'THE HISTORY OF INDIFFERENCE THUS BEGINS'*

W.E.H. Stanner

On this first inhabited spot, from that time tranquillity ceased,
and the foundation of a new country usurped the seat of silence.

—*The History of New South Wales*,
George Barrington, 1810.

The Instructions given in 1787 to Captain Arthur Phillip, the Governor-Designate of the intended penal colony in New South Wales, required him 'by every possible means to open an intercourse' with the Aborigines. He was ordered to begin barter with them, to estimate their numbers, and to report how association could be turned to the colony's advantage, but these practical aims were to be attained in a humanitarian way. He must 'conciliate their affections', enjoin everyone to 'live in amity and kindness with them', and punish all who should 'wantonly destroy them, or give them any unnecessary interruption in the exercise of their several occupations'.

Phillip, before leaving England, thought the instructions entirely possible of performance. He nagged the authorities about scores of matters, but took the racial problems in his stride.

I shall think it a great point if I can proceed in this business without having any dispute with the natives, a few of which I shall endeavour to persuade to settle near us, and who I mean to furnish with everything that can tend to civilize them, and to give them a high opinion of their new guests.

He even nurtured the hope that he might 'cultivate an acquaintance with them, without their having an idea of our great superiority over them, that their confidence and friendship might be more firmly fixed'. Before as well as after the landing, he gave 'strict orders that the natives should not be offended, or molested on any account and advised that, wherever they were met with, they were to be treated with every mark of friendship'. He forbade anyone to fire at them with ball or shot, and made clear that he would regard the killing of an Aboriginal as seriously as the killing of a European. 'This', he wrote, 'appears to me not only just, but good policy'.

His appreciation of what he would encounter in New South Wales drew on the experience of Captain Cook and Joseph Banks, the only authorities. Cook had found it necessary to fire a gun at some Aborigines who sought to oppose his landing in Botany Bay in May, 1770,

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and (according to Dr Hawkesworth) he subsequently found that after the first contest at our landing they would never come near enough to parley; nor did they touch a single article of all that we had left at their huts, and the places they frequented, on purpose for them to take away.

Banks, before a Committee of the Commons in 1779, had given his immense authority to an opinion that 'there would be little probability of opposition'. He described the Aborigines as 'naked, treacherous' but 'extremely cowardly' and said that they 'constantly retired from our people when they made the least appearance of resistance'. To that impressionistic picture Phillip added a romantic gloss. He developed a theory that 'the only means of warding off a conflict with the natives was to place confidence in them'. From the moment of landing, that was what he tried to do. The approach spoke volumes for the idealism, and also for the muddled theory of human nature and society, which characterized him.

The older Aborigines of Botany Bay in 1788 would have remembered Cook's visit in 1770 and the main events of the week that he spent there. But that experience may have made the nine days' wonder between 18 and 26 January, 1788 seem more overwhelming. During that period thirteen ships, eleven British and two French, entered the bay. They arrived in four divisions — one ship on the first day, three on the second, seven on the third, and two (the French squadron commanded by M. de La Pérouse) on the ninth. Any impulse among the Aborigines to mass against the strangers must have been paralyzed by the increasing size of the divisions over the first three days. The ships' companies — seamen, soldiers and civilians, numbering 290 — would have been visible, and the Aborigines may well have caught a hint too of the convicts, 717 all told, crammed below the decks. Such numbers must have been far greater than any they had ever seen. They could only have likened them, in their characteristic similes, to the leaves of a tree or to ants in a nest, and felt at a loss to act. After the arrival of the third division there were three clear days on which they may have taken some sort of measure of the prodigy before them. Then, on 24 January, Phillip's hurried preparations, at the first sight of the French approach, to move the First Fleet from Botany Bay to Port Jackson, could well have suggested to them that all the ships were about to go and, like *Endeavour*, be seen no more. But the substitution of the French for the British in Botany Bay, on 26 January, would have dashed their hopes, and then added a new mystification for, with their quick ear for language, they would soon have realised that they were in touch with two different peoples speaking unlike tongues. What they made of it all is of course unknown. One can but piece together the rough outline of their reaction from exiguous entries in the colonists' journals, diaries, despatches and letters.

The records make much of the Aborigines' apparent hostility at first sight. As the ships entered Botany Bay, Lieutenant Phillip Gidley King, on *Supply*, saw 'several of ye natives running along, brandishing their spears'. David Blackburn, master of the same ship, noted the same thing: 'The Natives as we saild in Came Down to the Edge of the Clifts Making a Noise & Lifting up their Spears'. When *Scarborough* arrived next day, Private John Easty remarked on the 'great many Indians' who, naked and black, 'came down to the shore and shroutted att us and held up there weapons over their heads and shook them at us'. The same thing happened at Port Jackson. To Daniel Southwell, the mate of *Sirius*, it seemed that

There was a something frantick in the manner of these petty veterans, their menacing gestures being occasionally interrupted by long considerings and excessive fits of laughter, in which there seemed to be more of agitation than of those pleasing emotions that usually excite risibility.

But the shaken spears did not necessarily indicate outright hostility, and the cries of *war-re*, *war-re*, which were presumed by the early colonists to mean 'go away', or 'bad, you are doing wrong', may have been (as Harrington later suspected) no more than a conventional response to anything startlingly new. Universally, the Aborigines used such gestures at all meetings of great significance; there was always something of ritual in them; and curiosity must have been at least equal to fear or anger.

At the first landing some Aborigines, according to King:

immediately got up and called to us in a menacing tone, and at the same time brandishing their spears or lances. However, the Governor showed them some beads, and order'd a man to fasten them to the stem of the canoe. We then made signs that we wanted water, when they pointed round the point on which they stood, and invited us to land there. On landing they directed us by pointing to a very fine stream of water. Governor Phillip then advanced towards them alone and unarmed, on which one of them advanced towards him, but would not come near enough to receive the beads which the Governor held out for him, but seemed very desirous of having them, and made signs for them to be laid on ye ground, which was done. He (ye native) came on with fear and trembling and took them up, and by degrees came so near as to receive looking-glasses &c. and seemed quite astonished at ye figure we cut in being clothed. I think it is very easy to conceive of ye ridiculous frame we must appear to these poor creature, who were perfectly naked. We soon after took leave of them and returned on board.

The man's first intent, under Aboriginal convention, would have been to discover Phillip's identity, the purpose of the visit — to find drinking water — having already been disclosed. In advancing alone Phillip did

the right thing. But he should then have named himself, and asked after the other's name, both of which he could have done without difficulty by using simple signs. To press goods on the man at once was also a mistake. Under Aboriginal custom they could not have been given or taken without consideration of return. Phillip's offer probably appeared at least two-edged. Later, the Aborigines must have concluded that Europeans were simply soft-headed because of their largesse with valuable things. The notions of forcing friendship, and of winning liking by prestations, were psychological and sociological nonsense. But at the time, to one officer, the report 'savoured much of fellow-feeling and humanity'.

