

gone, rotting at anchor, but still afloat and theoretically habitable. Convicts sentenced to be transported would now be kept on them until the government decided where to send them; this would relieve the bursting land prisons. Tactfully, the Hulks Act did not mention the revolt of the American colonists. It made a virtue of necessity by noting that transportation had deprived England of people "whose labour might be useful to the Community." These men would now be set "to Hard Labour . . . cleansing the River Thames." Thus the felons "might be reclaimed."

But the convicts jammed on the hulks were no more reclaimed than the Thames was cleansed. By 1790 their number was rising by about one thousand a year. Not only had the problem of security become acute, but typhus was by then endemic and the prospect of general infection terrified free citizens outside. The authorities would have done almost anything to get rid of the criminals their laws had created. Clearly, transportation must begin again—but to where? They chose the least imaginable spot on earth, which had been visited only once by white men. It was Australia, their new, vast, lonely possession, a useless continent at the rim of the world, whose eastern coast had been mapped by Captain Cook in 1770. From there, the convicts would never return. The names of Newgate and Tyburn, arch-symbols of the vengeance of property, were now joined by a third: Botany Bay.

The Geographical Unconscious

TO GRASP what exile to such a place meant, one must think of the size of the world in the late eighteenth century, so much vaster than it is today.

In the 1780s, most of the world was still unknown to Europeans. The outlines of all the continents but two, Australia and Antarctica, had been traced. In profile, it had today's shape, but immense blanks lay behind the coasts. North America was a populated eastern fringe tacked onto millions of square miles of wilderness. The interiors of South America, Asia and Africa were scarcely explored. No European had ever visited the high Himalaya, the fountains of the Nile or the poles; while the Pacific basin, to all except the most educated Englishmen in 1780, was the least imaginable of all.

The social strata from which the convicts would be drawn knew little about the remoter facts of geography. Perhaps seven Englishmen in ten still lived in the countryside; the urban population of England would not outnumber the rural until 1851. Fixed to the soil and its demands, such people did not travel; their world had a radius of ten miles or so. Because they did not read, news came to them erratically and no English newspaper, in any case, sold more than 7,000 copies.¹

For most people, the Pacific remained as obscure and unimaginable after Captain James Cook's death as it had been before his birth, and as monstrous: an oceanic hell. Nevertheless there was a deposit of rumor and legend about it, a myth that filtered into popular culture. This was the idea of a Southern Continent, set in the antipodes. It was first raised by two late classical geographers, Pomponius Mela and Ptolemy. Symmetry, Pomponius Mela argued in A.D. 50, demanded such a continent. The northern continents must be balanced by an equal land mass below the equator. In this land, *terra australis incognita*, Pomponius placed the source of the Nile. Supported by the prestige of Ptolemy, the father of

Renaissance geography, this Southern Continent survived the flat-earth doctrines of the medieval scholars, and Marco Polo seemed to confirm it. The Venetian wanderer described how, coming home from the kingdom of Cathay, he had sailed south to "Chamba" (modern Vietnam) and thence southwest for 1,200 miles, to a place named Locac.

Locac was the Malay Peninsula, but an ambiguity in the text anchored it somewhere between the East Indies and the South Pole, far below the equator, thus turning it into the Southern Continent. As such, with its name corrupted to Luchach, Locach or Beach, it appeared in the maps of influential sixteenth-century cartographers such as Mercator and Ortelius. Without the colossal mass of Locac, Mercator wondered, what would stop the world toppling from its axis?

By the end of the sixteenth century, Locac was encysted with fable. To some, it was the golden country, filled with every kind of wealth—jewels, sandalwood, spices—and inhabited by angelic beings: an embellishment upon the myth of the Terrestrial Paradise. To others it was the land of deformity. Legends of the freaks and wonders of India had proliferated since Alexander the Great's Indian expedition (327–325 B.C.)—dog-headed men, basilisks, people whose faces grew on their chests or who had a single huge foot which, during siestas, shaded them from the equatorial sun. These creatures infested medieval books and Romanesque tympana; they were invoked in sermons, in glosses on the Bible, in romances and epics, and by Shakespeare.

It made sense, of a kind, to assume that the further south one went, the more grotesque life must become. What demonic freaks, what affronts to normality, might the Southern Continent not produce? And what trials for the mariner? Waterspouts, hurricanes, clouds of darkness at midday, ship-eating whales, islands that swam and had tusks—this imagined country was perhaps infernal, its landscape that of Hell itself. Within its inscrutable otherness, every fantasy could be contained, it was the geographical unconscious. So there was a deep, ironic resonance in the way the British, having brought the Pacific at last into the realm of European consciousness, having explored and mapped it, promptly demonized Australia once more by chaining their criminals on its innocent dry coast. It was to become the continent of sin.

THE MAN WHO named the ocean *el mar Pacifico* and was the first to cross its stupendous expanse was the Portuguese captain Fernão de Magalhães or, as he is known to history, Ferdinand Magellan. During the entire voyage between Portugal and Guam, he glimpsed only two little

uninhabited islands near the strait that now bears his name. "*Que de seu Rey mostrando se agruado / Caminho ha de fazer nunca cuidado,*" wrote Camoëns in his praise: "Feeling affronted by his King, he took a route unimagined by others before."² Having opened the westward way to the Spice Islands with his epic voyage, Magellan was killed at Mactan in the Philippines in 1521.

Spanish explorers who followed him into the Pacific at the end of the sixteenth century were seeking the glory of God and a Southern Continent full of gold. Sailing out of Peru in 1567, blown by the Pacific trades across the low latitudes between 18° S. and the equator, Alvaro de Mendana brought his ships four-fifths of the way across the Pacific to an island group which—after King Solomon's fabled gold mines of Ophir—is still known as the Solomons. Perhaps these were the outer markers of the Southern Continent, perhaps not; half-mad with starvation, thirst and scurvy, Mendana and his conquistadors had to retreat. He tried again twenty-eight years later, in 1595, but the Solomons had vanished and no one would find them again for two centuries. They are at about 160° E. longitude, navigational instruments were so inaccurate that their estimated position varied by a full seventy-five degrees, between longitude 145° E. and 140° W.

Piloted by the young Portuguese Pedro Fernandez de Quiros, Mendana struggled on to the west, finding no continent, only scattered islands. His track lay too far north to encounter Australia. Seven months out of Peru, on the island of Santa Cruz, Mendana died. The great expedition, which was to have claimed *terra australis* in the name of Philip III, dissolved in a nightmare of violence and malaria, but de Quiros brought its demoralized survivors westward to Manila and then returned across the Pacific to Acapulco and safety.

This, one might think, would have put anyone off continent-hunting in the Pacific. It did not stop de Quiros. Somewhere to the west, on the blind blue eyeball of the world's greatest ocean, the Southern Continent must lie, and its discovery would be the climax both of Spanish imperialism and of the Church Militant's mission on earth. From Acapulco, de Quiros struggled back to Spain and thence to Rome, bombarding the Pope with letters about *terra australis* and its millions of innocent heathen souls, ripe for salvation. It took him two years to raise the money for three ships and three hundred men from Philip III. In December 1605, de Quiros sailed to find the continent.

He took a new track, further south than either Magellan or Mendana, well below the Tropic of Capricorn. He ran through the Tuamotu Archipelago, passed north of Samoa and, after five months at sea, saw land to the south and southeast—high mountains, their peaks veiled in clouds, retreating to the horizon. On May 3, 1606, de Quiros's fleet anchored in

a bay. They had reached the New Hebrides group at 167° E., 15° S. De Quiros decided without any further evidence that this must be the south-land and, fast succumbing to religious mania, named it *Australia del Espiritu Santo*,² created an order of nobility, distributed taffeta crosses for almost every man-jack on his fleet to wear, christened the stream that ran into the bay the Jordan, and announced in a prophetic ecstasy that the New Jerusalem would be built there among the coral reefs— which, in his feverishly optimistic mind, were already turning into quarries of porphyry and agate.

All this was an illusion, but de Quiros, convinced of its truth, sailed back to Mexico while Luis Vaez de Torres, the captain of his second ship, pressed on across the Pacific to Manila, passing just north of Australia between Cape York Peninsula and New Guinea through the strait that now bears his name. But he hugged the New Guinea coast and did not see the continent.

After eight years' struggle to raise another fleet, de Quiros died in 1614, his quest unfulfilled. There is some intriguing evidence, in the form of the so-called Dieppe Maps copied by spies from secret Portuguese charts and presented to the future Henri II in 1536 (one of which shows a Southern Continent strikingly similar in eastern profile to Australia's), that the northeast and east coasts of Australia had been found and charted before 1550 by a Portuguese fleet sailing south from the Spice Islands. If this voyage was made, it would have been illicit. Under the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), Portugal and Spain had agreed to divide the Earth along the great diameter of 51° W. and 129° E. longitude. Thus, everything east of 129° W., which passes through Australia, became part of the Spanish imperium—including the east coast of Australia. Portugal had no rights of exploration there and could well have chosen to keep the results of such a voyage secret. However, the originals of the Dieppe Maps, along with any logs and documents that may have amplified them, were destroyed in the Lisbon earthquake in 1755. The only other relics of European contact with Australia before 1600 are two Portuguese brass cannon, datable around 1475–1525, found at Broome Bay in northwest Australia—evidence of another voyage, but this time on Portugal's side of the Tordesillas line.³

There had been Asian landings in the sixteenth century, but none resulted in colonization. They were made by Makassan traders from the island of Celebes, who ran down the northern monsoons in their slat-sailed praus to what is now Arnhem Land, on the north coast of the continent.⁴ The goal of their 1,200-mile voyages was a sea slug, the tre-

² "Australia" was a reference to his King's Hapsburg blood ("Austria") and a pun on *tierra austral*, "the south land."

pang or *bêche-de-mer*. These creatures, which looked like withered peonies when smoked and dried, were Indonesia's largest export to the Chinese, who esteemed them as an aphrodisiac. Thus, until the nineteenth century, Australia's sole contribution to the outside world was millions of sea slugs.

In 1605 the Dutch East India Company in Bantam sent a pinnace, the *Duyfken*, under Captain Willem Jansz, to see if New Guinea had gold and spices. The little boat entered the Torres Strait, turned south after coasting New Guinea for more than two hundred miles and found a cape that its skipper named Keerweer ("turn back"). The place was wilderness, and "wild, black, cruel savages" killed some of the crew. Jansz had found a northern promontory of Australia.

In 1616 another tessera was added to the edge of the puzzle by Dirck Hartog, an Amsterdam captain who reached the west Australian coast in his ship *Eendracht* and nailed up an engraved pewter dish as proof of his visit. In 1618 another vessel on the outward voyage to Java, the *Zeeuwulf*, glimpsed more coast to the north.

The next year, Frederick de Houtman, an outward-bound captain who steered further south from the Cape of Good Hope than most, landed on the west coast of Australia south of modern Perth. In time, more Dutch mariners offered their fragments of information: Jan Carstens in 1623, and Francis Pelsart in 1629. Clearly, the southland seemed to be worth exploring, with the expectation that it held more than sand, reefs and choleric savages. To that end, Anthony van Diemen, Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company, organized in 1642 a grand expedition that would map "the remaining unknown part of the terrestrial globe." Abel Tasman, its commander, was to sail from Batavia to Mauritius, drop south to latitude 54° S. and then sail east until he found the South-land.

He missed it completely. Tasman's two vessels, the *Heemskerck* and the *Zeehaen*, sailed right past Australia without once glimpsing its mainland; his course had been too far south. The only part of the country he touched was an island in the southwest which he guessed was mainland and named for his patron: Van Diemen's Land. Two centuries later, when that name had become so tarnished with stories of criminality and cruelty that respectable settlers would no longer endure it, the island was renamed Tasmania after its discoverer.

