CHAPTER SEVEN

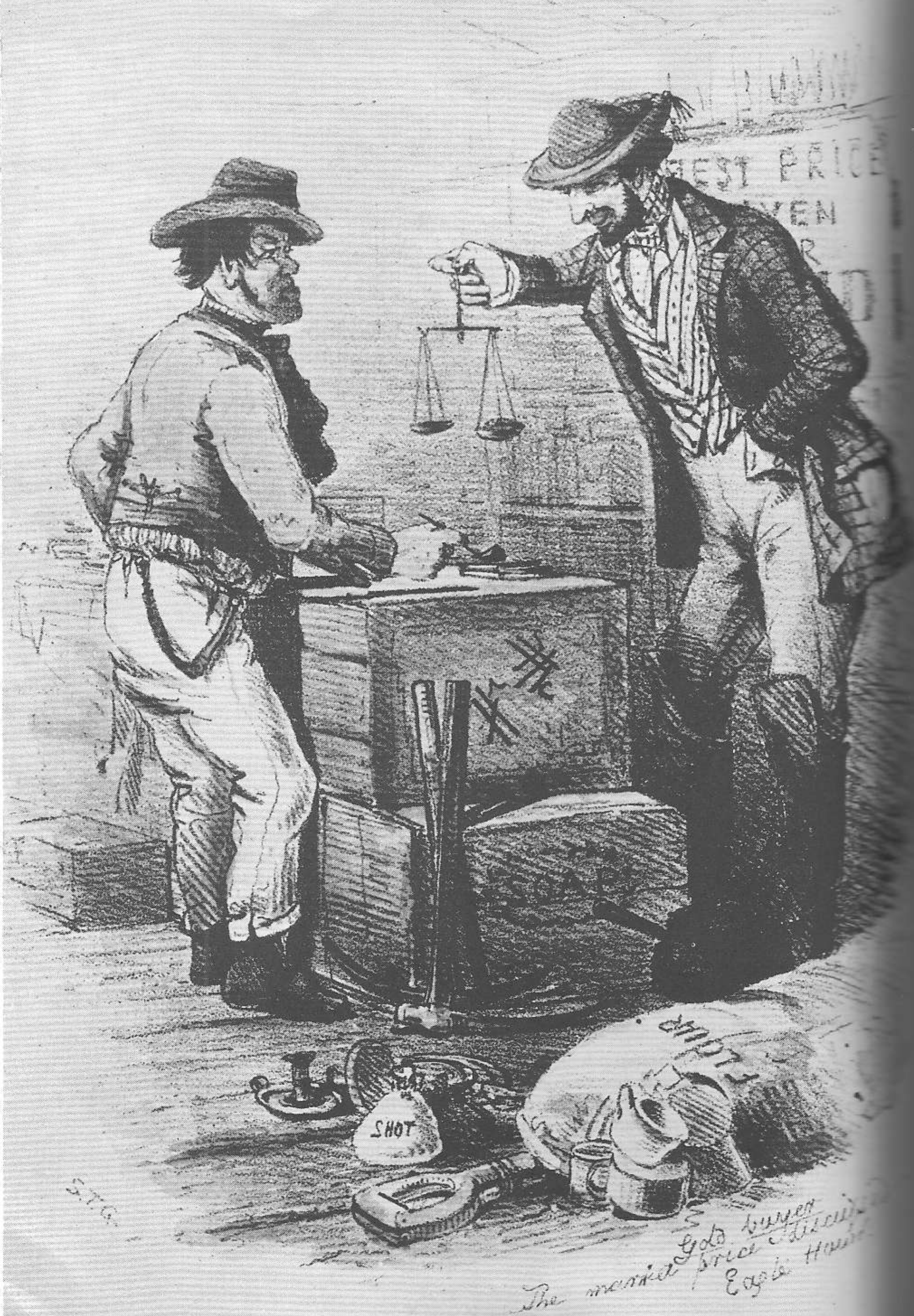
GOLD
1851—1861

Buying and selling gold at Eaglehawk in Victoria.

N JANUARY 1851 E. H. Hargraves returned to Sydney from the Californian gold-ields with an anxious heart. Without any real knowledge of geology he had ompared the geological formations in California with what he had seen in New South Wales eighteen years before, and concluded that gold must exist n Australia. On arrival in Sydney he told friends and acquaintances of his expectations, and one and all derided him as mad. Undaunted by their ridicule, e travelled from Sydney to Bathurst, from where, in the company of a bush-nan named Lister, he set out down the Macquarie River, followed one of its ributaries, then went along a creek that flowed into that tributary, and finally ound himself in the country he was so anxious to see. In his excitement he old Lister that gold lay under their very feet. But the bushman was just as ncredulous as the mockers in Sydney. So Hargraves dug a panful of earth, vashed it in a waterhole, and exclaimed 'Here it is. This is a memorable day n the history of New South Wales. I shall be a baronet, and you will be knighted, nd my old horse will be stuffed, put into a glass case, and sent to the British Museum!' On his return to the inn at Guyong that night Hargraves wrote a nemorandum on the discovery which he sent to the Colonial Secretary, Deas Thomson, who announced the discovery in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 15 May, 1851.

Immediately a wave of excitement passed over the city. Government and mployers trembled as more and more workers deserted to run to the end of he rainbow. The prices of commodities required at the diggings began to soar: lour rose to thirty or thirty-five pounds a ton, bread sold at sixpence to eight-pence a pound loaf. Shop-fronts began to display goods for diggers—blue and ed serge shirts, California hats, leather belts, mining boots and camping blan-ets. On the pavements picks, pans, pots and Virginian cradles were offered or sale. Each day more and more extravagant reports of the nuggets picked ut of the ground, or even lying on the surface waiting to be snatched by the irst comer, circulated through the city.

By August the centre of interest shifted to Melbourne, for in that month Thomas Hiscock discovered the rich alluvial field at Ballarat. Again excitement an high. The towns of Melbourne and Geelong were almost emptied of men. Cottages were deserted; businesses were deserted; ships in Port Phillip Bay vere deserted. Even some masters of ships, accepting the loss of the crew as nevitable, teamed up with their men and set off for the diggings. Few families vere able to retain their domestic servants in the first flush of excitement uring that wet and depressing August in Melbourne. But by December large umbers had discovered the life of the digger was not for them and had drifted ack to their positions. The clerks and the timid men in secure places were as



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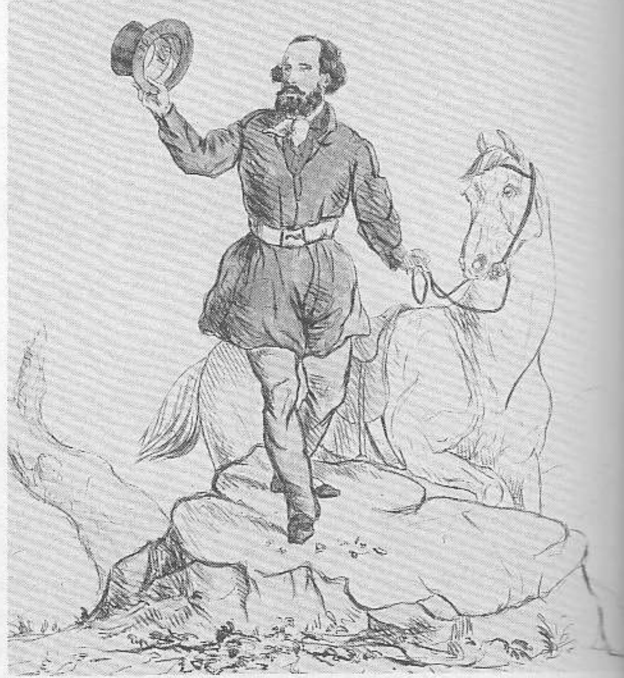


Above: The cover of a sheet-music song entitled 'I'm Off to the Diggings'.

