The Missionary Marsden
AN AUSTRALIAN VIEW

SAMUEL MARSDEN, in spite of his outstanding importance in the early history of Australasia, has fared ill at the hands of our historians. New Zealand writers, until the recent publication of Judith Binney’s perceptive book on Thomas Kendall, have not looked beyond the too simple folk tradition of Greatheart Marsden, the Apostle to the Maoris. Australians, with the exception of a few uncritical clerics, have perpetuated the equally unsatisfactory colonial tradition of the selfishly materialistic flogging parson that was set firmly by the biased contemporary accounts of William Charles Wentworth and John Dunmore Lang. Manning Clark has come closest to bringing out the complicated motivation of the man in his multi-volume History of Australia, but the need remains for a comprehensive and careful study that might rescue Marsden from the caricaturist and present him as a credible human being.

My purpose here is to suggest the complexity of Marsden’s character and motivation, and to indicate a line of biographical approach that takes account of his activities in every area engaging his interest. The great weakness of the existing delineations of Marsden is not so much that they are violently partisan, rather that they are too narrowly identified with his work in a particular geographical

The theme of this article was presented, with variations, to the 1968 ANZAS Conference at Christchurch, New Zealand, and as the Anniversary Lecture to the Royal Australian Historical Society in January 1969. Much of the argument has appeared in my Oxford University Press booklet on Marsden in the ‘Great Australians’ Series. I wish to thank the Australian Humanities’ Research Council for a Myer Foundation Grant that subsidised research at the Hocken and Alexander Turnbull Libraries, and to acknowledge the generosity of the people with whom I travelled, worked and lived while in New Zealand.

2 As expressed in A. H. Reed, Greatheart of Maoriland, Dunedin, 1939.
field. The most serious biographical study yet published is Professor J. R. Elder's introductory essay in his *Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden*, but this is essentially an unbalanced work, as it takes its tone from a detailed consideration of Marsden's New Zealand exploits, and fails to penetrate below the surface of a career in New South Wales that accords ill with a simple unqualified picture of a dedicated evangelist.

The result is a loss of balance and perspective. Neither M. H. Ellis and Bill Wannan in Australia, nor J. R. Elder and A. H. Reed in New Zealand, have produced a portrait of Marsden which is credible or comprehensible to the opposing camp. What has been missed so far is the opportunity for a full scale study of Marsden's interests in England, New South Wales, the Society Islands, and New Zealand. Such a study must cope with an immense range and volume of sources and with the difficulty of interpreting behaviour that appears irreconcilable. But the effort is worthwhile, in that Marsden's work in a variety of fields is interdependent. His role in any one sphere assists in the illumination and explanation of his actions in the others. The truth of this is especially apparent when we seek to understand his work as an evangelist.

Except for a two years' stay in England, and for his seven trips to New Zealand, Marsden was resident in New South Wales, as chaplain and later senior chaplain to the penal colony, from his arrival in 1794 to his death in 1838. He acted as agent in the Pacific area for the London and Church Missionary Societies and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. He was a highly successful and imaginative breeder of sheep and cattle, a founding Vice President of the Agricultural Society, a pioneer in the culture of hops and vine, a millowner, ship owner and money lender. He was for many years an agricultural advisor to governors and a senior member of the Parramatta bench of magistrates. He was in short, a very active man.

I used the word 'serious' a moment ago. Let me say that no study of Marsden could possibly be as serious as the subject himself. In not one of the thousands of Marsden letters or in his journals and publications does the writer permit himself a trace of jocularity. I am confident that he intended no levity in reporting a friend's troubles in November 1833: 'Mrs Hill is very low spirited and a few days ago, she cut her throat — and has not been able to swallow anything yet.' Similarly, no humour is in his heart as he writes to Dandeson Coates in April 1838: 'A Catholic Bishop and several Priests have landed [in New Zealand], and doing what they can to promote the Catholic Religion amongst the natives, and they will be assisted by runaway convicts from New South Wales.'