It looked poor and wild. No natives showed themselves, although notched trees and traces of cooking-fires were seen. There was little to remark. Tasman sailed east across what is now the Tasman Sea and discovered the west coast of New Zealand. Sailing on into the Pacific he discovered Tonga and Fiji as well, before returning to Batavia in June 1643. The voyage, as far as van Diemen and his merchant colleagues

were concerned, was a fiasco. Tasman had found no people to trade with, no commodities to exploit. So they ordered Tasman out on a second voyage, to see if the north coast of Australia held anything worthwhile. Tasman sailed in 1644, but the only people he found on that coast were black, "naked beach-riding wretches, destitute even of rice . . . miserably poor, and in many places of a very bad disposition." There would be no trade. With this, the Dutch East India Company's interest in Australia languished.

The last seventeenth-century explorer to try the northwest coast of Australia was an English buccaneer, William Dampier, in 1688. He found nothing but the propertyless men of New Holland; his description of them is one of the minor classics of racism:

The inhabitants of this country are the miserablest people in the World. The *Hodmadods* [Hottentots] of *Monomatapa*, though a nasty People, yet for Wealth are Gentlemen to these . . . and setting aside their humane shape, they differ but little from Brutes. They are tall, strait-bodied, and thin, with small long Limbs. They have great Heads, round Foreheads, and great Brows. Their Eye-lids are always half closed, to keep the Flies out of their Eyes . . . therefore they cannot see far . . .

They are long-visaged, and of a very displeasing aspect, having no one graceful feature in their faces.

They have no houses, but lye in the open Air, without any covering, the Earth being their Bed, and the Heaven their Canopy . . . The Earth affords them no food at all. There is neither Herb, Pulse, nor any sort of Grain, for them to eat, that we saw; nor any sort of Bird or Beast that they can catch, having no instruments wherewithal to do so.

I did not perceive that they did worship anything.

Such was the Ignoble Savage, orphan of nature. Dampier's visit to the northwest coast produced no discoveries, but his book was popular in England and its notion of a Southern Continent—still a geographical hypothesis separate from New Holland—struck a responsive chord. The Spaniards and Dutch had failed in the Pacific; the eighteenth century would make it either a French or a British ocean.

So the direction of approach shifted again, and ships once more began probing the Pacific from the east, coming round the Horn or through the Straits of Magellan: Roggeveen in 1721, Byron in 1764, Wallis and Carteret in 1766, Bougainville in 1766 and 1769. They all sailed too far north in the trade winds to find the Australian coast; only Bougainville kept far enough south and would have discovered Queensland had he not been turned back by its coral rampart, the Great Barrier Reef, and gone north like the rest. They were all resolute men, but there were some problems courage alone could not beat. The first of these was scurvy.

This disease, caused by vitamin C deficiency, was the bane of every seaman. The victim weakened, his flesh puffed up and his joints were wracked with gouty pain; his teeth loosened while his gums swelled and turned black, so that he could not eat. Scurvy could kill most of a ship's company on a long voyage. The simple cure for it was fruit (especially lemons or oranges) and green vegetables. Captains did not know this; some had noticed that scurvy victims recovered in port on a green diet, but fruit and vegetables would not keep long at sea. In mid-Pacific, Magellan's crew had to eat a mixture of biscuit crumbs and rat droppings; then they ate the rats; at last they sucked and chewed the ship's leather chafing-gear in their desperate need for animal protein. Scurvy afflicted them so badly that to chew their rations, they had to keep slicing the swollen tissue of their gums away. From de Quiros in the sixteenth century to Bougainville in the eighteenth, none of the Pacific explorers suffered as badly from scurvy as Magellan and his crew.

Scurvy chilled the ambition of every voyage. Because they did not know the causes of the disease, they could not control it. In 1768–71, James Cook first beat scurvy on a long voyage by the regular issue of the proper anti-scorbutics. By then, it was known to be a dietary problem. Dr. James Lind, in 1753, had hit on the right cure: a daily dose of citrus juice. Yet neither Cook (who always worried about the health of his crew) nor the officers of the Admiralty's Victualling Board read Lind's treatise, and instead of citrus juice Cook tried other anti-scorbutics: sauerkraut, malt, and half a ton of "portable soup," made by boiling down meat broth into a gummy cake, the ancestor of the bouillon cube. In combination, these worked. Throughout the three-year voyage of the *Endeavour*, Cook did not lose a man from scurvy—a feat without precedent in the history of seafaring. Malt-juice and pickled cabbage put Europeans in Australia, as microchip circuitry would put Americans on the moon.

The other obstacle to Pacific exploration had been finding the longitude. Exploration means nothing unless you know your daily position, but to do this two coordinates are needed. The first is latitude, the measure of one's distance from the equator. The second is longitude, the distance between a fixed prime meridian (for British navigators, that of Greenwich) and the meridian of one's position. (A meridian is the shortest line drawn from the north to the south pole on the Earth's curved surface.) A ship's latitude was easy to figure and had been since antiquity. But without longitude, one could not determine one's position with any certainty. Mariners had to make do with guesswork, based on the ocean current, the wind and the speed of the ship. Mistakes of more than 2,000 miles were common on the early Pacific voyages, because accumulated longitude error could not be checked. In calculating the longitude of the

Philippines, Magellan's pilot was wrong by some 53 degrees—more than a seventh of the world's circumference.

The more they thought of Empire, the more the British realized the need for a longitude fixing method. As England began to challenge Dutch mercantile supremacy in the Far East, the more urgent this became. In 1714 the British government put up a prize of £20,000, a fortune, for anyone who could come up with a method by which a navigator could fix longitude at sea that would be correct within thirty miles at the end of a six-week open-water voyage.

By Cook's time, there were two systems of finding longitude. Both relied on the fact that as the earth spins, local time alters from place to place—thus, when it is noon in London, it is 7 a.m. in New York. The Earth rotates once a day, and as there are 24 hours in a day and 360 degrees of longitude around the equator, an hour's difference in time represented a shift of 15 degrees in longitude. So if one knew when and at what angle a given astronomical event would be seen at Greenwich, and observed it from, say, a spot in the Pacific at that same angle, the difference in hours multiplied by 15 would yield the longitude in degrees. This constant was the angle between the moon or sun and a fixed star, such as Polaris, and was known as "lunar distance." The English Astronomer Royal, Nevil Maskelyne, was the first man to publish a complete tabulation of future lunar distances in relation to Greenwich Mean Time; this was the famous Nautical Almanac, first issued in 1766. Armed with "Mister Masculine's Tables," along with some basic trigonometry and some well-made instruments, any captain could now find his longitude. That was the first method. The second was to carry Greenwich Mean Time on board ship, compare it with local time and multiply the difference by 15 as before. That was far quicker, but it required a chronometer, a clock more accurate and durable than any other. If it ran fast or slow, every minute it lost or gained would mean an error of longitude of nearly 20 miles on the equator. It had to stand up to salt, corrosion and the ceaseless pounding of a ship at sea. Such a chronometer was finally built in 1764 by the great John Harrison.

For his first Pacific voyage, Cook had no chronometer, preferring to rely on lunar distance calculations. But the *Endeavour* was equipped with other instruments, as measurement rather than discovery was the main purpose of her voyage. Her passengers were to observe from Tahiti the transit of Venus across the Sun's face. The importance of this celestial event was that, if accurately observed and recorded, it could help establish the earth's distance from the sun. The last time that Earth, Venus and the sun had come into line was in 1761; the silhouette of Venus on the solar disk was watched and timed by 120 observers scat-

tered across the world from Russia to South Africa, but even so the readings had been fuzzy and the British wanted to improve them. From Tahiti, on the predicted date of June 3, 1769, the whole transit would be seen in daytime, in clear air.

After Cook completed this task, he could then pursue his explorations. The Admiralty wanted him either to find or to eliminate the Southern Continent. He must do this by dropping south of Tahiti, below the tracks of all previous Pacific navigators, to 40° S. latitude. He must then make a sweep westward, keeping between 35° and 40° S. until he either found the Southern Continent or reached "the Eastern side of the Land discover'd by Tasman and now called New Zealand." One way or the other, a myth that had haunted exploration for centuries would be cleared up.

iii

ON AUGUST 25, 1768, the *Endeavour*—a converted Whitby collier, small and brawny, 106 feet long—set sail from Plymouth. Along with her crew, marines and officers, she had on board a number of civilians. The most important of them, from Greenwich's point of view, was the astronomer Charles Green. The rest made up a private scientific party: a brilliant, mercurial young amateur named Joseph Banks and the servants and specialists he had hired to accompany him. At twenty-five, Banks was well-educated (Eton, Oxford), well-connected, well-off (a rural fortune) and in the proper sense a dilettante: one who took an eclectic, educated pleasure in the world about him. His passion was botany, and his hero (whom he had not met) was the great Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus. On hearing of the expedition to Tahiti, Banks realized that this was his chance. To be the first botanist into the South Seas would make his reputation, for he would have the flora of a new world to himself. "Any blockhead can go to Italy," he is said to have told a friend who wondered when he would take his Grand Tour. "Mine shall be around the world." He would go with Cook. Friends in the Admiralty and the Royal Society arranged it. Banks went on board the *Endeavour* with a retinue consisting of two artists (one of them a young genius of botanical illustration, Sydney Parkinson), several servants, a secretary, two hounds, and another naturalist, the most affable, enthusiastic and learned of travelling companions, a favorite pupil of Linnaeus himself: Dr. Daniel Solander.

The *Endeavour* took almost eight months to reach Tahiti via Rio de Janeiro and Tierra del Fuego, dropping anchor in Matavai Bay in mid-

April 1769. The doings of Cook, Banks and the crew in this barely touched Eden must no more concern us here than the details of Cook's coastal exploration of New Zealand, as the Crown never considered either Tahiti or New Zealand as penal settlements.⁷

The transit of Venus was duly, though imperfectly, observed. Banks's crates and bottles were filling up with specimens, his artists' folios with sketches. Early in August they left Tahiti, taking with them a young Tahitian of exalted birth named Tupaia, whom Banks intended to bring back to London as the ultimate exotic pet, a live Noble Savage. Their search for the Southern Continent now began.

For months, beating west through the toppling green hills of the Pacific, they were misled by what Banks called "Our old enemy Cape fly away"—cloudbanks on the horizon. Then, on the afternoon of October 6, 1769, land lay before them. "All hands seem to agree," wrote Banks, viewing the low solid line to the west, "that this is certainly the continent we are in search of."⁸

It was not, and their track across the southern Pacific had nearly eliminated that continent. They had reached Poverty Bay on the east coast of the north island of New Zealand, and for the next four months Cook sailed the *Endeavour* around the coasts of both the north and the south islands, mapping every reef, cliff and indentation and, with caution, observing the habits of the brave and bellicose Maori. The Tahitians made love, but these men with faces rigidly tattooed like purple finger-dogs, and enemies.⁹

At the end of March 1770 Cook was ready for the homeward voyage. The Southern Continent had proved "imaginary"; however, more than 2,400 miles of New Zealand's coastline were charted. He had fulfilled the Admiralty's brief and could shape his course for England. He could return eastward around the Horn or westward via the Cape of Good Hope. The western route was unlikely to bring forth new discoveries. But March is the end of the Pacific summer and Cook did not want to commit his ship—battered and wormy as she was from two years' voyage—to the eastern route and the winter storms of Cape Horn. Cook had Tasman's charts, and he decided to try another way. Somewhere to the west, there must lie the east coast of New Holland. They would follow Tasman's track, in reverse, from New Zealand to Van Diemen's Land. Then they would find whether Van Diemen's Land was part of New Holland, or a separate island. If it was separate, they would find the coast of New Holland and sail north along it.