Above right: Edward Hammond Hargraves, who returned from the Californian goldfields in 1851, was sure that gold must exist in Australia. Ridiculed by his friends, he set out to find gold, and did. His discovery was announced in May 1851.

reluctant as ever to risk their all on such a gamble. More and more the diggings attracted the adventurers and the men of brawn. By January of 1852 enough men had returned to accomplish the season's shearing, and by March there were enough men to bring in the harvest.

By October 1851 wise men on the fields were reporting that gold finding was a matter of pure chance. Others were shaking their heads at the drivelling idiots who expected to accumulate bags of gold with a minimum of labour. The latter soon drifted back to the cities, where they whined about their hardships. On the other hand those who were well-equipped, who worked hard for three or four months, and who put up with the hardships were often very successful. The men of brawn and muscle succeeded, while the educated and the refined succumbed before the ordeal. Conditions on the fields in the early days were primitive. The diggers lived in tents, with the cooking and other chores being done either by one of their team or by a wife. Tents and bark huts were of primitive construction. A few yards of calico stretched between a few poles provided all the protection most diggers needed against wind or rain. Nor did the diggers shave, as 'beardies' became the fashion for men who were pursuing their fortunes with single-mindedness. Slightly more substantial tents were put up by storekeepers, sly-grog-sellers, and, from time to time, prostitutes. For six days of the week the diggers laboured from sun-up to sundown, but on the Sabbath the secular-minded spruced themselves and the religious joined a group listening to a parson perched on a stump who led them in the singing of hymns or recited with them their belief in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

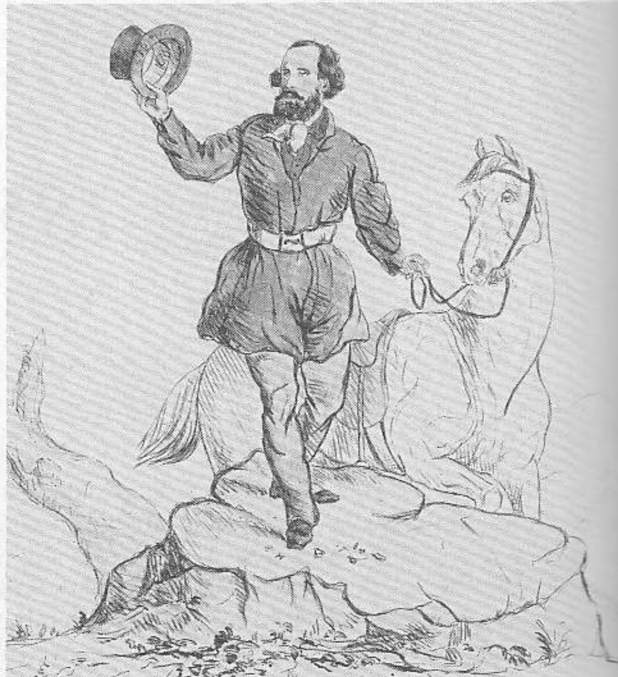
Most of the diggers worked in teams of four to six. One man picked and shovelled the earth out of the hole; two wheelbarrowed the earth from the hole to the water, where the other members of the team dollied or cradled it till any gold was separated from the earth. A team would probably get an ounce of gold in a day, for which they received probably three pounds from the merchants on the fields, or three pounds and six to ten shillings if they sold it direct to the government assayer in Melbourne or Sydney. Work began each day after an early breakfast of steak and chops washed down with huge cans

of tea. Then with pick, spade, cart, wheelbarrow and cradle the work began in earnest. At times a man with a stentorian voice might call the diggers to a meeting where the chairman elected by the diggers would mount the stump and urge them in their own interests to observe the regulations.

In the meantime life in the towns went stark, staring gold-mad. According to the Melbourne *Argus* young misses whose fathers had been to Bathurst began to appear in brand-new bonnets, perhaps carrying a parasol, and strut about like India-rubber dolls. Several once-respectable and sedate matrons came out on the streets in gaudy silk dresses and wafted strong perfume over passers-by. Successful diggers, together with women whose morals provided material for the sermons by the parsons, sat in low-class inns with a roll of notes in one hand and half a pint of gin in the other, treating all and sundry who came their way. A doctor in Geelong compared the madness to the symptoms of a fever where the patient displayed restlessness, anxiety, and a disinclination to follow his ordinary avocation. Such excitement could, he predicted, terminate in delirium. Yet for the most part order and decorum prevailed on the fields, while the towns quickly accustomed themselves to the sight of diggers squandering the fruits of hard labour on ephemeral pleasures.

By October the government of the new colony of Victoria had improvised a government for the goldfields. All fields were placed under the control of a chief commissioner, and under him there was an assistant commissioner for each field. The commissioners were responsible for the general enforcement of the regulations under which the goldfields were worked. No person was permitted to dig, search for, or remove gold on or from any land without paying one pound ten shillings per month for a licence which had to be shown to the commissioner on demand, or to any person acting under the authority of the government. For failure to produce a licence a digger was fined. Later in Victoria the licence fee was changed to one pound a month, two pounds for three months, four pounds for six months, or eight pounds for twelve months, while licences to carry on business as storekeepers were sold at fifteen pounds for three months, twenty-five pounds for six months, or fifty pounds for twelve months. The diggers and storekeepers grumbled and groused at the height of the fee. 'What's the use of the separation?' called one digger when a stump orator read out the regulations. Another digger referred contemptuously to this 'specimen of independent government', while yet another shouted in anger that the licence was more than the squatter paid for twenty square miles, adding that the squatter, unlike the digger, was not a poor man. The government, however, needed the fees to pay for the cost of administering the fields, and so long as the legislative council, which was stacked with anti-digger men, withheld other financial support, there was no alternative but to collect the fees.

In the beginning the administration of the goldfields worked tolerably well. Observers praised the orderliness of the fields, and British columnists beat their breasts and thanked the God of the Anglo-Saxons that they were not as the Yankees in California, where lynch law had ruled unashamedly. According to one observer, the people were very well-behaved when the 'material' (i.e. their social origins) was considered, though they did not like gentlemen amongst them. Deaths were frequent, both from natural disasters such as a falling tree or the wall of a hole falling in on a digger, or from apoplexy brought on by hard labour and the excitement that surrounded everyday life. Doctors and even parsons worked for gold, too. The bearded parson indulged in open-air preaching on the Sunday. Each night bands struck up lively tunes, and the yells, whoops and shrieks of the successful, or the drunken cries of the failures, made the night hideous. Thefts were few, and murders were even rarer, for



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Conditions on the goldfields were primitive and human tragedy frequent. Doctors on the fields were often quacks and used their surgical instruments for cutting up tobacco or spreading butter. Their fees ranged from one pound to visit a sick miner, to fifteen guineas for the local squatter.

by the end of the first summer the faint-hearted had departed, the parasites, the bludgers and sharpers had not arrived in numbers, and most diggers who remained were earning good wages, though not those fortunes that had first attracted them to the fields.

Where the officers of the law failed, diggers sometimes inflicted summary justice on those who stole from their neighbours. Early in 1852 some diggers on a Victorian field caught such a thief. While women shrieked, men shouted, and dogs barked, a rowdy discussion began on the appropriate punishment. Some wanted to tie him to a tree and lash him with a rope; others wanted to drown him, though they were somewhat at a loss to say where they would find enough water for the purpose; still others wanted to hurl him from a rock. A strange man asked, 'Has the culprit done anything worthy of murder?' Almost before the cries of 'No' had died away, the crowd rushed the culprit, hurried him off to a nearby gum-tree, stripped him, and whaled his bare back with a half-inch rope in such a manner that he could hardly walk. He hobbled off the goldfield into the bush, knowing that to return as a digger might cost him his life. Theft of water or gold was the only crime the diggers did not forgive, though they also judged a man harshly for any failure to endure the hardships of their daily lives.

