1929 in the same file.



Plate 7. J.W. Bleakley Photograph.
(AA, CRS A263, NN)



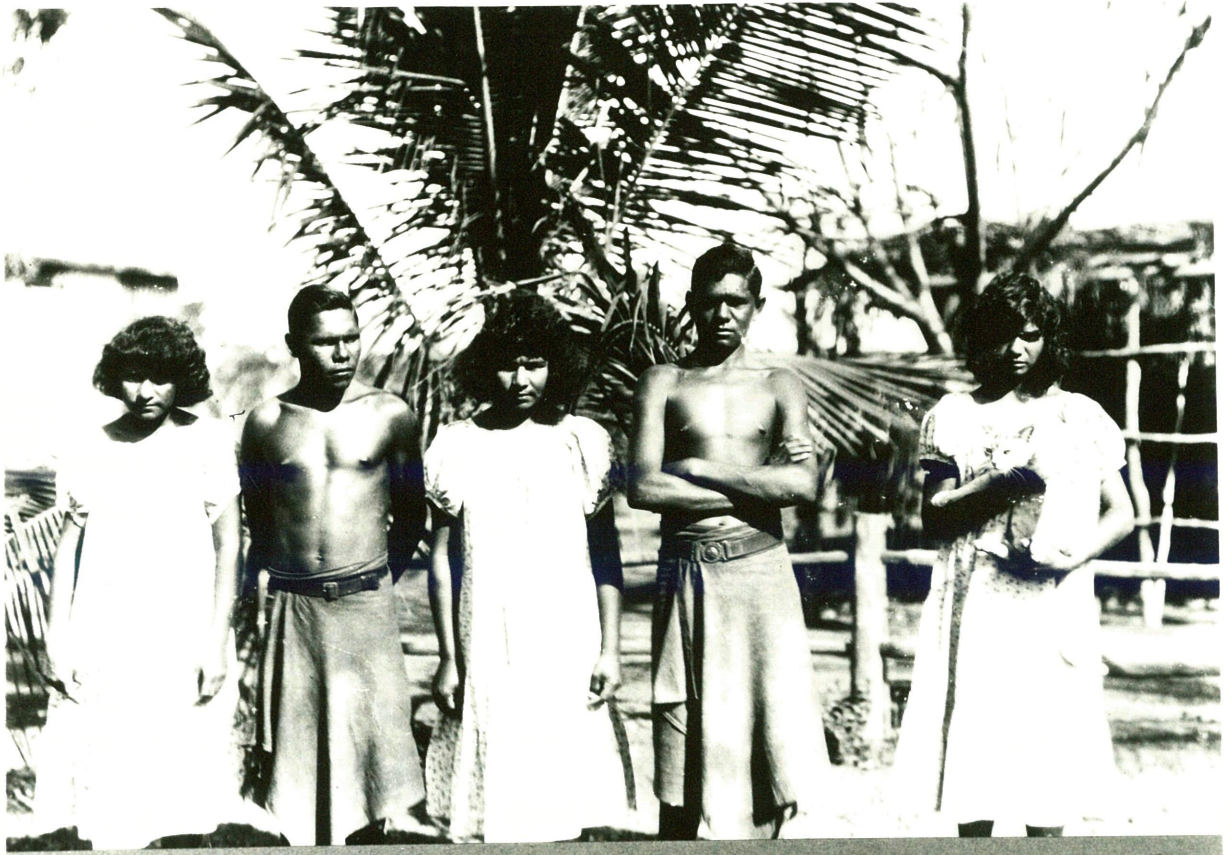
Plate 8. J.W. Bleakley Photograph.
(AA, CRS A263, NN)



*Halfcaste Inmates.- Groote Eylandt Mission
Rev^d H. E. Warren.*

Plate 9. J.W. Bleakley Photograph.

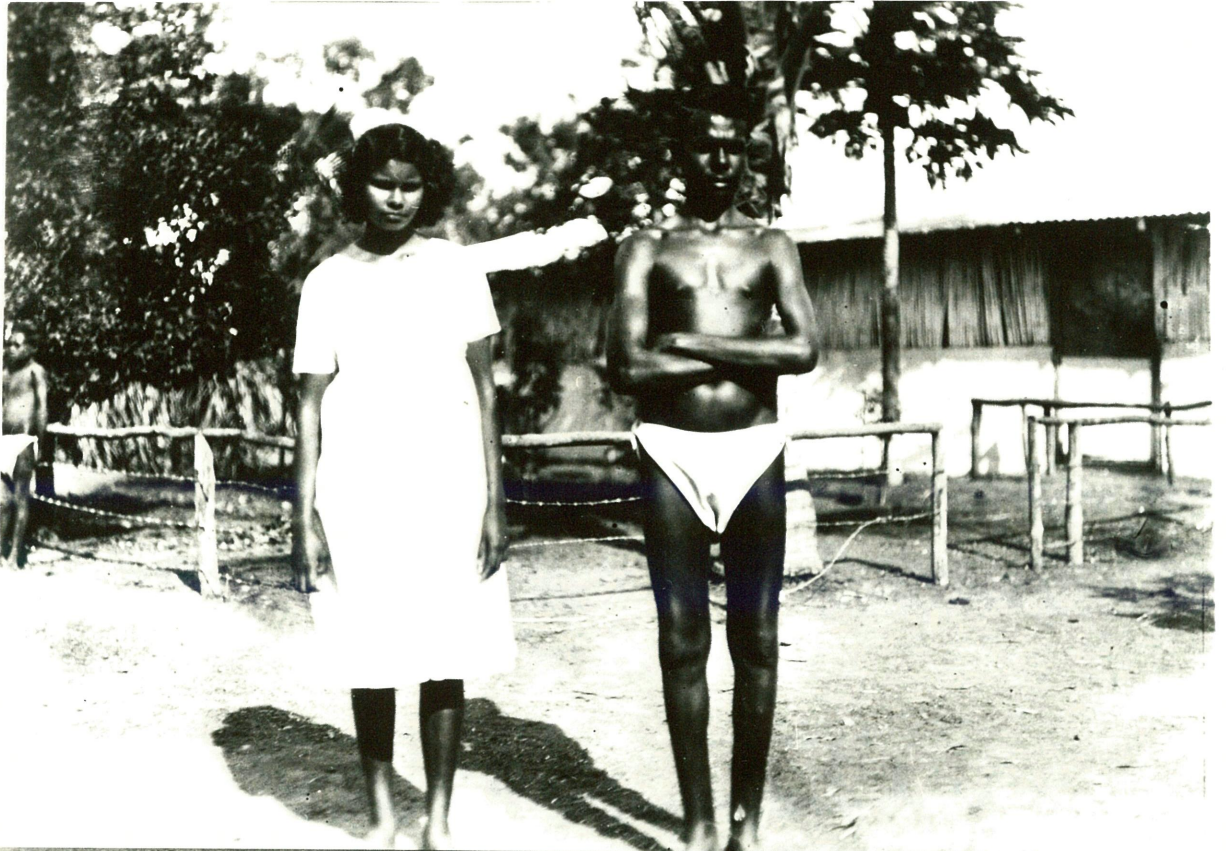
(AA, CRS A263, NN)



*Halfcaste boys & girls - receiving vocational
training Groot Eylandt M.S.N.*

Plate 10. J.W. Bleakley Photograph.

(AA, CRS A263, NN)



*Halfcaste boy, girl - Goulburn Is Mission -
Since sent to Southern College for vocational training*

Plate 11. J.W. Bleakley Photograph.
(AA, CRS A263, NN)



Plate 12. J.W. Bleakley Photograph.
(AA, CRS A263, NN)

tribal ancestors".⁸⁴ In the Northern Territory a more far-sighted scheme was in process; there, according to Cook:

the policy has been to endeavour to save the white element in the half-caste from further dilution and to encourage the half-caste to qualify for and accept the duties of citizenship. So far from regarding the quadroon, as Mr Bleakley does, as a menace even more deplorable, considerable care has been exercised in raising these delicate children, with a view to their future availability in the total breeding out of colour.⁸⁵

Cook may not have fairly represented Bleakley's views, but it was an accurate summary of his own administrative ambitions: to solve the half-caste problem by encouraging the marriage of mixed-blood women to white men, so that within a few generations all apparent traces of Aboriginal descent would be "bred out".

Bleakley's recommendation, that categories of part-Aborigines should receive differential treatment according to their percentage of white blood, had in fact been in operation in the Northern Territory for some years before 1928, although on an irregular and *ad hoc* basis. In March 1925 Chief Protector Dudley initiated moves for finding an alternative home for three quadroon children from the Darwin half-caste institution. They were, he wrote, "to all intents and purposes white children and should be removed from their present surroundings".⁸⁶ Administrator Urquhart concurred, adding that quadroons "should have a reasonably better outlook than is available for the ordinary halfcaste children".⁸⁷ After some negotiation, the children were sent to the Methodist Dalmar Home in New South Wales, and from there adopted out to private families.⁸⁸ While a number of part-Aborigines of fair

⁸⁴ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 1.3.1929, AA, CRS A431, 46/3026; also Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 11.6.1929, in the same file.

⁸⁵ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 11.6.1929, AA, CRS A431, 46/3026; also Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 1.3.1929, in the same file.

⁸⁶ Dudley to Deputy Admin., 23.3.1925, AA, CRS A452, 52/420.

⁸⁷ Urquhart to Sec., Home and Terr., 7.12.1925, AA, CRS A452, 52/420.

⁸⁸ See S. Jarvis, Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, to Chief Protector, 1.12.1925, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A452, 52/420. Formal adoption of these children presented formidable legal problems; see the various letters to and from the Attorney-General's Department in this file.

complexion fell victim to this sort of preferential treatment, the major criterion on which half-castes were divided was sex.

It had long been considered that half-caste girls constituted a far greater problem than their brothers. In 1915 the Reverend J.R.B. Love claimed that the "future of the half-caste boy need not ... cause misgiving", for he could easily find employment and "take his place as a white man". Not so for the half-caste girl, who was in "the saddest position of all".⁸⁹ In his official report for the same year, Chief Inspector Beckett remarked that the "lot of the half-caste man is necessarily much easier than that of his sister", for the former could find respectable employment while the latter was often forced by circumstance into immorality.⁹⁰ Moral weakness was frequently attributed to half-caste girls, although as in the case of Beckett, it was not necessarily assumed that this defect derived from their racial inheritance. The girls' need for moral protection was a major reason for locating the Darwin Half-caste Home adjacent to the house of the Compound Superintendent and Matron.⁹¹ In the Darwin Home, as in the Alice Springs Bungalow, females substantially outnumbered males, the authorities taking the pragmatic view that if half-caste boys were being adequately looked after on the pastoral stations, it was best to leave well enough alone.⁹² For girls, however, institutional confinement was considered necessary, as their chances of respectable employment were small, the likelihood of their falling victim to male lust was high, and their role in the procreation of the next generation of part-Aborigines a cause for concern.

⁸⁹ Love, *The Aborigines: Their Present Condition*, p.32. Love was still arguing along similar lines in 1930; see Love, "What the Missions are Doing", p.16.

⁹⁰ Beckett, "Report", 1915, p.28.

⁹¹ Gov. Sec., Darwin, to Sec., Home and Terr., 5.4.1923, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A452, 52/284.

⁹² "Bleakley Report, 1928", p.14. Cecil Cook, however, claimed that the reasons for the preponderance of girls in the institutions were the higher birth-rate of half-caste females and overcrowding in the Homes. "Had sufficient accommodation been available", he claimed, "the boys would also have been brought in"; Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 11.6.1929, AA, CRS A431, 46/3026.

Institutions could provide protection, education and training for children, but life-long institutionalisation was hardly practicable, particularly since the declared object of the exercise was to mould the inmates into capable and independent citizens. From around 1918, a number of part-Aboriginal adolescents were sent into service interstate; the vast majority were girls, mostly from the Alice Springs district.⁹³ Motivations behind their being sent to Adelaide and other cities may well have been mixed; but officials did argue that the girls would benefit from a more civilised environment than could be found in the Northern Territory. Some misgivings were expressed about the practice, Baldwin Spencer remarking:

At the present day a certain number of the girls [from the Alice Springs Bungalow] are sent down to Adelaide to domestic service in private houses. Though these, thanks to the Protector, Sergeant Stott, are carefully selected, the advisability of this system is open to grave doubt. The girls are isolated, they have no friends on their own footing and, with their peculiar natures, may be very easily led astray and ruined.⁹⁴

There were problems along the lines suggested by Spencer;⁹⁵ at times the girls were not paid the full wages due to them;⁹⁶ and at times the employers were not satisfied with the standard of employee they received.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, the system was retained. To ensure that the Northern Territory girls in Adelaide were properly supervised and domiciled in respectable surroundings, arrangements were made for regular inspections by Official Visitors from the South Australian Advisory Board of Aborigines, and by Honorary Lady Visitors nominated by the Aborigines' Friends' Association

⁹³ Lists of Half-caste Girls and Boys from Northern Territory employed in South Australia, c.March 1925; List of Half-castes, Quadroons and Octoroons under agreement from Half-caste depot Alice Springs, 29.11.1926; R. Stott, Chief Protector, Central Australia, to J.C. Cawood, Gov. Res., Alice Springs, 10.3.1927; all in AA, CRS A1, 36/7846. Cook to Gov. Res, Darwin, c.October 1927, AA, CRS A1, 29/1972.

⁹⁴ Spencer Report, 1923, p.18, AA, CRS A1, 30/1542.

⁹⁵ Neville House (for PM), to Premier, SA, 30.8.1927; Premier, SA, to PM, 30.9.1927, AA, CRS A461, F300/1.

⁹⁶ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, c.October 1927, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 29/1972.

⁹⁷ Senator H.P. Foll to C.W.C. Marr, Canberra, 23.11.1927, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 27/21687.

and the Women's Non-Party Association.⁹⁸ Surveillance could never be relaxed.

There were some successes, in terms of the desired goal of uplifting the girls into the respectable working class. But success brought its own problems. Half-caste girls who had lived for some years in Adelaide became familiar with the aspirations and expectations of white Australian city-dwellers and came to desire their liberty from restrictive Aboriginal laws. In 1927 two such part-Aborigines - by then women over 21 years of age - wrote to Sergeant Stott, Protector at Alice Springs, requesting control of their own bank accounts and "freedom from being under the Government".⁹⁹ Their requests were expressed with propriety: they attended church regularly, were responsible with money, diligent in their employment, and were grateful for the opportunities in life which they had been given. Sergeant Stott was convinced that their applications were "honest, Sincere and just", and recommended that they be "freed from Control of Chief Protector as their Legal guardian, so that these unfortunate girls may be given every opportunity of improving their Domestic and Social position as a Citizen".¹⁰⁰ After considerable deliberation, the Minister for Home and Territories approved their "release from the control of the Chief Protector", adding that others like them, over 18 years of age and appropriately civilised, could also be "released".¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ L. Atkinson (for PM), to Premier, SA, 12.5.1925, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A461, F300/1. Davoren, Home and Terr., memo, 16.4.1928, AA, CRS A1, 36/7846.

⁹⁹ Eileen Cooper to Stott, 8.2.1927; Topsy Fitz to Stott, 22.2.1927; both in AA, CRS A1, 36/7846.

¹⁰⁰ Stott to Cawood, 10.3.1927, AA, CRS A1, 36/7846.

¹⁰¹ J.G. McLaren, Sec., Home and Terr., to Gov. Res., Alice Springs, 10.11.1927, AA, CRS A1, 36/7846. Although the term "release" was used in official correspondence, it appears somewhat inappropriate, for it was decided that according to the Aboriginals Ordinance 1918-1927, control of the Chief Protector over half-caste girls ceased at the age of 18, except in "special cases". In addition, it was doubtful whether the Chief Protector's powers ever extended beyond the boundaries of the Northern Territory.

Bleakley commended the system of sending quadroon and fairer castes inter-state, where their prospects for employment and improvement were greater.¹⁰² In 1934 the Minister for the Interior, J.A. Perkins, published advertisements in various newspapers, seeking people or institutions willing to take on the care and education of some 50 fair-complexioned part-Aborigines, mostly girls, from the Northern Territory. A number of viable offers were received.¹⁰³ Chief Protector Cook, however, opposed the scheme. He insisted that because the girls were the potential mothers of the next generation of lighter skinned children, they should remain in the Territory where their reproductive activities would have the desired demographic effects. The removal of quadroons and octoroons, he argued:

would introduce a further factor of depopulation into the settlement problems of the Territory, further reducing the white or near white population and exaggerating the percentage of colour.¹⁰⁴

In Cook's scheme for solving the half-caste problem through a program of controlled breeding, the retention of part-Aboriginal girls of fair complexion was particularly important, as they made more attractive potential spouses for white males than did their darker sisters.¹⁰⁵ Besides, quadroons were already well on the road to being proper white Australians. Cook also objected to sending part-Aborigines out of the Territory on the grounds that past actions along these lines had "not been attended with the success anticipated", the children often returning to the Territory after failing "to find a place as

¹⁰² Bleakley to Sec., Home and Terr., 11.2.1929, AA, CRS A1, 36/7846. See also "Bleakley Report, 1928", p.29. Bleakley was careful to specify that those children sent interstate should be fair complexioned, and should be under continual supervision.

¹⁰³ See correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 34/6800. See also H. Barrenger, Int., memo, 2.7.1934; Barrenger, memo, 6.8.1934; both in AA, CRS A452, 52/420.

¹⁰⁴ Cook to Acting Admin., 12.9.1934, AA, CRS A452, 52/420. See also Cook to Acting Admin., 30.4.1934, AA, CRS A1, 34/5541.

¹⁰⁵ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 1.3.1929; Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 11.6.1929; both in AA, CRS A431, 46/3026.

citizens in the Southern States".¹⁰⁶ His primary objection, however, was to the loss of good breeding stock.

Cook's scheme of breeding out the colour was an extreme variant of the notion that the half-caste constituted a bridge between the primitive Aborigine and the civilised white. Already half way to civilisation, further accessions of white blood would push the half-caste not only into full civilisation but into full whiteness as well. Although the scheme flew in the face of some ideas about the deleterious effects of race crossing which still held credibility, it was fully in accord with another strand of racial thought which had been gaining ground since the end of the nineteenth century. According to this theory, Aborigines represented a primitive root-stock of the racial tree which led ultimately to the Caucasian.

An Aboriginal Caucasian

A prominent strand of racial theorising in the late nineteenth century postulated that Aborigines were a hybrid race, one element of which had a remote kinship with Europeans.¹⁰⁷ Without pushing the kinship too close for comfort, it was argued that if the tangled threads of racial history were traced back far enough, a degree of common ancestry could be found. In 1893 Alfred Russel Wallace snipped through the tangle. The Australian Aborigines, he stated, "must be classed as Caucasians".¹⁰⁸ In his autobiography, Wallace claimed this classification to be original, and "an important simplification in

¹⁰⁶ Cook to Acting Admin., 12.9.1934, AA, CRS A452, 52/420. In a letter to Cook dated 11.9.1934, in the same file, the Superintendent of the Kahlin Compound, V.J. White, provided a more detailed account of the alleged failure of attempts to civilise the half-castes by sending them interstate. In a rare - and probably unintentional - flight of poetic fancy, White described those sent south as "exiles wilting under banishment from their natural habitat".

¹⁰⁷ This idea has been alluded to in Chapter One, in the context of Howitt's and Mathews' theories.

¹⁰⁸ A.R. Wallace, *Australia and New Zealand*, London, 1893, p.152. On the following page he added that they were "the lowest and the most primitive" representatives of the race.

the classification of the races of man".¹⁰⁹ Certainly it was a good deal simpler than the convoluted sequences of racial migrations and crossings which characterised the writings of contemporary specialists. Preferring a more straightforward line of evolutionary development, Wallace proposed "the three great divisions of mankind, Negroid, Mongolian, and Caucasian" as the "well-marked types" from which all existing varieties of humanity had developed, and into which they could still be fitted.¹¹⁰ However, Wallace appears to have had more in mind than mere convenience of classification. Because the Aborigines were "nearly allied to ourselves", he implied that they were deserving of respect.¹¹¹ Since the late 1860s Wallace had drifted further and further from the conventional assumptions of racial superiority and inferiority; he could not altogether escape them.¹¹² His Caucasian classification of the Aborigines seems to have been, in part, an attempt to elevate their status. In the hierarchy of races, there could be no more effective way of doing this.

In Australia, the Caucasian classification found a receptive audience amongst humanitarian lobbyists. Archdeacon Lefroy, in his 1911 address to the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, claimed Aborigines "to be a fairly distinct race, mainly of Caucasian origin".¹¹³ On the opening page of her book *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, M.M. Bennett asserted that: "Like us they belong to the Caucasian stock".¹¹⁴ For Bennett and other activists on the Aborigines' behalf, racial kinship was useful device for fostering public interest in their plight.

¹⁰⁹ A.R. Wallace, *My Life: A Record of Events and Opinions*, London, 1905, vol.2, p.390. Although many specialists had previously posited a distant and partial common ancestry, I am unaware of any earlier published statement that the Aborigines were Caucasian.

¹¹⁰ Wallace, *Australia and New Zealand*, p.156.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.156.

¹¹² See Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp.66-77.

¹¹³ Lefroy, "The Future of the Australian Aborigines", p.453.

¹¹⁴ Bennett, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*, p.13.

Among Australian scientists too, the theory of Aboriginal-European relatedness struck root. By 1909 Ramsay Smith could claim that it had been "established that the aborigines are an homogeneous race, unmixed in descent, of Caucasian stock, not negro or negrito".¹¹⁵ His fellow anatomist Frederic Wood Jones was a prominent advocate of the idea that the Aborigine was "a pioneer from the home-lands that subsequently gave birth to the white usurpers of his hunting-grounds".¹¹⁶ According to Wood Jones, the Aborigines' "next of kin" were to be found "not among any negro race - but among the races of the north and west of the Mediterranean area".¹¹⁷ Having migrated out of the Mediterranean homeland in the long-distant past, subsequent isolation had ensured that the Aborigines remained "a pure race - a race as pure as any that exists in the world today".¹¹⁸ Herbert Basedow took a slightly different route to the same conclusion. According to his theory, Aborigines represented the root stock of the Caucasian race, whose line of evolution had very early dissociated from the Mongoloid and Negroid strands.¹¹⁹ Thus there was a particular pointedness in his statement that:

the Australian aboriginal stands somewhere near the bottom rung of the great evolutionary ladder we have ascended - he the bud, we the glorified flower of human culture.¹²⁰

In a literal sense, Aborigines were "the prototype of man as he appeared in Europe in the Stone Age".¹²¹ Primitive as they were, Aborigines were racially closer to Europeans than to any of the other primary divisions of humanity. Basedow suggested that therein lay a solution to the half-caste

¹¹⁵ Smith, "The Aborigines of Australia", p.160. On the previous page he alluded to Wallace's statements on the matter.

¹¹⁶ Jones, *Australia's Vanishing Race*, pp.11-12.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.11. See also Jones, "The Aborigines of Australia", pp.109-10.

¹¹⁸ Jones, *Australia's Vanishing Race*, p.32. Wood Jones expressed some reservations about the concept of a "pure race"; nonetheless, he maintained that "the term may be applied to the Australian race, perhaps more fittingly than to any other existing people"; Jones, "The Aborigines of Australia", p.112.

¹¹⁹ H. Basedow, *The Australian Aboriginal*, Adelaide, 1925, pp.22-30, 57-59. In the preface, Basedow acknowledged his intellectual indebtedness to Hermann Klaatsch, under whom he had studied in Germany; *ibid.*, p.x.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p.58.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.58.

problem, for the mixed offspring of the related Aboriginal and European races rapidly and progressively whitened over successive generations.¹²²

In the 1920s, blood-group tests were incorporated into the scientific techniques for assessing racial affinities.¹²³ Among the first Australians to utilise this procedure was A.H. Tebbutt, a medical scientist at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney. From his research, Tebbutt made "the tentative inference that the aboriginals come from the same primitive stock as the English, and are more Western European in type than the English".¹²⁴ More detailed and more comprehensive investigations into the blood-type of the Aborigines were carried out by Dr J.B. Cleland and his colleagues on the Board for Anthropological Research at the University of Adelaide.¹²⁵ Like Tebbutt, Cleland expressed his findings with circumspection:

There is some evidence [from blood-group tests] to make us think that the Australian aboriginal is more closely akin to us perhaps than is the Chinaman or the Negro, and those who have seen a good deal of him will agree that he has many traits in common with the white man.¹²⁶

Cleland also maintained that "the Australian aboriginal represents a wonderfully homogenous type".¹²⁷ Admitting that along the far northern

¹²² *ibid.*, p.59.

¹²³ See Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp.102-03, 178-79.

¹²⁴ A.H. Tebbutt, "Second Report on the Comparative Iso-agglutinin Index of the Australian Aborigines and Australians", *Proceedings of the Pan-Pacific Science Congress*, 1923, vol.1, p.244. In 1922, 1923 and 1926 Tebbutt, in collaboration with S.V. McConnell and H.K. Lee, published a number of brief papers dealing with Aboriginal blood type in the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

¹²⁵ See for example H. Woollard and J.B. Cleland, "Anthropology and Blood-Grouping, with special reference to the Australian Aborigines", *Man*, vol.29, November 1929, pp.181-88. Other colleagues who worked with Cleland on the blood-group studies included Cecil Hackett and T.H. Johnston; all were from the Medical School at the University of Adelaide. Between 1929 and 1938, Cleland published at least twelve papers on Aboriginal blood-type (five in collaboration with one or another of these colleagues) in specialist journals such as *The Australian Journal of Experimental Biology and Medical Science*, the *Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* and the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

¹²⁶ Cleland, "The Native of Central Australia and his Surroundings", pp.69-70. In this article, Cleland attempted to make his findings accessible to the lay public; his publications in specialist journals were hedged around with still more professional circumspection.

¹²⁷ Woollard and Cleland, "Anthropology and Blood-Grouping", p.187.

coastline there may have been a slight infusion of Malay, Chinese and Papuan blood - the term can be taken literally in this context - he argued that:

Such admixture of race was ... comparatively recent, and we have good evidence that the alien blood has not penetrated far south. On the grounds of physical anthropology, and especially on the results of the blood-grouping of the natives of Southern Australia, I see good reason for considering that these folk are a pure race, and that, if a Tasmanian people did precede them, it has left no evidence of its absorption by them.¹²⁸

The denial of a Tasmanian element in the mainlanders' ancestry was important, for the Tasmanians were regarded as negroid or negrito in affinities. Negroid characteristics, unlike those of primitive Caucasians, did not readily fade by intermixture with the white race.

Among Australian scientists, Dr Cleland was probably the foremost advocate of biological absorption as a means of resolving the half-caste problem. Writing as the Chairman of the Board for Anthropological Research, he advised the Minister for the Interior that the absorption of half-castes into the white population was feasible, because:

The physical characteristics of the Australian aboriginal are not dominant and there are not throw-backs to the original type when individuals with native blood marry whites. An octoroon is almost indistinguishable from a pure-blooded white person.¹²⁹

At the 1937 Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, Cleland argued that there was "only one satisfactory solution to the half-caste problem", and that was "the ultimate absorption of these persons in the white population".¹³⁰ He also urged the Commonwealth government to fund scientific investigation into the half-caste problem, as it had not yet been ascertained whether part-Aborigines were capable of adopting a fully civilised way of life.¹³¹ At the time, N.B. Tindale, another member of the Board for Anthropological Research, had already begun negotiations with Professor E.A.

¹²⁸ Cleland, "The Native of Central Australia and his Surroundings", p.68.

¹²⁹ Cleland to Parkhouse, Min. Int., 4.10.1932, Cleland Collection.

¹³⁰ *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities*, Canberra, 1937, p.10.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, pp.10, 25.

Hooton of Harvard University, to obtain funding for such a study through the Carnegie Corporation.¹³²

Although Cleland had argued since the early 1930s that a scheme of biological absorption was feasible, on the grounds that descendants of mixed race did not "throw-back" to the Aboriginal side of their ancestry, the empirical foundations of this claim were tenuous. Indeed, it appears to have been based on nothing more than anecdotal evidence, combined with the theory of a racial relationship between Aborigines and Caucasians. As late as October 1939, he had to admit in private correspondence that the view:

that there is no 'throw back' in intermixtures of half-castes with whites appears to be quite correct though there appears to be no scientific statement backed with data in support of this as yet published.¹³³

He went on to remark that:

Mr Tindale, the Ethnologist at the South Australian Museum, has for some time been making an extensive search for any such statement. Recent researches are entirely in favour of the view [that Aboriginal ancestry does not throw back], and within the next couple of years data in support of this will probable [sic] be published.¹³⁴

In 1941 it was, with the publication of Tindale's "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem in South Australia", based on his and J.B. Birdsell's researches under the auspices of the joint Harvard-Adelaide Universities' Expedition of 1938-39.¹³⁵

¹³² N.B. Tindale to Dr F.P. Keppel, Carnegie Corporation of New York, 20.10.1936; Tindale to Hon. Sec., Board for Anthropological Research, 7.5.1937; both in J.B. Cleland, Miscellaneous Papers, Letters, Reprints, concerning anthropology etc., UAA, 572, C61, SR2, (hereafter Cleland Papers), box 1, folder 1. See also minutes of the meeting of the Board for Anthropological Research, 23.9.1937, UAA, Board for Anthropological Research: Minutes, vol.1, December 1926-August 1956.

¹³³ Cleland to Dr H.O. Lethbridge, 6.10.1939, Cleland Papers, box 1, folder 1.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ N.B. Tindale, "Survey of the Half-caste Problem in South Australia", *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch*, vol.42, session 1940-41, pp.66-161. Although the title specified South Australia, Tindale's researches for this article covered every state in Australia.

Tindale's endorsement of absorption was scarcely surprising. On 5 May 1938 - before the Expedition set out - E.A. Hooton, Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University, had listed as one of its objectives:

It is agreed that there should be stressed the capacity of the hybrids for adapting themselves to European civilization, since this group of the population constitutes a government problem, and it is possible that the assistance of the government may be enlisted in the work.¹³⁶

Tindale's research was meticulous. Genealogical information was elicited from over 2,500 people of mixed descent, who were also subjected to "sets of questions designed to bring out various aspects of their life, their adjustments, failures, and the difficulties they had found in meeting new conditions of life".¹³⁷ His colleague, Dr Birdsell, focussed more narrowly on physical anthropology, examining and measuring the majority (2,458) of those studied by Tindale.¹³⁸

Tindale discussed four possible policies for dealing with the half-caste problem, listing them as "(a) Segregation (b) Assimilation (c) Sterilisation (d) An uncertain or drifting policy".¹³⁹ The last of these, he claimed, characterised existing half-caste administration in the various states and the Territory. Tindale regarded it as a "negative" policy, producing "large populations of partly dependant, partly acculturated, rather illiterate people".¹⁴⁰ Sterilisation was dismissed as "a matter of academic interest only", as there was little likelihood of its ever being employed.¹⁴¹ Segregation from the white community was worthy of more serious consideration,

¹³⁶ E.A. Hooton, Joint Research of the University of Adelaide and the Division of Anthropology of Harvard University, with the cooperation of the Museum of South Australia: Objective, 5.5.1938, Cleland Papers, box 3, folder 6.

¹³⁷ Tindale, "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", p.160.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.160.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p.116. By "assimilation", Tindale meant biological absorption. To clearly distinguish this from the policy of social assimilation which was advocated by A.P. Elkin and others at the time, Tindale's proposal is here designated 'absorption', except in quotation.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.116.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.116.

particularly since it was the policy followed on some missions and reserves.¹⁴² According to Tindale, the segregation of half-castes had been advocated partly as a means of guarding against an internal undermining of the White Australia ideal.¹⁴³ However, this policy posed major problems, for on their isolated settlements people of mixed descent reproduced much more rapidly than the general Australian population. In terms of maintaining a White Australia, the growth of these "dark ethnic pockets" constituted more of a problem than a solution.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, there were practical considerations, Tindale arguing that:

Segregation does not entirely prevent crossing and may be only a temporary expedient; it seems possible therefore that isolation policies would merely provide an ultimately greater reservoir of mixed bloods for future absorption by the dominant ethnic type.¹⁴⁵

As a means of solving the half-caste problem, segregation was self-defeating.

Absorption, according to Tindale, offered the only viable resolution to the half-caste dilemma. The crossing of black and white Australians posed no biological threat, Tindale asserting that:

Complete merrgence of the half-castes in the general community is possible without detriment to the white race. Their aboriginal blood is remotely the same as that of the majority of the white inhabitants of Australia, for the Australian aboriginal is recognised as being a forerunner of the Caucasian race. In addition, the half-castes are increasingly of our own blood, in places the majority of them already are more than half-white. Two successive accessions of white blood lead to the merrgence of the aboriginal in the white community. There are no biological reasons for the rejection of people with a dilute strain of Australian aboriginal blood. A low percentage of Australian aboriginal blood will not introduce any aberrant characteristics and there need be no fear of reversions to the dark aboriginal type.¹⁴⁶

Birdsell agreed, claiming that in European-Aboriginal crosses there was "no danger of a throw-back to the aboriginal type as was the case with the Negro and the general absorption of the Australian into the white population should

¹⁴² *ibid.*, pp.93-100, 117-18.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p.122.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp.97-100, 103-06, 122-23.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.123; also pp.97, 117-18.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.67.

be easy".¹⁴⁷ Moreover, mixed-bloods possessed adaptive powers far superior to their full-blood progenitors. Tindale maintained that his and Birdsell's genealogical data revealed:

the varying degree in which the inadaptable fullbloods have been replaced by a new cross-bred stock which is capable of surviving and even of increasing under the changed conditions of white occupation.¹⁴⁸

Miscegenated stock, with their increased adaptability, were able to make their way in modern Australian society.

The passage of mixed-bloods into white society, he observed, was already "occurring naturally".¹⁴⁹ In the course of his genealogical investigations, Tindale quickly discovered:

how under favourable circumstances whole groups of 1/4 castes have passed over into the white community and are even climbing the social scale and becoming small farmers, railway porters, carpenters and even government employees.¹⁵⁰

This process should be fostered, through:

the dispersal of all artificial aggregates of mixed-bloods and the real training of the rising generation to take their place in the general community.¹⁵¹

Absorption, in Tindale's version, had both biological and social dimensions. The ultimate objective was the complete disappearance of mixed-bloods as a distinct ethnic group. Its achievement entailed a good deal of social amelioration, raising the educational, vocational and economic standards of the half-castes to a level which made them fit members of a civilised society - and fit spouses for white people.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Summary of a lecture delivered by Dr J.B. Birdsell before the Anthropological Society of South Australia on 24th July, 1939, Cleland Collection.

¹⁴⁸ Tindale, "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", p.125.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.118.

¹⁵⁰ Tindale, Palm Island, to J.B. Cleland, 23.10.1938, Cleland Papers, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁵¹ Tindale, "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", p.68.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, pp.138-154.

There were, Tindale admitted, some problems with a policy of absorption. White prejudice against persons of mixed descent was "gradually increasing", a phenomena which he attributed to the transmission of American antagonism toward Negro-white crosses, as Australia came more and more under the cultural influence of the United States.¹⁵³ Tindale dismissed this as an irrational prejudice, since the Aborigines were "fundamentally not negroid in ethnic constitution".¹⁵⁴ He recognised too, that not all mixed-bloods were entirely of European and Aboriginal descent, many families having an ancestry which included Maori, Chinese, Indian, Afghan, Negro and numerous other races. For the purposes of his absorptionist policy, Tindale tended to minimise the significance of these additional racial elements.¹⁵⁵ He conceded that absorption may have been feasible only in the more densely settled parts of Australia, where a large white population provided the necessary absorbing substance. Thus, he cautioned:

Where the population of half-castes is greater than the white population amongst whom they are living, such assimilation is, seemingly, entirely impracticable. In practice, therefore, areas such as the Broome district in Western Australia, a large part of the Northern Territory and the northern half of Queensland could not be subjected to this device with the same effect as would occur in settled districts of the south-east and southern parts of Australia.¹⁵⁶

He managed, however, to convert this apparent problem into a plausible virtue by conjuring up the old dispute over whether the white race was fitted to the tropics, suggesting that:

the introduction of a low percentage of a primitive Australian strain may provide just that extra range of variation necessary for the ultimate selection and development of a white stock adjusted to the tropical parts of Australia.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, pp.86-90, 121-22.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.87.

¹⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, pp.109-11.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.120; also p.92. It bears noting that the Northern Territory and Western Australia were the two places where schemes of biological absorption had already been put into operation.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.124.

Tropical half-castes could, eventually, be absorbed; it would merely take longer than in the south, with the additional benefit of an environmentally well-adjusted population in the meantime.¹⁵⁸

Although both Tindale and Birdsell publicly championed the cause of biological absorption, their investigations on the Harvard-Adelaide Universities' Expedition of 1938-39 led to some findings which were not easily reconciled with an absorptionist policy. Cleland and his colleagues had claimed the Aborigines to be not only Caucasian in type but also a remarkably pure race; this was fundamental to the argument that Aboriginal ancestry would not "throw-back" in later generations of crossing. As well as their half-caste surveys, Tindale and Birdsell also conducted investigations among full-bloods, from which they concluded that "the Australian aboriginal no longer may be considered as a pure race of unusual homogeneity, but a well-blended group of at least dihybrid and probably trihybrid origin".¹⁵⁹ The initial impetus for this theoretical line appears to have been provided by their observations of the rain forest inhabitants of north Queensland, who differed in blood-type, physical features, customs and language from the surrounding Aborigines.¹⁶⁰ These people appeared to be most closely akin to the Tasmanians, classified as a "negritic" race, and thus having affinities with the negroid type.¹⁶¹ Tindale and Birdsell postulated that the Australian mainland had once been occupied by Tasmanian negritos, who were isolated in remote regions such as island Tasmania and highland rainforests when the continent was subsequently invaded by two waves of immigrants, whom they tentatively

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.124.

¹⁵⁹ N.B. Tindale and J.B. Birdsell, "Results of the Harvard-Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition, 1938-1939: Tasmanoid Tribes in North Queensland", *Records of the South Australian Museum*, vol.7, no.1, 27 October 1941, p.6.

¹⁶⁰ Tindale to Cleland, 23.10.1938, Cleland Papers, box 1, folder 1. Field Impressions: Summary of a Lecture delivered by Dr J.B. Birdsell before the Anthropological Society of South Australia on 24th July, 1939, (hereafter Birdsell, Field Impressions), Cleland Collection. Tindale and Birdsell, "Tasmanoid Tribes", pp.1-8.

¹⁶¹ Tindale and Birdsell, "Tasmanoid Tribes", p.5; Birdsell, Field Impressions.

termed "Southern" and "Northern" ethnic groups.¹⁶² "Between these three primary ethnic strains", they wrote, "intermixture has long continued on a generous scale".¹⁶³

The supposition that Aborigines were compounded out of three distinct types, one of which had negroid affinities, would seem to pose some problems for the absorptionist argument. The case for absorption could still be salvaged, by postulating that the later immigrants had some racial kinship with Europeans, and that these became the dominant types over most of the continent. This appears to have been Tindale's way out of the dilemma, although the argument was more implied than explained.¹⁶⁴ In fact, in the ninety-five pages of his "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", the "archaic negrito strain" received only one passing mention, and that to minimise its significance as merely a "theoretical" consideration.¹⁶⁵ Yet according to Tindale's own research, the negrito element in north-east Queensland and amongst the Tasmanian descendants on Cape Barren Island could not be so lightly dismissed. In his "Survey of the Half-caste Problem" he made no mention of the north Queensland rainforest negritos, despite the fact that in another contemporary publication he claimed that they occupied a considerable area, were reasonably numerous and had spread their "negritic" genes into surrounding Aboriginal tribes.¹⁶⁶ The Tasmanian descendants on

¹⁶² Tindale and Birdsell, "Tasmanoid Tribes", pp.1, 5-6. The "Southern" and "Northern" groups later acquired greater fame as the Murrayian and Carpentarian races; the rainforest negritos were termed Barrinean, after Lake Barrine in north Queensland. See C.S. Coon, S.M. Garn and J.B. Birdsell, *Races: A Study of the Problems of Race Formation in Man*, Springfield, Ill., 1950, pp.115-127; N.B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia: Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits and Proper Names*, Canberra, 1974, pp.89-93.

¹⁶³ Tindale and Birdsell, "Tasmanoid Tribes", p.2.

¹⁶⁴ This argument could be inferred from an unpublished paper by Tindale, entitled *Race Crossing in Australia and Tasmania*, dated 10.10.1941, Cleland Collection. However, it would strain credibility to the limit to infer any such argument from his "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem"; there, the anomaly was simply ignored.

¹⁶⁵ Tindale, "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", p.87.

¹⁶⁶ Tindale and Birdsell, "Tasmanoid Tribes". In his "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", pp.123-24, Tindale did mention a "Melanesian negroid ethnic element" on Cape York Peninsular, which had derived from the Torres Strait Islanders; it was quickly passed

Cape Barren Island did receive some consideration in the "Survey", but only to emphasise the allegation that they were so infused with European blood as to be regarded as "dark whites".¹⁶⁷ According to Tindale and Birdsell's theory, the original Tasmanians were a negroid or negrito race.¹⁶⁸ Yet in the "Survey", Tindale simply took for granted the absorbability of the Cape Barren Islanders, despite the negroid blood which flowed in their veins. This anomaly is all the more remarkable for the fact that in an unpublished paper Tindale claimed to have discovered:

a dihybrid 7/16 Tasmanian youth of the fourth generation [who] has 'thrown back' in his skin colour and features, so as to appear much like the ancestral Tasmanian; the degree of European admixture visible in his make-up being only a little more than that unconsciously introduced into the portraits of the Tasmanian by the European portraitist Dutereau.¹⁶⁹

This awkward finding was not mentioned in the published "Survey".

In "Tasmanoid Tribes in North Queensland" Tindale and Birdsell claimed to have made a "fundamental discovery in Australian anthropology", confirming the theory that the Australian Aborigines comprised three ethnic strains, one of which was negroid in affinities; the latter still survived in relatively pure form in north Queensland.¹⁷⁰ Yet in his "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem" published in the same year, Tindale made no mention of his "fundamental discovery" concerning the racial composition of the Aborigines, despite its apparent relevance to the question of the viability of biological absorption. It would seem that Tindale conveniently skated very lightly over those aspects of his own racial theories which were not quite congruent with the pre-determined advocacy of biological absorption.

over.

¹⁶⁷ Tindale, "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", pp.103, 129-30.

¹⁶⁸ In a lecture to the Anthropological Society of South Australia on July 24 1939, Birdsell stated that the Tasmanians were of "negroid origin"; Cleland Collection. In "Tasmanoid Tribes", p.5, Tindale and Birdsell claimed that the Tasmanians were "negritic".

¹⁶⁹ Tindale, Race Crossing in Australia and Tasmania, 10.10.1941, Cleland Collection.

¹⁷⁰ Tindale and Birdsell, "Tasmanoid Tribes", p.1.

There was yet another incongruity in Tindale's account of the half-caste problem and its solution. His discussion of the problem was framed in racial terms. The complexity of mixed-race inheritance was rendered into quasi-algebraic formulae, in which percentages of blood were supposed to give some indication of an individual's capacity for assimilation. Yet for all his detailed consideration of racial intermixture as a biological issue, in the final analysis, according to Tindale himself, the half-caste problem had its origins in social circumstances. After over fifty pages discussing the biology of race crossing, he wrote:

There seems little evidence to indicate that the difficulties of adjustment mixed breeds may have at present are particularly the result of marked ethnic inferiority. Physically many are of fine type ... their disabilities seem to be lack of education and home-training and the discouragement implicit in belonging to an outcast stock.... The majority are of a mediocre type, often but little inferior to the inhabitants of small white communities which have, through force of circumstances remained in poverty, ignorance or isolation.¹⁷¹

If the problem was predominantly social in genesis, why was a biological program of absorption necessary for its resolution? Tindale appears to have assumed that white Australians would never fully accept persons of Aboriginal descent as long as the outward signs remained.¹⁷² He even provided a "scale of absorbability"; although decorated with mathematical and algebraic symbols, it could be reduced to the simple statement that the paler and better educated the part-Aborigine, the more acceptable he or she was to white society.¹⁷³

Breed Out the Colour

Tindale's survey was the first detailed scientific investigation into the feasibility of biological absorption. By the time it was published, a policy of "breeding out the colour" had already been implemented in the Northern

¹⁷¹ Tindale, "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", p.124. The following thirty pages were devoted more to sociological issues, in which Tindale clearly indicated that, given appropriate facilities, mixed-race people were quite capable of educational and vocational advancement.

¹⁷² See *ibid.*, pp.120-24.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, pp.120-21.

Territory; and after a trial of almost a decade had already been abandoned. In the early 1930s, when the scheme was in its heyday, Dr Cecil Cook had proclaimed that in the Territory: "Every endeavour is being made to breed out the colour by elevating female half-castes to white standard with a view to their absorption by mating into the white population".¹⁷⁴ To buttress his proposals, Cook drew on the scientific theory of the Caucasian affinities of the Aboriginal race.¹⁷⁵ He drew more heavily on the anecdotal observation that apparent Aboriginal features faded rapidly with successive accessions of European blood. Most heavily of all, he drew on the fear that White Australia was under threat from the growth of a coloured community within the nation.

Cecil Cook was appointed to the dual position of Chief Medical Officer and Chief Protector of Aborigines in February 1927.¹⁷⁶ His appointment was based on his medical, not his Aboriginal, expertise.¹⁷⁷ Cook held the Diploma of Tropical Medicine, had studied for the Diploma of Public Health, had undertaken a study of the epidemiology of leprosy in northern Australia, and before his appointment to the Northern Territory was on the staff of the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine in Townsville. Like the first Commonwealth Chief Protector, Herbert Basedow, Cook was not only medically qualified; he was also convinced that "the function of Aboriginal Protection is a Medical preserve".¹⁷⁸ Breaking Aboriginal administration into

¹⁷⁴ Cook to Admin., 7.2.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

¹⁷⁵ See for example Cook to Admin., 27.6.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

¹⁷⁶ J. McLaren, Sec., Home and Terr., to Cook, 1.2.1927, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/11170.

