

labour. The popular image obscured the very different conditions of workers; it implied the 'workingman's paradise' was open to all, at all times. That veneer of prosperity was ominously thin, and could easily be shattered by unemployment, recession, illness or old age.

The idea of Australia as some sort of paradise could mean many things. For sections of British society it could be an imaginative reaction against industrialisation, or a convenient salvation for the failures of industrial society, or merely a scrapheap, a dustbin for the sweepings of the poor-house. For migrants it held out hopes that would often have been illusory. In Australia it could be used deceptively, to attract labour and ignore poverty, or complacently, to prop up the system, and imply that the worker had all he or she could possibly hope for. Needless to say, it also reinforced discrimination against women, children, non-whites, the unemployed and other sections of the working class, since only the successful, adult, white male fitted the image of the 'workingman'. It was rarely an accurate description of the Australia that the working class knew.

But for that one group, white, skilled males in secure jobs, it had more meaning, especially when some of them became employers themselves. In Australia's different social structure, they had more prominence and more status than in England, and this was perhaps why they were always noticed by visitors, and taken as evidence of egalitarian prosperity. In 1883, Twopeny had seen the plumber as typical of 'the Australian working-man', struck by the fact that he had to try four before he could get one to take on a job, who then did not turn up.⁸⁹ In the twentieth century the plumber continued to be seen as typical, particularly when regarded by the middle class as a perfect example of workers earning too much. A long string of observers also saw the plumber as a symbol of equality, because when the plumber called he frequently drank tea with the housewife.⁹⁰ Perhaps he does, but if it proves anything, it is not that Australia is an egalitarian paradise, but that the upper working class attract more than usual respect in Australia. It remains true that no-one ever asks the garbage man to tea.

4 Another America

The people of this colony resemble the Americans in their presumption, arrogance, ignorance, and conceit.

G.T.W.B. Boyes¹

The question of Australian identity has usually been seen as a tug-of-war between Australianness and Britishness, between the impulse to be distinctively Australian and the lingering sense of a British heritage. However this attitude to the development of an Australian identity only became common towards the end of the nineteenth century, when self-conscious nationalists began to exaggerate what was distinctive about Australia. The result has been that those aspects of the Australian identity which were not distinctive have been underestimated ever since. In fact, during most of the nineteenth century, it was generally accepted that Australia had a clear political and cultural 'image' which was considered neither particularly British nor Australian. Australians saw themselves, and were seen by others, as part of a group of new, transplanted, predominantly Anglo-Saxon emigrant societies. The basis of this shared image varied. Sometimes the emphasis was on being new; at other times, on being colonial; later a more explicitly racial element was added, so the emphasis was on being Anglo-Saxon or, as these societies grew more confident, on being the most vigorous branch of Anglo-Saxondom. The Irish had a slightly different view of them as societies freed from British repression. But certainly, the question of a distinctively Australian identity was not the burning issue it was to become for later historians.

Australia as a New Society

It was accepted, both in Europe and in the new societies themselves, that they all—the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, southern Africa, occasionally Argentina, Uruguay and other parts of

South America—had much in common. Words such as brash, young, egalitarian, materialistic, provincial, braggart, were applied to all of them. They were commonly thought of as the children of Britain or Europe, as strapping sons, dutiful daughters or juvenile delinquents. Politically they were considered 'in advance' of Europe; culturally they were more often thought to be inferior. Their inhabitants developed a counter-image of Europe or the 'Old World': oppressive and decadent, but also sophisticated and intellectually intimidating, the old world could be sentimentalised or identified with poverty and privilege.

The new societies had a similar ancestry. The Australian colonies were by no means the only lands of opportunity offered to the British working class, nor the only solution to a Victorian novelist's problems. Indeed in 1850 the Australian colonies were only attracting 6 per cent of British emigrants, and even in the gold rushes, they only attracted a third of the number going to the United States.² Emigrant societies were to be distinguished from dependencies existing purely for economic exploitation. Thus in Trollope's definition of colonies, as 'countries outside our own, which by our energies we have made fit for the occupation of our multiplying race'³, he included the United States but excluded India. These new settlements were continually supplemented by new arrivals throughout the nineteenth century, so that they retained their character as emigrant communities: before 1871 over half the white population of Australia was born elsewhere, and the adult population was not predominantly Australian-born until some time later.