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5 Dunedin, 1932.
6 Though he spent short periods in Norfolk Island and Van Diemen's Land.
7 Marsden to H. Williams, 1 November 1833, Hocken MSS. 57/218.
8 Marsden to Coates, 2 April 1838, ibid., 57/262.
Marsden’s letters convey the impression of a lonely struggle against sin and the Father of Lies. He depicts himself throughout his forty years in the colony as contending against ‘wicked and unreasonable men of Power,’ comforted only by the support of great and powerful friends in England, and by the reflection that God would assist him, as he had assisted the prophets of old, to triumph over his enemies.

What sort of advice would this man give to members of his own family? We find him writing to his daughter Jane in 1826: ‘... No Book is equal to the Bible, for Simplicity, Beauty, fine Language and entertainment. We have there the Lives and deaths of the best of men and women for our Example; and by following their Steps we may hope for their happy end. I recommended to you before to read no novels — or Trash of any kind — they will corrupt the Taste — and spoil the Relish for what is good. It is much more easy to get a Taste for bad reading that for good.’

Poor Jane. She was the recipient of much good advice. Thomas Hassall, her brother-in-law-to-be, while studying for the ministry in Wales, had written some years before in a similar strain. Hassall, a young protegé of Marsden’s, began by expressing fond memories of happy days in Parramatta. He then went on: ‘... But now another thought crosses my mind which is the great many hours I spent in play or in reading useless books, when a little boy — O my Dear Jane let me beg of you not to spend too much time in play but spend as much time as possible in doing something that may be useful to yourself or to others.’

A good deal of Marsden’s sense of duty may have rubbed off on young Hassall and on his own daughters. But his only surviving son, Charles Simeon Marsden, apparently rebelled against the stern view of life. He returned from a sojourn in Britain of several years without the appropriate qualifications to enter the professions of medicine or the church, leaving behind unpaid bills from a holiday in Scotland. There is some reason to believe that Charles, having lost his two elder brothers in childhood accidents, was unduly protected and pampered in his youth. He certainly caused much anguish to Samuel, who referred to his son’s behaviour as a subject ‘too painful for me to dwell upon’. Marsden reflected, as at other times of stress, that ‘the Lord suffers his People to be tried’, but Charles’s financial irresponsibility must have been a terrible cross for the Calvinistic father to bear: his own attitude to financial obligations is shown by his instructions to an agent in England to ascertain the total costs incurred by the Elland Society in his own education at Hull Grammar School and Cambridge University. A gift of £200 was made to the

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9 Marsden to Jane, 5 September 1826. Copy held in Alexander Turnbull Library, from original in the possession of Rev. R. E. Marsden of Penzance.
10 Hassall to Jane, n.d., Webster collection, copy held in Alexander Turnbull Library.
11 Marsden to Pratt, 12 July 1823, Hocken MSS. 57/94.
Society, together with annual donations, as to a score of other religious, philanthropic and community causes. Perhaps the saddest feature of the relationship between father and son lies in the fact that Charles, after sharing in 1838 in his father’s estate of £30,000, had fallen into bankruptcy by 1842, and the great Saxon Merino flocks and Hereford herds of the father passed into the hands of strangers.

However repelled we may be by Marsden’s private vision of a grim Old Testament God, whose functions included a sort of backstop for English law and morality, we must recognize, I think, the intensity of his religious convictions. On only one or two occasions does he allow himself the luxury of self-doubt. Not once, in a hundred clashes with governors, settlers and missionary subordinates on moral and ethical questions, does he appear to entertain the suspicion that he might be in the wrong.

But, more to the present point, is the overwhelming evidence that he saw himself as a divinely appointed and protected instrument, bringing the light of civilization and the Gospel to the ‘perishing heathen’ of the Pacific. We see the courage of faith in the serene night he spent on the hillside overlooking Matauri Bay, conciliating the Whangaroa Maoris whose previous intimate contact with Europeans had consisted of eating the crew of the whaler Boyd. From this day in December 1814 until his seventh journey in 1836 as a nearly blind old man of seventy, Marsden expended himself generously in terms of physical effort, mental anxiety, and monetary loss in the service of the New Zealand mission.

