

Extract of a letter from Macquarie to Bathurst concerning William Redfern

Major General Macquarie to Earl Bathurst

London, 10 October 1823.

(Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 25 June 1828.)

My Lord,

...

Your Lordship, in your instructions to Commissioner Bigge, directed that he should be sworn in a justice of the peace, to enable him to take examinations and informations on oath. On my preparing to swear him in accordingly, he declined it; at which I could not help feeling and perhaps testified some surprise, his reason for waving that ceremony being then incomprehensible to me. But he afterwards avowed, that being in the expectation of getting more full information without that solemnity, it was unnecessary to invest him with that authority.

The principal malcontents in the colony, and those who were not hostile to me and my administration, were well known to Commissioner Bigge before he left England; but although I was aware of this being the case, I considered it a justice, both to him and myself to furnish him with their names, assuring him at the same time, as was really the case, that I had no wish to prejudice him against them, and merely suggesting that he might receive their informations, as far as I was personally concerned, with such degree of caution as he might think fit; but your Lordship may imagine my surprise on observing that those individuals [the Macarthur family] had soon become Mr. Bigge's intimate associates and most frequent visitors.

They were also the persons most hostile to the principle I had long adopted (and which I still considered to be just and wise) of bringing forward deserving men who had been convicts, and admitting a few of the most respectable amongst them to my society; and I was sorry to observe, very soon after the commissioner's arrival, and without allowing himself sufficient time to ascertain the cases and merits of those people, that he had concurred in the prejudices which the old inhabitants, who had come out free, still entertained towards them. This was a subject of deep regret to me, and ill accorded with the spirit of his instructions from your Lordship to conciliate and reconcile, as far as it might be found practicable, the differences and enmities which were known to have so long subsisted between these two descriptions of the inhabitants of the colony.

The nature and particulars of my disputes with Commissioner Bigge, on the subjects of appointing Mr. Redfern to the magistracy, and calling on the magistrates and chaplains to answer certain circular queries I had thought it necessary to put to them, being in your Lordship's possession, I shall only observe that I did then and ever shall consider his conduct towards Mr. Redfern unjustifiably harsh and severe.

...

I cannot help observing in this place, that Mr. Bigge has unnecessarily, and I think with little regard to delicacy, swelled his Report by introducing the circumstances of his dispute with me relative to the appointment of Mr. Redfern to the magistracy, after our mutual reference to your Lordship's decision, which I of course respectfully and submissively bowed to. I accordingly did not expect so pointed a recurrence to it in his Report; and if I may be permitted a similar indulgence in again alluding to Mr. Redfern's name, I am happy in the opportunity of testifying that his talents are respectable, his professional acquirements eminently creditable; that his humane and regular attendance on the sick under his charge in the Colonial General Hospital was unremitting, and his whole conduct and practice in his medical capacity highly appreciated in the colony.

...

Commissioner Bigge, also, after repeatedly censuring my conciliatory conduct towards emancipated convicts, and introducing a select few of them into society, is pleased to accuse me of having three *persons of that description* (whom he names [Meehan, Fitzgerald, and Redfern]) *for my confidential advisers!* To this unexpected and extraordinary accusation, I am under the necessity of giving the most positive contradiction; since, having no advisers joined with me officially in authority and responsibility, I always acted to the best of my own judgment and views of justice and expediency; and to that, and that alone, are to be ascribed the merits or demerits of my administration.

...

Surgeon Bowman required more personal accommodation than any other gentleman in His Majesty's service, and harassed the chief engineer with his endless applications. As to the exigencies of the hospital, the established number of attendants, after his appointment, not only far exceeded what it had formerly been, but supernumeraries were even allowed him when he required them, although the chief engineer was satisfied that the establishment was fully equal to all purposes.

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In regard to Mr. Bigge's charge of my appointing improper persons to be magistrates, *and dismissing one from that office*, I shall remark generally, that I made choice of those, at their different residences, whom I considered most fit to fill that important office.

...

Commissioner Bigge and myself seem to be at variance generally in matters of opinion. When a magistrate commences taking evidence in a secret and clandestine manner, in a district in which he has no authority, solely with the vindictive view to criminate the conduct of the governor of the colony, from whom he derives his commission, I think it full time to relieve him from the duties of such an office.

...

Commissioner Bigge's feelings of commiseration for the distress experienced by military officers and others, in meeting with persons *who had been convicts at my table*, might have been spared; as he well knew that all of them were in the habit of associating in the most familiar manner with a person who had been in similar circumstances, voluntarily and totally uninfluenced by any motive of deference towards me. In regard to my using compulsory methods, or even attempting to influence other persons, either civil or military, to associate with such individuals who had been convicts, and whom I thought worthy of inviting to my own table, it is a malicious and groundless assertion, *and totally devoid of truth*.

It was made known to all officers serving under my command, that so far from requiring an observance of the etiquette generally shown to the invitations of governors and commanders-in-chief, it was my request that no previous engagement should ever meet with interruption on my account.

...