For most of those emigrants, the difficult decision was the one to leave Britain, to emigrate: the question of where to go was probably a relatively minor one, determined by such accidental factors as climate, cost or proximity, and the vagaries of imperfect knowledge, advice and rumour or the likelihood of help from friends or relatives who had already emigrated. Few would have arrived with any strong attachment to their new home—any of the others would have done as well—but they would have shared a sense of exile and the feeling that their old home had failed them. An additional link between the new societies was the fact that migrants to any one of them often had friends and relatives in others.

Another shared characteristic was the newness of these societies. They were new, physically. They had no town walls, castles, ancient churches, Gothic or Roman ruins, or stately old homes, the material evidence of ancient Western civilisation. Their cities were marked by rapid growth, often built from the ground up within the memory of

living men and women. The wonder of visitors at Melbourne's spectacular growth was echoed in praise of Chicago and Toronto. These sparkling symbols of Anglo-Saxon progress were stamped on what was, to European minds, uncivilised wilderness. They were also new in a more important sense: their institutions were established afresh. Rather than being the accretion of centuries, as in Europe, they were, at least in the minds of the colonists, free of the hidebound traditions of older societies. In the liberal's view of progress, they were generally 'in advance' of Europe, being more democratic and more radical, and they attracted a lot of interest for that reason. They shared a different class structure from Europe, lacking an aristocracy, a peasantry and a large, English-style industrial proletariat, but with the addition of an exploited native population. Finally they had a similar economic relationship with Britain, exporting raw materials and providing markets for British industry and openings for British investment. By the end of the century, however, the United States had industrialised and was overtaking Britain as an industrial power.

It was the United States which stood out among these new societies. Because of its position as the oldest, biggest, and most advanced of the new societies, it was commonly considered to be, as the *Australian* put it in 1831, 'a model for all new countries and New South Wales (hereafter) in particular'.⁴ It was a model, not only in the sense of being worthy of imitation, but also in the other nineteenth-century sense of being the archetypal example of a new society, and therefore the one to which the others would assimilate simply because they were all thought to be going through the same experience. Thus separation and an Australian republic were often seen as being as inevitable as democracy and federation—America had provided the model. So when observers made a comparison between Australia and the United States, they were in fact indicating Australia's status as a new society.

In political and social terms, the United States was often seen as the model for much of Europe as well: America had advanced furthest along the road to equality and Europe would inevitably follow. This was by no means a development that was universally welcomed: 'Americanisation' was to become a dirty word in British politics. Europe and the United States were placed on opposite ends of a spectrum, and the usual assumption was that the other emigrant societies were somewhere in the middle. The result was that almost anyone whose impressions of Australia were published in the nineteenth century—and even well into the twentieth—at some stage implicitly located the Australian colonies on this spectrum. One important implication of this was to deny Australia an independent

identity: the less it was like Britain, the more it was like the United States, and vice versa. It was there between the two, and had to approach one or the other.

Both ideas of America, as the archetypal new society, and as one end of the spectrum, were bound up with and often confused in the continual comparison of Australia with America. Throughout the nineteenth century, Australia was being depicted as 'another America', a 'new America', 'the America of the South', 'the Future America', 'a humble imitation of the United States', 'that great America on the other side of the sphere', 'the United States of Australia', 'a newer America' and 'The Yankee-land beneath the Southern Cross'.⁵ American visitors tended to stress the similarities,⁶ while those from England were generally comforted that the similarities were not as great as they might have been. Sir Charles Dilke disagreed with the oft-stated comment that 'In Australia . . . we have a second America in its infancy',⁷ while in 1886, J.A. Froude decided that, in thought, manners and speech, Australians were 'pure English and nothing else'.⁸ E.C. Booth thought Australia 'Another England',⁹ while another observer was pleasantly surprised 'that the Australian has not more resemblance to the American'.¹⁰ Most forthright was Sidney Webb, the socialist, who was convinced in 1898 that 'Australia is utterly and completely unlike America in every respect'.¹¹

There were variants of these ideas. At first, before the flood of mid-century emigrants revealed their preference for America, Australians hoped they would one day far exceed America in wealth and power.¹² By 1861, the *Sydney Morning Herald* was content for Australia merely to equal American greatness, in which there was something 'rather flattering' to Australian eyes, 'something premonitory of Southern Glories yet to dawn'.¹³ By the end of the century the dream that Australia would emulate America in prosperity was fading. It was replaced by the idea that Australia had overtaken America along the road to equality: it was the world's social laboratory. American academics could now see Australia as 'the representative of the new order of things, toward which the modern world is advancing'.¹⁴ On the other hand, there were those who wondered whether Australia was not in fact more English than England: Trollope pointed to the 'English-mad' Tasmanians who were sure of their own Englishness, but suspected that Britain itself had been 'Americanised'. Trollope's own view was a typical English one, that Australia was so slightly 'in advance' of England that it was 'rather a repetition of England than an imitation of America'.¹⁵ Another variant was the distinction between Melbourne, considered on the whole to be more

American, and Sydney, seen as closer to the British end of the spectrum.¹⁶ In the twentieth century, these positions were usually reversed, an interesting illustration of the way in which America remained the standard of modernity.