¹⁷⁷ See J.H. Cumpston, Director-General of Health, to J. McLaren, Sec., Home and Terr., 8.12.1926, and subsequent correspondence, in AA, CRS A659, 39/1/11170. Cumpston appears to have been favourably disposed toward the appointment of Cook even before the position was advertised. In a letter to McLaren dated 27.9.1926 (in AA, CRS A659, 39/1/11170), Cumpston alluded to earlier discussions with the secretary of the Department of Home and Territories, in which he had supported Cook's appointment to the position of Chief Medical Officer. The position was first advertised in newspapers on 30.10.1926.

¹⁷⁸ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 1.3.1929, AA, CRS A431, 46/3026. For further detail on the importance which Cook attached to medical attention as a central aspect of Aboriginal administration see Cook to Admin., 10.8.1932, and Cook to Admin., 12.11.1932, both in AA, CRS A1, 34/1881; Cook to Admin., 19.6.1934, AA, CRS A1, 34/4888; Cook to Admin., 2.9.1938, Cook to Admin., 28.4.1938, Cook to Admin.,

four component parts - employment, care of the aged and infirm, care of the sick and care of the hybrid - he argued that each of these should be considered in medical terms.¹⁷⁹

His medical background was probably influential in shaping the eugenic element in Cook's policy. Cook was supportive of the classic eugenic proposal for the sterilisation of those designated unfit. In early 1933 he sought clarification on the question of whether he, as Chief Protector, could demand the compulsory sterilisation of those half-caste children who were classified as "congenital idiots" or as otherwise "mentally defective".¹⁸⁰ However, his scheme for breeding out the colour represented quite a different strand of eugenic thought. Australian eugenicists tended to emphasise nurture as much as nature, and Cook's scheme fitted into this environmental variant of eugenic ideas.¹⁸¹ He attached little significance to racial inheritance as a cause of the half-caste problem, regarding it rather as a possible solution.¹⁸² Moreover, he was well aware of how his scheme differed from classic eugenic prescriptions, explicitly offering it as an alternative. The uplift and biological absorption of half-castes was, he declared:

29.4.1938, all in AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

¹⁷⁹ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 1.3.1929, AA, CRS A431, 46/3026.

¹⁸⁰ Cook to Admin., 30.3.1933, AA, CRS A1, 33/3589. In response, the Crown Law Officer advised that Cook possessed no such authority, and the Director-General of Health, J.H. Cumpston, pointed out that there was no reliable evidence supporting the contention that sterilisation would appreciably reduce the total number of mental defectives in the community; E.T. Asche, Crown Law Officer, to Admin., 28.4.1933; Cumpston to Sec., Int., 23.6.1933; both in AA, CRS A1, 33/3589.

¹⁸¹ For analyses of the environmental emphasis in Australian eugenics see Bacchi, "The Nature-Nurture Debate in Australia"; Garton, "Sir Charles Mackellar"; see also Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*.

¹⁸² Tony Austin has claimed that Cook's scheme for breeding out the colour "represents an ultimate eugenic solution"; T. Austin, "Cecil Cook, Scientific Thought and 'Half-Castes' in the Northern Territory 1927-1939", *Aboriginal History*, vol.14, part 1, 1990, p.113. If this was so, it was only in the context of an extreme environmentalist variant of eugenics, a point on which Austin was not sufficiently clear. In terms of mainstream eugenics, breeding out the colour was nothing like an ultimate solution; that, during the time of Cook's protectorship, was taking shape in Germany.

the only method by which the future of this country can be safeguarded in the absence of such radical methods as sterilization of the unfit and legalized abortion.¹⁸³

Lacking these "radical methods" all that could be done was to conceal the outwards signs of Aboriginal descent, by successive accessions of white blood. Again in distinction from the classic eugenist viewpoint, Cook seems to have had no doubt that such concealment of hereditary was possible.

Although Cook's solution to the half-caste problem was ultimately biological, his conception of the nature of the problem itself was sociological. He contended that:

The importance of a coloured element contained within a white community is dependent upon the degree of assimilation taking place and the success or otherwise with which that coloured section adopts the social, economic and industrial standards of the white. Where the coloured individual is 'white' in all but colour very little conflict is likely to take place industrially ...¹⁸⁴

It was only where "the coloured element" maintained "different standards to the white" that there would be discord and conflict.¹⁸⁵ Social cohesion was at the core of Cook's concern. Like other adherents to the White Australia ideal, he assumed that social cohesiveness depended upon a large measure of racial homogeneity. However, he was adamant that the central issue was conformity to shared social standards, not approximation to a common complexion. Cook declared:

In a White Australia the existence of a coloured community, whether alien, aboriginal, or hybrid, must remain a constant menace socially and economically as long as its members (a) fail to conform to White

¹⁸³ Cook to Admin., 23.7.1932, AA, CRS A1, 33/479.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.* An extract from this letter, headed "The Social Problem", can also be found in AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408. It could be inferred from further comments that in the situation described, where white and coloured persons were on a similar social and economic footing, little conflict could also be expected in areas other than the industrial. Cook always placed considerable importance on industrial relations; but in the document cited it was given greater prominence as he was arguing specifically for changes in the conditions of employment of half-castes.

¹⁸⁵ Cook to Admin., 23.7.1932, AA, CRS A1, 33/479. See also Cook to Admin., 27.6.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

standards; (b) are not accepted as white citizens. Where these conditions are satisfied the fact of colour is, of itself, of no import.¹⁸⁶

Perhaps point (b) offers some explanation for the policy of breeding out the colour, Cook considering that persons of mixed descent would not be accepted as white citizens unless they *were* white citizens.

Cook maintained that his policy offered "the only instrument of realizing the objective of the conservative purist who demands an All White Australia".¹⁸⁷ In addition, it would benefit the part-Aborigines themselves by granting "full citizenship to a generation of persons who may fairly claim it".¹⁸⁸ That generation lay in the future. In the meantime, white Australians had a duty to assist part-Aborigines toward both whiteness and civilisation. At a meeting of unionists, pastoralists and missionaries in 1930 he asked rhetorically:

Is there one of you who will dispute the necessity to give that Halfcaste the opportunity to evolve into a white man? We have grown up with our own civilization. It is absolutely essential that he should be given an opportunity of evolving, more or less into a white man.¹⁸⁹

Cook was here using the term "evolve" in a non-Darwinian sense, to designate a process of education, training and miscegenation. Yet it did embody the evolutionist assumption that to evolve was to ascend the ladder of progress. Cook was confident that half-castes were capable of the ascent. Moreover, he averred, the "half-caste must be admitted to be exceptionally assimilable - he has no national outlook, social custom or alien background incompatible with full white citizenship".¹⁹⁰ There remained the difficult task of ensuring that the half-caste did "evolve into a white man". The first step along the path was to provide a social environment conducive to progress.

¹⁸⁶ Cook, memo headed Half-Caste Housing Policy, c. February 1932, (Hereafter Cook, Housing Policy), AA, CRS A452, 52/414.

¹⁸⁷ Cook to Admin., 27.6.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Notes on Conference regarding payment of Halfcastes and Aborigines in Country Districts, held in Darwin, 9-13 May 1930, (hereafter Conference regarding payment), p.5, AA, CRS A1, 38/329.

¹⁹⁰ Cook to Admin., 27.6.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

When Cook came to office, he inherited an administrative and institutional apparatus for the social elevation of half-castes, rudimentary though it may have been. Throughout the 1930s, numbers in the Darwin Half-caste Home continued to grow, while its physical condition deteriorated. Cook himself admitted the problem, putting it down to a shortage of funds.¹⁹¹ Educational facilities remained inadequate, prompting School Inspector V.L. Lampe to report in 1936 that under prevailing conditions teaching efforts were largely and unavoidably "abortive of results".¹⁹² By this time, the Chief Protector was, "and for several years [had] been, of the opinion that a new Halfcaste Home should be erected" and appropriate educational facilities provided.¹⁹³ No new home or school was constructed in Darwin until after Cook left office.¹⁹⁴ For part-Aborigines in Central Australia, institutional renovation came earlier. The Jay Creek home closed on 17 November 1932 and its inmates were moved to new accommodation at the former Alice Springs Telegraph Station. Rapidly, this institution too became overcrowded and dilapidated. Little attempt was made to effect repairs, so that when Administrator C.L.A. Abbott visited it in January 1939 he reported that "to use entirely unofficial language, the whole place stinks and is in an exceedingly bad condition".¹⁹⁵ Although a qualified teacher was appointed to the staff in 1934, the children were taught a simplified curriculum, which in the opinion of School Inspector Lampe "had been modified too much".¹⁹⁶ As institutions for the inculcation of dominant white Australian values, both the Darwin and Alice Springs Homes continued, throughout Cook's regime, to be severely

¹⁹¹ See for example Cook to Admin., 27.11.1936, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580. In this letter, Cook admitted the inadequacy of the institution, but defended his Department's record of achievement within the prevailing financial constraints.

¹⁹² V.L. Lampe, School Inspection: Kahlin Half-Caste School - Darwin, September 7th, 16th, 21st, 1936, AA, CRS A1, 36/9959. See also earlier reports of inspection of the same school by P.W. Moorhouse on 10.11.1931 and by D.S.A. Drain on 24.9.1934; both in AA, CRS A1, 37/1544.

¹⁹³ Cook to Admin., 27.11.1936, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

¹⁹⁴ See "Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory for Year 1939-40", *CPP* no.24 of 1940-43, p.19.

¹⁹⁵ Abbott to Sec., Int., 6.1.1939, AA, CRS A659, 42/1/4499.

¹⁹⁶ Lampe to Admin., 28.8.1936, AA, CRS A1, 36/9959. After 1936, the regular school curriculum was taught at the Alice Springs Half-caste School.

hampered by scarcity of resources and over-abundance of inmates. But if acceptable white standards could not always be maintained within the institutions, Cook was determined to exclude the unacceptable standards of black society. On a list of instructions to the matron of the Alice Springs Half-caste Institution, he appended:

Note:- No Aboriginal influence can be permitted to bear upon the inmates of the Half-Caste Home and the Matron is responsible for ensuring that children in the Institution have no association with Aborigines.¹⁹⁷

Institutional care was, of course, intended to mould the rising generation. Eventually, the children would become adults, and by the time of Cook's appointment there were already considerable numbers of adult part-Aborigines in the Territory. Whereas earlier schemes for the uplift of half-castes had dealt almost exclusively with the children, Cook extended the hand of the Chief Protector into their adult lives. Perhaps his most ambitious proposal in this regard was his half-caste housing policy, which was intended to transform part-Aborigines into respectable and responsible private homeowners. Despite the bureaucratic, legal and financial problems, Cook managed to have his scheme approved in principle by the Minister in February 1932, and construction of the houses began in mid-1933.¹⁹⁸ Cook was quite explicit about his intentions in promoting the housing scheme; it was part of his plan:

to rescue these adult half-castes no longer under legal control. As a first step in this direction I recommend that proper housing be provided for these people. It may then reasonably be expected that (a) a property sense will develop which will go far towards combating the sinister influence of communist propaganda (b) a proper self-respect will develop in the individual (c) avenues of additional income will be available to those casually employed, who are debarred from taking other work for wages.... The provision of proper housing accommodation should ... remove the principal contributory factors in their moral and physical degeneration.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Copy of Instructions issued to Matron by Chief Protector, n.d., AA, CRS A1, 35/643.

¹⁹⁸ See the voluminous correspondence generated by Cook's housing proposal in AA, CRS A452, 52/414.

¹⁹⁹ Cook, Housing Policy, AA, CRS A452, 52/414.

Recognising the limitations of the Half-caste Homes, Cook wished to ensure that half-castes had houses of their own.

Decent home-owners required respectable employment. In urging the need for the vocational training of half-caste males, Cook went so far as to assert that:

The Half-Caste problem as at present existing in Darwin is the direct result of the Administration neglecting to train Half-Caste youths in industry.²⁰⁰

As he recognised, however, the industries of the Northern Territory were limited in number and shaky in their economic foundations. "Actually", he wrote, "there is available to males, only one industry in which constant and profitable employment may be anticipated: this is the pastoral industry".²⁰¹ Accordingly, he attempted to carve out a secure place for half-castes within the pastoral labour force. Ever the bureaucrat, Cook conceived formal regulation as the only appropriate strategy. Over the objections of the North Australian Workers' Union, the Northern Territory Pastoral Lessees' Association and some segments of missionary opinion, Cook pushed through the Apprentices (Half-Castes) Regulations, the central provisions of which stipulated that pastoralists could employ half-caste youths only under the formal conditions of apprenticeship.²⁰² His clear intention was to convert the

²⁰⁰ Cook to Admin., 7.6.1932, AA, CRS A1, 33/479.

²⁰¹ Cook to Admin., 27.11.1936, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580. In 1933 he considered a proposal for the employment of half-castes on pearling vessels operating out of Darwin. While recognising that pearling could provide one avenue for "utilizing surplus half-caste labour", he was not in favour of the scheme. For one thing, the pearling industry did not offer sufficiently secure employment, whereas the pastoral industry did. For another, maritime enterprises were dominated by Asians, and Cook had no desire to "lower the half-caste's standard of living by encouraging his employment in the pearling industry under conditions approximating to those applicable to indentured Koepang labour"; see Cook to Admin., 3.4.1933, AA, CRS A1, 33/2419. In a letter to the Administrator dated 18.2.1933, in AA, CRS A1, 33/4332, Cook set out in some detail the various issues he considered pertinent to the employment of half-castes.

²⁰² See the extensive correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 33/479 and in AA, CRS A1, 38/329. Basically, union opposition derived from their concern about the possible impact of half-caste apprenticeship on white employment; pastoralists were opposed to such overt government intrusion into their employment practices; while some missionaries were concerned that these efforts to elevate half-castes could have

male half-caste population into a skilled or semi-skilled work-force, with a social status and level of income well above that of full-blood Aborigines. Cook was prepared to allow the latter group to continue to work for scant or no wages; but the half-caste had to be "elevated to the white standard of living and this [could] only be effected by accustoming him to those standards".²⁰³

While Cook insisted that half-castes be given white standards of vocational training and white rates of pay, they were not to be permitted the same degree of control over their earnings as their white colleagues. Rather, it was "considered essential that a proportion of the wage payable to the half caste should be retained to his credit in the Trust Account administered by the Chief Protector".²⁰⁴ The incongruity was pointed out by a number of contemporary commentators, the Chairman of the Australian Board of Missions observing that:

There seems to be an inconsistency running through the whole document [the Apprentices (Half-Castes) Regulations]. In parts the half-caste is to be treated as the equal of the white in intelligence, ability and culture, and then again he is to be treated by the Chief

deleterious repercussions on full-blood Aborigines, by displacing them from the stations. For further detail on the Apprentices (Half-Castes) Regulations, and opposition to them, see: Booklet entitled "Northern Territory Matters", pp.27-29, in AA, CRS A1, 32/2186; Report of a Tour [of the Northern Territory] by the Hon. Archdale Parkhill, Min. Int., 31.8.1932, AA, CRS A1, 34/3449; Aborigines: Commonwealth Government's Policy in respect of North and Central Australia, c.1930, AA, CRS A1, 37/70, part 1; H.C. Brown, Sec., Int., to Sec., Att.-Gen., 1.6.1933, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A432, 33/877. Missionary misgivings were well set out in a letter from the Chairman, ABM, to J.W. Allen, Sec., NT Pastoral Lessees' Assoc., 17.3.1930, in Elkin Archive, box 70, item 1/12/173; see also Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, pp.3, 8-9.

²⁰³ Cook to Admin., 23.7.1932, AA, CRS A1, 33/479. See also Cook's remarks in Conference regarding payment, AA, CRS A1, 38/329; Cook to W. Morley, Sec., APNR, 28.4.1931, AA, CRS A1, 36/6595.

²⁰⁴ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 21.1.1930, AA, CRS A1, 33/479; this point was repeated in Cook's subsequent correspondence on the Apprentices (Half-Castes) Regulations, in the same file.

Protector in matters financial as a child unable to spend his own money wisely.²⁰⁵

The apparent inconsistency could be reconciled by supposing, as Cook did, that while half-castes were capable of attaining white social, economic and cultural standards, they had not yet reached that point. Mid-way between black and white, they could be permitted some of the privileges of the white citizen while remaining subject to many of the controls placed upon the black. In Cook's view it was necessary for official control to be maintained not only over half-castes' incomes but also over their lives; without the guiding hand of authority, they would fail in life's struggle. He explained that:

Just as it is impossible to convert raw hide into leather by officially proclaiming their identity, so it is impossible to adapt a camp bred half caste to our civilization by means of a gazette notice proclaiming his full citizenship. Left to battle for himself in competition with white men, the product of many centuries of natural racial selection, he must, of necessity, go under bringing degradation and poverty upon himself and discredit upon the community.²⁰⁶

Under Cook's regime, part-Aborigines experienced an intensification of official interference. In the interests of elevating a later generation to the benefits and rights of full white citizenship, the present generation was to be bound more tightly by regulation and authoritarian prescription.

While Cook devoted much attention to securing viable vocational futures for male part-Aborigines, he placed comparatively little importance on the employment prospects of their sisters. He acknowledged that "Halfcaste females provided a source of domestic labour to the white women of Darwin";²⁰⁷ and in his annual reports remarked that the demand for half-

²⁰⁵ Chairman, ABM, to J.W. Allen, Sec., NT Pastoral Lessees' Assoc., 17.3.1930, Elkin Archive, box 70, item 1/12/173. It may be added that the Chairman of the ABM was himself not altogether consistent in his argument. On the one hand he urged that part-Aborigines should be elevated "to the white level"; on the other, he considered that white rates of pay were "too high" for the majority of such people, as access to cash in such amounts "might prove to be a serious moral danger to the half-caste".

²⁰⁶ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 21.1.1930, AA, CRS A1, 33/479.

²⁰⁷ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 11.6.1929, AA, CRS A431, 46/3026.

caste domestics outstripped the supply.²⁰⁸ A few part-Aboriginal women received professional training as nurses at the Darwin hospital.²⁰⁹ Many more were employed within the Darwin half-caste institution as seamstresses and laundresses. These enterprises appear to have developed out of the training in domestic skills which was a part of the education of female inmates, and both met with considerable success.²¹⁰ Cook was particularly pleased with the success of the laundry, for it simultaneously achieved a number of laudable results: the moral tone of half-caste girls was lifted by their undertaking respectable labour; the Chinese, who had formerly dominated the laundry business in Darwin, were squeezed out of the market; and the half-caste laundresses, by earning an income of their own, ceased to be a financial burden upon the administration.²¹¹ While Cook infused his declarations on male half-caste employment with grandiose notions of elevation to white standards, his statements on female employment were pegged at a more mundane level, where considerations of their economic self-sufficiency were uppermost.²¹²

²⁰⁸ See for example Cook, "Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals", 1934, in "Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory for the Year ended 30th June 1934", *CPP* no.138 of 1934-37, p.12; Cook, "Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals", 1937, in "Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory for the Year ended 30th June 1937", *CPP* no.58 of 1937-40, p.26.

²⁰⁹ Cook, "Report", 1934, p.12; Cook, "Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals", 1935, in "Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory for the Year ended 30th June 1935", *CPP* no.237 of 1934-37, p.13; Cook, "Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals", 1936, in "Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory for the Year ended 30th June 1936", *CPP* no.63 of 1937, p.13.

²¹⁰ See Cook, "Report", 1933, pp.8-9; Cook, "Report", 1934, p.13; Cook, "Report", 1935, p.14; Cook, "Report", 1936, p.14; Cook, "Report", 1937, p.28. See also X. Herbert, Acting Superintendent, Kahlin Compound, to Cook, 22.5.1936, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580; this letter, in which Herbert portrayed conditions in the Kahlin Compound in very positive terms, provides an interesting counterpoint to his later strident condemnations of the same institution, for example in his novels, *Capricornia* and *Poor Fellow My Country*.

²¹¹ Cook to Admin., 18.2.1933; Cook to Admin., 21.2.1933; Cook to Admin., 12.6.1933; all in AA, CRS A1, 33/4332.

²¹² Cook also expressed the traditional view that employers should oversee the moral welfare of their female employees; see Cook to Admin., 18.2.1933, AA, CRS A1, 33/4332; Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 1.9.1927; Cook to Admin., 27.11.1936; both in AA, CRS A659, 39/1/15580.

The comparative neglect of female employment fitted into Cook's conception of appropriate gender roles. Women did not need a vocational future mapped out for them, for their destiny lay in the domestic - or more precisely the reproductive - sphere. In Cook's scheme of absorption, the role of part-Aboriginal women was biological; their task was to propagate progressively lighter-skinned progeny. Part-Aboriginal men, on the other hand, were to be absorbed in a social and economic sense, by becoming responsible workers and respectable home-owners. Male half-castes could not advance the process of biological absorption by mating with white women: For one thing, such sexual unions were widely looked upon with abhorrence; for another, the shortage of white women in the Territory was already regarded as a problem, which could only be exacerbated by their marriage to half-caste men. This gender distinction in Cook's proposal was the source of some difficulty, for it meant that his scheme of biological absorption was necessarily partial, only half the existing part-Aboriginal population being potentially capable of participating in it. This raised a further problem regarding the appropriate source of spouses for half-caste males. Cook tended to skate rather lightly over this awkward question. In a policy document which he and J.A. Carrodus drafted in the early 1930s, he remarked that half-caste males were "encouraged to marry half-caste girls", and that they were not permitted to marry full-blood women.²¹³ Nonetheless, the problem remained that rising numbers of half-caste males would continue to father dark-skinned children and thus impede the process of progressive whitening. There was a solution. Cook suggested that after appropriate vocational training, half-caste males could be:

safely removed to centres of denser white population where they would be competent to take work on the same basis as white men, thereby reducing the coloured population of the Territory and very appreciably diminishing the coloured birth-rate.²¹⁴

²¹³ Aboriginals: Commonwealth Government's Policy, c.1930, AA, CRS A1, 37/70, part 1. In his official reports, published in *CPP*, Cook provided annual statistics of the numbers of half-caste men married to half-caste women.

²¹⁴ Cook to Admin., 23.7.1932, AA, CRS A1, 33/479.

For Cook's scheme to succeed, the removal of male half-castes along these lines was probably necessary. Yet in his voluminous correspondence this expedient was seldom explicated, perhaps because he realised that in "centres of denser white population", an influx of half-castes was not wanted.²¹⁵

Part-Aboriginal women, Cook urged, should remain in the Northern Territory, where they could perform their biological duty of breeding part-white children. To facilitate this process, their training in the half-caste institutions was oriented toward making them attractive potential spouses for white men, by giving them a white standard of schooling as well as instruction in domestic skills.²¹⁶ It was necessary, he affirmed, "to elevate the half-caste girl to a high living standard so that there may be no question of her impairing the social or economic status of her husband".²¹⁷ In Cook's scheme, the domestic unit was vital; it could be part Aboriginal biologically, but it had to be all white sociologically.

Attaining the heights of enthusiasm, Cook proclaimed that his scheme would not only secure the uplift of part-Aborigines, it would also arrest the degeneration which was all too apparent amongst the white bushmen of the Northern Territory, and thereby contribute to the noble enterprise of civilising the wilderness. He explained:

The excess white population living in rural districts, deprived at present of the company of women of its own race, is denied any

²¹⁵ The Minister for the Interior, J.A. Perkins, openly acknowledged this fact; he advised J.B. Cleland that "the half-castes would be more readily absorbed into the general population in the more densely populated areas than in the Northern Territory, but the Commonwealth Government is confronted with the fact that the State Governments are not prepared to permit half-castes to be transferred permanently to the States"; Perkins to Cleland, 12.12.1932, Cleland Collection; the same correspondence may also be found in Elkin Archive, box 61, item 1/12/173. See also the correspondence on this issue, between the South Australian and the Commonwealth Governments, in AA, CRS A461, F 300/1.

²¹⁶ In a letter to the Rev. Morley, Cook acknowledged that the purpose of schooling and domestic training for half-caste girls was "to fit them for a higher station as the wives of higher grade halfcaste males, or whites"; Cook to Morley, 28.4.1931, AA, CRS A1, 36/6595.

²¹⁷ Cook to Admin., 27.6.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

opportunity of making homes. These men live, therefore, for the most part in camps many of which are of a very low order and closely approximate to those favoured by the aboriginal. It is only a matter of time under these conditions before cohabitation with the aboriginal female follows. This cohabitation is attended by moral, economic and physical deterioration of the individual which react unfavourably upon the development of the Territory generally. Many such men would be prepared to marry half-caste females and make decent homes. Provided the girl has been reared to a moderately high standard there can be no objection to such a mating resulting as it does in the white man rearing a white family in good circumstances instead of a half-caste family under degrading conditions. Experience shows that the half-caste girl can, if properly brought up, easily be elevated to a standard where the fact of her marriage to a white will not contribute to his deterioration. On the contrary under conditions in the Territory where such marriages are socially accepted amongst a certain section of the population, the results are more beneficial than otherwise since the deterioration of the white is thereby arrested and the local population is stabilised by the building of homes. It is not to be supposed that such marriages are likely to produce an inferior generation. On the contrary a large proportion of the half-caste female population is derived from the best white stock in the country whilst the aboriginal inheritance brings to the hybrid definite qualities of value - intelligence, stamina, resource, high resistance to the influence of tropical environment and the character of pigmentation which even in high dilution will serve to reduce the at present high incidence of Skin Cancer in the blonde European.²¹⁸

Whatever else it may have been, Cook's was no modest proposal. Simultaneously, it would elevate both whites and half-castes, secure the citizen rights of the latter, promote the progress of the Northern Territory and save Australia for the white man.

Preventing the perpetuation of a coloured northern Australia was a central preoccupation of the Chief Protector. Following a long-established tradition, he depicted Asians as the greatest impediment to the success of his proposals. In 1933 he drew attention "to the very grave problem which has been developing in Northern Australia owing to the intermarriage of alien coloured races with aboriginals and half-castes".²¹⁹ The Chief Protector was

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ Cook to Admin., 7.2.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408; see also Cook to Admin., 27.6.1933 in the same file. In his correspondence, Cook generally employed such terms as "alien coloured races" rather than 'Asian'; nonetheless, the vast majority of individuals in the "alien coloured" category were of Asian descent.

empowered to prohibit the legal marriage of Asian men to Aboriginal and half-caste women; his powers over informal relationships were more limited; and over casual sexual activity he had almost no effective control at all.²²⁰ In any case, he maintained that "legal prohibitions of intercourse" were "ineffective, no matter how large the penalty".²²¹ A more effectual strategy for obstructing sexual liaisons between Asian men and half-caste women was to promote the marriage of the latter to white men. Cook was quite explicit about this, stating that part-Aboriginal women "must be married to men substantially of European origin" in order to control "the propagation of the hybrid [of] alien coloured" ancestry.²²² Advertising the virtues of his policy, in his official report for 1934 he explained that the "success achieved by encouraging the marriage of half-castes to whites has curtailed the birth rate of hybrids of coloured alien paternity".²²³ Drawing together the various demographic problems which were to be resolved by his policy, Cook explained that:

In the Territory ... the preponderance of coloured races, the prominence of coloured alien blood and the scarcity of white females to mate with the white male population creates a position of incalculable future menace to purity of race in tropical Australia, and the Federal Government must so regulate its Territories that the multiplication of multicolour humanity by the mating of Halfcaste with alien coloured blood shall be reduced to a minimum. Halfcaste females in centres of population where alien races are prominent unfortunately exceed males in number. If this excess is permitted to mate with alien blood, the future of this country may very well be doomed to disaster. The Commonwealth has therefore endeavoured to elevate the Halfcaste to the standard of the white, with a view to his ultimate assimilation, encouraging the mating of white male and

²²⁰ For a discussion of the legal issues, with particular reference to Sections 45 and 53 of the *Aboriginals Ordinance*, see J.A. Carrodus, memo: *Intermarriage of coloured and foreign races with aboriginals*, 25.5.1933, and subsequent correspondence, in AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

²²¹ Cook to Admin., 2.9.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

²²² Cook to Admin., 27.6.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408; see also Cook to Admin., 7.2.1933, in the same file.

²²³ Cook, "Report", 1934, p.12.

halfcaste female, thereby gradually eliminating colour and reducing one contributory factor in the breeding of Halfcastes.²²⁴

In this rendition, half-castes were merely the vessels by which an Asian inheritance could be reproduced and perpetuated in northern Australia; and the social elevation of the half-caste was rendered little more than an initial step toward the maintenance of a White Australia.

To secure a White Australia, full-blood women, as well as half-castes, had to be protected from the sexual depredations of Asian men. Particularly in the latter part of the 1930s, Cook devoted considerable attention to the "question of illicit relationships between crews of pearling vessels and aboriginal women".²²⁵ Many of the vessels were owned and crewed by Japanese; some were Australian-owned, but even these usually had Asian crewmen. While Asian maritime workers had long been a source of concern, in late 1936 the "trafficking in lubras" by Japanese pearlers was given prominence in the press, and became a frequent source of complaint from organisations concerned with Aboriginal welfare.²²⁶ Cook was concerned on a number of counts. He considered that Asian pearlers were likely carriers of tropical diseases and venereal infections.²²⁷ He also feared the contribution of the crewmen to the "multiplication of multicolour humanity". His concerns were shared by other senior administrative personnel and politicians, resulting

²²⁴ Cook to Morley, 28.4.1931, AA, CRS A1, 36/6595. This letter was in response to the publication of the APNR booklet, *The Half-Caste Aborigines of North and Central Australia*, which Cook perceived to be unfairly critical of his regime. See also Cook to Admin., 7.2.1933; Cook to Admin., 27.6.1933; both in AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

²²⁵ Cook to Admin., 21.6.1937, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/864; all correspondence in this file, spanning the period from May 1937 to August 1940, concerned the problem of prohibiting the trespass of pearling crews onto Aboriginal reserves, especially Arnhem Land. See also the extensive correspondence on the same topic, with specific reference to Bathurst and Melville Islands, in AA, CRS A659, 39/1/7917.

²²⁶ See for example the letters of complaint sent to the Federal Government by the ABM (10.11.1936), the Church Assembly, Missionary Council, London (8.10.1936), the Australian Aborigines' League (29.11.1936), the Aboriginal Fellowship Group (22.11.1936), the Aborigines' Friends' Association (8.1.1937), and ANZAAS (15.2.1937), all in AA, CRS A659, 39/1/7917.

²²⁷ For an extended discussion of the threat of venereal diseases, with particular reference to the role of Asian crewmen in its spread amongst the Aborigines, see the correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 37/3348.

in more stringent regulation of the pearling fleets and, in some cases, in the deportation of Asians who were found to be consorting with Aboriginal women.²²⁸ Despite the strong anti-Japanese feeling which ran through the official correspondence on this issue, Cook acknowledged that only a minority of the Japanese pearlers indulged in sexual relations with Aboriginal women, and that the local Japanese Society was "bitterly opposed to the practice of cohabitation with aboriginals", regarding offenders "somewhat in the light of renegades bringing disgrace to their fellow nationals".²²⁹ This in no way diminished his zeal in attempting to put an end to Asian-Aboriginal liaisons.²³⁰

Throughout his regime, Cook continued the protective tradition of shielding full-blood women from the sexual depredations of white men. He also continued the administrative tradition of half-heartedness in the endeavour. Early in his career as Chief Protector he remarked:

It must be recognised that it is no offence under the Aboriginal ordinance or any other legal enactment for a White man, whether in an official position or not, to have occasional normal sexual relations with a Lubra or Halfcaste female, over the age of consent. The question of the propriety of such relations is purely one of morality. In a country where White males in remote localities are deprived of all female society, other than Aboriginal, the application of a civilised moral code must be tempered by a recognition of the physiological and psychological factors involved.²³¹

Some years later, he endorsed amendments to the Aboriginals Ordinance to allow legal action to be taken "against persons procuring or consorting with

²²⁸ Deportations from the Territory for this reason appear to have begun in 1939, a Japanese pearler named Kinjo Kanashira being the first deportee; see L.H.A. Giles to Sec., Int., 21.3.1939, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/7917.

²²⁹ Cook to Acting Admin., 16.1936, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/7917.

²³⁰ A different perspective was offered by the Reverend T.T. Webb, a missionary with long experience on the Arnhem Land coastline. He maintained that although the "peril from Japanese pearlers" was "real enough", the white man was "a far greater menace than the Asiatic"; see Webb, *A Future for the Half-Caste*, p.7. However, in June 1938 Webb had written to the Minister for the Interior complaining of "the deplorable state of affairs at the King River Pearling Base", directing his complaint primarily against Asian pearlers; Webb to Min. Int., 22.6.1938, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/864.

²³¹ Cook to Gov. Res., Darwin, 18.4.1929, AA, CRS A1, 29/984.

female aboriginals and half-castes and against aboriginals soliciting for purposes of prostitution".²³² Prosecutions under the amended legislation were few, and Aboriginal welfare groups continued to press for the stricter enforcement of laws for moral protection.²³³ Cook held out against their entreaties, apparently regarding sexual liaisons between white men and black women as inevitable.²³⁴ He seems to have wished to restrict such liaisons only to the extent that the rate of increase of half-castes would be held down to a moderate level. A flood of half-castes could never be absorbed; on the other hand, their procreation could never be totally prevented.

Although Cook took a lenient view of the moral lapses of Territorians, he was not prepared to officially sanction the union of white men with full-blood Aboriginal women by granting permission to marry. In 1932 a pastoralist, Alfred Anderson of Seven Emus Station near Borroloola, applied to Cook for permission to marry an Aboriginal woman named Alice, with whom he lived and who was the mother of at least one of his children.²³⁵ In Cook's brief response, he stated that: "All applications made by white men for permission to marry female Aboriginals are unequivocally refused".²³⁶ Five years later, Mr H.F. Lake of Katherine wrote to the Association for the Protection of Native Races, seeking their support in his endeavours to legally marry Mary, an Aboriginal woman and mother of his son.²³⁷ According to

²³² Cook, "Report", 1933, p.6.

²³³ See for example correspondence from the APNR in AA, CRS A1, 36/6595; N. Buxton, T. Buxton and J. Harris, A-S&APS, to S.M. Bruce, High Comm., London, 19.12.1933, AA, CRS A431, 48/273, part 1; Rev. J.S. Needham, Findings of the National Missionary Council Conference on Aboriginal Matters, December 1933, sent with covering note to Min. Int., 13.12.1933, AA, CRS A1, 37/6639.

²³⁴ See for example Cook to Admin., 6.10.1936, AA, CRS A1, 36/8795.

²³⁵ Before applying to Cook, Anderson wrote directly to the Minister for Internal Affairs, seeking permission to marry Alice; Anderson to Min. Internal Affairs, 11.4.1932, AA, CRS A1, 32/3578. In attempting to by-pass the relevant local official, Anderson appears to have been well aware that Cook would not concede to his request.

²³⁶ Cook to Anderson, 31.5.1932, AA, CRS A1, 32/3578.

²³⁷ Lake to Sec., Society [sic] Protection of Native Races, 6.10.1937, Elkin Archive, box 67, item 1/12/140.

Lake, Cook had always "curtly refused" his requests.²³⁸ Although there seem to have been few applications from white men to marry full-blood women, throughout Cook's regime none were successful until 1938. In that year - the last of his Chief Protectorship - one European was permitted to marry a female Aborigine.²³⁹

On the other hand, critics alleged that Cook was overly-enthusiastic in promoting the matrimonial union of whites with half-castes, even to the extent of applying coercion. In 1933 the Victorian Aboriginal Group sent the Prime Minister a statement from an un-named "correspondent in the Territory", who claimed that "girls ARE being pressed to marry white men whom they have not previously seen".²⁴⁰ A year later, E.J. Holloway, Federal Member for Melbourne Ports, alleged that white men were pressured into selecting half-caste spouses. According to Holloway, Dr Cook used "the economic weapon" of giving "preference in employment ... to men who will agree to marry a half-caste woman".²⁴¹ Refuting this claim, J.A. Carrodus, then Acting Administrator of the Northern Territory, pointed out that:

Dr. Cook has no power whatever to make appointments and consequently cannot, even if he desired to do so, give preference in any kind of Government employment to persons who have married or who promise to marry, half-castes.... Dr. Cook naturally has nothing whatever to do with appointments made by private persons or firms. It is not seen, therefore, how Dr. Cook can give preference in employment.²⁴²

²³⁸ *ibid.* At the end of Lake's letter, someone from the APNR had pencilled "3rd case of kind in last few years".

²³⁹ Cook, "Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals", 1938, in "Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory for Year 1937-38", *CPP* no.150 of 1937-40, p.24.

²⁴⁰ From a correspondent in the Territory, enclosed with letter A.N. Brown, Hon. Sec., Victorian Aboriginal Group, to PM, 15.7.1933, AA, CRS A431, 48/961; upper case in the original. In response, J.A. Perkins, Minister for the Interior, stated that: "Unless the name of the writer is furnished, it is not proposed to take any further action in the matter"; Perkins to Brown, 27.7.1933, AA, CRS A431, 48/961; no further action was taken.

²⁴¹ H.A. Barringer, Int., memo: Marriage of Half-caste Women, c.June 1934, AA, CRS A1, 34/6710.

²⁴² Carrodus, Acting Admin., to Sec., Int., 16.7.1934, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

Despite the official denials, rumours of coercion persisted. Cook's high-handed and imperious manner did little to deflate their credibility.

Although Carrodus was prompt in defending the integrity of the Chief Protector, he was unenthusiastic about the program of biological absorption. After seven months in Darwin in the role of Acting Administrator he wrote:

In my opinion no great success will attend the scheme for the encouragement of the marriage of half-caste girls to whites. It will be found that half-castes will prefer to marry half-castes. The effort to breed out colour is a commendable one, but it would appear that the Government must face a large natural increase of the half-caste population from the mating of half-caste with half-caste.²⁴³

Shortly after his return to Canberra, Carrodus was appointed secretary to the Department of the Interior. His predecessor in this position, H.C. Brown, was also "of the opinion that, theoretically, [Cook's] suggestion would be quite good, [but] in practice ... would prove to be unsound".²⁴⁴ In response to a suggestion that a policy of absorption should be incorporated into Aboriginal legislation, Brown remarked that he failed "to see how it would be practicable to provide the necessary legal machinery in order to give effect to Dr. Cook's proposals".²⁴⁵ He also pointed out the impropriety of such overt administrative intrusion into the private lives of individuals, arguing that:

Whilst there are undoubtedly some instances of very satisfactory results from the mating of half-caste women with white husbands, it would, I think, be unwise to attempt to restrict the selection by half-caste women of husbands of their own choice and, moreover, it would, I think, be quite improper to limit by Ordinance the procedure to be adopted by half-caste women in respect to their selection of husbands, unless the machinery were to apply equally to half-caste men, and here I think, is where Dr. Cook's proposals break down.

My own view is that half-castes who have been given certain rights and enjoy the franchise, should have the same privileges in respect to selecting their husbands or wives, as are enjoyed by other citizens of the Commonwealth.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Carrodus, Report on the Northern Territory, 20.11.1934, AA, CRS A1, 34/10021.

²⁴⁴ Brown to Min. Int., 3.11.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*

While bureaucrats in Canberra were unenthusiastic about schemes for breeding out the colour, they were not antagonistic; and Cook was able to develop his policy from Darwin without official hindrance. He had, however, no lack of critics.

Absorption or Extinction?

Cook's proposals attracted more condemnation than approbation. He may have been correct in claiming that marriages between half-caste women and white men were "socially accepted amongst a certain section of the population" of the Northern Territory.²⁴⁷ But they were decidedly unacceptable to a vocal section of Darwin's white community. When the policy of absorption was given a public airing in 1933, condemnatory letters flowed in to the editor of the local newspaper, the *Northern Standard*; many were written in the rough and colourful language of the outback.²⁴⁸ From the Sydney suburb of Belmore, protest was articulated in more sanctimonious style; a woman signing herself "Anxious Mother" wrote to the members of the Commonwealth Parliament:

Asking you to reconsider before passing any Law to encourage the marriage of halfcastes with out [sic] white men against our Divine Rules, Holy Bible.

God says woe unto the young men who marry these wives.²⁴⁹

More strident condemnation was heard from the Women's Section of the United Country Party, whose secretary, Emily Curtis, designated absorption "a monstrous innovation".²⁵⁰ The Women's Section resolved:

That, it is greatly to be deplored that the Federal Government is so far lost to the knowledge of our deep rooted sentiments and pride of race, as to attempt to infuse a strain of aboriginal blood into our coming generations....

²⁴⁷ Cook to Admin., 27.6.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

²⁴⁸ Relevant newspaper cuttings, including those from the *Northern Standard*, may be found in AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408. A common complaint in the letters published in the Darwin newspaper was that Cook unfairly placed the burden of absorbing the half-castes onto the shoulders of the working class.

²⁴⁹ Anxious Mother, Belmore, to Members, Commonwealth Government, 14.6.1933, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

²⁵⁰ Curtis to Sec., Int., 19.8.1934, AA, CRS A452, 52/420.

That, the Women's Organisations of Australia be urged, that for the race heritage that we hold in trust for the generations to come, for the sanctity of our age old traditions, and the protection of our growing boys, to combat with all their power this insidious attempt to mingle with the community, women of illegitimate birth, tainted with aboriginal blood, the offspring of men of the lowest human type, many of whom are Asiatics and other foreign nationalities.²⁵¹

Whatever their views on uplifting the half-caste, the ladies of the United Country Party were convinced that absorption into the wider community could bring only a down-grading of the white race.

The editor of the eugenic journal *Health and Physical Culture* agreed. Under the headline "Would You Welcome Marriage with a Half-Caste?", he published an article which argued that because it was the "lower classes" who were expected to marry part-Aborigines, the proponents of absorption were:

prepared to 'remedy' one racial problem by making it doubly acute - that is by sponsoring what could only be a race of low whites of the type which in the Southern States of the U.S.A. constitutes such a problem.

And so, it would appear, Australia, in order to absorb her own (her very own) half-castes must father an even more undesirable under-strata of humanity and bring into being a class of low white trash.²⁵²

Those white men who fathered half-castes had "committed a great racial crime".²⁵³ Apparently it was a crime against both black and white, for its outcome was that:

The full-blood is ... dying out. It is estimated that within another few decades there will be few of them left.

But there will be left for us an even greater coloured problem, and that is, the problem of the half-caste, of whom there are 21,000 or

²⁵¹ Resolution passed by the Metropolitan Branch, Women's Section, United Country Party, Melbourne, 2.8.1934, AA, CRS A452, 52/420. This resolution was in response to the attempted settlement, in Melbourne, of a number of octoroon girls from the Northern Territory, allegedly with a view to their absorption into the local population.

²⁵² "Would You Welcome Marriage with a Half-Caste", *Health and Physical Culture*, 1.7.1937, p.21, in Elkin Archive, box 130, item 1/12/146. The editor claimed that this article had been "endorsed by Dr. A.P. Elkin"; Whatever the truth or otherwise of the claim, the style of the article was very different to that of Elkin, and its tone of strident condemnation was not in keeping with Elkin's insistence on always striking a positive note.

²⁵³ *ibid.*, p.20.

more men women and children, increasing at an alarmingly rapid rate.²⁵⁴

According to the editor of *Health and Physical Culture*, "the day may come when Australia will be a land of half-castes!"²⁵⁵ A policy of absorption could only hasten the coming of that day.

A more temperate critique of absorption was offered by a young lecturer in anthropology at the University of Sydney, W.E.H. Stanner. In June 1933 he published two brief articles, headed "Peril in Racial Crossing" and "The Problem of the Half-Caste", in the Sydney newspaper the *Sunday Sun*. As a social anthropologist, Stanner began by asserting that:

It is not the physical anomaly of being a hybrid that makes the halfcaste 'a problem' so much as the social environment into which he is born.

If there were no social discrimination and prejudice against mixed bloods the mere fact that they were physically anomalous would not be of great weight.²⁵⁶

Cook himself would have agreed with these sentiments. However, Stanner devoted the greater part of these articles to the biological, not the social, implications of absorption. He pointed out that there was "no general agreement among biologists as to the behavior of all human characters in inheritance in race mixture".²⁵⁷ Alluding to the Mendelian distinction between phenotype and genotype, he contended that:

What has **apparently** happened in a racially mixed population is no necessary guide to what has **actually** happened. This is what makes it possible for sudden reversions to the primitive ancestral type to occur. Recessive characters, lying dormant, may show out when mating has favored their appearance.²⁵⁸

More plainly, he declared that: "Heredity plays strange, unpredictable tricks".²⁵⁹ Stanner's central contention on the viability or otherwise of

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.20.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.21.

²⁵⁶ W.E.H. Stanner, "Peril in Racial Crossing", *Sunday Sun*, 11.6.1933; clippings in AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *ibid*; bold face in the original.

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*

absorption was simply that the facts of the matter were not known. He pointed out that:

It is a widespread belief that the descendants of the children of a white man and an Australian aboriginal woman do not 'throw back', that is, do not revert to the aboriginal ancestral type. But this belief has never been substantiated, and to proceed with a radical racial experiment on the assumption that it has been so substantiated is inviting at least disillusion, and perhaps worse.²⁶⁰

According to Stanner, scientific research into racial mixture was necessary, to ascertain "the degree of blending, and to what extent Mendelian principles apply"; this entailed "a strictly genealogical examination by a specialist of the descent lines from marriages between Australian aborigines and British Australians".²⁶¹

On the social implications of absorption, Stanner's comments were pedestrian. He maintained that:

If miscegenation were officially sanctioned, it is most improbable that many whites would marry mixed-bloods. Those who did would, on the whole, be 'poor whites', inferior or 'failed' types.²⁶²

He suggested too, that many of the difficulties experienced by mixed-bloods derived from the fact that they were "the progeny of inferior types of whites and Chinese".²⁶³ Despite his statement that the half-caste problem was primarily an outcome of social environment, Stanner persisted in the conventional view that biological inheritance could also be a relevant factor. He concluded his article by declaring that absorption was "a blunder" and that a "practical, constructive native policy [was] possible without it."²⁶⁴ In the absence of firm scientific knowledge, the deliberate encouragement of miscegenation was a dangerous strategy.

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*

²⁶¹ *ibid.* It was another six years before Tindale and Birdsell conducted their research into this field.

