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George Forster

New Holland and the British Colony at Botany Bay

translated by Robert J. King[1]

Quidam magnus videlicet vir et sapiens cognovit, quae materia esset, et quanta ad maximas res opportunitas in animis esset hominum, siquis eam posset elicere et praecipiendo meliorem reddere.

Cic. De inv. rhet. l.1. c.2.[2]

New Holland, an island of enormous extent or it might be said, a third continent,[3] is the future homeland of a new civilized society which, however mean its beginning may seem to be, nevertheless promises within a short time to become very important. We do not wish to enumerate the thousands of examples whereby this assumption, founded on the course of nature and the evidence of history, receives the highest degree of probability. It is sufficient for our purpose that from similar small, almost imperceptible seeds, a great state has germinated before our eyes in less than a hundred-and-fifty years, which has achieved independence despite England's utmost efforts. Certainly the first settlers of New Holland are a villainous rabble, who in their fatherland neither the Law or even the fear of punishments could restrain. Even disregarding the fact that the thief in general is the deplorable victim of a failed upbringing, of a moribund legal system and a deficient state policy, it is sufficiently proved by ancient and modern history that he ceases to be an enemy of society whenever he regains his full human rights and becomes a proprietor and cultivator of land. The presumed necessity that forces some to live at the expense of richer citizens, provides the motivation to steal and constitutes a danger to the state, is often only the school where men's strengths develop quickly and extraordinarily. In the same way that the complete lack of restraint of the savage stifles the activity of body and spirit, at the other extreme the same can be said of brutal force; a certain degree of compulsion, a gentler pressure, calls forth such activity and matures it for the future lawgiver. The robber band of the Seven Hills became through Numa's precepts[4] the most eminent and most admired people on Earth. A rude tribe of herdsmen, who for long centuries had borne the Egyptian yoke and who as well, like every slave, had lost their human dignity, sense of virtue and shame of vice, were transformed by their great war leader from the dregs of the earth into the Chosen People, despite their obstinacy, which often enraged him. The descendants of the offenders whom James I first

sent to Virginia now hold rank and voice among the nations and have become through Franklin and Washington the free allies of the mightiest European states.[5] Should our future expectations, nevertheless, be deceived and the colony in New Holland becomes a meteor which only shines an instant and disappears, then we shall at least have been entitled by all the foregoing to expect the opposite. The reader who feels involved in the events of mankind in general and in his times in particular, will readily take an interest in the possible and probable importance of this new settlement; perhaps he will thank us for going before to lead him onto the scene, and sketching for him a few outlines of the undisturbed nature of that land which yet awaits only its settlers' active efforts in order to have its day to shine in history. In everything that we shall say about it, Dampier and Cook will be our guides.[6]

New Holland, as far as its extent on the map can now be determined, encompasses an area of more than 162,000 square miles, which comes near to equalling the area of the whole continent of Europe. The continent of Europe, after the latest estimations and calculations, covers about 163,000 square miles, with the islands belonging to it adding another 11,000 square miles.[7] New Holland forms a large, nearly quadrangular mass extending through forty-two degrees between the 20th and 35th degrees of latitude South, and in the Southeast a narrow cape extends southward to the 43rd degree of latitude. It also has two considerable projections northward reaching to 11 degrees from the Equator, which enclose the deep Gulf of Carpentaria. The Indian Ocean washes the western and the Pacific Ocean the eastern coasts. In the North, a strait separates New Holland from the New Guinea islands, and at no great distance to the Northwest lies the string of islands which define the southern edge of the Great Indian Archipelago, from Timor to the rich island of Java, the focal point of the Dutch Indies. At almost same distance eastward of the southern cape, the mountainous islands of New Zealand arise from the Great South Sea. The western parts of New Holland were first discovered in the year 1616 by Dutch East India voyagers. In the following years Carpentier and Van Diemen, the Governors-General of Batavia, sent out several vessels which gradually explored the northern and western coasts, and lastly in the year 1642 the southern cape was explored, which received the name of Van Diemen. The discovery and accurate investigation of the whole eastern side was undertaken by the celebrated Cook, who navigated it in the year 1770 on his first voyage of discovery and gave it the name of New South Wales. Here, because of his iron perseverance, we know of several useful harbours, and of several large bays and inlets where some safe anchorages can be assumed to be. The earlier Dutch discoveries did not provide any certainties for navigation and geography beyond the bare outline of the country. It is only known that, in general, the whole coast of New Holland toward the West is extremely low and so dangerous because of coral reefs and shoals that no ship without special reason would lightly dare to approach it. Dampier, a great seaman of the last century, discovered a port here, probably because he combined determination with experience in his profession and could come closer to the land than a more timid and less experienced seaman would have done. A part of New Holland, from the Bight toward the Southwest (though perhaps hardly the most important area), remains still unexplored.