It seems that almost every aspect of Australian life was, in hope or despair, at some stage compared to its American equivalent. American examples could be introduced by all sides into almost any political argument. American experience was taken into account in a wide range of colonial legislation, in such areas as land policy, immigration, tariffs, education, railway construction, state aid to religion, irrigation, technical colleges, female suffrage, temperance and dog licences.¹⁷ The debate over the tariff question, probably the most divisive issue in colonial politics, was often reduced to a contest between British free trade and American protectionism.¹⁸ The American example was raised on everything from the most portentous issue—Deakin estimated that at least four-fifths of the Australian Constitution was based on American example¹⁹—to the most trivial—Tweny saw Australians following their 'American cousins' in their preference for champagne, remarking that 'it requires some education to acquire a taste for claret'.²⁰

Even responses to the Australian flora and fauna could have American models. In 1818 William Cobbett had described American 'birds without song, and flowers without smell'.²¹ Twenty years later George Loveless used the same words to describe the Australian bush,²² and it became an Australian cliché, with Mackenzie talking about 'our birds without music, many of our flowers without any smell'.²³ Adam Lindsay Gordon writing poetry about the land and Marcus Clarke trying to find beauty in 'our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly'.²⁴

America was also a model for the landscape, and for the type of civilisation—the small farms, the pioneer families—to be imposed upon it. In 1802 it was suggested that New South Wales 'might . . . in the course of a few centuries present as it were another America, a country of rising knowledge and civilisation, in the midst of a benighted and savage region of the world'.²⁶ Despite the geographical differences that became more apparent as the century passed, both countries were conceived as pre-industrial Arcadias for an industrialising Britain. In many ways America was a more suitable country for that sort of rural idyll, although it was difficult enough to realise it there. Nevertheless the pattern was followed in Australia: words such as 'scatter', 'homestead' and even 'the bush' were borrowed from

America, while the American slogan 'Homesteads for the People' was used in Victoria to encapsulate the ideal behind the Selection Acts.²⁷

Democracy and the Mob

The view of America as a model for new societies was particularly relevant to the political relationship between Britain and the Australian colonies. It was never forgotten, by colonial politicians and British administrators, by radicals and conservatives alike, that disputes between Britain and the American colonies had led to war, separation and republicanism. Many thought the Australian colonies would inevitably take the same road. For some, that was an inspiration, for others it was an unfortunate mistake which Britain should not make again.

It was in this context that what is often regarded as an incipient Australian nationalism developed. From the 1820s, a number of issues—freedom of the press, trial by jury, control of Crown Lands, the extension of self-government, opposition to transportation—were framed in terms of conflict between the British government and colonial opinion. In fact those issues surfaced in a power struggle taking place between factions within the colonies themselves. In that power struggle, it was in the interests of colonial liberals to portray themselves as the 'Australian' party. In 1835 the Australian Patriotic Association was formed to embrace a range of liberal policies, and the term 'Australian' began to be used to refer to liberal sentiment.²⁸ However there was nothing particularly Australian about their politics. In 1827 they petitioned for the 'Rights of Englishmen, Trial by Jury and Taxation by Representation'; they talked of the British government's 'tyranny', 'the rights and liberties of Englishmen' and the 'birthright of a British Subject'.²⁹ What the 'Australian' case was founded on was not national sentiment nor a sense of being distinctively Australian; rather it was based on the notion of a growing colony, at some stage along the road taken by all British colonies. That road was best exemplified by the United States.