²⁶² W.E.H. Stanner, "The Problem of the Half-Caste", *Sunday Sun*, 18.6.1933; clippings in AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

²⁶³ *ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*

Missionary opinion on the question was divided. The Anglican E.R.B. Gribble, from Yarrabah in north Queensland, declared:

Personally I object to the idea of absorption into the white race as the objective for the solution of the Aboriginal problem, for such a solution must of necessity be based upon immorality.

That being the case I say GOD HELP BOTH RACES.²⁶⁵

The report of the 1937 Australian National Missionary Conference couched its objections in purely secular terms, claiming that experience in other countries provided a "strong warning" against "an unrestrained policy of inter-marriage", and that half-castes were best uplifted in "self-contained communities" segregated from both full-bloods and whites.²⁶⁶ On the other hand, there were missionaries who endorsed absorption; the Reverend J.R.B. Love maintained that:

the solution of the half-caste problem is to train the half-caste to earn his own civilised living, find him an occupation and a start in life, and gradually lose him in the stream of white blood.²⁶⁷

The Reverend J.H. Sexton adopted a wait-and-see policy. In his published pamphlets, Sexton gave brief consideration to schemes for breeding out the colour, without either criticism or open endorsement.²⁶⁸ In 1934 he noted that:

while the idea to breed the half-caste black existed for some years, a new conception has now arisen to breed him white, and this is now the Federal view. Experiments are now being tried along this line, and are being watched with keen interest.²⁶⁹

A decade later, he remained non-committal on the advisability of a policy of absorption.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ E.R.B. Gribble, Motion for Agenda, Diocese of North Queensland, 6.7.1939, Gribble, E.R.B., Collected Papers, 1892-1970, AIATSIS Ms.1515, box 16, item 158; upper case in the original.

²⁶⁶ Missionary Conference, 1937, *Report*, p.70.

²⁶⁷ Love, "What the Missions are Doing", p.16. However, Love did not openly endorse the deliberate encouragement of biological absorption; he may have merely regarded the process as the inevitable accompaniment of raising half-castes to white standards of living.

²⁶⁸ See for example, Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, p.6; Sexton, *Legislation Governing the Australian Aborigines*, p.12; Sexton, *An Extensive Survey*, p.7.

²⁶⁹ Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, p.6.

²⁷⁰ See J.H. Sexton, *Australian Aborigines*, Adelaide, c.1943, especially pp.27, 120-21. Sexton endorsed the social assimilation of half-castes into the white community; he may have assumed that their biological integration followed as a matter of course.

A number of commentators adopted an attitude of circumspection. In his articles on the half-caste problem of the south-west, Paul Hasluck remarked that in "the long run [biological absorption] may prove to be the way out"; but he saw it as impractical under existing circumstances, and advocated a straightforward policy of social assimilation.²⁷¹ N.M. Morley, secretary of the Australian Aborigines' Ameliorative Association, adopted the alternative view that since interbreeding between races was inevitable, the authorities were wise to take cognisance of the fact. In an article published in 1936, he stated that:

The policy has been adopted in Federal Territory of encouraging the marriage of whites with female half-castes in an effort to breed out colour. It is claimed by scientists that where there is no admixture of other blood than British and aboriginal, there is every chance of colour decreasing with succeeding generations. I do not profess to have a knowledge of anthropology, but if this 'encouragement' simply means the abolition of a prohibitory ordinance, it is only common justice. In any case, human nature will make itself felt, and the blood will be gradually absorbed, whether through legal marriage or promiscuous unions.²⁷²

Without promoting a deliberate program of absorption, Morley gave tacit approval, noting that the Aborigines were a branch of the Caucasian race, that their colour was "not deep seated", that interbreeding with Europeans led rapidly to the lightening of colour, and that was no case on record "where the colour in a later generation reverted to the dark again".²⁷³

The inevitability of racial intermixture was taken one step further by the Adelaide historian, A. Grenfell Price. Designating biological absorption "a far-sighted policy", he asserted that:

It looks toward breeding the Aborigine white, instead of letting the half-castes become black. Blood tests appear to show that the Aborigine is akin to the white man. There are no records of throw-backs. The black strain breeds out comparatively quickly, and the slight evidence available indicates that the octoroon is of good type. One feels that Australia should support the Federal authorities in

²⁷¹ Hasluck, *Our Southern Half-Caste Natives*, especially pp.5-6.

²⁷² N.M. Morley, "The Problem of the Half-Caste", p.4.

²⁷³ N.M. Morley, *Australia's Tragic Error: Five Addresses*, Moonee Ponds, Vic., 1940, pp.5-6; see also pp.13-16.

their policy, which is in accordance with racial tendencies; for if a country attains a large majority of one colour and a small minority of another the majority will always tend to breed the minority out.²⁷⁴

This argument - that a numerically preponderant white population would inevitably subsume a much smaller black population - echoed one strand of the doomed race idea. Eventually, all Aborigines would be absorbed into the white population. While Grenville Price regarded the process as inescapable, if not actually desirable, critics of absorption took a different view. Mary Bennett railed against Cook's scheme in the Northern Territory, claiming that the "real policy" was:

still the extermination of the unhappy native race, and the leaving of the most unfortunate native women at the disposal of lustful white men - this policy is euphemistically described by Australian officialdom as 'the absorption' of the native race and the 'breeding out of colour'!!! We shall be better able to evaluate this policy when another race applies it to ourselves as 'the absorption of the white race' and 'the breeding out of white people'!!!²⁷⁵

On the other hand, there were those who celebrated the process of total racial absorption. In 1936 R.H. Goddard, a member of the Anthropological Society of New South Wales, presented a paper entitled "The Passing of the Australian Aboriginal", in which he declared that:

They are doomed race [sic] while they remain black. They can be made white. Better than all political rights is the right of absorption or assimilation in marriage.²⁷⁶

Goddard effectively turned the doomed race idea inside out, insisting that "the preservation of the remnant of the race" demanded a thoroughgoing miscegenation.²⁷⁷

By the late 1930s, senior Aboriginal administrators were propounding the view that absorption would be the ultimate fate of the entire Aboriginal

²⁷⁴ A.G. Price, "Preserving the Aboriginal Race", in Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, p.15.

²⁷⁵ Unpublished article by M.M. Bennett, 15.9.1934, Elkin Archive, box 68, item 1/12/145.

²⁷⁶ R.H. Goddard, *The Passing of the Australian Aboriginal*, c.1936, typescript in Elkin Archive, box 141, item 3/1/5.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.* In his proposals for preservation, Goddard was clearly not thinking in the traditional terms of pure racial entities; he argued that white Australians should become proud to possess the blood of the country's original inhabitants.

race. At the 1937 Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, Cecil Cook stated that:

The policy of the Commonwealth is to do everything possible to convert the half-caste into a white citizen. The question arises whether the same policy should not be adopted in regard to the aborigines.... My view is that unless the black population is speedily absorbed into the white, the process will soon be reversed, and in 50 years, or a little later, the white population of the Northern Territory will be absorbed into the black.²⁷⁸

Comprehensive racial absorption followed logically from Cook's half-caste scheme. Although he considered that the means by which full-bloods reproduced half-castes required no encouragement, he acknowledged that the demographic trend was toward the decline of the former and the growth of the latter. At the 1937 Aboriginal Welfare Conference, J.A. Carrodus stated the case with his characteristic bluntness: "Ultimately, if history is repeated, the full bloods will become half-castes".²⁷⁹ Shortly after Carrodus made this remark, one of the most significant resolutions of the conference was passed; it stated:

that the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end.²⁸⁰

The destiny of the full-bloods was not so clearly laid out. But the vagueness of the prescriptions for this latter group, taken in the context of the reported conference discussions, seems to point toward a general agreement with Carrodus's statement.²⁸¹ The destiny of the full-bloods was to become half-castes; then, and only then, their destiny became "ultimate absorption".

At the 1937 conference, the most uncompromising advocate of absorption was the Western Australian Commissioner of Native Affairs, A.O.

²⁷⁸ *Aboriginal Welfare Conference, 1937*, p.14.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.21.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*, pp.3, 21.

²⁸¹ At the 1937 conference, the only Aboriginal administrator who argued against absorption was the Queensland Chief Protector, J.W. Bleakley; see *ibid.*, pp.8, 19-20. Nonetheless, Bleakley put his signature to the conference resolutions, including the "Destiny of the Race" statement.

Neville, who had made it an article of that state's policy since the early 1930s.²⁸² More explicitly than any other delegate, Neville argued that absorption would ultimately be the fate of the entire Aboriginal race. He asked:

Are we going to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there ever were any aborigines in Australia?²⁸³

After detailing the decline in the full-blood population, and corresponding rise in the numbers of half-castes in the south-west of his state, he answered his own question:

I see no objection to the ultimate absorption into our own race of the whole of the existing Australian native race.²⁸⁴

He later remarked in his published reminiscences that this was very much "a long-range plan". A beginning had to be made "with those first showing signs of fitness for the innovation", those of mixed descent.²⁸⁵ He also explained that the 1937 conference resolutions regarding full-blood Aborigines entailed no neglect of these people; the resolutions "merely placed the people in evolutionary order looking at it from the point of view of assimilation".²⁸⁶

In reviewing the 1937 conference, the Association for the Protection of Native Races singled out Neville's remarks for particular censure, claiming that the "absolute extinction of the native race appears to be the objective of the Commissioner".²⁸⁷ Secretary of the Association, William Morley, declared that "Mr. Neville's view of absorption really means extinction of the native race of Australia", and denounced Neville's "vague talk about

²⁸² For detail on Neville's policy in Western Australia see Biskup, *Not Slaves, Not Citizens*, pp.187-96; P. Jacobs, *Mister Neville: A Biography*, Fremantle, 1990, especially pp.190-96. See also Neville's reminiscences on his career, *Australia's Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community*, Sydney, c.1942, pp.26-27, 54-58.

²⁸³ *Aboriginal Welfare Conference, 1937*, p.11.

²⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.11.

²⁸⁵ Neville, *Australia's Coloured Minority*, p.27.

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.29. Neville used the term "assimilation" as a synonym for 'absorption'.

²⁸⁷ "Review of the Chief Protectors' Conference, 1937", p.17; see also pp.18-19.

absorption which means progressive extinction".²⁸⁸ Cecil Cook too, was not spared criticism. Although the Association did not explicitly accuse Cook of encouraging Aboriginal extinction, it clearly indicated that his policy of absorption led in the same direction as Neville's.²⁸⁹ Similar criticism was advanced by Tom Wright, Vice-President of the Labor Council of New South Wales. In his pamphlet calling for urgent reforms in Aboriginal administration, Wright maintained that:

The inclination of those in authority is to aim at the elimination of the aborigines by means of a gradual but planned 'vanishing' and the physical absorption of the remnants into the white population. This was clearly shown at the Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities held at Canberra in April, 1937.²⁹⁰

Citing statements made by Cecil Cook, J.B. Cleland and J.A. Carrodus at the conference, Wright claimed that absorption was little more than a euphemism for extinction.²⁹¹

W.E.H. Stanner took a more moderate, though still critical, view of the 1937 conference resolutions. In a "Memorandum on the Condition of the Australian Aborigines", which he drafted on behalf of the Royal Anthropological Institute of London, he remarked that "the assimilation into the white population of persons of native blood" should not be a high priority of the government; other matters were of far greater urgency.²⁹² In 1939 he again tackled the policy of absorption and the "Destiny of the Race"

²⁸⁸ W. Morley, "Association for the Protection of Native Races: Twenty-Seventh Annual Report, Year 1937-38", *The Aborigines' Protector*, vol.1, no.6, January 1939, p.22.

²⁸⁹ See especially "Review of the Chief Protectors' Conference, 1937", p.23.

²⁹⁰ T. Wright, *New Deal for the Aborigines*, Sydney, 1939, p.19.

²⁹¹ *ibid.*, pp.20-21.

²⁹² [W.E.H. Stanner,] Memorandum on the Condition of the Australian Aborigines, (hereafter Stanner Memorandum, 1938), with covering letter, R. Firth, Hon. Sec., RAI, to J.A. Lyons, PM, 14.2.1938, AA, CRS A1, 38/8043. In this file, authorship of the memorandum was not specified; in an article published much later, Stanner acknowledged that it was his own; see W.E.H. Stanner and D. Barwick, "Not by Eastern Windows Only: Anthropological Advice to Australian Governments in 1938", *Aboriginal History*, vol.3, part 1, 1979, p.37. The entire memorandum was reproduced as Appendix 1 of Stanner and Barwick's article, pp.54-60.

resolution from the 1937 conference.²⁹³ He maintained that this and other conference resolutions embodied:

most of the elements which have made so much of Australian native policy a tragi-comedy. Here are high official aspirations, unimpeachable liberal social principles, an ambitious paper plan, an objective dimly conceived and pleasantly worded. Here, apparently, is belief that prejudiced men, case-hardened viewpoints, vested interests, a bureaucracy with a long tenure of office yet to run, and a proven difficult environment will belie their history and become conveniently malleable. Here is a partial and faulty grasp of the facts and forces which have to be reckoned with.²⁹⁴

Although personally he held absorption in disfavour, Stanner was at pains to point out that his argument was "not that policy-makers should abandon their hope of fusing the mixed-bloods with white stock, if they really want to attain that end."²⁹⁵ However, such matters were trivial and ignored the real problem. It must, Stanner wrote, be asserted "with as much vigour as possible ... that the aborigines are dying out".²⁹⁶

²⁹³ W.E.H. Stanner, "The Aborigines", in J.C.G. Kevin (ed.), *Some Australians Take Stock*, London, 1939, pp.23-30.

²⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.27.

²⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.30.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.30. Unlike the more extreme critics, Stanner did not claim that absorption was deliberately engineered to ensure extinction.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROGRESS FOR ALL

In 1935 Dr Cecil Cook outlined a new policy for the Northern Territory, which aimed at the social integration of all Aborigines, not just those of mixed descent, into the wider Australian society.¹ Although his account of the means by which this could be accomplished remained rather vague, its central thrust was to civilise the primitives.² For administrative purposes, the Aboriginal population was to be divided into three categories according to their degree of enculturation into Western ways - "detrribalised natives", "partly detrribalised natives" and "myalls" - each of which had different requirements for their elevation into civilisation.³ Cook claimed that it was the increased availability of finance, with Australia's "emergence from the depression", which allowed him the scope to devise "a definite long-range policy in respect of the aboriginals".⁴ While this was probably so, it seems that a growing confidence in Aboriginal capacities may also have been a factor.

Invoking Enlightenment stage theory, Cook argued that Aboriginal primitivity was an outcome of environment, not of race, and in the appropriate circumstances Aborigines would progress. He explained that:

¹ At the same time, he persisted with the policy of biological absorption of the half-castes. In view of his remarks on the ultimate absorption of the entire Aboriginal race, it is possible that his scheme for the social uplift of full-bloods was merely preparatory to their biological integration.

² Cook remarked that his new policy was first "submitted verbally to the Minister, the Honourable T. Paterson, on the occasion of his visit to Darwin in August 1935"; Cook to Admin., 28.4.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541. First outlined in writing in a memorandum dated 7.10.1935, it was a further nine months before Cook set out his new policy in more detail, on 8.7.1936; even then it remained sketchy; see correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 37/70, part 1.

³ See Carrodus, memo: Aboriginal Policy, Northern Territory, 12.2.1936; Cook to Admin., 8.7.1936; both in AA, CRS A37/70, part 1. Memo: Aboriginal Policy - Northern Territory, (unsigned and undated; probably 1938), AA, CRS A1, 38/3540. Cook to Admin., 29.4.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541. Cook also outlined his policy at the 1937 Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities; see *Aboriginal Welfare Conference, 1937*, pp.13-14.

⁴ Cook to Admin., 28.4.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

The native organisation has been evolved by him to suit the peculiar conditions existing in this Continent prior to white settlement. Particularly, one may quote the absence of big game and the lack of any domestic animal or crop developed to a stage suitable for intensive culture. Under the conditions prevailing, the aboriginal found it necessary to limit his population, to migrate from water to water in small hordes and to live upon the yield of the hunt, supplemented with fruits, honey and roots occurring naturally in the area traversed.

Is it logical to assume that the aboriginal, of all human races, is unwilling or incapable of developing beyond this stage once the natural factors under which he became adapted to it cease to operate? The new civilization offers him domestic animals, crops and the means of cultivation.... The history of the human race has been the history of hunters who, having recognised the advantages of domesticating their quarry, have become pastoralists and later have applied the same principle to the cultivation of plants used for food and other domestic purposes. One may assume that the peculiar conditions prevailing in Australia were met along different lines by the aboriginal inhabitants but it does not follow that this race is not progressive. All experience in Australia has shown that the aboriginal is willing and capable of following the precedent of all other races in developing a higher civilization.⁵

Resonances from the eighteenth century were also sounded in his statement that:

the ultimate objective of the policy recommended is the conversion of the detribalised aboriginal in town districts from a social incubus to a civil unit of economic value, and in country districts from an unproductive nomad to a self-supporting peasant.⁶

The creation of a black Australian peasantry seems somewhat out of place among the national ideals of the 1930s. Yet it followed logically from Cook's prescription that the advancement of the Aborigines should not bring them into economic conflict with the white population.⁷

Although Cook's plans gained official approval and provided the basis for the government's long term policy which was announced by T. Paterson, Minister for the Interior, in October 1936, they were never implemented. A cabinet reshuffle in 1937 saw Paterson replaced by Jack McEwen, who was

⁵ Cook, memo: Aboriginal Missions, 2.4.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

⁶ Cook to Admin., 8.7.1936, AA, CRS A1, 37/70, part 1.

⁷ *ibid.* See also *Aboriginal Welfare Conference*, 1937, pp.13-14.

determined to put Aboriginal affairs on a new footing. Disregarding Cook's proposals, McEwen turned to the advice of a man who had been lobbying the Commonwealth government to adopt a new "positive policy" since the early 1930s - A.P. Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney.⁸ In 1938 Elkin, McEwen and Carrodus drafted the framework for a policy which was subsequently approved by cabinet and issued in February 1939.⁹ The "New Deal for Aborigines", as it was dubbed, was fundamentally in accord with the proposals put forward by Cook in 1935 and 1936.¹⁰

In 1938, when the broad outlines of the "New Deal" were submitted to Cook for his comments, he realised that not only were his own proposals to be disregarded but also he was to lose the position of Chief Protector in the process. In a flurry of official and confidential letters to the Administrator, Cook poured out his bitterness at this turn of events. He pointed out that apart from a few details of administrative structure, the supposedly new deal was no more than his own policy reworded.¹¹ Cook protested:

This policy is now returned to me complete in broad outline for my comments, with the variation that it is considered necessary to appoint another officer to implement it...

⁸ Throughout the 1930s, Elkin usually referred to his scheme for Aboriginal advancement as a "positive policy for the future", or more simply as a "positive policy". It was characteristic of Elkin to dwell upon the word 'positive'.

⁹ See *The Northern Territory of Australia: Commonwealth Government's Policy with Respect to Aborigines*, issued by the Honourable J. McEwen, Minister for the Interior, February 1939, 12pp. typescript, ANL, Np 572.99429 McE (hereafter *Commonwealth Policy 1939*). The cabinet draft of this document can be found in AA, CRS A452, 52/541; although substantially the same as the ANL document, as it appears in the AA file it lacks a few sentences which will be referred to later in this work. For Elkin's views on the policy and his part in its formulation, from both contemporary and later perspectives, see: Elkin to McEwen, 9.2.1939, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785; A.P. Elkin, "Australian Aboriginal and White Relations: A Personal Record", *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal*, vol.48, part 3, July 1962, p.222; Elkin, "Aboriginal Policy 1930-1950: Some Personal Associations", *Quadrant*, vol.1, no.4, Spring 1957, pp.30-31.

¹⁰ Elkin himself described Cook's scheme as: "Generally speaking ... very praiseworthy"; Elkin to Min. Int., 28.10.1936, AA, CRS A1, 37/1718.

¹¹ See Cook to Admin., 28.4.1938; Cook to Admin., 29.4.1938; both in AA, CRS A452, 52/541. The major administrative difference between the two policies was that whereas the "New Deal" demanded a separate Native Affairs Branch, Cook insisted that Aboriginal administration should remain attached to the medical service; see especially Cook to Admin., 2.9.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

I feel it unnecessary to do more than direct your attention to the anomaly and injustice of adopting a policy which I have submitted to a former Minister and had approved, with the proviso that I, being unfit to implement it, should be discarded and replaced by another officer.¹²

Casting about for an explanation for this anomalous state of affairs, he remarked that the "first that suggests itself is the propaganda of individuals and organizations with an anthropological bias".¹³ Less circumspectly, he alleged that it derived from the influence exerted by "an outside individual or an outside organization, probably not very remote from Professor Elkin".¹⁴ However, the target of Cook's attack was not so much Elkin himself as the Association for the Protection of Native Races and its secretary, the Reverend William Morley.¹⁵ For years, Cook complained, he had been a "scapegoat for Mr. Morley", and it appeared "that the scapegoat is now to be discarded as a final douceur to his and kindred organizations".¹⁶

While Cook's complaints were infused with a large measure of personal rancour, his basic allegation, that he was to be shifted aside in response to anthropological and humanitarian lobbying, was probably accurate. Instead of ironing out the relatively minor differences between Cook's and Elkin's proposals, McEwen simply discarded the Chief Protector's scheme. It seems that the new minister wished to make a clean sweep of Aboriginal affairs; and Cook's associations with past administrative practices and with the controversial program of breeding out the colour may have been seen as undesirable. It is likely too that after his long lobbying efforts, Elkin seized the moment.¹⁷ He was not alone in his lobbying. Throughout the 1930s, the Commonwealth government was besieged by recommendations and

¹² Cook to Admin., 28.4.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

¹³ Cook to Admin., 29.4.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

¹⁴ Cook to Admin., 28.4.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

¹⁵ Elkin was at the time president of the APNR; Morley, as secretary, was responsible for the majority of the Association's public statements.

¹⁶ Cook to Admin., 28.4.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

¹⁷ Tigger Wise, in her biography of Elkin, noted that he and McEwen "took to each other immediately". Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, pp.143-44.

complaints from groups interested in Aboriginal welfare. One of their persistent demands was for the science of anthropology to be brought to bear on the problems of the Northern Territory.

Applying Anthropology on Aborigines

As early as October 1930, the Royal Anthropological Institute of London urged the Australian government to appoint anthropologically trained officers in the Northern Territory.¹⁸ In December 1933 it again recommended that "protectors of aborigines should have some training in Anthropology", drawing attention to the fact "that such training has for some time past been available in Australia, in particular at the University of Sydney".¹⁹ Five years later, the Institute put the same point more forcefully.²⁰ In 1937 Radcliffe-Brown, recently appointed to the Chair of Social Anthropology at Oxford University, published a letter in the London *Times* in which he argued the need for a scientific approach to Australia's Aboriginal problems.²¹ Also from London, the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society suggested "the advisability of some training for the Protectors in anthropology".²² Locally, the Association for the Protection of Native Races was an ardent advocate of anthropological training for Northern Territory officers. In 1935 the secretary of the Association, William Morley, wrote strong letters of complaint against the elevation of Mr Vincent White, former Superintendent of the Darwin Compound, to the position of Assistant Chief Protector of Aborigines. Morley's central contention was that White had

¹⁸ H.A. Barringer, Home Aff., memo: Anthropological Course for Northern Territory Officers, 17.6.1931, AA, CRS A1, 31/2597.

¹⁹ L.O. Blagden, Hon. Sec., RAI, to High Commissioner for Australia, London, 21.12.1933, AA, CRS A431, 48/273, part 1.

²⁰ See correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 38/8043. See also Stanner and Barwick, "Not by Eastern Windows", pp.37-61.

²¹ A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Case for Scientific Understanding", *The Times*, 15.12.1937, cited in Stanner and Barwick, "Not by Eastern Windows", p.45.

²² J. Harris, Parliamentary Sec., A-S&APS, to Official Sec., Office of the High Commissioner for the C'wealth of Australia, 9.5.1934, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 2.

"no training in anthropology", and his appointment was therefore contrary to the government's stated position on the desirability of such training.²³

Almost all the Aboriginal welfare groups of the 1930s asserted the relevance of anthropology to Aboriginal administration and urged the appointment of suitably trained officers in the Northern Territory. A list of proposals to the Commonwealth government from the Victorian Aboriginal Group in 1933 included:

That the existing Cadet Service for New Guinea be extended to train Protectors of Aborigines in Anthropology and practical experience of the natives.²⁴

Four years later, the Group sent a similar recommendation for the consideration of the 1937 Conference of Aboriginal Authorities.²⁵ The Australian Federation of Women Voters urged the 1933 Premiers' Conference to consider the appointment of trained social anthropologists to sit on a national commission overseeing Aboriginal administration.²⁶ Even a section of missionary opinion was convinced that anthropological training would be of benefit not only to themselves but also to government officers. However, these groups which urged the appointment of anthropologically trained officers tended to be rather vague about what this was supposed to achieve. It seems to have been assumed that the study of anthropology would, in itself, promote a more sympathetic understanding of the Aborigines, and that scientifically trained personnel would automatically arrive at better administrative decisions.

²³ Morley to T. Paterson, Min. Int., 27.2.1935, AA, CRS A1, 34/10291. In reply, the Minister advised that while anthropological training may be "useful", it was not "indispensable"; Paterson to Morley, 3.4.1935, AA, CRS A1, 34/10291.

²⁴ Proposals to form basis of suggested petition to the Commonwealth Government, sent with covering note, A.N. Brown, Hon. Sec., Victorian Aborigines Group, to PM, 15.7.1933, AA, CRS A431, 48/961.

²⁵ Suggestions to the Conference of Chief Protectors, with covering note, A.N. Brown to Sec., Conference of Chief Protectors of Aborigines, 22.3.1937, AA, CRS A431, 48/961.

²⁶ J.A. Carrodus, memo: Control of Aborigines, 9.8.1933, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 1.

The attitude of Canberra bureaucrats toward anthropological training was not so much antagonistic as unenthusiastic; their priorities lay elsewhere.²⁷ When the survival of the University of Sydney's Department of Anthropology was under threat in 1931, due to the financial stringencies of the Depression, J.A. Carrodus, then the Chief Clerk in the Department of Home Affairs, wrote in praise of anthropology courses "of a practical nature":

I am of opinion that a practical course will be of considerable benefit to our officers in North Australia and Central Australia and that it is desirable that, if possible, the Chair of Anthropology should be retained.²⁸

He also noted that up to that time, the practical courses in anthropology had been utilised only by officers from Papua and New Guinea, except for Chief Protector Cook who had attended in 1930. Carrodus suggested that other Northern Territory officers should "undergo courses as opportunity offers".²⁹ Opportunity seldom offered. Seven years later, Carrodus could still write:

Up to the present the Territory of New Guinea has reaped the greatest benefit from the Anthropological Department. Only one officer of the Northern Territory, Dr. Cook, has undergone a course in practical anthropology at the University.

It is probable that, in the future, greater use of the Department will be made by officers of the Northern Territory Administration connected with the welfare of aboriginals.³⁰

Over the intervening years, he and other senior bureaucrats had penned many memoranda on the relevance of anthropology to Aboriginal administration.³¹

²⁷ Hostility to anthropology was more frequently expressed by politicians than by bureaucrats. For example, in 1938 a Queensland member of Federal Parliament, A. MacAlister Blain, suggested to Prime Minister Lyons that in framing Aboriginal policy more credence should be given to practical missionaries "and less use be made of anthropologists!"; AA, CRS A1, 38/403. Markus provided a useful discussion of the differing perspectives of bureaucrats and politicians in "After the Outward Appearance: Scientists, Administrators and Politicians" in B. Gammage and A. Markus (eds), *All That Dirt: Aborigines 1938*, Canberra, 1982, pp.96-103; see also Markus, *Governing Savages*, pp.122-43.

²⁸ J.A. Carrodus, memo: Chair of Anthropology, University of Sydney, 14.4.1931, AA, CRS A431, 50/1661.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Carrodus, memo, 10.2.1938, AA, CRS A431, 50/1661.

³¹ See for example Carrodus, memo, 12.2.1936, AA, CRS A1, 37/70, part 1; P.E. Deane, Sec., Home Aff., to Sec., PM Dept, 16.4.1931, AA, CRS A431, 50/1661.

Despite the lukewarm attitude of officials, anthropological expertise was occasionally sought. In early 1935 Donald Thomson was commissioned to investigate the problems of the inhabitants of Arnhem Land, in particular the causes of their conflicts with Japanese and European intruders.³² This was in the wake of the Caledon Bay killings and the trial of Tuckiar by Judge Wells, whose blatant bias from the bench inflamed the opposition of southern welfare groups and inspired a good deal of public interest in Aboriginal affairs.³³ Thomson had originally trained as a biologist, later converting to anthropology. In 1928 he became the first graduate in the one-year diploma course offered by the University of Sydney. At the time of his appointment in 1935, few Australians had superior qualifications in the discipline; but by then Thomson had decisively split from the Sydney school.³⁴

In 1935 the Department of the Interior considered the appointment of Dr H.K. Fry as a Medical Anthropologist in the Northern Territory, apparently following a suggestion from A.P. Elkin.³⁵ However, Fry was not a part of the Sydney school; his primary interest was in Aboriginal psychology and his connections were with the Adelaide anthropologists. Although Fry was offered the position, he declined, largely because of his unwillingness to serve

³² There was considerable dispute over the terms of Thomson's appointment. He refused to be answerable to the Administrator or to the Chief Protector of the Northern Territory, preferring to be responsible directly to the Minister for the Interior; the government refused to appoint him a Special Commissioner. After more than a year of negotiation, Thomson had his way and was made responsible directly to the Minister. See N. Peterson, "Donald Thomson: A Biographical Sketch" in D. Thomson, *Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land*, South Yarra, Vic., 1983, pp.6-8, and Peterson's briefer biography of Thomson in *NTDB*, pp.294-96.

³³ Markus provides good analyses of Judge Wells and the Tuckiar case in "The Impartiality of the Bench': Judge Wells and the Northern Territory Aborigines 1933-38", in D. Kirkby (ed.), *Law and History in Australia*, Bundoora, Vic., 1987, vol.3, pp.109-22; and in *Governing Savages*, pp.108-21. Assessments of the impact of the trial can be found in Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, pp.290-304; Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, pp.121-31.

³⁴ See Wise, *Self-Made Anthropologist*, pp.98-99, 131-32; Peterson, "Donald Thomson", pp.3-4.

³⁵ Elkin to Min. Int., 23.2.1935, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785. T. Paterson, Min. Int., to H.K. Fry, London, 25.4.1935; Carrodus, memo: Dr. H.K. Fry, Medical Anthropologist, Northern Territory, 17.6.1935; both in AA, CRS A1, 35/4434.

as an officer under the Chief Protector. Like Thomson, he wished to be given a more free hand by being made responsible direct to the Minister.³⁶ In 1936, a Patrol Officer was appointed to the Aborigines' Department of the Northern Territory. T.G.H. Strehlow, who took the position, was a fluent speaker of Aranda and familiar with Aranda society, having grown up on Hermannsburg Mission where his father was Superintendent. But he was not a trained anthropologist; his degree was in English Literature and Linguistics, taken at the University of Adelaide.³⁷

Considering that the Anthropology Department at the University of Sydney was founded with practical purposes in mind, why was it that more use was not made of the department on those few occasions when the government attempted to recruit specialised personnel into its Northern Territory service? Official half-heartedness provides only a partial answer. There were also problems within the discipline itself, and with the orientation of the department.

After Radcliffe-Brown's departure, Raymond Firth was appointed Acting Head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney. Firth was a former student of Malinowski, an adherent to functionalist theory and an ardent promoter of its practical relevance. Early in his career as Acting Head of Department, he published an article entitled "Anthropology and Native Administration", in which he explained how science could assist in the piece-by-piece reassembly of cultures shaken by alien impacts:

The principle of substitution then, of replacing an item of culture which is ill-adapted to a new situation by one which is better fitted to stand the strain, is advocated by modern anthropology. A matter of insistence in this case is that the novel item of culture shall be firmly linked on to the remainder of the social scheme, that it shall be in harmony with the old native system of beliefs and institutions, not alien and apart from it....

³⁶ Fry to Min. Int., 30.5.1935; Carrodus, memo, 17.6.1935; Elkin to Min. Int., 17.3.1936; Min. Int. to Elkin, 24.3.1936; all in AA, CRS A1, 35/4434.

³⁷ See McNally's biography of Strehlow, *Aborigines, Artefacts and Anguish*.

Constructive substitution is the course desired. It implies a change in the native culture which does not break down but builds up an institution which will fit into the general social scheme and is acceptable to the people themselves.³⁸

Firth noted that by the early 1930s, colonial governments were coming to appreciate the assistance which anthropology could offer, a trend which he attributed to:

the growth of the ethical and political concept that assistance, not exploitation, should be the aim of the white man in control of native peoples, that they should be ruled in their own interests, not in his - a concept which energises the Mandate system under which, for example, Australia holds the Territory of New Guinea.³⁹

But it did not energise the Australian government's administration of the native peoples within the Commonwealth; and nowhere in his article did Firth suggest that it might. Aboriginal studies and Aboriginal administration were not even mentioned in the article, all his practical examples being drawn from Papua New Guinea and from Africa.⁴⁰

In an article published a year later, Firth did refer to Aboriginal anthropology. But while Melanesian studies were considered significant in both theoretical and practical terms, the Australian Aborigines were regarded as a field for research rather than as the potential recipients of scientific assistance.⁴¹ Along conventional lines, he injected a note of urgency into the need to prosecute research into Aboriginal society; the people "were disappearing very rapidly", so scientific work must:

be done soon, ere the still primitive tribes lose the fresh vigour of their social and religious system, and those already attached to the skirts of the white man loosen their enfeebled grasp and go to join their elders.⁴²

³⁸ R. Firth, "Anthropology and Native Administration", *Oceania*, vol.2, no.1, September 1931, pp.4-5.

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp.1-2.

⁴⁰ Firth was, admittedly, a Melanesian specialist. Nonetheless, his total omission of a domestic problem which would appear to have been pertinent and which was becoming increasingly prominent, would seem to indicate at least an uncertainty about what anthropology may have to offer in the case of Aboriginal administration.

⁴¹ R. Firth, "Anthropology in Australia, 1926-1932 - and After", *Oceania*, vol.3, no.1, September 1932, especially pp.2-3, 6-9.

⁴² *ibid.*, pp.3, 6.

As a functionalist, Firth interpreted social problems in terms of "disequilibrium", or the failure of the components of the social mechanism to properly mesh together. In Papua and New Guinea, anthropology could offer practical guidance in the re-establishment of social equilibrium.⁴³ However, in Australia the task was more difficult, because:

The Australian aborigine, with a less complex social and religious structure, reacts in a simpler manner when his way of life is rudely thrown out of gear by the impact of an alien civilization - he mutely dies.⁴⁴

For such people, what possible assistance could detailed functionalist studies offer? Like Radcliffe-Brown before him, Firth steered his arguments on applied anthropology in the direction both of his own expertise and of the area of proven administrative relevance, in Australia's dependencies overseas.

After Firth's departure, A.P. Elkin was elevated to the chair late in 1933. Unlike his predecessor, Elkin was an Australian specialist; also unlike Firth, he was determined to forge an anthropology with practical implications for the administration of Aborigines. In this objective, he had the support of a good many of his colleagues. Yet even under Elkin's regime, the practical side of anthropology at the University of Sydney continued to be oriented toward Papua and New Guinea. From 1934, the departmental journal *Oceania* came under Elkin's editorship; the bulk of articles dealing with the practical or administrative aspects of anthropology remained focussed on Papuan and New Guinean affairs, except for those written by Elkin himself. By and large, Australian Aboriginal studies at the University of Sydney continued throughout the 1930s in the traditional manner of a salvage operation, recording what was left or could be remembered of a unique Aboriginal culture before it vanished forever. In this vein, a good deal of research was conducted and published in the pages of *Oceania* or in separate monograph studies. Probably, these publications contributed to a growing white Australian awareness of the complexity of Aboriginal culture; and some, such as Phyllis

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp.8-9.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.9.

Kaberry's work on Aboriginal women, challenged conventional assumptions about Aboriginal society.⁴⁵ In the 1930s, Elkin was the only Sydney anthropologist to make a sustained effort to grapple with the problems deriving from the interactions between black and white Australians. There were, however, others who made some contribution to the debate.⁴⁶

Ralph Piddington's contribution was to add a psychological dimension to the anthropology of "culture contact".⁴⁷ While Piddington was critical of "the more enthusiastic exponents of applied anthropology",⁴⁸ he considered that the science did and should have a practical side, stating that:

It is anomalous that the Australian Governments, which subsidize a Chair of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, where administrators from the Mandated Territory of New Guinea receive systematic instruction, should not make full use of the facilities thus provided for the training of those officials to whom they entrust the administration of native affairs in Australia itself.⁴⁹

As a psychologist, he argued that more consideration needed to be given to relations between blacks and whites at an individual level, pointing out that "the problems of culture contact are, in the last analysis, the sum of a number of individual problems of adjustment".⁵⁰ Since in Australia it was "between the squatter and the native that the permanent adjustment must be made", it

⁴⁵ See P.M. Kaberry, *Aboriginal Women: Sacred and Profane*, London, 1939.

⁴⁶ In an otherwise perceptive account of the history of anthropology at the University of Sydney, Nicolas Peterson overstated the case by claiming that "until the outbreak of World War II, research in Aboriginal Australia was actively pursued ... not under the guise of being useful to administration but for the same reason it had always been studied because of the insight it was thought to give into 'man's nature'"; Peterson, "Studying Man and Man's Nature", p.13. Unaccountably, Peterson neglected the enormous and very public efforts of A.P. Elkin, in the 1930s, to relate the science of anthropology to the practical problems of Aboriginal administration; he also neglected the other Sydney University anthropologists who made some effort in the same direction; one of these, Olive Pink, will be discussed in Chapter Six.

⁴⁷ R. Piddington, "Psychological Aspects of Culture Contact", *Oceania*, vol.3, no.3, March 1933, pp.312-24. This paper was first presented at the 1932 meeting of ANZAAS. Piddington carefully explained that his psychological interpretation was intended to complement, not to supersede, an anthropological analysis.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.316.

⁴⁹ R. Piddington, "Report of the Royal Commissioner Appointed to Investigate, Report and Advise upon Matters in relation to the Condition and Treatment of Aborigines (Western Australia)", *Man*, vol.36, November 1936, p.197.

⁵⁰ Piddington, "Psychological Aspects", p.313; also p.319.

was in that interface that the most basic problems of culture contact had to be resolved.⁵¹ Relations between Aborigine and government or administration were less significant. Whatever the validity of this line of argument, in practical terms it seems to have led merely to the notion that white people, especially those in frequent contact with Aborigines, should become better informed and more understanding of the indigenous way of life.⁵²

With his emphasis on assessing individual interactions, Piddington was critical of zealous humanitarians who applied blanket moral condemnations to the behaviour of outback white men. This, he claimed, merely retarded a "mutual understanding between natives and those white men with whom they come in contact".⁵³ As an example he cited:

the attitude frequently adopted towards sexual irregularities between white residents and aboriginal women in Australia. Now no one with any knowledge of the facts would deny that cruelty is frequently inflicted upon natives in this way. But it is equally untrue to say that such cruelty is inherent in the relationship, or even that it occurs in the majority of cases.⁵⁴

In arguing for a more culturally relativist interpretation of outback sexual mores, Piddington also took anthropologists to task for their failure to appreciate the viability of social change.⁵⁵ Sexual morality, in his view, was culturally contingent, and both humanitarians and anthropologists were misguided in judging sexual behaviour according to ideal standards. He explained that:

it must not be forgotten that the contact of two cultures forms a context (a new culture, in effect) in which institutions from both cultures fuse together to form new institutions which possess characters drawn from both sources. In view of this, to extend the implications of such a term as 'prostitution' to this new cultural *milieu*

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp.320-21, 324. Piddington was clearly thinking of Aborigines in remote regions like the Kimberleys, where he conducted his own fieldwork.

⁵² See *ibid.*, pp.319-21, 323-24.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.318.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.318.

⁵⁵ Apparently referring to the more doctrinaire devotees of functionalism, Piddington maintained that "the academic anthropologist ... sometimes forgets that white influence is itself a cultural factor, and that its effect upon primitive social structure may in itself be worthy of consideration"; *ibid.*, p.317.

is to distort the nature of the relationship involved. Looked at from the other point of view it is merely the extension, from the side of the aboriginal culture, of the perfectly normal and socially accepted institution of the lending of wives. It is only where the husband or the wife is unwilling that the native conscience is shocked ...⁵⁶

A connection between traditional customs and Aboriginal 'prostitution' had frequently been noted by others; but Piddington went much further than most in refusing to make moral judgements on frontier sexual behaviour.

Notions of cultural relativism were voiced with increasing frequency by social anthropologists in the inter-war period. Firth pointed out that "our moral values are a product of specific social circumstances, having no absolute validity"; thus in dealing with other cultures "a more liberal interpretation of our own system of morality is necessary".⁵⁷ In arguing the relativist line, Piddington asserted that questions of the moral merits or demerits of particular customs were "of the same type as the question whether tea is preferable to coffee, or *vice versa*".⁵⁸ A.P. Elkin also displayed some notions of cultural relativism, albeit in rather dilute form.⁵⁹ Yet adherence to a relativist perspective on culture and morality did not necessarily mean that the anthropologist denied the desirability of civilising the Aborigine. Ralph Piddington, for example, argued along purely pragmatic lines that:

We must necessarily adopt the assumption that what we term European civilization is the culture pattern dominant in the world today, and that, whatever our ideas may be as to the relative merits or demerits of civilized and primitive modes of life, it is the former which tend to be dominant. In other words we must think, in the main, of the savage adapting himself to our civilization rather than of the reverse relationship. This, of course, does not mean that there are no valuable lessons to be learned from the native - no one who has lived among a primitive people could uphold that contention - but merely that in the broad pattern of social structure we must think of civilized customs rather than of primitive ones as the dominant factors in the adjustment of mankind.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp.318-19.

⁵⁷ Firth, "Native Administration", p.4.

⁵⁸ Piddington, "Psychological Aspects", pp.314-15.

⁵⁹ See for example A.P. Elkin, "Native Education, with Special Reference to the Australian Aborigines", *Oceania*, vol.7, no.4, June 1937, p.478.

⁶⁰ Piddington, "Psychological Aspects", p.313; also p.321.

Piddington adopted a somewhat sceptical attitude toward the idea of progress, referring to Western social change as a process which was merely "dignified by the name progress".⁶¹ Yet for all its shortcomings, Western civilisation was, in his view, the hard reality to which Aborigines had to adjust.

While Piddington considered it necessary to civilise the savages, he gave little guidance as to how this might be done. Merely adding a psychological dimension did not resolve the fundamental problem that the social anthropology of the day was ill-suited to the practical tasks of Aboriginal administration. "Constructive substitution", in Firth's phrase, was regarded as appropriate in New Guinea, where indigenous cultures were vital and flourishing and where the desired state of "social equilibrium" could be maintained through times of social and cultural change. But anthropological theories held out less promise in Australia, where indigenous cultures were seen to be either in an advanced state of decay or, at very least, so fragile that the least breath of the winds of change brought only destruction.

Throughout the 1930s functionalism dominated Australian social anthropology both at theoretical and at practical levels. Yet discordant voices were heard, even from the heartland of Australian applied anthropology. F.E. Williams, Government Anthropologist in the Territory of Papua, gave the presidential address to the anthropology section of the 1939 meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science.⁶² Warning that what he had to say "may be deemed unorthodox, because functionalism holds the field", he went on to provide an incisive critique of the school.⁶³ While he acknowledged that "if any kind of anthropology can claim

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.321.

⁶² F.E. Williams, "Creed of a Government Anthropologist" in *Report of the Twenty-Fourth Meeting of the ANZAAS*, 1939, pp.145-59.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.148. On the same page he also claimed that he had "never owed the school any allegiance", by which he presumably meant that he was not a doctrinaire devotee of functionalism; his anthropological publications - and this ANZAAS address - clearly show that he did draw upon functionalist theory, amongst other currents of anthropological thought.

to be of practical use, it is this which we call the functional", Williams maintained that functional theory had led to the "serious error" of "overstressing the systematism of culture".⁶⁴ The fallacy, he declared:

... exists in the premises of functionalism, it is a fallacy of over-statement. The integration of culture is not a principle but merely a good idea which has been ridden too hard.⁶⁵

In place of the functionalist dogma that a healthy society was in a state of cultural equilibrium, all its parts neatly integrated together, Williams proposed a "theory of culture as a semi-integrated, imperfect whole". This, he claimed, would "allow for the process of expurgation (as well as expansion) in a way that seems hardly possible if we postulate a full, or even a very high; degree of integration".⁶⁶ As well as providing a critique of functionalism, Williams' paper made the simple point that theoretical coherence and practical efficacy were not necessarily compatible. Effectively, it was a celebration of anthropological eclecticism.

Although Elkin never published any such searching critique of functional theory, he too travelled down a path of eclecticism, combining diverse intellectual strands in an endeavour to construct an anthropology suited to the distinctive problems of Australia. His "positive policy for the future" drew upon three basic currents of anthropological thought: an evolutionist or progressivist theme, which entailed a model of social change as an advancement from primitivity toward civilisation; a racial theme, which posited inherent differences between human groups in terms of their capacities for such advancement; and a functionalist theme which envisaged social change as a piece by piece reassembly of the working components of a social mechanism. The three currents did not always flow smoothly together. Indeed, the confusion which is apparent in many of Elkin's Aboriginal welfare

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp.148-50. A similar argument, though in less developed form, was expressed in Williams' earlier paper, "Some Effects of European Influence on the Natives of Papua" in *Report of the Twenty-Second Meeting of the ANZAAS*, 1935, pp.215-22.

⁶⁵ Williams, "Creed", p.153.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.155.

articles may best be understood in terms of the tensions between them. Nonetheless, in general terms, the evolutionist or progressivist view provided the basic framework. In Elkin's words, the task was "to frame and put into operation a policy designed to raise [Aborigines] in the scale of civilisation".⁶⁷ Functionalism provided some guidance as to how this social change could be effected; while the concept of race set the parameters of change.