By the end of 1851 the news of the discoveries had spread round the world. In England, Scotland, and Ireland gold-seekers scrambled for passages on ships bound for the Australian colonies. Australians who had joined the gold rush to California tried for passages home. Americans who believed the roaring days of '49 had vanished for ever took ship for Sydney or Melbourne. At the same time the British government began to ponder the effects on colonial policy of the discovery of gold, though it was not until December 1852, over a year after the early reports reached London, that they announced their decision in a dispatch to the governor of New South Wales. Numerous public meetings and all the legislative councils in the colonies had declared themselves strongly against transportation. 'It would appear a solecism,' the Secretary of State said, 'to convey offenders, at the public expense, with the intention of

at no distant time setting them free, to the immediate vicinity of those very goldfields which thousands of honest labourers are in vain trying to reach.' In meeting the wishes of the colonists to end transportation the Secretary of State expressed the hope that they might recognize in it the desire of the government to consult their wishes and to strengthen their loyalty to the crown and to the British Empire. So the discovery of gold finally ended transportation to eastern Australia. The last convicts arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1853. Approximately 168,000 convicts had been transported to Australia, including approximately 10,000 to Western Australia, between 1850 and 1868.

By the use of convict labour the Australian colonies reaped the advantages of semi-slave labour in transporting a civilization without handing on to posterity either the social problems or the sense of guilt that the use of slave or semi-slave labour often engenders. Opinion remains divided on the other effects of the use of convicts. Some, rather fancifully, have traced the Australian passion for equality to the sense of community in worthlessness amongst the convicts, as though the convicts perceived darkly the spiritual truth that he that is down need fear no fall. Others, pointing to the great disproportion of males to females in the early days of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, have traced to the convicts the beginning of a male-dominated society in Australia, from which developed the social habits of men and women collecting in different groups on social occasions and all the humiliations both great and small to which men subject women in Australia. Others have traced the attitude of defiance and hostility to the police back to the days when the police, who were often ex-convicts, taunted and mocked at the men in servitude. Others again have commented on the adverse effects on the large landowners of the use of convicts, to which they have traced the supercilious arrogance with which the upper classes have treated all members of the community. The use of convict labour, the same observers argued, began the alienation of the upper class of landowners from the rest of the community. But on that day in August 1853 when it was announced that transportation had ceased few paused to ponder the legacy of the convict labour system. Rejoicings and prayers of thanksgiving were offered in Sydney, while in Hobart a high festival was held on 10 August, which the inhabitants celebrated as a voluntary holiday. To mark the occasion the legislative council of Van Diemen's Land in the following year prayed to Her Majesty that the island might be called Tasmania in honour of the first European discoverer. On 21 July, 1855, an order in council in London proclaimed that from 1 January 1856 the said colony of Van Diemen's Land shall be called and known by the name of Tasmania.

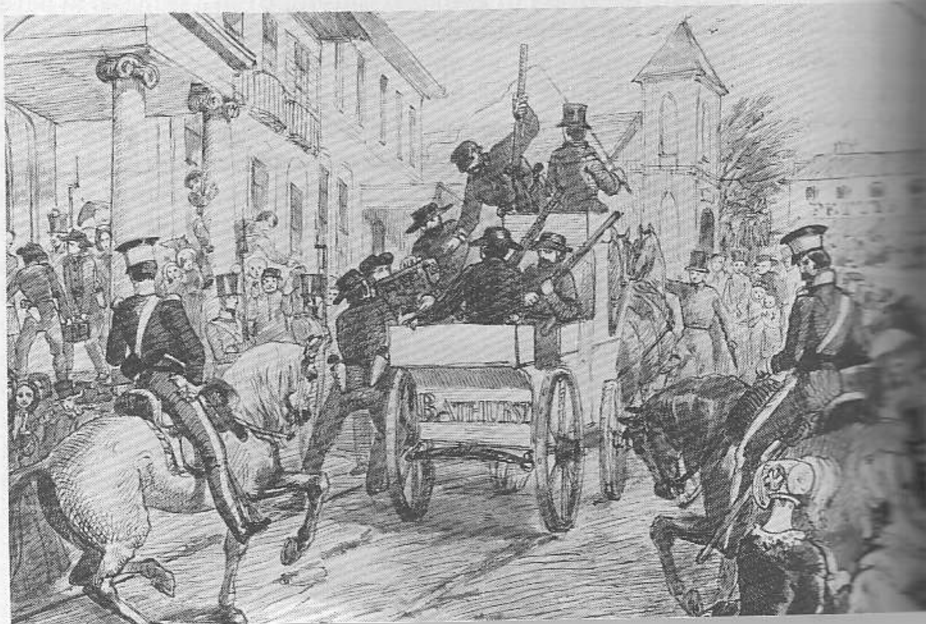
At the same time the discovery of gold was causing British officials to have second thoughts on the future constitutions of the Australian colonies. By the end of 1852 the Secretary of State accepted the view that the most loyal, respectable, and influential members of the community wanted responsible self-government. He was influenced, too, by the discovery of gold, which would, he believed, stimulate the advance of population, wealth, and material prosperity with unparalleled rapidity. He therefore invited the legislative councils of New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, and Victoria to draft new constitutions and submit them for approval and ratification by Parliament. Those councils promptly appointed committees to draft such constitutions. It was during the debates in the legislative councils, in discussions in the press, and at public meetings that there emerged two quite different views on who should exercise political power in Australia.

All agreed that power to legislate on customs, disposal of crown lands, and, indeed, on all local questions should be vested in the colonial parliaments. But there the agreement ended. One group, representing the large landowners

and conservative opinion in the cities, wanted the constitution to reflect the large interests in the community. They wanted a constitution in perpetuity for the colony, not one that could be set aside, altered, and shattered to pieces by every blast of popular opinion; they wanted, as Wentworth put it to the legislative council of New South Wales, 'a conservative one—a British, not a Yankee constitution'. To achieve this Wentworth proposed at first that the upper house should be composed of those holding hereditary titles, but he was laughed to scorn by the local wits, who talked with effect of a 'Bunyip Aristocracy' and suggested scurrilous titles for those whose wealth had been created by convict labour—James Macarthur would be called the Earl of Camden and have a rum keg on his heraldic emblem. So Wentworth compromised and suggested a nominated upper house of men of wealth, property, and education, 'men,' he said, 'not raised from any particular section of the community, but from every class that has the energy to aspire to rank and honour'. As a further safeguard for conservative interests he suggested a clause by which the constitution could only be amended by a two-thirds majority in both the assembly and the council.

The liberals in New South Wales were not happy with these proposals. They wanted a constitution in which population rather than the interests of property and education were represented in any parliament. At public meetings their speakers howled at and derided the Wentworth proposals. When W. R. Piddington, a liberal, came forward at a public meeting in Sydney in August 1853 and asked the people whether they submitted to be robbed of their rights, they shouted 'No'. When Piddington went on to mention the Wentworth proposal to create a colonial nobility with hereditary privileges, there were tremendous groans. 'Colonists,' Piddington concluded to loud cheers, 'speak now, or for ever hold your peace.' But power then rested in the pastoral interest, the city interest, and the official interest rather than with the people. So Wentworth won the day, and a bill went off for approval by parliament in which conservative interests were protected by a nominee legislative council, the two-thirds majority amending clause, plural voting, and property qualifications for electors to the legislative assembly.