On both sides there was conscious and constant reference to the sentiments and catch-phrases of the American rebellion. In 1820 a Tory such as Barron Field, Supreme Court Judge and author of *First Fruits of Australian Poetry* (distinctly not a nationalist *cri de coeur*), feared one thing leading to another along the familiar road to republicanism:

I see the shadow of the spirit of American revolt at taxation rising in the shape of the petition for trial by jury; it will next demand legislative assembly; and . . . end in declaring itself a nation of freebooters and pirates.³⁰

On the radical side, Wentworth could imagine an Australian War of Independence being fought out in the Blue Mountains when he put the case for representative government.³¹ The American spectre appeared again in the campaign against transportation: Robert Lowe climbed on top of a tramcar at Circular Quay and warned 'The injustice forced upon the Americans is not half so great as that forced upon this colony'.³² Finally there was J.D. Lang, converted to outright republicanism after visiting America, fulminating on British tyranny and calling for a republic and an Australian Declaration of Independence. For Lang there was no other course: 'The fact is, there is no other form of government either practicable or possible, in a British colony attaining its freedom and independence, than that of a republic'.³³

Independence was not the same as democracy. Increasingly from the 1840s, the burning issue became the extent to which colonial institutions should be democratic. Once again the United States, where manhood suffrage had operated since the 1830s, became the example which everyone quoted. Once again Australia's identity became a matter of how much it resembled America. From 1835, all sides could turn to the single most influential account of how democracy worked, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.³⁴ De Tocqueville was an aristocratic French liberal who, like many others, accepted the view that history was a movement towards equality, and that Europe itself, for better or for worse, would follow America towards democracy. He had visited the United States to see the future, but also to discover for himself how the 'less desirable consequences' of democracy could be avoided. He both admired and distrusted democracy, and his cool, sophisticated account of what he found established a pattern of response, not only to America but to other new societies and to democracy itself. He expressed and refined what a broad section of the middle class was thinking. The concepts he popularised, 'the tyranny of the majority' and 'the middling standard' in the arts, were part of a formidable liberal ideology.

His book reflected the two common fears of democracy among the middle class. One was political, the fear of the mob; the other cultural, a fear of a decline in civilisation. De Tocqueville, and many others like him, argued that a tyranny of the majority could rule in these new democratic societies, that popular opinion was easily mani-

pulated, that political corruption was likely, that the liberty of the individual was at risk, that mob rule was incompatible with good government, that the working class, if given power, would rule in its own interests, and that other interests (property, religion, education) and the interests of the nation as a whole would be overwhelmed unless somehow protected.

What applied to America also applied to Australia. American democracy, as interpreted by de Tocqueville, remained the standard by which the local variety was judged, for better or worse, for the rest of the century. De Tocqueville's influence was felt in the Colonial Office and in the British Parliament when self-government was gradually being extended to the Australian colonies in 1842 and 1850.³⁵ It was also felt in the colonies themselves when they set about drafting their own constitutions. These were democratic but contained provision for upper houses and plural voting, the sort of in-built constitutional protection for the middle class that de Tocqueville approved. Once again the United States was, as Wentworth put it, 'in every man's mouth in reference to the constitution fitted for this colony'. In his speech on the New South Wales Constitution Bill, he quoted great slabs of de Tocqueville. But on the question of democracy, Wentworth was no longer the radical that he had once been:

I sincerely hope that the Constitution the Council is about to frame will be a constitution that will be a lasting one—a conservative one—a British and not a Yankee constitution.³⁶

From the British point of view, American and Australian democracy were often seen as identical. This was most clearly borne out in the debates on the extension of the British franchise in 1867. Supporters of reform such as John Bright pointed to Australia to prove that democracy did not threaten 'a regard for law and property', and made similar comments about Canada and the United States. There were vestiges of an older image of Australia in his suggestion that an extended franchise would improve the attitude of the British Parliament to the bulk of the nation: 'the Botany Bay view of their countrymen would be got rid of'.³⁷ At the same time the most effective opponent of reform was none other than Robert Lowe, whom we last saw on top of a tramcar at Circular Quay. No longer the colonial radical, he now stood for respectability and the absolute rights of property. He also turned to the new democracies to prove his case that democracy threatened property and lowered the character of parliament: 'I do not want to say anything disagreeable, but if you

want to see the result of democratic constituencies, you will find them in all the assemblies of Australia, and in all the assemblies of North America'. Later he tried to prove, by citing Australia, that democracy governed by universal suffrage, and it is as much as we can do to prevent their going to war with each other'.³⁸