On March 31 they left New Zealand. Southerly gales rose and drove the *Endeavour* to latitude 38°, too far north to make Van Diemen's Land.

But on April 19 a new coast announced itself. Flat and sandy, most unlike the magnificent scenery of New Zealand, it lay dry on the gray horizon. Their landfall was at Cape Everard, in Victoria.

They coasted north, finding no harbor. But now and then they saw smoke rising from the scrubby headlands, so they knew that the place must be inhabited. To Banks, the landscape looked poor after Tahiti and New Zealand. "It resembled in my imagination the back of a lean Cow, covered in general with long hair, but nevertheless where her scraggy hip bones have stuck out further than they ought accidental rubbs and knocks have intirely bar'd them of their share of covering."¹⁰ On April 22, they saw some Australians on a beach. They looked black but it was hard to tell their real color. Exactly a week later, the first contact was made. Heading up from the south, Cook saw a wide bay and steered into it, sending the pinnace ahead to make soundings.

They saw bark canoes and in them blacks were fishing. The ship floated past these frail coracles. It was the largest artifact ever seen on the east coast of Australia, an object so huge, complex and unfamiliar as to defy the natives' understanding. The Tahitians had flocked out to meet her in their bird-winged outriggers, and the Maoris had greeted her with *hakas* and showers of stones; but the Australians took no notice. They displayed neither fear nor interest and went on fishing.

Only when they anchored and Cook, Banks, Solander and Tupaia—who, all hoped, might act as interpreter—approached the south shore of the bay in a longboat did the natives react. The sight of men in a small boat was comprehensible to them, it meant invasion. Most of the Aborigines fled into the trees, but two naked warriors stood their ground, brandished their spears and shouted in a quick, guttural tongue, not a syllable of it familiar to Tupaia. Cook and Banks pitched some trading-truck ashore—nails and beads, the visiting cards of the South Pacific. The blacks moved to attack, and Cook fired a musket-shot between them. One warrior ran back and grabbed a bundle of spears, while the other began shying rocks at the boat. Cook fired again, wounding one of them with small-shot, but still the man did not retreat; he merely picked up a bark shield.

It was time to land. A young midshipman named Isaac Smith was in the bow. Years later, after many promotions, Admiral Smith—the cousin of Cook's wife—would proudly tell how the greatest navigator in history hesitated before quitting the longboat, touched him on the shoulder and said, "Isaac, you shall land first." The lad sprang into the green, bottle-glass water as it prickled on the floury white sand, and waded ashore. Cook and the others followed, and the seal of distance and space that had protected the east coast of Australia since the Pleistocene epoch was

broken. The colonization of the last continent had begun. The blacks threw their stone-tipped spears.

Cook fired a third shot. With an insolent lack of haste, the tribesmen retreated into the bush. The whites found some bark shelters near the beach from which the adult natives had fled, although in one humpy there were "four or five children with whom we left some strings of beads &c." What kind of people were these, who ran away and left their babies to the mercy of strangers? Nothing could win their confidence. "We could know but very little of their customs," Cook complained on May 6, a week after at anchor, "as we were never able to form any connections with them, they had not so much as touch'd the things we had left in their huts." They seemed to have no curiosity, no sense of material possessions. "All they seem'd to want was for us to be gone." Tupai, in particular, had a low but prophetic opinion of these elusive men and women of Australia. He was heard to remark that "they were *Taata Eno's* that is bad or poor people." The Polynesian phrase *taata ino* denoted the very lowest caste of Tahitians, the *titi*, who were used as human sacrifices.

Cook saw them differently, and in a famous passage in his journal he contradicted Dampier's view of them. "They may appear to some to be the most wretched people upon Earth," he remarked,

but in reality they are far happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary Conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in Tranquillity which is not disturb'd by the Inequality of Condition.¹⁰

These few days of sparse contact on the coast of New South Wales sealed the doom of the Aborigine. There was no chance that the Crown would ever try to plant a penal colony in New Zealand, for the Maori were a subtle, determined and ferocious race. These Australians, however, would give no trouble. They were ill-armed, backward, and timid; most of them ran at the sight of a white face, and they had no goods or property to defend. Besides, there were so few of them. All this the British authorities would presently learn from Joseph Banks, without whose evidence there might have been no convict colony in Australia.

The men of the *Endeavour* gave little thought to any of this as they explored that distant sheltered bay in the Pacific autumn of 1770. Banks and Solander were especially busy. The low, flat shores were full of plants and creatures unknown to European science. The animals were elusive—they found one kangaroo-turd, without seeing the 'roo—but there was

a staggering quantity of "nondescript" (unclassified) plant life. Eventually, the young botanists were to bring back 30,000 specimens from their voyage, representing some 3,000 species of which 1,600 were wholly new to science. The harbor was full of fish, and on its shallow flats immense stingrays, *Dasyatis brevicaudatus*, were caught; Sydney Parkinson, Banks's botanical artist, commented that their guts tasted "not unlike stewed turtle." Cook decided to call the bay Stingray Harbor, but later he changed his mind. The place represented such a triumph for his young companions' science that, thinking of all the accumulated specimens and drawings in the *Endeavour's* stern cabin, he fixed on the name Botany Bay. Its northern and southern heads went on the chart as Cape Banks and Point Solander.

They sailed and kept coasting north. They passed but did not enter a harbor fifteen miles north of Botany Bay, which Cook named Port Jackson, after the Secretary for the Admiralty. Their track up the immense eastern flank of Australia ran through twenty-eight degrees of latitude, more than two thousand miles from Botany Bay to the tip of Cape York. In the labyrinth of the Great Barrier Reef—Cook had unwittingly sailed into it like a fish into the funnel of a trap—the ship struck, a coral fang ripped through her sheathing and broke off, by the merest fluke stopping the hole until the ship could be kedged clear, beached and repaired. This brush with annihilation delayed them seven weeks at Endeavour Bay, giving Banks more time for botanizing. At last the mysterious kangaroo was seen, and two were shot; they tasted like tough venison. A seaman told Banks, to his amusement, about a ghastly monster he had spied, "about as large and much like a one gallon Kegg, as black as the Devil and had 2 horns on its head, it went but slowly but I dar'd not touch it." It was a flying fox. More Aborigines appeared, behaving in the fickle uncertain manner of people startled by an alien intrusion. They seemed as timid as those of Botany Bay. Apparently, the variations of culture and nature were small along this immense coast.

On August 21, 1770, the *Endeavour* rounded Cape York. From there, to the west, stretched a discovered sea crossed by Dutch ships. Cook, Banks, and Solander landed on a nubbin of rock now called Possession Island, hoisted a Union Jack and formally claimed the whole coast south of where they stood—down to 38° S., near their original landfall—as "New South Wales" in the name of George III. They fired three volleys, which were answered from the ship. The salute had to be given with small arms, for all the *Endeavour's* cannon had been trundled overboard to lighten her when she lay holed on the Barrier Reef. In this modest way, by the slap of muskets echoing across a flat warm strait, Australia was added to the British Empire.

iv

AMID THE TUMULT of publicity that greeted the safe return of the ship and her crew to England in July 1771, it was clear that only one place ravished the public imagination: Tahiti, languid isle of the Golden Age, Cythera of the Pacific. New Zealand was next in order of interest, while Australia ran a poor third. Naturally there was professional curiosity among scientists as to the plants and fauna of the new continent. But no kangaroo, even when painted by George Stubbs, could possibly compete with Tahitian princesses as an object of fantasy. There was something, if not exactly dull, at least ungraspable about that flat hot fringe of a blank continent, sown about with deadly reefs. Cultivated opinion on the matter was symbolized in a portrait of Banks done in 1773 by Benjamin West, the rising young prodigy of America paying his homage to the even younger virtuoso of a world still newer, the Pacific. Banks stands wrapped in a fine chief's cloak, pointing out a detail of the weave, around him are trophies of his periphrasis—Tahitian ceremonial gear, a carved paddle, a Maori *mere* (jade war-club). But the only thing that might stand for New South Wales, and rather ambiguously at that, is an open folio with Parkinson's drawing of a lily. The disappointing truth about Australia was that once the legend of the Southern Continent had been disproved and the facts about New Holland were known, there was not much reason to go there.

In 1772 Cook boarded the *Resolution* and began his second voyage, that epic navigation of the Antarctic Ocean which took him further south than any human had ever been—to 71° S.—and which destroyed the last vestiges of that legend. There was no habitable latitude where such a continent could be, and "the greatest part of this Southern Continent (supposing there is one) must lay within the Polar Circle where the sea is so pestered with ice, that the land is thereby inaccessible." Cook's intuition of Antarctica was correct.

Thus eighteen years passed before another ship called at Botany Bay, and for the first eight of those years the subject of Australia, as far as George III's government was concerned, was forgotten. It was revived after 1783, when Pitt the Younger became prime minister. The idea that Australia might carry a British penal colony was raised by the revolt of the American colonies, and by a crisis in England's hulks and jails. However, it is by now a common (though by no means general) opinion among students of Australian history that the "grand design" of Botany Bay was really strategic, hatched by Pitt's desire to deny France power over India and the Far Eastern trade routes that were so vital to British interests in

the late eighteenth century. This vision of the embryo colony as a "strategic outlier" of England, not just an opportunistically chosen dump for its criminals, has become popular with Australians as our national bicentenary approaches. It lends dignity to our origins. "The rag and bone shop of Australia's beginning," wrote the main spokesman for this view, Alan Frost, "was perhaps not so foul as we have long supposed." "We shall see.

In 1779, the year Captain James Cook was killed by the Hawaiians at Karakakoa Bay, a House of Commons committee was set up to determine where convicts, if sentenced to transportation, could be sent now that America was closed to them. The place should be very distant but not a mere desert, for it was essential that a colony there be able to support itself. What about New Holland? The committee invited Joseph Banks, now a celebrity and soon to be knighted, to deliver his views. Nobody in England knew more about Australia. The great man, now thirty-four years old, spoke of Botany Bay and its naked cowardly savages. The climate was good, the soil was arable; he described the abundance of fish, pasture, fresh water and wood and set forth the opinion that a colony of felons could support itself within a year. Perhaps he actually believed this farrago of optimistic distortions; but though the committee was impressed, it made no decision. It heard other witnesses, who suggested transportation to Gibraltar or the west coast of Africa.

There was reason to be skeptical about such projects. The American transportation system had relied on free settlers who would buy indentured labor. The convicts were sold by middlemen and from the moment they stepped on American soil they ceased to cost England a penny, they were not a charge on the State.

Yet in Australia, these conditions would not apply. Thousands of men and women would be packed off, in ships that would bring back no cargo, to a place expected to produce no surplus. There were no free settlers to buy the indentured labor of the felons, and every item of their upkeep would be a dead charge on the government. Even granted the pervasive sense of a crisis in the criminal system and the widespread desire to solve it by expelling the "criminal classes" of England to some place "beyond the seas," the notion of setting a convict colony in a place as remote and ill-known as Australia was certainly bizarre. The argument for strategic colonization of Australia seems, at least on the face of it, to make the exercise more rational.

When William Pitt the Younger became its prime minister in 1783, England was half-bankrupted from war with France. Pitt believed it was essential to keep the French from gaining any influence over India and the trade routes of the Far East. The East's economic importance to Britain was growing. It had not approached the volume of Britain's Atlan-

1781, but its direction was clear: in the future, a great part of British economic destiny would lie in the "East Indies," a vast swath of territory that ran from the Cape of Good Hope through India and Malaya to the coast of China and on into the Pacific.