Soon after daylight on the 19th, a fishing-party saw the same group of natives, who seemed 'much more confident than they were the night before'. But although three boats explored part of the bay no other natives were seen. On the 20th, there were two landings, one under Phillip, who was said to have found the natives 'very sociable and friendly', the other under Lieutenant King, who found them neither: they 'holler'd and made signs for us to return to our boats'. One of Phillip's front teeth was missing and the fact gave him instant standing among the Aborigines, who practised tooth avulsion as an initiatory rite. The deference paid to him by the other colonists must also have impressed the watchers, who would have dined out on every detail of dress, deportment and conduct. King, with a notable lack of success, tried to emulate Phillip's calm unarmed advance, bearing gifts of beads and baize. The goods were taken, but then the Aborigines 'in a very vociferous manner desired us to be gone, and one of them threw a lance wide of us to show how far they could do execution'. King thought it wise to retreat. On the way to the boats, he again offered presents; this time the Aborigines refused them and, 'ten times more vociferous', threw spears directly at the party, which was in a minority of five to twelve. King now felt the risk too great; he had a gun — loaded with powder only — fired; and at the report the natives 'ran off with great precipitation'. When the party had re-embarked, Phillip joined them, and at once showed both the persistence which characterized him and a something in his bearing and address which impressed the Aborigines.

We relanded ... and ye same body of natives appeared, brandishing their lances and defying us. However, we rowed close in shore, and ye Governor disembarked with some presents, which one of them came and received. Thus peace was re-established, much to the satisfaction of all parties.

That was the first true interaction. On both sides, it probably caused as much confusion as it removed.

The Aborigines were not sure for several days that the strange beings who came on shore were truly human. They were particularly astonished

by the hats, clothes and weapons, probably thinking them, as in the case of other Aborigines in many parts of the continent, incredible extensions of the body. They were also puzzled, by the hairless faces, to decide the sex of the strangers. There was 'a great shout of admiration' when one of the sailors was ordered to 'undeceive them' on the question of sex, and another when the bashful King covered a woman's nakedness with a handkerchief. The Aborigines offered the Europeans women, which were declined; the Europeans offered the Aborigines wine, which they tasted and spat out. On the whole, the Aborigines won the honours for hospitality; they singled out the man who had flung the spear, and stood 'pointing all their lances at him and looking at us, intimating that they only waited our orders to kill him'; or so King deluded himself. He probably puzzled the natives by making a special point of giving the man a present! Had King given the order to throw, he would have seen a marvellous exhibition either of spear-dodging, at which the Aborigines were brilliantly adept, or of how not to hit a man by the narrowest of margins. The parting was amicable enough, and selective memories of the reports led to later impressions of an 'easy reception' and 'a kind of cautious friendship'.

But some stereotypes which the colonists had brought with them were also vivified. 'Those poor creatures', under whose gaze King had felt ridiculous, were to David Blackburn 'to all appearances the Lowest in Rank among the Human Race'; to Edward Home, 'I think, the most miserable of the human form under heaven'; to Southwell, 'more like monkeys than warriors'; to Bowes, 'altogether a most stupid insensible set of beings'; and to the log-keeper of *Fishburn*, '... quite harmless, only inclinable to thieving'. The same writer recorded that 'it was with difficulty that the Captain kept his hatt on his head'. But two seamen, 'straggling into the woods without arms or anything to protect themselves, sailor like, met with some natives, men, women and children, who were *very very* friendly...'. And David Collins, Phillip's secretary and Judge Advocate, was storing up the impressions that enabled him to write: 'how tractable these people are, when no insult or injury is offered, and when proper means are employed to influence the simplicity of their minds'.

While the ships were at Botany Bay, there were warning signs that injury *was* being offered. The seine nets were cast:

no sooner were the fish out of the water than they began to lay hold of them, as if they had a right to them, or that they were their own; upon which the officer of the boat, I think very properly, restrained them, giving, however, to each of them a part. They did not at first seem very well pleased with this mode of procedure, but on observing with what justice the fish were distributed they appeared content. A work-party cleared a path to a supply of fresh water: 'the natives were well pleased with our people until they began clearing the ground,

at which they were displeased and wanted them to be gone'. Saw-pits were about to be dug: 'they expressed a little anger at seeing us cut down the trees'. But the colonists attached little significance to such signs, and apparently did not connect them with a pattern of reaction that became noticeable within a few days of the transfer to Sydney Cove. The Aborigines now showed a progressive disinclination to come near the settlement, and their general behaviour became less predictable. That the colonists wondered why says much for their eyeless judgement of their own doings.

On his first visit to Sydney Cove on 21 January, Phillip had found the Aborigines more confident than those at Botany Bay. The fresh water in the cove, the best supply in Port Jackson, made it a natural gathering place, and one can scarcely doubt that members of the local band, having seen the transfer of the First Fleet on the 24th and 25th, would have watched from the bush, on the 26th, the landing, masting of colours, the firing of a *feu de joie*, and the preparations for encampment. Others, increasingly drawn by the spectacle and uproar, must have been agog at the relentless, baffling activity: scores of men felling the forest, hundreds marking out squares, mounds of goods piling up, endless traffic between ships and shore, martial parades, and boats exploring the harbour arms. Not even the scale of the visitation could have been clear until the nineteenth day, when the last of the convicts were herded ashore. The Aborigines had had no experiences by which to judge such things, or to see in them shapes of permanence. The realization that it *was* an invasion, and that the strangers meant to stay, could have come only slowly. When at last it came, the dismay must have been profound.

As the days went by, there would have been sharp eyes and ears on all that happened. It is quite clear from the records that, even at Botany Bay, the Aborigines had begun to categorize the strangers. Worgan's *Journal* noted on the third day that

they did not like the soldiers and made signs for us to take them away, before they would venture to come near us. One of them was bold enough to go up to a soldier and feel his gun, and felt the point of his bayonet, looked very serious and gave a significant 'HUM'!