In Victoria, by contrast, the conflict between pastoralists and bourgeoisie was not so sharp. There was less of that confrontation between conservative and liberal and more of a spirit of compromise between the two groups to resist the radical demands of the gold-diggers. The colonial secretary in the legislative council of Victoria declared in December 1853 that it would be a very poor policy to dam up the flood then setting in, saying that it would be a truer policy to direct that stream into the proper channels, and to develop



Crowds line a Sydney street as the Government escort and mail containing gold arrive at the Treasury.

properly that democratic element. It was the Tocqueville plea for a democracy guided by the educated and the intelligent rather than the opinions of any mob. He wanted the legislative assembly to represent both 'interests' and 'people', and the legislative council to represent the fixed and settled interests of the colony. So the legislative council sent off for approval by Parliament a constitution in which there was plural voting for both houses, a property qualification for voting for both houses, and a power to amend the constitution by an absolute majority of both houses. A similar constitution was sent by the legislative council of Tasmania.

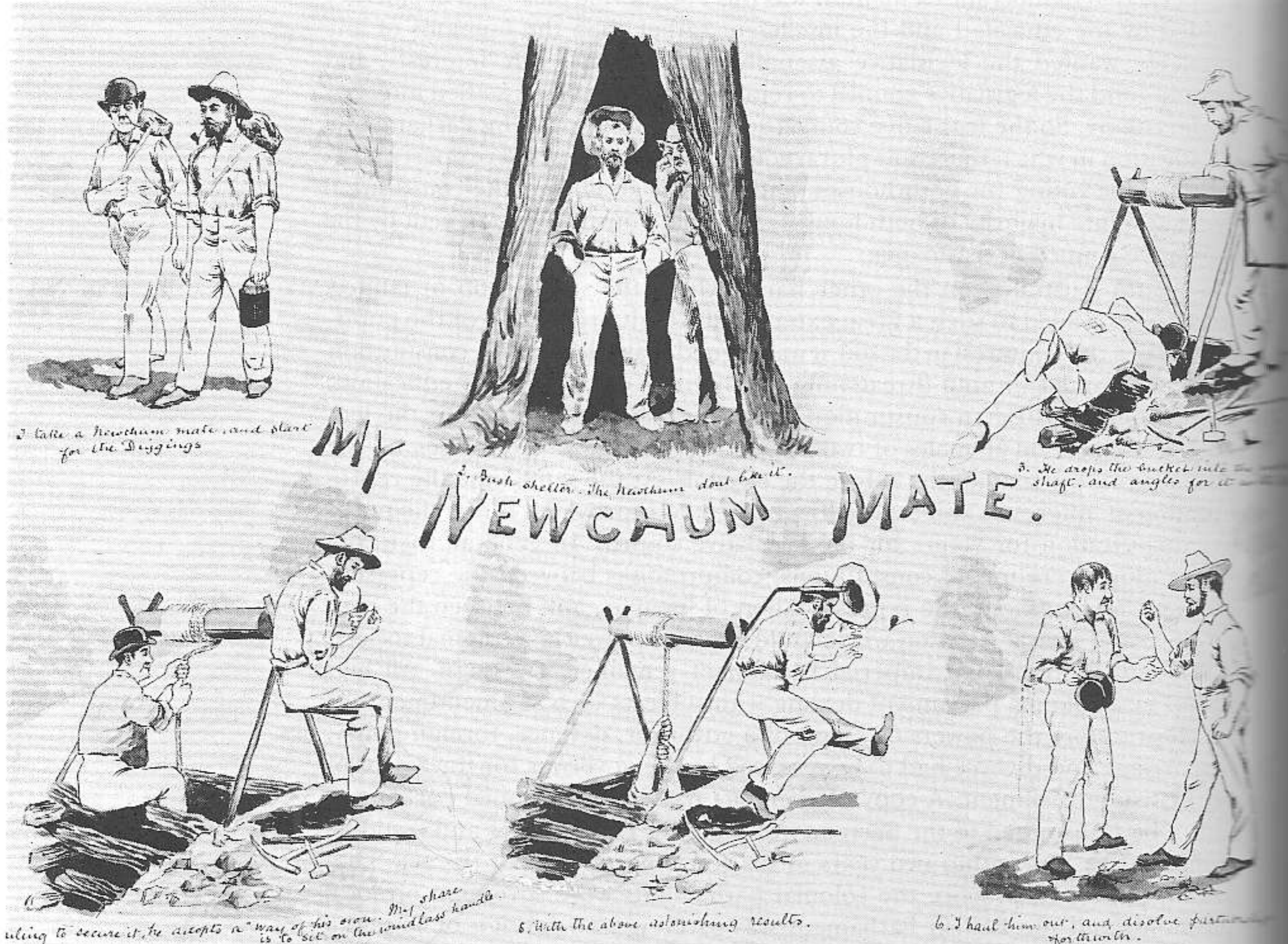
In South Australia, on the other hand, where the subdivision of landed property prevailed to such a great extent that a high proportion of the population had a fixed interest in the soil, it was argued that a democratic constitution could be adopted without threatening the interests of property or education. So the South Australian constitution conferred the right to vote for the legislative assembly on all males of twenty-one years of age who had been on the electoral roll for six months before the election. At the same time the representation of 'interests', and especially property, was provided for by the property qualification for voters for the legislative council. In general, then, the constitutions were mixed constitutions, compromises between the representation of 'interests' and the representation of 'people', and between the conservative and liberal views on who should exercise power in a colonial society. In the constitutions, the Imperial Parliament remained sovereign. All bills passed by a colonial parliament dealing with subjects such as amendments of the constitution, the powers or salary of a governor, defence, foreign policy, or marriage and divorce had to be reserved by the governor for the assent of the British government. A copy of every act passed by a colonial parliament had to be transmitted to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and could be disallowed by him within two years of his receiving the text of the act. That was on paper. In practice the colonial parliaments were sovereign on local questions, and the British Parliament was sovereign on foreign or imperial questions. So the colonial parliaments of New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia and Victoria received self-government on local questions and responsible government, i.e. the political and legal responsibility of the executive to the legislature, in the constitution acts passed for those colonies by Parliament between 1855 and 1856.

In the meantime observers in New South Wales and Victoria were commenting on the effect of the life on the goldfields on social values. One man in the Bathurst fields wrote at the end of 1851:

> Nothing indeed can have a more levelling effect on society than the power of digging gold, for it can be done, for a time at least, without any capital but that of health and strength; and the man innured to toil, however ignorant, is on more equal terms with the educated and refined in a pursuit involving so much personal hardship.

By 1853 another English observer noted that on the Victorian goldfields all the aristocratic feelings and associations of the old country were at once annihilated. Plebeianism of the rankest and, in many instances, of the lowest kind prevailed. It was not what you had been but what you were that was the criterion. If you could not work, you were of no use, and would infallibly sink in the social rank in a society in which physical activity and industry were made the highest standards of a man's abilities for getting on in the world. Victoria, he concluded, had become 'an equalising colony of gold and beef and mutton'.

By the end of 1853 the decline in the income of the alluvial digger caused him to perceive a wider significance in the difference between the equality and mateship of the goldfields and the inequality and political and social privilege that prevailed in the society that surrounded him. By the end of 1853 the



My Newchum Mate.

stump orators on the goldfields were beginning to address their audiences on wider issues. They were beginning to talk of the three great grievances of the diggers: the licence grievance, the land grievance, and the political grievance. They complained that it was beyond their capacity to pay the licence fee, and that the police were unduly severe and tyrannical when searching for unlicensed persons. Diggers without licences were treated like felons, marched along the highway in charge of the mounted police, exposed to the gaze of the populace, and, if unable to pay the fee, put into a cell with thieves, horse-stealers, lags, and murderers amidst filth and vermin. Others were chained to posts where they were exposed to the sun and the ridicule of the rather insensitive troopers. All this was happening in colonies with a tradition of implacable hatred for the police by the working classes. Knots of diggers were heard murmuring that in California this state of things would soon be altered, or grumbling to others about the evils of a police-ridden country. They were grieved, too, by the lack of opportunity of acquiring land on reasonable terms. Some wanted to invest their earnings from gold in land and found it was impossible to do so. They were also grieved by their lack of political rights. As they saw it they had contributed to the wealth and greatness of the colony without enjoying any voice whatever in its administration.