186 The main instrument of British interests there had been the sprawling East India Company, which had the closest relationships to the government of any English business. For ten years, starting with Lord 187 Regulating Act (1773), the government strove to curb and reform the Company.¹² With the passage of Pitt's India Act (1784), which 188 nationalized control of the East India Company, the matter of 189 as at the front of all political argument, the responsibility not of 190 the Company men but of the Crown and its ministers. Trade had brought 191 territory war, war an Empire. With this had come immense 192 losses of security as well as trade. Not only did India have to be run, 193 the East as a whole—not excluding the Western Pacific—had to be 194 turned to British shipping, especially along the vital trade route from 195 Canton. Eastern trade represented Britain's best hope of eco- 196 nomic recovery from the setbacks of the early 1780s: her loss of North 197 America, her costly war against the French, and her alienation from once 198 European states—notably, Holland.

199 The key to strategic power in the East. The forts and 200 of the Dutch trading empire ran from Cape Town to the south- 201 Pacific. The Dutch monopoly of the Spice Islands was the oldest 202 and most obstinate the East India company had to face. Yet the mili- 203 tary weakness of this trading empire had been revealed after England 204 had won Holland in 1780. The British began a series of inconclu- 205 sive strikes against Dutch bases in the East. In March 1781 a British 206 force bungled an attack on the "Gibraltar of Africa," the Cape of 207 Good Hope, from which East India convoys sailing round the tip of Africa 208 were harassed by privateers. This backfired badly with the net result 209 that the French, under Admiral de Suffren, reinforced the Dutch garrison 210 on the Cape and held it to the end of the war. Another British fleet 211 of two lesser Dutch ports which had some strategic influence over 212 access to the Bay of Bengal: Negapatam (modern Negapatnam) 213 on the east coast of India, and Trincomalee in Ceylon. Soon after, 214 the British retook Trincomalee.

215 John Pitt drew from this distant, inconclusive sea war, after 216 it had ceased, was that the combination of Dutch depots and French 217 garrisons and dangers for the British in India even though Holland was no 218 longer a major sea power. There was a vacuum of naval power in the Far 219 East. The British had to fill it before the French did. In the postwar 220 years, Pitt tried very hard to reach friendly agreements with the 221 British seaborne trade in the East Indies, while edging the French

222 garrisons out of the Cape. He hoped (in the words of Sir James Harris, 223 Pitt's minister at The Hague) "not only to separate the interests of the 224 Dutch East India Company from those of France, but to unite them with 225 those of Great-Britain."¹³ The fabric of England's Far Eastern trade was 226 too delicate to permit anything but conciliation in dealing with the 227 Dutch. If provoked again, they could join the French to drive England 228 from the East Indies.

229 But though there was no doubt that the French wanted India, they 230 lacked the military force to take it. After the peace of 1783, they made a 231 series of diplomatic moves to weaken British influence there. In 1785 232 they struck a treaty with the Bey in Cairo to give them trading rights in 233 Egypt, which was seen as a distant gambit to a possible invasion of India. 234 They also formed a chartered trading company, the French East India 235 Company of Calonne, to compete with Britain's East India Company. 236 The peace settlement had called for a balance between British and French 237 fleets in Indian seas—the understood figure was five warships each, none 238 larger than 64 guns. There was some British concern (more from spies 239 and diplomats than from naval men) when it appeared that the French 240 East India Company was using decommissioned 64-gun cruisers, known 241 as *flûtes*, as merchantmen. Their lower gun-decks had been removed, but 242 in theory they could soon be re-armed. On the other hand, the French 243 thought the massive and growing tonnage of British East India merchant 244 fleets from the Cape to Canton could easily be converted to war, and 245 they too were right. Despite the highly colored intelligence reports it got, 246 there is no sign that Pitt's government saw the French *flûtes* as a grave 247 threat.

248 Its main field of concern, in the problem of keeping the Indian trade 249 routes open, was relations between the French and the Dutch. French 250 postwar diplomacy concentrated on the majority faction in the Dutch 251 government, the Patriot Party. At the end of 1785, France and Holland 252 signed a treaty of defensive alliance. Early in 1786, the Patriots took 253 control of the Dutch East India Company and, encouraged by their 254 French allies, moved to put thousands more troops into the Cape and 255 Trincomalee. The French also pressed the Patriots to take all military 256 decisions about India and the Cape from the ailing hands of the Dutch 257 East India Company. Sir James Harris gloomily reported to Pitt in March 258 1786 that France had told the Dutch Patriots "that a Rupture with Eng- 259 land in Asia is not of a very distant Period—no Time should be lost in 260 augmenting [British] Naval and Land Force in that Quarter of the 261 World."¹⁴

262 The threat of such a "rupture," according to the strategic-outlier ar- 263 guments of Australian historians like Frost and Blainey, led to Botany 264 Bay. The reason lay in pines and flax.

In eighteenth-century strategy, pine trees and flax had the naval importance that oil and uranium hold today. All masts and spars were of pine, and flax was the raw stuff of ships' canvas; neither could be had in quantity in the Far East, although there was plenty of coir fiber for rigging. A first-rate ship of the line needed immense quantities of spar timber. The mainmast of a 74-gun first-rater was three feet thick at the base, and rose 108 feet from keelson to truck—a single tree, dead straight and flawlessly solid. Such a vessel needed some 22 masts and yards as well. No other timber would do. Only conifers made good masts, because of their natural straightness and because the pine resin cut down friction between the fibers in their grain. This second characteristic made the great sticks relatively supple, so that they could absorb the punishing stress of heavy-weather sailing.

No such spar timber grew in the British Isles or in India. It all had to come from Riga, on the Baltic coast of Russia. The flax for sails also came from Russia, and England spent half a million pounds a year importing it. The supply line from Riga to Portsmouth through Russian and Scandinavian territorial waters was 1,700 miles long and highly vulnerable to shifts of alliance between England, France and their northern neighbors. Even when these strategic materials reached England, they still had 10,000 miles to go before they could be of use to a British squadron in the Far East. Hence the anxiety of the British in September 1784, when France got from Sweden the right to put a naval depot on the island of Göteborg at the mouth of the Baltic; from there, French ships could harass the British timber-transports.

One reason for the French-British naval stalemate in Indian seas in 1782 was the drastic shortage of spar timber, all of which had to be shipped from Europe. "There was not anywhere in India, so much as a Spar fit to make a Jibb Boom for a 64 gun ship," Admiral Sir Edward Hughes reported in 1781, "nor any Timber to be had of a size to make an Anchor Stock for a Line of Battle Ship."¹⁵

Faced now by the prospect of a Far Eastern war (so the argument goes) Pitt's counsellors remembered Norfolk Island, a rock that Captain James Cook had discovered in the Pacific a thousand miles east of Botany Bay during his second voyage a decade earlier, in 1774. His track toward it had taken him past several islands on which pine trees grew, some trunks of which were the size of the foremast of his ship, the *Resolution*. Larger ones, he thought, might well grow on larger islands, and this would be a boon to navigators. As he noted in his log, "I know of no Island in the South Pacific Ocean where a Ship could supply herself with a Mast or a Yard, was she everso much distress'd for want of one. . . . the discovery may be both useful and valuable." His guess proved right. The Norfolk Island pines grew to 3 feet in diameter and 180 feet in height. Better still,

the island's cliffs and shoreline were densely covered with stands of flax, *Phormium tenax*, seemingly ideal for the manufacture of canvas.¹⁶

Samples of the flax were gathered and, back in England, test pieces of hawser, canvas and twine were made from them. The "New Zealand flax" proved to be exceptionally tough and durable. Surely it, and the pines, were to be seen as a strategic asset for the Indian ships? And—stretching the possibilities further—might not the coast of New South Wales provide an armed haven, a "strategic outlier," where war-ships could refit with this timber, sailcloth and cordage, protected by a garrison?

To some people then, and to later historians, this looked good on paper, but there is no hard evidence that it did so to William Pitt or his ministers. The first man to propose it was an American-born functionary, James Mario Matra (ca. 1745–1806), who had held minor administrative posts in London and diplomatic ones in Tenerife and Constantinople. Matra held no official position in England. He was one of the bit-players in the drama of Empire: a speculator petitioning for a commercial scheme that, he hoped, would give him a job. It is in this light that one must see his suggestion—the first on record—that pines and flax might afford a strategic reason for colonizing Australia. It was read because he, at least, had seen Botany Bay, having sailed as a midshipman under Cook on the *Endeavour*. He presented his idea in a letter to Lord North, who had briefly replaced Thomas Townshend, Viscount Sydney, as the home and colonial secretary in 1783. His memo was endorsed by Banks, whose name Matra invoked in flattering terms throughout.¹⁷

It did not involve convicts. To "atone for the loss of our American colonies," the loyalist Matra proposed a free settlement in New South Wales, a country that held out "the most enticing allurements to European adventurers." The settlers should be of two kinds: British peasants, and dispossessed Loyalists fleeing from America to find asylum. Matra was an apostle of prophylactic emigration; he wanted to export the British poor before they turned to crime. "Few of any country," he realistically observed, "will ever think of settling in any foreign part of the world from a restless mind and from *Romantick* views." Thus, he reasoned, the Australian colonists ought to be the newly poor, of whom there was no shortage, as the economic woes brought about by the American revolt had caused a serious rural depression in England by 1783.

Matra rhapsodized on what the colony might produce, with the help of Chinese slave labor: tea, silk, spices, tobacco, coffee. There would be trade with China, Japan, Korea and the Aleutians. Best of all there were the flax and the pines, material "of the greatest importance," "eminently useful to us as a naval Power." Through them, the blank coast of New Holland would acquire

a very commanding influence in the policy of Europe. If a Colony from Britain was established in the large Tract of Country, & if we were at war with Holland or Spain, we might very powerfully annoy either State from our new Settlement. We might with a safe, & expeditious voyage, make Naval Incursions on Java, & the other Dutch Settlements, & we might with equal facility, invade the Coasts of Spanish America. . . . This check which New South Wales would be in time of War on both those Powers, makes it a very important Object when we view it in the Chart of the World, with a Political Eye.¹⁸

Lord North ignored Matra's scheme, and a glance at the atlas will show why. These strategic promises were puffery. The "facility" with which Chile could be attacked from Sydney involved crossing the whole Pacific. The "safe and expeditious voyage" to Java was some 4,000 miles long, through ill-charted and reef-strewn seas, with a dangerous choke-point in the Torres Straits.