Contemporaries of Marsden such as J. T. Campbell and W. C. Wentworth accused him of using his missionary agencies for the Society Islands and New Zealand as a cloak for profiteering in the lucrative trade in muskets, powder and grog. Granted that he did make gifts of a few firearms in the early days, and that his captain, Thomas Hansen parted with two cannon from Marsden’s ship in return for a cargo of scarce pork in the Leeward Islands in 1816. However, Hansen was dismissed after this voyage, and generally the evidence points clearly to the view that Marsden maintained the Active, at a considerable financial loss, in order to keep open a safe and reliable avenue for supplying the missionaries with provisions, letters and recruits. The Active was also intended to give security to the missions, a means of bringing islanders to the seminary at Parramatta, and a stimulus to the commerce and therefore the productive efforts of the Polynesian race. By 1820 the cost of running the ship had become prohibitive — because of its inadequate size, its poor

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12 e.g. Marsden to Mrs Stokes, 26 October 1795, Hassall Correspondence (Mitchell Library), vol. 2, pp. 21-2.
13 e.g. Marsden to Coates, February 1838, Hocken MSS. 57/284.
14 The ‘Philo Free’ libel by Campbell, published in the Sydney Gazette, 4 January 1817; Wentworth, op. cit.
sailing qualities, and its inability as a multi-purpose ship to compete with the single-minded gentry from Port Jackson and Massachusetts. It seems that Marsden had sold the Active to the C.M.S. by 1821,\textsuperscript{16} thus bringing to an end a seven years' run of losses that were inadequately subsidised by the two missionary societies.

The view of Marsden as a philanthropic ship owner is reinforced by his constant efforts to protect the Polynesians from the frauds and cruelties practised by the whalers, the sandalwooders, and the pork traders. His efforts ran through an impressive gamut: of appeals to governors for local regulations; to the missionary societies and parliamentary friends in England for legislation extending British jurisdiction in the islands; and to the British government for the provision of regular naval police visits. His representations contributed to the appointment of a resident in the Bay of Islands in 1833 and to later attempts to arm James Busby with effective powers. He brought legal actions against many ships' captains who had maltreated, defrauded, or murdered islanders, whether as crew members or as customers. He set up in Sydney a Society for the Protection and Civilization of the Natives of the South Sea Islands, but within a year of being formed it failed to take action on atrocities committed in Rarotonga by an expedition under Philip Goodenough and W. C. Wentworth in 1814. Amongst the committee members of the Society was Wentworth's father D'Arcy, while another three members were financially interested in the voyage.\textsuperscript{17} This is not without its bearing on an assessment of the validity of young Wentworth's ferocious picture of Marsden in his trend setting history of New South Wales.

Also consistent with this view of Marsden as the islanders' friend are his donations of sheep, cattle, horses, plants and seeds to the missionaries. The fifty prime cattle that he made over to the New Zealand mission in 1823 were probably worth well over £1000.\textsuperscript{18}

But even more impressive to the modern student is Marsden's hurried note to the secretary of the C.M.S. as the Active got under weigh for New Zealand on 28 November 1814. After describing his mixed crew of Polynesian and European sailors he drops the remark: 'I told all those New Zealanders who acted as Sailors, that I would pay them for their Services, the same as I paid the Europeans — according to the work they did — at this they were astonished and much gratified'.\textsuperscript{19} Well might they be astonished, to receive two months' pay in advance so they could buy goods in Sydney, when masters commonly defrauded and abandoned them far from home and

\textsuperscript{16} Marsden to Pratt, 16 February 1822, Hocken MSS. 57/60; see also 57/52, 57/12.
\textsuperscript{18} Marsden to Pratt, 15 January 1823, Hocken MSS, 57/88.
\textsuperscript{19} Marsden to Pratt, 28 November 1814, ibid., 54/77. The more usual situation is described by Elder, pp. 63-6, 81-2.
friends. In this single little document is recorded more than a touch of greatness — a perception of a principle of race relations that marks Marsden in this respect, as being more than a century ahead of his time.