On the night of 6 October, 1854, James Scobie was found murdered on the goldfield of Ballarat. The proprietor of the Eureka Hotel, James Bentley, his wife, and John Farrell were tried for the murder and found not guilty by the magistrates. The diggers, sensing in this acquittal the corruption and bribery in high places that plagued their class, gathered outside the hotel and burnt

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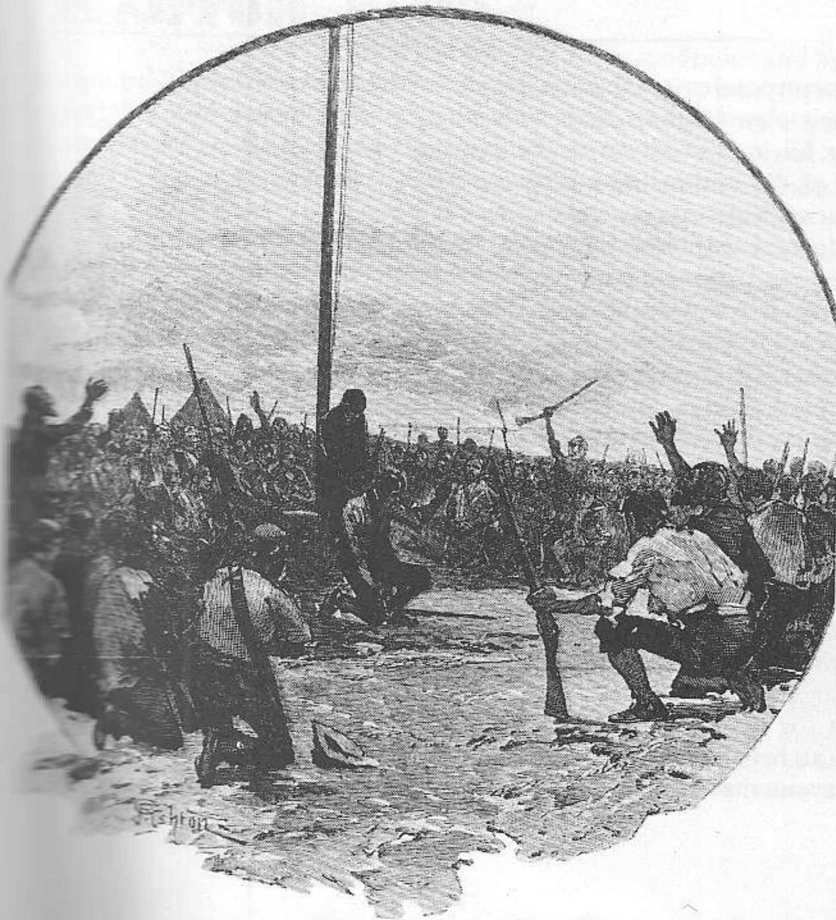
it to the ground. From that day the diggers began to hold a series of mass meetings in which the demand for justice against the murderers of Scobie was soon swallowed up in the demand for the redress of grievances. At Bakery Hill on 11 November a mass meeting of 10,000 diggers joined in a reform league and pledged themselves to work for (1) a full and fair representation; (2) manhood suffrage; (3) no property qualification for members of the legislative council; (4) payment of members; (5) short duration of parliament. In addition they demanded an immediate change in the management of the goldfields by the dismissal of the commissioners, and the abolition the diggers' and store-keepers' licence tax. The response of the government in Melbourne was to dispatch more troops to the goldfields and to organize more licence hunts.

On 29 November the diggers held a mass meeting that ended on a note of enthusiasm and passion when the diggers, inflamed by the stump orators, burnt their licences in a huge bonfire. With incredible folly the commissioner chose the next day for a general licence hunt, which precipitated a riot and the reading of the riot act. The more fanatical among the diggers then began to arm and to erect a stockade at Eureka in Ballarat, behind which they drilled. At night, when the flag of the Southern Cross was raised over the stockade, they solemnly took an oath of loyalty. On the morning of Sunday, 3 December, when all but one hundred and fifty diggers had become discouraged and left the stockade, the commander of the troops called on the remainder to surrender. When they refused, he ordered the troops to charge. After fifteen or twenty minutes the whole affair was over. Twenty-five of the diggers were killed and thirty wounded, while three privates and one officer of the troops were killed and eleven privates wounded. When the soldiers had once tasted blood, they became violent. The mounted troops began to mangle the diggers till they were stopped by their commanding officers. The police also bullied



Administering the oath at Eureka Stockade in 1854. On 29 November the diggers at Ballarat held a mass meeting and burnt their licences. Next day, the commissioners held a general licence hunt, which precipitated a riot. The diggers erected Eureka stockade and solemnly took an oath of loyalty.

NOTICE!!

Recent events at the Mines at Ballaarat render it necessary for all true subjects of the Queen, and all strangers who have received hospitality and protection under Her flag, to assist in preserving

Social Order

AND

Maintaining the Supremacy of the Law.

The question now agitated by the disaffected is not whether an enactment can be amended or ought to be repealed, but whether the Law is, or is not, to be administered in the name of HER MAJESTY. Anarchy and confusion must ensue unless those who cling to the Institutions and the soil of their adopted Country step prominently forward.

His Excellency relies upon the loyalty and sound feeling of the Colonists.

All faithful subjects, and all strangers who have had equal rights extended to them, are therefore called upon to

ENROL THEMSELVES

and be prepared to assemble at such places as may be appointed by the Civic Authorities in Melbourne and Geelong, and by the Magistrates in the several Towns of the Colony.

CHAS. HOTHAM.

BY AUTHORITY: JOHN FERRES, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE.

A notice calling on true subjects of Queen Victoria to assist in preserving social order.

the correspondents of the newspapers on the goldfields for publishing accounts of their abominations against the diggers. The leader of the diggers, Peter Lalor, having lost an arm in the fighting, hid for a season to escape the vengeance of the authorities and reappeared years later as a conservative in the Victorian legislative assembly.

It looked as though the appeal by the governor for all true subjects of the Queen, and all strangers who had received hospitality and protection under her flag, to assist in preserving social order and maintaining the supremacy of the law had triumphed over the forces of rebellion and the demands of the radicals. The government hastened to redress the grievances of the diggers. A miner's right of one pound per year replaced the hated licence; an export duty on gold of two and sixpence per ounce was imposed to raise money for the administration of the fields; the administration of the goldfields was changed with the substitution of wardens for commissioners; the goldfields were made part of electoral districts, and the possession of a miner's right became a qualification for voting for the legislative assembly in Victoria. Once again the Anglo-Saxon seemed to have silenced the radical by acceding to the demands of the moderates. But the idea of Eureka was to prove more tenacious than the original defenders of the stockade. In the 1890s the alluvial diggers at Kalgoorlie in Western Australia used Eureka as their inspiration in another fight for the rights of diggers. At the turn of the century the poets of the radicals began to write of Eureka as the origin of all the democratic and radical achievements since that time. Victor Daley wrote:

Yet, ere the year was over,
Freedom rolled in like a flood:
They gave us all we asked for—
When we asked for it in blood.