Lord Sydney replaced Lord North at the end of 1783. He faced a rising clamor over the problem of criminal confinement—the shamefully overcrowded hulks and prisons. As home and colonial secretary, he was pressed to come up with a plan for disposing of British convicts. Matra heard he was casting around for a place to send them, and so he quickly wrote convicts into his plan and re-submitted it to Sydney:

Give them a few acres of ground as soon as they arrive . . . in absolute property, with what assistance they may want to till them. Let it be here remarked that they cannot fly from the country, that they have no temptation to theft, and that they must work or starve.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the administration drafted a new bill authorizing the revival of transportation to places other than America, "to what Place or Places, Part or Parts beyond the seas" the Crown might think fit. This Transportation Act (24 Geo. III, c. 56) became law in August 1784. All that was lacking was a place to receive the felons. Lord Sydney passed Matra's idea of an Australian thief-colony along to Lord Howe, the first lord of the Admiralty, who curtly rejected it as impractical.²⁰ But another naval man liked it, Sir George Young (1732-1810), a future admiral who had served in Indian waters. He advised Pitt that Botany Bay would make a good base for British ships "should it be necessary to send any into the South Seas"; that it should be established by convict labor; and that Pacific flax could replace that of Russia. Like Matra, he fancied that every imaginable cash crop could be grown in New South Wales, "uniting in one territory almost all the productions of the known world." Although his plan was scarcely distinguishable from Matra's, Young proposed sending only 140 convicts a year.²¹

Another proposal for opening a strategic supply-base in Australia with convict labor came from John Call (1732-1801), a former colonel in the service of the East India Company, whose specialty was military engineering. He pointed to "the declining if not . . . precarious state" of Britain's East Indies trade, and recommended a British base in either New South Wales or New Zealand, with Norfolk Island and its superior flax as a convict-worked source of naval supplies.²²

Nothing suggests that Pitt gave this more than glancing attention, although his attorney general, Pepper Arden, liked the idea. The strategic argument was ridiculed in July 1785 by a man whose views carried more weight in official circles than Young's, Call's or Matra's: Alexander Dalrymple, hydrographer to the East India Company, who opposed plans to colonize Norfolk Island as a violation of the company's monopolistic charter. In a report to the Court of the company's directors, Dalrymple sharply pointed out that serviceable mast timber could be got in Borneo and Sumatra—Chinese and southeast Asian shipwrights, after all, had done without Riga pines for centuries—and that "the best cables in the world" were made from Eastern coir and a palm fiber called gummatty. Dalrymple thought there was every reason to grow Pacific flax in England, but none to bring "so bulky an article" from Norfolk Island—"The absurdity . . . is too great to merit any serious consideration." And he heaped scorn on the way promoters like Matra, Young and Call had tried to tailor the idea of a strategic thief-colony to fit whatever the British Government seemed to have on its mind:

This project of a Settlement in that quarter has appeared in many Proteus-like forms, sometimes as a halfway house to China; again as a check upon the Spaniards at Manila and their *Acapulco* Trade; sometimes as a place for transported Convicts; then as a place of Asylum for American Refugees; and sometimes as an Emporium for supplying our Marine Yards with Hemp and Cordage, or for carrying on the Fur Trade on the N.W. Coast of America; just as the temper of ministers was supposed to be inclined to receive a favorable impression.²³

But through the flurry of promotional schemes, more attractive to historians as documents today than they had ever been to Pitt's government at the time, the real problem continued to grow. The jail and hulk population swelled through the winter of 1784-85, and the task of finding a place for transported convicts became perceptibly more urgent. Provincial jails were filled to bursting and even Newgate, whose complete rebuilding by George Dance the Younger was finished in 1785, was already so overcrowded that three hundred convicts had to be taken from it and put in a hulk in Langston Harbor at Portsmouth. On April 20,

1785, as the pressure on Pitt's government mounted, a committee met to decide once and for all where to send the convicts. Its chairman was Lord Beauchamp.

The first proposal was the island of Lemane, 400 miles up the Gambia River in West Africa. It was put up by the governor of the Africa Company, a British slaving enterprise. "Notorious felons," he urged, could be sent there packed in British slavers, stranded on Lemane with natives all around and a guardship stationed downstream in the Gambia River to stop them fleeing to the coast, the prisoners could be left "entirely to themselves" without a garrison and permitted to elect their own disciplinary officers. Many would perish in this African grave, but the survivors would turn into planters.

The Beauchamp Committee, to its credit, saw through this lunatic scheme, and one of its members, Edmund Burke, spoke against it in the House of Commons. So Lemane was dropped, and the committee was left with two alternatives: Das Voltas Bay, by the mouth of the Orange River on the southwest coast of Africa, and Botany Bay. It closely questioned its witnesses on the cost of sending convicts to Botany Bay, and how to keep them alive and disciplined once they got there. Yet despite the arguments of Matra, Call and Young for a convict settlement in New South Wales, the vote went to Das Voltas Bay, for several reasons. Das Voltas Bay was more strategically located. Unlike Botany Bay, it sat plumb on the main sea route from Europe to the Far East and promised to be an excellent staging depot for naval supplies. A British garrison there could offset a French one in Cape Town. The country behind it was said to be fertile and could serve as a new home for American Loyalists, those displaced and slightly embarrassing reminders of England's vast failure in the New World. Besides, there were rumors of copper ore in the mountains, at a time when the British Navy had started coppering the bottoms of all its ships to increase their service life in distant seas.²⁴ With high hopes, the government dispatched a sloop to survey Das Voltas Bay in September 1785, but it came back with the news that the place was too dry and sterile to be settled.

That left Botany Bay as a mediocre second choice. Perhaps its putative access to flax and pines, as raw material to be obtained by convict labor, gave it the edge over other suggested places such as Gromarivire Bay, on the Caffre Coast east of Cape Town, or Madagascar or Tristan da Cunha. But the "strategic" arguments for Botany Bay do not seem to have impressed Pitt. References to them in his correspondence are few and vague. His concern was getting rid of convicts, for by the spring of 1786 he was under severe political pressure from independent MPs to enforce the sentence of transportation and get convicts out of hulks within their constituencies at Plymouth and Portsmouth. "Though I am not at this

Moment able to state to You the Place, to which any Number of the Convicts will be sent," he wrote placatingly to one of these Devon men, John Rolle, "I am able to assure You that Measures are taken for procuring the Quantity of Shipping necessary for conveying above a thousand of them. . . . [A]ll the Steps necessary for the removal of at least that Number, may be completed in about a Month."²⁵

It took longer than that. No ship was sent to reconnoiter Botany Bay because, as Lord Sydney and his more able undersecretary Evan Nepean stressed, the hour was late and the British hulks and jails were facing an imminent breakdown. (In one hulk riot, in March 1786, eight prisoners were killed and thirty-six wounded.²⁶) The Government did not have eighteen spare months to send a ship to New South Wales and back; and in any case the Beauchamp Committee trusted what Banks told them of its merits as a spot for convict settlement. Nepean and Sydney also appeared to believe Matra's claim (supported by Young) that New South Wales was not so very far from the strategic centers of the Far East: "a Month's run from the Cape of Good Hope, five weeks from Madras, and the same from Canton, very near the Moluccas, & less than a Month's Run from Batavia." These figures were absurdly low. It took the First Fleet two months to reach Botany Bay from the Cape, with the prevailing westerlies behind it. Returning against them, the run was more like three months. And no ship could reach Canton or Madras from New South Wales in five weeks.

Attractive though it may have looked on paper to the geographically naive, the "strategic" argument of Matra, Young, Call and Banks for a convict-colony in New South Wales remained a chimera to which Pitt's government showed no attachment. The flax industry began weakly and was soon abandoned. No ship (except the *Buffalo*, a small colonial-built vessel) ever had a suit of sails woven from Norfolk Island flax or sailed under spars of Norfolk Island pine. Although the early colonial governors Arthur Phillip and Philip Gidley King did pursue the cultivation of the flax plant *Phormium tenax* on Norfolk Island, their home government's actions spoke louder than its instructions: it sent neither trained flax-dressers nor appropriate tools to the colony. (David Mackay is probably right in seeing King's enthusiasm for flax production as "a personal and colonial necessity, rather than a strategic one"²⁷), he wanted to be re-membered as the governor of an infant state, one with its own export economy, not just as the keeper of the human dump that New South Wales actually was.)

As for the direct strategic role of the colony, it was nugatory. Port Jackson was thousands of miles from England's areas of strategic interest and, in any case, the threat posed by French ships in the Far East dwindled to insignificance by the mid-1790s. The garrison sent to guard the

convicts was too small and weak to resist a determined invader, not that it mattered, for no invaders were interested. In terms of military advantage, the English presence in Australia at most caused some ripples of apprehension in France and on the far side of the Pacific. In 1790 the Viceroy of Mexico thought there were "not enough forces in our South Seas and the Department of San Blas to counteract those which the English have at their Botany Bay." A visit to the half-starved, virtually shipless colony of Sydney would have put his mind at ease. Although Napoleon thought about invading New South Wales, he did not try, and the place played no role in the Napoleonic Wars.²⁸

Thus, despite the talk about strategic advantage that was heard up to the dispatch of the First Fleet in 1787, the actual benefits of the new colony to England were only two: It was a sign of claim, a foothold on the new continent; and, in Evan Nepean's words, it absorbed "a Dreadful banditti." For all the hopes, New South Wales was too far out on the geopolitical periphery of the late eighteenth century to do much else.

In the summer of 1786, Pitt's Cabinet, having run out of alternatives, decided to found its penal colony at Botany Bay. Lord Sydney's announcement to the Lords of the Treasury (drafted by Evan Nepean) held a note of urgency: "The greatest danger is to be apprehended" of escape from the crowded hulks and jails, while "infectious distempers" threatened their inmates. Thus "measures should immediately be pursued" for getting the transportable convicts out of England. In round numbers, the first shipment should contain 600 of them (later 750), guarded by three companies of marines. Nepean estimated the cost of the equipment for founding the settlement in Australia at £29,300. Running it would cost the government £18,669 the first year, £15,449 the second and under £7,000 the third; after that, if all went to plan, it would be self-victualling.²⁹

The proposal to colonize Botany Bay with convicts was formally drawn up (almost certainly by Nepean rather than Sydney) in an unsigned document titled "Heads of a Plan for effectually disposing of convicts" and was presented to the cabinet in August 1786. Its emphasis was clear: The proposed colony would serve as "a remedy for the evils likely to result from the late alarming and numerous increase of felons in this country, and more particularly in the metropolis." The secondary benefit of the region's raw materials was presented at the end of the document: "It may also be proper to attend to the possibility of procuring . . . masts and ships' timber for the use of our fleets in India, as the distance between the two countries is not greater than between Great Britain and America." The author's eulogies on Pacific flax repeated Matra's almost phrase for phrase.³⁰

The cabinet gave its approval, and without further ado, the govern-

ment chose a man to lead the expedition and govern the new colony. He was found on the navy's semi-retired list: a man of independent but modest means, living as a gentleman farmer at Lyndhurst in the New Forest of Hampshire. His name was Captain Arthur Phillip.

V

WHEN PHILLIP received his commission from George III on October 12, 1786, appointing him "Governor of our territory called New South Wales," he was one day past his forty-eighth birthday. To judge from the surviving portraits, he was slight in build, with a long nose, a slightly pendulous lower lip, a smooth pear of a skull, and liquid melancholy-looking eighteenth-century eyes. It is a face most unlike the square-boned visage of Cook; one could imagine it under a European peruke, perhaps belonging to a kapellmeister in some little Bavarian court. Phillip was half German. His father, Jakob Phillip, was a language teacher from Frankfurt, who emigrated to London and married a certain Elizabeth Breach.

Phillip first went to sea at the age of sixteen, in time for the start of the Seven Years' War against France. Three years later he was promoted to lieutenant, but when peace resumed in 1763, he retired early on half-pay at the age of twenty-five. He married, but the marriage was not a happy one and he was formally separated from his wife in 1769. They had no children. Rural life at Lyndhurst now palled on him, and by 1770 he was back on the active list. In 1774 he got leave to join the Portuguese Navy, then at war with Spain. As captain of a Portuguese ship, Phillip delivered 400 Portuguese convicts across the Atlantic to Brazil without losing a man—a feat that presumably convinced Lord Sydney of his fitness to govern a penal colony.

By 1778 he was back in the British Navy and in 1779 he received command of the fireship *Basilisk*. To be past forty with no better post was no triumph, but three years later he had risen to be master of a full ship of the line, the 64-gun *Europe*. Yet by 1784 he went back to his farm again, on half-pay.