White's *Journal*, two days later, remarked that 'from the first, they carefully avoided a soldier, or any person wearing a red coat, which they seemed to have marked as a fighting vesture'. Now, the four social groups — officers, soldiery, seamen and convicts — would have been plainly distinguishable, and such formations must have seemed bizarre and inexplicable. Darkness probably hid from the Aborigines the first orgiastic meeting of the male and female convicts on the night of 6 February 1788: Bowes' *Journal* reports that 'The men got to them very soon after they landed, and it is beyond my ability to give a just description of the scene of debauchery and riot that ensued during the

night'. But they may well have seen, though perhaps from a distance, something of other events that disfigured the first weeks of transplanted civilization — the drunkenness and fighting, the drumming of male-factors out of camp, the attempts by convicts to escape, the first flogging (29 January), and the first hanging (27 February). A place which ten convicts, including one woman, had tried to flee by 23 February can have had little attraction for those outside it. There is little mystery in the Aborigines' apparent aversion.

Some of the early writers give the impression that, once the British had left Botany Bay, encounters with the Aborigines fell away abruptly. That was not actually the case. During the first six weeks only two Aborigines visited the settlement, but between 29 January and 29 February seventeen meetings were thought sufficiently important to be mentioned in journals. In two cases the Aborigines fled; in thirteen their conduct ranged between wariness and boldness; in two, conflict occurred; on 4 February some of them pelted a European seine-party with stones and, on the 19th, a group making a daring theft of iron tools near the settlement had to be 'peppered with small shot'. At Botany Bay, the French also had troubles. From unknown causes, they were 'often obliged to fire on the natives, for that they are become most dearing and troublesome'. M. de La Pérouse seems to have been at least as idealistic as Phillip, and his order as strict, but he did not share Phillip's theory and therefore probably acted differently. Experience in the South Seas had made him suspicious of 'the perfidious caresses' of all savages. He thought the Aborigines 'extremely mischeivous', complained that 'they even threw darts at us immediately after receiving our presents and caresses', and felt compelled to build a protective stockade. Plainly, the policies of trust and mistrust were equally unsuccessful.

The Europeans' inability to understand why they were shunned or attacked was obviously, though only in part, an expression of their total ignorance of Aboriginal life. They had no idea, it seems, that they were crowding at every place on to a confined estate whose every feature and object entailed proprietary rights and religious significances. Nor did they suspect for some time that they were upsetting a delicate balance between population and food supplies. For example, it took Lieutenant Bradley four months to feel he had sufficient proof that the Aborigines 'seek other food besides fish'. Phillip never comprehended how they could support themselves in what seemed to him the sterile, foodless bush. The whole system of nomadic ecology was so woefully misunderstood that, even half a century after the landing, the explorer Grey could still find pleasure in describing it. The first colonists had no comprehension that Sydney Cove had vital importance for a whole band, which was necessarily driven to depend on other places for food and water, to the embarrassment of other groups. But the settlement

itself was a sufficient cause for the Aborigines to keep at a distance. In February, one convict was publicly hanged; twelve were given a total of 1,172 lashes; the numbers of sick increased; and from such spectacles they would have turned away with loathing or fear. There must also have been repellent external evidence of the tension, hatred, brawling and drunkenness that, in spite of ferocious discipline, were turning Sydney Cove into what Clark later described as a 'whore's camp' — 'I would call it by the name of Sodom', he said, 'for there is more sin committed in it than in any other part of the world'.

For such uncomprehended reasons the colonists, in the course of February, usually saw only very small numbers of Aborigines, whose behaviour seemed unpredictable. At the sight of Europeans, individuals or small parties hid or ran away, especially in the less frequented parts of the harbour; even near the settlement they showed wariness; none would come near at all if the soldiers were present, or unless guns were laid down. There were nevertheless some confident, even bold, encounters. The recorded meetings must have been but a fraction of the actual total, but those that are known to have occurred were less complete and frontal than had been the case at Botany Bay. Relations worsened during March, but the same mixed pattern continued through fewer encounters. Some Aborigines raided a fishing party; two convicts were wounded and a number were threatened; someone threw a spear at an officer and did not flee when a gun, loaded with ball, was fired. Even Phillip had a tiff, and was warned by a raised spear, during a visit to Broken Bay, where he showed the mixture of calm, courage and wrong-headedness that was to characterise most of his dealings with them. Now too came the first complaint about European maltreatment: an Aboriginal man, pointing to marks or bruises, told Phillip as best he could of a beating he had received. There were nevertheless many meetings that were civil, friendly, or without incident.

In April and May the recorded meetings were fewer again and Hunter observed 'the natives to decrease in their numbers considerably', but did not realize that the winter-pattern of dispersal had begun by which the coastal clans spread out along the sea-board, though not inland. The differences between the 'tree' or 'forest tribes' inland from the coast and the 'brush' (i.e. heath) or 'coastal' peoples were not yet understood, nor was there any grasp of the contrasted marine-estuarine and woodland ecologies. It became evident, especially in May, that they were very short of food. When given it by the colonists, 'they eat with an eagerness that convinced us they must have been very hungry'. But civil meetings continued. Some small groups came close to the settlement and, at Botany Bay, a European party slept tranquilly near a large gathering of men, women and children. However, a new element appeared: several instances were noted of open fear amongst the women, and of their menfolk's refusing to let them go near the colo-

nists. Three convicts were murdered and one injured; a calf was wounded by a spear; some clothes were stolen. It was apparent that there was 'a pattern of growing irritation and hostility'.

The prevailing tendency among the colonists was to attribute the less understandable aspects of Aboriginal conduct to 'the fickle, wavering disposition of all savages', a proposition which revealed all too clearly what was wrong with their view point. At the same time Aboriginal insouciance and indifference struck some as puzzling. 'This day two of the natives app'd in camp without testifying any mistrust or indeed curiosity ... the novelty of such a scene seem'd in a g't measure to pass unnoticed by them'. A few 'passed close to the *Sirius*, without seeming to express, by their countenance or actions, either fear, curiosity or surprise'. Such experiences allowed no single opinion of the Aborigines either as persons or as social beings, to form. Where one colonist remarked '... a Quiet, Inoffensive People', and credited them with being 'total strangers to Personal Fear and have a Quick Sense of Injury', another would note but '... an appear(ance) of stifled apprehension, with now and then a forced laugh and a look of astonishment at all they saw'. No one could fathom their reluctance to become close friends. Even the thoughtful, observant Watkin Tench asked himself: was it possible that Captain Cook had done something in 1770 that now 'prevented the intercourse that would otherwise have taken place'? One fact seemed particularly baffling: 'there is something odd in their never being seen but in small (numbers) except by accident, tho' there is every reason to suppose they are numerous' (although the same writer had seen 'a body of near a hundred drawn up with an unexpected degree of regularity, having something the app'ce of discipline'). The 'something odd' eventually led to uneasiness. Major Robert Ross, the officer commanding the marine companies, was 'by no means of the opinion' that the Aborigines were 'that harmless, inoffensive race they have in general been represented to be'.