Such was the attitude in Britain: the Australian colonies merged into the generalised attitude to the new societies, the dubious democracies. Liberal opinion within Australia also accepted the equation between the colonies and America. Although there was greater sympathy for democracy among the colonial middle class, they still shared de Tocqueville's qualms about mob rule and popular government. However, they increasingly took comfort in one aspect of Australian democracy which de Tocqueville, being a mere Frenchman, did not appreciate. This was the fact that America was tainted by being 'foreign', whereas the Australian colonies were indubitably, impeccably British. The very worst could be believed of American democracy, while the Australian (and Canadian and New Zealand) variety could still be regarded as safe. As Earl Grey put it, the good sense and reverence for parliamentary institutions 'which distinguish the English race' would enable Australians to correct 'any evils that may arise from the political institutions they have adopted'.³⁹

This distinction between American and Australian (or British) democracy began to be made in the 1850s, when the gold-fields of Australia, discovered so soon after those of California, again invited the inevitable comparisons with America. The slightest hint of mob rule—and there was more than a hint—was condemned by conservatives and liberals alike. Here was all they feared of democracy, and fact and fancy surrounding Californian lynch law coloured the response to the situation in Australia. The overturning of the social order, and the lack of respect for authority which culminated in Eureka were equated with, and used to discredit, democracy. Yet often a distinction was made: 'the highly commendable morality and good conduct of the miners generally, strikingly contrasted with the savage violence, the lynch law, and the brute force said to be dominant at California'.⁴⁰ Lynchings could be stopped by appeals to miners' better feelings as Englishmen,⁴¹ and even Eureka could be excused as the work of 'foreigners'. John Fawkner, radical and patriotic, blamed the uprising on the Americans who were 'accustomed . . . to resist the laws by armed mobs', while the Royal Commission which investigated Eureka concluded that 'foreigners formed a larger proportion among the disaffected than among the miners generally' and

that they had drawn the diggers into 'courses that, among the British people, are happily as rare as they are disgraceful'.⁴²

The idea that Australian democracy was safe because it was British became more important as the century wore on. The colonial bourgeoisie were proud of their political achievements, which they commonly saw as the product of British democracy. Eureka itself was seen as the assertion of the rights of British subjects against tyranny: it was only towards the end of the century that it acquired a distinctly Australian flavour. The inflated estimate of the British political character, puffed up by late nineteenth-century imperial expansion and racial attitudes, reached ever more ridiculous proportions. By the end of the century many Australians would have shared the view held by Rudyard Kipling, the laureate of imperialism, about the border between British Canada and the 'foreign' United States: 'Always the marvel... was that on one side of an imaginary line should be Safety, Law, Honour, and Obedience, and on the other frank, brutal decivilisation'.⁴³

Culture and Mediocrity

Ultimately, the political implications of *Democracy in America* were to be less damaging than its cultural implications. Britain itself tardily embraced democracy, with only the die-hard conservatives regarding the result as disastrous. Even *The Times* came round in 1914.⁴⁴ Culture was a rather more delicate thing. The new societies, thought of and thinking of themselves as the outposts of a great European culture, were inevitably regarded as culturally inferior. There were two reasons: they were democratic and they were new.

Although de Tocqueville was not entirely pessimistic about culture in America, his work encouraged many English intellectuals to despise American culture and to regard democracy and high culture as totally incompatible. He argued that democratic societies lacked the aristocratic elite which made great art and literature possible. Democratic societies were materialistic, habitually preferring 'the useful to the beautiful'. Despite their constant bustle and their prosperity, their cultures would stagnate, swinging 'backwards and forwards forever without begetting fresh ideas'. Their 'doctrine of the equality of the intellect' would lead to a persecution of minority tastes. The tyranny of the majority would impose a culturally debilitating middling standard which, while enlightening the ignorant, would replace excellence with mediocrity.⁴⁵

De Tocqueville's comments were tempered by his good-will towards America and his fairness, but they nevertheless amounted to a damning critique of democratic culture, a critique which was to be widely accepted by liberal intellectuals in the democratic societies themselves.⁴⁶ If the political spectrum went from undemocratic Britain to democratic America, then the cultural spectrum led from the refined and educated British gentleman (or aristocratic Frenchman) to the loud-mouthed, ill-bred American philistine. The Australian colonies were once again considered as lying somewhere in the middle, protected from complete cultural mediocrity by the fact they were 'British', although Matthew Arnold once suggested that Australia rather than America represented the nadir of cultural debasement.⁴⁷ This alleged decivilising influence of democracy was often based on simple snobbery; nevertheless the snobbery was so ingrained that it became one of the most effective arguments paraded against political reform, and one that democrats at first found difficult to dispute.