From the above-mentioned latitudes, it may be seen that this large country lies within good climatic zones. Its northern areas, which lie twelve degrees within the Tropics and so are exposed to the direct rays of the sun, suffer occasionally from excessive heat; but beyond the Tropic of Capricorn up to the latitude of 43 degrees South the climate is temperate and to be compared, for instance, to the Cape of the

Good Hope. Even the southernmost point of Van Diemens Land, which is situated a full nine degrees further south than the African Cape, seems to be favoured in the same degree, probably because there are no snowy mountains like those that lie to the north of the Cape, which cool the atmosphere and give a penetrating sharpness to the winds. The interior of this large country may nevertheless be intersected by substantial mountain ranges. As the horizon at its farthest point extends only as far inland as thirty miles from the sea shore, how enormous may not be the region beyond that still remaining unexplored and unknown? The east coast, which Cook found to be almost five hundred miles in length, is on the whole higher than the western, and everywhere presents small eminences, hills and mountains of moderate elevation. Here and there, where the great circumnavigator landed with his fellow voyagers, they penetrated inland for a couple or, at the most, three to four miles distant from the coast; all the rest remains unexplored until the needs of the new colonists make more painstaking investigation necessary. However, the knowledge already obtained just from the coast favours the assumption that Natural History may expect a large addition from that new part of the world.

No European mineralogist has yet set foot on New Holland. Cook's companions are silent on the products of the mineral world and the charms of the flora seem to have made them forget that the earth over which they hastened also deserved the attention of the savant. The surgeon [William] Anderson, who visited Van Diemens Land with Cook in the year 1777, found there a fine-grained pale sandstone and sandy soil, alternating with stretches of lighter, yellowish mould and reddish clay. A clue to more important underground wealth seems meanwhile to be suggested by the compass needle, which in several parts of the coast between the 22nd and 19th degrees of latitude suddenly exhibited large deviations or pointed not quite straight, giving clear indications of the metallic content of the high land in those parts. Another circumstance which gives ground for probable assumptions concerning the constitution of the mountains of New Holland is the exploration of the island of New Caledonia, which was discovered on Cook's second voyage at a distance of approximately 230 German miles eastward between the 20th and 23rd degrees South latitude. This island, of which Cook took care to tell us that its soil and its products showed a remarkable similarity to the coasts of New Holland visited by him, differs in the character of its mountains from all the island groups of the Pacific Ocean situated more to the eastward. The rather high ridge running through its centre consists of the kind of age-old rock which serves as the underlying bedrock for the surface layers of our Earth. We found there large quartz mountains with heavy deposits of gold-coloured and reddish mica running through them, and in some places blocks of serpentine mixed with hornblende, talcum and granite. If, therefore, the similarity between New Caledonia and New Holland is correct, may not the miner expect to be able to draw much important geological information from that enormous area of 160,000 square miles?