When, on 30 May, two convicts were killed, Phillip's perplexity was such that he determined to force a confrontation — not with punitive intent but, so he said, to try to make the Aborigines who had been concerned aware of how highly he disapproved of any injury to them. But it is a little doubtful if that was his sole intent; some of the dead convicts' possessions were missing and, according to White, 'the governor was resolved, on whomsoever he found any of the tools or clothing, to shew them his displeasure, and, by every means in his power, endeavour to convince them of his motives for such a procedure'. Many colonists suspected at the time, and later all accepted, that the Aborigines 'must have been provoked and injured by the convicts'. In an incident a week before, when some articles had been stolen and recovered, a convict had knifed one Aboriginal man ('the proof could not be got — they were dismissed without coming before a criminal court')

and it was supposed that the killing of the convicts was a retaliation. One of the Governor's ideas had been to display drawings showing a European shooting an Aboriginal and then being hanged, and an Aboriginal spearing a European and then being hanged. As like as not, the Aborigines would have reasoned: shoot an Aboriginal and hang any European; spear a European and hang *some other* Aboriginal.

In two minds, and certainly with only a hazy notion of what he was going to do, Phillip put himself at the head of an armed party of eleven — nine redcoats and two convicts, in Aboriginal eyes the feared and the despised — and plunged into the bush. So clumsy an excursion was probably bound to fail, and fail it did. No one knew the country well; a large, arms-bearing party asked for evasion; and, without a word of the language, Phillip could not have made his meaning clear — anyway, not without risking worse misunderstanding. In the event, they all got lost; they met no natives at all on the first day, though they saw some fishing placidly on Botany Bay; and, on the second day, they blundered on two very large groups whose presence had been entirely unsuspected. It is not necessary to suppose that such large gatherings took place from hostile intent. The Aborigines were also affected by the 'rage for curiosity' which had all the colonists, including Phillip, in its grip, and there is much to suggest that they felt the fascination of the novel — and the horrible. The thunder of the ordnance on the King's birthday would in itself have been enough to bring all the Aborigines between Broken Bay and Port Hacking to the neighbourhood of Port Jackson.

The first group numbered about three hundred, and among them were some who 'at first seemed rather hostilely inclined, and made signs, with apparent tokens of anger, for us to return', though some individuals 'shewed little fear or distrust'. By coolness and restraint, Phillip was able to come to an amicable relation. But some of the credit also lay with the Aborigines; indeed, only the foresight of one of them saved the Governor from a surprise meeting with the second large group, not in view, but less than a mile away. His luck might not have held a second time. Had there been anything practicable in his plan, the meetings gave him a good opportunity to explain himself, but he seems to have made no attempt to do so, having seen nothing to connect either of the parties with the murders. He did not know that not far away was the head of another convict who had been killed sometime earlier. But the Aborigines he encountered must have known, and they may well have concluded from the whole episode that to kill convicts was not only of no account but might even induce Phillip to reward them. The fact of this murder was revealed three weeks later by a runaway convict who had returned, half starved, only to be hanged for theft. According to his story, the Aborigines did not use him ill, and even on one occasion fed him. But they would not have him with them, and towards the end of his adventure 'would have burned him'

had he not escaped.

A large group, again more than three hundred strong, was still between Port Jackson and Botany Bay a week later, but they 'walked out of the track our people were in, & let them pass without showing any mischeivous intention'. The knowledge of such gatherings disturbed the colonists, who began to take precautions. Parties of less than six armed men were forbidden to go into the bush and at least one ship kept its boats within the cove. Nevertheless, there were still several friendly encounters, and not until the end of the month did the undercurrent of anxiety show how strong it was. Towards midnight on 27 June, the voices of many Aborigines — some sentinels supposed from from twenty to thirty — were heard from darkness near the women convicts' tents. The voices (a sure sign that no attack was intended) ceased abruptly when the sentinels cried out, no doubt quaveringly, the midnight 'all's well'. Whether the report was true, or the product of nerves, was never settled. The continuing nervousness was exemplified by an incident six months later. A rumour that two thousand armed Aborigines were mustering a mile from Sydney town led to a momentary panic. A second report gave the number as four hundred. A military party, hurriedly organized, found that there had been but fifty, all of whom had fled when a working-party of convicts pointed spades in the manner of guns.

The hope of amity and trust between the races had obviously miscarried by the middle of 1788. Whether fewer meetings occurred as the year went on, whether writers bothered less to mention them, is perhaps not certain, but the number of recorded incidents grew and, with them, the Governor's perplexity. On 9 July the Aborigines attempted what he called the only 'unprovoked act of violence' — the forcible seizure of a catch of fish after some had been shared; on the 22nd, they chased a convict party for two miles; on the 27th, they speared a convict and next day stoned a sailor. In August, September and October the story was much the same. During those months, several men were killed, and others wounded or threatened; one (a marine) disappeared; there was a daring raid on the hospital's herd of goats, and a quarrel over a fish-catch; a spear was thrown at an officer taking a census, and one at Philip's own party after returning from a walk to Broken Bay, where he had met nothing but friendliness and thoughtful kindness. It now seemed that the Aborigines near Sydney had ceased to discriminate between officers and men, soldiery and convicts, stragglers and formed parties, and had either lost some of their respect for firearms or would take advantage of any reluctance to use them.

A significant change took place in Phillip's outlook at this stage. It is smoothed over in his own account, but emerges through his secretary's.

On the 24th (October) a party of natives, meeting a convict who had straggled from the settlement to a fence that some people were mak-

ing for the purpose of inclosing stock, threw several spears at him; but, fortunately, without doing him any injury. The governor, on being made acquainted with the circumstances, immediately went to the spot with an armed party, where some of them being heard among the bushes, they were fired at; it having now become absolutely necessary to compel them to keep at a greater distance from the settlement.

No talk now of conciliating their affections; or of living with them in amity and kindness; of confident friendship without display of force; of giving them a high opinion of their new guests: the turnabout was complete. Yet, a week afterwards, Phillip could still admit that 'it is not possible to punish them without punishing the innocent with the guilty ...'. Two months later, at the end of 1788, he made another turnabout, and the way in which his mentality veered is a question of primary interest for the historian of racial relations.