I cannot overlook the unnecessary introduction of Mrs. Macquarie's name by Commissioner Bigge in his Report: but having brought her name before the public, he should have said a little more, and given her the character in which I have reason to hope she will ever be considered in New South Wales; where it was her undeviating principle to notice persons of merit in every rank in the colony, at least in as far as her influence and kindness could extend.

The General Hospital at Sydney is divided, in both lower and upper stories, by party walls, into two distinct apartments and divisions, containing four large wards. The end of this building, containing four wards, was entirely devoted to the sittings of the civil and criminal courts; and the stair leading up to those apartments was separated from the sick by the party wall already mentioned. One of the upper rooms, used as a retiring room by the courts, was occupied by Mr. Judge Wylde for that purpose; he permitted Mr. Lewin to paint a large picture in it, which he said would not at all interfere with the use to which the apartment in question was at that time appropriated; but as soon as Mr. Wentworth, the principal surgeon, made a Report to me that the hospital was crowded, this room was given up immediately for the accommodation of the sick, and an easy communication was made

to it through one of the windows in the verandah ; the entrance to the stair was shut up, and thus more room was given to the sick, without any interference with the courts. Mr. Lewin then removed the large picture to a vacant room in the quarters assigned to the assistant surgeons.

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No knowledge of the present state of the colony can be obtained from a perusal of the first part of Commissioner Bigge's Report.

...

In respect to the bank of New South Wales, established under my authority, and in conformity with my wishes; when it first became a subject of discussion, I thought it reasonable, and was of opinion, that those to whom the principal part of the property to be invested in bank stock belonged should have some share in the management and direction of it; but it is not true that I ever interfered or attempted to interfere, by my authority or influence, in the election of the directors or the subordinate officers of the bank: indeed, not being a proprietor of bank stock, I had as little power as inclination to interfere with its direction and management.

...

It is a matter of little importance to the colony that Commissioner Bigge's Report condemns nearly all my acts during my command of it, because statements do not make facts; and what has been done will stand, is felt, and is enjoyed, and I am happy to say properly appreciated by many of those who knew the state in which I found the colony, and that in which I left it. The extension of the settlements, the improvements of the towns, the roads, and the resources of the colony generally, as well as the degree of order and civilization which it has attained, and the means of comfort its inhabitants enjoy, seem not to be understood in this country, nor can such a Report as Mr. Bigge's throw any light on the subject.

...

It yet remains, my Lord, to account for not sooner submitting to your Lordship the foregoing remarks on Commissioner Bigge's Report. The delay was occasioned by my being obliged to go to the Continent for the benefit of the health of my family, very shortly after the first Report was published, and my not having access to the second and third Reports until after my return; and I did not consider it regular to answer one part until I had seen the whole.

...

I may be permitted also to observe, that the commissioner wilfully exposed himself to error, by admitting testimony in the course of his investigation without binding the parties to the truth, as far at least as the solemnity of an oath and the impending penalties of perjury might have operated. He was not, it is true, armed with that authority; but it was his own choice to proceed without it,

notwithstanding your Lordship's instructions, in the hope, as he expressed himself, of getting more full information. In this he probably succeeded; but the latitude thus allowed to his informants, was not the surest way to obtain correct and impartial testimony.

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APPENDIX

QUERIES submitted for ANSWERS to the Magistrates and Clergymen of New South Wales.

Sydney, 15th January 1820.

...

1. —HAVE crimes been more or less frequent, in proportion to the increase of the population, since the commencement of the year 1810, than in the antecedent years?—Crimes have been less frequent, in proportion to the increase of population, within the last ten years, than formerly, and are unquestionably becoming less frequent. The greater number of crimes are committed by convicts recently imported; since it is a fact established beyond contradiction that those who have been for two or three years in the colony generally acquire settled habits of industry. When the materials of which our population is composed be taken into consideration, it cannot fail to be a matter of astonishment to every impartial observer that crimes are so infrequent.

2. —Has drunkenness prevailed in a greater or less degree, for the last ten years, in proportion to the population, than formerly?—Eighteen years ago, the period when I arrived in this colony, it was lamentable to behold the excess to which drunkenness was carried. It was no uncommon occurrence for men to sit down round a bucket of spirits, and drink it with quart pots, until they were unable to stir from the spot; and frequently did the settler involve himself so deeply in debt by drunkenness, that it terminated in his ruin. I am decidedly of opinion that drunkenness is very much diminished within the last ten years, and that it is annually diminishing; I think it questionable whether drunkenness at present, in this colony, be more common or more excessive than in some of the large manufacturing towns in England.

3. —Have immorality and profanation of the Sabbath increased or decreased within the last ten years; and are the general habits of the people more or less correct than formerly? —If crimes be less frequent, and drunkenness diminishing, as stated in the answers to the 1st and 2d queries, it follows as a matter of course that immorality and profanation of the Sabbath must also be diminishing, and consequently that the general habits of the people must be more correct; the fact is, that moral feeling is daily acquiring a firmer tone; the Sabbath more respected; and the people, in point of correctness, improving; the contrast is now so great in these points, from what they were ten years ago, that it cannot escape the notice of the most careless observer.

