

# THE COLONIAL JOURNALS

AND THE EMERGENCE OF  
AUSTRALIAN LITERARY CULTURE

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&  
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'THE CHINESE PUZZLE'

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The Vandemonian alarm having died away, and the State Trials being now absolutely a bore, a new excitement has opportunely sprung up—a trial to Mayoral jurisprudence, an exercise for Young Collingwood oratory—the Chinese puzzle.

It has, of course, been our lot to witness the commencement of that terrible irruption of Pagans (as they are now invariably called) which threatens the Christianity (and the diggings) of Victoria. With horror we have heard of the barbarian hordes about to be poured into this happy land, and of their obvious intention of exterminating the British—and indeed, (in



spite of Colonel Vern) the whole European population. With horror we have read those foul and wicked prints which, when exposed in the police-court, brought the blush of shame and indignation into the cheek of His Worship, and sent a highly respectable lady of the name of Bridget (we believe from Sligo) into fits.

These things are, at first sight, horrible, we must admit; but let us look at them again, to be quite sure whether they are as monstrous as they appear.

No doubt, to get over the preliminary objection which has brought up *Paterfamilies* in his wrath, certain pictures, said—by undoubted judges—to be of an immoral tendency, have been sold by certain Pagans to certain Christians; and no doubt more—we are not told how many—have been fished up by our vigilant and intelligent police. Very well: the Collector of Customs should have stopped these in the Bay; but the offenders, either by way of sale or publication, may be punished when they get on shore. They have adopted this country, and they must, with it, take its laws. We believe they do, most submissively. Some individuals, out of an immigration said to amount to very many thousands, have then been detected in an offence and punished for it. Is their sin to be visited on their country-men? And shall we, in common justice, hang simultaneously a few of our leading booksellers in consideration of the vice of Holywell Street? “Down they shall be put,” said Sir Charles Hotham, rather too aristocratically, of foreigners in general, the other day. “Down they shall be put,” say many wise people, of the Chinese now. But why, and how?

For our part, we doubt the policy as well as the legality of any such proceedings as our intensely European fellow-citizens are calling for, against the Pagans from the land of tea. We think it would be at least wise to reflect a little before setting out on so eminently unchristian a crusade, as Peter—beg pardon, John Thomas—the hermit is getting up at this crisis.

Look at John Chinaman as you see him in Collins Street, with his happy and intelligent—and, we ought to add, clean—face, and compare him with a few of our fellow-countrymen as they first appear in the colony. If he is not a Christian, this is your opportunity to make him one; if he is, so much the better. But, as a citizen, how is he objectionable? Nobody seems willing to answer that.

We submit then, in the first place, that we want colonists, and that till there is a clear case against John Chinaman, we want *him*. We see him marching through the street in European dress, and we are much obliged to him for his custom; we see him consuming European food, and we admire his appetite. (We only hope he has imported his taste for little dogs, and will consume the few thousand useless curs which the government *won't* tax.) We see him refusing European drink, and we respect his sobriety! There he is, a Victorian from Asia—a Pagan, certainly, but ready to be converted, reverend and dear sir, whenever you like to begin! There he is, we say, a Victorian, who has brought his speciality of industry, whatever it may be, and his producing power, to add to the real wealth of the colony. A Victorian, obedient to our laws,

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and likely to be more useful to us in many ways than many of our importations from home, however meritorious and well-meaning they may be. If he be an inferior animal, as we are informed the intellectual Brown believes, let him do inferior animals' work, of which there is plenty required; if this be an error on the part of Brown, why then let the Chinaman improve us; let him be Lieutenant-Governor, if the post will fit him; let us do anything, in fact, except declare war upon a friend—against a visitor, at any rate—in whom we see a good servant to begin with, and possibly a good customer into the bargain.