At the same time Henry Lawson wrote in his ballad 'Eureka':

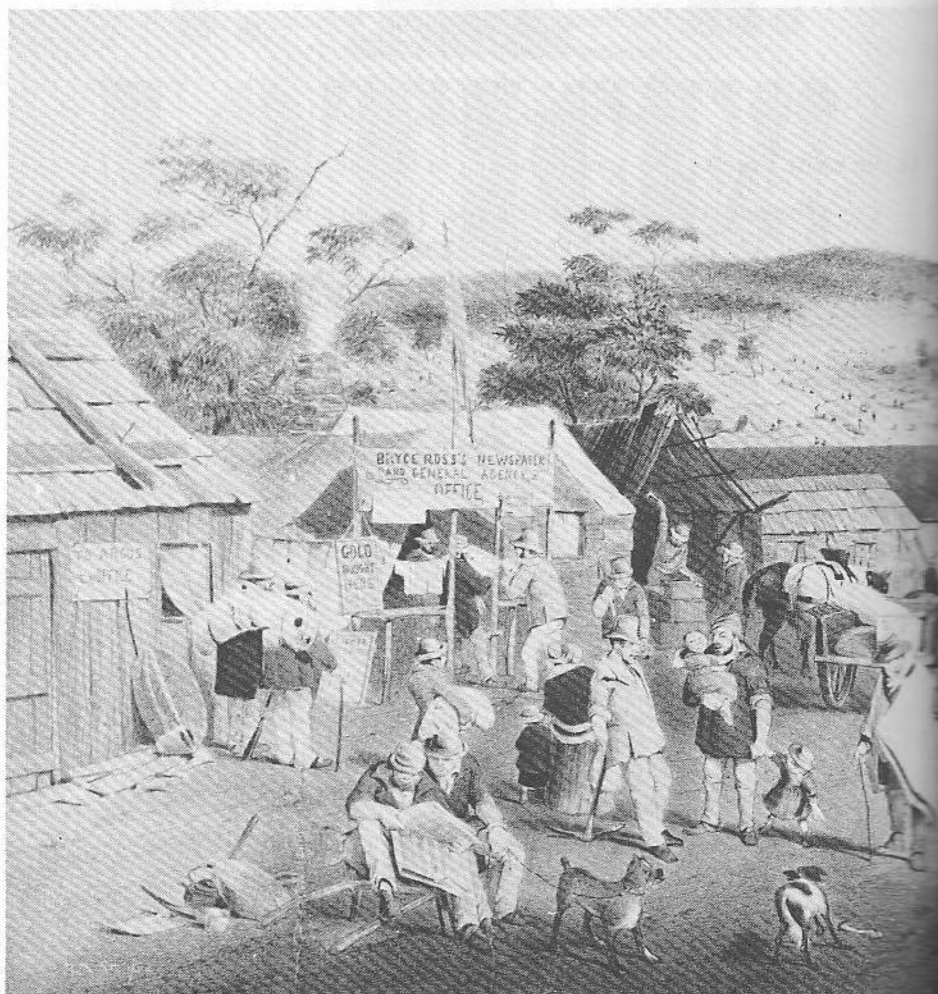
But not in vain those diggers died. Their comrades may rejoice
For o'er the voice of tyranny is heard the people's voice;
It says: 'Reform your rotten law, the diggers' wrongs make right,
Or else with them, our brothers now, we'll gather to the fight.'

In this way Eureka became a part of the tradition of those of the Australian people who viewed their history as a steady progress from the dark and bloody days of the birth-stain to their great and glorious future when the people would be liberated from capitalist and imperialist enslavement.

But no such vision crossed the mind of the diggers chafing under the indignity and ignominy of the licence tax. Once that indignity was removed they were soon caught up in other obsessions. The first of these was the Chinese. They began to arrive in the goldfields of Victoria in large numbers during the years 1855-56, when the income of the alluvial diggers was sinking to that of unskilled manual workers, and when gold was being found at such depths that gold mining by companies, employing diggers as wage earners, was beginning to replace alluvial digging by teams of four to six independent diggers. The Chinese came from southern China, generally bound to some headman to work under his orders to pay debts in the homeland. They arrived in groups of six or seven hundred, each man with a pole and two baskets and a hat like the top of a haystack nearly a yard across. In the beginning their manners were those of the old world; the young respected the old, and would not sit down till the aged bade them. But as one cynic observed: 'I expect they would lose their good manners when they got colonised.'

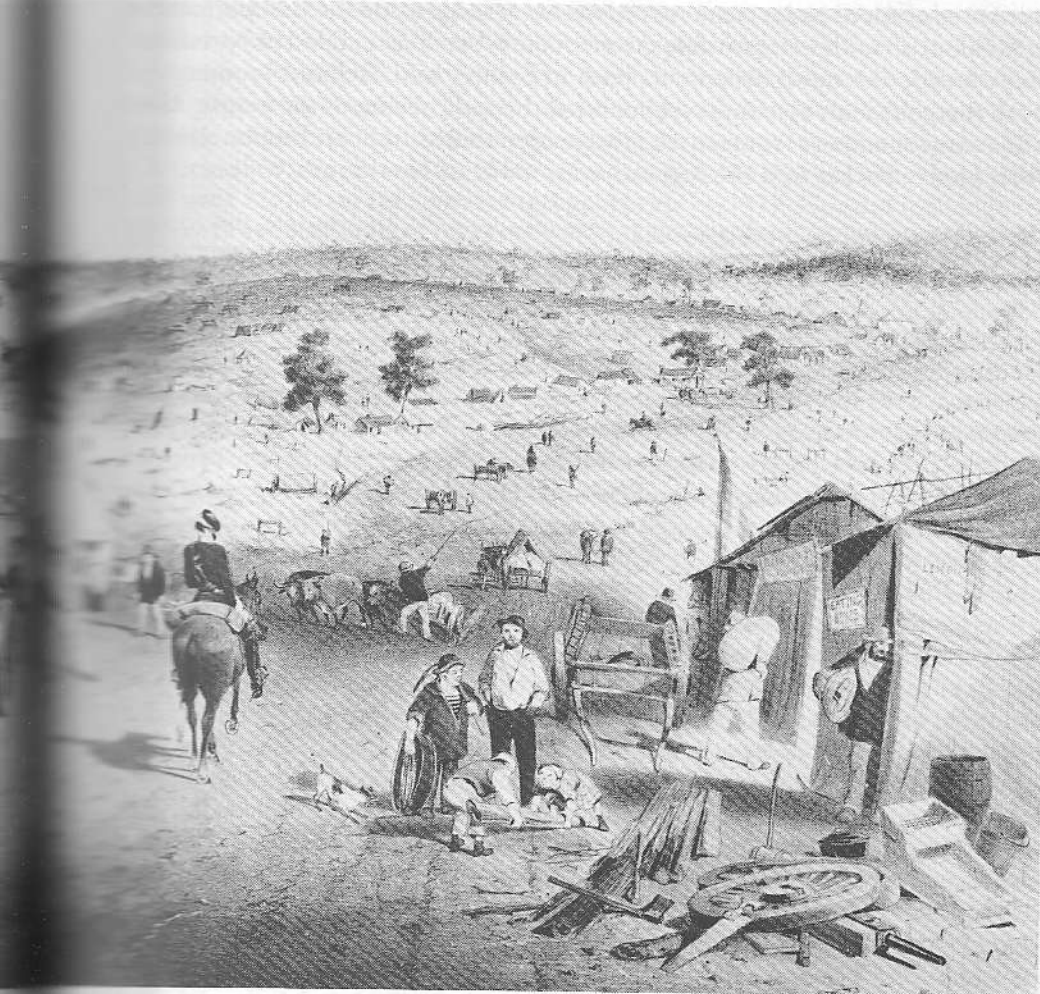
By 1857 there were 23,623 Chinese on the Victorian goldfields and by 1861 there were 24,062, of whom only six were women. At that time there were 203,966 Europeans on the fields in Victoria, of whom 130,535 were men and 73,431 were women. By 1857 the Europeans both in the towns and on the goldfields had become afraid of the Chinese. John Pascoe Fawkner asked the legislative council of Victoria to appoint a committee to frame a bill to control the flood of Chinese settling in the colony, and 'effectually prevent the Gold Fields of Australia Felix from becoming the property of the Emperor of China and of the Mongolian and Tartar hordes of Asia'. The diggers accused the Chinese of immorality caused by the absence of women, of not contributing to the wealth of the country but on the contrary exporting all their wealth to China, and of crimes of great magnitude. But the principal grievance was the great diminution in the yield of gold and the lowering of the price of labour. The Europeans took fright. The Chinese retorted that they thought the English very kind and were delighted by the mercy manifested. They said:

We Chinamen who are here get no gold only by working, headings and tailings, and from old holes abandoned by Europeans, and from which we can but barely make a living. We having only the refuse cannot make as much as Europeans, but with their chances we should not be so poor. As soon as we get a little money we will try to get home to our aged parents, for our ancient books teach that we must look after our parents. . . . Now we hear you are going to put a tax of a pound a month and we much sorry we do not know what to do. . . . We pray your Honourable House will feel for the poor man, and not exact this money, and then all the Chinese will be happy and ever honor the Governor and Legislators and never forget those who are so kind to poor people, and when we get to our own country we will ever speak in honor of such rulers of poor people.