Not actual lack of water, but nevertheless lack of rivers and considerable streams, is a distinguishing feature of the new country, which is not dissimilar to parts of southern Africa. However, it is by no means certain that there are no large rivers flowing through the interior of New Holland and, if we dare to make an assumption from analogy and probability, then it seems that more than one reason would suggest that the low western coast is the area where the mouth of a substantial river may be discovered. Cook, who ventured along the eastern side of New Holland in the middle of the dry season of the year, nevertheless judged from the appearance of the country at that time that it must probably be well watered. Everywhere he found innumerable small streams, which tended to swell in the rainy season to large rivers, and in the woods there were often ponds of stagnant fresh water, presumably left from the rain that fell during the summer. The flat coastland is often intersected by bays and channels, with long tracts thickly grown with mangroves (*Rhizophora*), between which the soil consists of swamp and mud, having some similarity to our peat bogs. Here also small lakes of salt water occasionally form, which probably accumulate in small depressions by underground channels from the sea, or by gradually oozing through the sand. Such a lake filled with salt water is situated in the wooded plain that surrounds Adventure Bay in Van Diemens Land.

The heights along the seashore are covered with a light sandy soil, which because of its great dryness does not promise a flourishing yield of vegetation, and is generally unfit for cultivation. But one also finds hills covered with better soil where woods alternate with grassy areas, and both flats and valleys often display rich, luxuriant clumps of grass, which the hand of the husbandman can easily make into meadows and fields. Here one finds a soil of black earth, undisturbed, perhaps, for many thousands of years, formed by the annual decay of vegetable matter. In the dry season nothing is easier than to put the withered grass, which reaches taller than a man, to the torch and thus reduce the area far and wide to ashes. When Cook took a turtle from one of the wretched savages who inhabit this coast in small numbers, they revenged themselves by devastating the area with fire and by trying to set the tents alight. He who knows the steppe fire in Russia will be able to imagine the terrifying speed with which fire spreads through dry grass. The length of the grass is, by the way, the only obstacle that troubles the traveller by foot in this country because everywhere, the mangrove-entangled swamps excepted, the woodland is open, the trees stand scattered some distance apart and between them one notices little or no undergrowth of scrub. The wealth of different species of trees and other plants which are unknown in Europe is sufficiently considerable to justify the name of Botany Bay that Cook gave to a port there. The Messrs. Banks and Solander collected there in the space of a few days between three and four hundred species which no botanist had described before them. Among the familiar trees is the Cajuput (*Melaleuca leucadendra*) from the leaves of which one distils the aromatic oil of this name; furthermore, there are several species related to this tree, the wood of some of which can be used with advantage for shipbuilding and which would provide excellent masts, as soon as a means be can found to work it more easily. Cook compared the wood of some of these trees to that of the American live oak. Another kind has likewise a similarity with our oaks; their heavy, hard wood is like the Guayak (*Lignum vitae*), is of a dark colour, supplies a reddish gum and is similar to the Dragon's Blood. The species

of beautiful tree, which the younger Linné called after its discoverer the Banksia, here displays its large, yellow flowers; the Sensitive Plant (*Mimosa*) appears here in different species of tree with simple leaves, to one of which New Caledonia is also the home. The Cabbage Palm (*Areca sapida*) and two other types of palm are also seen to be abundant in those parts which border the sea shore; two of them are found in the northern, hotter parts of the country, the third is plentiful in the south. The cabbage, or actually the heart, which contains the tender bud of the new leaves and flowers, is excellent eating. The only plants edible in case of need are a kind of bad, unpalatable fig, a tree with a flattened fruit, and still another, which bears purple coloured apples, likewise a wild banana which contains ripe seeds in its fruit, a plant which is related to the Aaron's Rod, two kinds of yam, a species of kidney bean, a species of parsley and purslane. But these also require some preparation: the apple, for example, must be left for some days before it becomes edible; and the roots must be boiled several times for them to lose their sharp taste. We have already mentioned the mangroves on the shores. One also finds in sandy stretches the Pandanus, whose fruit looks similar to the pineapple but which is hardly edible; the Eastern Anacardium [cashew] (*Semecarpus orientalis*) and a quantity small plants, ferns and mosses.