The best reputation Phillip could have had, in view of this lackluster record, was that of a reliable, forthright and rather unimaginative man; solitary, perhaps; competent on ship and self-effacing on shore. Nobody could have mistaken him for a charismatic leader. He had no apparent political talents. But politicians were the last people the Crown needed in a remote penal settlement. If the colony were to survive at all, it must be run by chain of command, not consensus, led by an eminently practical man. Australia's remoteness would set free cruelty and madness in

some British officers sent to guard convicts there. But power made Phillip equitable and level-headed, and he appears to have believed that at least some of his convicts could be reformed, provided they were isolated. "As I would not wish convicts to lay the foundations of an empire," he wrote,

I think they should remain separated from the garrison, and other settlers that may come from Europe, and not allowed to mix with them, even after the 7 or 14 years for which they are transported may be expired. The laws of this country will, of course, be introduced in [New] South Wales, and there is one that I wish to take place from the moment his Majesty's forces take possession of the country: *That there can be no slavery in a free land, and consequently no slaves.*³¹

One could hardly compare Phillip's words with the clarion speech of a Jefferson or a Lafayette, but they were the only ones verging on the description of a social ideal that would be uttered in, or about, Australia for the rest of the eighteenth century. However, what Phillip was really talking about was *apartheid*. He had no "democratic" feelings toward the convicts, and his later gestures of apparent equality, such as cutting rations for free and bond impartially in times of crisis, indicated no special sympathy for them. He thought of the convicts essentially as slaves, by their own fallen nature if not in the strict terms of the law. In declaring that "there can be no slavery in a free land, and consequently no slaves," he was not suggesting that his new colony would *begin* free, he was pointing to a remote future in which it might *become* so, a time when the convict system would have withered away and New South Wales would be populated by free emigrants, English yeomen and planters.

On August 31, 1786, Lord Sydney told the Admiralty that the voyage was going ahead, and instructed it to commission the fleet. There were, in all, eleven vessels. Only two of them were naval warships—the flagship *Sirius* and the brig-rigged sloop *Supply*. The rest were converted merchantmen. The Navy Board chose three storeships—*Borrowdale* (272 tons), *Fishburn* (378 tons) and *Golden Grove* (331 tons)—and six transports: *Alexander* (452 tons), *Charlotte* (345 tons), *Friendship* (278 tons), *Lady Penrhyn* (338 tons), *Prince of Wales* (333 tons) and *Scarborough* (418 tons). Most of them were fairly new vessels; *Scarborough*, the oldest, had been launched in 1781. The terms of the charter contract were that all of these ships, except the naval vessels, would cost the Government 10 shillings per register ton per month. Assuming an eight months' passage out and the same back, the government would have to pay the contractors at least £20,900 for the hire of their ships, and that was the largest single expense of the First Fleet.

But they were all small vessels, and very overcrowded by modern standards of sea travel. The largest transport, the *Alexander*, was 114 feet long and 31 feet in beam. In all, the fleet had to carry almost 1,500 people—officers, seamen and marines, women, children, and convicts. That meant a close pack—less than 3 tons of ship per person embarked.³² [The situation on a modern passenger liner is closer to 250 tons per person.] In an exasperated letter Phillip complained that his passengers, convicts and marines alike, "after taking off the tonnage for the provision of stores . . . have not one ton and a half per man."³³

As the winter wore on, Phillip did what he could to call the authorities' attention to the lack of space. On January 11, 1787 he wrote to Nepean,

I find that 184 men are put on board [*Alexander*]. . . . [T]here are amongst the men several unable to help themselves, and no kind of surgeons' instruments have been put on board that ship or any of the transports. . . . It will be very difficult to prevent the most fatal sickness among men so closely confined; on board that ship which is to receive 210 convicts there is not a space left . . . sufficiently large for 40 men to be in motion at the same time.³⁴

No craft, then or later, was ever designed specifically to carry convicts; that would have cost the owner too much for too specialized a vessel. It became the practice to dump the bulkheads, sleeping-racks and iron grilles in Sydney before the ships sailed north to China for their cargoes of tea on the home run. The 'tween-deck plans of the First Fleet transports are lost, but the quarters were certainly very cramped for the marines and crew, let alone for the convicts: Four transportees lying in a space seven feet by six feet, the dimensions of a modern king-size bed, were the norm. There was little headroom, *Scarborough*, the second-largest transport, had only four feet, five inches, so that even a small woman had to stoop and a full-grown man had to bend double. Philip Gidley King, second lieutenant on *Sirius*, described the security, "which consists," he wrote in his journal,

of very strong & thick Bulkheads, filled with nails & run across from side to side in ye tween decks abaft the Mainmast with loop holes to fire between the decks in case of irregularities. The hatches are well secured down by cross bars, bolts & locks & are likewise nailed down from deck to deck with oak stanchions. There is also a barricade of plank about 3 feet high, armed with pointed prongs of iron on the upper deck, abaft the Mainmast, to prevent any connection between the Marines & Ships Company, with the Convicts. Centinels are placed at the different Hatchways

& a Guard always under arms on the Quarter Deck of each Transport in order to prevent any improper behaviour of the Convicts.³⁵

The prisoners' quarters had no portholes or sidelights, such things³⁶ were an innovation and perhaps a security hazard. The lower decks were as dark as the grave, as lanterns and candles were banned for fear of fire. The only fresh air the convicts got was from a windsail rigged to scoop a breeze down a hatchway. In a storm, when the hatches were battened down, there was no fresh air below. In calm weather, prisoners could exercise on deck.

By January 6, 1787, the first convicts were loaded from the Woolwich hulks, the men onto *Scarborough* and the women aboard *Lady Penrhyn*. But two months passed before all the convicts embarked and the eleven ships were mustered at anchor on the Motherbank outside Portsmouth harbor, and they would remain at anchor two months more. The late winter and spring of 1787 went by in a stream of blunders and delays. The bureaucrats of Whitehall naively supposed that the logistics of a six-week slave run across the Pacific could be applied to an eight-month passage to Australia—which, as Phillip kept stressing, they could not. His letters to Nepean and Sydney are full of the complaints of a practical sailor. Luckily, Nepean understood them; Sydney was too insulated or obtuse to do so.

To begin with, the fleet was undervictualled by its crooked contractor, Duncan Campbell. He had shortchanged the convicts with half a pound of rice instead of a pound of flour—"this will be very severely felt"—and supplying only enough bread to give each prisoner the pitiful ration of six ounces (two slices) a day.³⁶ Even worse, despite the lessons of Cook's voyages, there were no anti-scorbutics. Phillip knew it would be murder to sail without them, and his letters now grew very blunt:

The contracts . . . were made before I ever saw the navy Board on this business. . . . I have repeatedly pointed out the consequences that must be expected of the men's being crowded on board such small ships, and from victualling the marines according to the contract which allows no flour. . . . this must be fatal to many, and the more so as no anti-scorbutics are allowed on board. . . . [I]n fact, my Lord, the garrison and the convicts are sent to the extremity of the globe as they would be sent to America—a six-weeks' passage.

. . . I am prepared to meet difficulties, and I have only one fear—I fear, my Lord, that it may be said hereafter that the officer who took charge of the expedition should have known that it was more than probable he lost half the garrison and convicts, crowded and victualled in such a manner for so long a voyage. And the public . . . may impute to my ignorance or

inattention what I have never been consulted in, and which never coincided with my ideas.³⁷

A stickler for detail, a true professional, Phillip knew that survival might depend on the humblest item of inventory and that he had to double-check them all. Why were only six scythes and five dozen razors provided? Could Nepean not see that they would need 560 pounds, not 200 pounds, of buckshot? How would the convict superintendents be paid? Where were the bolts of cloth against the inevitable day when, thousands of miles from Portsmouth, the convicts' clothes wore out? Phillip begged for fresh meat for the convicts, wine for the sick, fumi-phants, extra medicine. His masters moved with maddening slowness.

The work of the embarkation dragged on through late February and March. The convicts came rumbling down to the Plymouth and Portsmouth docks in heavy wagons, under guard, ironed together, shivering under the incessant rain. The pale, ragged, lousy prisoners, thin as wading birds from their jail diet, were herded on board and spent the next several months below; orders forbade them to exercise on deck until the flotilla was out of sight of land. The condition of the women provoked Phillip to a furious outburst:

The situation in which the magistrates sent the women on board the *Lady Penrhyn*, stamps them with infamy—tho' almost naked, and so very filthy, that nothing but clothing them could have prevented them from perishing, and which could not be done in time to prevent a fever, which is still on board that ship, and where there are many venereal complaints, that must spread in spite of every precaution I may take hereafter.³⁸

Who were these First Fleet convicts? It was once a cherished Australian belief that at least some of the people on the First Fleet were political exiles—rick-burners, trade-unionists, and the like. In fact, though victims of a savage penal code, they were not political prisoners. On the other hand, few of them were dangerous criminals. Not one person was shipped out in 1787 for murder or rape, although more than a hundred of them had been convicted of thefts (such as highway robbery) in which violence played some part. No woman on the First Fleet, legend to the contrary, had been transported for prostitution, as it was not a transportable offense. Many were treated as whores, and doubtless some were, although only two—Mary Allen and Ann Mather—had been described by their judges as "unfortunate girl" or "poor unhappy woman of the town."

In all, 736 convicts went on the First Fleet. Of these, we know the

age or occupation, and sometimes both, of 330 people—127 women, 201 men.³⁹ They came from all over England, but most of them were Londoners. Their main categories of crime were as follows:

OFFENSE	NUMBER
Minor theft	431
"Privy theft," including breaking and entering	93
Highway robbery	71
Stealing cattle or sheep	44
Robbery with violence (mugging)	31
Grand larceny	9
Fencing (receiving stolen goods)	8
Swindling, impersonation	7
Forgery of documents, banknotes, etc.	4
Other	35
Total of known indictments	733

All these were crimes against property, some forced by a pitiful necessity. Elizabeth Beckford, the second oldest woman on the First Fleet, was seventy. Her crime, for which she got seven years' transportation, was to have stolen twelve pounds of Gloucester cheese. At the Stafford Assizes, a laborer named Thomas Hawell went down for seven years for "feloniously stealing one live hen to the value of 2d., and one dead hen to the value of 2d." Elizabeth Powley, twenty-two and unemployed, raided a kitchen in Norfolk, took a few shillings' worth of bacon, flour and raisins, with "twenty-four ounces Weight of Butter value 12d," and was sentenced to hang; but a reprieve came and to Australia she went, never to eat butter again. Hunger drove a West Indian named Thomas Chaddick into a kitchen garden where he "did pluck up, spoil and destroy, against the form of the statute" twelve cucumber plants; he, too, went to Australia, there to contemplate the exactness with which the god of property had measured out his black life in cucumbers.

Some purloined inedible trifles. William Rickson, a nineteen-year-old laborer, made off with a wooden box which proved to contain merely a piece of linen and five books. James Grace, an eleven-year-old, took ten yards of ribbon and a pair of silk stockings. William Francis stole a book entitled *A Summary Account of the Flourishing State of the Island of Tobago* from a London gentleman named Robert Melville. Fifteen-year-old John Wischhammer grabbed a packet of snuff from an apothecary's counter in Gloucester. They all went down for seven years.

There were, of course, less trivial crimes. Apprentices robbed their masters' stock. John Nicolls, a hairdresser's assistant, drew seven years'

transportation for stealing goods worth £14 9s. 6d., enough to start his own barbershop: fifty-seven razors, sixty-two ivory combs, six bunches of human hair, soap, wig ribbon, pomade, scissors, hairnets and powder. A journeyman watchmaker mugged another watchmaker for a dozen silver watchcases; another stole a mass of parts, comprising 185 complete watch movements, barrels, fuseses, arbors, verges and studs.