The contrast between Marsden's position and that of even enlightened contemporaries is brought out by a letter of the Reverend Thomas Kendall, who urged in extenuation of his admitted fornication with a Maori girl the fact that he had never lifted a lascivious eye to a female of his own nation. Whether he included in this the wife who gave him nine children is not made clear.

This excursion into polemical argument was prompted largely by my re-reading a journalistic effusion by Bill Wannan called Very Strange Tales. The Turbulent Times of Samuel Marsden, published in 1962. This book, from which appears to have been drawn the savage portrait of Marsden in an A.B.C. television series, is even more misleading and inaccurate than the hagiographic accounts by clerical writers. It requires little wit to see that neither the detractors nor the champions of Marsden have begun to appreciate the contradictions and the torment of mind that made up their subject's complex personality. The most difficult fact to be faced by the Marsden biographer is that he presents not one but a number of faces to the researcher, just as he did to his contemporaries.

He is at once the stern parson who told his congregation that the famine of 1815 was a judgment of God on the wickedness and worldliness of the people of New South Wales, and the money lender who had on his books in 1829 the names of fourteen men who owed him a total of £3,700, most of them probably at the interest rate of 8%. He is the Senior Chaplain who lamented the absence of an assistant for parish work — who found time nonetheless to supervise a landed estate which at the time of his death included some 25 farms pasturing over 10,000 sheep and 1,500 head of cattle. He is the magistrate who upon conviction of a thief recorded a sentence imposing regular floggings to elicit the surrender of stolen goods. Yet a few years later he wrote home to William Wilberforce accusing an ex-colleague and enemy of a similar breach of the principles of common law. Here, it may be noticed, Marsden exhibits the corrupting effects of the convict system on all ranges of New South Wales society. Further, the Anglican cleric and magistrate who tortured Irish political prisoners in 1800 to secure information about a suspected rebellion, and who inveighed against the toleration of Roman Catholicism, was open minded enough to act as the faithful and honoured agent in the Pacific for a missionary society formed by Congregationalists, Independents and Presbyterians. Finally, the man who dismissed the adulterous Thomas Kendall raised his lone voice in defence of a missionary's daughter when she was brought back to Sydney a fallen woman, seduced by a Tahitian chief.

20 Kendall to Marsden, 9 August 1823, ibid.
But let me return to the starting point of Marsden's colonial career as an evangelist.

The earnest priest of thirty years who left behind his pious friends at Cambridge had an early sight of the obstacles he would face in New South Wales when he tried to introduce Sunday prayers and moral conversation to the crew of the storeship that carried him out from England in 1793. The colony that he saw first in March 1794 exhibited to a refined degree the struggle for survival, the rapacious materialism, and the irreligion that commonly mark frontier societies. He found his senior colleague, the Reverend Richard Johnson, embroiled in a dispute with the Lieutenant Governor that was dramatised by the roll of a drum and the marching out of convicts when sermons overstepped a safe time limit. Marsden himself was soon rebuked by Major Grose for interfering with convict labour on the Sabbath. Appointed to Parramatta, he embarked on a lifetime feud with the Commandant, Lieutenant John Macarthur, who brushed aside his charge of disrespect against a drunken settler. Marsden was soon agreeing with Johnson as to the 'invincible depravity' of the felonry of New South Wales, who furnished the first unpromising object for his zeal as a missioner.\(^{21}\)

Two events of those early years must stand out in any explanation of Marsden's career. In October 1794 he accepted, like Johnson, a 100 acre grant of land and convict labour to work it. New orders from London had enabled Major Grose to put land in the hands of the civil and military officers, who almost alone had the salaries, the contacts in England, and the temperament to build up livestock numbers and create a pastoral industry. Marsden later claimed that it was not from inclination but from duty that 'my colleague and I took the axe, the spade, and the hoe.'\(^{22}\) But within a few years famine had been virtually abolished and duty demanded a full scale evangelical effort, the more so when Johnson's departure in 1800 left him in sole spiritual charge of a population of 5,000 dispersed around the centres of Sydney and Parramatta. Instead, the pressure of events, together with his own inclinations, led him to welcome a wide range of worldly interests.