Yet a fourth current of thought needs to be added. The Christian humanitarian tradition both informed Elkin's attitudes toward social problems and imbued his quest for a positive and practical Aboriginal policy with a sense of urgency. As a young man, he had been ordained a priest of the Anglican Church.⁶⁸ He was a later convert to the cause of science. In 1921 he began a Master of Arts thesis dealing, appropriately, with the religion of the Australian Aborigines.⁶⁹ Through the early 1920s, his interest in anthropology sharpened. In 1925 he travelled to London, where he studied under Professor Grafton Elliot Smith and wrote a doctoral dissertation on "The Myth and Ritual of the Australian Aborigines".⁷⁰ In London, he met Radcliffe-Brown; by the time Elkin returned to Australia, Radcliffe-Brown occupied the Chair of Anthropology at the University of Sydney. Not until after he had been awarded his doctorate did Elkin conduct any anthropological field work, his first investigations being in the Kimberleys in 1927 and 1928. There, for the first time, he came face to face with Aborigines as people, and with the conditions of life in a remote outpost of European

⁶⁷ A.P. Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future of the Australian Aborigines", *Oceania*, vol.5, no.1, September 1934, p.15.

⁶⁸ See Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p.22.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.34.

⁷⁰ See *ibid.*, pp.44-50. Grafton Elliot Smith was an Australian-born anatomist and racial theorist who spent the greater part of his adult life in Britain. In the 1920s he was a staunch adherent to the diffusionist doctrine that all human civilisation derived ultimately from ancient Egypt. Elazar Barkan, in *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, pp.38-47, examined Elliot Smith's somewhat uneasy combination of racial distinctions with an incipient egalitarianism. He nominated Elliot Smith as "an unlikely hero in the story of the transition away from formal racial typology", but pointed out that he did play a part in that shift. Elliot Smith's equivocal stance on race may have been a significant influence on his student, Elkin.

settlement. Less than a year before his arrival, the notorious Forrest River Massacre had occurred; he later wrote of the impact of finding "gaps in genealogies on the Forrest River which represented individuals who, not long before, had been shot and whose bodies had been burnt by a punitive expedition led by two policemen".⁷¹ In addition, Elkin was horrified by what he saw of the authoritarian and high-handed methods employed at the Anglican Forrest River Mission. Encouraged by the Reverend Needham, chairman of the Australian Board of Missions, in 1928 he wrote the first of what was to become a long series of critiques of mission policies and methods.⁷²

Later in life, Elkin remarked that before his Kimberley experiences his interest in the Aborigines was purely academic; he had "no humanitarian motive", and was not "concerned with the contact situation".⁷³ Subsequently, humanitarianism and the problems of culture contact were prominent themes in his writings. In 1931 Elkin was invited to address the Association for the Protection of Native Races. Despite his criticism of "the negative, though humanitarian, attitude of the Association", he quickly became one of its most prominent spokesmen.⁷⁴ In 1933 he was elected president, and the pamphlet he published that year, *A Policy for the Aborigines*, remained a central plank in the Association's lobbying for years afterward.

In the brief ten pages of *A Policy for the Aborigines*, Elkin set out his views on the "negative" protectionist policies of the past and outlined the "positive" policy he envisaged for the future. Always in his lobbying he was careful to strike a positive note; dwelling on the sins of the past was to him a futile exercise. Even in condemning protectionist policies, he acknowledged

⁷¹ Elkin, "Aboriginal and White Relations", p.212. For an account of the Forrest River massacre, see Biskup, *Not Slaves, Not Citizens*, pp.84-85.

⁷² See Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, pp.60-67.

⁷³ Elkin, "Aboriginal and White Relations", p.212.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp.213-14; see also A.P. Elkin, "Native Policy in Australia", *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, vol.2, no.8, November 1943, p.276.

that they had been motivated by "kind intentions".⁷⁵ They were, however, inadequate, for merely shielding Aborigines from overt abuse could "not solve the problem of the clash of races".⁷⁶ White Australians, he insisted, were "morally bound to aid the development of the primitive race"; it was "the responsibility of a civilized nation".⁷⁷ While his pamphlet made few suggestions of specific strategies for Aboriginal development, Elkin played upon a comparison between native policy in Australia and that in Papua and the Mandated Territories of New Guinea. In the latter areas, considerations of native "welfare and development" were uppermost, whereas in Australia these issues had been much neglected.⁷⁸ He suggested setting up a system in northern Australia similar to that which prevailed in Papua, complete with patrol officers who had been trained in anthropology.⁷⁹ Most of all, he argued the need for strong administrative control over relations between black and white. Elkin advocated the appointment of an Administrator of Native Affairs in northern Australia who:

should be clothed with strong administrative powers, and be as free from control by a distant Parliament or bureaucracy as, say, the Lieutenant-Governor of Papua.⁸⁰

In the long Australian tradition, Elkin's plans for the Aborigines entailed a large measure of authoritarianism.⁸¹

The year 1933 was a significant one for Elkin. At the end of that year he was elevated to the Chair of Anthropology at the University of Sydney. As the only professor of anthropology in Australia and as the president of the

⁷⁵ A.P. Elkin, *A Policy for the Aborigines*, Morpeth, 1933, p.7. In later articles too, where Elkin published criticisms of protectionist policies he always balanced this with due recognition of their humanitarian intentions; see for example Elkin, "Native Education", pp.476-79.

⁷⁶ Elkin, *Policy for the Aborigines*, pp.6-8.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, pp.8, 10.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp.1,8.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, pp.8-9.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.8.

⁸¹ Elkin, like Baldwin Spencer and others before him, advocated authoritarian control not only over blacks but over whites as well.

country's largest Aboriginal lobby group, he was in an extraordinarily influential position. In addition, as an Anglican cleric he had connections with various missionary bodies. From around this time, too, he became a frequent and respected correspondent with members of parliament and senior bureaucrats.

From the start, Elkin won a respectful hearing from the Minister for the Interior, J.A. Perkins, and his departmental secretary, H.C. Brown. Circumstances were in his favour: in 1933 and 1934 the Caledon Bay killings and trial of Tuckiar put Aboriginal affairs in the public spotlight; Perkins was one of the few ministers in the inter-war years to take his Aboriginal responsibilities seriously; and Elkin's stance as the moderate, well-informed and constructive critic won him the willing ear of politicians and bureaucrats. In March 1935 one of his letters pleading the need for change in the Northern Territory was annotated by H.C. Brown: "Professor Elkin is always ready and willing to help the Dept [of the Interior] in any way possible, and I would suggest that an appointment be made with him when details of his proposals could be discussed".⁸² By this time, Perkins had lost his cabinet position and Brown was soon to be shifted into another department. The loss of these two men, his closest supporters in government, had been a fear of Elkin's for some time.⁸³

Perkins' replacement, Thomas Paterson, did not display his predecessor's commitment to Aboriginal matters; and the new secretary of the Department of the Interior, J.A. Carrodus, did not take so readily to the Professor of Anthropology as Brown had done. Shortly after his elevation to the position of departmental secretary, Carrodus penned a highly critical memo on Elkin's suggested policy, as outlined in his correspondence and his two publications, *A Policy for the Aborigines* and "Anthropology and the

⁸² Annotation, H.C. Brown, 1.3.1935, on letter Elkin to Min. Int., 23.2.1935, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785.

⁸³ See Elkin to W. Morley, Hon. Sec., APNR, 24.10.1934, APNR Records.

Future of the Australian Aborigines".⁸⁴ In his distinctively severe bureaucratic style, Carrodus went through the documents point by point, highlighting Elkin's impracticality and his "lack of knowledge of the facts", claiming that any attempt to implement his proposals would "be simply courting disaster and trouble".⁸⁵ Most tellingly, Carrodus asserted that Elkin's recommendations were:

like many others put forward by persons and institutions interested in the welfare of aboriginals; a germ of an idea is suggested but no attempt is made to elaborate it or follow it to its logical conclusion.⁸⁶

Yet before long, Carrodus too was won over, expressing his respect, if not always his agreement, with the professor. By 1938, the two were cooperating in drafting the "New Deal for Aborigines" policy, the foundations for which were laid down in Elkin's earlier publications which Carrodus had criticised so severely in 1935.⁸⁷

Gaining the ear of government ministers and bureaucrats was one achievement necessary for the implementation of Elkin's proposals.⁸⁸ This, however, seems to have come rather easily to him; his moderation and his

⁸⁴ Elkin had sent these two publications to Prime Minister Joseph Lyons in November 1934; see Elkin to PM, 21.11.1934, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785. The memo by Carrodus, entitled Policy for the Aborigines - Professor A.P. Elkin, is undated and unsigned, but its position within the file, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785, indicates a date early in 1935, and its style clearly indicates Carrodus as the author.

⁸⁵ [Carrodus,] memo: Policy for the Aborigines - Professor A.P. Elkin, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Elkin himself acknowledged that the guiding principles of the New Deal were taken from his earlier *A Policy for the Aborigines* publication; see A.P. Elkin, "Anthropology in Australia, 1939", *Oceania*, vol.10, no.1, September 1939, p.24; Elkin, "Native Policy in Australia", p.276.

⁸⁸ It seems that a close understanding of the existing mechanisms of state was not an essential requirement of the lobbyist. In his letters to officials, Elkin frequently betrayed an extraordinary ignorance of the legislative and legal framework within which Aborigines were administered. This was well illustrated in a letter which he wrote to Carrodus in March 1941, requesting "information regarding the rights of Aborigines of mixed blood in the Northern Territory in particular, and from the Commonwealth point of view, in Australia in general". His following remarks - including the bald statement "I suppose there is some Act governing this" - displayed a remarkable unfamiliarity with the process of legislative enactment and legal interpretation. See Elkin to Carrodus, 10.3.1941, AA, CRS A431, 50/597.

eschewing negative condemnation in favour of positive and constructive suggestions, struck a chord with the relevant officials.⁸⁹ More difficult was the task of shaping a practical anthropology appropriate to the Aboriginal problem. Out of his eclectic approach to this task, he devised a program for the assimilation of Aborigines into the wider Australian society. For Elkin, assimilation was an affirmation of faith in an Aboriginal capacity for civilisation. Yet Elkin's confidence in Aboriginal advancement was never total, for he could not shrug aside the notion that innate racial characteristics may constitute an impediment to progress.

A Nagging Question of Race

Racial determinism was most salient in Elkin's earlier writings. In 1929 he published a paper in four parts, significantly entitled "The Practical Value of Anthropology", in which he argued the necessity of basing native administration on sound scientific principles.⁹⁰ It was a rambling, sometimes confusing, sometimes almost incoherent article, for Elkin was grappling with two difficulties inherent to his discipline. One was the thorny question of the possible significance of race in determining a people's social and cultural attributes. The other was the challenging task of forging a practical anthropology which was relevant to Australian conditions. Although in this article Elkin did not get far in the latter endeavour, in the attempt he became entangled in the enduring issues of racial inheritance.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Some of his students were less diplomatic in their criticisms, much to the annoyance of officialdom. For example, Ralph Piddington's condemnation of the treatment of Aborigines in Western Australia - as well as his alleged drunken behaviour in Broome - was a subject of complaint from Chief Protector A.O. Neville for two and a half years; see Neville to Committee on Anthropological Research of the ANRC, 26.4.1932, and subsequent correspondence to 15.9.1934, in Elkin Archive, box 157, item 4/1/25. Elkin, on the other hand, managed to maintain a relationship with Neville which was not merely cordial but apparently friendly, despite the latter's support for a program of biological absorption, which was an anathema to Elkin; see their correspondence in Elkin Archive, box 157, items 4/1/25 and 4/1/26.

⁹⁰ A.P. Elkin, "The Practical Value of Anthropology", *Morpeth Review*, 1929, part 1: vol.1, no.7, pp.23-33; part 2: vol.1, no.8, pp.44-47; part 3: vol 1, no.9, pp.33-44; part 4: vol.1, no.10, pp.43-50.

⁹¹ On the practical application of anthropology, the article offered little beyond the commonplace observation that understanding was the first step toward amelioration.

In his "Practical Value" articles, Elkin maintained a conventional distinction between primitive and civilised peoples, explicitly relating this to differences of inherent racial endowment.⁹² Although he considered that as members of a common human species "fundamentally, all races are one", he went on to explain that:

The fundamental unity of human races, however, does not mean that all races are biologically equal with respect to all their powers. Indeed, ... there are differences.... some races possess certain powers in greater degree or in more individuals, or in both, than do others. Thus, the Australian Aborigines and the African Negroes are human and have their powers, but they are not necessarily equal to the white or yellow races, especially as regards those traits which are most important for the development of advanced culture.⁹³

Acknowledging that it was "difficult to separate biological from cultural factors", he nonetheless maintained that:

if we deal with peoples who appear to be furthest apart as regards the higher mental factors, we are able to correlate with this fact a corresponding difference in brain size and arrangement.⁹⁴

He admitted also that:

some persons will doubt this conclusion of the average inferiority of the 'black' races. Certainly, the cultural Anthropologist who, during his field-work, has day by day discussed with 'blacks' aspects of their own culture, and in doing so has forgotten that he has been associated with primitive naked savages, will be inclined to doubt it.⁹⁵

Such persons could maintain that the difference between blacks and whites was "not one between different types or standards of brain, but between different stages of culture, say, the stone and the iron ages". Elkin, at this time, considered it "doubtful, however, whether such a line of reasoning will prove to be valid".⁹⁶

Although he acknowledged a diversity of opinion on the matter, in Elkin's view "brain size and arrangement" was "causally related with mental and cultural powers". From this, he argued:

⁹² See for example Elkin, "Practical Value", part 3, pp.36-37.

⁹³ *ibid.*, pp.33-35.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.35.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.37.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.37-38.

we must infer that the higher aspects of European culture cannot be fully appreciated by such primitive peoples as the Negro, Australian Aborigine and Melanesian, apart from a few exceptions. This does not mean that the bearers of that culture cannot help these peoples. They can, but not by suddenly engulfing them in a strange, though worthy cultural endowment, from above and outside, but rather, by helping them to develop further along their own cultural lines which are in harmony with their own neurological stage of development.⁹⁷

How this assisted development could be accomplished was not explained. Nor did he explicate the phrase "along their own cultural lines", a particularly confusing phrase since Elkin's entire article was framed within an essentially unilinear model of development, arranging cultures and races along a single scale from high to low. If the expression had any meaning at all, it was presumably that while the basic stages of progress were common to all humanity, some slight variations were possible in the journey toward civilisation.

Elkin puzzled over the observation that for races like the Aborigines, civilisation did not civilise; it destroyed. The primitive races had been unable to adapt themselves "when brought into contact with higher cultures", and thus had "gone under".⁹⁸ To Elkin, the theories of Pitt-Rivers were alluring, for they neatly combined the functionalist dogma of social integration with a recognition of inherent racial differences. He explained that:

The problem is, can a people which has for a long period been possessed of a particular type of culture, be really influenced by a culture of a widely different kind, unless its physical stock be radically changed through miscegenation, more particularly with the blood of the bearers of the immigrant culture? If the answer be 'yes' in some cases, and 'no' in others, then some ethnic stocks possess the capacity of changing their culture under such conditions, while others do not. To put it somewhat differently, the power to evolve, acquire or accept a culture depends then on a definite capacity 'inherent in the ethnic composition' of a people, its 'culture-potential', to use Pitt-Rivers' term. It may therefore be physically impossible for such people as the Australian Blacks or the Melanesians to change the forms of their culture, that is, their traditional beliefs, customs, art-forms, and so on,

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.37.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, pp.38-39.

and that the attempt to cause them to do so from without may lead to their extinction whether through depopulation or miscegenation.⁹⁹

This line of reasoning could have led to a defeatist attitude toward the Aboriginal problem; but defeatism was not in Elkin's nature. Pitt-Rivers' theories were attractive, but Elkin stopped short of a whole-hearted endorsement. His bewilderment over the relative significance of race and social environment was well expressed in a passage in which he drew attention to:

the view that a people may be so adapted ethnically (biologically) to its culture that it cannot adapt itself to an immigrant culture, and further, that such a culture only becomes implanted amongst a native population in proportion as the latter has become miscegenated with the bearers of the new culture. The previous discussion of the inequalities of races lends some support to the first of these conclusions, but much more research must yet be carried out before a definite solution can be given to the problem. That miscegenation of a 'primitive' people and a 'higher' stock does produce a type which is better able to adapt itself immediately to the culture of the latter, is what we should expect, and, in fact, it does happen. Examples could be quoted from the Pacific, the Maories [sic] being the outstanding case. Most of us, too, know that half-castes - white and Australian Aboriginal - do take their place in our civilisation more readily than do the pure Blacks. But as already [sic] pointed out, their early training and surroundings, which are generally among whites, might largely account for this. But still we can reasonably look for a biological basis for it.¹⁰⁰

A little later in the same article, he declared that in considering the "problems arising out of racial mixture" it was necessary "to take account of the social, cultural and historical aspects of the races concerned, but these should not be confused with the biological questions".¹⁰¹ In 1929, Elkin himself still had a long way to go in this regard.

Among social anthropologists of the day, Elkin was far from unique in awarding credibility to the notion that racial inheritance may be a determinant of cultural attributes. To some extent, the concept of race may be considered an item of intellectual baggage inherited from an earlier anthropology and not

⁹⁹ Elkin, "Practical Value", part 1, p.32.

¹⁰⁰ Elkin, "Practical Value", part 3, p.40.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.44.

yet subjected to adequate disciplinary scrutiny by the new generation of socially oriented scholars.¹⁰² Yet it was a very heavy item of baggage, and one which could not easily be discarded. For Elkin, writing in the 1930s, questions of race were vital and pressing. Over the course of the decade, he pushed racial considerations more and more to the side, but never entirely out of the picture. For all his insistence on the viability of social assimilation, race remained a persistently nagging question.

Particularly in the early part of the 1930s, Elkin attached considerable significance to the long-standing racial measurement of cranial capacity. In 1932 he remarked that the "smaller brain capacity of the aborigines as compared with that of the bearers of the new culture suggests at least a handicap".¹⁰³ More decisively, he asserted that:

we must face the physiological fact that the aborigine is, generally speaking, endowed with a comparatively small size of brain, the average capacity of which is twenty per cent less than ours. Now this implies a handicap in the brain machinery required for adaptation to and overcoming of, circumstances, especially such as have been introduced by a people whose brain capacity is so much higher.¹⁰⁴

This assessment accorded with the writings of contemporary specialists in Aboriginal psychology. S.D. Porteus, in his *Psychology of a Primitive People*, maintained that the average size of the Aboriginal brain was approximately

¹⁰² The anthropologist Gillian Cowlshaw adopted this perspective in her analyses of the persistence of the concept of race in Australian social anthropology. However, Cowlshaw's position was that of the anthropological insider, whose primary purpose was the reforming or reorientation of the discipline by pointing up the supposed errors of the past. While her accounts were both historically informed and perceptive, Cowlshaw's stance as internal disciplinary critic led her away from a full historical contextualisation of such figures as Elkin. Also, her major targets appear to have been a later generation of anthropologists, including the Berndts and Maddock. See in particular G.K. Cowlshaw, "Australian Aboriginal Studies: the Anthropologists' Accounts", *Sydney Studies in Society and Culture*, no.4, 1988, pp.60-79. See also G.K. Cowlshaw, "Aborigines and Anthropologists", *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no.1, 1986, pp.2-12; G.K. Cowlshaw, "Race for Exclusion", *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, vol.22, no.1, March 1986, pp.3-24; G.K. Cowlshaw, *Black, White or Brindle: Race in Rural Australia*, Cambridge, 1988.

¹⁰³ A.P. Elkin, "The Social Life and Intelligence of the Australian Aborigine: A Review of S.D. Porteus's 'Psychology of a Primitive People'", *Oceania*, vol.3, no.1, September 1932, p.111.

¹⁰⁴ A.P. Elkin, "Cultural and Racial Clash in Australia", *Morpeth Review*, no.21, September 1932, p.38.

twenty percent less than that of the European, and that there was a correlation between the average cranial capacity of a racial group and its "cultural level".¹⁰⁵ In their 1931 article, "The Mentality of the Australian Aborigine", H.K. Fry and R.H. Pulleine designated as "a pertinent fact" the assertion that "the cranial capacity of the aborigine is relatively less than that of any other extant race".¹⁰⁶ However, Porteus and Fry and Pulleine were wary of inferring too much from measurements of the skull.¹⁰⁷ The greater part of their research entailed subjecting Aborigines to barrages of spatial, memory and intelligence tests. Although Fry and Pulleine drew only tentative inferences from their testing procedures, Porteus came to the far-reaching conclusion that Aborigines were "as a racial group, inadaptable to our form of civilisation".¹⁰⁸

While Elkin came gradually to develop a degree of scepticism about the significance of cranial capacity, he was dubious from the outset about claims made on the basis of intelligence tests. It was not that he disparaged attempts to find an objective measure. As an ardent empiricist, he believed that such things as intelligence could be quantified, and was confident that "when satisfactory psychological tests have been devised to measure aboriginal intelligence, it will be found to be of no mean order".¹⁰⁹ In Elkin's view, such

¹⁰⁵ Porteus, *Psychology of a Primitive People*, pp.321-33. Porteus devoted an entire chapter of this book (pp.378-407) to a refutation of the doctrine that there were no intellectual inequalities between races; at the time, this doctrine was in its infancy, at least in scientific circles.

¹⁰⁶ Fry and Pulleine, "The Mentality of the Australian Aborigine", p.153.

¹⁰⁷ Their colleagues in Britain and America were also tending to minimise the significance of cranial capacity as a measure of racial intelligence. However, the notion that there was a correlation between the two had by no means been totally discredited; for an example of contemporary scientific opposition to the notion that intelligence could be assessed by measurement of the skull, see O. Klineberg, *Race Differences*, New York, 1935, (reprinted Westport, Conn., 1974), pp.77-89.

¹⁰⁸ Porteus, "Mentality of Australian Aborigines", p.33; see also Porteus, *Psychology of a Primitive People*. Fry and Pulleine, on the other hand, found that sensory and motor tests revealed that the Aborigine did "not differ much from the European"; and the intelligence tests highlighted, most of all, the "difficulty of estimating mental abilities"; Fry and Pulleine, "The Mentality of the Australian Aborigine", pp.164-65.

¹⁰⁹ A.P. Elkin, "Anthropology and the Australian Aboriginal", in Needham, *White and Black in Australia*, p.17.

tests had not yet been devised. He was critical of Porteus's attempts to extract definite conclusions from intelligence tests which the psychologist himself admitted to be only imperfectly adapted to the thought-processes of the Aborigines.¹¹⁰ More robust criticism of the application of psychological tests to Aborigines was advanced by Marjorie and Ralph Piddington, both of whom had worked under Porteus in 1931.¹¹¹ Their own psychological research demonstrated "conclusively that mental tests (even of the 'performance' variety) are quite unsuited to natives reared in a primitive environment".¹¹² According to the Piddingtons:

The general conclusion from the results of the work with psychological tests is that such tests, for the purpose of racial psychology, require careful selection, and that they are not suitable for application to aborigines who have had no schooling.... From the point of view of mental measurement ... the quantitative results are of little value.¹¹³

Aboriginal intelligence remained a contentious issue in science throughout the 1930s and it continued to have some significance in Elkin's writings.¹¹⁴ Late in the decade, he was more forthright in asserting the limitations of intelligence tests, claiming in 1937 that:

these tests are matters of culture and traditions and not just of individual mental capacity, and to test the members of one culture for their capacity to respond to another culture, or to parts of it, is a very difficult matter indeed.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Elkin, "Social Life and Intelligence", especially pp.110-11. In his reply to Elkin's review, Porteus again admitted some limitations to his tests, but denied that this affected the validity of his conclusions, arguing that: "A theory may be held to be reasonably established even if the evidence is not wholly acceptable"; Porteus, "The Psychology of a Primitive People", pp.107-09.

¹¹¹ M. Piddington and R. Piddington, "Report of Field Work in North-Western Australia", *Oceania*, vol.2, no.3, March 1932, pp.342-58. The Piddingtons did not directly criticise Porteus's work or his conclusions; however, the particular psychological tests which they held to be inadequate or inappropriate were those on which Porteus had based his findings in 1929.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.357.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.358. In Porteus's rejoinder, "Mentality of Australian Aborigines", pp.30-36, he argued that the Piddingtons' data was congruent with his own findings; in the process, he skated very lightly over the Piddingtons' major conclusion that test scores were dependent on socio-cultural background and gave no reliable measure of racial aptitude.

¹¹⁴ See for example Elkin, "Anthropology and the Australian Aboriginal", pp.16-17; Elkin, "Anthropology in Australia, 1939", p.22.

¹¹⁵ Elkin, "Native Education", p.487.

He still considered the measurement of Aboriginal intelligence a worthwhile endeavour.

For Elkin, questions of Aboriginal adaptability and their capacity to adopt the ways of civilisation were of more pressing importance than the quantification of their intelligence. In his 1932 article, "Cultural and Racial Clash in Australia", he postulated the inheritance of an Aboriginal way of life as part of their racial constitution, making them unable to adapt to changing circumstances.¹¹⁶ Thus, he suggested:

the Australian aboriginal race is going down to biological history as another instance of a type which was so adjusted to, and specialized for, one environment, that it could not adapt itself to another.¹¹⁷

Despite these statements, Elkin's stance on Aboriginal adaptability remained equivocal, and he avoided definite commitment on the question of whether they could become civilised.¹¹⁸ In another article published in the same year, he suggested that the "smaller brain capacity of the aborigines", together with "the experiences of the past 145 years", offered:

little hope that the aborigines will adapt themselves to the new human and cultural environment which has come upon them. We are almost forced to realize the possibility that the aboriginal race may have been so completely adapted biologically as well as mentally to its own cultural environment that it cannot adapt itself to a culture of a different type, or, in other words, that it lacks the 'ethnic capacity' to become civilized.¹¹⁹

If this came dangerously close to defeatism, he added the rider:

But while this is so from an academic point of view, yet we must remember that the change in the aborigines' social, spiritual and economic environment which was caused by white settlement was severe and sudden.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Elkin, "Cultural and Racial Clash", pp.36-37.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.37-38.

¹¹⁸ Equivocation was probably the most notable feature of his "Cultural and Racial Clash" article. In the concluding paragraph, p.45, he posed the questions: "Are the aborigines, full-blood and mixed-blood, biologically able to become part of our civilisation and society? If so, will our racial prejudice allow either of them to do so?" The questions were left open.

¹¹⁹ Elkin, "Social Life and Intelligence", p.111.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p.111.

A scientific approach was required, to assess the difficulties involved in "helping the native to adapt himself to the change". "Until this has been done", Elkin declared, "we cannot say that it is impossible for the aborigines to advance along the road of civilization and be of positive value in the exploitation of Australia".¹²¹

Over the course of the 1930s, Elkin acquired a firmer faith in the capacity of Aborigines to become civilised. Yet old doubts about racial adaptability remained. In a paper published in 1937 he pointed out that:

so far they [the Aborigines] have shown little power to adapt themselves to our culture; there may be biological reasons for this, for their adaptation to aboriginal life may have become part of their very physiological make-up.¹²²

In the same paper, he took a conventional line on the possible consequences of a nexus between culture and race, suggesting that:

It may be that his [the Aborigine's] present adjustment has become part of his very nature - biological - and that he cannot become adapted to the environmental changes, and so like the dinosaur in the face of a glacial epoch, he is doomed to extinction.¹²³

This near encounter with defeatism was qualified by an appeal for a philanthropic, rather than a "merely academic", approach to Aboriginal issues. There was a duty to help the Aborigines, Elkin declared. Moreover, their society had never been entirely static, and it was possible that they could, with the help of trained white people, successfully negotiate the dramatic changes of the present.¹²⁴

The decline in the significance which Elkin was prepared to award to inherent biological attributes, while still maintaining a typological orientation toward race, was well exemplified in his 1938 monograph, *The Aborigines: How to Understand Them*. Physical features, origins and racial affinities comprised the material for the first chapter, and he was at pains to point out

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.112.

¹²² Elkin, "Native Education", p.496.

¹²³ *ibid.*, p.470.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, pp.470-71.

that Aborigines were "rightly classed ... in a special human division".¹²⁵ Racially, they were not Negroid, Mongoloid or - as was then commonly claimed - primitive Caucasian; they were Australoid.¹²⁶ While he was adamant on this point of racial classification, its significance was not explained.¹²⁷ Elkin seems to have considered that the Aborigines had first to be put into their correct racial pigeon-hole, before proceeding to discuss his own specialist area of socio-cultural attributes. He noted that: "The question 'Are the Aborigines the lowest race of mankind?' is not easily answered". Indeed, after pointing out that they did display some primitive features, he indicated that fundamentally the question was unanswerable.¹²⁸ As a social anthropologist, he maintained that the relevant issues were the workings of the social and cultural mechanisms, not highness or lowness on an imputed scale of human progress. In the preface he declared:

I do not regard the Aborigines as interesting survivals of man's early ancestors, nor their customs as cultural curiosities - noble, barbarous or amusing. I am concerned with their culture as a means of life worked out during the past centuries ...¹²⁹

This was in no way a denial of Aboriginal primitivity. On the same page he noted that: "Some folk carry the metaphor of a child-race too far". Clearly, he believed that the metaphor did carry some validity; but how far could it be legitimately carried? Elkin provided the answer:

A child-race is so called because it has not attained to the stature of our civilization; its grown men and women, however, are adults; they do not think as children but as social personalities who are

¹²⁵ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, p.4.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, pp.1-5. He had earlier made the same racial classification in his 1935 article "Anthropology and the Australian Aboriginal", pp.13-15.

¹²⁷ It may be speculated that his denial of the commonly accepted Caucasian classification stemmed from his antipathy toward programs of 'breeding out the colour', which drew their scientific sustenance from such doctrines; however, he did not explicitly make that connection.

¹²⁸ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, pp.19-21. Amongst the "primitive features" to which he alluded were the Aboriginal skull and "the comparatively small brain". However, in this monograph he made no suggestion that brain-size constituted a psychological handicap.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p.vi.

responsible for the development and maintenance of the social, economic and religious life of their community.¹³⁰

Behind the banal phraseology there was a significant point: It was a refutation of the long-standing belief that a lack of advancement in the socio-cultural realm mirrored a lack of maturity at an individual, biological level. Within this framework, Aborigines could still be seen as culturally primitive, but not necessarily as biologically undeveloped.¹³¹

The drift away from racial determinism in Elkin's arguments may perhaps be expected of an academic specialising in social anthropology. Equally, it was symptomatic of the state of the discipline in his day that Elkin drifted away from - rather than abandoned - racial ideas. In Britain and America during the 1930s, cracks in the longstanding edifice of racial science were becoming wider and wider; but the whole structure had certainly not tumbled down.¹³² Race remained a remarkably resilient construct. Majority scientific opinion overseas, as in Australia, was moving in a more egalitarian direction. Yet this was done by minimising the significance of racial differences, and not, with few exceptions, by attacking the fundamental assumption of the reality of race. This tendency was well exemplified in the classic anti-racist text published in 1935, *We Europeans*, co-authored by the anthropologist A.C. Haddon and the biologist Julian Huxley. The target of this polemic was Nazism; in particular, the authors attacked those doctrines which they regarded as perversions of racial science for Nazi propaganda purposes. Whatever critique there may have been of the concept of race itself, it was vastly overshadowed by criticism of its political misuse.¹³³ Moreover, the

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p.vi.

¹³¹ Nonetheless, in the same year as his book was published, Elkin agreed to lead a missionary conference entitled "Education of the Younger Races"; see Rev. F.O. Hulme-Moir, Gen. Sec., CMS, to Elkin, 10.5.1938; Elkin to Hulme-Moir, 14.5.1938, Elkin Archive, box 65, item 1/12/105. In his reply, Elkin did not suggest any change to the title of the conference; perhaps the missionaries did not push the "younger races" metaphor "too far".

¹³² See Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*; Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp.140-69.

¹³³ J.S. Huxley and A.C. Haddon, *We Europeans: A Survey of 'Racial' Problems*, London, 1935, (reprinted New York, 1970).

views expressed by Huxley and Haddon did not represent a consensus of British scientific opinion. In the 1930s, attempts were made to forge a united scientific front against Nazi doctrines; they floundered in Britain because of lack of agreement over the nature and significance of racial differences.¹³⁴ Although the majority of British scientists disagreed with the extremes to which the Nazis took their racial ideology, they were not prepared to launch an attack on racial science itself. Over the course of the 1930s, racial determinism fell increasingly out of fashion in the scientific community; but there was little in the way of a thorough-going critique of the concept of race itself, and still less any semblance of consensus over the meaning of supposed racial differences. Elkin's changing views on race, his minimising rather than rejecting the significance of racial differences, were quite congruent with more general trends within his science.

One of the earliest works to launch a frontal attack on the concept of race was Ashley Montague's *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, published in 1942.¹³⁵ Elkin reviewed the book in 1945, after a revised and enlarged edition had been published. In his review, he returned to the question of whether the Aborigines were the "lowest race or human group" on earth.¹³⁶ On this occasion he declared that "the question has no meaning. There is no such phenomena as a low or lowest race".¹³⁷ On the other hand, he maintained that "one human group may be inferior to another in this or

¹³⁴ E. Barkan, "Mobilising Scientists against Nazi Racism, 1933-1939" in Stocking (ed.), *Bones, Bodies, Behavior*, pp.190-95; Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, pp.285-96.

¹³⁵ A.M.F. Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, 5th edn, New York, 1974, (1942). Ashley Montagu was an American physical anthropologist who was to become a leading light in the anti-racist campaign of the immediate post-War period. In 1938 he had strongly endorsed Elkin's proposals, particularly those set out in Elkin's article "Native Education"; see M.F. Ashley-Montagu [sic], "The Future of the Australian Aborigines", *Oceania*, vol.8, no.3, March 1938, pp.343-50. It is revealing of the tentativeness of the pre-World War Two critique of race that this leading anti-racist was apparently undismayed by the strand of racial determinism which ran through Elkin's article.

¹³⁶ Elkin, "Race - Our Tragic Myth", pp.84-89.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p.84.

that cultural mechanism".¹³⁸ It seems that although Elkin had come to reject the validity of attributing superiority and inferiority at the grand level of racial differences, he remained convinced that such judgements of worth could be made of particular cultural attributes. Elkin remarked favourably on Ashley Montague's central contentions: that "the concept of race does not correspond to any measurable biological reality, and that if we are to arrive at a valid classification of mankind, the real task lies in the study of the frequency distribution of genes"; and that because of its political content, the word "race" should be dropped from the scientific vocabulary and "ethnic group" adopted in its place.¹³⁹ Although his endorsement of these arguments was somewhat muted, Elkin's review reveals how far he had, by the 1940s, retreated from his early position on the significance of innate racial attributes. His retreat was perhaps most clearly signified in his statement that "the half-caste problem is really a caste, and not a biological problem".¹⁴⁰ In Elkin's own earlier accounts of the half-caste problem, biology was a matter of considerable significance. His changing views on the nature of the problem chart the course of his drift away from racial determinism.

In his 1929 article on "The Practical Value of Anthropology", Elkin gave tentative support to Pitt-Rivers' theory that miscegenation was a route to cultural adaptation, suggesting that the observed greater adaptability of Australian mixed bloods may have some biological basis.¹⁴¹ In his 1932 "Cultural and Racial Clash" paper, he expressed similar ideas with a little more coherence. He was extremely "doubtful" about the proposition that "the only obstacle to the complete civilization of the mixed-bloods is a social

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.84.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p.87. For an account of the transformation from studies of race to investigations of population genetics in the years after World War Two, see Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp.170-89. Nonetheless, Elkin himself continued to use the term 'race', in a sense which implied its biological reality, even in his much later writings of the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁴⁰ Elkin, "Race - Our Tragic Myth", p.87.

¹⁴¹ Elkin, "Practical Value", part 3, pp.40-44. Elkin's arguments on this score were not notable for their clarity, but the biology of hybridisation was given prominence.

one".¹⁴² For Elkin, the fundamental question was: "are they really biologically capable of playing an average part in a civilized society?"¹⁴³ With characteristic equivocation, he proffered a response:

So far, this question cannot be answered with any degree of definiteness, for the opinions of both lay-observers and scientific investigators vary. But if the theory of the hybrid vigour of the first generation of mixed-bloods, followed by a decrease of vitality and vigour in succeeding generations be proved, and some say that it is, then we must be prepared for the ultimate failure of any attempt to make the mixed-bloods part of our body politic. We must not, however, at this stage regard our efforts in this direction doomed to failure, and not worth the making.... Of course, the problem is fundamentally altered by any further infiltration of white blood into the mixed-blood stocks, for the mixed-blood handicaps might then disappear as a result of such further miscegenation.¹⁴⁴

Despite the final sentence, Elkin opposed schemes of biological absorption. He insisted that "while there should be mutual respect between races, it does not follow that intermarriage should be a necessary consequence".¹⁴⁵

In 1932 Elkin circulated a fifty-four point questionnaire entitled "An Inquiry into the Present Condition and Future Development of the remaining Aborigines (Full-bloods and Half-castes) of the State [of New South Wales]".¹⁴⁶ Explaining the motivations behind this inquiry in a brief article in the *A.B.M. Review*, Elkin indicated that his primary interest was in the half-caste inhabitants of the state; after all, there were very few full-bloods left.¹⁴⁷ The objectives of the inquiry were:

(a) to ascertain the present condition, both social and economic, of the remaining Aborigines, full-bloods and half-castes, in the State; (b)

¹⁴² Elkin, "Cultural and Racial Clash", p.43.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p.43.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.43.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.44.

¹⁴⁶ Inquiry into the Conditions and Possibilities of Aborigines, with attached Questionnaire, Elkin Archive, box 72, item 1/12/200.

¹⁴⁷ A.P. Elkin, "The Remaining Aborigines of New South Wales", *A.B.M. Review*, vol.19, no.4, July 15, 1932, p.67. In this article Elkin also indicated that the state referred to in the title of the questionnaire was NSW. However, the questionnaire was sent further afield, to missionaries and government officials in Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and Northern and Central Australia; respondents included such notables as the Rev. E. Gribble and the Rev. J.R.B. Love.

to see whether it is possible for them to become part of our social and economic order; and (c) if this be possible, to make suggestions regarding a policy to be adopted with this end in view; but (d) if this seem to be impossible, to make suggestions regarding a policy which would enable these Aborigines to play a useful part in the State, to be developed morally and intellectually, and yet to remain outside our general social system and the body politic.¹⁴⁸

As an item of social scientific research, the questionnaire appears remarkable chiefly for its lack of sophistication. This may have derived from either, or both, the comparative novelty of the methodology or the naivety of Elkin himself. Two sample questions will suffice for illustration:

(27) Have you any evidence in support of a common opinion that half-caste females are of looser morality than full-blood females?

(28) Have you any evidence for or against the opinion that half-caste women and men have the vices of both black and white, the virtues of neither?¹⁴⁹

Although the responses were often long and detailed, they comprised nothing but anecdotal observation.¹⁵⁰ Elkin himself appears to have been aware of the limited value of the information gathered, for the questionnaire responses were not used in any substantial way in any of his published works. Indeed, a bare mention in a 1939 article in *Oceania*, indicating that he had conducted such research, seems to have been the extent of it.¹⁵¹

By the mid-1930s one of Elkin's research students, Caroline Kelly, was conducting field investigations in part-Aboriginal communities in northern New South Wales and at Cherbourg in Queensland. Contradicting the well-established view that half-castes were as socially unacceptable to full-bloods as they were to whites, Kelly found that part-Aborigines took an active role in the traditional culture and were integrated into the kinship system.¹⁵² Elkin himself had observed the same fact in 1930 in the course of field work

¹⁴⁸ Questionnaire, Elkin Archive, box 72, item 1/12/200.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ See Responses to Questionnaire, Elkin Archive, box 72, item 1/12/201.

¹⁵¹ Elkin, "Anthropology in Australia, 1939", p.25. Amongst his unpublished papers too, I found no indication of any substantial attempt to utilise the data from his questionnaire.

¹⁵² C.T. Kelly, "Tribes on Cherburg [*sic*] Settlement, Queensland", *Oceania*, vol.5, no.4, 1935, pp.461-73.

amongst the Wailpi of the Flinders Ranges, South Australia, although these observations were not published until 1935.¹⁵³ Here, he described his initial amazement at finding all the half-caste men of the tribe to be fully initiated and fully conversant with the "secret life".¹⁵⁴ In the part-Aboriginal communities on the north coast of New South Wales too, Elkin found that: "Initiation ceremonies are held from time to time and the great majority of the men, though almost white, have been initiated".¹⁵⁵ Even in the Sydney suburb of Parramatta, he found that there were part-Aboriginal people, long removed from tribal life, who in times of illness resorted to traditional magical cures.¹⁵⁶ In none of these instances did Elkin attempt a racial explanation for the persistence of traditional Aboriginal ways, although such a line of reasoning would have been quite consistent with his earlier position on the nexus between culture and biology. Instead, explanation was couched in sociological terms: Lacking full integration into white Australian society, Aborigines called upon elements from their own past to fill in the cultural gaps in an attempt to make their lives meaningful and satisfying.¹⁵⁷

Yet even at this time, Elkin was not prepared to deny the possibility that biological inheritance may be a causal factor in the half-caste problem. In his 1937 article on native education, he pondered the question of whether half-castes were, by nature, more adaptable to civilisation, and more educable, than full-bloods.¹⁵⁸ On their employment prospects, he trotted out the conventional anecdotal observations that:

half-castes are superior to full-bloods as consistent workers, and that they can be interested in a wider range of activities than the latter. The full-blood takes readily to stock work, with its riding, continual

¹⁵³ A.P. Elkin, "Civilized Aborigines and Native Culture", *Oceania*, vol.6, no.2, December 1935, pp.117-46.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, especially pp.122-24.

¹⁵⁵ A.P. Elkin, "The Reaction of Primitive Races to the White Man's Culture: A Study in Culture-Contact", *Hibbert Journal*, vol.35, no.4, October 1936 - July 1937, p.544; see also pp.541-42.

¹⁵⁶ Elkin, "Civilised Aborigines and Native Culture", p.131.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, especially pp.117-20, 145; Elkin, "Reaction of Primitive Races", pp.541-45.

¹⁵⁸ Elkin, "Native Education", pp.471, 493.

shifting of camp, and 'sings' at night; but he does not take so readily to farm work ... Half-castes, however, do take to farming in a greater degree, though even here inquiry shows that they are much happier at timber work (e.g. sleeper-getting and clearing) and stock work.¹⁵⁹

In explaining these differences, he pointed out that:

though they [half-castes] do show some superiority in results to the full-blood, yet it is dangerous to argue, reasonable as such argument is, that they are higher in intelligence and in capacity for work, though this is quite possible and reasonable. The cause may be earlier association with whites than is usually the lot of the full-blood.¹⁶⁰

The equivocation and tentativeness were characteristic of Elkin's writings. He seems to have considered that because science provided no definite answer to the question of whether race was a determinant of ability, it would be improper to explicitly deny the relevance of racial attributes. On the other hand, it was quite legitimate to push such matters to the side-lines.

By the end of the 1930s, Elkin was to a large extent ignoring biological factors as a component of the half-caste problem. His article "Anthropology in Australia, 1939" devoted two pages to "People of Mixed Blood", in which the only mention of racial inheritance was a denial of the indictment that "the half-caste inherits the vices of the races of both parents, but none of the virtues".¹⁶¹ He also stated plainly, without the equivocation characteristic of his earlier articles, that "ultimately they [half-castes] must become part of our life - social and religious as well as economic".¹⁶² The bulk of his discussion concerned the need for more research into the social aspects of the half-caste problem, for education programs to be implemented to assist part-Aborigines, and for changed attitudes on the part of white Australians toward a fuller acceptance of people of mixed descent.¹⁶³ The last of these had become an increasingly prominent theme in Elkin's writings, as he considered that the continual social ostracism of half-castes was driving them toward a futile

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.496.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.496.

¹⁶¹ Elkin, "Anthropology in Australia, 1939", p.25.

¹⁶² *ibid.*, p.25.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, pp.25-27.

attempt to regain the culture of their Aboriginal forebears. What was needed was not merely the education of half-castes into Western ways, "but also the conversion of the whites so that they will be willing to receive peoples of mixed blood into their own social, economic and religious life".¹⁶⁴

The shift in Elkin's interpretation of the half-caste problem was more prominently displayed in his private correspondence. In 1939 he commented critically on the Reverend R.C.M. Long's "Memorandum from the Aborigines Committee on the C.M.S. and the Half Caste Problem in North Australia", a brief paper which presented some conventional views on the character of part-Aborigine, the nature of the problem and the appropriate solution.¹⁶⁵ Against Long's claim that half-castes were "unwanted by the aborigines", Elkin asserted that: "Half-castes may be wanted by the Aborigines or they may be unwanted. That depends on the local history".¹⁶⁶ His strongest criticisms were of a sentence in Long's report reading: "These half-castes are, in only too many cases, the offspring of profligate whites and have inherited the worst features of white and black life". Alongside this sentence Elkin pencilled: "No learn or drift into vice".¹⁶⁷ Expanding on this point in a letter to the Reverend J.W. Ferrier, he declared that:

The sentence ... is the usual talk of some politicians and knowalls on the spot. Some half-castes are the offspring of profligate whites but that does not mean they inherit the worst features of black and white life. The black woman may not have been a profligate, and anyhow because the white person may be a profligate, it does not mean he passes on the tendency to loose moral life. We must work on the assumption that that comes only through wrong influences in childhood, through wrong or lack of moral education and by a process of drift.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Elkin to Rev. J.W. Ferrier, Sec., CMS, 14.11.1939, Elkin Archive, box 65, item 1/12/105.

¹⁶⁵ Rev. R.C.M. Long, Memorandum from the Aborigines Committee on the C.M.S. and the Half Caste problem in North Australia, c.October 1939, Elkin Archive, box 65, item 1/12/105.

¹⁶⁶ Elkin to Ferrier, 14.11.1939, Elkin Archive, box 65, item 1/12/105.

¹⁶⁷ Annotations by Elkin on Long, Memorandum from the Aborigines Committee, Elkin Archive, box 65, item 1/12/105; underlining in the original.

¹⁶⁸ Elkin to Ferrier, 14.11.1939, Elkin Archive, box 65, item 1/12/105.