4. —Have marriages been more or less frequent, in proportion to the population, within the last ten years, than formerly?—Marriage ten years ago was, comparatively speaking, but little known; at present, and during the last ten years, marriage has outstript and continues to outstrip the increase of population, in a proportion unknown at any former period; indeed there is now a decent kind of shame in the minds of the people attached to living in the unmarried state.

5.—Has attendance on divine worship on Sundays been more or less regular, for the last ten years, than formerly?—Attendance on divine worship is, in my opinion, much more regular than it was ten years ago; and this attendance, in point of numbers and regularity, has been for the last ten years annually increasing in a ratio exceeding the population compared with former years.

6. —Has industry increased or diminished, and are the lower classes more or less circumspect in their conduct, and decent in their personal appearance, within the last ten years, than formerly?—It is impossible for any person to look around him in any of the towns, but especially in that of Sydney, without being impressed with astonishment at the monuments of industry which thirty-two years labour presents to his view; the country exhibits equal if not greater proofs of industry. The lower classes are more circumspect in their conduct. The impression which strangers arriving from Europe receive is that the various classes of the inhabitants of this colony dress superior to those in similar ranks of society in the mother country; hence I can feel no hesitation in giving it as my opinion that industry has increased, that the conduct of the lower classes of the people is more circumspect, and their appearance much more decent, within the last ten years, than formerly.

7. —Have the police establishments in the several towns and townships tended to secure the tranquillity of the colony, or otherwise; and have or have not detection and punishment more promptly and surely followed on the perpetration of crimes, since the year 1810, than formerly?—A single riot not having taken place within the last ten years in any of the towns or districts in the colony, must be admitted in proof of the efficacy of the police establishments, as well as the decent and orderly conduct of the inhabitants in maintaining the public tranquillity. Detection and punishment have indubitably more promptly and more surely followed the perpetration of crime, within the last ten years, than formerly.

8. —Have corporal punishments been more or less severe, or more or less frequent, in proportion to the increase of the population, within the last ten years, than formerly? — Formerly suspicion was guilt, and corporal punishment was inflicted with a degree of severity, as well to extort confession as to punish crimes, unknown within the last ten years; consequently corporal punishment has borne a very small proportion, in point of severity or frequency, to the increase of population, to what it did antecedent to the last ten years.

9. —Are the youth (born of European parents in this country) more or less industrious and sober in their habits, than might be reasonably expected from the character and description of the persons from whom generally they are descended?—It may be asserted without fear of refutation, that the youth of any country in the world do not surpass those of New South Wales in industry and sobriety. It is matter of notoriety that the vices of the parent, instead of operating as incitements to dissoluteness of manners, operate as antidotes; the children frequently bewailing the irregularities of the parents.

10. —Has the colony improved in agriculture, commerce and opulence, in a greater or less proportion, within the last ten years, than it did at any former period?—Many districts are now open and largely cultivated, which ten years ago were almost if not entirely unknown, and certainly in which a single tree had not been felled; commerce had scarcely obtained notice or name; and opulence was confined to a few. Commerce has been gradually improving, and riches becoming more gradually diffused. Hence the colony has improved in agriculture, commerce and opulence, in a greater proportion within the last ten years than it did at any former period. In proof, it is only necessary to state that the population, civil and military, in 1810, amounted to 11,950 souls; land in cultivation, to 7,269 acres; population in 1819, to 27,294; land in cultivation, to 33,909 acres. The revenue, by returns of police and orphan funds, have increased, within the last two years, in a more than quintuple ratio.

11. —Have or have not an improved system of agriculture been introduced, and a superior description of buildings been constructed by the settlers throughout the country, within the last ten years, than formerly?—The plough, the harrow, the roller, the scuffler and drill-machine having been in a great measure substituted for the unthrifty implement the hoe, will establish the improvement in the system of agriculture. The immense tracts of lands latterly inclosed, and being now inclosed, will demonstrate the spirit of improvement so generally prevalent. Many settlers of the lower class still live in wretched hovels; but there is unquestionably a much better style of building introduced, and a very great number of respectable houses erected within the last ten years; so that the improvement in the system of agriculture, and in the description of buildings throughout the colony, has been much greater within the last ten years than formerly.

12. —Are the people, through all the gradations of society, better or worse protected in their persons and properties, within the last ten years, than formerly?—The persons and properties of its inhabitants are as safe and as well protected in New South Wales as those in any part of the world; neither one or the other being interfered with but by the authority of the law, on its violation rendering them subject to its penalties.

13. —What length of time have you resided in this colony, and how long have you been magistrate or chaplain therein?—I have resided in the colony upwards of eighteen years, having filled a situation in the medical department during the whole of that period till October last, when I resigned my commission of assistant surgeon, and have had the honour of being since appointed to the magistracy.

(signed) W. Redfern, J.P.

Campbell Field, District of Airds, January 30th, 1820.

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