As to any danger to our laws from Chinamen, we confess our fears lie in a different direction. We look with some alarm at the habits of despotism likely to be engendered amongst our small authorities, by the too ready submission of the thousands of Celestials whom they will now have the opportunity of bullying to the top of their bent. "The Chinaman," says an undisputed authority, "is bred up to civil obedience *tenero ab ungui*, with every chance of proving a quiet subject at least. Such institutions certainly do not denote the existence of much liberty; but, if peaceful obedience and universal order be the sole objects in view, they argue, on the part of the governors, some knowledge of human nature, and an adaptation of the means to the end." So John Chinaman would be peaceful—even at Ballaarat [sic]. One question: Was Peter Lalor, late Commander-in-Chief of the Insurgents, a Chinaman?

To our minds there is something contemptible in the rush from panic to panic for which Melbourne is so sadly distinguished. The Russians have not invaded us; the *Great Britain*, spite of her cannonading, has left of us safe; special constables have been sworn in to save us from Ballaarat: Ballaarat stands where it did, and so does Melbourne—not a constable being required. And now, at length, there being nothing left of our Rifle Brigades and our Sepoys to talk valorously about, we have a chattering of Tartar domination and anti-Celestial morals; we are to exclude industry and energy from the colony, on the plea that it is not European; and with a shout of "China for the Chinese," we are to shut ourselves within such lands as our own wise system allows us, to despise foreigners, and to be the laughing-stock of all sensible mankind, in all quarters of the world.

If anybody could tell us what we were afraid of; if we were not mere children, seeing ghosts in the dark, and only in the dark, our terrors would be respectable; but, really, our present condition is absurd. Take any British citizen aside and ask him what he is afraid of—why he wishes to exclude the Chinese—and whether he is sure that he wishes to exclude them at all. His answer is terribly confused. "Morals, sir, morals, must be attended to. Pagans, you know Pagans. No Mrs. Chisholm at the Chinese ports—no distressed needlewomen—no wives for Pagans, sir. Prints, sir, improper prints. Very proper observation of Mayor. Pagans' wives—prints—pictures—mayor—inferior race—Asiatic Tartar.—Must be put a stop to!"

This is all we can learn against the Chinese, an intelligent, educated, and industrious class of immigrants who, we think, may be made immensely serviceable to us (the English) in the



development of the industrial resources of this colony. A prejudice has been got up against them, and that prejudice has sought every possible pretext for doing them wrong. It has sought to make our little Legislature exclude the Chinese, assuming an imperial right, and pretending that we are an independent state with a voice in the matter. It has sometimes called itself by sacred names, and sometimes announced itself in a mere political character; but it is a prejudice, and worse, it is a panic. We are afraid of the Chinese, and we have not the moral courage to say so. They have not a weapon amongst them; nevertheless they have terrified us. And the Attorney-General is preparing a bill to relieve our minds—a bill for the exclusion of skilled artisans and admirable agriculturists, a bill to cause a further delay in the cultivation of our lands. That is Mr. Stawell's present amusement and occupation, since, without the assistance of Mr. Molesworth, he acquitted all the state prisoners. But let us wait a little. Let us do nothing in haste. Let us give Chinese colonists a chance, and not commence legislating against them till we know the reason why. And even then let us consider whether we wish to exclude them from the colony or only from the diggings, and whether, by cutting them off from the gold-fields and opening the land, we could not make their industry of vast value to ourselves. In short, let us look at this question as selfishly as possible. Let us assure the Chinese that they are Pagans and our inferiors, and let us bastinado them from time to time, if that oriental mode of punishment be thought desirable; but if we can get anything out of them let us do so, and unless we are a perfectly irrational people, let us stay Mr. Stawell's hand till we see whether he is about to slay an Asiatic goose come here to lay golden eggs.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Chisholm is requested to smuggle us a few China women, and, by all means, to let those she brings be young. It is, we believe, a melancholy truism, applicable to the whole people, "that with the progress of age, the old men come very ugly, and the old women, if possible, more so." (*Vide Penny Cyclopædia*, article China.)

Such being the case, perhaps some of the Pagans will unite themselves to more durable British spinsters, and, attaching themselves to the soil of Victoria, found a new family upon the face of the earth.

We say nothing of the expediency of such marriages, except that in no case, we trust, will the lady find that by any accident she has "caught a Tartar!"