Although there was still a slight ambivalence in the phrase "we must work on the assumption that ...", the views propounded here were quite different to those which Elkin had put forward in the early part of the decade. Effectively, he had demoted, rather than denied, the possible influence of inherent racial attributes as a determinant of ability.

A Positive Policy for Progress

While race received consideration in Elkin's work, social and cultural issues were his paramount concern. If his own specialisation in social anthropology was a key factor in this, Elkin drew also upon much older intellectual traditions. In his 1932 article on "Cultural and Racial Clash" he propounded a straightforward view of social progress, resonant with the principles of Enlightenment stage theory:

The position demands that if he [the Aborigine] is to survive, he must pass with great rapidity from the food gathering stage of complete dependence on nature, and from the socio-mystical organization of tribal life, to a stage in which nature is exploited, and in which mechanization and economics control the outlook on nature and society.¹⁶⁹

Over the following years, Elkin gave increasing prominence to the economic aspect of Aboriginal primitivity. He came to qualify the adjectives "primitive" and "civilised" in explicitly economic terms, referring to "their peculiar primitive food-collecting stage of economic life"¹⁷⁰ and to the "cultural clash which has arisen from the invasion of a primitive food-gathering people's country by a civilised, agricultural and industrial people".¹⁷¹ Indeed, one of the major shifts in Elkin's thinking over the course of the 1930s was away from a racial conception of Aboriginal primitivity, toward an economic interpretation. Professor Elkin was certainly no Marxist, and never embraced a fully-fledged economic determinism. As a functionalist anthropologist he insisted that the economic aspects of life were inextricably intertwined with

¹⁶⁹ Elkin, "Cultural and Racial Clash", p.38. At the time, Elkin expressed strong reservations about whether such a rapid transformation was possible.

¹⁷⁰ Elkin, "Native Education", p.468.

¹⁷¹ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, p.21.

religious beliefs, kinship systems and so forth. Yet he was prepared to go some way toward awarding primacy to economics as a controlling factor behind other socio-cultural attributes, arguing that: "The Australians are a food-gathering people, and around their peculiar economic position their social organization and religious life are orientated".¹⁷² He maintained that Aboriginal life:

has been adjusted to one set of economic conditions - food-gathering - and great skill is evinced in it. Skill, however, is not sufficient. The aborigine realizes that nature varies and that he is dependent on her, and so his 'philosophy of life' has become closely interwoven with nature and his food-gathering efforts.¹⁷³

The suggestion of economic primacy may have been tentative, but Elkin came increasingly to the view that the culture of the Aborigines depended more on their economic circumstances than on their innate racial attributes.

In line with this trend, Elkin attempted to rebut the prevalent assumption of an ineradicable nomadic instinct, which, he claimed, had "become quite a shibboleth where Australian aborigines are concerned".¹⁷⁴ As early as 1934 he pointed out that "too much emphasis can be laid ... on the nomadic aspect of aboriginal life".¹⁷⁵ Two years later he advised T. Paterson, Minister for the Interior, not to place any credence on the argument that "the Aborigines are nomadic and will therefore never take to a settled or gardening life"; after all, the "same could have been said of our ancestors".¹⁷⁶ Later in the decade, his arguments were more explicit and more comprehensive. The nomadic habit was, he wrote:

often referred to in terms which imply that it is biologically and ineradicably rooted and is therefore an insuperable bar to progress. But after all, it is not the fundamental thing about the aborigines for it is itself a consequence of their food-gathering manner of life. Food-gathering, which is the effect of certain economic and historical conditions, is the cause of nomadism and except in an area most

¹⁷² Elkin, "Native Education", p.472.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p.463.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp.467-68.

¹⁷⁵ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.16.

¹⁷⁶ Elkin to Paterson, 28.10.1936, AA, CRS A1, 37/1718.

prolific in various food resources, could not but result in nomadism. On the other hand the reverse is not true. The nomadic feature of the life of some primitive peoples is not the expression of a fundamental instinct; it is a cultural trait which food-producing (horticulture and agriculture) changes, but which pure pastoralism may accentuate; the cause of this again is economic and geographical.¹⁷⁷

Continuing the Enlightenment theme, Elkin argued that if the appropriate circumstances were provided, Aborigines would adopt a settled life of agriculture and industry. He returned to the issue in his 1938 monograph on the Aborigines, declaring that:

This point requires emphasis; the nomadic aspect of Aboriginal life is not biologically founded, but is culturally, in short, economically, determined. If the means of gaining a livelihood be changed, then the characteristics of nomadism will be changed.¹⁷⁸

He admitted that the transformation of the Aborigines into a settled people may "not come to pass quickly"; but given time and education it could and would occur.¹⁷⁹

For Elkin, the fundamental task was to raise a primitive, nomadic, food-gathering people to the higher cultural stage of settled agriculture and industry. However, he was adamant that this process of civilising did not necessitate the adoption of a totally European culture. Arguing against Porteus's claim that Aborigines were unequivocally uncivilisable, Elkin pointed out that:

There is no reason for expecting that our civilization in all its developments would be the most suited to the aborigines; there are racial differences and inequalities, but this does not necessarily imply, as Porteus categorically states, that the aborigines 'are certainly unadaptable to a civilized environment'. After all, there are other

¹⁷⁷ Elkin, "Native Education", pp.462-63.

¹⁷⁸ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, p.14.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, pp.14-15. A primary objective set out in the "New Deal" policy statement was the conversion of Aborigines "from their traditional nomadic inclinations to a settled life"; it cautioned that this would "certainly take not only many years, but many generations"; Commonwealth Policy, 1939, pp.2, 8, 12. Official correspondence generated by the initial implementation of the "New Deal" indicates that bureaucrats, including J.A. Carrodus, envisaged the transformation from nomadism to settled agriculture as a very slow process indeed; see correspondence in AA, CRS A431, 50/597.

types of civilized environment, and any race must ultimately develop its own from within.¹⁸⁰

Elkin's conception of the Aborigines' "own" civilisation entailed no radical departure from European norms. Rather, he envisaged a transformation from an indigenous to an essentially Western economic, religious and social order, in which only the trappings of traditional art, ceremony and ritual would be retained. His insistence on their retention derived not so much from a desire to preserve the exotic, as from lingering notions of a connection between racial and cultural attributes.

One element figured disproportionately in Elkin's version of cultural elevation. Religion may be expected to have loomed large in the mind of a man who was both anthropologist and cleric. As an anthropologist, he laid great emphasis on the function of spiritual beliefs and practices as integrative forces within Aboriginal society.¹⁸¹ He also considered religious belief to be the aspect of the traditional culture to which Aborigines - even the comparatively civilised - clung most tenaciously, pointing out that:

however much we undermine the old beliefs, however much blacks and, usually too, half-castes mix with us, the old animistic and magical beliefs are never totally eradicated, and are always active at life's crises or when they meditate on such.¹⁸²

In another article on the subject, he concluded with the statement:

The chief point arising from this examination of native culture and civilized Aborigines is that while economic and social and legal elements of the culture are forgotten or allowed to drop into disuse, the mystical and animistic philosophy of life as expressed in totemism, magic and the ceremonial life, is never far from the surface ... External elements can be changed or dropped with impunity provided that this does not affect the inner life.... The task, therefore, of civilizing agents is so to preserve and modify or supplant the aboriginal view of life and the rites and practices arising from it, that

¹⁸⁰ Elkin, "Social Life and Intelligence", p.112.

¹⁸¹ See for example Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, especially pp.155-74.

¹⁸² Elkin, "Native Education", p.466.

primitive man may still feel at home in the universe, a sharer of that common life which animates all that therein is - including ourselves.¹⁸³

Elkin considered that religion was never more important than in times of great stress, such as the Aborigines were suffering as their traditional world was breaking down under the onslaught of advancing civilisation; he declared that:

In a time of disillusionment, man requires faith in the eternal and ultimate 'rightness' of things and in some friendly power in the universe; he needs religion.¹⁸⁴

Yet Elkin was not one to thrust his faith down the throats of the unwilling. And he did not share the common missionary view that traditional beliefs had to be totally excised and supplanted by a received version of the Christian religion. Rather, he considered that just as an Aboriginal civilisation could be constructed on the foundations of the traditional culture, so an Aboriginal Christianity could be founded upon the old beliefs and rituals. The task lay, he averred, "in building up a 'New Testament' on **their own** 'Old Testament'".¹⁸⁵ Expanding on the metaphor - if it was a metaphor - of the Testaments, he wrote in his 1938 monograph:

Just as most Christians take a long time to pass through the Old Testament type of life to that required by the New Testament, so it is with the Aborigines. They, too, must pass through the Old Testament state before attaining to our view of life, but it must be *their own* old testament of myth and sanction, for this alone has intimate relationship with their social and economic life.¹⁸⁶

In Elkin's view, all cultural phenomena, including his own Christian religion, followed a sequence of progressive development, the general direction of which was common to all people although the details of the course could vary with historical and geographical circumstances.

¹⁸³ Elkin, "Civilized Aborigines and Native Culture", p.145. See also Elkin, "Reaction of Primitive Races", pp.537-45.

¹⁸⁴ Elkin, "Reaction of Primitive Races", p.548.

¹⁸⁵ A.P. Elkin, "The Aborigines: Our National Responsibility", *Australian Quarterly*, vol.6, no.23, 14 September 1934, p.56; bold face in the original.

¹⁸⁶ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, p.152; italics in the original.

Although Elkin's vision of building a Christian faith upon decidedly non-Christian foundations made missionary effort a more daunting prospect than ever, there were a minority of protestants prepared to make the effort.¹⁸⁷ Some also shared his vision of a concurrence between ancient Jewish and primitive Australian spirituality. The Presbyterian J.R.B. Love provides the best example. In his account of his work amongst the Worora of the West Kimberley, Love described his witnessing a sacred ceremony:

As I looked at these rites the amazing realization flashed upon me that here, among one of the most primitive tribes of some of the most primitive savages on earth, I had been witnessing rites akin to the most sacred observances of the Christian faith. I had been witnessing, in all their primitiveness and crudeness of administration, the rites of the Laying-on of hands, of Baptism, and of a sacred meal that could without irreverence be called a Communion.

When our Lord instituted the Last Supper he gave us no new observance, but took an age-old rite, sublimated it and gave it a new content. The sacred rite of baptism, as a ceremonial lustration with a deeper meaning than that of a mere outward cleansing; and the laying-on of hands, as a symbol of the communicating of spiritual power; all were here, practised in the spirit of the deepest reverence and awe by naked savages in north-western Australia.¹⁸⁸

Accordingly, Love attempted to integrate Christianity into the traditional order, with minimal disruption to the Worora way of life.

In Elkin's view, missionaries had a vital role to perform, for the elevation of Aboriginal religion to a higher Christian plane was one essential part of their over-all social and cultural advancement into civilisation. Majority opinion amongst his anthropological colleagues was less favourably disposed toward missionary activity. From within the Sydney school of anthropology, Ralph Piddington provides an apt counterpoint to Elkin's views on religion and missionaries. Characterising Christianity as "vague philosophic concepts

¹⁸⁷ Jesuits and other Roman Catholic orders had been engaged in proselytising along these lines for centuries; the idea of working within the indigenous cultures, rather than attempting to totally suppress them, had much greater novelty amongst protestant missionaries.

¹⁸⁸ Love, *Stone-Age Bushmen of To-Day*, p.219. Love probably reached this understanding of Aboriginal ritual quite independently of the more academic musings of Elkin.

set in a matrix of Hebrew folk-lore", Piddington saw no way of reconciling this with Aboriginal spiritual values.¹⁸⁹ "Upon certain issues", he maintained:

there exist definite clashes of interest which simply cannot be resolved ... This may perhaps be illustrated by reference to the conflict between the primitive religion of the Australian aborigines and that which is propounded by the missionaries. Here there exists a definite clash of values, a conflict which cannot be obviated by a mere understanding of native culture.¹⁹⁰

On three essential points, he insisted, "no rational reconciliation" was possible: the cosmogony of the Bible was "fundamentally opposed to that of any Australian tribe"; spirit beliefs of the Aborigines were "essentially opposed to any Christian teaching"; and the idolatry of sacred objects was at odds with the Second Commandment.¹⁹¹ Piddington may here have been demonstrating a rather narrow understanding of the Christian faith; he was himself a non-believer. Yet his most telling criticism of efforts to spread Christianity was in terms of its inappropriateness when the dominant Australian society was moving in an increasingly secular direction. Piddington declared that:

Here is to be found the most serious objection to missionary activity which presents to the native a distorted conception of our civilization, in which religion is coming to play a smaller part every day.¹⁹²

From this perspective, far from assisting Aborigines to adjust to Western civilisation, missionaries were retarding adaptation by peddling images which were at odds with the reality of modern society.¹⁹³

Although the tensions between missionaries and anthropologists were long-standing and often cut deep, there was also an alternative tradition involving a degree of cooperation and even mutual admiration between the two groups. Missionaries had been in the forefront of amateur ethnography in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; although they were being pushed

¹⁸⁹ Piddington, "Psychological Aspects", pp.316-17.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.316.

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.316.

¹⁹² *ibid.*, p.322.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, pp.322-23.

aside as the discipline became increasingly professionalised, in the 1930s they still published a significant volume of ethnographic material, and some were given a platform in scientific bodies such as the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science. When Sydney's Department of Anthropology was first established, a number of Protestant missionary bodies expressed interest in enrolling trainee missionaries in the Short Course in Anthropology.¹⁹⁴ Building upon this, Elkin attempted to bring the mission bodies more fully within his sphere of influence.¹⁹⁵ Success was mixed. The more fundamentalist groups like the United Aborigines' Mission had no time for a clergyman who was prepared to tolerate heathen practices:¹⁹⁶ The mainstream Protestant denominations - particularly the Anglicans and Methodists - were more amenable, so that by the latter part of the 1930s they were calling upon Elkin for advice on missionary matters,¹⁹⁷ and at the 1937 Australian National Missionary Conference he seems to have been put unofficially in the role of scientific commentator.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ See the correspondence between Radcliffe-Brown and Rev. J.W. Ferrier, Sec., CMS (NSW Branch), from 21.9.1926 to 29.5.1929, Elkin Archive, box 65, item 1/12/104; and correspondence between Radcliffe-Brown and Rev. J.W. Burton, Gen. Sec., Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, from 27.7.1926 to 28.7.1930, Elkin Archive, box 66, item 1/12/110. From 8.9.1931 to 19.4.1932 Burton maintained a correspondence with Raymond Firth; then from 16.8.1933 to 18.9.1941 a much more voluminous correspondence with Elkin; Elkin Archive, box 66, item 1/12/110. All these letters were written in a cordial, and frequently friendly, style. Burton in particular, from his very first letter to Radcliffe-Brown, expressed an enthusiasm for anthropology and an appreciation of its relevance to mission work. While it may be naive to accept the friendliness and admiration at face value, it is clear that these leading scientists and churchmen were at least willing to cooperate when each had something to gain from the relationship. The Anthropology Department acquired another practical string to its bow, and the missionaries a familiarity with up-to-the-minute theories.

¹⁹⁵ His attempts seem to have been confined to the protestant denominations. Perhaps reflecting the sectarian climate of the times, Roman Catholic missionary orders appear to have maintained a distance from their protestant colleagues, and from the Reverend A.P. Elkin.

¹⁹⁶ See Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p.134 for an account of the dispute between Elkin and R.S. Schenk, Superintendent of the United Aborigines' Mission at Mt Margaret, Western Australia.

¹⁹⁷ See the correspondence between Elkin and Ferrier, of the CMS, in Elkin Archive, box 65, item 1/12/105; and between Elkin and Burton, of the Methodist Missionary Society, in Elkin Archive, box 66, item 1/12/110.

¹⁹⁸ See Missionary Conference, 1937, *Report*.

Although Elkin did acquire a position of influence within missionary circles, and this was no doubt facilitated by his being both academic scientist and minister of the gospel, his relationship with missionaries remained somewhat uneasy.¹⁹⁹ His priorities and those of the missionaries did not always coincide. For the missionary in the field, the primary concern was to open the hearts and minds of non-believers to the Word of God; along the way, civilised habits may be inculcated and various socially useful functions performed, but these were subsidiary to the central endeavour of Christian conversion. For Elkin, the social role of missionaries was paramount. In none of his published articles did he push the need to save souls for Christ, or to replace heathen error with Christian Truth.²⁰⁰ In his 1934 article "Missionary Policy for Primitive Peoples", Elkin declared that groups like the Aborigines offered:

a great opportunity for religious missions, provided that their policy is not so much to save individual souls, as to preserve societies, especially during periods of cultural clash and transition.²⁰¹

Missions served pragmatic purposes. They acted as buffers against the rapaciousness of frontier settlers.²⁰² They served as centres for education and vocational training. Most importantly, Christian teaching could help to fill the spiritual void which had opened up with the decline of traditional beliefs.²⁰³ From the "Slough of Despond"²⁰⁴ into which they had fallen,

¹⁹⁹ See Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, pp.133-35.

²⁰⁰ At times he may have come close to statements of the latter kind. For example, in "Cultural and Racial Clash", pp.40-41, he remarked on the efforts of missionaries to give Aborigines "what is believed to be, and really is, a richer view of life and a loftier system of moral and social sanctions". But in this and similar statements he did not - as many missionaries did - declare the Aboriginal beliefs or practices to be in any absolute sense wrong; they were merely, within Elkin's progressivist vision, undeveloped or incomplete strivings toward the truth.

²⁰¹ A.P. Elkin, "Missionary Policy for Primitive Peoples", *Morpeth Review*, vol.3, no.27, April 1934, p.38; see also p.40.

²⁰² See A.P. Elkin, "Bibliographical Notice [on] 'Protection of Aborigines in Australia, A Letter from the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia, the Right Hon. J.H. Scullin. *Man*, xxxi, 1931, 92", *Oceania*, vol.2, no.3, March 1932, pp.370-71.

²⁰³ See Elkin, "Civilized Aborigines and Native Culture", especially the "Additional Note on Missions", pp.145-46; Elkin, "Reaction of Primitive Races", especially pp.543-45; Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, especially pp.152-55, 173-74.

²⁰⁴ This was the phrase used by Elkin in his 1937 article, "Reaction of Primitive Races".

only an alternative religion could offer the Aborigines hope for the future. The task of the missionary, Elkin declared, was "to tide them through a period of spiritual and philosophical shock and bewilderment".²⁰⁵

From Elkin's functionalist anthropological perspective, religious beliefs and practices, which had once occupied such a large place in Aboriginal life, could not be taken away without dire social consequences; the old religious cog in the social mechanism had to be replaced by another system of spiritual faith. In his "Missionary Policy" article he maintained that:

The binding power in most primitive societies is religious and spiritual in nature, and one of the main causes, if not the chief cause, of disintegration is just the absence, or the failure, of the religious sanctions and hopes during the process of transition from the old stone age culture to that which will eventually result from contact with civilizing agencies. The missionary, however, is in a position to supply this absence and make good this failure.²⁰⁶

If this functional view of religion was at odds with majority missionary opinion, still more so was Elkin's insistence that the conversion to Christianity was not necessarily permanent. Christian faith was necessary during the difficult times of social transformation. After that process was complete and the Aborigines had found cultural and social stability, they may choose to "become Christian, atheistic, or agnostic, but that must be their decision and responsibility".²⁰⁷

Supporter though he was of missionary endeavour, Elkin was more importantly a critic and reformer of missionary methods. Too often, he claimed, missionaries shattered traditional beliefs, and "we can rest assured that the desecration or destruction of the secret life is not the way to success, but is rather the way to cause social disintegration, conflict of loyalties and

²⁰⁵ Elkin, "Civilized Aborigines and Native Culture", p.146.

²⁰⁶ Elkin, "Missionary Policy", p.38. This line of argument made a modest appearance in the "New Deal" policy statement, where it was "recognised that there must be some religious training to instil into these people some stability of character to replace that which has been lost by the destruction of their ancient philosophy and moral code through contact with civilization"; Commonwealth Policy, 1939, p.2; see also pp.10-11.

²⁰⁷ Elkin, "National Responsibility", p.56; see also Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", pp.17-18.

psychological disturbance".²⁰⁸ Missionaries should always "beware the temptation, arising from lack of knowledge, to destroy the old myths, rites and sanctions".²⁰⁹ Effective missionary work, he acknowledged, was both difficult and time-consuming, for it entailed building a new faith upon the foundations of the old. Moreover, missionaries should work within the traditional social and cultural framework, "with the help of the elders" building up "those higher views of life which they desire to inculcate".²¹⁰ Contrary to the conventional missionary view that efforts should focus on the young, whose minds had not yet been moulded by the traditional culture, Elkin insisted that:

The only satisfactory method of really influencing a community and the generations yet to come is to convert the parents and the elders - the headmen, chiefs, medicine men, priests, and masters of secret associations.²¹¹

This was perhaps Elkin's major contribution to the debate over missionary methods.²¹² He explained that:

when any modification of existing usages are [sic] deemed necessary, these changes should be effected through the old men, who are the custodians of native law and traditions. The missionary should know and learn to appreciate the native religious life; this is for the most part secret, and consists of myths, beliefs, symbols, and rites. These provide the sanction in moral and social life, and give hope for the present and the future. Real success will only come when we get to understand the old men, with their grip on the secret life, and after much conversation, plus earnestness, convert them towards our view of life, so that eventually the New Testament will take the place of their own old unwritten lore.²¹³

In Elkin's view, traditional missionary methods entailed "a culpable neglect of the older men and women"; worse still, they caused "conflict of allegiances" in

²⁰⁸ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, p.174.

²⁰⁹ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.14.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.14.

²¹¹ Elkin, "Missionary Policy", pp.34-35.

²¹² The technique of Christianising communities through the conversion of the elders - particularly those in positions of authority within the indigenous society - had long been practised by missionaries in places like the Pacific islands. In arguing for a similar procedure to be adopted in Australia, Elkin was not altogether original; but in setting out a coherent missionary strategy for working in cooperation with the custodians of traditional Aboriginal culture, he was to some extent innovative.

²¹³ A.P. Elkin, "Three Ways of Helping the Aborigines", in Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, p.11.

individuals, leading ultimately "to the disintegration of the native social order".²¹⁴

Anthropology was an essential part of missionary training. According to Elkin, the missionary should be familiar in the kinship system, marriage laws and other socio-cultural practices and beliefs of the group with whom he worked, as well as fluent in the local language.²¹⁵ Moreover, "an understanding of the social function of religion [was] a matter in which missionaries should be thoroughly versed".²¹⁶ He maintained that functionalist anthropology was:

engaged in a work which is of fundamental importance for all who, like the missionaries, seek to influence the aborigines and to modify their culture. It endeavours to supply a detailed knowledge of native social life in all its ramifications, and so to be in the position to offer suggestions with regard to changes which are considered desirable.²¹⁷

A familiarity with the science of anthropology was necessary to effectively spread the Word of God.

Beyond the missionary sphere, anthropology was to play a prominent part in reformulating the relations between black and white Australians. Anthropology, Elkin maintained, "at least can insist that they [the Aborigines] are human and social personalities, who deserve the respect of those who have taken their country".²¹⁸ For a science with pretensions to sophistication, the claim seems rather limp. However it was one which Elkin was eager to push, because he was well aware of the alternative tendency of anthropology, to dehumanise by making people into mere objects of investigation. Thus, he frequently reiterated the claim that he, like other social anthropologists, was:

²¹⁴ Elkin, "Missionary Policy", pp.32-35.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp.39-41. In "Anthropology and the Australian Aboriginal", pp.34-35, he provided a convenient summary of the anthropological expertise necessary for the missionary.

²¹⁶ Elkin, "Missionary Policy", p.38; see also p.45.

²¹⁷ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Australian Aboriginal", p.34.

²¹⁸ A.P. Elkin, "Anthropology in Australia, Past and Present" in *Report of the Twenty-Second Meeting of the ANZAAS*, 1935, p.207.

not concerned with human or cultural fossils, but with human beings in society, who have to adjust themselves to one another and to their environment, and in some cases also, as in Australia, have to *readjust* themselves to conditions arising from a clash of peoples and cultures.²¹⁹

With the inhabitants of Australia, who remained at a "palaeolithic" level of development,²²⁰ the dangers of dehumanisation were particularly acute, for Aborigines offered "an archaeology of a living people", and:

We may be inclined to think of that people archaeologically, as though they were as their stones; thus we may forget that there are thousands of them facing life's problems and presenting a problem to us.²²¹

Social anthropology too had inherent dangers, Elkin explaining that:

Our tendency has been to reduce aboriginal life far too much to kinship, section, marriage and ritual formulae, but, useful though such formulae be for the general understanding of that life, we do need descriptions which will reveal the natives for what they are, human personalities with their desires, loves, fears, hates, delights, and so on.... We anthropologists, therefore, must take care lest, as a result of our scientific urge to systematize whatever we study, we abet this dehumanization of a living people.²²²

From this perspective, he praised Phyllis Kaberry's *Aboriginal Woman: Sacred and Profane* for its depiction of Aborigines "as the living human beings they are, exercising choice and ignoring or resisting the camp gossip and defying authority".²²³ Appropriately presented, social anthropological studies could contribute to the humanising of a people who for too long had been regarded as mere living fossils. White Australians, Elkin urged, must be "seized by the

²¹⁹ Elkin, "Anthropology in Australia, 1939", p.23; italics in the original. See also Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, p.vi.

²²⁰ Elkin made a point of emphasising that the material culture of the Aborigines was palaeolithic, not neolithic, for the latter term "must be kept for a culture which includes settled village life, gardening, domestication of animals and pottery with, or even without, the making of polished stone implements"; Elkin, "Anthropology in Australia, Past and Present", pp.200-201.

²²¹ *ibid.*, p.199.

²²² *ibid.*, p.197.

²²³ A.P. Elkin, "Introduction" to Kaberry, *Aboriginal Woman*, p.xxv. Kaberry's achievement was significant, for not only did she firmly establish Aboriginal women as worthy of anthropological investigation but she also turned attention to the mundane aspects of everyday life, instead of dealing merely with spectacular and exotic aspects of Aboriginal culture. Indeed, as a contribution to a humanising perspective, her book far outshone Elkin's own of the previous year, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*.

fact that as individuals, the aborigines are human personalities, and not just 'primitives'".²²⁴

More than this, social anthropology could contribute to a resolution of the problems of racial and cultural clash by revealing the inner workings of the indigenous society and offering guidance in the gradual replacement of its parts. In line with conventional anthropological wisdom, Elkin believed that:

the aboriginal social, economic and religious organization is a very complex and delicate mechanism, and that unwise interference, designed or unintended, mars its efficiency and causes social disintegration which is followed, as we know only too well, by depopulation.²²⁵

Because of the peculiar fragility of the traditional culture, social change had to be carefully engineered with scientific expertise. The contribution of trained anthropologists was vital, Elkin argued, for "on the basis of their researches, they are able to give help to those responsible for cultural change, without which that change is fraught with disastrous results".²²⁶ Blundering efforts to elevate the Aborigines in the past had been unsuccessful because of their lack of adequate anthropological grounding. Success in social and cultural advancement, as in religious, demanded that the traditional culture - or what was left of it - be built upon, not torn down. "In the time of transition", he declared, "let us safeguard for them their ties to the past, to the land, to one another and to the 'eternal dream time'".²²⁷

Elkin insisted that Aborigines must be active agents in determining their own future, that they must shape and direct cultural and social change for themselves. Referring to native peoples in general, he affirmed that:

The adaptation to the economic, geographical, social and spiritual changes wrought by the impact of civilization must be their own, and not just what the ruling power, through its colonial and native administrations, thinks it should be. What the adaptation in any

²²⁴ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.15.

²²⁵ *ibid.*, p.15.

²²⁶ *ibid.*, p.3.

²²⁷ *ibid.*, p.18; also "Anthropology in Australia, Past and Present", p.207.

particular case will be cannot be foretold, for it must not only be conditioned by the new, by changes brought about by civilization and its various agents; it must also and inevitably be conditioned by the people's own history and ideals, by the pattern and bias of its own culture. Unless such self-adaptation occur, the people will either cease to exist or else will be as slaves - perhaps slavish imitators of ways of life which have no roots in their own past.²²⁸

Despite such disclaimers, Elkin set himself up as the expert. He, the professor of anthropology, knew best how to facilitate the process of cultural adaptation, and, at least in broad outline, the direction which that adaptation should follow. He seems to have held a notion that the anthropologist could act as intermediary between native and official. Nonetheless, it was the scientific expertise of the anthropologist, rather than the expressed desire of the native, that the administrator should heed. In August 1934 he advised the Minister for the Interior that trained anthropologists within his own department "know quite sufficient about the social and religious organization of the aborigines of the various parts of the Northern Territory to give guidance in the formulation of a general policy of administration".²²⁹ Presumably, the sources of that information on cultural and religious organisation were also sufficiently knowledgable. Indigenous knowledge, however, had to be mediated through science to be of any practical value.

Anthropological training for those who dealt with Aborigines in an official capacity was an essential part of Elkin's proposed administrative reforms in northern Australia. A Government Anthropologist should be appointed, to advise and assist the patrol officers, judges and magistrates whose duties demanded an understanding of Aboriginal society.²³⁰ These latter officers should themselves have anthropological training, though not necessarily of the same order as the Government Anthropologist. Patrol officers were to bear particularly heavy responsibilities, negotiating the

²²⁸ Elkin, "Native Education", p.460.

²²⁹ Elkin to J.A. Perkins, Min. Int., 8.8.1934, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785.

²³⁰ Elkin, "National Responsibility", p.59; Elkin, *A Policy for the Aborigines*, p.9; Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.17.

conflicts between black and white societies.²³¹ The system was modelled on that already existing in Papua and New Guinea. In 1934 Elkin informed Prime Minister Lyons that:

My work in connection with the cadets and magistrates of New Guinea and Papua makes me realise that I should be doing similar work for officers of a like kind working amongst the aborigines of Australia.²³²

There may have been an element of professorial aggrandisement in this. For Elkin to have taken on the training of numerous officers for Australian service, as well as for Papua and New Guinea, could have considerably boosted the fortunes of his department. However, his enthusiasm for the implementation of his scheme led Elkin to support some rather unlikely candidates for positions in the Northern Territory Aboriginal administration. Perhaps the most interesting instance was his lobbying for the appointment of Xavier Herbert as a patrol officer.

Although Xavier Herbert had extensive experience amongst northern Aborigines,²³³ and he was to place the issue of Aboriginal-European relations firmly on the Australian literary landscape with the publication of his novel *Capricornia* in 1938, he had no training in anthropology. Indeed, he had no academic background whatever. Early in 1936 Herbert initiated a correspondence with Elkin in which he expressed his desire to enrol in the one-year Diploma of Anthropology course. Although Elkin admitted that he knew "nothing of the man personally", he was favourably disposed toward the suggestion, as he "should very much like to have a student or two from the Commonwealth Service".²³⁴ By October that year, Elkin was recommending Herbert as "a very suitable person" to be appointed Patrol Officer in the

²³¹ See for example Elkin to Min. Int., 11.6.1936, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785.

²³² Elkin to PM Lyons, 21.11.1934, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785; see also Elkin to J.A. Perkins, Min. Int., 8.8.1934, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785.

²³³ In the mid-1930s he was the Acting Superintendent of the Kahlin Compound. Prior to that, he was employed, from 1929, as Dispenser-Dresser at Darwin Hospital. See correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 37/1718.

²³⁴ Elkin to Paterson, Min. Int., 7.4.1936, AA, CRS A1, 37/1718.

Territory,²³⁵ despite the fact that the latter still had not undertaken any formal anthropological training, and indeed, never would. After the two men met in February 1937, Elkin's support strengthened; "Mr. Herbert," he asserted, "would be an ideal person for the position of Patrol Officer in the Northern Territory".²³⁶ In Elkin's view, Herbert had "a better understanding of the Aboriginal social organization and outlook than any other untrained person of whom [he] had any knowledge".²³⁷ But why choose an untrained person at all? In other contexts, Elkin always insisted on the necessity of scientific training and expertise for personnel having close dealings with Aborigines.²³⁸

Herbert's lack of formal academic qualification was amply compensated by his skill at self-promotion. His letters to Elkin - and to others whom he endeavoured to impress - were garnished with fulsome praise, frequently to the point of obsequiousness.²³⁹ In the prim and earnest

²³⁵ Elkin to Paterson, Min. Int., 28.10.1936, AA, CRS A1, 37/1718.

²³⁶ Elkin to Paterson, 8.3.1937; see also Elkin to Carrodus, 18.2.1937; both in AA, CRS A1, 37/1718.

²³⁷ Elkin to Paterson, 8.3.1937; also Elkin to Paterson, 28.10.1936; both in AA, CRS A1, 37/1718.

²³⁸ In this instance it was the bureaucrats, not the professor, who made most of Herbert's academic shortcomings. As early as May 1936 L.H.A. Giles, Acting Administrator of the Northern Territory, pointed out that: "So far as the selection of Mr. Herbert for Anthropological work is concerned, there are difficulties ... regarding the absence of a University degree which must undoubtedly place him at a disadvantage ..."; Giles to Sec., Int., 7.5.1936, AA, CRS A1, 37/1718.

²³⁹ See for example Herbert to Elkin, 28.11.1936, Elkin Archive, box 72, item 1/12/193; and Herbert to Elkin, 21.5.1937, APNR Records. For instances of Herbert's obsequiousness toward others, see Herbert to W. Morley, Hon. Sec., APNR, 4.4.1937, APNR Records; and Herbert to C.L.A. Abbott, Admin., 28.4.1937, AA, CRS A1, 37/1718. On the other hand, the major part of these letters was taken up with strong condemnation, bordering on calumny, of those with whom Herbert disagreed. He appears to have had no compunctions in using his literary talents to denigrate others; much of what he retailed as fact bears every indication of being no more than gossip gleaned from Darwin bars. He bore a particular grudge against Chief Protector Cook, whom he blamed for his lack of success in securing a position as Patrol Officer; see Cook to Acting Admin., 12.1.1937, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 37/1718; correspondence with Elkin in Elkin Archive, box 72; and correspondence with Morley in APNR Records. In Herbert's novels *Capricornia* and *Poor Fellow My Country*, Cook provided the model for the fictional Protectors of Aborigines, Doctor Aintee and Dr Cuthbert Cobbity. Cecil Cook was no novelist, but as a practitioner of the art of public service memo-writing he was more than a match for Xavier Herbert.

professor, he evidently struck the right chord. Throughout the late 1930s Elkin continued to lobby on behalf of Herbert. In a letter congratulating McEwen for his success in pushing the "New Deal" through cabinet in 1939, Elkin suggested Herbert for the position of Patrol Officer in the restructured Aboriginal administration.²⁴⁰ Well before this time, the novelist had apparently tired of the professor and his academic ways.²⁴¹ In April 1938 Xavier's wife Sadie informed the Reverend W. Morley that her husband:

expressed disgust [at Elkin's inaction], saying, 'nothing practical will ever be done by these academic arm-chair temporizers, who are more concerned about keeping their good jobs and basking in the lime-light than assisting the unfortunate blacks. I'm the only man who can smash this evil system here - and I'm going to do it with another book, even if it ruins me.'²⁴²

Xavier Herbert went on to write many more books, none of which either smashed the system or brought him anywhere near the brink of ruin.

Elkin preferred not to smash the system but to build upon it. In place of the existing system in the Territory, where Aboriginal and medical administration were combined in a single department, Elkin envisaged two departments with exclusively Aboriginal responsibilities. One was a Department of Native Affairs, "to deal with the employment, education, development and health of the aborigines".²⁴³ The other was a Department of Native Justice, which as well as having a judicial function should also educate Aborigines in the ways of the new legal system and "persuade and help natives and whites alike to work out a satisfactory scheme of co-

²⁴⁰ Elkin to McEwen, 9.2.1939, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785.

²⁴¹ In 1936 and 1937 Herbert may well have had a genuine admiration for Elkin and his ideas; but it appears that he initiated correspondence with the intention of securing a position for himself. He came close to admitting as much in a letter to A.W. Dibley of the A.B.C. in May or June 1936, where he complained of the ineffectiveness of "the professor's interference"; Herbert to Dibley, May or June 1936, Herbert, Xavier, Papers, ANL Ms. 758, series 3, correspondence 1934-1938.

²⁴² Sadie Herbert to Morley, 24.4.1938, APNR Records. I am unable to ascertain whether Elkin saw this letter, although since he was at the time president of the APNR it is likely that he had access to the correspondence.

²⁴³ Elkin to PM Lyons, 21.11.1934, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785. See also Elkin, "National Responsibility", p.59; Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", pp.16-17.

operation and reciprocity based on mutual understanding".²⁴⁴ Above them all sat an Administrator, a man chosen "for his special knowledge of native races and of problems of racial clash", and vested with quite extraordinary powers.²⁴⁵ All this, as Elkin frequently reiterated, closely followed "the lines laid down in the Administrations of Papua and the Mandated Territory of New Guinea".²⁴⁶

Elkin was aware that the situations in Papua New Guinea and in Australia were not equivalent. "It is true", he remarked, "that there is some slight difference in the problem, for the peoples of Papua and New Guinea are settled horticulturalists, while the Australians are nomadic food-gatherers".²⁴⁷ In a review published in 1943 he came closer to the central and significant distinction, particularly in relation to the difficulty of applying the doctrines of functionalism in the Australian context. Discussing the problems of native administration, he pointed out that:

These difficulties are especially great in a country like Australia, where the native people and the invading immigrant population, and also their mixed offspring, live continually in close contact. The problem is different in a dependency like Papua, where the local white population is small, the culture-contact is almost solely of a limited economic and missionary nature, and the administrative policy is only slightly hampered by local or distant white opinion. In Australia, however, the contact could be described as 'totalitarian', with disastrous results to the aboriginal population.²⁴⁸

Recognising that the distinction between a settler-society and an overseas colony made the problems of native administration more acute in the former,

²⁴⁴ Elkin, "National Responsibility", p.59; also Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", pp.16-17.

²⁴⁵ Elkin, "National Responsibility", p.59; Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.16; Elkin, *A Policy for the Aborigines*, p.8.

²⁴⁶ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.16; also Elkin, "National Responsibility", p.58; Elkin, *A Policy for the Aborigines*, p.8.

²⁴⁷ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.16.

²⁴⁸ Elkin, "Native Policy in Australia", p.274. Elkin's use of the term "totalitarian" is interesting, particularly in view of the date (1943). Was he hinting that Australia's treatment of its racial minorities was akin to that of the totalitarian regimes of Europe? Or did he merely mean that in the contact situation Aborigines were given no option but to defer to the political, social and cultural dominance of the immigrants?

Elkin still considered that the issues were fundamentally similar - the all-too-familiar problems of "racial and cultural clash". Not only did he argue that Papua and New Guinea provided appropriate administrative models, he also suggested that personnel drawn from those colonies should be employed to implement his scheme in Australia. From as early as 1934, he lobbied the Federal Government to "obtain, or borrow, a small team of officials from Papua to put [his] system into operation".²⁴⁹ Expressing his "hearty congratulations" to McEwen for pushing the "New Deal" through cabinet in 1939, Elkin added: "I hope you can cap this with the appointment of Mr Chinnery", then the Director of Native Affairs and District Services in New Guinea.²⁵⁰ Chinnery was duly appointed Director of the newly-created Department of Native Affairs.

Papua and New Guinea provided both the model for the new administrative apparatus and the senior personnel to work it. But the system of patrol officers, government anthropologists and native justices, was, as Elkin made clear, applicable only in the northern and central parts of the continent, where conditions came closest to the classic colonial situation.²⁵¹ There, the quasi-colonial apparatus could mitigate the worst effects of racial and cultural clash and could provide a framework for a new Aboriginal adaptation; but it could not, in itself, assure their elevation to a higher cultural stage. The latter task demanded an educational policy.

In Elkin's earliest articles pushing his positive policy he argued that education should not merely provide basic academic and technical training,

²⁴⁹ Elkin to J.A. Perkins, Min. Int., 8.8.1934, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785.

²⁵⁰ Elkin to McEwen, 9.2.1939, AA, CRS A1, 38/31785. In the same letter Elkin suggested that a suitable person for the position of Assistant Director of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory was Leo Austen, Resident Magistrate of Papua.

²⁵¹ Elkin also put forward proposals for the reform of Aboriginal policy in southern parts of the continent, and in the latter part of the 1930s had an active involvement in the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. For a highly unsympathetic analysis of Elkin's recommendations on southern Aborigines, see Heather Goodall's unpublished paper *An Intelligent Parasite: A.P. Elkin and white perceptions of the history of Aboriginal people in New South Wales*.

but should also inform Aborigines of the significance and meaning of Western practices. His suggestions were competently summed-up in his 1934 paper on anthropology and the future of the Aborigines:

- ... Education should include instruction in (1) the three 'R's', in (2) crafts and occupations, especially those which are somewhat related to the aborigine's own former economic life, such as boat-work, timber-work, carpentry and fencing, mechanical occupations, stock and sheep work and also gardening; (3) instruction in the meaning, method and purpose of the new pursuits in which we require his service or which we desire him to follow for himself; especially is this necessary in the case of gardening or stock-raising; and (4) instruction in religion; this cannot be omitted, and in this the Government must necessarily seek the co-operation of religious missions.²⁵²

These elements remained fundamental to his educational proposals. By the latter half of the 1930s, education and the need for specially trained teachers had grown considerably in importance. A key influence appears to have been his attendance at a conference on the education of native races in Pacific countries, held in Hawaii in 1936. Shortly after his return from this conference he advised the Minister for the Interior, T. Paterson, that:

The teachers appointed to native schools [in the Northern Territory] will require special training not merely in teaching method, but even more, in an understanding of the primitive outlook, - in the anthropology and psychology of the Aborigines. I have just had this driven home to me in the Conference on Native Education in Honolulu. Whether these teachers be secular or missionary they need this special training.²⁵³

His educational proposals were subsequently expounded in some detail in his 1937 article "Native Education, with special reference to the Australian Aborigines".

In this paper, Elkin explained the need for teachers to receive "special training in aboriginal mentality, tradition, social life, and the problems arising out of the clash of white and black".²⁵⁴ Education, like missionary and

²⁵² Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.17; see also Elkin, *A Policy for the Aborigines*, p.9; Elkin, "National Responsibility", pp.59-60.

²⁵³ Elkin to Paterson, 28.10.1936, AA, CRS A1, 37/1718.

²⁵⁴ See Elkin, "Native Education", pp.479-482.

administrative work, required a strong dose of anthropology. He argued that it was necessary to:

ensure the co-operation of administrators, educationalists and anthropologists in the common task of education, for when dealing with native races, administration is, or should be, almost mainly concerned with education, and education is largely an application of anthropology; at least, it cannot proceed without the constant support and guidance of the latter.²⁵⁵

In contrast to some of his earlier articles, Elkin here gave education a higher priority than administration. He explained that economic change brought about modifications in the cultural and religious spheres; and "because the change is spiritual, and indeed also intellectual, the problem raised by it can only be solved by education, not by administration in the usual sense of that term".²⁵⁶ The establishment of peace and the "protection of the natives from exploitation" were essential duties of administration; but these, he proclaimed, were "only preliminary to the main task ... This task is, as already stated, education".²⁵⁷

Elkin took a broad view of education, as preparation for life as a social being. Vocational training alone was inadequate, for as much as Aborigines needed economically viable occupations, they also "should be given some idea of the purpose of these pursuits".²⁵⁸ Education was, he affirmed:

not just the learning of facts, nor being trained in useful pursuits, but the preparation of peoples to see and understand the problems which confront them and to evaluate possible solutions which are either suggested to them or which they themselves formulate.²⁵⁹

For Aborigines, whose traditional ways had been so dramatically upset, this meant that education "must aim at conscious *adaptation* to the new problems of life ... and this has many aspects, chiefly economic, social and religious, none of which can be avoided".²⁶⁰ In making this adaptation, the traditional

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.462.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.468; see also pp.464-67.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.460.

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.471.

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp.460-61.

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.472; italics in the original.

culture "*should not be dismissed as useless*"; some "objectionable" customs had to be forsaken, but ultimately, Aborigines had "to incorporate what is worth while [from Western culture] into their own social, economic and religious system, with such modifications of the old as are necessary".²⁶¹ Elkin was adamant that the complete Europeanisation of the Aborigines was neither desirable nor practicable. He was highly critical of:

the idea that education meant transforming the natives into whites, save in appearance; and Australians are still prone to think that an educated native should be a Europeanized one in mental, spiritual and social life - an ignorant or conceited view of the universal application of our standards which social anthropology must squash.²⁶²

He recommended that in the schools:

the curriculum should provide for a knowledge and appreciation of what was of social and moral value in the native order, for this ... will enable them to take an active part in working out a blend of their own and Western culture and so establish a way of life.²⁶³

This new way of life may have had roots in the traditional culture, but he was emphatic that it was "*not the same sort of life*" as of old.²⁶⁴

Indeed, the manner of living which Elkin envisaged for Aborigines after their education differed radically from that of the past. If the traditional culture provided a foundation, it was to be almost entirely obscured by the civilisation which would be constructed upon it. This emerged clearly from the one passage in which Elkin came close to specifying the actual content of a desirable educational program. He had unstinted praise for the "progressive policy" of Aboriginal education which had recently been approved for the Northern Territory, because it devoted particular attention to:

(i) Equipping the child to take its place in the white community with a proper realization of his obligations to it, a knowledge of the significance of time, and the value of money, neither of which is realized by the aborigine at present;

²⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp.470-71; italics in the original.

²⁶² *ibid.*, p.478.

²⁶³ *ibid.*, pp.499-500.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp.469-70; italics in the original.

- (ii) teaching him to recognize the significance of contract (one of the principal difficulties in the employment of an aboriginal at present is the irresponsibility of native labour);
- (iii) inculcating a high appreciation of the principles of hygiene and personal cleanliness; and
- (iv) eradicating the nomadic background and developing the community sense centred upon the provision of a home for the individual and his family and the exploitation of the soil and domestic animals as a source of food supply.²⁶⁵

With its emphasis on work, time, discipline and the nuclear family, this could be taken as mere apologetics for capitalist labour relations; and up to a point it was. With his Enlightenment vision of progress, Elkin took for granted that capitalist economic systems represented a higher stage of social development than hunting and gathering.²⁶⁶ Aborigines, in his scheme, were not to remain convenient and marginalised units of labour; they were to be fully integrated economically, as well as socially, into the Australian nation. Yet precisely for this reason, his scheme of social and economic advancement left very little space for the retention of elements of the traditional culture. This was all the more so for the fact that he clearly understood a linkage between economic and socio-cultural attributes; change in the economic arena demanded changes in family structure, concepts of social duty, ultimately even in cosmogony, with the entrenchment of Western notions of linear time.