As the winter of 1788 approached, conditions in the settlement deteriorated. Fresh provisions grew scarce; the catches of fish fell off; and the cutting of building-timber over a large tract frightened the game away so that few kangaroos, which were the colonists' only fresh meat, were caught. Sickness and scurvy increased, and deaths from all causes mounted to more than sixty. Every day ailing men foraged for food-stuffs and medicinal plants, and fishing parties went out almost every other day. The strain on food supplies provoked the Aborigines, and they must have been irritated too by the physical disturbance. Every week marines tramped to Botany Bay, and exploration parties went north and west. The local bands thus had both cause and occasion to keep at a distance, while making what retaliation they could. And, as if understandable causes of dismay were not enough, there were also events to play on their secular and superstitious fears. On 4 June, in celebration of the King's birthday, *Sirius* and *Supply* fired 21-gun salutes at sunrise, noon and sunset. On *Supply*, Blackburn noted in his journal that 'No cannon had ever been fired since our Arrival on the Coast', and wondered whether the Aborigines 'might take such a Terrible Noise as a Denunciation of War'. On 22 June, as the sun declined, the shock of an earthquake 'came from the South West like the wave of the sea Accompanyd by a Noise like a Distant Cannon. The Trees shook their Tops as if a Gale of Wind was Blowing'.

At about this time Watkin Tench, that 'candid and liberal mind', with many others was puzzling over the fact that intercourse with the Aborigines was 'neither frequent nor cordial'. He had at first suspected it to be due to their fear, jealousy or hatred. Then, as he wrote:

I confess that, in common with many others, I was inclined to attribute this conduct to a spirit of malignant levity. But a farther acquaintance with them, founded on several instances of their humanity and generosity ... has entirely reversed my opinion; and

led me to conclude, that the unprovoked outrages committed upon them, by unprincipled individuals among us, caused the evils we had experienced.

Phillip's outlook developed in much the same way. In the midst of the troubles of May 1788 he assured Lord Sydney that 'nothing less than the most absolute necessity' would ever make him fire on the Aborigines, though he tacitly admitted that he had come close to it. But he could not yield his thesis that confidence was the key. He harped on that theme until early 1790, by which time he had destroyed all Aboriginal confidence and may have lost his own. In 1788, being still unable, evidently, to grasp that two communities so constituted could not imaginably live together without friction, and being deeply committed to what Tench, with some irony, would later call, 'those speculative and laborious compositions on the advantages and superiority of a state of nature', he had necessarily to find a scapegoat. The convicts were ready-made for the role.

Perhaps *Blackwood's Magazine* went a little far (in 1827) in describing them as 'the most murderous, monstrous, debased, burglarious, brutified, larcenous, felonious and pickpocketous set of scoundrels that ever trod the earth', but they were a very hard lot, if not for being where they were, then for withstanding their fate with such desperate vitality. They were probably at the bottom of some, perhaps many, of the worst troubles; the records are not very explicit; understandably, because the marines declined to supervise the convicts and their supervisors had to be of their own kind. It seems certain, however, that they had much to do with the Aborigines openly, and the surreptitious traffic was probably constant. Illicit relations were easier by night than by day, and it was recorded that 'neither the fear of death or punishment prevents their going out in the night'. The most condign reprisals — in one case, 150 lashes and fettering for twelve months for a party which had 'daringly and flagrantly broken through every order which had been given to prevent their interfering with the natives' — had little effect. The documents are curiously silent about sexual traffic between Europeans and the 'sooty sirens', as one appreciative officer called them. But in a colony in which even the officers had convict concubines, and in which women were few (the sex ratio among the convicts in 1788 was three to one), the male convicts probably made persistent efforts to gratify their appetites through the native women. There was, as well, much purloining of Aboriginal fishing-gear, weapons and canoes by men desperate for food and without equipment of their own. But soldiery and seamen were probably also involved in such delicts. They certainly helped to irritate the natives by the 'rage for curiosity' — a mania for collecting artifacts. No amount of blame heaped on the convicts can sufficiently explain the general troubles. The Aborigines did not always attack them and, when they did, it could have been because such

miserable wretches were as convenient a target as they were, for Phillip and his officers, a convenient scapegoat.

Racial relations had thus passed through three phases by the last months of 1788 — the 'cautious friendship' of the first few days; the 'neither frequent nor cordial' intermezzo of the late summer and autumn; and the often open animosity of the winter and spring. In November, Phillip had to admit that the Aborigines 'now avoid us more than they did when we first landed'; rather oddly, in view of the October raid, he did not seem to connect that fact with his own conduct. A fourth phase now began. The Governor professed himself 'tired of this state of petty warfare and endless uncertainty', of 'inconsequent fraternization and inconsequent hostility', and of a stalemate in which 'not a native has come near the settlement for many months'. Having, in October, found it 'absolutely necessary' to force them away, he now saw it as 'absolutely necessary' to force them in. He decided to capture some by force. There were evidently two motives, one immediate, one more remote. Immediately, as Tench put it, kidnap-

would either inflame the rest to signal vengeance, in which case we should know the worst, and provide accordingly: or else it would induce an intercourse, by the report of which our prisoners would make of the mildness and indulgence with which we used them. And farther, it promised to unveil the cause of their mysterious conduct; by putting us in possession of their reasons for harassing and destroying our people.

Or, as Phillip phrased it somewhat later,

it was absolutely necessary that we should attain their language or teach them ours, that the means of redress might be pointed out to them if they are injured, and to reconcile them by showing the many advantages they would enjoy by mixing with us.

More remotely (but perhaps nearer the bone), according to Tench again: intercourse with the natives, for the purpose of knowing whether or not the country possessed any resources, by which life might be prolonged, as well as on other accounts, becoming more and more desirable, the Governor resolved to capture two more of them.

That observation was made some nine months after the first capture, but perhaps the lapse of time had only uncovered the thought.

Arabanoo, the first prisoner, was taken at Manly Cove on 31 December, 1788. A second man escaped after a desperate struggle, and no doubt spread a tale of treachery. The captive (according to Tench's description, which may have idealised the man), was about thirty, not tall but robust, and with a face that suggested manliness, sensibility, and thoughtfulness rather than animation. His voice, at its best, was soft and musical. He behaved with cleanliness and decency, was quickly courteous to women, and gave an impression of gentleness and humanity. Children flocked to him. He showed gravity and steadiness, together

with dignity and independence, brooking no insult but giving none. Although peaceable and easily led, he often turned the tables, with humour, against those who teased him. Strong liquor repelled him: he turned away from it with disgust and abhorrence, as he did also from the sight of a convict being flogged. He had, or showed, less intelligence than other Aborigines the colonists came to know, but he endeared himself more: 'perhaps the only native who ever attached himself to us from choice; and who did not prefer a precarious subsistence among wilds and precipices, to the comforts of a civilized system'. The 'choice' came about when Phillip unfettered him, leaving him almost free of restraint, out of gratitude for help to native victims of a smallpox epidemic which, in the second quarter of 1789, brought about the deaths of perhaps half the Port Jackson Aborigines and unknown numbers elsewhere. For a while there were three natives in the settlement — Arabanoo, and a boy (Nanbaree) and girl (Abaroo) who had been found bereft. Arabanoo might then have escaped but did not try to do so. On 18 May, 1789 he died from the disease. Phillip thought his plan 'utterly defeated'. Arabanoo had had no real opportunity to talk with other Aborigines, so his capture and death can have taught them nothing, unless it were that friendly overtures could not be trusted. If it taught Phillip anything then it was not visible in his subsequent conduct.