There was another argument which even democrats could use against the culture of America and Australia—its very newness. The simpler form of this argument was heard most often in the early nineteenth century, when the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott and the picturesque paintings of Claude Lorraine set the standard: true inspiration could only be found in the contemplation of ancient castles and picturesque ruins, which were amenities that new societies clearly did not possess. So John Ruskin could not contemplate even visiting the United States, 'a country so miserable as to possess no castles'.⁴⁸ A more sophisticated form of the same argument appeared later in the century. Henry James, the expatriate American novelist, argued in 1879 that:

the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion.⁴⁹

Or, as an American art critic put it in Australia in 1890, 'A nation must be somewhat ripe in years before it develops appreciation of the refinements of life'.⁵⁰ Both ideas would continue to crop up in the twentieth century.⁵¹

It was a romantic view of culture which was being challenged by a more earth-bound view from the 1840s, not only in Britain but also in the colonies. In 1856, in one of the first extended analyses of the possibilities of an Australian literature, Frederick Sinnett, a young English-born journalist, facetiously parodied the conventional romantic argument:

No storied windows, richly dight, cast a dim, religious light over any Australian premises... No Australian author can hope to extricate his hero or heroine, however pressing the emergency may be, by means of a spring panel and a subterranean passage, or such like relics of feudal barons... There may be plenty of dilapidated buildings, but not one, the dilapidation of which is sufficiently venerable by age...

He put in a plea for the 'realism' of Dickens against the romanticism of Scott, and argued that the passions, character types and human life which were the true subject of fiction were quite as in evidence in Australia as anywhere else.⁵²

Australian intellectuals could then challenge the view that new societies, simply because they were new, could not produce great literature. They had a natural refuge in realism, and in the new societies there was a continuing commitment to ordinary life as the true subject of art and literature. In 1871, Marcus Clarke was suggesting that 'in a new country... there are opportunities for fresh and vigorous delineation of human character',⁵³ and he continued to affirm the virtues of realism. In 1896 Australian writers were again being urged to take note of the American brand of realism, where 'nobody murders or debauches anybody else',⁵⁴ while Australian painters were also exhorted to discard the 'grand style' and stick to a more realistic depiction of 'the intimate facts of our own life and environment'.⁵⁵

It was more difficult for Australian intellectuals to come to terms with the charges of materialism, anti-intellectualism and mediocrity levelled at the new democracies. Sinnett's quail was that a new society might prefer ledgers to books;⁵⁶ another observer worried that a migrant society was inevitably motivated by the 'engrossing desire for wealth',⁵⁷ many were persuaded that democracy and mediocrity were inseparable. On the whole, local intellectuals accepted the charges as true, and joined British visitors in an incessant complaint about Australian philistinism, a complaint which is still aired. Indeed so many joined in that criticism that it is tempting to ask: can Australia really be considered an anti-intellectual society when it contains so many intellectuals ready to condemn it? The constancy of the complaint simply demonstrates the size of the intellectual class, not the nature of Australian society.

It was all, of course, part of the European intellectual's stance; attacks on materialism, philistinism, industrialism or on modern society itself increasingly became part of the intellectual's stock-in-trade in the nineteenth century. Whether romantics, utilitarians, social critics, bohemians or aesthetes, creative artists and thinkers

could distinguish themselves by this stance from a rising middle class; it could also include a conservative, disdainful response to the material improvement of sections of the working class. Understandably, intellectuals in the new societies adopted a similar position: their cultural heritage, their social role, their financial worries, their sense of neglected genius were all pretty much the same. However they did not share England's bleak industrial towns, and these were central to the English intellectual's condemnation of nineteenth-century society. The new societies were unable to see themselves as part of the Industrial Revolution, despite the appearance of mills and factories in their cities and the importance of their primary produce for British industry. There was no tradition of village life being destroyed by industry's 'satanic mills'. They had to find something else to blame for the materialism they saw around them, and they chose to blame the very newness and democratic nature of places like Australia. For this, they had a ready-made critique in the work of de Tocqueville, and they put it to good use.