Elkin contended that in a situation of cultural and racial clash, the burden of cultural adaptation fell heaviest on the primitive race.²⁶⁷ Thus his educational proposals emphasised the need for special Aboriginal education, to promote their incorporation into the nation. Yet he also acknowledged a

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.483. This was Elkin's description of an actual educational policy, not an account of a scheme of his own. Nonetheless, from his laudatory remarks it may be inferred that it was along lines with which he agreed. It may be added too, that between the official pronouncements which Elkin cited and actual educational practice in the Northern Territory, there existed a wide gulf.

²⁶⁶ However, in none of Elkin's pre-War writings, published or unpublished, that I have seen did he use the word 'capitalist'. For a man as politically conservative as Elkin, perhaps 'capitalism' smacked too strongly of its rival.

²⁶⁷ Elkin, "Anthropology in Australia, 1939", p.23.

need for the "education of public opinion" amongst the dominant people, asserting that:

There is no doubt that the native educational policy of the future must include instruction of the whites in what education really is, and in the spirit and faculty of appreciating societies other than our own.... Education of the administering people is a pre-requisite of the education of the ruled native race.²⁶⁸

In the task of educating public opinion, Elkin assumed a prominent role, advertising the fact in the title of his 1938 monograph, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*. How Elkin himself understood the Australian Aborigines was determined not only by his specialisation in social anthropology but also by prevalent assumptions about the reality of race and the desirability of progress.

Professor A.P. Elkin was not an original, creative theoretician. He was, rather, a diligent worker who advanced the status of anthropology and the cause of Aboriginal welfare by perseverance and dogged toil. His eminent colleagues and contemporaries such as Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski had devised sophisticated methodologies for the study of human societies; and Elkin drew upon these in shaping the details of his proposals. Yet he also drew heavily on a much older tradition of social progress. His positive policy for the future centred on the elevation of primitive nomads to the status of civilisation. Its finer details aside, the most salient features of Elkin's proposals were not innovativeness or novelty, but the common-places of the idea of progress which echo back through nineteenth century evolutionism to the eighteenth century Enlightenment.

²⁶⁸ Elkin, "Native Education", pp.478-79.

CHAPTER SIX

BLACK AND WHITE AND OLIVE PINK

In Elkin's writings, the survival of the Aborigines went hand in hand with their social elevation. Not all anthropologists concurred with this. Writing on behalf of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland in 1938, W.E.H. Stanner argued that while education and uplift were laudable objectives, they failed to get to the heart of the Aboriginal problem. The problem was preservation. Stanner maintained that the pressing needs were the provision of adequate nutrition, proper medical supervision, good conditions of employment, appropriately trained administrative staff with sufficient financial resources, and the creation of inviolable reserves.¹ Elkin may not have disputed the desirability and importance of all these elements; but between his and Stanner's proposals there was a substantial difference of emphasis. In Stanner's article on the Aborigines in the 1939 publication *Some Australians Take Stock*, his focus was squarely on the rapid decline of the Aboriginal population and the urgent need to halt that process.² He did not condemn attempts to civilise or to Christianise; he merely regarded such matters as secondary to the pressing issue of preservation. "We might", he wrote:

let first things for once come first. We might start with an allotment of ample funds. A large vote is essential. Then we should remedy native malnutrition, control all disease among them, make an exact tribal census, stop population drift, provide the administrations with an expert diagnosis of the state of each tribe and its special needs, and raise the tribal standard of living. Until we offset or stop the conditions which are giving the tribes no chance of survival we can do very little for them.³

¹ Stanner Memorandum, 1938, AA, CRS A1, 38/8043.

² See Stanner, "The Aborigines", pp.3-35. Stanner's article, "Dying Races of Australia", published in the *London Times*, 25.11.1937, carried the same emphases on population decline and physical preservation; see Stanner and Barwick, "Not by Eastern Windows," pp.42-44.

³ Stanner, "The Aborigines", p.35.

In this view, physical needs had first to be met before any effort should be expended on social uplift or cultural renovation. Though superficially banal, it was in fact a rather unconventional view, for it undercut the traditional connection between civilisation and survival. According to Stanner, the two issues should be tackled separately - if the latter was to be attempted at all.

Stanner placed considerable importance on the provision of inviolable reserves for the remaining nomadic tribes of northern and central Australia. Claiming that inviolability was officially upheld in principle but not in practice, he remarked that existing reserves "may be failing to do what they were intended to do - 'protect' the still uncivilized tribes and preserve them from the effects of civilization".⁴ The demands of economic development and the intrusions of prospectors, pastoralists and pearlers constantly threatened the usefulness of reserves as refuges. Stanner also recognised that Aborigines themselves were unwilling to remain within the reserve boundaries. Even the relatively uncontaminated blacks of Arnhem Land, the Kimberleys and the central deserts were, he noted:

tending to drift away from their traditional tribal lands to live near white settlements where they can secure more readily the tobacco, tea, sugar, new foods, clothing and manufactured articles they have learned to value and to crave. This tribal drift is threatening to dissolve such so-called uncivilized tribes into small floating segments, each of which is likely to leave the main tribe and attach itself in parasitic fashion to a cattle station, mission, farm, or settlement.⁵

In Stanner's view, this population drift was "eating silently into the last of the nomadic tribes", and for that reason should be checked.⁶ How this voluntary movement was to be curbed he did not clearly explain, although the argument could be inferred that if proper food and medical attention were provided on the reserves, people would be less likely to desert them.⁷ But whatever the

⁴ *ibid.*, p.19; see also Stanner Memorandum, 1938, p.5, AA, CRS A1, 38/8043.

⁵ Stanner, "The Aborigines", p.20.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp.20-21. Stanner argued the same case in his Memorandum, 1938, p.5, AA, CRS A1, 38/8043.

⁷ See Stanner, "The Aborigines", especially pp.19-23; Stanner Memorandum, 1938, pp.5, 7, AA, CRS A1, 38/8043.

means, Stanner insisted that reserves had to retain their inhabitants, for once a tribe had become "parasitic" on white society, it was "in the half-way house to extinction".⁸

Preservation by Reservation

Some scientists took the argument for reserves much further than Stanner, insisting that Aboriginal survival could be ensured only by setting aside large tracts of land where Aborigines could be totally isolated from Western civilisation. Proponents of this strategy adhered to the conventional view that contact with civilisation destroyed the Aborigines; their novel contribution was to argue that absolute racial segregation was a feasible option. A prominent advocate of segregation was the anatomist, Professor Frederic Wood Jones, who bluntly asserted that:

No solution will ever be found for the problem of the uncontaminated native save that of preserving him from contamination by the establishment of inviolate reserves for his sole occupation.⁹

He characterised the efforts of those "earnest people" who endeavoured to civilise and convert the natives as "well intentioned" but leading only to the deaths of those whom they sought to uplift.¹⁰ The Aborigine, although "by no means unintelligent", was "absolutely unfitted to cope with the demands of our civilization", and "once contact has been made with our alien culture" he was "inevitably doomed to death".¹¹ The arguments of Wood Jones and other proponents of absolute segregation, did not so much transcend the doomed race idea as merely add an extra saving clause. A remnant of the race could be preserved by total isolation; but all those in contact with whites faced extinction, as Aborigines were incapable of civilisation. Only by the establishment of inviolable reserves, Wood Jones declared, would "Australia's

⁸ Stanner, "The Aborigines", p.20.

⁹ Jones, *Australia's Vanishing Race*, p.40.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.40.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.39.

Vanishing Race [cease] to vanish and, at long-last, redeem Australia's reputation in this matter".¹²

Contrary to the arguments for social advancement put forward by men like Elkin, Wood Jones contended that the maintenance of primitivity was the pathway to preservation. Although he was an anatomist, and his particular interest was in physical anthropology, he highlighted the importance of safeguarding the integrity of traditional Aboriginal culture, asserting that:

As for those full-blooded natives still living under their own strict tribal organization one thing must be said very emphatically, and must be maintained at all costs, that, despite any sectional interest in exploiting the native, no white man should be permitted under any religious or legal pretext whatever to attempt to undermine this organization or to put a stop to the ceremonial observances with which it is associated and upon which it depends. Detribalisation is the first step towards certain racial death, attempts to fit the detribalized native for a place in our civilization is the final one.¹³

Reserves could offer immunity for the "uncontaminated native", but for those already infected with the virus of civilisation the only possible diagnosis was "racial death". By this, Wood Jones did not mean that such people would leave no progeny at all; rather, that with them the line of racial purity would terminate. They were the potential progenitors of the next generation of half-castes. In Wood Jones view, physical segregation was essential to maintain the cultural integrity of the Aborigines, which in turn was necessary if the purity of the race was to be preserved.

According to Wood Jones, Aborigines had to be shielded from contact with civilisation, by allowing onto the reserves "no traders, no missionaries, no exploiters, not even Government police themselves". This policy he claimed to be in line with "the verdict of scientific bodies, accustomed to deal with such problems".¹⁴ However, prohibition on contact with outsiders was not quite total. Scientists were the one group who could be trusted to enter these life-

¹² *ibid.*, p.40.

¹³ *ibid.*, pp.39-40; see also pp.16-18.

¹⁴ Jones, "Claims of the Australian Aborigine", p.509.

preserving refuges. Wood Jones cast this in terms not of the rights of the scientists but of their duty, claiming that:

Apart altogether from our obligation to protect [the Aborigine] and to shield him from those influences of our making which will inevitably destroy him, there is the paramount necessity - a duty that devolves upon every ruling race - to study him and to understand him and his institutions. This duty is ours merely because we have assumed the custody of the aborigine.... [N]o man should be entrusted with the care of a native race unless he understands the lore, the legends, the beliefs and the prejudices of the people who are placed under his jurisdiction.¹⁵

Yet for closed reservations, such detailed scientific knowledge would appear superfluous; it would seem essential merely to appoint a conscientious gate-keeper, who could debar both ingress and egress.

A major centre of scientific support for absolute segregation was the Board for Anthropological Research of the University of Adelaide, with which Wood Jones had early associations. In October 1932 the chairman of the Board, J.B. Cleland, sent the Minister for the Interior a proposal for the better protection and care of Aborigines. There were, according to Cleland, three distinct problem groups:

1. Natives in areas not yet affected by European settlement.
2. Natives in areas occupied by Europeans.
3. Half-castes.¹⁶

Those in the first category could be found only in the central desert, Arnhem Land and parts of the north-west of Western Australia; in the desert and Arnhem Land, reserves already existed, but not on the stringent terms which Cleland claimed to be necessary to ensure Aboriginal survival. He contended that:

if any remnants of the aboriginal population are to be granted permission to survive, we are convinced that these areas must be conserved inviolate from European settlement, either religious or

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp.514-15.

¹⁶ Cleland to A. Parkhill, Min. Int., 4.10.1932, Cleland Collection. The Board's recommendations in regard to the last of these groups has already been dealt with in Chapter Four. While the Adelaide anthropologists advocated absolute segregation of the uncontaminated full-bloods, they simultaneously advocated the absolute integration of half-castes, through biological absorption.

commercial. This necessarily involves a definite abandonment of mineral, hunting, pastoral, or agricultural enterprise in these areas.¹⁷

However, it did not involve an abandonment of scientific research. Cleland suggested that a lease over the Central reserve "might be granted to some responsible body such as the University of Adelaide, and held by that body in trust for the native population".¹⁸ He went on to raise the possibility of the trustees gaining access to Rockefeller Foundation money, to promote "the better protection of the natives".¹⁹ Rockefeller finances were available only for the purpose of scientific investigation.

Cleland held out little hope for Aborigines in the second category, those who lived alongside Europeans. He suggested that the government should continue to support the religious bodies which were "working in the interests of the natives", and should continue to police labour relations on the pastoral stations; beyond that, little could be done.²⁰ Those Aborigines who lived in pastoral districts, but were not fully integrated into the station economy, presented some difficulty; however as Cleland pointed out:

The problem of the bush native in station areas is a temporary one as he is disappearing rapidly. We do not consider that it is justifiable to hasten this natural process of extermination by transporting such natives and collecting them in special areas.²¹

Unlike the half-caste, who could be made both fully civilised and fully white, and the uncontaminated full-blood who could be preserved in pristine primitivity, Aborigines who had suffered the touch of civilisation were doomed to disappear.

Another member of the Board for Anthropological Research, H.K. Fry, maintained that there was "ample evidence to prove that in Australia instruction in religion and in European ways are bridges not to a higher form

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

of civilisation but to extinction".²² Interference with the Aborigines' religion, customs and way of life led invariably to "detrribalisation", the first step toward their demise.²³ According to Fry:

There are still areas where natives are living in relative independence and maintaining their own social existence in their own territory. They alone appear to have some slight chance of surviving. They have every right to hold inviolate the country they possess.²⁴

Reflecting his training as a psychologist, Fry claimed that there was "no doubt that the determination of the white man to uplift the savage from his degraded state is in part a sub-conscious reaction to a sense of guilt for robbing him of his territories".²⁵ Such efforts were misguided, at least as far as nomadic Aborigines were concerned. He acknowledged that "religious organisations have made and are making magnificent efforts on behalf of the aborigines, and that their missionaries have done more than any others to smooth the passing of the natives, and help them in their unequal struggle for existence".²⁶ Amongst the detrribalised, missionaries did have a role, for these rootless people needed "above all a new reason for their existence".²⁷ Yet Fry maintained that their existence could not be sustained for long; only the uncontaminated Aborigines had any possibility of survival, and only by their total isolation.

N.B. Tindale was another Adelaide advocate of segregation. He claimed that "the effective isolation of the present native inhabitants would on the evidence, lead to their multiplication, and to the redevelopment of an optimum population within the [Western Desert] region".²⁸ The evidence

²² H.K. Fry, "The Problem of the Aborigines: Australian Policy in Retrospect and Prospect", *The Australian Rhodes Review*, no.2, 1936, p.41.

²³ *ibid.*, pp.40-41.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.41.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.40.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.41.

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.41-42.

²⁸ Tindale, "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", p.80. Tindale's Western Desert region took in the north-west of South Australia, the south-west of the Northern Territory and an enormous area in the east of Western Australia; it was much larger than the existing Central Reserve which spanned those two states and the Territory.

consisted largely of data collected by earlier expeditions of the Board for Anthropological Research, which indicated that "tribes that had not yet abandoned their nomadic habits had ... retained their fertility to a high degree", whereas those in continuous contact with whites had rapidly died out.²⁹ Total isolation could guarantee the survival of the desert people as "an unmodified and virile people".³⁰ On the other hand, he asserted, the "fullbloods in the settled districts are a diminishing group and will soon be extinct".³¹ In explaining the process of extinction, Tindale awarded high priority to miscegenation.³² "The appearance of the first (F1) hybrids", he wrote, "marks a definite stage in the decline and disappearance of a fullblood people".³³ One of the primary purposes of the closed reserve was to prevent the procreation of that first generation of half-castes which represented the beginning of the end for the Aboriginal race.

Advocates of segregation claimed that closed reserves offered benefits not only to the Aborigines but also to the entire Australian nation. Cleland argued the economic viability of reserving vast tracts of the central deserts, since the area was unsuited to pastoral or agricultural enterprise.³⁴ He explained that:

There can be no question that the native population - in our North West corner [of South Australia] alone probably numbering 500 or so - are making a much better use of this country than we ever can, and that the density of their population is many times that of any possible white one. If we occupy it and displace them, we shall have to support in indigence several hundred natives and half-castes. Surely we should, purely as an economic measure, see that these Central Australian Native Reserves are kept intact, and that the natives

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp.71-79.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.75.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.68.

³² *ibid.*, pp.81-83.

³³ *ibid.*, p.83.

³⁴ Cleland to Min. Int., 4.10.1932, Cleland Collection.

belonging to these parts are prevented from becoming the hangers-on of civilisation.³⁵

Tindale spelt out the economic argument in greater detail, drawing attention to the ecological role played by Aboriginal hunting and gathering activities, which would facilitate "the control of faunal pests".³⁶ Referring to the vast Western Desert region, he claimed that it was:

indisputable that, if the area could be held by the aborigines, and whites excluded, it would be an economic advantage to the whole community. The 800 to 1,000 aboriginal individuals could in isolation, be maintained without cost to the community (beyond the minimum necessary for occasional medical and police patrol work) as permanent game wardens.

The aboriginal population so reserved would constitute a far more effective occupation of the country than that produced by the residence of the relatively few whites who, at present, make their living by acting as wild dog killers in the desert area.³⁷

The most advantageous course of action, according to Tindale, was to allow "the present fullbloods of the Western Desert [to] continue to live unmolested within their country as nomads".³⁸

Donald Thomson, in his 1937 recommendations on Aboriginal policy in the Northern Territory, listed as the first requirement:

That the remnant of native tribes in Federal Territory not yet disorganized or detribalized by prolonged contact with alien culture be absolutely segregated, and that it be the policy of the Government to preserve intact their social organization, their social and political institutions, and their culture in its entirety.³⁹

³⁵ Cleland, "The Native of Central Australia and his Surroundings", pp.76-77. Cleland made the same point in a letter to the Minister for the Interior, dated 7.9.1936 in AA, CRS A1, 36/8795.

³⁶ Tindale, "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", pp.68, 79-80.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.80. Tindale allowed for the provision of medical services, on an "itinerant" basis, in reserves; see *ibid.* p.68. Cleland may also have been in favour of such a scheme; see J.B. Cleland, "The Value of a Travelling Medical Service", in Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, p.12. However Cleland did not clearly explain whether the travelling medics were to attend on the inhabitants of reserves or only on the station-dwellers. Tindale's suggested police patrols were intended to prohibit white entry rather than to enforce European laws upon the Aborigines.

³⁸ Tindale, "Survey of the Half-Caste Problem", pp.79-80.

³⁹ "Recommendations of Policy in Native Affairs in the Northern Territory of Australia, December, 1937, by Donald Thomson", *CPP* no.56 of 1937-40, p.5. Although Thomson had completed the one-year Diploma of Anthropology at the University of

Pointing out the "serious rate at which depopulation was occurring" in such areas as Arnhem Land and Cape York Peninsular, he maintained that existing reserves were grossly inadequate.⁴⁰ In the Arnhem Land reserve, Japanese pearl-ers were a "grave menace", as their "wholesale prostitution" and degradation of Aboriginal women threatened the survival of the entire population.⁴¹ In terms redolent of the doomed race idea, he declared that:

It is evident to any scientific observer who examines the evidence, that wherever the white or Asiatic races come into contact with the aboriginals the latter first become degenerate and ultimately die.⁴²

Explaining the process by which Aborigines around settlements became "hangers on, pauperised and degraded", he claimed that:

They are quick to pick up the vices of the white man, and in addition to clothing and tobacco, the natives who return from Darwin to the Arnhem Land reserve bring packs of playing cards, and spend days in concentrated gambling.... And the ambition of almost every native was to go to Darwin to work and amass 'wealth', generally in the form of more or less dirty, cast-off clothing, or to live as a hanger on in 'China Town'.⁴³

Little, it seems, had changed since Baldwin Spencer's day, although Thomson was at least egalitarian; he gave equal weight to white and Asian vices as causes of the Aboriginal demise. As well as vice, there was disease. "Biologically, they have no racial immunity even to our common diseases", he wrote, "and they have no chance to acquire an active immunity".⁴⁴

However, as a social anthropologist Thomson emphasised socio-cultural decay as the major contributor to Aboriginal depopulation, explaining that:

Culturally, when it comes into contact with civilisation, the highly specialised and complex organization of the aboriginal is unstable. It

Sydney in 1928, by the 1930s his academic connections were with the University of Melbourne, where he was employed as a Research Fellow in the Department of Anatomy. The head of that department, Professor Wood Jones, was one of Thomson's most prominent supporters. See N. Peterson, "Donald Thomson", pp.2-7.

⁴⁰ "Committee on Applied Anthropology: Discussion on the Australian Aborigines", *Man*, vol.38, July 1938, p.106; "Thomson Recommendations", p.4.

⁴¹ Thomson to Min. Int., 6.9.1937, AA, CRS A659, 39/7917.

⁴² "Thomson Recommendations", p.4.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.6.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.8; also "Committee on Applied Anthropology", p.106.

begins to crumble, and chaos follows in every case. The aborigine is unable to grasp the philosophy of the white man's life; he sees, and is attracted only by the 'flashy' and superficial, the less important, the material things - tobacco, clothes, alcohol, and objects of material wealth. He will sacrifice everything to gain possession of these, and when he gets them he loses his own interest in his own culture, he loses his grip, he can get neither backward nor forward, and he dies, ultimately, in a dreadful state of spiritual and cultural agnosticism, adrift in a no man's land between the world of the white man and the black.⁴⁵

The image of the lost Aborigine, cut adrift from his own indigenous ways and unable to be tied into the world of civilisation, had a long currency. In the social anthropological literature, its appearance was symptomatic of the marked tendency to reify the concept of culture, in much the same way as the concept of race had earlier been reified. Cultures became, in the anthropological imagination, real things, which people either did or did not possess. Thus Thomson could write of natives "who have been deprived of their culture" and who had not acquired any other.⁴⁶

Thomson did acknowledge the possibility of Aborigines becoming civilised at some time in the distant future. While arguing strongly for a "policy of absolute segregation", he added:

This does not necessarily imply a permanent segregation for all time, but it should be the policy to maintain these inviolable reserves for the natives who are still in possession of their culture until and unless a sound working policy and one in the best interests of the aboriginals is established, tested, and proved by experience over a long period, among the natives who are already detribalized. This would commit the Government then, to a declared policy of safeguarding the life and culture of surviving natives until, and unless, a new and satisfactory means of handling the problem has been proved among those whose culture is already lost.⁴⁷

However, he did not hold out high hopes for the success of any civilising efforts, suggesting that there may be both "biological and social reasons" behind the Aborigines' failure to attain "real social equality" with whites.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ "Thomson Recommendations", p.8.

⁴⁶ D. Thomson, "Problems of Administration among the Australian Aborigines: A Correction", *Man*, vol.38, September 1938, p.160.

⁴⁷ "Thomson Recommendations", p.7; underlining in the original.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.5.

Moreover, he implied that Aborigines were entitled to remain apart from civilisation. His proposals recognised "the right of a primitive race to survival in a world with which it appears at present to be incompatible".⁴⁹ Survival, he insisted, could be achieved in "only one way, and that is by segregation".⁵⁰ A primitive race was best left to live in primitive manner.

Although Thomson stressed the need for scientific expertise in the administration of Aborigines, he remarked also that his recommendations were founded upon his status as "a friend and advocate of these people for whom I have a great regard, and an infinite pity".⁵¹ Friendship, regard and infinite pity appear strange attributes to list in a document which claimed "to present a plain, unbiassed [sic] scientific statement of the facts".⁵² The anomaly was perhaps indicative of the dangers of extended periods of anthropological fieldwork. By the time of his 1937 report, Thomson had spent between five and six years living with the Aborigines of Arnhem Land and Cape York Peninsular. Although his commitment to the welfare of these people cannot be doubted, it was expressed in the familiar idiom of the all-knowing scientific expert. Donald Thomson was not the first, or the last, white Australian to see in the primitive Aborigine a host of desirable qualities; while in the detribalised fringe-dweller he could see only a distorted image of the evils of his own society.

Thomson's proposals received strong support from the New South Wales Labor Council official, Tom Wright. In his booklet *New Deal for the Aborigines*, Wright lauded Thomson's recommendations as the only viable and

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.4.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.7.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.8.

⁵² *ibid.*, p.4.

"scientific" strategy for preserving the Aborigines.⁵³ "The essential feature of these recommendations", he wrote, was:

to make each reserve inviolable, as the only means of preserving native culture and tribal entities, until the development of a policy limited to specialised and scientific contact. Thus the destructive features of present and past contact would be eliminated and the aborigines would cease to be a 'vanishing race'.⁵⁴

Wright's depiction of the Aborigines had much in common with the classic evolutionary viewpoint. They had been isolated "almost completely from the rest of humanity for tens of thousands of years", so that while their social organisation was "complex", it remained at a level "which scientific inquiry has shown to have been a stage in the history of all peoples".⁵⁵ He suggested that had they been left to themselves, some form of "progress" would have occurred, "although the lack of animals such as were domesticated by peoples elsewhere and the limited prospects for developing agriculture, precluded any rapid social changes".⁵⁶ The dying race idea made its appearance, Wright claiming that the "normal form of contact with Europeans brought and still brings ruin and death to the aborigines".⁵⁷ But he was no devotee of inevitable extinction. The dying out of the Aborigines was attributed to "malnutrition, dejection and the diseases of the white men", to "wholesale and indiscriminate shooting and poisoning" and to policies which were at best inappropriate, at worst deliberately destructive.⁵⁸ Wright emphasised that it was "*a duty for all progressive people in the community to demand immediate action at all costs to rescue and safeguard the remnant of the native race*".⁵⁹

⁵³ Wright persistently used the term "scientific" as a synonym for 'true' and 'good'. Virtually every mention of Thomson's proposals was embellished with the word "scientific"; the same term was never employed to describe Elkin's proposals, which were a target of Wright's attack, despite the fact that Elkin's qualifications in the science of anthropology far outweighed Thomson's modest one-year diploma.

⁵⁴ Wright, *New Deal*, p.25.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.4.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.5.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.5.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp.5-6, 12-15, 21, 29.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.7; italics in the original.

Science had shown the way, in the form of Donald Thomson's segregationist proposals.

Wright castigated McEwen's "New Deal" policy for giving only "a sham recognition of the work and recommendations of Dr. Thomson", despite the fact that Thomson had been specially "commissioned by the Commonwealth government to conduct a scientific survey of the natives".⁶⁰ He described McEwen's proposals as merely the "old policy in new disguise", for it failed to ensure the creation of inviolable reserves, persisted in the notion that Aborigines must be incorporated into a capitalist economy and continued the practice of promoting missionaries as the primary agents of civilisation.⁶¹ Wright's booklet was as much an attack on missionaries as on McEwen's "New Deal". Missions, he declared, "have contributed largely to the social downfall and ultimate extermination of the aborigines"; proselytising could "never stop the extinction of the aborigines, rather does it hasten their extinction".⁶² More colourfully, he asserted that:

Much of the literature of the missions is nauseating for its sanctimonious hypocrisy and the general glossing over of the indignities suffered by the natives physically, stressing instead the alleged 'spiritual' uplifting. The fact must be stated that the despoiled natives everywhere, and especially where missions operate, suffer more and more the effects of cultural and moral degeneration, leading rapidly to racial extinction.⁶³

Although Wright did not specify Elkin by name, he was clearly aware of the latter's role in the formulation of McEwen's policy. He referred to "clerical advisors [sic]" to the government, who had long "association with mission activities" and who had "secured key positions, including professorial rank in anthropology".⁶⁴ In Wright's view, if the Aborigines were to survive, the first requirement was an end to the influence of the church. In place of missions,

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, pp.6, 8.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, especially pp.9-10, 15-18, 21-24.

⁶² *ibid.*, pp.12, 14.

⁶³ *ibid.*, pp.26-27.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.21. Elkin was the only professor of anthropology in Australia at the time.

he recommended the establishment of "a secular reserve in each tribe's area", in the "hands of secular advisers".⁶⁵

At least to the extent of pointing out that the Commonwealth government had paid little heed to Thomson's recommendations, Wright was quite correct. In his 1939 statement, McEwen claimed that in "the preparation of this policy, the Government has studied closely the report and recommendations of Dr. Donald Thomson".⁶⁶ But he nowhere claimed that they had been followed. The passage in which McEwen came closest to Thomson's proposals was under the heading "Myalls (Natives living in tribal state) and Semi-detribalized", where he stated:

As to the natives who are still living in tribal state, it is felt that these people may be left alone and protected from the intrusion of whites until we have made much further progress in the care of those who through their contact with civilisation are in need of training, education, medical attention and general care.

It will be the policy of the Government to, at least for the present, leave these natives to their ancient tribal life protected by Ordinances from the intrusion of whites and maintaining the policy of preventing any exploitation of the resources of the reserves.⁶⁷

However, any impression that the government may have been supporting the idea of absolute segregation was promptly negated by the following paragraphs:

On the boundaries of the reserves missions or District Officer stations will be maintained to act as buffers between the tribal natives and the outer civilisation.

It is expected that these buffer stations will gradually attract to them some of the natives from the tribes in the reserves, who, it may be anticipated will, after making their first contact with civilisation, return to their tribes. Thus gradual contact with civilisation will be established.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp.24, 25.

⁶⁶ Commonwealth Policy, 1939, p.2. However, this sentence appears to have been added as an afterthought. In the document submitted for cabinet approval on 7.2.1939, this sentence appeared on a separate sheet headed: "add Page 2"; AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

⁶⁷ Commonwealth Policy, 1939, p.5.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, pp.5-6.

The idea that Aborigines should be attracted out of the reserves, to become emissaries who carried civilisation back to their primitive compatriots, was a far cry from Thomson's proposals for absolute segregation.

Elevation by Reservation

Chief Protector Cecil Cook was strongly antagonistic to schemes for absolute segregation. He rejected Donald Thomson's proposals on the grounds that:

the problem is not one of devising a means whereby a futile attempt may be made to conserve the aboriginal tribes as museum specimens, but is one of solving the problem of adsorbing [sic?] the aboriginal to the white community so that he may become a definite social and economic unit within the civilised state.⁶⁹

In a long memorandum dated April 1938, Cook expounded his views on reserves in detail.⁷⁰ He maintained that closed reserves - which Cook designated "inviolable reserves" - would have the effect of giving:

an area of land the status of a sanctuary, within the boundaries of which the aboriginal lives and moves and has his being as a museum specimen, with the difference that theoretically there should be no observers to study him. It is debatable whether there is any moral justification for this arbitrary exclusion of the aboriginal from the benefits of modern social organisation.⁷¹

Cook alleged that any policy which sought to perpetuate traditional Aboriginal customs would place the government in the moral dilemma of condoning "cruel initiation ceremonies and such bitterly controversial matters as ritual rape [and] tribal murder".⁷² In addition, there were practical considerations, which would render any inviolable reserve "ineffective if not actually noxious".⁷³ For one thing, such a reserve would necessarily "embrace a vast section of territory", and therefore "have a very considerable length of frontage". To maintain its inviolability, "this frontage must be patrolled; all

⁶⁹ Cook to Admin., 24.1.1936, AA, CRS A1, 37/70, part 1.

⁷⁰ Cook, memo: Aboriginal Missions, 2.4.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541. This was a time when Cook perceived his own position to be under threat from the government taking too much heed of anthropological experts.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

sections of it must be under observation every day and every night. Quite obviously this is impossible".⁷⁴ He went on to explain that:

Not only must access be denied persons outside the reserve but egress must be denied aboriginals inhabiting it. If this is not done, the natural urge of the aboriginal to avail himself of the amenities of the higher civilization will bring him off the reserve and he will return to it after clandestine contact with vices and disease, which he will disseminate through the reserve amongst his fellows. As the reserve is assumed to be inviolate these may develop, unknown to authority, until the population on the reserve is degraded by vice and decimated by disease. Surely, this is not the purpose for which the inviolable reserve is intended.⁷⁵

Additionally, inviolable reserves "may constitute a national menace", for their sparse and unsupervised population "would make invasion easy and defence practically impossible".⁷⁶ From these considerations, Cook concluded that the "inviolable reserve is an illusion. It is undesirable and impracticable".⁷⁷

He agreed, however, that Aborigines needed to be sheltered from the "evil effects of the impact of civilization".⁷⁸ Thus he was led to support what he termed "controlled reserves", which should be:

designed to regulate the tribal life within the reserve, with a view to the aboriginal's ultimate adaptation to admission to the new advanced civilization, so that he may enter it with full capacity to enjoy its advantages without having been seriously affected by its sinister influences.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid.* The difficulty of keeping Aborigines within the reserve boundaries was a persistent weakness in the segregationists' arguments, and one to which contemporary critics frequently alluded. Segregationists tended to minimise the problem - often by ignoring it - apparently assuming that if Aborigines were allowed to live unmolested, they would have no interest in events beyond their own homelands. Nonetheless, the problem had to be acknowledged on occasion. J.B. Cleland, for example, in proposing that a part of the Tanami Desert be declared a reserve, remarked that the "natives in this area tend to gravitate naturally towards the settlement at the Granites". How this process of natural gravitation was to be stopped, he did not explain, although stopping it was vital to the success of his proposed reserve. See Cleland to T. Paterson, Min. Int., 7.9.1936, AA, CRS A1, 36/8795.

⁷⁶ Cook, Aboriginal Missions, 2.4.1938, AA, CRS A452, 52/541.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

Unlike Elkin, Cook openly avowed that the transformation to Western civilisation must be total, obliterating all traces of the old Aboriginal culture. If, he declared:

... we resort to interference, we must recognise that there can be no compromise. The policy ... that interference should be as far as possible compatible with the retention of tribal organization and unobjectionable native custom, is fallacious. Once having interfered, we must admit the necessity of proceeding step by step until existing social organization has been completely demolished and replaced by a new structure adapting the aboriginal to an economic life in the white community.⁸⁰

The "controlled reserve" provided a suitable environment for this task of social demolition and reconstruction.

On at least one issue, however, Cook agreed with the proponents of absolute segregation. He considered that missionaries should focus their efforts on detribalised Aborigines, leaving the nomads to their accustomed ways until such times as they too felt the blighting influences of civilisation. Among many complaints against missionaries, his most damning criticism was that:

They neglect the detribalised aboriginal, devastated by disease, disrupted by the impact of white civilization and lost in the new social order, and clamour for concessions in inviolable reserves, where they feel they will not be confronted with the insuperable difficulties obtaining in the vicinity of towns. The result is that the aboriginal who needs assimilation into the white community, elementary education and the inculcation of a moral and social code to replace that which he has lost, is thrown into the discard by the people who most loudly claim that he is the white man's responsibility. On the other hand, the native, living happily in his own country, for the most part secure from molestation and the impact of white civilization, is selected as a field for mission endeavour. The process of social disruption, so loudly lamented and deplored by missionaries, where its effects are seen, is deliberately commenced by them in areas where otherwise the native organization might remain intact for generations.⁸¹

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.* Other criticisms of missionaries included the allegations that they were often "individuals of low intelligence and poor capacity", whose "vanity" led to their becoming "autocrats"; that they were responsible for the spread of disease in some communities; and that they raised the economic aspirations of Aborigines, without being able to satisfy them. Cook grudgingly conceded that missions did have a role to play; but he insisted that they must "submit voluntarily to strict government control".

If missionaries persisted in proselytising amongst the primitives, social dislocation was inevitable, for Christianity was "incompatible with the native organisation". According to Cook, "it does not seem possible to Christianize the Australian aboriginal without destroying his social organization".⁸² He went so far as to assert that missionaries were "no less destructive to the native race than are the Japanese pearling crews, towards which attention is usually directed".⁸³

A particularly robust critic of absolute segregation was Dr Charles Chewings, a mining engineer with long experience of central Australia. Deriding "the advocates of shutting the natives off entirely from the 'wicked whites' whose touch they believe contaminates them", Chewings declaimed:

This panacea evidently had its birth in dreamland, for no person with any practical knowledge of the natives believes that they can be retained within a given area without strongly policing them. And the cost of that would be prohibitive.⁸⁴

He maintained that every station owner in the interior knew that Aborigines had "been drifting in from far outback for the last fifty years", and this voluntary migration toward settlement rendered the declaration of "mammoth reserves" futile.⁸⁵ Apart from raising pragmatic objections, Chewings expressed suspicions about the motives of those who demanded absolute segregation. Acknowledging that anthropologists had gathered "much valuable information", he added that:

the scientist is insatiable. He wants the uncontaminated natives kept in their primitive state mentally, morally, and in every other way, so that they can be further studied. He has pleaded successfully for large reserves, and would keep them there as zoological curiosities.⁸⁶

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ C. Chewings, *Back in the Stone Age: The Natives of Central Australia*, Sydney, 1936, p.150.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, pp.147, 150.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.145.

Chewings was agnostic on the question of whether the Aborigines could survive, although he considered that their only possible chance lay in their uplift into civilisation. He concluded his book with characteristic ambivalence:

... The future of the Central Australian natives lies in the lap of the gods. All experience points to the race becoming extinct within a few generations. The one hope of prolonging their existence seems to lie in the direction of improving the race by means of teaching and especially by personal contact with reputable white people.⁸⁷

In line with this, he argued that if reserves were to serve any useful function they must not be places for preserving the blacks in stone age conditions, but should be missionary enterprises which aimed to bring about "a complete transformation from barbarism to civilization, from totemism to Christianity".⁸⁸ At the very least, the "humanizing influence" of the missionaries could not "be other than for good".⁸⁹

The Aboriginal spokesman David Unaipon was less strident in his denunciations of segregation. He was, nonetheless, highly critical, remarking that:

Some people say that the white man should leave the aborigine alone, should not interfere with his customs and his manner of living.

The white man must not leave the aborigine alone. We cannot stand in the way of progress....

It is the duty of the white man to stand by the aborigine, to guide him and help him until he can help himself in this new world which has grown up around him.⁹⁰

Characterising segregation as "a policy of negation which leads nowhere", Unaipon claimed that "the only hope for the improvement of my race lies along the line of properly-conducted missionary enterprise, which ... gives them the inner power to reconstruct their lives".⁹¹

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.155; see also p.144.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.145.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.146.

⁹⁰ Unaipon, *Australian Aborigines*.

⁹¹ Unaipon, "The Aboriginal Viewpoint", p.11.

Missionaries themselves were at the forefront of opposition to segregationist schemes. Reserves, in the missionary view, were havens from the evils of white society, where Aborigines could be uplifted into Christianity and civilisation, not sanctuaries for the perpetuation of primitivity. At the 1933 Conference of the National Missionary Council of Australia, it was resolved that missionary work was of "essential importance" on all reserves; the resolution was reaffirmed at the 1937 meeting.⁹² "Some criticism of the attitude of Anthropologists who seemed anxious to preserve Aboriginal culture intact" was voiced at the 1937 Missionary Conference, although Elkin managed to smooth over the potential discord between science and religion.⁹³ In his review of the Conference, the Reverend J.H. Sexton condemned "the attitude taken by anthropologists generally", that "Arnhem Land should be made a close preserve for anthropologists" and that "missionary work should be tabooed".⁹⁴ While missionary opposition to absolute segregation doubtless entailed an element of self-interest, their criticisms were well informed, frequently displaying a familiarity with contemporary anthropological writings.

Citing Stanner's research, Sexton pointed out the impracticality of segregation, as there was a "drift of even the most highly organized tribes toward civilization". This, Sexton asserted, could not be stopped and "no theorizing of anthropologists will keep them in a static condition".⁹⁵ Turning on its head the anthropologists' argument that social change brought racial extinction, he claimed that:

⁹² Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, pp.2-3, 7-8; Missionary Conference, 1937, *Report*, p.24. For a more comprehensive statement of the need for missions on reserves see Needham, *White and Black in Australia*, especially pp.152-72. Many humanitarian groups also maintained that missions were an essential part of any substantial reserve; see for example Victorian Aboriginal Group, *Suggestions to the Conference of Chief Protectors*, 22.3.1937, AA, CRS A431, 48/961.

⁹³ Missionary Conference, 1937, *Report*, p.9.

⁹⁴ Sexton, *An Extensive Survey*, pp.8-9. Sexton specifically excluded Elkin from his strictures.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.9.

the anthropologists are too conservative in their outlook on the aborigines, for they are averse to changes. The statu [sic] quo must be maintained, which means the death knell of a native race. It is not the way of preservation to urge that native customs remain unchanged. As a matter of fact, there is the breaking of a new day upon the black race from all points of the compass.⁹⁶

Sexton also pointed out the fallacy in the scientists' argument that they alone should have access to the primitive tribes, while contact with any other white persons brought death. He contended that:

When this claim is made that anthropologists only should move among the primitive tribes, it is well to remember ... that the natives are being thoroughly disturbed by constant anthropological excursions. These visits are only a prelude to detribalization, for when the natives have been in touch with these scientific parties for a few weeks, and gone through these experiments, they are never the same again. The contact of the white man with the black, no matter what his calling, is found to affect the latter, but we are confident that missionary contact can have no ill effect upon the aborigines.⁹⁷

According to Sexton, Aboriginal preservation demanded cultural and religious renovation, not an artificially imposed stagnation.

Sexton suspected scientists of improperly attempting "to entirely occupy the field" of Aboriginal welfare.⁹⁸ In his view, the advocacy of absolute segregation was symptomatic of an unhealthy displacing of spiritual concerns by the claims of secular science. It was, he wrote:

confidently predicted by some that the academy will take the place of the church, and science will supersede religion in the solving of aboriginal problems. Time will show whether science can meet the strivings, yearnings, and spiritual needs of the Aborigines as well as their physical necessities.⁹⁹

The notion that people could deliberately be left in a state of savagery was an anathema to Sexton. It was "surely our clear duty", he pleaded, "to bring to the aborigines the blessing of British culture and the Christian religion", and:

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.9.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.9.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.9.

⁹⁹ Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, p.10. He went on to cite a number of eminent scientists, including Charles Darwin, who supposedly "recognised that the uplift of a primitive race can only come through the Gospel".

Surely after 150 years' occupation of Australia we ought to be able to agree that the stone-age condition of the aborigines should be now recorded and ended. It is the duty of the Government to instruct, control, protect and be responsible for the well-being of all the King's subjects. The natives should be developed to the limit of their capacity. They should no longer remain in a backwash of civilization.¹⁰⁰

Scientists, he claimed, did their cause scant justice by putting forward impractical schemes which would advance only their own research and not the people studied. Sexton urged that "surely it would be much better for the anthropologist and missionary to co-operate, for each has a distinctive contribution to make to the solution of a most difficult racial problem".¹⁰¹

Despite Sexton's allegations, scientists had in fact disputed the viability of segregationist schemes. Raymond Firth was critical of those anthropologists who argued that "absolute cessation of contact" was the only course of action which could restore social equilibrium and "save a dying people".¹⁰² "From a theoretical point of view", he admitted, "this analysis may be entirely justifiable"; but in practical terms it achieved nothing except "to alienate [the] non-specialist".¹⁰³ And science, in his view, had to have both theoretical and practical dimensions.¹⁰⁴ Firth considered the provision of reserves to be "the only practicable way of assisting" the Aborigines, but he did not suggest that this entailed a total prohibition on cultural contacts.¹⁰⁵ He pointed out that reserves would always be under "pressure from commercial quarters keen on development", and this foredoomed to failure any attempt to rigorously segregate the races. Astutely, Firth observed that native reserves were at odds with fundamental values of Western society, sardonically remarking that:

Of all the peoples on this earth it seems to irk white men most of all to be compelled to contemplate resources of nature lying undeveloped by their possessors. They are apt to become provoked to a kind of

¹⁰⁰ Sexton, *An Extensive Survey*, pp.9-10.

¹⁰¹ Sexton, *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, p.10.

¹⁰² Firth, "Native Administration", pp.2-3.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, pp.6-7; Firth, "Anthropology in Australia", pp.6-12.

¹⁰⁵ Firth, "Anthropology in Australia", pp.9-10.

sacred frenzy at the sight, not purely from the desire for material gain to themselves, but quite largely from their conception of utilization as a species of moral duty to the universe which has made such resources available.¹⁰⁶

Insightful as his comments were, Firth did not have much to offer as practical contributions to resolving the Aboriginal problem. That task was left to his successor, A.P. Elkin.

In Elkin's conception, reserves were not to be mere conservation sanctuaries, but must be "localities where the Aborigines can be trained to play some part in the changed circumstances of which we are the cause".¹⁰⁷ He stated:

quite clearly and definitely that anthropologists connected with the Department in the University of Sydney have no desire to preserve any of the aboriginal tribes of Australia or of the islands in their pristine condition as 'museum specimens' for the purposes of investigation.¹⁰⁸

Reserves should encompass good and well-watered land, and preferably be located so as to "include parts of the territories of adjacent tribes".¹⁰⁹ Elkin argued that missionary activity should be encouraged on the reserves, not merely as a cost-saving device but as an essential ingredient of Aboriginal spiritual and material improvement.¹¹⁰ However, the primary requirement was appropriate educational facilities. A "sane native educational policy" on the reserves would entail not merely technical training, but "also direct education in the meaning of the new activities in which the aborigines are trained".¹¹¹ On all reserves "institutions should be established ... for education and also for giving the natives some new economic interest, such as

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁰⁷ Elkin, "Three Ways of Helping", p.11.

¹⁰⁸ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.2. In his 1938 Memorandum, p.1, AA, CRS A1, 38/8043, Stanner inserted a similar disclaimer. However, while Stanner did not demand the total cessation of outside contacts on which Wood Jones insisted, neither did he advocate the civilising interference which Elkin promoted.

¹⁰⁹ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", pp.6-7; Elkin, "National Responsibility", pp.56-57; Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, pp.26-27.

¹¹⁰ Elkin, "Bibliographic Notice [on] Protection", pp.370-71; Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.7; Elkin, "Civilized Aborigines and Native Culture", pp.145-46.

¹¹¹ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.7.

gardening, pastoral work, carpentry, and so on".¹¹² In Elkin's view, reserves without educational institutions were not only pointless; they also would fail to retain their Aboriginal inmates, who would be "lured away to white settlements" by the attractions of new foods, tobacco and material goods.¹¹³

According to Elkin, it was the lure of Western material goods that initiated the whole process of deculturation, and ultimately of depopulation. Aboriginal attraction to white settlement was fostered, either intentionally or unintentionally, by such persons as missionaries, pastoralists and police; yet over-all it was a voluntary movement toward the sources of new commodities. "In every case", he argued, "the attraction is mainly economic, but it breaks social ties and leads to the undermining of religious beliefs and sanctions, and is the *beginning of the end*".¹¹⁴ The problem was that this drift toward settlement took place before Aborigines had become conversant with, or enculturated into, the ways of white society, so that arriving in an environment which they did not understand, they were rendered mere "hangers-on to a culture which is not theirs, and to which they do not adapt themselves".¹¹⁵ The paramount purpose of reserves was to act as intermediate steps in this Aboriginal drift toward settlement: places where Aborigines could acquire a basic grounding in Western ways of life and thought, to prepare them for a later, and fuller, participation in Australian society.¹¹⁶ Without this intermediate step, if primitives were allowed to confront civilisation suddenly and without preparation as they had in the past, then premature social and cultural collapse was inevitable, and the demise of the Aborigines at least likely.¹¹⁷ Indicative of his faith in Aboriginal rationality and foresight - and in

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.6. See also Elkin, *A Policy for the Aborigines*, p.7; Elkin, "National Responsibility", pp.56-57.