The shoals and reefs which surround by far the greater part of New Holland and make navigation in the northern parts extremely unsafe, are well known to be the work of small polyp-like animalcules, which only since the investigations of [Jean André] Peyssonel have been admitted to be a form of animal life.[8] One is astonished at the miraculous cellular construction of such soft and, to appearance, insubstantial creatures. The walls of rock with creatures living on them grow, as it were, from the unfathomable depths of the sea, which no lead-line can plumb, spreading their branches ever outward in every direction the closer they approach to the surface. Here the breaking waves strike incessantly on the fragile home of the polyp, which nevertheless resists their force and forms within its boundaries calm havens. Tracts of several hundred miles are enclosed within these coral reefs and often they extend so far into the open sea that the eye cannot see the coast from outside their limits. The hardest seafarer is afraid at this astonishing sight when the prevailing wind drives his ship upon it, and he despairs when a dead calm makes him entirely a sacrifice to the will of the waves, and only the roar of the foaming breakers disturbs the awful stillness of nature. The first discoverer of such terrible rock walls usually struggles with tenfold danger and ventures his life for the safety of subsequent navigators. Even Cook, when he sailed along the coast of New Holland, notwithstanding his vigilance, ran upon a hidden rock that, had it not remained in the ship, would inevitably have caused it to sink. To the naturalist, meanwhile, every prospect in these reefs is remarkable not only because of the different species of coral in various genera, but also the quantity of conches of countless kinds and the sundry other sorts of molluscs lying on these banks. On the coasts of New Holland there are oysters, mussels, large clams (which are a meal sufficient for more than two men), mother-of-pearl shell, hammer oysters, flat-fish, sea-stars, sucking sponges, jelly-fish and sea-hares [sea slugs], together with all kinds of other molluscs and shellfish in incredible quantities. The mud banks of Bustard Bay, in 24 degrees South latitude, are so full of pearl oysters that, in Cook's opinion, a prosperous pearl fishery could be created there. The seaman, to whom it is all the same whether it is a rare *Tubipora musica* or a quite common coral that threatens to sink his ship, on becoming filled by the hope of plentiful gain with courage and determination, will venture among these reefs in the hunt for pearls; and soon every sand bank and shoal there will be as accurately known and as easily avoided as

those in the Persian and Arabian Gulfs, on the coasts of China or in the West Indies, where the bold spirit of enterprise and the love of gain often perform far more daring deeds and bid defiance to more menacing dangers.

The sea around New Holland, which possesses such a wealth of sea snails and shellfish, also swarms with all kinds of fish, water insects and amphibians. On these coasts there are rare crabs and lobsters, including especially two so far little-known species, distinguished by their abdomens, the one a brilliant ultramarine and the other like completely white-glaze porcelain. In all the harbours and bays the fish swim in the greatest abundance and with a considerable variety of species. Cook seldom set a seine without catching from fifty to two hundred pound of fish. There are besides mullet, elephant fish (*Chimaera callorynchus*), skate, shark, sole, flounder, sea-cock, earfish [abalone] and others to some extent already known, and an even more considerable quantity of species never hitherto described. Included in these is a curious little fish with very strong pectoral fins, which at times remains on the dry land, probably left there by the ebb-tide. Far from being weakened by this change in the elements, it hops briskly like a frog from one stone to another, without even seeking to stay in puddles. Included in the kinds of ray, the Stingray is remarkable on account of its sting, which the natives of New Holland fasten to a wooden shaft to make a spear. On the reefs and on the banks, particularly in the northern parts, there is an incredible quantity of the best green turtles (*Testudo midas*), and in addition a species of crocodile, which come into the bays and river mouths. On land may be seen a quantity of large and small lizards and snakes of various kinds, among which may be found some that are poisonous. An army of insects of a variety of forms lives in these great wastes, as in the hotter deserts of Africa, and trouble the traveller more by their quantity than by other harmful qualities. As well, it also includes scorpions, scolopendrids [centipedes and millipedes], mosquitoes and ants, whose sting or bite is very painful. The ants are characterised by their nests, which are sometimes glued together from tree leaves, sometimes attached to the inside of one of the branches of a certain tree, whose pith they everywhere clear out, in such a way that no point can be broken where the ants do not rush out and avenge themselves on the disturber of their peace. A third type inhabits the root of a parasitic plant which, like the mistletoe on our oaks, grows out of the bark of a tree. The first of these ants is grass green, the two last black. Besides these, one notices the White Ant (*Termes*), an extremely curious insect, which has two different dwellings, one in the branches of the trees and the other, conical in shape, often six feet high, set on the earth, but both are connected by a covered pathway. Butterflies in some places are so common that Cook once saw in the space of three or four acres of land millions fluttering in the air over the country in every direction, while at same time the vegetation was full of those settled on the branches. On the mangroves he found a species of hairy caterpillar which, if one touched it, felt like a stinging nettle. Mr. [Johann] Fabricius' *Novae Species Insectorum*, a work in which all the species contained in Mr. Banks' museum are listed, informs on what a quantity of the rarest beetles, cicadas, bugs, bees, wasps, flies and other insects of all kinds is to be found in New Holland.[9]