None of these acts were news when they happened. They were mere drops in a swollen torrent of eighteenth-century crime. The only exception was Thomas Gearing, who created a brief sensation in Oxford in 1786 by breaking into the chapel of Magdalen College and stealing some ecclesiastical plate. For this sacrilege, he was condemned to death, reprieved and then transported for life.

Judges were particularly severe on thieves who used violence and threats. In 1782 Thomas Josephs accosted a married woman on a London street, "putting her in fear" and seizing her handkerchief, worth 2 shillings. The sentence was death; after five years in jail he was embarked on *Scarborough*, to serve the Crown for seven years in New South Wales. All the cattle duffers and horse thieves on the First Fleet were under commuted death sentences.

The Beauchamp Committee had urged that the new colony consist of "young Convicts," and so it did. The convicts' average age was about twenty-seven years. Age distribution was much the same for either sex:

AGE (YRS.)	MEN	WOMEN
under 15	3	2
16-25	68	58
26-35	51	50
36-45	11	6
46-55	4	3
over 56	3	3
Total convicts of known age	140	122

The oldest female convict was Dorothy Handland, a dealer in rags and old clothes who was eighty-two years old in 1787. She had drawn seven years for perjury. In 1789, in a fit of befuddled despair, she was to hang herself from a gum tree at Sydney Cove, thus becoming Australia's first recorded suicide. The oldest male convict was a Shropshire man, Joseph Owen, who was somewhere between sixty and sixty-six. The youngest boy was John Hudson, a nine-year-old chimney sweep. He had stolen some clothes and a pistol. "One would wish to snatch such a boy, if one possibly could," the judge remarked, "from destruction, for he will only

return to the same kind of life which he has led before." So little John Hudson was sent to Australia for seven years. The youngest girl was Elizabeth Hayward, a clogmaker aged thirteen, who had stolen a linen gown and a silk bonnet worth 7 shillings.

Classed by occupation, the First Fleet convicts were an anthology of country and town trades—but that did not guarantee their fitness as pioneers. The details of employment (or lack of it) for 190 men and 124 women have survived. Of the men, twenty-four (12 percent) were noted as unemployed. The largest occupation group was laborers, mostly rural—eighty-four men, or 44 percent of the total. From there the size of the professional groups dropped sharply:

TRADE	NO. OF PERSONS
Seamen	8
Carpenters, shipwrights and cabinetmakers	6
Shoemakers	5
Weavers	5
Watermen	4
Ivory turners	3
Brickmakers	2
Bricklayers, masons	2
Other trades	47

"Other trades" included three domestic servants, two leather-breeches makers, two tailors, two butchers, a jeweller, a baker and a silk-dyer. There was also one fisherman, a Cornishman named William Bryant. Of the women, fourteen (11 percent) were "unemployed," and some if not most of these may have been prostitutes. More than half the women were domestic servants. The rest were milliners, mantua-makers, oyster-sellers, glove-makers, shoe-binders—a spatter of trades that reflected the kind of jobs women in eighteenth-century England could expect to find, all of them fairly menial.

So it had a motley crew, this Noah's Ark of small-time criminality, and for all the trades represented aboard, it was absurdly ill-chosen for the task of colonizing New South Wales. The authorities had used no criteria of selection apart from youth, and that erratically. There was no choice by trade. The colony that would have to raise its own crops in unknown soil had only one professional gardener, and he was a raw youth of twenty. It would need tons of fish, but had only one fisherman. There were only two brickmakers, two bricklayers and a mason for all the houses that would need building, no sawyers were aboard, and only six carpenters. It had no flax-dressers or linen-weavers—proof of the government's indifference to the prospect of a "strategic" colony. This muddle

and lack of foresight in the choice of convicts typified the planning, being one of many matters over which Captain Arthur Phillip had no control.

And there was one general class of crook not represented on the First Fleet: the successful ones. This was pointed out a few years later in a mordant ballad entitled *Botany Bay: A New Song* (1790):

Let us drink a good health to our schemers above,
Who at length have contriv'd from this land to remove
Thieves, robbers and villains, they'll send 'em away,
To become a new people at Botany Bay.

Some men say they have talents and trades to get bread,
Yet they sponge on mankind to be cloathed and fed,
They'll spend all they get, and turn night into day—
Now I'd have all such sots sent to Botany Bay.

There's gay powder'd coxcombs and proud dressy fops,
Who with very small fortunes set up in great shops,
They'll run into debt with design ne'er to pay,
They should all be transported to Botany Bay. . . .

There's nightwalking strumpets who swarm in each street,
Proclaiming their calling to each man they meet:
They become such a pest that without more delay,
Those corrupters of youth should be sent to the Bay.

There's monopolizers who add to their store,
By cruel oppression and squeezing the poor,

There's butchers and farmers get rich in that way,
But I'd have all such rogues sent to Botany Bay. . . .

You lecherous whore-masters who practice vile arts,
To ruin young virgins and break parents' hearts,
Or from the fond husband the wife lead astray—
Let such debauch'd stallions be sent to the Bay.

There's whores, pimps and bastards, a large costly crew,
Maintain'd by the sweat of a labouring few,
They should have no commission, place, pension or pay,
Such locusts should all go to Botany Bay.

The hulks and the jails had some thousands in store,
But out of the jails are ten thousand times more,
Who live by fraud, cheating, vile tricks and foul play,
And should all be sent over to Botany Bay.

Now should any take umbrage at what I have writ,
Or find here a bonnet or cap that will fit,
To such I have only this one word to say:
They are welcome to wear it in Botany Bay.⁴⁰

a three-year issue of rum and wine. However, the womens' clothes had still not arrived, and neither had the small-arms supplies for the marines. "We have neither musquet balls nor paper for musquet cartridges, nor have we any armourers' tools," Phillip complained—and it had to be kept a dead secret all the way across the Atlantic, for fear of a convict mutiny.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, on the evening of May 12, Phillip ordered his flagship *Marius* to weigh anchor. The signal flags fluttered, but nothing happened; the merchant seamen in some of the transports refused point-blank to go aloft. Lieutenant King went to investigate. It turned out that the seamen—who were not under military command, being the crew of chartered commercial vessels—were on strike against the ships' owners, who owed them seven months' back pay. The owners, skinflints all, hoped to force their crews to buy "necessaries" from ships' stores on credit at inflated prices during the long voyage; the sailors naturally wished to equip themselves cheaper and better, for cash, in Portsmouth. Their complaints were sorted out, after a fashion, and at three in the morning of Sunday, May 13, before the first cold gristle of pre-dawn light had spread upon the sea, the First Fleet weighed anchor and shaped its course in a rising wind for Tenerife.

vi

THE CONVICTS were "humble, submissive and regular" on this first leg of the voyage, Watkin Tench wrote with relief. They had been told "in the most pointed terms that any attempt . . . to force their escape should be punished with instant death." Escape, however, was unlikely, as they were chained, in shock and atrociously seasick. Through the long rolling weeks at anchorage on the Motherbank, the literate prisoners had written letters to their families and friends ashore, and Tench had had the "tiresome and disagreeable" duty of acting as censor. "Their constant language," he noted, "was an apprehension of the impracticability of returning home, the dread of a sickly passage, and the fearful prospect of a distant and barbarous country." He dismissed their laments as "doubtless an artifice to awaken compassion."⁴⁵

There was nothing artificial about them. None of the convicts could have had any idea of their destination. Before them yawned a terrifying void of time and space. They were going on the longest voyage ever attempted by so large a group of people. If they had been told they were off to the moon, the sense of loss, deracination and fear could hardly have been worse—at least one could see the moon from England, which could not be said for Botany Bay.

THE FATAL SHORE

In March 1787, with two months to sailing date, typhus broke out in the ships anchored on the Motherbank outside Portsmouth. The cramped decks of *Alexander* incubated it; by April 15, eleven of its prisoners had died, and the rest were hastily disembarked. Enlisted men fumigated the ship, scrubbed her with creosote (the navy's all-purpose disinfectant and pesticide) and swabbed the convict quarters with quicklime. Even so, five more men died on *Alexander* before she sailed. One woman convict died of "jail fever" on *Lady Penrhyn*, but luckily the disease did not spread through the squadron.

This outbreak of fever provoked a flood of rumors on shore. The expedition to Botany Bay had piqued the curiosity of the public from the moment it was announced. It had been furiously lampooned and defended by pamphleteers. "What is the Punishment intended to be inflicted?" cried Alexander Dalrymple, the official of the East India Company who was an unsparing critic of penal colonies in the South Seas:

Not to make the Felons undergo *servitude* for the benefit of others, was the Case in America; but to place them, as their own Masters, in a temperate Climate, where they have every object of *comfort* or *Ambition* before them! and although it might be going too far to suppose, This will *incite men* to become *Convicts*, that they may be *comfortably* provided for; yet surely it cannot *deter* men, inclined to commit Theft and Robbery, to know that, in case they are detected and convicted, all that will happen to them is that they will be sent, at the Publick Expense, to a good Country and Temperate Climate, where they will be their own masters!⁴¹

In the same vein but more facetiously, ballads had described the southern arcadia, free of death and taxes, where the lucky felons were going:

They go to an Island to take special charge,
Much warmer than Britain, and ten times as large:
No customs-house duty, no freightage to pay,
And tax-free they'll live when in Botany Bay.⁴²

A theatrical producer commissioned an opera entitled *Botany Bay*, which opened at the Royal Circus in London in April and closed the night before the fleet sailed.

The typhus outbreak was played up by the newspapers, which had one good effect: At last Duncan Campbell, the contractor, was forced to issue the fresh beef and vegetables Phillip wanted for the convicts and marines. The marines also complained that they would not be issued liquor in New South Wales, "without which . . . we cannot expect to survive the hardships"⁴³—and three days later Nepean guaranteed them

The convicts, of course, were not the only ones who felt their lives cut in half. As the flotilla sailed from Portsmouth, a young second officer of marines, not long married, began his diary:

5 o'clock in the morning. The Sirius made the signal for the whole fleet to get under way. O Gracious God send that we may put into Plymouth or Torbay on our way down Channel that I may see my dear and fond affectionate Alicia and our sweet son before I leave them for this long absence. O Almighty God hear my prayer and grant me this request . . . what makes me so happy this day is it because that I am in hopes the fleet will put into Plymouth. O my fond heart lay still for you may be disappointed I trust in God you will not.

But Plymouth fell astern, and Ralph Clark's journal for May 14 bears the anguished scrawl, "Oh my God all my hoppes are over of seeing my beloved wife and son."⁴⁶

The run to Tenerife passed almost without incident. The weather was fine and, once out of sight of land, the convicts were allowed on deck to exercise. On June 3 the fleet made its anchorage in the port of Santa Cruz, under the high conical peak of Tenerife.

The officers and crewmen had a week to stretch their legs on land, while the ships took on fresh water, pumpkins, onions, indifferent and costly meat and Canary wine. Phillip and twenty of his chief officers were lavishly entertained by the Sicilian-born governor of the Canaries. One night, a convict named John Power escaped from *Alexander* by shinnying down her anchor hawser. He swam quietly astern, scrambled into a dinghy, cut its painter and drifted on the current across the bay to a Dutch East Indiaman. Its crew would not take him on board; so Power rowed to a small island in the lee of the fleet, where he beached the boat, rested up for the night (his plan being to row thirty miles to the Grand Canary) and was captured by a search party the next morning. But Power's was the only such venture, and on June 10 the fleet set sail for Rio de Janeiro.