¹¹³ Elkin, "National Responsibility", p.57; also Elkin, "Three Ways of Helping", p.11; Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", pp.6-7; Elkin, *A Policy for the Aborigines*, p.7.

¹¹⁴ Elkin, "Native Education", p.469; italics in the original.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.469.

¹¹⁶ See Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", pp.6-7; Elkin, *A Policy for the Aborigines*, p.7; Elkin, "Native Education", pp.469-70.

¹¹⁷ Elkin, "Native Education", pp.469-70.

the correctness of his own proposals - Elkin seems to have believed that Aborigines would voluntarily come into, and remain upon, reserves which offered education, training and uplift into civilisation. Indeed, he argued that reserves run along his suggested lines would reverse the drift of people into towns and stations, the reserves themselves becoming the focal points of attraction.¹¹⁸

In promoting his vision of reserves, Elkin asserted that anthropologists, "like all good members of a 'higher' and trustee race, are concerned with the task of raising primitive races in the cultural scale".¹¹⁹ Making the same point in his article on missionary policy, he explained that:

Social anthropologists are just as much concerned with the study of changing cultures and the phenomena of racial and cultural contact and clash, as with investigations into the lives of untouched communities.¹²⁰

Reserves were to be settings where, with anthropological expertise, social and cultural change could be channelled in the desired direction. They were to be temporary expedients, assisting Aborigines toward assimilation. Yet there were those in his own department who held quite different views on the purpose of reserves, and very different views on the desirability of "raising primitive races in the cultural scale".

The Clear Categories of Olive Pink

Of all the anthropologists to come out of the University of Sydney in the 1930s, none was more devoted to the cause of Aboriginal welfare than Olive Pink. She was a forthright woman of very strong opinions, who believed that:

Loyalty to anything but one's 'Ideals' means compromise. And 'compromise' or 'tact' or 'diplomacy' - all mean moral cowardice! ... That is why I must do as I think right about the Aborigines and not subordinate my views to anyone's.... (I have not time for pretence and compromise and do 'see through' things....) One naturally does not stir

¹¹⁸ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", pp.6-7; Elkin, "National Responsibility", p.57.

¹¹⁹ Elkin, "Anthropology and the Future", p.3.

¹²⁰ Elkin, "Missionary Policy", p.37.

up antagonism unnecessarily. But neither does one wish to be like most Aborigines 'friends' (!!!) (turn a blind eye and silent tongue to obvious wrongs) (a la Cleland and Duguid for two.)¹²¹

With views like these, it is scarcely surprising that her relationship with Elkin was uneasy and often tense; for the latter adhered firmly to the belief that tact and diplomacy were vital to promoting the cause of the Aborigines. Nor is it surprising that, although she may not have wished to, Miss Pink did stir up antagonism. From the time she first joined the Anthropological Society of New South Wales in 1929, there were complaints about her conduct. In July of that year, the Secretary and Treasurer of the Society, C.C. Towle, complained to Radcliffe-Brown of her "manners and methods", her "causing further trouble" and her "untrue" statements for which she refused to apologise.¹²²

Because Pink was so forthright and uncompromising, her writings throw into sharp relief some of the assumptions which informed contemporary anthropology. Her anthropology was idiosyncratic. But the idiosyncrasy derived not from a novel theoretical or intellectual perspective, but from the fact that she grasped some of the ideas which had currency in anthropological circles, and ran with them faster and further than any of her colleagues.¹²³ Perhaps, too, it derived partly from the fact that she had a foot in both the Adelaide school of anthropology, with its emphasis on physical and racial studies, and the Sydney school, with its social orientation. She owed institutional allegiance to neither. From around 1930 she maintained a

¹²¹ O. Pink to Elkin, 26.1.1936, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/5. Emphases in this, as in all quoted passages from Pink, follow the emphases in the originals. She appears to have been incapable of writing without liberally peppering the page with exclamation marks, underlining, upper-case lettering, question marks, quotation marks, dashes and brackets.

¹²² C.C. Towle to Radcliffe-Brown, 14.7.1929, Elkin Archive, box 141, item 3/1/1.

¹²³ This interpretation of Olive Pink differs from that advanced by Julie Marcus, who argued that Pink was original, perceptive and astute in her anthropology; see J. Marcus, "Olive Pink and the Encounter with the Academy", *Mankind*, vol.17, no.3, December 1987, pp.185-97. In my own view, Pink merely pushed quite commonplace anthropological ideas to the limit - and sometimes beyond the limit, into unintentional parody.

professional, and apparently friendly, relationship with J.B. Cleland, before falling out with him around 1934. In 1932 she began formal anthropological studies at the University of Sydney, in the same year commencing a correspondence with Elkin which continued until at least the 1940s. Although she seems to have developed a certain degree of respect for Elkin's abilities, his views and hers diverged widely. And she was not shy of telling him so, in very blunt language.¹²⁴ In an obvious reference to Elkin, she alluded to "clergy camouflaged as 'scientists'", and she consistently condemned the church and missionary groups with whom Elkin worked.¹²⁵ Yet for all her criticism of the Christian welfare lobby, her own moral stance was as stern and unbending as the dourest of Puritans.

When she first began studying anthropology at the University of Sydney, Pink already had strong views on Aboriginal issues. In February 1932 Raymond Firth, Acting Head of the Department of Anthropology, suggested that she consult Elkin's publications; to which she replied:

The Rev. A.P. Elkin's writings I would never think of 'consulting' in regard to the Aborigines.... I might read them out of critical curiosity.¹²⁶

That Elkin was an Anglican clergyman was a constant irritation to Pink. Yet by September 1932 she was corresponding quite cordially with him.¹²⁷ On the pressing need for a resolution to the Aboriginal problem, she wrote:

It seems to me most urgent we should set about planning constructive details and building up a definite policy at once.... Dr Firth did say you and Mr Burton and 'others' (whom he did not name) were doing

¹²⁴ A good example is the eighteen page letter Pink wrote to Elkin on 10.2.1935, in which she poured out, in very frank terms, her disappointment and displeasure with Elkin himself, as well as Stanner, Kaberry, Strehlow, the entire Australian anthropological establishment, missions and Christian welfare bodies; Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/4. She wrote numerous letters of this kind to Elkin, especially in 1935, 1936 and 1937.

¹²⁵ Pink, Text of an article for the *Canberra Times*, 6.12.1938, Pink, Olive Muriel, Papers and Manuscripts, AIATSIS Ms.2368, (hereafter Pink Papers), section F(d).

¹²⁶ Pink to Firth, 13.2.1932, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/1.

¹²⁷ It could be suggested that she had little choice, for by that time it was clear that Elkin would assume the Chair of Anthropology from the beginning of 1933. However it was not in Pink's nature to be cordial merely because a person was in a position of authority.

that sort of thing with Half Castes' and Mixed bloods' problems - but that was all he said. That is a fine work but as you know my WHOLE interest is in the FULL BLOODS - and above all in the 'Bush Natives' (those not yet uprooted and spiritually 'at sea'). Would it be possible for you to spare time to bring those of us interested in that problem - (a totally different one from the Half Caste one (and one much less 'popular') together - to attempt to formulate a constructive policy in regard to them.¹²⁸

Throughout the 1930s, Pink maintained her focus on saving the full-bloods. By the end of the decade, her insistence on the distinctiveness of this issue from the half-caste problem amounted to a obsession.

Pink's early statements on how to help the Aborigines probably struck a chord with Elkin. She suggested that it was necessary to develop "in our Full-Bloods a feeling of (worthy) 'Racial-pride'".¹²⁹ More fully, she explained that:

In Races (as in individuals) it seems to me it is better to develop [sic] to its highest point the best in oneself - rather than trying to be a poor (or even good!) imitation of someone else.

Anyway that is my aim for our Full-bloods - self-development along their own lines (modifying some things, eliminating others and developing yet others of their characteristics (and no longer making 'sham Caucasians' of them!))¹³⁰

Although she wrote of "self-development" Pink displayed no doubts that she knew best which elements needed to be modified, eliminated or fostered. Over the course of the decade, ideas of Aboriginal social development receded further and further from her concerns, as she became increasingly preoccupied with preservation as the matter of greatest urgency.¹³¹ While Elkin was working toward his assimilationist policy, Pink became convinced that segregation was the only solution.

In 1933 Pink began field-work among a people who had been favourites of anthropologists since the days of Spencer and Gillen - the

¹²⁸ Pink to Elkin, 12.9.1932, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/1.

¹²⁹ Pink to Elkin, 13.10.1932, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/1.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ Like the majority of her colleagues, Pink seldom depicted social change among the Aborigines as anything but destructive.

Aranda of central Australia. Very quickly, she adopted the common anthropological practice of referring to those whom she studied as "my" people. Indeed, she took her attachment to her people further than most. In a letter to Elkin in September 1933, she remarked that Camilla Wedgwood, an anthropologist then studying a New Guinea tribe:

Sympathizes with me not having 'a virile' people to study - like hers are. Says 'but a mother always thinks her own baby is the best!' I quite agree: and think my (Aranda) 'baby' is infinitely preferable to her Papuan one!!!! Perhaps not so virile but more spiritual far.¹³²

She later encompassed the near-northern neighbours of the Aranda, the Wailbri, with the same maternal possessiveness. Claims to academic possession of particular tribes or groups have frequently led to antagonism and disputation amongst anthropologists. In Pink's case, it led to rivalry with W.E.H. Stanner and T.G.H. Strehlow, both of whom were also conducting investigations amongst the central desert tribes.¹³³ The rivalry was not just - perhaps not even primarily - professional. Convinced that all anthropologists should, like herself, devote themselves to the welfare of those whom they studied, Pink found both Strehlow and Stanner too complacent and too compliant with those in authority.

With her uncompromising moral stance and her dogmatic devotion to the Aborigines, Pink seems to have found nobody who came up to the standards she demanded. Probably it was these qualities which made her appear fickle, full of praise for a fellow lobbyist for a short time, then equally consumed with condemnation. For example, on July 17 1934 she informed Elkin, with evident excitement, that she had met Dr Charles Duguid, a prominent South Australian churchman who was active on issues of Aboriginal welfare. Duguid was, she enthused:

¹³² Pink to Elkin, 16.9.1933, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/2.

¹³³ In the Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/3, are numerous letters from Pink expressing her distrust and resentment of these two men. Strehlow was the acknowledged authority on the Aranda, having grown up with them on Hermannsburg Mission and speaking the Aranda language fluently. Stanner had done comparatively little work in the centre, his main research being further north in the Daly River region. Pink, however, seems to have detested Stanner more than Strehlow.

A man after my own heart - in regard to the natives.... He is the most outspoken man I have met for ages.¹³⁴

Twenty-three days later, she wrote again to Elkin:

Do you know Dr Duguid? Between ourselves I fear he is a man easily 'bluffed'. And those kind of men do more harm than good. He is on Committee (or Council) of Aborigines' Friends ?? Society.¹³⁵

The fact that she managed to maintain some sort of workable relationship with Elkin for so long may have reflected an admiration for his high moral stance, despite their differing views on the Aboriginal problem and their contrasting personal styles.

Olive Pink demanded high moral standards not only of whites but of blacks as well. She believed that the pristine nomads of the desert possessed a moral integrity which had been lost even by those Aborigines whose contacts with European civilisation were comparatively slight. From Junction Camp near Alice Springs she wrote:

I shall be glad when I get among the uncontaminated natives again!! These men [her present informants] have a 'black tracker' relative - have been in gaol (Mick anyway for 3 days while I was out West) and talk with Half-Castes in a (low type) 'white' way. (All the sharp tricks they have.)

Mick [a major informant] has contradicted several things he definitely stated last year (and had the impertinence yesterday to tell me I 'must have put it down wrongly'!! (Eaglehawk feathers when it should have been Emu!!!) So he got a scolding (and some home truths) and I thought would go off - (He gets so angry if one accuses him of not being truthful (and yet at times he is not - and knows it!) A sort of sanctimonious indignation.¹³⁶

Such remarks reveal something of Pink's character, combining the attitude of the all-knowing scientist with the maternal concern of the moral guardian. They point also toward her romance with the noble savage, who could be found beyond Alice Springs, in the wilds of the desert.

¹³⁴ Pink to Elkin, 17.7.1934, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/3.

¹³⁵ Pink to Elkin, 9.8.1934, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/3.

¹³⁶ Pink to Elkin, 15.4.1934, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/3. Pink had a particular detestation of Aboriginal police trackers; she advised J.B. Cleland that: "A Black Tracker is to me such a contemptible person. Prostituting his primitive gifts to be used against people of his own culture (if not always his own tribe)"; Pink to Cleland, 26.4.1932, Cleland Papers, box 5.

Unlike her colleagues Phyllis Kaberry and Ursula McConnell, Olive Pink did not attempt to turn anthropological inquiry into the domain of Aboriginal women's lives. Instead, she adhered to the conventional view that the important aspects of Aboriginal culture were the exclusive preserve of men. On women's affairs, she could be quite disparaging. In response to J.B. Cleland's suggestion that she look into the social and ritual role of women, she wrote to Elkin:

The pen is the pen of Dr Cleland but the voice (words) is that of Strehlowe [sic] don't you think? (The German view of women and Aranda view of women. (Below the salt!!) Which is exactly what I impress on the natives I am not. I mean a white woman should be to them sexless. I am always telling them 'white women' know all the things white men do. And so can read all about the same things (native ceremonies) as the men - so they may as well tell me. I should hate to concentrate on women's things! - (Chiefly of 'sex' and 'food' and 'gossip' - (as with white women!! One half of them anyway.) (I like a few 'white women' and a few 'black' but the remainder worry me. I suppose I am not 'feminine' - that is why. (The things they are 'after' don't seem worthwhile) Anyway I am sure the old Ilpirra men did not think of me in terms of sex but a new creature. They certainly let me see their ceremonies without all this fuss.¹³⁷

In one of her few published scientific papers, "The Landowners in the Northern Division of the Aranda Tribe, Central Australia", Pink asserted that:

Natives, if uninfluenced by non-scientific whites, or half-castes, are quite as ready to act as candid and reliable informants to a female as to a male anthropologist. Sex does not count. To them we are something new ... Even some male scientists suggested that I would be handicapped, but my data and photographs are proof to the contrary.¹³⁸

This paper demonstrated that Pink was quite capable of writing anthropological articles which accorded with the prescriptions of the science. That she published very few was probably more a reflection of her priorities than of her abilities.

If Pink had a somewhat jaundiced view of the generality of women, she had an even lower opinion of men - especially of white men. When news

¹³⁷ Pink to Elkin, 15.4.1934, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/3.

¹³⁸ O. Pink, "The Landowners in the Northern Division of the Aranda Tribe, Central Australia", *Oceania*, vol.6, no.3, March 1936, p.276.

reached her of the dismissal of Mr Freeman, Superintendent of the Alice Springs Half-caste Bungalow, she wrote to Elkin in dismay:

Have you heard about Mr Freeman. It was for 'interfering with' Half-caste girls at the Institute he was dismissed. Professor, are there no pure white men? (But that is a silly question. I know my father was.) But they seem few and far between - it is horrible. It has upset me horribly as I thought him the last to be that kind of man. But out here they seem to be in a majority (98% one man said and admitted he had been one of them before marriage.)¹³⁹

Sex was the central issue in Pink's formulation of the Aboriginal problem. More precisely, it was male sexuality. She insisted that:

male licentiousness is responsible for the fact that there is a native problem at all ... Were there no white males there would be no 'native problem'. That is outside the costal [sic] areas open to alien males.¹⁴⁰

She had no time for the moral relativism of colleagues like Ralph Piddington. Pink's morality was black and white. Sex between the two races was wrong.

Olive Pink was one of a long line of humanitarian lobbyists who regarded sex as the most potent force leading to the degeneration and decline of the Aboriginal race.¹⁴¹ In line with her predecessors, she pointed to the prevalence of venereal disease and its effects on the fertility of Aboriginal women.¹⁴² More than this, she emphasised the role of miscegenation. Together, she declared, venereal disease and miscegenation would lead to "the

¹³⁹ Pink to Elkin, 15.4.1934, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/3; see also Pink to Elkin, 17.7.1934. For detail on the dismissal of Mr Freeman, for alleged sexual offences against half-caste girls in the Alice Springs Institution, see V.G. Carrington, Deputy Admin., Alice Springs, to Sec. Int., 3.3.1934, and subsequent correspondence in AA, CRS A1, 35/643.

¹⁴⁰ Pink, What is the Future the Commonwealth Government is preparing for the Australian Aborigines - the Full-bloods? Especially those in the N.T., Text of an article for the *Canberra Times*, 6.12.1938, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁴¹ Both Julie Marcus and Christine Cheater implied that Pink's thunderings against frontier sexual behaviour and its deleterious effects on the Aborigines represented a new and adventurous voice in anthropological circles. See Marcus, "Olive Pink", especially p.189; and C. Cheater, "Olive Pink and the 'Native Problem'", *Bulletin of the Olive Pink Society*, vol.1, no.2, 1989, especially pp.6-7. In fact, there was nothing new in condemnations of frontier sexual morality, and nothing novel about connecting this with the degeneration and decline of the Aborigines.

¹⁴² O. Pink, "Camouflage: Summary of a Lecture dealing with Culture Contact in Australia", *Mankind*, vol.2, no.1, April 1936, p.20.

extermination of the Native race. And at no distant date".¹⁴³ But Pink was no devotee of a fatalistic doomed race idea. The Aborigines could be saved. Indeed they must be saved. Since male sexuality was responsible for the problem, the moral guardianship of women was one possible solution. Pink was one of a great many women and men of her time who advocated the need for white women to play an active part in the protection of the black. She argued that "as an entirely male regime had failed to afford the aborigines any real benefits, it was time women took an active and prominent part in the administration of native affairs".¹⁴⁴ She also suggested, as a means of deterring miscegenation, that the name of the white father should be placed on the birth certificate of every half-caste, remarking that:

If we are in earnest about stamping it out that would be very efficient way. (They don't mind having them but they do mind others knowing.) Also it would sheet it home to the police - whom I was told are some of the worst offenders. (And white girls become engaged to them!!!) I'll get some women's society to take up that point (Father's name to be registered) on my return.¹⁴⁵

However, she was under no illusion that these means alone would be sufficient to save the race.

Pink's more ambitious scheme entailed the creation of a "Secular Sanctuary" for each Northern Territory tribe which still remained intact. The name was meant to distinguish these institutions from missions and reserves, which according to Pink were run along altogether inappropriate lines.¹⁴⁶ At least some of these Sanctuaries should be "administered by a woman".¹⁴⁷ In the case of the envisaged Wailbri Secular Sanctuary, that woman was to be Olive Pink. Supremely confident of her own fitness for the task, she insisted that she should have total control within the Sanctuary. "There are not going to be two 'captains' on my ship!", she declared.¹⁴⁸ There is no reason to

¹⁴³ Pink to T.A. Paterson, Min. Int., 3.6.1937, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁴⁴ Pink, "Camouflage", p.20.

¹⁴⁵ Pink to Elkin, 15.4.1934, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/3.

¹⁴⁶ Pink to Elkin, 25.7.1938, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

¹⁴⁷ Pink, Text of an Article for the *Canberra Times*, 6.12.1938, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁴⁸ Pink to Elkin, 25.7.1938, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

doubt the sincerity of Pink's motives - to save the Wailbri from extinction. Equally, it is not at all surprising that her proposal, like those of so many anthropological experts before her, was founded on the assumption that she knew what was best for those who needed saving. She demanded:

an inalienable area for the Wailbri - to be developed (but along my own unconventional lines) for the benefit of the Wailbri full-bloods themselves.

There are to be no mixed bloods or 'absorption' in my scheme!¹⁴⁹

Male sexuality had long been considered the root of the half-caste problem; controlling black women's sexual activity had long been considered a solution. Pink's "Secular Sanctuary" ideas were quite within these conventional terms.

Pink's "Secular Sanctuary" proposals had much in common with the arguments for absolute segregation put forward by men like Wood Jones and J.B. Cleland. She did, however, allow a place for some element of social progress. Within the protection of the sanctuary, Aborigines could "slowly become developed and eventually fully and really 'civilised blacks'".¹⁵⁰ But the central thrust of her proposal was preservation, not progress. She considered that Aborigines were best left to pursue an Aboriginal way of life, as attempts to civilise merely made "sham whites" of them.¹⁵¹ The issue of social development was vastly overshadowed by that of racial survival. On one issue she was particularly adamant - her Aborigines had to remain full-bloods. That was the major impetus behind her "Secular Sanctuary" scheme. In 1937 she wrote to J.A. Carrodus, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, urging the declaration of a sanctuary for the Wailbri, "so 'my' natives won't breed half castes".¹⁵²

Olive Pink bluntly stated that she was "not interested in the Half-Caste problem - except to stop it at its source".¹⁵³ Conscious that her tirades

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Pink, Text of an article for the *Canberra Times*, 6.12.1938, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² Pink to Carrodus, 17.8.1937, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁵³ Pink, Text of an article for the *Canberra Times*, 6.12.1938, Pink Papers, section F(d).

against frontier sexual behaviour may have appeared puritanical moral interference, she explained:

I am not attempting to be a reformer of white men's morals especially in the N.T. but I am determined to protect full-blood women's bodies and their right to black babies.¹⁵⁴

Apparently they had no right to any other kind; in her "Secular Sanctuary", half-caste children would be taken from their mothers. Writing of her envisaged Wailbri sanctuary, Pink insisted that: "If any [half-castes] 'occur' they will be immediately sent to an Institution!!! (the full-blood women will be told that.)"¹⁵⁵ She informed J.A. Carrodus that she was:

not the least interested in the morals of the white men. (I have my own views about them). But I am deeply and anxiously worried about the effect of their lack of sexual self-control is having [sic] on the native women. And on these women's (potential) black children. (Infinitely preferable to any 1/2 caste!)¹⁵⁶

Only by stopping the interbreeding of black with white could the Aboriginal race survive. For only full-bloods were true Aborigines.

For Olive Pink, the policy of biological absorption was an anathema. She informed the Minister for the Interior, T.A. Paterson, that:

the Commonwealth Government's long range police [sic] of absorption into the white community only means and only can mean one thing (Camouflage they [sic] ever so nicely!) Native Australia has long been a free brothel for the white men in areas where there are still full-blood women but now it is to be officially implemented as a corollary of the long range absorb-policy.¹⁵⁷

In correspondence with Elkin she described absorption as:

A 'policy' which only means Government approval of (and Ecclesiastical silence on) encouraged licentiousness; as a solution of the 'native problem'!¹⁵⁸

Probably it was Cleland's endorsement of absorption, more than any other single factor, which led to her alienation from him. She was horrified by the resolution passed at the 1937 Conference of Commonwealth and State

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Pink to Elkin, 25.7.1938, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

¹⁵⁶ Pink to Carrodus, 17.8.1937, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁵⁷ Pink to Paterson, 3.6.1937, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁵⁸ Pink to Elkin, 25.7.1938, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

Aboriginal Authorities, recommending that efforts be directed toward the absorption of people of mixed descent. After reading the report of the conference she remarked that:

... it would seem that 1/2 castes and other mixed bloods are the sole anxiety of the Commonwealth. In other words 'Aboriginals' Welfare! Not the Aborigines' welfare at all - (except as economic 'fodder'). So it looks as if - in spite of 'tons' of ordinances to the contrary the living of white men with native women is going to be encouraged and the full-bloods thus silently exterminated and their illegitimate children absorbed!¹⁵⁹

Carrodus's statement at that conference - "if history is repeated, the full bloods will become half-castes"¹⁶⁰ - especially drew her ire. She wrote to him in indignation:

How can you so calmly say it. (I can not understand such complaisance [sic] with and resignation to what could be prevented) 'eventually there will only be 1/2 castes'. It simply means that what I said is true - the welfare of the full-bloods does not matter tuppence to anyone! And ordinances are all camouflage and only to act as sedatives to those who do care really about full-bloods.¹⁶¹

Pink argued that Carrodus's remark, taken in conjunction with an alleged legal prohibition on the marriage of white men with full-blood women in the Northern Territory, indicated that:

an 'Absorption policy' can only mean one thing. The Commonwealth's 'blessing' on casual sexual relations between white men and full blood women in the hope that:-

(a) half castes will result to be later 'absorbed' as a cheap labour reservoir for the North. 'Poor Whites.'

(b) that the native women will become sterile through venereal infection by white men. So that when they are thrown back to their native husbands like worn out shoes, they will be incapable of bearing full-blood children to them. So the situation which is poetically called 'vanishing' will again be engineered and unostentatiously 'solve' the 'native problem'. - Immorally - and that with the blessing of Church, State and Anthropologist Churchmen advising Governments.¹⁶²

A letter which Pink sent to Carrodus shortly after the 1937 Conference of Aboriginal Authorities was particularly vitriolic in its condemnation of him, of

¹⁵⁹ Pink to Carrodus, 17.8.1937, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁶⁰ *Aboriginal Welfare Conference*, 1937, p.21.

¹⁶¹ Pink to Carrodus, 17.8.1937, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁶² Pink, Text of an article for the *Canberra Times*, 6.12.1938, Pink Papers, section F(d).

the staff of his department and of the Northern Territory Administration.¹⁶³ Affronted, Carrodus replied that he "must refuse to take any notice of future communications" from her.¹⁶⁴ Pink's unwillingness to play the political game, and her insistence on a forthright exposition of her opinions, did not make her an effective lobbyist for the cause she held so dear.

Terminology was a matter of exceptional importance to Pink. In the inter-war years, a certain ambiguity attached to the word 'Aborigine'. In some contexts it referred exclusively to persons of full Aboriginal descent; in other contexts it designated a wider range of persons of both full and mixed descent.¹⁶⁵ Increasingly, the tendency was to use the term in the more widely encompassing sense. For Olive Pink, this was a regrettable and dangerous linguistic trend. She wrote to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

When kindly, disinterested people, fighting to improve the conditions of both full-bloods and mixed-bloods leave off applying the term 'Aborigines' to the Half-castes and those with increasingly less and less admixtures of black blood in their white blood, then will more and more people, who wish to help, but also greatly reverence TRUTH, stand behind them in their fight for these two distinct sections of the Australian community who are being oppressed by whites.¹⁶⁶

The mixed-bloods, she declared, were "certainly neither by descent nor culture 'ABORIGINES'. ONLY full-bloods are that".¹⁶⁷ Moreover, "the black race no more looks on the Mixed-bloods as racially 'blacks' than do whites look on them as 'whites'".¹⁶⁸ She reasoned that because of the patrilineal descent systems of both Aborigines and Europeans:

¹⁶³ Pink to Carrodus, 17.8.1937, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁶⁴ Carrodus to Pink, 20.12.1937, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁶⁵ Legally too, half-castes were Aborigines for certain purposes, and not Aborigines for others, a fact which gave rise to some difficulties. A memorandum by the Crown Law Officer, E.T. Asche, on the rights of Northern Territory half-castes to consume alcohol, provides a good illustration of the confusion engendered by ambiguities in the use of the term 'Aborigine'; see Asche, Half-castes drinking in hotels, c.October 1929, AA, CRS A1, 38/4979.

¹⁶⁶ Pink to Editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16.6.1939, Pink Papers, section D(15).

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

The Whites have a social responsibility for them [the mixed-bloods] that the blacks have not. White MEN are, originally, responsible for breeding them, so whites must help them to become white, culturally.¹⁶⁹

Pink's hard racial boundaries had to be maintained through firm linguistic distinctions:

So let there be an end to calling Mixed bloods 'Aborigines'. And let that term be, truthfully, confined to its correct use - 'the inhabitants found in possession by colonists' (vide Oxford Dictionary).¹⁷⁰

Her letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* was not published, due "to the very heavy pressure" upon space, as the editor reassured her.¹⁷¹ He did, however, take the trouble to write a short note disputing her argument:

With regard to your particular point, however, I cannot agree that the word 'aborigine' should of necessity be limited to full-bloods. If you take the parallel of the negro, it is customary throughout the world to apply the term to all who have a preponderance of coloured blood.¹⁷²

Pink heavily underlined the phrase "of the negro" in the last sentence, and wrote in the margin: "an introduced slave. Not a dispossed [sic] landowner!!"¹⁷³

Pink was certainly not alone in asserting the need to clearly distinguish full-bloods from mixed-bloods for legislative and administrative purposes. Support for this view came from across the political spectrum. The Communist trade union official Tom Wright proclaimed that:

It would be an important step towards a better understanding of the aborigines question if it were clearly recognised that there are two separate problems.

The most urgent problem is that of the Aborigines proper, the full-blooded natives, thousands of whom still live under tribal or semi-tribal conditions, and who could be saved from extinction if appropriate measures were adopted immediately by the Australian people....

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Editor in Chief, *Sydney Morning Herald*, to Pink, 16.6.1939, Pink Papers, section D(15).

¹⁷² *ibid.*

¹⁷³ Note, in Pink's handwriting, on *ibid.*

A second problem, often wrongly referred to as the aborigines problem, is that of the half-castes and others of mixed blood.... It is a separate problem, not the aborigine problem, and requires a different and separate treatment.¹⁷⁴

Following the logic of his own argument, he listed as one of the necessary "Urgent Reforms for Aborigines":

Acts and Ordinances to be amended to provide that the words 'Aborigines', 'Aboriginals' or 'Natives' shall apply only to full-bloods and not to persons of mixed blood.¹⁷⁵

Tom Wright probably agreed with Paul Hasluck on very few issues. Hasluck's emphasis on the need "*to place the half-caste in a different category from the aboriginal*" was one of the few.¹⁷⁶ Majority missionary opinion concurred with this, the National Missionary Council of 1933 urging that "the problem of the half-caste ... should be regarded as distinct from that of the full blood".¹⁷⁷ Explaining this proposition, the Reverend J.H. Sexton insisted that "there should be legislation separating the half-castes from the full-blooded black. For he is not really an Aboriginal".¹⁷⁸ As vehemently as Wright condemned the missionaries, on this issue at least, he and they saw eye to eye.

An insistence on considering half-castes separately from full-bloods was commonplace enough; but Pink was, characteristically, exceptionally

¹⁷⁴ Wright, *New Deal*, p.2.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.32.

¹⁷⁶ Hasluck, *Our Southern Half-Caste Natives*, p.24; italics in the original.

¹⁷⁷ J.S. Needham, National Missionary Council: Conference on Aboriginal Matters, December 1933, p.1, AA, CRS A1, 37/6639.

¹⁷⁸ Sexton (ed.), *The Aborigines: A Commonwealth Problem and Responsibility*, p.6. However, Sexton was self-contradictory on this point. Perhaps the most blatant example was in his book *Australian Aborigines*. On p.116 he endorsed the policy of the Aborigines' Friends' Association, of which he was president, specifying that: "the half-caste shall be separated from the old aboriginal, so as to give him a chance of being merged in the white population. The view we take is that the half-caste is the white man's child and certainly displays a higher intelligence than his darker brother". On pp.85-86 he declared that: "There should be no discrimination made among the aborigines in regard to shades of colour. The entrance into citizenship should not rest upon the accident of colour, but should be decided by the intelligence and character of the applicant.... The full-blooded black is quite as intelligent as the half-caste, and in some cases more so ... The aborigines should be regarded as one family, and the most fitting among them should be encouraged along the line of development irrespective of their light or dark shade of colour".

clamorous on this point. In 1938, when the New South Wales government was considering new Aboriginal legislation, she drafted a motion to be put at a meeting of the Anthropological Society of New South Wales. The motion read, in part:

that the words 'Aborigines' and 'Aboriginals' be entirely eliminated from the New Act and from Ordinances and official correspondence and the quite unambiguous words Full-bloods and Mixed-bloods be substituted, in the interests of Justice and fair play to the [?] former owners of N.S.Wales - the full blood minority, who are the only true Aborigines.

And would point out that word is being used at the present time as a 'smoke screen' behind which much propaganda is being carried on - detrimental to their interests. And in the interests of mixed-bloods who are not Aborigines.¹⁷⁹

The nomenclature had to be reformed, to ensure "clarity and straightforwardness" of expression, and to create "a precedent of [sic] the correct use of words, thus avoiding the dangerous new linguistic disease spoken of by Lord Horder as 'Obscurantism'".¹⁸⁰ But she was motivated by far more than mere devotion to linguistic proprieties.

In August 1938 she wrote to P.G. Spender, M.P., insisting that it was "tremendously important" for the words "full-bloods" and "mixed-bloods" to replace loose usage of the term "Aborigine".¹⁸¹ The term "full-blood", Pink asserted, left "no room for ambiguity or argument"; it applied to the people who were "the only Aborigines". "Mixed-blood" was in her view equally unambiguous.¹⁸² Loose usage of the word "Aborigine", she claimed, was being "deliberately" fostered by certain persons and groups to "camouflage" their "real aims".¹⁸³ Just what those "real aims" were, she never revealed. She did, however, explain that if her terminology was adopted:

¹⁷⁹ Draft of a motion to be put forward at a meeting of the Anthropological Society of New South Wales in late 1938, Pink Papers, section F(d); [?] designates an illegible word in the manuscript.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Pink to P.G. Spender, 24.8.1938, Pink Papers, section F(d).

¹⁸² *ibid.* As an alternative term for mixed-blood, she suggested "Euralian"; this was advocated by a number of her contemporaries, including Xavier Herbert.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

Then when people talk about 'giving Citizen Rights' to Aborigines they can instead say 'to mixed bloods'. And that is just, because they are white men's offspring... But not to full bloods because for them it is merely a camouflaged taking away of all their rights, this so-called giving.¹⁸⁴

How the grant of citizen rights to full-bloods would take away their real rights, Pink did not clarify. However, it may be inferred from her arguments that the imposition of Western political concepts would destroy the one legitimate right which the full-bloods possessed - their right to live as proper Aborigines.

In the late 1930s, considerable publicity was given to Aboriginal - in Pink's terms "mixed-blood" - political activists who pressed the case for the granting of citizen rights.¹⁸⁵ Corresponding with Elkin on this topic, Pink revealed both her disagreement with the cause and her distaste for the individuals involved. One of the New South Wales organisers for the Sesquicentennial Day of Mourning was Bill Ferguson. In November 1937, as publicity for the event was building up, Pink asked Elkin: "Who is that 'Mr Ferguson' who has been so much in the papers? Is he a half caste?"¹⁸⁶ Elkin replied that Ferguson was "an almost white Aborigine" who had "done some agitating"; he added that Ferguson had "not been very helpful" toward the Aboriginal cause.¹⁸⁷ In response, Pink wrote:

I concluded Ferguson was a 'mixed blood'. They will get more help when they give up 'trading on' the name 'Aborigines' - to which of course they have even less right than to that of 'white' (except actual Half-Castes who are 1/2 aborigine 1/2 white but are not 'Aborigines'.) A candid statement of their real descent would be better.

We are all (white) 'mixed bloods'! Until they get full citizenship why don't they stick to that name instead of passing (by subterfuge) as full-bloods - the only people who are Aborigines.

Could you not get that distinction made and kept to in N.S.W.?

That 'Aborigines' (or the incorrect 'Aboriginals'!) are full-bloods **ONLY**

It would clear the issues and the problems.

One knows - quite well - why they are clinging to it! While at the same time wanting white status.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ See the Epilogue below.

¹⁸⁶ Pink to Elkin, 23.11.1937, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

¹⁸⁷ Elkin to Pink, 2.12.1937, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

It is quite inconsistent and entirely misleading.¹⁸⁸

Again, Pink failed to explain what was so self-evident to her: Why did mixed-bloods persist in clinging to the name 'Aborigine' in the face of legislation and popular attitudes which discriminated against people in that category?

Elkin expressed some sympathy with Pink's opinion of Ferguson, although instead of railing against him and his fellow activists, he advanced, in characteristic fashion, a sociological account of the plight of the half-castes:

Lots of them are quite decent types, but they have had no education and the attitude taken up towards them is making them feel that they should return if they possibly could to the beliefs and ways of their grandmothers.¹⁸⁹

Ferguson, Elkin claimed, was "receiving bad advice from some interested quarter".¹⁹⁰ He was also "trying to live in two camps at once", by which Elkin presumably meant that he was attempting the impossible task of being both Aboriginal and white.¹⁹¹ Pink was unimpressed with this sort of sociological explanation. In her view, Ferguson and his fellow mixed-blood propagandists were simply wrong.¹⁹² As for Ferguson, he:

ought not to be in any 'camp' at all. He should fight for 'principles' - then those (anywhere) who help them on will be 'friends' and those who don't 'enemies' - with no personal feelings about it whatever. (That is how I feel and why I do not belong to any 'camp'.¹⁹³

Alternatively, perhaps, no "camp" would have her.

By 1939 even Elkin's priestly patience was wearing thin. In July that year, C.C. Towle, Secretary of the Anthropological Society of New South

¹⁸⁸ Pink to Elkin, 7.12.1937, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

¹⁸⁹ Elkin to Pink, 9.12.1937, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.* Elkin was probably here referring to the N.S.W. labour movement, with which Ferguson had connections.

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁹² Pink to Elkin, 5.1.1938, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

¹⁹³ *ibid.* It seems that Pink misunderstood Elkin's term "camps" (probably meaning societies or ways of life) to mean political factions or groups.

Wales, advised him of Pink's "spiteful and unjust criticisms" and her "tantrums" at the Society's meetings.¹⁹⁴ Elkin responded:

How unfortunate we are to be bothering ourselves over Miss Pink? I am sure that both of us are far too busy to be wasting time over her unending complainings.¹⁹⁵

This was shortly after an incident which, although superficially trivial, highlighted both Pink's prickly personality and the intensity of her conviction that the misapplication of the term 'Aborigine' to mixed-bloods was not merely detrimental, but also deadly, to those who truly deserved the name.

At the 1939 meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, Pink presented a paper entitled "Bone-Pointing by Whites and its Past and Future Contribution to the Extermination of the Full-Bloods - the Aborigines of Australia".¹⁹⁶ In the account of this meeting which was published in *Oceania*, and which was probably written by Elkin, the title of her paper was rendered slightly differently as: "Bone Pointing by Whites and its Past and Future Contribution to the Extermination of the Full-Blood Aborigines".¹⁹⁷ To Pink, the omission of the dash and the article in the title was "inexcusable", and she told Elkin so in no uncertain terms.¹⁹⁸ The fuss Pink made over her title is all the more remarkable for the fact that when she first offered to present the paper, on 1 October 1938, the title she gave was closer to the *Oceania* version: "Bone-pointing by whites and its past and future contribution to the extermination of the full-blood Aborigines of Australia".¹⁹⁹ In this initial offer of the paper, she even included the statement:

¹⁹⁴ Towle to Elkin, 30.7.1939, Elkin Archive, box 141, item 3/1/1.

¹⁹⁵ Elkin to Towle, 4.8.1939, Elkin Archive, box 141, item 3/1/1.

¹⁹⁶ *Report of the Twenty-Fourth Meeting of the ANZAAS*, 1939, p.166.

¹⁹⁷ "Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science. Canberra meeting, January 1939", *Oceania*, vol.9, no.3, March 1939, p.341.

¹⁹⁸ Pink to the Editor, *Oceania*, 20.5.1939, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

¹⁹⁹ This was the title which Pink first gave to Dr Ian Hogbin, Acting Secretary of the Anthropology Section of ANZAAS; see Pink to Hogbin, 1.10.1938, Elkin Archive, box 141, item 3/2/5.

N.B. Please put 'full-blood Aborigines' in the programme title - although it should be unnecessary. But we have seen so much of the abuse of the term 'aborigines' that it is necessary for clarity.²⁰⁰

Some time between October 1938 and January 1939 she evidently decided that "full-blood Aborigines", without the dash and article, was not sufficient for purposes of clarity. By the time of her letter to Elkin in May 1939, complaining about his mistake with her title, she seems to have forgotten about her own initial correspondence on the matter. With rising indignation, she fulminated:

I wish to correct the title of my Culture-Contact paper, read at the Canberra Science Congress, and incorrectly printed in 'Oceania' of March 1939. That is inexcusable as it was printed correctly in the official programme, issued to everyone present.

My title was chosen, deliberately, to convey, exactly what I wanted conveying. The wording:- "'Bone pointing' by Whites and its Past and Future contribution to the Extermination of the Full-bloods - the ABORIGINES of Australia' was chosen with the express purpose of emphasizing a, most often, suppressed truth. That truth is that the FULL-BLOODS, alone, are 'the Aborigines' of Australia, not the mixed-blood offspring of full-bloods men [sic] and of male Whites or Asiatics, also.

When aiming at getting real justice for full-bloods, the bracketing of Mixed-bloods with them, incorrectly, under the one word 'ABORIGINES' is extremely harmful to the interests of the full-bloods. Yet it is being deliberately done, by people who know what they are doing and the results of its misuse.

It is one of the Whites' 'pointing-bones'. And a lethal one, too, when so used.²⁰¹

That this tirade was inspired by the omission of a dash and an article is indicative of the extreme seriousness with which Pink viewed the correct application of the term 'Aborigine'.

Pink never clearly explained why or how the bracketing of mixed-bloods with full-bloods under the term 'Aborigines' could be so lethal to the latter. Her insistence on this point appears to have derived from her conviction that full-blood Aborigines were in imminent danger of extinction, and that all humanitarian efforts should focus on preventing their passing. If

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*

²⁰¹ Pink to Elkin, 20.5.1939, Elkin Archive, box 38, item 1/10/6.

the term 'Aborigine' was applied to both full-bloods and mixed-bloods, the problem of imminent extinction was hidden - in Pink's favourite term "camouflaged" - for the combined numbers of both indicated no downward trend at all. In her view, humanitarian efforts to uplift the half-castes were misdirected. It was the true Aborigines, the full-bloods, who were in need of saving; and this, Pink believed, could be done only by their maintaining a truly Aboriginal way of life. It was an Aboriginal way of life which she had learned about at the University of Sydney.

EPILOGUE

CIVILISED ABORIGINES CLAIM CITIZEN RIGHTS

In 1937 the Aborigines Progressive Association was formed, with a membership exclusively of persons "of Australian Aboriginal blood or descent".¹ The organisation was aptly named. In their manifesto, *Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights!*, the two leading lights of the Association, President John Patten and Secretary William Ferguson, expressed their vision of Aboriginal aspirations:

We have no desire to go back to primitive conditions of the Stone Age. We ask you to teach our people to live in the Modern Age, as modern citizens.²

Their demand for citizen rights was premised on the assertion that Aborigines had a capacity for civilisation, that many, indeed, were already living in a civilised manner.³ Although membership of the Association was restricted to persons of Aboriginal descent, its political platform was far from separatist. It was assimilationist. Patten urged that:

all Aborigines in Australia who want the privileges and benefits of civilisation for the welfare of their wives and children should get behind this movement. We want to be absorbed into the Nation of Australia, and thus to survive in the land of our forefathers, on equal terms.⁴

¹ *The Australian Abo Call: The Voice of the Aborigines*, no.1, April 1938, p.3. The Association had a forerunner with a similar name, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, which was formed in the mid-1920s. However, this body seems to have declined into inactivity by the early 1930s, and was different to the later Association in a number of ways, notably in having white persons among its members, and in having a strong element of Christian philanthropy in its platform. It would therefore seem appropriate to regard the Progressive Association of the late 1930s as a new group, rather than as a continuation of its earlier close namesake.

² J.T. Patten and W. Ferguson, *Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights! A Statement of the Case for the Aborigines Progressive Association*, Sydney, 1937, p.9.

³ The Aboriginal activists of the 1930s used the word 'civilisation' in the same way as their white contemporaries, to designate socio-cultural forms which were supposedly progressive; generally it was synonymous with Western civilisation.

⁴ *Abo Call*, no.3, June 1938, p.1.

In line with this assimilationist ideology, black and white Australians were depicted not only as equal in capacities but also as virtually identical in aspirations and interests. Patten and Ferguson declared:

Aborigines are interested not only in boomerangs and gum leaves and corroborees! The overwhelming majority of us are able and willing to earn our living by honest toil, and to take our place in the community, side by side with yourselves.⁵

The Aborigines Progressive Association was based in New South Wales, although it did attract some members from outside the state. In Victoria a similar Aboriginal political organisation, the Australian Aborigines' League, was set up in the mid 1930s. The word 'progress' was lacking from its title; but the aims and objectives of the League were as much informed by the idea of progress as were those of its New South Wales counterpart. In the League's constitution, its "immediate programme" was given as "the progressive elevation of the aboriginal race by education and training in the arts and crafts of European culture". The "ultimate object" was "the removal of all disabilities, political, social or economic, now or in the future borne by aboriginals and to secure their uplift to the full culture of the British race".⁶ Like the Progressive Association, the Aborigines' League advocated an assimilationist program, although the latter did include in its objectives "the conservation of special features of Aboriginal culture".⁷ These features were not specified, but the demand was clearly for the preservation merely of some of the trappings of Aboriginal art and ceremony, rather than fostering the continuity of traditional Aboriginal culture as a vital and viable way of life. Secretary of the League, William Cooper, affirmed that:

Our League does desire the preservation of the best features of aboriginal culture and feels that the preservation of certain corroboree dances, in the way the old World peoples have retained their folk dances, is in harmony with this ...⁸

⁵ Patten and Ferguson, *Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights!*, p.11.

⁶ W. Cooper, Hon. Sec., AAL, to Min. Int., 22.2.1936, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Cooper to Min. Int., 15.6.1936, AA, CRS A1, 36/7014.