The class of the birds is no less numerous and diverse. There is a beautiful white eagle, different falcons, large and small parrots of exceptional beauty, as well as white cockatoos, pigeons, bustards, quails, ravens, herons and cranes. The pigeons fly together in large flocks and are distinguished by a dainty crest on the head. The quails and crows are no different from the European, at least according to Cook's report. The sea and water birds are sea gulls, cormorants, brent geese, boobies, terns, plovers, wild

geese, ducks and pelicans of an enormous size. Of the smaller fowl, except for a kind of bunting, none is particularly mentioned; but Mr. Anderson says that in Van Diemens Land a wagtail with a sky-blue head and neck is found. There one also sees the black oyster-catcher of New Zealand, and a grey plover with a black head.

In a country so extensive, quadrupeds also may be assumed to exist, even though it may be the case that the explorers, who were only few days on the coast, saw none of them. Is it not hard to understand how a country which is more than five hundred German miles in each direction, should have turned out to be so empty; and even less, why the mammals that are there should have appeared just at the two or three points on the coast which were touched at by Europeans in order, as it were, to undergo examination? But without regard for what the future inhabitants of New Holland may yet perhaps discover, we will be content for now with discussing what has already been actually discovered there. Cook found there a kind of wild cat, and the track of a larger animal, which must from all the circumstances and from several which were seen from afar to be judged to be similar to the wolf. Besides these, he mentions a kind of polecat, which were called *quolls* by the savages. They are brown with white spots on the back and have a white belly. The large bat, which is probably the Roussette [fruit bat] of Mr. Buffon, belongs likewise in the catalogue of New Holland animals. Finally, one finds there yet another two species of marsupial, one of them perhaps the Phalanger [opossum] of Mr. de Buffon, the other the Kangaroo, which has already been described by Cornelys de Bruyn (as the renowned [Pieter] Camper reminds us). The latter grows nearly as large as a sheep, and is recognizable from the length of its hind legs, on which with unbelievable speed it hops on its way without ever using its short front feet. These two animals give one proof among others of the felicitous temper of the climate of New Holland, as being found not only around Endeavour River in the fifteenth degree of southern latitude but also on the utmost southerly point of Van Diemens Land around Adventure Bay. The marsupial which so resembles the Phalanger, is very different from the kangaroo in its way of life: it climbs in the trees and feeds itself partly on berries; perhaps it also occasionally hangs from the branches by its tail, of which about a third is hairless and which seems to be made for grasping and wrapping around. The dogs are mentioned by Captain Cook as the only tame animals; however they were in small number and no more than two or three were seen. Sometimes they visited the tents of the Englishmen in order to get bones or other scraps thrown away from meals. Strange that Man, who here stands at his lowest level, nevertheless has this sociable, faithful beast for his companion! Let us see whether it is credible that reason taught him to select this friend from among the creatures of the earth; or whether rather mutual need and blind instinct may have led them together?

Among all the races which may claim to be called human, that which inhabits New Holland is the most wretched.[10] They live without agriculture, without clothes and without dwellings. One never saw more than fifteen warriors assembled, even in cases where they were obviously contemplating an attack on the Europeans and therefore had called together their full strength.