The second decisive event was his acceptance from Governor Hunter in 1795 of the office of magistrate at Parramatta, where the incidence of sexual immorality and crime was a direct result of the presence of turbulent female convicts who were housed in the factory by day, but left to fend for their own lodgings at night. Marsden had a passionate, almost pathological detestation of crime and sin, and he held a firm belief in the special value of the lash in disciplining evil doers. He failed to realize that in a convict colony his moral and spiritual influence was peculiarly undermined by his becoming identified with the establishment of judges, gaolers and floggers.

\(^{21}\) Elder, pp. 17-34.
\(^{22}\) Cited in ibid., p. 34. He was writing in 1826.
Marsden's alienation from a potential spiritual flock of convicts and emancipists was confirmed by his material success as a landowner and by his inflexible opposition to Governor Macquarie's emancipist policy. This involved the breaking down of the barriers between bond and free by offering ex-convicts every mark of material favour, social recognition and official status as an inducement to and reward for reformation. Marsden, by contrast, saw the penalties of crime as continuing to the grave; he laboured to preserve the social chasm between emancipists and free colonists, and he was supported by most of his Anglican colleagues and generally vindicated by the Report of Commissioner J. T. Bigge.

The immense damage thus suffered by the Church of England during its formative years in Australia was noticed by a visitor from India, Captain Frank Irvine. He wrote in 1821 of the social and religious gulf separating the clergy from the convict and emancipist. ‘... The parties may know themselves to be fellow Christians, members together of the same mystical body, but they feel that on earth they cannot approximate or mingle. The Wesleyan Ministers, by themselves associating with the more moral of the convicts, set an example calculated to lessen among their adherents ... the repulsion just mentioned ... It is no wonder that the convicts, as a body, are partial to the Wesleyans, who associate with them on terms of familiarity and equality.’

Cut off in this way from the convict citizenry of New South Wales, Marsden turned elsewhere for the fulfilment of his evangelical vocation.

With the Australian Aborigines he encountered the classic difficulties that were remarked on by all the early observers. The promise shown by the infant who lived with Marsden’s family was dissipated when the lad ran away. In 1814, when Governor Macquarie sought his advice in forming a residential school for native children at Parramatta, Marsden put all too plainly his doubts as to its chances of success. He recommended an ex-missionary friend William Shelley to take charge. For Marsden the years that followed appeared to confirm his opinion, as the efforts of the government, the Wesleyans, the Independents, and the Anglicans collapsed in failure. He explained to Archdeacon Scott in 1826 that there were four great obstacles to civilizing the Aborigines: they put no value on material possessions and were thus not ‘induced to form industrious habits to obtain them’; they had no more reflection or capacity to provide for the future than the ‘fowls of the air or the beasts of the field’; they would not form a permanent residence with or attachment for Europeans; and they lacked a tradition of ‘regular government’ and subordination to authority.

23 Irvine to Committee of C.M.S. Auxiliary Society, 8 August 1821, C.M.S. Archives (London), C.N./012.
24 Marsden to Scott, 2 December 1826, L.M.S. Archives (London) Australia Letters, Box 2, Threlkeld Correspondence.
As a well-known exponent of these beliefs, Marsden gave less than encouragement to the few individuals and organizations that attempted to halt the destruction and demoralisation of the tribes. Further, by his own significant role in the penetration of the interior by growers of fine wool, he contributed to the decimation of the Aborigines as surely as their own inability to merge usefully and honourably into a materialistic white society.