However he went on to warn that "great care should be exercised till such time as the native race is so fully civilised that the outlook on the corroboree is just that of the Old World civilisation on their folk dances".⁹

Neither the Progressive Association nor the Aborigines' League demanded the immediate and universal granting of citizen rights to all Aborigines. Both organisations explicitly made the attainment of civilisation the essential prerequisite to the awarding of citizen rights. On behalf of the Aborigines Progressive Association, William Ferguson advised Prime Minister Menzies that:

We do not ask that wild aborigines should be made citizens, but we do expect that we educated aborigines should be treated as fellow Australians, and given the same political rights and social services as our white fellow Australians.¹⁰

William Cooper urged the Prime Minister to "pass amending legislation granting full rights to aborigines", but only to those "who have attained civilised status".¹¹ Frequently in the correspondence of the League, the term "approved aborigines" was used to designate this group.¹² The League was particularly careful to spell out the limitations to the awarding of citizen rights, Cooper explaining to the Prime Minister that:

We are not unreasonable and do not ask that community services be given to all natives for we well know that many are not able to understand these matters and as little able to benefit from them. In respect of that number who are civilised on the average standard of their equivalent stratum in society, and often much more highly, we protest that it is not consonant with British justice that we should continue to be treated as Stone Age folk.¹³

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Ferguson to PM, 10.2.1940, APNR Records.

¹¹ Cooper to PM, 3.12.1939, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3.

¹² See for example Agenda of proposals submitted by the Australian Aborigines' League for the consideration of the [1937] Conference of Chief Protectors and others (hereafter Agenda of proposals), AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3; Cooper to PM, 3.12.1939, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3; Cooper to PM, 8.9.1939, AA, CRS A461, N382/1/1.

¹³ Cooper to PM, 8.9.1939, AA, CRS A461, N382/1/1.

An insistence on their cultural distance from the Stone Age was a persistent theme in the writings of the leaders of both the Progressive Association and the Aborigines' League. They readily conceded that many Aborigines still lived in a primitive manner. Cooper, for example, referred to the inhabitants of Bathurst and Melville Islands as "backward people" and "our primitive brothers".¹⁴ It was conceded too that the ancestors of civilised Aborigines had only recently emerged from a state of primitivity. In urging the Prime Minister to grant "every civilised man and woman ... full equality in law", Cooper demanded: "Why should we be legislatively considered as we were when the white man came to our shores[?]"¹⁵ Pointing out that all people were once in a state of primitivity, Cooper advised the Minister for the Interior that:

We do not want our people to remain primitive, uncultured and a prey to all comers. Why should we remain in the near Stone Age? The British were once where we are now. The conquering power of Rome, whatever else it did, lifted the British to culture and civilisation. We want that same uplift.¹⁶

The point which Cooper, Ferguson and Patten stressed was that they, along with others of their race, had successfully made the leap from the Stone Age to modern civilisation, and were thereby entitled to the rights of a civilised people. From this perspective, what was to be lamented at the Sesquicentennial Day of Mourning was not the coming of European civilisation to Australian shores, but the fact that Europeans had selfishly attempted to exclude Aborigines from the benefits of that civilisation, to prohibit their advance along the path of progress. Reviewing the history of relations between black and white Australians, Cooper complained that "the object of the government was to keep the Aboriginal down and not allow them to rise to the full standard of European culture".¹⁷ He added that

¹⁴ Cooper to Sec., PM Dept, 10.1.1937, AA, CRS A659, 39/7917.

¹⁵ Cooper to PM, 23.5.1938, AA, CRS A431, 49/1591.

¹⁶ Cooper to Min. Int., 25.6.1937, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

¹⁷ Cooper to Min. Int., 21.1.1939, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858. This letter consists largely of a ten page document written by Cooper, headed "From an Educated Aboriginal". In earlier correspondence to the Prime Minister, dated 31.3.1938, he included a slightly shorter document entitled "From an Educated Black"; this is also in the AA file, CRS

among white Australians there was a "definite will to prevent [Aboriginal] uplift by restricting opportunity", and that this accounted for the fact that "the native has made so little advance".¹⁸ At the Aborigines Conference on the Day of Mourning Ferguson declared: "We are backward only because we have had no real opportunity to make progress. We have been denied the opportunity".¹⁹ In the Association's newspaper, the *Abo Call*, there was a persistent cry: "We do not wish to go back to the Stone Age, we want to join in the march to progress and civilisation".²⁰

Little historical scholarship has been devoted to the Aboriginal activists of the 1930s, perhaps because of academic unease in dealing with an Aboriginal political agenda which is difficult to reconcile with more recent demands for indigenous rights. In the mid-1970s Jack Horner produced a biography of William Ferguson which, while providing a comprehensive account of Ferguson's life, did not attempt a detailed analysis of his political ideals.²¹ In one of the Bicentennial History volumes, Horner and Marcia Langton published an article on the 1938 Day of Mourning, which gave some account of the event and the lead up to it, but offered scant explication of the political ideologies of the leading figures, beyond the assertion that they were demanding the rights of citizenship.²² The most probing analyses of the Aboriginal political movements of the 1930s have been written by Andrew Markus.²³ While he acknowledged the qualifications which the Aboriginal activists hedged around their claims to citizen rights, he was shy of exploring

A659, 40/1/858. While the two documents cover much the same ground, the later version gives a more comprehensive exposition of Cooper's views on the uplift of Aborigines.

¹⁸ Cooper to Min. Int., 21.1.1939, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

¹⁹ *Abo Call*, no.1, April 1938, p.2.

²⁰ *Abo Call*, no.3, June 1938, p.1.

²¹ J. Horner, *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom*, Sydney, 1974.

²² J. Horner and M. Langton, "The Day of Mourning", in B. Gammage and P. Spearritt (eds), *Australians 1938*, Sydney, 1987, pp.29-35.

²³ A. Markus, "William Cooper and the 1937 Petition to the King", *Aboriginal History*, vol.7, part 1, 1983, pp.46-60; A. Markus (ed.), *Blood from a Stone: William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League*, Clayton, Vic., 1986; Markus, *Governing Savages*, pp.173-89.

in detail the crucial nexus in their writings, between civilisation and citizenship. Particularly in his most recent publication, *Governing Savages*, Markus located the Aborigines Progressive Association and the Australian Aborigines' League in the context of the 1930s, when scientific and humanitarian bodies were pushing forward the notion that Aborigines may be able to find a place in modern Australia. Yet he did not adequately elucidate the significance of the persistent cry of the Aborigines, that they were, in many cases, already civilised; and those who were not were perfectly capable of becoming so. Their own ability to attain the status of civilisation was vitally important to the Aboriginal activists precisely because this capacity had long been denied by white Australians. In asserting their demands, they were, in effect, plugging into a debate which had persisted since the first colonisation of this country in 1788.

In broad overview, the history of European attitudes toward Aborigines may be understood in terms of two contrary perspectives. On the one hand there was the vision of the Enlightenment, ably expressed by an early Captain of Marines, Watkin Tench: Aborigines, like all humanity, possessed a capacity for reason and progress; they could and would, in the environment of civilisation, become civilised. On the other hand, there was the view that Aborigines were so fundamentally different to Europeans that they could never attain the status of civilisation. Although the former outlook retained some currency, over the course of the nineteenth century the latter view rapidly gained ascendancy, as European understandings of other peoples hardened into a science of sharp racial differences. By the end of the century, evolutionary theory had consolidated an image of innately primitive Aborigines; unable to adapt to the circumstances of civilisation, they would be exterminated by its progress. Contemporary science held Aborigines to be primitive not merely in their customs, their culture, their way of life, but also in their psychological and physiological constitution. Primitivity was an inherent racial characteristic.

This view of the Aborigines as a race irretrievably locked into the Stone Age persisted well into the twentieth century; but in the inter-war years it came increasingly under challenge, as the evolutionary anthropological paradigm broke down, as cracks began to appear in the edifice of racial science and as the humanitarian lobby group became more and more vocal. Though often hesitant and faltering, in the 1930s there was a revival of the Enlightenment view that progress in civilisation may be attained by all humanity, regardless of race. While prevailing opinion may have shifted over the preceding one hundred and fifty years, the terms of the debate had remained constant: either the Aborigines were incapable of progress in civilisation, and were thereby doomed to extinction; or they could be civilised and thus survive.²⁴ When Cooper, Ferguson and Patten entered the political arena, the parameters of debate over the future of the Aborigines were firmly set. They made no attempt to venture outside those parameters, but within them they pushed the line of Aboriginal progressiveness harder and further than any of the white humanitarian lobby were prepared to do. It is perhaps ironic that at the Sesquicentennial celebrations, Aborigines felt the need to assert a vision of universal human rights and capacities which was remarkably similar to that which had been articulated one hundred and fifty years before.

With their adherence to Enlightenment notions of universal human rights, the Aboriginal activists' expressed desire for incorporation into white society could be interpreted as an instance of the hegemonic force of the Western intellectual tradition in the colonial context. Undoubtedly, they were constrained within political, ideological and linguistic limits which were not of their own making; and an analysis from a postcolonial perspective could offer interesting insights into the intellectual colonisation of the indigenes. Yet there are dangers in an overemphasis on hegemony; in particular the danger of

²⁴ The exception to this generalisation was the argument advanced by Wood Jones, J.B. Cleland and others, that Aboriginal survival could be ensured only by their total segregation from other races. However, segregationist arguments were framed in terms of the old doomed race idea, merely adding an extra saving clause.

allowing too little space for agency, so that the Aboriginal activists would appear as mere dupes of a dominant ideology, rather than as political actors who made conscious and deliberate choices from the range of options which in the 1930s had some currency.²⁵ However constraining the Western intellectual tradition may have been, the Aboriginal activists showed themselves perfectly capable of fashioning certain of its elements anew, into arguments which challenged dominant white perceptions of a race locked forever in the Stone Age and thereby undeserving of the rights of the citizen. In the 1930s, after 150 years of Aboriginal exclusion from white society, an ideology of incorporation was both radical and liberationist.²⁶

There remains the question of the extent to which the arguments of these Aboriginal activists matched their aspirations: Did Cooper, Ferguson and Patten actually believe what they wrote, or was it mere political rhetoric, designed to convince white politicians and bureaucrats, but overlaying some deeper and unstated agenda? Ultimately, the question is unanswerable. As historians, we cannot peer inside people's heads; we have only textual fragments upon which to base our explications or analyses of the past. Yet although we cannot know with any certainty what people actually thought in the past, degrees of plausibility or implausibility may be awarded to the various possible options. In the case of the Aboriginal activists of the 1930s, the consistency of their arguments points to the likelihood that the gap between argumentation and aspiration was not particularly wide. If their arguments were merely tactical devices, concealing some deeper hidden purpose, then they were political tacticians of extraordinary dexterity. Their

²⁵ Use of the concept of hegemony does not, of course, necessarily deny a place for human agency. Nonetheless, I consider that the argumentative strategies employed by the Aboriginal activists of the 1930s may most appropriately be interpreted as intelligent and perceptive refutations of what they perceived to be the sources of their oppression, rather than as merely the delusions of the intellectually colonised.

²⁶ The point here is simply that ideologies of liberation, like regimes of oppression (or hegemony), are contingent upon historical circumstance. There are no eternal doctrines of liberation, merely argumentative strategies which have force at particular times, in particular circumstances.

rhetoric, if not exactly seamless, was so carefully tailored as to allow no glimpse of any concealed purpose. Moreover, there was a remarkable consistency between the argumentative strategies employed in their letters to politicians and bureaucrats and those employed in the *Abo Call*, a newspaper edited by an Aborigine, John Patten, for an Aboriginal readership. If there was a duplicity in Patten's political rhetoric in his correspondence with officials, then the replication of this same rhetoric in his communications with an Aboriginal audience gives a somewhat disconcerting meaning to his actions. These features suggest a reasonably close fit between the arguments and the objectives of the Aboriginal activists of the 1930s. Of course, like all political actors they did employ rhetorical strategies; but there is nothing to indicate any fundamental mis-match between their rhetoric and their aspirations.

In constructing their political agenda, Cooper, Patten and Ferguson took on board the Western idea of progress; they jettisoned the notion of fundamental racial differences. And if one element can be singled out as being of primary significance in fostering a negative interpretation of Aboriginal abilities, it is the concept of race. Advocating the progressive capacities of the Aborigines, the activists of the 1930s vehemently refuted any notion of innate racial handicaps. At the Aborigines Conference for the Day of Mourning Patten explained that:

White men pretend that the Australian Aboriginal is a low type who cannot be bettered. Our reply to that is, 'Give us the chance!' We do not wish to be left behind in Australia's march to progress.... [Aboriginal inequality] is not a matter of race, it is a matter of education and opportunity.²⁷

Acknowledging that they had only recently emerged from a primitive state, Patten insisted that this in no way meant that the Aboriginal people were inherently primitive; he declared:

We are NOT an inferior race, we have merely been refused the chance of education that whites receive. 'The Abo Call' will show that we do not want to go back to the Stone Age.²⁸

²⁷ *Abo Call*, no.1, April 1938, p.2.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.1; upper case in the original.

This theme was reiterated in subsequent issues of the newspaper, although perhaps the most provocative attack on racial attitudes was made in *Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights!*, where Patten and Ferguson proclaimed:

We ask you to be proud of the Australian Aborigines, and not to be misled any longer by the superstition that we are a naturally backward and low race. This is a scientific lie, which has helped to push our people down and down into the mire.

At worst, we are no more dirty, lazy, stupid, criminal, or immoral than yourselves. Also, your slanders against our race are a moral lie, told to throw all the blame for our troubles on to us. You, who originally conquered us by guns against our spears, now rely on superiority of numbers to support your false claims of moral and intellectual superiority.²⁹

However, Patten and Ferguson's diatribe against the "scientific lie" did not amount to a blanket condemnation of racial science. They were quite prepared to use scientifically based racial ideas when it suited their purposes.

Immediately before the passage quoted above, they stated:

Professor Archie Watson, of Adelaide University, has explained to you that Aborigines can be absorbed into the white race within three generations, without any fear of a 'throw-back'. This proves that the Australian Aboriginal is somewhat similar in blood to yourselves, as regards inter-marriage and inter-breeding. We ask you to study this question and to change your whole attitude towards us, to a more enlightened one.³⁰

Scientific racial ideas could be utilised when they emphasised similarities, rather than differences, between black and white Australians, for the Aboriginal leaders endeavoured to assert similarity as grounds for equality.³¹

²⁹ Patten and Ferguson, *Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights!*, p.11.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Horner and Langton, in "Day of Mourning", p.34, entirely missed the point in claiming that this passage was "an argument which no self-respecting Aborigine would countenance" and must have been included because it appealed to the publisher P.R. Stephenson's "opposition to racial miscegenation". If Stephenson was opposed to miscegenation, why would he encourage the insertion of a remark which legitimised miscegenation? And since Patten and Ferguson did publish this statement under their own names, does this mean that they were not "self-respecting Aborigines"? It may be that the statement was mere political rhetoric, designed to appeal to prevailing white assumptions. Yet it is taking unwarranted license to attribute statements from the past, which are at odds with present-day Aboriginal political rhetoric, to textual interference by whites. In making their allegation, Horner and Langton appear to have lost sight of the fact that the political preoccupations of the 1930s were not those of the 1980s.

This one favourable reference to Professor Watson aside, the leadership of the Progressive Association showed scant respect for the science of anthropology. "We do not wish to be 'studied' as scientific or anthropological curiosities", they declared; "we do not ask you to study us as scientific freaks".³² Distrust of anthropologists seems to have derived largely from the perception that they were the major purveyors of the doctrine that Aborigines were inherently inferior and incapable of civilisation.³³ It may also have stemmed from the dehumanising tendency of science, to depict people as mere objects. Patten wrote sardonically of his visit to Burnt Bridge, near Kempsey:

Sydney University anthropologists have been busy here, much to the amusement of our people, who are not in a tribal state, and live in the Tin Hut Age, not the Stone Age.³⁴

In 1939 William Cooper advised the Minister for the Interior that:

Scientists, anthropologists, and other distinguished gentlemen have ... failed to bring relief, and we don't like being kept merely as material for scientific investigation, research, etc. etc. That is all valueless so far as the blackfellows' present needs and comforts are concerned. Sending anthropologists into isolated parts of the continent amongst wild people with the object of doing blacks good may have its scientific value, but after all, there are very few scientists in our midst to appreciate the scientists' point of view, whereas from our point of view it is a failure. It does not help the black fellow one little bit.³⁵

Cooper conceded that anthropologists may have been well-meaning; but they were misguided, for they focussed not on the progressive Aborigines of the present but on the primitives of the past. He was, however, prepared to advocate the appointment of T.G.H. Strehlow, to head the Native Affairs Branch of the Department of the Interior, as he was confident that Strehlow's

³² Patten and Ferguson, *Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights!*, pp.1, 9.

³³ It is difficult to discern whether Ferguson, Patten and Cooper were aware of the attacks which were being mounted on the construct of race from within the scientific community in the 1930s, particularly in Britain and the United States. They may also have been unaware of the misgivings which were being expressed by Elkin and other Sydney University anthropologists on the significance of racial attributes.

³⁴ *Abo Call*, no.4, July 1938, p.2.

³⁵ Cooper to Min. Int., 21.1.1939, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

"singular knowledge of and love for aborigines will be able to be used to their advantage".³⁶

Cooper had no sympathy for the anthropological ideal of preserving pristine primitives on closed reserves. "We don't want to be zoological specimens in Arnhem Land", he declared.³⁷ Referring to the term "segregation", he claimed that Aborigines "don't like this word, and while we know that reservations are essential as a medium in uplift, they must be only a bridge to Uplift".³⁸ Condemning the idea of absolute segregation on both moral and practical grounds, he contended that:

The whole of the argument at the moment revolves round the primitive man, as though he were the only one left worth saving and the ideal is the saving of this man, in his present state, as a zoological exhibit for succeeding generations.

We are not flattered by the impractical proposals which, so far, hold the attention. There are certainly primitive people, living the life of their fathers, but I venture to doubt if one of these is ignorant of the white man and his wonderful new world. These will not be kept in their present conditions short of compulsion so complete as to be impracticable, without an enormous policing force. Whether the white man likes it or not, every native is headed toward the culture of the white man.³⁹

What was required was not a scheme for the "compulsory retardation" of the Aborigines, but "an official policy of uplift"; only by that means was it possible to "stop the rot and save the race".⁴⁰

While the leadership of both the Progressive Association and the Aborigines' League shared a distrust of anthropologists, they held widely divergent views of those white persons who commonly acted as the harbingers of civilisation in frontier areas - the missionaries. Patten lumped missionaries together with anthropologists and government officials, as agents for the

³⁶ Cooper to PM, 20.2.1939, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3. See also Cooper to PM, 4.2.1939, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/408.

³⁷ Cooper to Min. Int., 26.7.1938, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

³⁸ Cooper to Min. Int., 21.1.1939, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

"persecution" and "extermination" of the Aborigines.⁴¹ In the first issue of *Abo Call* he declared:

This paper has nothing to do with missionaries, or anthropologists, or with anybody who looks down on Aborigines as an 'inferior' race.⁴²

William Cooper, on the other hand, nominated missionaries as "our best friends", although he acknowledged that "regrettable episodes have occurred on some missions at various times".⁴³ He advised the Minister for the Interior that Aborigines "have never had anything worthwhile from the administration as such but owe everything of value to the missions".⁴⁴ In 1939, after Patten had branded the missionaries "our greatest enemies", Cooper wrote to Jack McEwen, Minister for the Interior, to dissociate both himself and the League from Patten's statement. The missions, Cooper reiterated, "have been and are our best friends", for it was they who brought the light of civilisation and the Christian faith to his primitive compatriots.⁴⁵ The more negative view of Patten and his group seems to have derived not so much from opposition to Christian efforts to civilise as from resentment of missionary attitudes of patronising superiority.⁴⁶

Like his New South Wales counterparts, Cooper argued against the prevalent assumption of an inherent Aboriginal incapacity for advancement. He contended that:

The question of the uplift of the whole aboriginal population to full European culture depends on the capabilities of the race to assimilate that culture. We claim that it has been fully demonstrated that aboriginals of both full blood and mixed blood can do anything a white man is able to do.⁴⁷

⁴¹ *Abo Call*, no.3, June 1938, p.1; no.4, July 1938, p.1; no.6, September 1938, p.1.

⁴² *Abo Call*, no.1, April 1938, p.1.

⁴³ Cooper to Kitson, Chief Secretary, Perth, 30.12.1938, Aboriginal Planning Authority (W.A.), 75/1936; cited in Markus, *Blood from a Stone*, p.95.

⁴⁴ Cooper to Min. Int., 21.1.1939, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁴⁵ Cooper to Min. Int., 3.1.1939, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁴⁶ Concerning their divergent views of missionaries, it is worth noting that the League had strong connections with Christian humanitarian groups, while the Association had links to both labour and right-wing nationalist organisations.

⁴⁷ Cooper to Min. Int., 31.10.1936, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

However, instead of confronting head-on the "scientific lie" of race, in the manner of Patten and Ferguson, Cooper's arguments were more subtle. In numerous letters to various government ministers he persistently pointed out the absurdities which stemmed from the legislative enshrinement of the concept of race. Aboriginal lack of entitlement to social security benefits such as Invalid and Old-age Pensions and the Maternity Allowance, and their ineligibility to vote in many states, were long-standing sources of complaint. Both the Invalid and Old-age Pensions Act and the Maternity Allowance Act specifically disqualified "aboriginal natives of Australia" from receiving the benefits. Following the advice of the Commonwealth law authorities, it had been decided that the term "aboriginal natives" referred to those persons in whom "aboriginal blood" preponderated. Thus those persons who were of more than fifty per cent Aboriginal descent did not qualify, while those who were of fifty per cent or less Aboriginal descent were eligible for the benefits.⁴⁸

Qualification for the franchise was more complex, as it was entangled in both state and Commonwealth electoral laws. Persons of half or less Aboriginal descent were entitled to Commonwealth enrolment and to vote in Commonwealth elections. The same group was entitled to vote in the State elections of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania; on a restricted basis in Queensland; and not at all in Western Australia. Persons of more than fifty per cent Aboriginal descent were not entitled to vote in Commonwealth elections, nor in the State elections of Queensland and Western Australia. Full-bloods and others in whom the "aboriginal blood" preponderated were, however, entitled to vote in the state elections of New

⁴⁸ Commissioner of Pensions to Sec., PM Dept, 22.12.1936, AA, CRS A461, N382/1/1. Further official discussion of Aboriginal eligibility and ineligibility for the pension, on the basis of percentage of blood, may be found in AA, CRS A571, 38/883 and AA, CRS A571, 13/9458. An additional qualification on entitlement was that those persons of any degree of Aboriginal descent, who lived on Aboriginal reserves, were deemed to be receiving benefits from the State Aborigines' Boards, and thus were ineligible for Commonwealth benefits.

South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania.⁴⁹ Thus in the League's home state of Victoria, a person in whom "aboriginal blood" predominated was entitled to vote in the state, but not in the Commonwealth elections.⁵⁰

In Cooper's view, it was absurd to determine a person's fitness to exercise the franchise or to receive a social security payment on the basis of percentage of blood. "Let the determination be, not color, but capacity", he declared.⁵¹ He went on to point out that there were "octaroons [sic] and quadroons unable to exercise the privileges of civilisation but there are full bloods who are fully able".⁵² He took up the cases of individuals, including Miss Ada Austin, "a charming, cultured, civilised aboriginal woman of Victoria", who was refused a pension on the grounds of her racial origins. This, Cooper contended, could not be "reconciled with British Justice".⁵³ The injustice, he thought, was all the greater for the fact that "Chinese, Japanese or Afghans can get the pension".⁵⁴ Another case involved Mr. Fred Stewart, a resident of Cumeroogunga in Victoria, who by virtue of being classified a full-blood Aborigine was not entitled to the Commonwealth franchise. Mr. Stewart, Cooper pointed out:

⁴⁹ The situation described was that in the late 1930s. It has been taken from the discussions on Aboriginal eligibility for the franchise in: AA, CRS A1, 34/4190; AA, CRS A431, 50/597; AA, CRS A432, 29/220; AA, CRS A432, 29/4352, file no.4.

⁵⁰ Sec., PM Dept, to Cooper, 8.8.1938, AA, CRS A431, 49/1591. This situation would appear to have been at odds with Section 41 of the Constitution which enfranchised, for Commonwealth purposes, any "person who has or acquires a right to vote" at the state level. However, Section 41 was interpreted very narrowly; the Commonwealth Chief Electoral Officer, V.F. Turner, explained in 1941: "Regarding this provision, the Administration, guided by the advice of the Law Authorities, has acted always on the assumption that a right under section 41 of the Constitution must have been acquired prior to the passing of the Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902 and that consequently only those aborigines who secured State enrolment prior to that date and who have retained that right are entitled to Commonwealth enrolment and to vote at Commonwealth elections in pursuance of the said section." Chief Electoral Officer to A.P. Elkin, 18.3.1941, AA, CRS A431, 50/597.

⁵¹ Cooper to Min. Int., 17.12.1938, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Cooper to PM, 3.12.1939, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3; Cooper to PM, 8.9.1939, AA, CRS A461, N382/1/1.

⁵⁴ Cooper to PM, 8.9.1939, AA, CRS A461, N382/1/1.

is better educated than most of the half-castes and is a good type whose only fault is that he has not an admixture of white blood, a detriment only in White eyes. By reason of his education and capacity he acted as clerk on the station when he was young. This coupled with the fact of other full bloods, whom we could name but whom you also know of, surely brings to notice the unreasonableness of the discrimination against full bloods.⁵⁵

By rejecting distinctions on the basis of descent, Cooper effectively rendered redundant the categories of full-blood, half-caste and so forth.⁵⁶ However, he continued to employ the terms; for polemical purposes he had no choice.

In 1936 Cooper proclaimed: "This league stands for the aboriginal race, full blood and coloured and definitely believes that the full blood is capable of advance to full culture as possessed by the white".⁵⁷ Therefore, he continued, any rights granted to Aborigines under Commonwealth legislation should be "made to include, additional to half castes and quadroons, 'approved full blooded aboriginals'".⁵⁸ Later in the same year he complained that "it seems to be current opinion that half-castes have special rights as against the full blood and there is official discrimination against which we are ever in protest".⁵⁹ Attacking more directly the division of Aborigines into distinct categories on the basis of percentage of blood, he wrote:

We want the right to full education, academic, cultural and industrial and to be able to take our place beside the white race in full equality and responsibility. We ask the right to be fully British. In claiming this we protest with all our might against the discrimination between the full blood and the half caste. All are aboriginals and prefer to be so. Even near whites are more disposed to lean to the aboriginal side of their ancestry than the white.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Cooper to PM, 10.9.1938, AA, CRS A431, 49/1591.

⁵⁶ See for example Agenda of proposals, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3. The Progressive Association also rejected any distinction on the basis of descent, although it was neither as explicit nor as consistent as the League on this point. Potential members of the Association were advised: "When applying for membership, please state whether you are full-blood, half-caste, quarter-caste, etc." *Abo Call*, no.2, May 1938, p.1. See also the article "Half-castes: by one of them" in the same issue, p.4.

⁵⁷ Cooper to Min. Int., 23.3.1936, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* The specific legal concession discussed in this letter was a proposed partial lifting of the prohibition on Aborigines consuming alcohol in the Northern Territory.

⁵⁹ Cooper to Min. Int., 31.10.1936, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁶⁰ Cooper to Min. Int., 16.6.1937, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

Cooper requested the Minister for the Interior to "please forget the white man's discrimination between the half caste and the full blood. Except where the notion is put into the head of the half caste no one thinks of the white strain at all".⁶¹ "What we ask", he pleaded, "is that fullbloods and near blacks be accorded the same opportunity to rise as half castes and near whites".⁶²

In 1938 Cooper advised the Minister for the Interior that the "discrimination between those of more than half aboriginal blood from [sic] those of half white or whiter color [sic]" had been the League's "chief bone of contention over the years".⁶³ He added that the Minister should not "suppose that we feel any different toward any member of our race who is full blood as against one with some white blood".⁶⁴ Apparently aware that the terminology itself reinforced the notions that Cooper was attempting to refute, he endeavoured to give the word 'half-caste' a socio-cultural, rather than a purely biological, meaning. In a long document dated January 1939 he divided the Aboriginal people into three groups: "primitives", "detribalised" and "half-castes". With more earnestness than lucidity, he went on to explain that:

It must not be thought that these divisions are arbitrary in the sense that no half castes are to be found in the two first classes [primitives and detribalised]. There are in both, and there are full bloods in the Half-caste class, with people of every shade from dark to white.⁶⁵

If the manner of expression was less than clear, the sentiments are nonetheless apparent: any meaningful division of the Aboriginal people must be on cultural, not on biological, grounds. Reasserting the notion of a universal human nature, Cooper maintained that a "plan of uplift" must recognise "the full humanity of the native", regardless of percentages of blood.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Cooper to Min. Int., 25.6.1937, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁶² Cooper to Min. Int., 17.12.1938, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Cooper to Min. Int., 21.1.1939, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

Cooper was very careful to explain that he was not advocating an immediate and universal grant of the franchise, social security benefits and other privileges of citizenship; rather, "full citizenship rights [should] be accorded to those of full aboriginal or mixed blood who may be qualified to exercise them".⁶⁷ What irked him was the fact that entitlement was on the basis of race, not of culture. Not only was this unjust, but it was also "offensive and hurtful to coloured people" for whites to award rights on the basis of how much white blood a person possessed.⁶⁸ Of course, Cooper envisaged only temporary restrictions on Aboriginal entitlement to social security and other benefits. The primitive and the detribalised Aborigines should be gradually uplifted into civilisation, "until there are no people of aboriginal blood who are not qualified by culture and education for full citizenship".⁶⁹

To ensure that all would eventually qualify for citizenship, the League devised a comprehensive program for the advancement of Aborigines at the national level. Its proposals for the consideration of the 1937 Conference of Aboriginal Authorities included:

That the aboriginal population shall be grouped into classes determined by the stage of their progress and that the policy of the Administration shall be the progressive elevation from one class to an higher one till the whole race is fully civilised and cultured. These groups shall be:-

- (a) Myall Aborigines.
- (b) Partly civilised and detribalised aboriginals.
- (c) Civilised aboriginals.⁷⁰

In the League's Constitution, the three categories were designated slightly differently as "Primitive aborigines", "Semi-Civilised and De-tribalised Natives" and "Civilised Natives".⁷¹ The first of these groups was to receive, among other things, "Progressive civilisation of the young people by the medium of

⁶⁷ Cooper to Min. Int., 9.5.1936, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁶⁸ Cooper to Min.Int., 17.12.1938, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁶⁹ Cooper to PM, 8.9.1939, AA, CRS A461, N382/1/1.

⁷⁰ Agenda of proposals, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3.

⁷¹ Cooper to Min. Int., 22.2.1936, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

education, including Industrial Training".⁷² For the semi-civilised, the educational standard was specified more clearly; they should be "encouraged to qualify up to the standard of White education. Education to include technical training".⁷³ In a long tradition, going back at least to Governor Macquarie's Native Institution of 1814, educational and vocational training was to be the primary agency of civilisation.

Cooper's attitudes toward the primitive Aboriginal culture were sometimes ambivalent. In countering the allegation that on Bathurst and Melville Islands the "aboriginal men have been only too willing to assist in making their lubras available" to Japanese pearlers, Cooper wrote:

Actually the culture of our primitive brothers is not so callous or crude. In its purity it may not be very desirable but in its corrupted state (not corrupted by us) it is something we civilised folk have grown out of and which we wish to see our brothers abandon.⁷⁴

The assessment was quite conventional: the corrupted primitive was worse, but even the uncorrupted was not very desirable. On another occasion Cooper depicted the pristine Australians as noble savages:

In our primitive state we Aborigines were gentlemen. Many of our present vices and defects have been imported. In our primitive state blacks were never known to take their own lives. No full blooded aboriginal ever went insane. We never had any sexual perverts in our midst, and we can proudly say that our moral standard was second to none and can take pride of place with the white people of our day.⁷⁵

It seems that Cooper may have gradually come to acquire a more positive view of the traditional culture. Yet if he imbued the Aboriginal past with primitive virtues, he argued strongly that the task of the present was to "help the natives into full British Culture".⁷⁶

Cooper maintained that civilised Aborigines had an important role to play in the uplifting of their "backward brothers". He suggested that "the

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Cooper to Sec., PM Dept, 10.1.1937, AA, CRS A659, 39/1/7917.

⁷⁵ Cooper to Min. Int., 21.1.1939, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁷⁶ Cooper to PM, 19.4.1939, AA, CRS A431, 49/1591.

proper method of dealing with the primitive people would be to send educated and cultured aborigines to their own uncivilised people".⁷⁷ The Progressive Association advocated a similar policy:

- ... In regard to uncivilised and semi-civilised Aborigines, we suggest that patrol officers, nurses, and teachers, both men and women, of *Aboriginal blood*, should be specially trained by the Commonwealth Government as Aboriginal officers, to bring the wild people into contact with civilisation.⁷⁸

Patten acknowledged that "as regards the primitive people who are still uncivilised ... there must be some stepping stone from the jungle".⁷⁹ However, the proposals of the Progressive Association for the uplift of primitive Aborigines remained rather vague, for its focus was on improving conditions in New South Wales, where virtually all Aborigines could be regarded as civilised. In contrast, the Aborigines' League maintained a stronger perspective on the national level, with less of a focus on exclusively Victorian affairs. The difference in emphasis was exemplified at the Aborigines Conference for the Sesquicentennial Day of Mourning. After Patten and Ferguson had spoken, largely in condemnation of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board and the dreadful conditions in the state, Doug Nicholls, a member of the Aborigines' League, declared:

Do not let us forget, also, those of our people who are still in a primitive state. It is for them that we should try to do something. We should all work in cooperation for the progress of Aborigines throughout the Commonwealth.⁸⁰

While the leaders of the Progressive Association were less concerned with the process by which the primitives could become civilised, they insisted that it was their own status as civilised people that entitled them to the rights of citizenship. At the Aborigines Conference in 1938 Ferguson proclaimed that:

Full citizen rights means the equality of our people with the white man. I think every one here has been in contact with civilisation since

⁷⁷ Cooper to Min. Int., 21.1.1939, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁷⁸ *Abo Call*, no.1, April 1938, p.1; italics in the original.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.2.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.2.

birth. You will find very few Aborigines in New South Wales who do not know how to count money and look after themselves.⁸¹

In similar vein, Patten asserted that "Aborigines born and reared in contact with civilisation have no need for 'protection'. We want full education and the benefit of modern ideas".⁸² A Queensland correspondent to the *Abo Call*, Roy Charleville, based his argument for Aboriginal rights on the fact that: "We are not living in our wild state now. There is a big majority has education, and speaks as well as a white man".⁸³

One step toward the attainment of full citizenship which was demanded by the Progressive Association was the abolition of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board, which was regarded as stifling Aboriginal initiative and advancement. However, there was some disagreement within the leadership about the pace of change. Patten believed that the Aborigines of New South Wales should be eased gradually into full participation in the social, economic and political life of the state; he explained:

that in advocating abolition of the Aborigines Protection Board, we understand that there must be some stepping stone. The people can not be thrown out of the reserves and expected to live like white men, when they have not had a white standard of education.... We want a stepping stone to modern civilisation.⁸⁴

Ferguson insisted that such gradualism was unnecessary in New South Wales, telling his followers "not to worry too much about the stepping stone. That will take care of itself if we have full citizen rights".⁸⁵ The disagreement was reported in the first issue of the *Abo Call*. In the second, ironically under the headline "United We Stand", Patten described how "Ferguson attempted to wreck the Easter Sunday Meeting" of the Association, without success.⁸⁶ Patten attempted to salvage even this divisive incident as an illustration of the

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.2.

⁸² *Abo Call*, no.2, May 1938, p.1.

⁸³ "A Letter from Cherbourg", *ibid.*, p.2.

⁸⁴ *Abo Call*, no.1, April 1938, p.2.

⁸⁵ *ibid.* Ferguson was here referring specifically to NSW Aborigines; like his colleagues, he displayed no misgivings about the need of primitive inhabitants of remote parts of the continent for a stepping stone to modern civilisation.

⁸⁶ *Abo Call*, no.2, May 1938, p.1.

similarity between black and white Australians; he reported that the meeting was:

like a white-man's political faction fight in the Australian Labour Party or United Australia Party. It seemed as though the Aborigines are just like white men, when a few 'rebels' start creating a disturbance.⁸⁷

Apart from full citizen rights, there were other demands made by the Progressive Association and the Aborigines' League, but these were either subsidiary or followed from the call for the uplift of all Aborigines to the status of civilisation. Land is an issue which has dominated the Aboriginal political agenda since the 1960s; and the activists of the 1930s also called for the granting of land to Aborigines. But while both the Association and the League pointed out the fact of dispossession,⁸⁸ their claim to land was based not so much on the ancestral rights of indigenous inhabitants as on the need of Aboriginal citizens for economic security. Thus in their Agenda of Proposals submitted for consideration at the 1937 Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, the League included the recommendation that grants of land be made "to permit of the development of full self-reliance" of Aboriginal communities.⁸⁹ The Progressive Association was more specific:

We recommend that a special policy of Land Settlement for Aborigines should be put into operation, whereby Aborigines who desire to settle on the land should be given the same encouragement as that given to Immigrants or Soldier Settlers, with expert tuition in agriculture, and financial assistance to enable such settlers to become ultimately self-supporting.⁹⁰

On a number of other occasions the Association drew a parallel between the envisaged land grants to Aborigines and the Immigration and Soldier Settler

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ See for example Patten and Ferguson, *Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights!*, p.3; Cooper to PM, 31.3.1938, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁸⁹ Agenda of Proposals, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3.

⁹⁰ *Abo Call*, no.1, April 1938, p.1. This recommendation was one of ten, comprising "A Long Range Policy for Aborigines", which was presented by a Deputation of Aborigines to the Prime Minister on 31 January 1938.

Schemes.⁹¹ In line with their adherence to an ideology of progress, it was emphasised that land was to be put to productive agricultural purposes. The arguments for land grants resonated with ideas of agrarian populism, which by the 1930s had enjoyed widespread currency in Australia for nearly one hundred years. Cooper's plea to Paterson, the Minister for the Interior, in June 1937, provides a clear illustration:

We claim that, given a trial, we will prove that we are capable of producing a yeomanry that can open up and develop the outback better than anyone else. We are acclimatised, and as our now primitive people become civilised, they lose the aboriginal culture and outlook taking on the psychology of the white man. The aboriginal is loyal to the Throne and Person of His Majesty. The development of Australia by civilised aborigines is therefore sound in that it provides a bulwark for the defence of your land and ours.⁹²

Cooper claimed that his people had a proven "aptitude for primary industry", so "an aboriginal race, civilised [and] industrialised" could well bear its "share of responsibility" for the development of the nation.⁹³ He went so far as to assert that "the natural tendency of the aboriginal is to lose his native culture and assume the culture of those associated with his uplift".⁹⁴

Another element in the League's platform was the call for Aboriginal representation in the federal parliament. This was perhaps the only demand of the activists of the 1930s which could be construed as a claim for a specific and exclusively Aboriginal right. It was on the issue of parliamentary representation that William Cooper first made his entry into the national political arena in 1934, with a Petition to the King which demanded representation to ensure the survival of the Aboriginal race. Cooper, however, did not insist that the representative had to be a person of Aboriginal descent. The Petition called on the King to:

intervene on our behalf and through the instrument of Your Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia:

⁹¹ See for example *Abo Call*, no.4, July 1938, p.1.

⁹² Cooper to Min. Int., 25.6.1937, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁹³ Cooper to Min. Int., 26.7.1938, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

⁹⁴ Cooper to Min. Int., 30.7.1937, AA, CRS A659, 40/1/858.

To prevent the extinction of the Aboriginal Race and better conditions for all and grant us power to propose a member of parliament in the person of our own Blood, or White man known to have studied our needs and to be in Sympathy with our Race to represent us in the Federal Parliament.⁹⁵

He pointed out that the "Maoris of New Zealand have had parliamentary representation since 1867, therefore, the Parliamentary representation of the Australian aborigine is long overdue".⁹⁶ Reference to the elevated status of the Maori was a persistent theme in the League's propaganda, but this argument was given short shrift by bureaucrats and politicians. J.A. Carrodus, Secretary to the Department of the Interior, stated baldly: "What has been achieved for the Maoris in New Zealand cannot be done for the Australian aboriginals. The Maori is a much more highly developed native than the aborigine".⁹⁷ The notion of a racial hierarchy, with Aborigines on the bottom, remained entrenched in the ranks of the bureaucracy.⁹⁸

The other reason given for the impossibility of Aboriginal parliamentary representation was the standard Commonwealth excuse that Aboriginal affairs were a state matter, that the federal government was constitutionally debarred from any action along the lines suggested except in the Northern Territory. When the Petition to the King finally came to be considered by the government in 1937, this was the major line of argument followed.⁹⁹ The Solicitor-General was invited to submit an opinion on the

⁹⁵ Petition of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Australia to His Majesty George V, AA, CRS A431, 49/1591.

⁹⁶ Carrodus, memo, 4.4.1935: Notes of a Deputation representing Aborigines and various associations interested in Aboriginal welfare work, which waited upon the Minister for the Interior at Commonwealth Offices, Melbourne, on Wednesday, 23rd January, 1935, at 2.30 p.m., AA, CRS A1, 35/3951.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ The Minister for the Interior, T. Paterson, demonstrated, perhaps, some sensitivity to Aboriginal feelings in his response to Cooper concerning the 23 January Deputation. In his letter, Paterson followed exactly the points set out by Carrodus in his 4 April memo, except that the statement comparing Aborigines and Maoris, quoted above, was omitted; Min. Int. to Cooper, 29.5.1935, AA, CRS A1, 35/3951.

⁹⁹ Other matters raised, apparently to question the legitimacy of the petition, were the fact that many signatories had affixed only their 'mark' (although it is not clear whether the point at issue was the possible invalidity of a 'mark', as against a proper signature, or the notion that an illiterate person had no entitlement to the right

constitutional question. He concluded that the Commonwealth parliament had sufficient authority:

to provide that aboriginals in the Northern Territory may elect an aboriginal member for that Territory to represent them as such. But these elective powers could only be conferred on the aboriginals living in the territories of the Commonwealth and not in Australia as a whole.¹⁰⁰

It was a foregone conclusion that no such initiative would be undertaken in the Territory, not only because of bureaucratic inertia but also because, as had been stated when the parliamentary representation idea had first been mooted, there was no known Northern Territory Aborigine "who would be competent to take a seat in the Commonwealth Parliament".¹⁰¹

The judgement about the competence of Northern Territory Aborigines to take a seat in Parliament must be understood in the context not only of prevailing white attitudes but also of the League's own views. It was not only the bureaucrats in Canberra who considered the majority of Northern Territory Aborigines to be uncivilised, and therefore unable to exercise the rights and duties of citizenship. The leadership of the Aborigines' League shared that opinion. Of course, the League was not requesting representation for Northern Territory Aborigines, but for all Australians of Aboriginal descent. Nonetheless, the argument stalemated on this point. Constitutionally, the Commonwealth government could not - even in the unlikely event that it wished to - grant representation to any Aborigines except those in the Northern Territory.¹⁰² And the Northern Territory, according to the

demand), and the fact that there was "no indication on the petition as to whether the petitioners are full-blood aboriginals or persons of part aboriginal blood" (although this point was frequently repeated, its relevance was never explained); Sec., Int., to Sec., PM Dept, 30.9.1937, AA, CRS A431, 49/1591.

¹⁰⁰ Solicitor-General to Sec., Int., 14.1.1938, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3.

¹⁰¹ Sec., Int., memo, 4.4.1935, AA, CRS A1, 35/3951. The alternative of "a white person to represent the aboriginals of the Territory" was dismissed on the grounds that it was "not seen that any advantage would accrue from the adoption of such a course." Min. Int. to Cooper, 29.5.1935, AA, CRS A1, 35/3951.

¹⁰² This, of course, could have been altered by referendum; but in none of the correspondence and propaganda of the League and the Association that I have seen was the matter of a referendum raised.

Aboriginal activists' own standards, was the least appropriate part of Australia to be granted such representation.

While the need for Aboriginal parliamentary representation retained a place in Cooper's program throughout his political career, from at least 1937, if not before, it was overshadowed by the grander issues of the uplift of the Aboriginal race and the granting of citizenship rights. In the agenda of proposals submitted by the League, under Cooper's name, for the consideration of the 1937 Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, the matter of parliamentary representation was not raised at all.¹⁰³ There were those in the Aboriginal political movement who opposed the idea of a specifically Aboriginal parliamentary voice. At the Aborigines Conference for the Sesquicentennial Day of Mourning William Ferguson declared:

I say definitely that we do not want an Aboriginal Member of parliament. We want ordinary citizen rights, not any special rights such as that.¹⁰⁴

No doubt, a line of descent may be traced from the Aboriginal activists of the 1930s to those of the 1970s and beyond. But the existence of a line of descent should not obscure the distinctiveness of the political agendas of the two periods. Cooper, Ferguson and Patten grappled with the problems of their own times. More than that, they entered into a debate which was already one hundred and fifty years old: Could the Aborigines become civilised? Did they have a place in a modern, progressive Australia? Since the early part of the nineteenth century the majority of white Australians had answered those questions in the negative. In the inter-war period, white academics and humanitarians were articulating a positive response with increasing frequency, though not without some hesitancy and ambivalence. That the Aboriginal activists should be more positive and less hesitant is scarcely surprising.

¹⁰³ Agenda of Proposals, AA, CRS A461, A300/1, part 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Abo Call*, no.1, April 1938, p.2. According to Markus, Ferguson changed his mind on this matter in 1940; see Markus, "William Cooper", p.48.

Whether Aborigines could become civilised had, according to the leaders of the Aborigines Progressive Association and the Australian Aborigines' League, already been answered: they and their followers were living proof that black Australians could and did lead a civilised lifestyle. There remained the task of elevating into civilisation those who still lived in a primitive manner. As for their place in a modern progressive Australia, it was assumed that there was but one option: as Australian citizens, having equal duties and equal rights with all other citizens. Their entitlement to full citizen rights, they believed, followed inexorably from their status as a civilised people. The Aboriginal political leaders of the 1930s based their demands for human rights not on any concept of Aboriginality, but on an ideal of civilisation.

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