At that time, Aborigines at any distance from Sydney, seeing the Europeans possibly for the first time, still 'showed every sign of welcome and friendship to the strangers'. But around the settlement 'the same suspicious dread of our approach, and the same scenes of vengeance on unfortunate stragglers, continued to prevail'. Even a Negro convict, who twice tried to thrust himself on the Aborigines, was repulsed. Within the settlement, conditions were worse and morale had slumped. Faction, jealousy and spite were at work. There had been a falling off in loyalty to Phillip. Many colonists now felt like John White, the sick, over-worked Surgeon General, that they were in a country 'so forbidding and so hateful as only to merit execration and curses'. Phillip, moved now by the second rather than the first motive, ordered two more Aborigines to be made captive. That was done, much against the grain of the officer who had the duty, on 25 November, 1789.

One of the men, Colby, escaped after a week; the other, Benelong, five months afterwards. He was to become something of a personage in the colony, but that was later. According to Tench's account (which certainly did not idealize Benelong, or Baneelon as his name was first spelled) he showed himself, during his captivity and immediately afterwards, to be about as unlike Arabanoo in personality and character as well could be. He appeared a volatile egotist, mainly interested in love and war; a tease, a flirt and very soon a wine-bibber; a trickster and

eventually a bit of a turncoat. His captors cared for him as well as they could in what were now 'desperate circumstances' because of food shortage. Phillip at this time seems to have been divided between a rising fear of the Aborigines and a falling confidence in them. In February, 1790 he wrote that there was now little to be feared; that the Aborigines had never betrayed a confidence placed on them; on what evidence is not clear, that they had continuing confidence in 'some of us'. He and his officers tried to hide from Benelong the facts of the famine in case, somehow, the knowledge leaked out to the surrounding Aborigines and led to an attack. Benelong nevertheless felt the pinch and it often made him 'furious and melancholy' although, on the whole, the enforced association seemed to please him. But he escaped by a trick on 3 May, 1790. Of stronger personality than Arabanoo, and quicker to learn, he had had excellent relations with many of the Europeans, including Phillip. He seems to have taken away with him a smattering of English, a love of liquor (possibly he invented the name 'tumble-down' by which the Aborigines knew it in the early years), an assortment of scrambled facts about Europeanism, and doubtless a fund of stories — including, probably, one about a white woman he had kissed. After the escape, Phillip still had thoughts of an attack in one corner of his mind: in June, he wrote that there was little risk of an attack on any building; 'not that I think they want innate bravery — they certainly do not — but they are sensible of the great superiority of our arms'. Significant relations then apparently ceased for four months. Apart from the fear of other captures, want must have driven the Aborigines towards the outer fringes of their domains. Both garrison and convicts were starving: 'the dread of perishing by famine stares us in the face'. A fifth phase of relations started in September and October 1790, by which time, incidentally, many of Phillip's domestic difficulties were easing. A chance encounter at Manly Cove between some of his officers and perhaps two hundred Aborigines — among them Benelong, emaciated and at first difficult to recognize — brought the Governor hurrying to restore freindship. On that occasion his courage and magnanimity never showed to better advantage, and his ignorance of Aboriginal mentality and tendency to worse. He was speared in an incident, the accounts of which differ in important details, but there seems little doubt that the fault was mainly his. He ignored signs of equivocation before the attack took place; he indulged his 'rage for curiosity' at what was clearly the wrong time; he ignored a minatory gesture; he used precisely the wrong word to calm either an affronted or frightened native; and he reached for a weapon even though only with the intent of discarding it. In all these respects he was more his own victim than that of his assailant.

The deeper motive of the attack remains a mystery. Historians tend to regard the assault simply as the act of a frightened man. That seems

improbable. There were at least six major grievances which could have been expressed in the attack. They would have been held (1) by the man who struggled free when Arabanoo was captured; (2) by relatives and friends of Arabanoo, grieving over his death; (3) by Colby, his relatives and friends; (4) by Benelong, his relatives and friends; (5) by men with a marriage claim on Abaroo, the nubile girl held in the settlement; and (6) by relatives and friends of Nanbaree, the young boy held in the settlement. Any one or all would have been a sufficient motive for a public remonstrance against Phillip. The actions of his attacker, one Wileemarin, up to the time the spear was thrown, were consistent with a remonstrance that need not necessarily have led to a direct assault. Perhaps Phillip's worst mistake was to shout words intended to mean 'bad! bad!', which was more an accusation than an appeal or warning. And had he stood still, instead of advancing, Wileemarin might not have thrown. To his credit, he allowed no retaliation, and harboured no resentment.

The wound, from which he recovered slowly, was the penultimate irony of his policy. Perhaps the ultimate irony was that when, mainly through Benelong, in early October, 1790, numbers of Aborigines began to come freely to the settlement and, at long last, it could be said that 'from this time our intercourse with the natives, though partially interrupted, was never broken off', other Aborigines from Rose Hill, farther west, now came to Sydney to express 'great dissatisfaction at the number of white men who had settled in their former territories'. The western bands, seeing the treasures being lavished on the now-mendicant Benelong and his friends as part of the price of peace, no doubt drew conclusions which, had Phillip known of them, must have surprised and disappointed him. That was the start of a chain-reaction which, as settlement expanded, and even ahead of it, forced one tribe after another into some sort of dependency on Europeans.

At the end of 1790 Phillip's policy came to its sixth phase. His huntsman, a convict named M'Entire, was speared at Botany Bay and died slowly and miserably. The man was widely known to be detested by the Aborigines, having long 'been suspected by us of having in his excursions shot or injured them'. The murder put Phillip in a great passion: 'I am fully persuaded that they were unprovoked and the barbarity of their conduct admits of no extenuation'. He ordered out a punitive party. At first he determined that he would have ten Aborigines shot and their lopped heads brought back, together with two captives. The attack was to be made by surprise and force: no duplicity, no signs of amity, no response to friendly advances, 'for such conduct would not only present treachery but give them reason to distrust every future mark of peace and friendship on our part'. Women and children were not to be harmed, nor any huts burned. The two men taken were to be hanged 'in the presence of as many of their country-

men as can be collected after having explained the cause of such a punishment'. Here indeed was a change from the man who, earlier, had said that he could not bear the thought of 'punishing the innocent with the guilty'. But he asked for suggestions from the officer ordered to command the force, and instantly fell in with part of a proposed modification: to capture six, execute some, and later send back the others to spread the lesson. Phillip then gave his final order:

... if six cannot be taken, let this number be shot. Should you however find it practicable to take so many, I will hang two and send the rest to Norfolk Island for a period, which will cause their countrymen to believe that we have despatched them secretly.