The shanty town of Mount Alexander goldfields in Victoria. These fields yielded nearly £3 million worth of surface gold in six months.

The Europeans were not moved by such tugs at the heart strings. The parliaments of New South Wales and Victoria passed legislation to restrict the entry of Chinese and to discriminate against those resident on the goldfields. Undaunted, the Chinese began to land in South Australia and walk overland in single file in groups of six to seven hundred from Adelaide to the Victorian goldfields. On the fields the Anglo-Saxon diggers took the law into their own hands. On the Buckland River in Victoria in 1857 there was an ugly riot against the Chinese. At Lambing Flat near Young in New South Wales on 30 June, 1861, the storm of anti-Chinese feeling broke with astonishing violence. To cries of 'Roll up', upwards of a thousand men armed with bludgeons and pick-handles assembled round a 'No Chinese' standard. Forming themselves into a rough line, to the accompaniment of martial music supplied by a local band, the men rode to the Chinese quarters at Lambing Flat, shouting, yelling, and singing to high heaven of their undying hatred for the Chinese. These monsters on horseback, as they were described by the correspondent of the *Sydney Morning Herald,* armed still with their bludgeons and their whips, took hold of the pigtails of the Chinese, pulled them towards the rump of their horses, where they cut off their pigtails and left them to the fury of others who surrounded them. One Chinese boy went down on his knees and, with tears running down his cheeks, begged for mercy. A ruffian gave him a blow sufficient to kill a giant, knocking him to the ground. A European woman married to a Chinese was assaulted, and her clothing and that of her children was torn to pieces



while her tormentors took counsel on how to rape her, only to be foiled by the restraining influence of other Europeans. All day the outrage went on till police and troops, summoned from neighbouring districts by the bush telegraph, arrived to restore order. In September juries at Goulburn acquitted all the Europeans charged with riot, which, wrote the *Sydney Morning Herald,* was 'a fitting wind up for so disgraceful a commencement with which it is so perfectly in keeping'. With the decline in alluvial digging in the next decade the agitation against the Chinese declined, only to be fanned again to white heat by the passions roused during the last quarter of the century. The diggers had found a scapegoat for their subterranean passions; in time the minds of large sections of the community would be moved by the same emotions.

Experience on the goldfields infected the diggers' ideal of mateship with the poison of race hatred, but the levelling and egalitarian tendencies present before the discovery of gold continued to be strengthened by events. By the end of 1854 the diggers had begun their campaign for political equality. At Beechworth in Victoria in October 1855 the diggers' candidate for election shod his horse with gold shoes and led off a drunken and rowdy procession down the main street to a mass meeting in favour of votes for all. During 1856 reform associations were formed in Melbourne and Sydney and on the goldfields, and the members pledged themselves to work for manhood suffrage, perennial parliaments, no property qualifications for members, no compensation to the squatters, abolition of state aid to religion, and compulsory free

secular education. Noisy demonstrations occurred outside the first parliament in Melbourne under responsible government when it assembled in November 1856. Inside the new parliaments both in Sydney and Melbourne, members from the goldfields electorates demanded the radicalizing of the constitution, while some members from city electorates demanded its liberalization. In May 1858 Henry Parkes told the legislative assembly of New South Wales:

> Here all men, comparatively speaking, were on a level. . . . In principle, this country was essentially democratic, and the difference of grade, so far as it went amongst us, would be laughed at by men in the Mother country. They were bound to establish their institutions in accordance with the spirit of the country.

He therefore supported the proposal to introduce manhood suffrage for the legislative assembly, a distribution of electorates to provide representation of people rather than interests, a vote by ballot, the abolition of the two-thirds majority for amendments to the constitution, and the abolition of the property qualification for members of the assembly. He believed in the representation of majorities and the career open to talent, rather than birth or privilege.

Both in New South Wales and Victoria this bourgeois liberalism was strongly opposed by the large landowners or squatters, who continued to defend the principle of the representation of interests. They wanted the two houses to represent the main interests in society—the landed interest, the city interest, the gold interest (pained though they were to admit its existence), and an educated or professional interest. S. A. Donaldson, for example, argued in the legislative assembly of New South Wales that to concede such demands would convert the legislative assembly into a convention as dangerous, as damnable, and as destructive of property and of liberty as that which met in Paris in 1789. He believed the proposals of the liberals would convert a hitherto prosperous colony into a home of destitution and drive both credit and capital from it. In the legislative assembly of New South Wales Daniel Deniehy made an impassioned plea for special representation of the University of Sydney on the ground that men of education might soften the otherwise harsh materialist spirit of a colonial society; but the advocates of government by the majority defeated his proposal, and the advocate of sweetness and light was buried later in a pauper's grave, while the colony of New South Wales swept on over wave after wave of material prosperity.

In both New South Wales and Victoria between 1856 and 1858 the liberals succeeded in introducing manhood suffrage, vote by ballot, a redistribution of electoral districts, and the abolition of the property qualification for members of the assembly. The interests of property were protected by plural voting, by the nominated legislative council in New South Wales, and by the high property qualification for voters for the legislative council in Victoria. One by-product of this principle of majority rule was the decision of the British government to accede to the requests of the inhabitants of the northern districts to implement a clause in the Australian Colonies Government Act and proclaim them a separate colony with the name of Queensland. By letters patent of June 1859 the boundaries of the new colony were defined by an Order in Council. In the same month the new colony was given a constitution the same as that of New South Wales—that is, the Constitution Act of 1856 as amended by such acts as the Electoral Districts Act passed by the New South Wales parliament between 1856 and 1859.

While these changes were occurring in political institutions and values, the material setting of the colonies was changing rapidly. Between December 1851 and December 1861 the total population increased from 437,665 to 1,168,149. In Victoria alone the population increased from 97,489 to 539,764 within those

years; South Australia—66,538 to 130,812; Tasmania—69,187 to 89,908; Western Australia—7,186 to 15,936; New South Wales—197,265 to 357,362. Queensland had 34,367 in 1861. The sudden increase did not change the pre-gold proportion between those from the United Kingdom and those from Europe or the Americas. The one significant change was the creation of a Chinese minority, of whom there were just over 24,000 in Victoria by 1861 and over 13,000 on the Queensland goldfields by 1877. Nor did it change the proportion of Catholic to Protestant in the colonies, for Catholics had approximately 23 per cent of the total population in 1861.