Marsden's interest in the Maori race owed much, in the first place, to the enthusiasm of Captain King, who had kidnapped two chiefs with a view to introducing to Norfolk Island the cultivation and dressing of flax. Subsequently, when Maoris came to Port Jackson, sometimes as crew members of whaling ships, Marsden lodged them at Parramatta. Their manly bearing and interest in the material culture of the white man planted in his mind the idea of a mission to New Zealand. The discussion of this project with the directors of the Church Missionary Society was an important reason for his visit to England from 1807 to 1809. A less well-known inducement for the voyage was a provision of his wife's mother's will requiring the Marsden's residence in England in order to qualify for an inheritance of £400.

Meanwhile, in consequence of the arrival in Sydney in 1798 of several missionaries who had fled Tahiti in fear of one of the wars which preceded the establishment of the missionary-backed dynasty of Pomare, Marsden had moved toward a lifetime task as agent in the South Seas for the London Missionary Society. He was soon an indispensable ally in the Society's work, as an advisor on policy, as an executor of the London board's decisions, as a forwarder of stores, and as a pricker of conscience when the softer life of Sydney weakened evangelical zeal. He received with generous humanity a succession of visiting missionaries, finding accommodation, providing temporary funds, securing jobs, and giving comfort and aid to the windows and orphans of men who died at their posts.

In his management of the establishments financed by the two societies in the Pacific, Marsden applied what became his settled principle of missionary procedure — summed up in the phrase 'Civilization before Conversion'. Barbarous nations must be led away from warfare and feckless idleness into the paths of industry and virtue; they required training in the crafts, commerce and language of the Englishman before they could usefully be exposed to his religion.

The choice of two of the first three New Zealand missionary-settlers, one a carpenter, the other a rope maker and flax dresser, indicates Marsden's stress on laying a material basis for a mission.

25 Rev. R. Hill to Coates, 25 March 1833, Hocken MSS. 57/233, criticizing Marsden's lack of support for missions to the Aborigines, as well as the indifference, generally, of the Christian Church.

It reflects too his own general outlook. Though repelled by the irreligion of New South Wales, he embraced its material values and delighted in the challenge of pioneering in a new land. Like the Old Testament patriarchs and many followers of John Calvin, he tended to see economic success as a tangible sign of divine favour. Labour he equated with virtue, idleness with sin.

One price paid for his material success, if we are to believe some contemporaries, was a lack of inspiration and fervour in his preaching and a warm suspicion of cant and hypocrisy on the part of a citizenry more than usually inclined to suspect the motives of their betters. The Independent (L.M.S.) Missionary, W. P. Crook, tells the story of a visit to Marsden’s farm to borrow some books from the library. The cleric was to be found not in this study, but out in the field with Surgion Luttrell, clad in a ragged old smock coat, anointing scabby sheep and in no mood to be disturbed by pious chatter. As he admitted to a private correspondent, ‘I may be too fond, perhaps, of the garden, the field and the fleece.’

My study of Marsden has not yet yielded a confident and sharply defined picture of the man. The main purposes of this article have been to question the validity of the too simple views held on either side of the Tasman and to suggest a working hypothesis that might explain his failure as an evangelist in New South Wales and his substantial achievement in New Zealand.

I believe that he was a sincere and devoted Christian evangelist with a robust faith in his mission to proclaim the gospel and save souls. The fulfilment of this mission was frustrated in New South Wales by his personal inadequacies, by the unyielding character of the convict and Aboriginal clay, and by the limitations imposed by his office and position in society. Denied success in the colony, he looked to Polynesia, where an attractive and responsive race appeared ripe to the harvest. In New Zealand particularly, Marsden’s efforts made possible a tangible and impressive victory, as measured in his lifetime by the imparting of British techniques and values, by the suppression of cannibalism, the growth of literacy, and the eventual scale of conversion and church membership.