The dutiful men went out, carrying axes and bags for the heads. On a first occasion, fifty-two strong, they failed to take any Aborigines, though they saw some. Much to their embarrassment they met Colby, whom Phillip had tried to bribe — and, in desperation, incapacitate by stuffing him with food! — to stay away from Botany Bay so that he could not warn the Aborigines of the impending raid. A second sortie, ten days later, collapsed in tragi-comic circumstances, and the whole idea was called off.

Had the punitive expedition succeeded, it must have greatly damaged Phillip's reputation. Possibly it might have led to his indictment or recall: there were men in the colony, who, from various motives, might have capitalized it as others were to try to do in a somewhat similar case in South Australia in 1840. In the upshot it cost him the respect of at least one officer, who was revolted by the affair and kept it on his conscience. A modern historian has wondered why, since 'it was such a very abstract sin'. Doubtless Lieutenant Dawes had no taste for murder. Phillip could not have made it appear even judicial murder. He did not intend to hold a trial; he wanted to hang some natives; and any would do. There were other curious aspects of the incident. The Governor brushed aside the known character of M'Entire, a tremendous villain who, knowing that he was dying, was heard to 'accuse himself of the commission of crimes of the deepest dye, accompanied with such expressions of despair as are too terrible to repeat'; although he denied any particularly wicked offences against the Aborigines, no one believed him. Moreover, Phillip nagged Benelong, who was known to have a particular loathing of M'Entire, to go with Colby in search of the murderers; and at one stage he expected Colby — 'Botany Bay' Colby, as he was called — to act against his own kin, the Botany Bay band.

After this revealing affair, Phillip's stay as Governor lasted a further two years. Over that time, according to an historian, 'the native question sank into unimportance', which means that no one bothered any more about it. The Aborigines commingled freely with the colonists, and it was recorded that 'a great many have taken up their abode entirely among us', so that 'every gentleman's house was now become a resting

or sleeping place for some every night; whenever they were pressed for hunger, they had recourse immediately to our quarters'. Whether the Governor imagined that his policy had now succeeded remains uncertain, for he did not say, but there is evidence that the status of the Aborigines was already in transition, and one may trace to this period the beginnings of the scorn and dislike of them, and the indifference to their fate, which were to become so strongly characteristic of Australian mentality. Thomas Watling, an artist-convict who arrived at Port Jackson just as Phillip was preparing to leave it, compared the prisoners' lot with the indulgence shown to the Aborigines, and commented bitterly: 'this may be philosophy, according to the calculation of our rigid dictators; but I think it is the falsest species of it that I have ever known or heard of'; and of course he was right.

The Governor had brought the harbour clans into close continuous touch with all classes of the European populace, in accordance with his idea that 'every means shall be used to reconcile them to live amongst us' but, as far as the record allows one to judge, saw nothing wrong with the outcome and, to all appearances, washed his hands of it. To the officers the Aborigines were

an amusement and an alleviation of the post's tedium. To the convicts they were people inferior even to themselves. They tried to take their own wrongs out on the black man or to make what profit they could out of him.

The well-intentioned hope of preventing contact with the convicts lest 'the women be abused and the natives disgusted' thus perished. Few of the other good things that Phillip had hoped would come from close association really eventuated, except that many Aborigines picked up enough English to make themselves understood; indeed, their linguistic facility began to be noticed in the first few days at Botany Bay. In 1792 George Thompson recorded in his *Journal*:

they are very quick in learning to speak English, and will repeat any sentence after you immediately, particularly any tune. When in their canoes, they keep constantly singing while they paddle along. They have the French tune of Malbrook very perfect; I have heard a dozen or twenty singing it together.

A few colonists learned a little of the Port Jackson dialects, but the officers who seem to have had the gift of tongues, or a lasting interest in Aboriginal culture, did not stay in the colony, so that their knowledge had little effect; so little, indeed that thirty years later a missionary complained that 'no one has yet attempted to study the language'. That was at a time when it was still official policy to 'ease the natives into a civilized community' and, west of the Blue Mountains, at Bathurst, where the calamity of Port Jackson was being repeated, the first Christian service ended with 'a very excellent, appropriate sermon, strongly impressing the justice, good policy and expediency of civiliz-

ing the aborigines or black natives of the country, and settling them in townships'. For many years after the 1790s no significant use was made of Aboriginal knowledge of the best routes through the country, of tracts suitable for settlement, or of useful natural products. The disrupted bands certainly learned nothing of 'the advantages they will reap from cultivating the land', and racial violence became more or less constant.

At Phillip's departure there were already present both the elements, and the conditions for the persistence, of two realities which continued without material change, except for the worse, over the next 150 years. One was a pattern of racial relations, the other a structure of racial equities. They were the products of a process — meeting, sporadic violence, a general struggle, and the imposition of terms by the stronger — which always appeared wherever settlement went. After a true economy formed, in the second decade of the nineteenth century, the pattern contracted: one side or the other plunged straight into the general struggle. The colonists' 'mania' — the word is their own — for stock and land soon disclosed as axiomatic that 'a hunting and pastoral economy cannot co-exist within the same bounds'. Consequently, Aboriginal society survived only outside the pastoral bounds. Within them, the racial pattern — dominance and subjugation — became a rule of practice, and the structure of equities — the Europeans' maximal, the Aborigines' minimal — became if not open rule of law, then its tacit convention.

During the five years under study there were two societies interacting in a single field. An ethnocentric approach, either in anthropology or historiography, to the facts of a two-sided racial struggle, must be regarded as insufficient. One cannot accept as *intellectually* adequate the judgments that dismiss the Aborigines as 'a melancholy footnote to Australian history' or are content, after some remarks on the sadness of it all, to say that history made of them 'a codicil to the Australian story'. To point out too that 'the aboriginal race has always possessed enthusiastic friends, but the friends have never agreed upon a consistent and practical policy for the black man's preservation' transfers, a little too blandly, an onus to where it does not belong. The primary axiom of settlement, or at least of development — that Aboriginal and European society could not or must not be allowed to co-exist — allowed little, if any, room for such a policy, even had it been practicable, which may well be doubted. It seems to follow that one cannot make full human sense of the development of European life in Australia without reference to the structure of racial relations and the persistent indifference to the fate of the Aborigines; in short, without an analysis of the Australian conscience. Part of such a study would be the apologetic element in the writing of Australian history, an element that sticks out like a foot from a shallow grave.