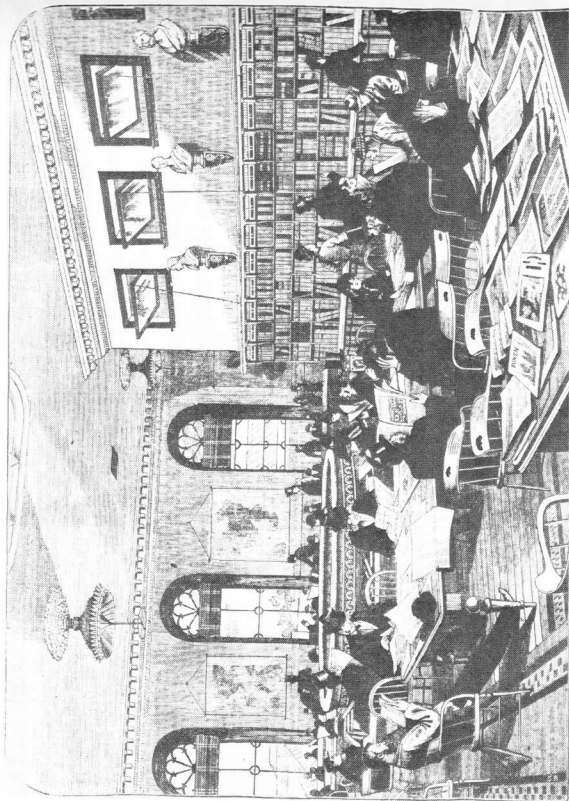
There is little point repeating much of the criticism of Australian materialism: it remained remarkably similar from around the 1830s on. What is important is to notice how similar their criticism was to criticism of industrial society in Britain. Charles Harpur, conscious of his role as the first Australian-born poet, could complain of having 'to mingle daily amongst men... who have faith for nothing in God's glorious universe that is not, in their own vile phrase, "money's worth"'—much as Keats or Wordsworth might have done. The difference was that they identified materialism with industrial society, whereas Harpur saw it as peculiarly Australian, but the romantic image of the intellectual was the same. Similarly, in a later generation, Francis Adams attacked the 'philistinism' of Australian society. When his mentor, Matthew Arnold, had first used the term, his target had been modern Britain. Again the sense of heroic intellectual isolation from the materialistic majority was shared. The result was that local writers set up a false contrast between materialist Australia and cultured Britain.⁵⁹ And so a familiar pattern has appeared: materialism was seen as being integral to the Australian identity, when in fact it was being discovered in Britain as well.

Taming the Philistines

Splendid isolation was one response to materialism. The other response, common among the leaders of the colonial bourgeoisie, was

to become the evangelists of 'Culture'. Defining 'Culture' as 'the machinery of intellectual and moral improvement',⁶⁰ they set about constructing the machinery that would improve the democratic populace. In 1849, they explained, 'This new country of ours must ... be moulded to our minds; not our minds to the country',⁶¹ and they proceeded to set up mechanics' institutes, public libraries, art galleries and museums, schools, universities and systems of self-improvement. Even the Eight-Hour Day was justified on the grounds that it would 'secure time for intellectual improvement and moral culture'.⁶² The machinery of moral improvement was as necessary to the old societies as to the new; the diffusion of culture would lead to a refinement in the manners and morals of society, and so, in the industrial cities of Manchester and Birmingham, as in the democratic cities of Sydney and Melbourne, art galleries and libraries sprang up to tame the philistines.

In a utilitarian age, 'Culture' was given a purpose. It existed, not for its own sake, but for the sake of morality. The prophet of this new 'moral aesthetic' was John Ruskin, whose ideas on cultural



'The New Reading Room at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts'. One of the many monuments to culture built by the colonial bourgeoisie. Note that a range of social groups (all male) are depicted improving themselves. From the Australian Town and Country Journal, 14 June, 1879, p. 1128.

matters were to dominate Britain for half a century from the 1840s. With a substantial private income he could afford to scorn materialism. He had found moral purpose in art: the greatest art was that which conveyed 'the greatest number of the greatest ideas'.⁶³ The moral purpose of culture was also widely accepted in the Australian colonies, and it was with that justification that they vied with each other to erect cultural monuments. The first wave of universities, the major art galleries, the museums, the large public libraries and the government education systems all appeared between the 1840s and the end of the century. All were intended, as W.C. Wentworth said of the University of Sydney, opened in 1852, 'to enlighten the mind, to refine the understanding, to elevate the soul of our fellow men'.⁶⁴

Established to defeat materialism, these cultural symbols themselves embodied the view that culture was measured in material terms. One reason for this was that national greatness and nationality were commonly measured by the extent to which a nation had erected the machinery for the moral improvement of its population. In the 1830s the colonies were urged to cultivate science and literature in order to gain 'a high standard of National character';⁶⁵ superior education was necessary lest 'our national (Colonial) character ... eventually be one of rustic boorishness'.⁶⁶ The important thing was for a nation to have the visible trappings of culture; the idea that a national culture ought to be original and express a distinctive national sentiment only gained acceptance towards the end of the century. Thus there was often a strange mixture of moral idealism and crass patriotic pride, of keeping up with the Joneses, involved in the building of cultural monuments. The mixture is apparent in the reasons given for the establishment of the University of Melbourne in 1853: its supporters, men like Hugh Childers and Redmond Barry, expected it to

go far to redeem their adopted country from the social and moral evils with which she is threatened: to improve the character of her people; to raise her in the respect and admiration of civilised nations.⁶⁷