Fish and shellfish are their principal fare; at the most, if fortune favours them greatly, they devour a kangaroo, a bird, a turtle and occasionally, a wild yam or a handful of berries from the woods. They have no occasion whatever to leave the confines of the coast, and both their small number and complete lack of civilization obviously prove a recent origin for the population. As well, one finds the same people living on the east and west coasts, and on the northern cape of New Holland, as in the southernmost part of Van Diemens Land. Lack of food probably caused the dispersal of these wretches, who do not seem to realize that they could remedy this lack by uniting. All the foregoing is sufficient to conclude that the interior of the country must be completely uninhabited. A people who lived by agriculture would not have remained completely unknown at the coasts, since one kind of industry so easily gives rise to another; or they would have had to cultivate their fields completely unbeknown, within a narrow tract, with a small number of people, far withdrawn from all neighbours, and without wishing to approach the sea.[11]

The savages on the coast are of medium size, well-proportioned and stout, but not especially lively and, like all savages, inactive and lazy. All reports agree that their hair is as frizzy and woolly as that of the Negro in Guinea and their skin black, or at least dark brown with a crust of black dirt, probably covered with sweat stains. Their facial features are not, meanwhile, as unprepossessing as those of the Moors. They have thick lips, but their jaws do not jut out as with the Negro, to make them even uglier, and for the same reason their nose is not flat or, as it were, pushed in. Their teeth are dirty but rather even, but Dampier noticed that on the west coast they were accustomed to pull out their two upper front teeth, which did not occur in the east. In general, it seems this seafarer discovered a family that was exceptionally feeble and wretched. The chins of the men were unbearded, and their eyelids always half closed so as to ward off the swarms of flies which were probably attracted in larger numbers by their dirt. Those however, that Cook described on the east coast, had thick beards, but the hair on their heads was so sticky with grease and filth that it consisted of nothing but small shags, like an dirty sheep's fleece. The women shore their hair short and left only a narrow fringe around their head. Both sexes incise long, transverse, crooked designs into their arms and body, upon which a raised welt or scar forms, perhaps representing decorations. As proofs that the instinct to adorn oneself is prior to the sentiment for morality in humans, these savages, who otherwise go about completely naked, pierce their nasal septum and stick a long peg through it, paint themselves with red ochre or with white stripes that, like as it were a medal sash, go diagonally over the shoulder and the whole body, also occasionally a fibre cross hatched by other stripes, and wear necklaces of strings of mussel shells, arm bracelets of small cords, and a cord of human hair around the abdomen. In Van Diemens Land some women had a piece of kangaroo hide which they tied like a bag around the neck and around the body, in order to carry their children therein on their backs; however, a covering such as our ideas of modesty would require was for them quite unthinkable.

These people, without permanent abode, without property, without furniture, who have nothing to lose and nothing to defend, without care for the morrow, simply let themselves be ruled and determined solely by the needs of the present moment;

these savages scattered so individually nevertheless feel that they rather stand in each others' way than that they should make to lighten each others' burden. Their industry does not suffice by itself to sweeten their life and to procure the many different kinds of amenities; instead, they are provided only with the weapons in their hands, with which they can either drive their neighbour from their rich fishing-grounds, or ward off their attacks. Certainly, this kind of hostile, solitary attitude is also in the end a path to civilization; it may end unexpectedly, like all human institutions, however paradoxically it might seem, in good sense, in deliberation with reflection, and would therefore lead to sociability. But how slowly must not this means work in a country where the population is so inconsiderable? Millennia could yet pass before one tribe was driven by another into such narrow straits that they would sacrifice either their freedom or their security, and either accept a new relationship with their conqueror or seek out some plant they could eat and, in the interior of the country far from their pursuers, take their subsistence from its cultivation.