I would insist, with Charles Darwin, on the unreasonableness of expecting a missionary or clergyman to attain Christ’s standard of perfection and consistency. Marsden and his colleagues were fallible men who achieved much by their lonely submission to hardship. The comfortably placed cynics who explained Marsden’s preference for the Maoris over the Aborigines in terms of the material profits to be

27 W. P. Crook to Rev. S. W. Tracy, 18 June 1813, L.M.S. Archives (London) Australia Letters, 1; 4; B.
28 Marsden to Stokes, 26 December 1811, cited in G. Mackaness, Some Correspondence of the Reverend Samuel Marsden and Family, Sydney, 1941, pp. 43-6.
won in Polynesia did not begin to fathom the dangers and privations he encountered on his pioneering journeys in New Zealand, or the odium he drew on himself in New South Wales by his espousal of an unpopular cause, or the financial sacrifices he incurred. The truth is expressed simply in a request he made of the Church Missionary Society, when setting out on the 1814 voyage — that if he should fail to return '. . . I recommend my family to the kind consideration of the Society as much of my capital is expended in this work.'

Yet — he had feet of clay. Like Macquarie, his great antagonist, he had a passion for recognition and self vindication. He was impatient of criticism and reluctant to share authority, as was shown by the early failure of the first committees set up in New South Wales by the London and Church Missionary Societies. He was quick to judge the transgressions of his fellows, but blind to his own errors, though in his latter years his correspondence was tempered with a new humility. We find him writing to Henry Williams in December 1834 of the progress achieved by the New Zealand mission in twenty years: 'You have got now far beyond my Bounds to give any directions against Marsden, exposes the absence of a comprehensive Concerns of the mission and therefore I must be silent. . . .' 31

The 'Philo Free' libel of 1817, though unfair in its main insinuations to you. . . . Your wisdom must now far exceed mine in the humanitarian impulse that embraced the Aboriginal possessors of Australian soil. As early as 1801 Marsden was showing impatience with their refusal to accept the boon of western civilization. He recognised the theoretical obligation in which the colonists stood to the Aborigines, and did not deny that God in his mercy might at some future date find means of salvation for them — but he remained a main obstacle to the mounting of a missionary effort that was commensurate with the task. Specifically, he showed little interest in, or support for the brilliant missionary linguist, Lancelot Threlkeld, whose work at Reid's Mistake showed the first promise of a breakthrough in understanding Aboriginal culture and language. Even Marsden’s loyal friend, Richard Hill, complained ‘Why are our poor Aborigines so reluctantly assisted while New Zealand is so liberally supported?’ 32

Or, as one of the Wellington Valley missionaries summed up the situation, it was commonly urged against the Aborigines that they ate snakes, while every allowance was made for the New Zealand custom of eating men.

The journals kept by the C.M.S. missionaries at Wellington Valley in the 1830’s make all too clear the prime reasons for their failure: the onrush of pastoral settlement; the prostitution of the Aboriginal women; the massive assaults of disease; the luring away of young scholars by the tribes; and as well, the gross deficiencies of the

30 Marsden to Pratt, 18 November 1814, Hocken MSS. 54/76.
31 Marsden to H. Williams, 8 December 1834, ibid., 57/228.
32 Hill to Coates, 25 March 1835, ibid., 57/233.
missionaries themselves. James Günther's journal in 1837 has many entries describing the punishment of children for theft. In one instance, Nancy, the best scholar, had taken a quantity of wheat for the tribe, and was locked up in solitary confinement for several days. Yet she felt no remorse, broke out of her dark little passageway and attempted the store room door once again. As Günther tells the story: 'Mr. W.atson] then began to give her a good flogging — when she made a most lamentable cry for my interference . . . . I indeed thought it my duty to interfere, however not for, but against her, holding her fast, at the same time speaking kindly and feelingly to her.' He concludes the entry by hoping that Nancy and the ' . . . other wretched heathens will experience the heart changing influence of the Divine Spirit!' 33

We have remarked on the intensity with which Marsden insisted on the individual's duty to accept his responsibilities as a Christian and a citizen. It seems that we have here and in Marsden's hypersensitivity to slights and criticism a key to his inability to live in peace and harmony in New South Wales. One can hardly overemphasize the sense of frustration and alienation that developed in his mind as a consequence of the indifference with which officials and convicts regarded his clerical work, especially in the early years. I see his acceptance of magisterial powers as a disastrously misguided attempt to supplement his tiny authority as a man of God with the more immediately reliable sanctions of the State.