One cannot dismiss the fact that three realities co-existed with the unfolding of 'the Australian story'. Racial conflict persisted wherever any Aborigines survived; many Aborigines made continuous efforts to adapt themselves to new conditions of life; and, among a few Europeans, an interest in the subjugated race never wholly died. The relevance of those facts may have been unappreciated or denied; they may have been passed over in the writing of history; but, without them, there could have been no ground or spring for the nascent humanitarianism of the 1930s. In other words, there was more than an accidental correspondence between the ruin of Aboriginal, and the making of European, life in Australia. There was, in fact, a functional concomitance. The interdependence was more clear at some times than at others. It was particularly clear in the decades of the nineteenth century in which material development and the spoliation of the native life were most intense. The vilification of the Aborigines reached its pitch precisely over that period. Few national histories can have afforded a more blazing, and odious, rationalization of ugly deeds. The social historian does not have to depend on an art of discovering obscure correlations to document the facts. In the 1870s, Anthony Trollope probably spoke for a majority of Australians. 'Their doom', he said of the Aborigines, 'is to be exterminated; and the sooner that their doom be accomplished, — so that there be no cruelty, — the better will it be for civilization'. In the next decade, Percy Russell wrote —

Her shield unsullied by a single crime,
Her wealth of gold and still more golden fleece,
Forth stands Australia, in her birth sublime,
The only nation from the womb of Peace.

Phillip's period is interesting because it produced the materials whose decay-products made the ground fertile for such rank growths. The vision of primitive man was already trifocal — romantic, realistic and sardonic. As might perhaps have been expected, the collapsed romanticism turned into violence, the realism into indifference, and the sardonicism into contempt. The ensemble of violence, indifference and contempt suited the mood and needs of a transplanted people. What makes the case for a relational history, within a field containing two peoples, is the continuous working of a single influence with two victims — a sightlessness towards Aboriginal life, and an eyelessness towards the moral foundation of Australian development. Let us call it simply the fact of indifference. It denotes a whole syndrome of psychosocial qualities, which were as much an enabling cause or condition of Aboriginal ruin as they were of the shaping of European mentality and life in Australia. One cannot readily call to mind any important issue or problem, as the outcome of which Australian life became what it became, in which there was more than a derisory regard for Aboriginal concerns. That fact, if true, supports the thesis that the destruction of

Aboriginal society was not the consequence of European development, but its price, which is a very different thing. The intuition of that fact was the maggot in Trollope's justification of the worst, and the demon in Russell's mythologizing of the best, in Australian history. The year 1791 is a natural starting-point for a study of the consequences, among a people of British moral traditions, and among their victims, of a moral indifference which expressed socially, and inter-racially, the main postulate of settlement. The disposal of land, the development of law and order, the distribution of political power, the recognition of human rights, and the administration of justice must all have taken a different course, had it not been for the suffocation of conscience. And a number of chickens would not now be coming home to roost.

Phillip has been eulogized, in many ways no doubt rightly, as 'an ideal founder for any new colony', but only in respect of his management of European affairs in New South Wales, not in his dealings with the Aborigines. In that field, and by the test, not of what he said or may have wished, but of what he did and what it led to, Phillip emerges badly. One is hard put at times even to recognize the man said to have been 'endowed with common sense, kindness, breadth of vision, firmness and sincerity'. He was undoubtedly courageous, kindly, and of good intent. But many of his transactions with the Aborigines lacked common sense; his vision of them was so warped by presupposition that he misunderstood their character as persons and social beings about as badly as he did the two-sided racial situation; and his 'sincerity' was all too soon overborne by considerations of 'good policy' — indeed, he appeared to forget all about them during the last two years of his stay. Apparently at no time did he see himself as a possible architect of their ruin, which in fact he was. But he seems to have been as impercipient towards the European society taking shape at Sydney. On his departure in 1792, he believed the colony to be 'approaching that state in which I have so long and anxiously wished to see it' whereas, within a month, it began to disintegrate under tensions he had helped to construct. By that time also he had induced the Aborigines in large numbers to become mendicants on the settlement. At the very doorstep of Government House there was 'a rendezvous for the blacks, where the soldiers joined them, singing and dancing in the evening', and no doubt sharing stronger pleasures as well. Nothing survives in the records to suggest that he saw anything amiss. Historians seem disposed to attribute all that was good in early Australian foundations to his courage, determination and prudence, and all that was bad to the conditions, including the human material, that limited him, but 'no historian would dare to speculate whether the pioneer's high reputation would have survived had he been forced to remain and face the problems of the next five years'. Among these problems were the degradation of many, and the alienation of most of the Aborigines within several days'

march of Sydney. Given the fact and the constitution of the settlement, the upshot for the Aborigines of course would have been much the same, probably worse, under another Governor. Little as it is, that is perhaps all that can be said. One of his naval captains thought that 'God Almighty made Phillip on purpose for the place, for never did man know better what to do, or with more determination see it done'. On the other hand Lord Howe, the Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet, had hinted to Lord Sydney at the time of Phillip's appointment that he was scarcely the man 'for a service of this complicated nature'. In any study of Australian history in which Aboriginal affairs are put in the forefront, Lord Howe's judgment has much to recommend it.

Much has been said, and said rightly, in Phillip's defence. There was no hint of general principle in his Instructions concerning the Aborigines. At the most, he could find a *modus vivendi*. He experimented with the two notions — assimilation and expulsion — which have always polarised Australian thought. But, while making proper allowance for the ideas and standards of his time, including his notions of the human and social nature of Aboriginal man, one must observe that his methods were very untactical, on occasions slightly crazy. Most of his troubles had been with the bands south of the harbour: to raid the bands north of the harbour was an odd thing to do. It is hard to understand his reasoning that force and trickery would 'take away that fear and prejudice which they have continued to show ever since our first misunderstanding with them'. One naturally wonders why it never occurred to him to use go-betweens: he had several suitable officers of high intellectual capacity who had shown much interest in Aboriginal life. It would be charitable to assume that accumulating burdens and failing health proved too much for a man who has been described by a modern historian as two men in one: a man who 'with grace, dignity, industry and great self-control had won the battle for survival' and the man who 'had once wanted to hand over murderers and sodomites to be eaten by cannibals'. In New South Wales he had to be the arbiter of a more terrible external duality, which no one has yet found a way to bridge.

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