The weapons, which we previously mentioned, are eight to fourteen foot long lances of cane, with one or several points fastened to them of heavy wood, fish bones, or the sting of the stingray, full of barbs or pieces of sharp mussel shell. These lances are thrown either from a free hand, or by means of a throwing-stick in which the shaft of the lance is lain in a groove or a slot. For defence they use oblong, three foot long by eighteen inch wide bark shields. The hunt for turtle requires its own tool, which if needs be can serve for defence. It is a wooden spike about a foot long and with strong barbs set into it. This fits into a thick shaft of light wood, let into a recess in one end of it. A three to four fathom long line connects both sections in such a way that one end is fastened to the point, the other to the stock. Now, as soon as the animal is struck, the point remains stuck in the flesh while the stock trails behind it, and stays tied only to the line, such that it serves as a floating marker whereby one keeps track of the turtle and at the same time can tire it. In a bag woven from yarn, they carry fish hooks of shell, which are rather nicely made; both red and white body paint, and their usual finery, as well as some points for their lances, and few bits of a resin which they use to glue on these points. Their woodwork smoothens it with the rough leaves of a wild fig tree. At the spots where they are wont to stay were found a kind of pail made from bark, with which they probably scoop water and carry it from one place to another. Their boats are also made of bark, and only in the northern parts did one notice a few consisting of hollowed out trees. A hollow tree which, however, is still standing and green, is their most comfortable abode. They hollow it out by fire for up to seven or eight feet from the ground and make a hearth of clay inside it around which, if the tree is large enough, four to five persons can huddle. Aside from this shelter prepared from nature, it hardly deserves mention that here and there along the beach are to be found some wretched bundle of branches covered with bark or palm fronds, upon which the name of hut may be reluctantly wasted. Their meals are usually roasted on coals, or baked in holes in which heated stones are laid. Their fire is made by rubbing; an invention which, whenever it occurred, seems to presuppose a Prometheus who must have been taught by the gods. But possibly, in the burning climate of New Holland, this discovery was easily made by accident.

There was too little opportunity to associate with these people to be able to be provided with any definite knowledge about their character, their customs and their rather primitive ideas. Reserve, with a certain good nature, was the general feature which marked the relations of the Europeans and the New Hollanders. At only one place, in Botany Bay, did a pair of them dare to oppose the landing of the strangers and have courage enough to withstand the fire of the muskets until they were painfully wounded with shot. On Cook's last voyage it seemed to displease the men that some sailors made all kinds of improper approaches to their women; they know thus the sentiment of jealousy. Of all that they were offered or given, not a single item was capable of exciting their attention; nothing received special approval, still less their admiration. Their language, which does not by the way seem to be very rough, has nevertheless an expression for astonishment, which always, perhaps, presupposes a certain degree of fright. The few words of it which have been brought to us show no similarity with any known dialect; a circumstance which frustrates all attempts to trace the origin of these savages. Their black colour and their frizzy, woolly hair point meanwhile to a certain relationship with the inhabitants of some nearby island groups, *e.g.* to the New Hebrides, the Charlotte islands and the Papuan islands, in which are included New Guinea, New Britain and New Ireland. The large difference from the way of life of the inhabitants of these islands is due indisputably to the nature of the places where they dwell, in that these are plentifully provided with all kinds of edible fruits and roots, and have coasts that are not so rich in fish. Suspicion, jealousy and lack of civilization are, however, characteristics which they possess in common with the New Hollanders. Nonetheless, it must be allowed that even on the assumption that they had a single origin, it is difficult to prove in a satisfying manner which of them, the New Hollanders or the inhabitants of the islands, are the original race, and which the colonies derived from them. A still third case is possible: they could both be different shoots off another common stem.

However that may be, at least it remains beyond doubt that the handful of natives scattered over a land of such great extent did not come into consideration in planting a European settlement there, and they are of as little threat to the colony as, for the time being, it can be harmful to them. How easily might the forty or fifty people who now roam over the area where the settlement is to take place be able to find another abode which is just as convenient for their purposes! And who can know what happy influence the example of the European settlers themselves can have on these uncultured, but not barbarous natives? Their ever so simple fishing tackle, their twine and their weapons are proofs of skill and

ability, which perhaps only want to be drawn forth and suitably led. They only lack, perhaps, a beneficent Triptolemus who would bestow upon them some cultivable plant![12]