Though Marsden was far from being a wowser in the sense made famous by John Norton of the Truth in the late nineteenth century, in that he was capable of great and joyous enthusiasm, and he enjoyed and promoted the pleasures of table, vine and hop field, he was enough of the puritan moralist to appear as a killjoy. He yielded to none in enforcing sabbath observance, and in suppressing cock fighting, gaming and horse racing. Most revealing of his preoccupations is a memorandum of January 1800, containing suggestions for cleaning up the Colony:

To establish a night patrole chiefly to apprehend all persons in liquor without distinction
— to build a Washing Boat to be moored at a convenient place in the Cove for the employment of Prostitutes [not professionally of course] something similar to those of Holland and Switzerland.
— No convict women to be allowed to wear any hat or Bonnet but of Straw any ribbon — but Black any silk — but a neck handkerchief any silver or gold ornaments any muslin but of the coarsest sort

33 C.M.S. Archives C.N./O47, entry of 7 September 1837.
— To be punished for prostitution
    for swearing
    for intoxication
    for insolence
    for idleness
    for indecency
    for sluttishness
    for theft
    for lying
    for non attendance at Church

to be kept secluded from the men

to be in constant employment

Marsden's role as a landholder cannot be justified, in his own or Professor Elder's terms, as a necessary sacrifice in the interests of food supply, since it expanded throughout his career, and markedly, with the opening up of sheep and cattle country in the Bathurst plains. However, I see his agricultural pursuits as a consequence of the restless activity of the practical man who loved the land, rather than a drive for wealth. His impatience with less vigorous colleagues comes through in a letter of 1828 telling Henry Williams that the Lisks were the same as ever — lacking in vitality: 'You know what my feelings are, when men are not active, and I cannot help it — nothing pains me more, that to see men half asleep, when they should be upon the watch.'

Years before, he had written of his own part in building the church of Christ: 'While others are employed in preparing the more light and delicate parts for ornament and beauty — my Portion is to sweat and toil in the hard and stubborn Quarry.'

In the prime of his life this restless need to be up and doing led Marsden into a bewildering mass of commitments which were beyond his capacity to perform. This I see as the reason for the embarrassing failure of the lending library project, and for the frequent complaints from New Zealand that the accounts were hopelessly muddled. Yet when a member of the newly formed Corresponding Committee of the C.M.S. sought to impose order on chaos, Marsden saw the intervention as a reflection on his probity and summarily dissolved the committee.

His lending of money at interest seems to have occurred innocently enough: in one case, by giving credit to a purchaser of his cattle; in another by making remittances to a colleague's needy parents; in another by lending money for the construction of a Presbyterian

34 Memoranda in Marsden's hand, apparently intended for Governor Hunter, Hocken MSS. vol. 498.
35 pp. 29-35.
36 Marsden to H. Williams, 17 May 1828, Hocken MSS. 57/171.
37 Marsden to Burder, 26 August 1806, L.M.S. Archives Australia letters, Box 1.
38 Marsden to Pratt, 21 November 1821, Hocken MSS. 57/55.
church. It may be argued that the possessors of capital in a colonial economy had a valuable contribution to make by providing credit, but the practice led to situations of embarrassment not only for Marsden but for the church he represented.

Marsden may be seen, perhaps, as having been corrupted by the values and tone of his society. Indeed, he may be seen as one of the corruptors. Yet in some areas, he acted with faith, courage, and magnanimity. When he fell, he fell heavily, but as with the Kendalls, the Butlers and the Notts, we must recall his human fallibility and make allowances for the temptations and difficulties to which he was exposed.

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