At first, Phillip's track looks remarkably indirect: Why cross the Atlantic twice to get to Australia? In fact, his course from Portsmouth to the Cape of Good Hope via the Canaries and Rio made the best of prevailing winds and currents. Boosted south-southwest by the Canary Current and the northeast trade winds, a ship would pass the Cape Verde Islands and sail south until it entered the equatorial doldrums in the Atlantic Narrows. Once through that zone of calms and fluky winds it could pick up the southbound Brazil Current, getting a good slant on the southeast trades to reach Rio and drop further south into the zone of the westerlies, around 30°S. Then it had a straight run downwind to Cape Town.⁴⁷

The fleet raised the Cape Verde Islands on June 18. Adverse winds prevented the ships from anchoring at Port Praia on São Tiago, and on they sailed. Now the weather became intolerably hot and humid, and as the fleet entered the tropics waves of vermin crept out of each vessel's woodwork, up from the bilges—rats, bedbugs, lice, cockroaches, fleas. Officers and convicts alike were tormented by them and fought back as best they could with "frequent explosions of gunpowder, lighting fires between decks, and a liberal use of that admirable antiseptic, oil of tar."⁴⁸

The bilges were foul in all of the ships. Even those whose guts have heaved at the whiff from the boat's head at sea can have little idea of the anguish of eighteenth-century bilge stink: a fermenting, sloshing broth of sea water mixed with urine, puke, dung, rotting food, dead rats and the hundred other attars of the Great Age of Sail. On *Alexander*, another batch of convicts fell sick from the bilge effluents,

which had by some means or other risen to so great a height, that the pannels of the cabin, and the buttons on the back of the officers, were turned nearly black, by the noxious effluvia. When the hatches were taken off, the stench was so powerful that it was scarcely possible to stand over them.⁴⁹

When tropical rainstorms whipped the fleet, the convicts—who had no change of dry clothes—could not exercise on deck. They stayed below under battened hatches, and conditions in their steaming, stinking holds were extreme. "The weather was now so immoderately hot," noted John White, surgeon on *Charlotte*, "that the female convicts, perfectly overcome with it, frequently fainted away, and these faintings generally terminated in fits." At night, some of them rutted like stoats. "Notwithstanding the enervating effects of the atmospheric heat," White recorded with some amazement,

so predominant was the warmth of their constitutions, or the depravity of their hearts, that the hatches . . . could not be suffered to lay off, during the night, without a promiscuous intercourse immediately taking place between them and the seamen and marines . . . [T]he desire of the women to be with the men was so uncontrollable that neither shame [but indeed of this they had long lost sight] nor the fear of punishment could deter them from making their way through the bulkheads to the apartments assigned to the seamen.⁵⁰

It sounds like bedlam, and probably it was. The marines on the four female transports—*Charlotte*, *Lady Penrhyn*, *Prince of Wales* and *Friendship*—could buy a woman with a pannikin of rum from their daily

rations, and from then on the drunkenness of some female convicts would become another problem for Captain Phillip.

When the women got unruly, they were ironed and sometimes flogged. One prisoner on *Friendship*, Elizabeth Dudgeon (7 years for stealing £9 19s. 6d. in London), was especially troublesome. She spent the first nine days of the Tenerife-Rio run in irons for fighting, and on release she was found carousing in the seamen's quarters. Back into irons she went, but a few days later she rashly gave a guard officer, Captain James Meredith, a tongue-lashing. He had her triced up to a grating and flogged, to the pleasure of Lieutenant Ralph Clark: "The corporal did not play with her, but laid it home, which I was very glad to see . . . she has long been fishing for it, which she has at last got to her heart's content."⁵¹

Once the fleet reached the doldrums, Phillip rationed water to three pints a day. But by mid-July the ships picked up the southeast trades, the sails cracked and bellied, and down to Rio they rolled, *Lady Penrhyn* lagging and wallowing, nimble little *Supply* herding up the slow transports until, on August 5, the whole fleet was snugged down in Rio harbor.

It stayed there a month. There was much to be done: watering and cleaning ship, buying stores and making repairs. Sixteen people had died since England—ten on one boat, the mephitic *Alexander*—and there were eighty-one on the sicklist. By eighteenth-century standards, things could have been much worse. Phillip busied himself with stores. He could not get the small-arms supplies he needed in Rio—Portuguese armorers' tools did not fit English guns—but he obtained 10,000 musketballs from the local arsenal. The clothing of the women convicts was already disintegrating, and to replace it Phillip parsimoniously bought 100 sacks of tapioca (which would substitute, in a pinch, for flour), the sacks of which "being of strong Russia [burlap] will be used hereafter in cloathing the convicts, many of whom are nearly naked."⁵² He bought seeds and laid in supplies of the local beef, which was excellent, and of the local firewater or *aguardiente*, which was not. "That [Brazilians] have not learnt the art of making palatable rum," Watkin Trench moseyly noted many hangovers later, "the English troops in New South Wales can bear testimony."

The Viceroy, who had known Phillip in the days of his mercenary service for Portugal, entertained him and his men generously and gave them *carte blanche* to go wherever they pleased, unescorted. They prom-enaded contentedly about, admiring the macaws and toucans, gorging themselves on limes, lemons and oranges, and ogling the "lusty" girls of Rio whose long hair, once unbraided, trailed two inches on the floor

when they walked barefoot. They envied the Portuguese their police, but their English souls were affronted by Rio's tropical Catholicism.

The convicts, of course, saw none of this. They were kept below deck but some of them had-been up to their old tricks on the long Atlantic run. John White found that a convict named Thomas Barrett had "with great ingenuity" started a forgers' ring, making quarter-dollars out of old buckles and pewter spoons:

The impression, milling, character . . . was so imitatively executed that had their metal been a little better, the fraud, I am convinced, would have passed undetected. . . . How they could effect it at all, is a matter of the most inexpressible surprise to me; as they were never suffered to come near a fire; and a sentinel was constantly placed over their hatchway, which . . . rendered it impossible for either fire or fused metal to be conveyed to their apartments. Besides, hardly ten minutes ever elapsed, without an officer going down among them. The adroitness, therefore, with which they must have managed, in order to complete a business that required so complicated a process, gave me a high opinion of their ingenuity, cunning, caution and address.⁵³

Barrett was lightly punished, but James Baker, a marine who had tried to pass off one of the forged coins on shore, got 200 lashes. As a rule, the floggings inflicted on the marines were far worse than anything the convicts got. The inequality of punishment would turn out to be a great source of friction between marines and convicts later.

Other tensions were felt not long after the fleet left Rio on September 1 for its drop south and its long run before the westerlies to Cape Town. In the confined space of a ship, irritations grow and all raw spots chafe. Some of the officers took to drink, traded insults in the mess and cursed their hangovers. One could find relief from the bickering on deck, watching the frigate birds and pintadoes, trolling a line for fish and admiring the hungry grace of albacore tearing into the schools of flying fish as they burst, like scattering chainshot, from the heaving indigo rollers. Luckily the fleet had a quick crossing. By mid-October they were at Cape Town, the tip of Africa, the extreme point of European penetration into the southern hemisphere.

The fleet spent a month in Cape Town. The main task was to stock up on plants, seeds and livestock for the colony in New South Wales. This Phillip did, with much hard bargaining against phlegmatic Dutch tightwads. He also tried to build up the convicts' strength for the last, most difficult leg of the voyage, by giving them fresh beef and mutton, soft bread and as many vegetables as they could eat, every day.⁵⁴ His officers hated Cape Town—the Dutch, the Kaffirs, the heat, the dust.

Nevertheless it was the last civilized place, the last repository of recognizable European values, that the men and women of the First Fleet would see for years; and the thought must have lain heavily on them when at last the tars stood to the capstans and the anchor-cables rose dripping through their hawser-holes. This was the end of Europe. Before them stretched the awesome, lonely void of the Indian and Southern Oceans, and beyond that lay nothing they could imagine.

The modern traveller, gazing down on the wrinkles of the earth's waters from an armchair six miles up, has no conception of the forbidding grandeur of the sea into which the First Fleet now moved. Its waves are the largest of any of the world's oceans, and from the deck of a boat they are overwhelming: tottering hills of indigo and malachite glass, veined in their transparencies with braids of opaque white water, their spumy crests running level with the ship's cross-trees. The inexorable rhythm of their passage numbs the brain, first with fear and then with repetition.

The fleet transports labored now, clawing up the swells and staggering down into the troughs. They were loaded down with new supplies, including some five hundred animals mooing, clucking and bleating frantically in their improvised pens. The convict quarters were more crowded than ever, because room had to be made for the future colony's livestock (and its bales of food)—two Africander bulls, three cows, three horses, forty-four sheep, thirty-two hogs, poultry of all sorts, and such animals as the officers had managed to cram on board for their private stock. All the women convicts had been moved off *Friendship* and redistributed among the other three female transports; their place was taken by sheep which, Ralph Clark opined, would be "much more agreeable shipmates." Arthur Bowes Smythe, the surgeon on the women's transport *Lady Penrhyn*, felt the same way. "I believe few Marines or Soldiers going out on a foreign Service under Government were ever better, if so well provided for as these Convicts are," he remarked, but

I wish I cd. with truth add that the behaviour of the Convicts merited such extrem indulgence—but I believe I may venture to say there was never a more abandon'd set of wretches collected in one place at any period than are now to be met with in this Ship. . . . The greater part of them are so totally abandon'd and callous'd to all sense of shame & even common decency that it frequently becomes indispensably necessary to inflict Corporal punishment upon them. . . . [E]very day furnishes proofs of their being more harden'd in their Wickedness—not do I conceive it possible in their present situation to adopt any plan to induce them to behave like rational or even human Beings. . . . Nor can their matchless Hippocracy be equalled except by their base Ingratitude.⁸⁶

As the vessels slipped further down the map, below the fortieth south parallel, under the southern coast of Australia and toward Van Diemen's Land, the gales stayed favorable and the weather "dark, wet and gloomy." Cannets and terns circled the ships. Whales were sighted, and often the wandering albatross, *Diomedea exsulans*, would materialize out of the spindrift, white from white, and wheel silently about the plunging masts on its fourteen-foot wings before vanishing into a rainsquall. Waves broke green over the decks, dumping tons of freezing water down the companionways and sluicing the marines and the shivering, half-clothed convicts out of their bunks. Coming north around Van Diemen's Land on January 10, 1788, they ran into a violent thundersquall that split the *Golden Grove's* topsails and carried away *Prince of Wales's* main yard; the women on *Lady Penrhyn* "were so terrified that most of them were down on their knees at prayers, and in less than one hour after it had abated they were uttering the most horrid oaths and imprecations that could proceed out of the mouths of such abandoned prostitutes as they are."⁸⁵

Surgeon John White on *Charlotte* had a revelation of how far from the company of European man they had all come. Flocks of "large oceanous birds" flew about the ship, and the marines amused themselves by shooting at them, but the seabirds showed no alarm "either at the report, or at the balls . . . [for] they had never been harassed with firearms before."⁸⁷

On the evening of January 19, *Sirius* and the transports sighted the coast of mainland Australia. By ten the next morning they were all anchored in Botany Bay. "To see all the ships safe in their destined port," White wrote with commendable restraint, "without ever having, by any accident, been one hour separated, and all the people in as good health as could be expected or hoped for, after so long a voyage, was a sight truly pleasing, and at which every heart must rejoice."⁸⁸

It had been one of the great sea voyages in English history. Captain Arthur Phillip, the middle-aged nonentity, had brought them across more than fifteen thousand miles of ocean without losing a ship. The entire run had taken 252 days. A total of forty-eight people had died—forty convicts, five convicts' children, one marine's wife, one marine's child and a marine. Given the rigors of the voyage and the primitive medical knowledge of the day, the crammed ships and the lack of anti-scorbutics, the poor planning and the bad equipment, it was a tiny death rate—a little over 3 per cent. The sea had spared them; now, they must survive on the unknown land.