The discovery of gold permanently influenced the history of the several colonies. It raised Victoria from a district of New South Wales to a position where in twenty years it challenged the mother colony in population, production of wealth, and prestige in the United Kingdom. On the other hand failure to discover gold in Tasmania except in negligible quantities put an end to the dream of its free settlers that Hobart might develop into the Athens of the South Seas. Instead, Hobart and its hinterland sank back into provincial lethargy, as history or destiny passed it by. South Australians, too, failed to find gold in their colony, and in the beginning paid the price by losing a large portion of their working-class population to the Victorian goldfields. But by the use of those same gifts with which they had begun to turn the hard stones of their native land into standing water, they turned this new flintstone into a springing well. The Bullion Assay Act, which was passed by their legislative council early in 1852, prevented speculation in gold in Adelaide unless the proceeds were used for investment in South Australia. This promoted the shipment of merchandise to Melbourne and the return of gold dust in payment, gave a strong inducement to the South Australian diggers to return to the colony with their gold, and secured to the farmer a good price for his produce. By this device South Australia not only weathered the storm, but so exploited the situation as to confer on her, as Governor Young pointed out in 1852, 'much of the advantage, unalloyed with any of the inconvenience, attendant on the locality of a gold field'.

The increase in population began a boom in the building trades in the cities. As housing accommodation in Melbourne had not kept pace with the demand in the decade preceding the discovery of gold, hard-pressed builders improvised and used weatherboard or canvas rather than stone. In the gold decade weatherboarding and canvas again became the order of the day in Melbourne. Temporary accommodation became permanent, and the improvisations to meet an emergency set the standards of domestic housing for the working classes and the petty bourgeoisie for the next two decades. The principle of fair average quality had come to the cities.

At the same time improvements in transport and communication created opportunities for a more intensive exploitation of the wealth of the country. In 1853 G. F. Train, an American businessman who had come to Melbourne to exploit the possibilities on the goldfields, imported from America a coach with springs, which rapidly improved transportation between Melbourne and Sydney and the fields. In 1854 the first steam train ran from Williamstown to Melbourne; in 1855 suburban trains began running in Sydney. By 1862 the Victorian government had built railways from Melbourne to the Ballarat goldfield and to the Bendigo goldfield. This latter was extended to Echuca on the Murray River in 1864 in an attempt to attract the wool and wheat of the Riverina and the wool brought down from the western lands of New South Wales along the Darling and the Murray to the port at Melbourne rather than to Sydney. In October 1856 the Lord Mayor of London presided at an elegant dinner to wish bon voyage to the *Istanbool,* a combined sail and steam ship that was

expected to reduce the voyage from London to Melbourne to sixty-five days, and thus, as the Lord Mayor pointed out, by a combination of sailing and steaming they would have arrived at perfection and be able to get to and from Australia in the shortest time and at the cheapest price. On 19 October, 1858, telegraphic communication was completed between Sydney and Melbourne and Adelaide.

So the discovery of gold became the occasion for, if not the cause of, material progress and a strong movement toward democracy. It was this juxtaposition of material progress and democracy that swept a wave of philistine optimism over the inhabitants of the Australian colonies. The Melbourne *Age* wrote on 13 May, 1858:

> . . . let us recall the established fact that self-government is by incomparable odds the most potent engine for developing and elevating the intellectual and moral condition of the people—surpassing all other machinery for the purpose by as long odds as the steam-engine surpasses all anterior methods of locomotion.

In simple truth, the *Age* went on, the people of Victoria were far better adapted for this prerogative of a civilized man than any one of the most refined nations of the Old World. The people of Victoria were, as a matter of fact, the picked men of Europe, and as a consequence, intelligence, enterprise, energy and spirit were immeasurably more universal here.

Not all of the colonists' energy or thinking was devoted to the pursuit of material gain. In December 1853 the Anglican cathedral in Melbourne, St Paul's, was opened for divine service, and large and attentive congregations attended at both matins and evensong. When the news reached Melbourne that on 8 December, 1854, Pius IX had proclaimed it as a dogma of Catholic faith that 'the most Blessed Virgin Mary from the very first instant of her conception, by a unique grace and privilege of Almighty God, through the merits of Jesus Christ the Saviour of mankind, was preserved free from all stain of original sin', the Catholic community sent a medal struck from Victorian gold to His Holiness to commemorate what was to them a momentous event in human history.

Then at very end of the decade an event occurred that might well have pricked the bubble of colonial conceit and the colonists' belief in moral and spiritual progress following in the wake of democracy and material progress. For more than a decade the governments of South Australia and Victoria had taken an interest in the possibility of finding suitable grazing land between the centre of Australia and the Gulf of Carpentaria. In 1860, somewhat to the surprise of informed opinion, the Victorian government chose Robert O'Hara Burke to lead such an expedition. Burke was a man in whom nature had so

The lavishly equipped expedition of Robert O'Hara Burke ended in tragedy. Burke and William Wills and party set off in 1860 to seek grazing lands between the centre of Australia and the Gulf of Carpentaria.

mixed up the elements that at the very moment when he reached a pinnacle of human achievement his weaknesses brought him to destruction. As a young man in Ireland he had entered the army with dreams of achieving honour and glory on the field of battle, but when the Crimean War broke out, Burke was serving as a police inspector on the Victorian goldfields, and by the time he reached Europe the fighting had ceased. His Victorian expedition, which was lavishly equipped, left Melbourne in 1860 at the height of the enthusiasm and confidence that made it seem that earth and sky would bend to the wishes of the colonists of Victoria. The explorers travelled to Menindee on the Darling, then to a depot on Cooper's Creek, from where Burke and three others, Wills, Gray, and King, set out for the Gulf of Carpentaria, leaving a small party at the depot under Brahe to wait for their return.

With a display of that energy and skill that were efficient servants of his passion for worldly recognition and honour, Burke drove his party to the Gulf of Carpentaria by February 1861. But then things began to go wrong. On the way back, when Gray began to display signs of exhaustion, Burke, who believed Gray was feigning illness to justify getting more than his share of their provisions, thrashed him soundly. Seventeen days later Gray died, and Burke, overwhelmed with remorse and guilt, pushed on in the hope of finding fresh supplies and human companionship at the depot. But Brahe had struck out just that morning, leaving behind a bottle below the word 'Dig' carved on a tree. So with their legs almost paralysed by their severe travelling and privation Burke, Wills and King paused at the depot at Cooper's Creek till they were refreshed.

Then with incredible folly Burke decided to set out for Mount Hopeless in South Australia rather than follow their old track to Menindee on the Darling. With almost equal folly he buried a note for Brahe in the bottle but did not change the sign 'Dig' on the tree. When Brahe's party returned after Burke, Wills and King had left the depot, they did not dig up the bottle and so assumed that Burke's party had not returned. In the meantime the three explorers had become so weak from their diet of nardoo root and crow that Wills returned again to the Cooper's Creek depot, found the bottle untouched, and concluded that Brahe had not been back. By the time Wills rejoined Burke and King, Burke had been so weakened by his privations that he died, asking Wills to place a pistol in his hand so that presumably he might die as an officer and a gentleman. A few days later Wills died. King was kept alive by the Aborigines and was eventually found by one of the search parties sent to investigate what had happened to the expedition.

When the news reached Melbourne, some referred to Burke and Wills as two of the most gallant spirits who had ever sacrificed life for the extension of science or the cause of mankind. Squatters began seriously to contemplate the occupation of Burke's land south of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Within a few years, some said, the journey from Melbourne to Carpentaria would be made with comparative facility by passing from station to station. In the last days of his life Wills had written in his diary: 'It is a great consolation, at least, in this position of ours, to know that we have done all we could, and that our deaths will rather be the result of the mismanagement of others than any rash acts of our own.' It was beyond the range of believers in progress and human perfectibility to ponder what came from within a man to lead him to his destruction, or to ponder over the combinations of chance and circumstance that cheated a man like Burke, whose heart was hot within him, of what he most desperately craved. Twenty years later, when the voice of the nationalists was heard in the land, they remembered the English and the Irish had been tried in the desert and found wanting.

For Sebastian and Elizabeth
and in memory of Katy Clark

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