Similarly the Age saw the foundation of the Melbourne Public Library as marking 'an epoch in our social advancement ... another stride forward in civilization ... Victoria should not be content to be a single step behind America'.⁶⁸

Such visible symbols of 'Culture' encouraged the immense pride of the colonial bourgeoisie in their own progress. It bolstered their position: they were the leaders of a cultured, not a debased, community, and they saw themselves as responsible for its moral improve-

ment. The temples to culture they had built were central to the broad strand of cultural patriotism which reached its peak in the 'Marvellous Melbourne' of the 1880s, and which never ceased to be astonished at its own achievement. While the materialist tone of this pride must be admitted, it should not be allowed to obscure the intense moral seriousness with which men such as Redmond Barry established public libraries and galleries, and encouraged all classes to use them.

It meant that, in their own terms, accepting the cultural values of the period, the colonies did have claims to cultural respectability, so much so that in 1885 one visiting journalist advised Victorians to worry less about cultural societies and more about building better hotels.⁶⁹ Despite British contempt for 'colonials' and intellectuals' contempt for philistinism, the renowned boasting of the colonial bourgeoisie was not entirely baseless. We can sneer at their imposing edifices filled with valueless copies of sculpture, but this was their means of getting 'the greatest number of the greatest ideas' at a price they could afford. In their own terms they had resisted materialism and built reasonably cultured societies. Libraries flourished and were widely used—according to Mackenzie, 'Every body reads',⁷⁰ although he was disturbed that they read Dickens rather than more serious works. Australia absorbed about one-third of Britain's entire output of books,⁷¹ and the number and quality of newspapers and journals published in the colonies were remarkably high—Trollope thought Australia had 'the best daily papers I have seen out of England'.⁷² What was not high was the quality of original work produced, although there was plenty of it. However, originality for its own sake was not valued as much as moral content. The point is that the accusation that nineteenth-century Australian culture was philistine was essentially a criticism of nineteenth-century cultural values in general. To continue to condemn it on those grounds is merely to condemn it because its values are not our own.

It is clear that in the nineteenth century the Australian colonies had a political and cultural identity that, it was thought, could be distinguished from Britain's. For the most part though, this identity was not considered to be peculiar to Australia. It was an identity that Australia gained by virtue of the fact that it was a new society, politically democratic, culturally materialistic. In this, it was not creating anything distinctive, but simply following in the footsteps of the archetypal new society, the United States, footsteps which the older societies were also following in the nineteenth century.

5 The National Type

The Australasian will be a square-headed, masterful man, with full temples, plenty of beard, a keen eye, a stern and yet sensual mouth. His teeth will be bad, and his lungs good. He will suffer from liver disease, and become prematurely bald... His religion will be a form of Presbyterianism; his national policy a democracy tempered by the rate of exchange.

Marcus Clarke, 1877.¹

Know, O friendly generalizer, that there be tall Australians and short Australians... faint or fierce, feeble-clinging or deathless strong... speculative, rash Australians; also cautious, very wary Australians... There is *no* generic native Australian.

Rolf Bolderwood, 1901²

It was difficult in the nineteenth century to pin down what was distinctive about Australia, apart from its unique flora and fauna. On the one hand, the Australian colonists were busy identifying themselves with wider loyalties, considering themselves primarily as British, or as being one of the new societies, another America. On the other hand there were narrower loyalties competing with the sense of being distinctively Australian. Politically Australia had no formal existence until Federation: the colonies were separate political entities owing their allegiance directly to Britain. Colonial rivalries were often surprisingly strong and until the 1880s, the general trend was towards a widening of the gap between the six colonies, at least politically. The first decades of self-government were marked by customs barriers, competition for investment and the short-sighted and expensive decision to build colonial railways on different gauges. At the same time, independent colonial identities were developing. Victoria was proud that it out-shone the others in political and economic progress; South Australians felt superior because they were without the convict taint; Queensland was the new frontier; Tasmania was the most English; Western Australia the most isolated and suspicious of the rest. New South Wales was less certain of a separate identity, being