But aside from this object, taking possession of New Holland can bring about yet more important consequences. The place which has been chosen for the first English settlement, which was called Botany Bay by Cook because of its wealth of plants, is of all the harbours so far known on that coast admitted to have the most favourable position, the most pleasant climate and the most productive soil. It is situated in the latitude of 34 degrees South, and in longitude 151 degrees 23 minutes East of Greenwich, is spacious, safe and comfortable, has a stream of fresh water on its northern shore where a ship may lie at anchor completely sheltered by the land, and its stores of wood and water can be taken on very easily. The country there is of a very moderate elevation, its soil light, with the trees growing so far apart from each other that the whole area, excluding some marshy places, could therefore be made arable without it being necessary to cut down a single tree. All the products of the land listed above are overflowing there and the whole population does not approach more than thirty or forty persons, including women and children. Hither the British Government in the future will call those criminals over whom the sentence of exile has been pronounced for committing thefts, robberies, forgeries, and so on. Formerly this punishment was transportation for life or for fourteen, seven or only three years to North America, and as a consequence of this process being prevented by the war with those colonies they were put into large flat-bottomed hulks on the Thames to work on removing the sandbanks from the river. However, with time the maintenance of so considerable a number of persons placed a heavy burden on the public, particularly since of late years the number of this riff-raff has grown to increased proportions. It was therefore seen to be necessary to return to the long-used method of transportation and resolve to populate a distant land with these prisoners and unfortunate victims of lust who disgrace the streets of a great capital.

Commodore Philipps^[13] leads the fleet which is appointed for the transportation, and to him as a Governor of the new colony has been entrusted the whole enterprise. The nearness of New Zealand, the excellent flax plant (*Phormium*) that grows so abundantly there and its incomparable shipbuilding timber; the pearl-oyster banks further down along the coast of New Holland and perhaps the export to India and even to Europe of some yet to be discovered product of the land or of the yield of the plantations which can be established there are, as it were, the first prospects which this remarkable settlement offers for the future. It all depends, perhaps, on the wise being able to look and discover in rude and degraded men the material for great enterprises, gathering and combining them together in one spot, seeing opportunity, drawing forth the spark of activity, in a word, on being able to educate and civilize men.

George Forster's Reflections^[14]

He who considers the merits of civilized life without prejudice cannot deny that it is only in this state that man first truly begins to achieve the potential with which he has been endowed in the form of his faculties, and becomes a true human being, namely one who is a thinking being, enjoying greater fulfilment by virtue of his consciousness and ideas than in by merely satisfying his sensual desires and blind instincts. Certainly Nature, as far as we yet know, has in her earthly creation made no unhappy beast. All gladly enjoy a vitality which expresses itself in innumerable and diverse ways, incessantly and skilfully maintaining their individuality without a tutor, striving to maintain their own form of existence. Receptivity and contentment are in eternal harmony, and the joy of life dwells to equal degree in the worm, which when cut tenfold regenerates each part to form ten wholes each enjoying a separate existence,^[15] as in the human who, instead of such plastic power of reproduction inherits more tender senses to be guardians of their nature. However, the ranking of creatures is not therefore any the less defined by their degree of receptivity. Who would

indeed relinquish one sense, just one talent, in order to lay claim to such a vegetative subsistence? Anyone, rather than being a worm, would sooner buzz around as an insect, and so progressing toward a state in which they would remain exposed to several and more various impressions. Those dissatisfied with the deficiencies of civilized society and preferring the natural state, would thus choose to forget that refined human beings enjoy their existence as much as savages, and that the only difference lies in the form of enjoyment, which for each of them depends on the skills whose aptitudes sleep within them. However, contemplation is more likely to result in error, such as finding distinctions where no differences exist; thus contriving a contradiction between nature and culture, that at most lies in an arbitrary use of words. The ability to think, with all its consequences, is as essentially intrinsic to our nature as the instinct to nourish ourselves and reproduce, although it is not developed to its full potential in each individual. Every individual of a species does not necessarily develop its typical characteristics. Gall flies lay eggs in autumn, which lie dormant through the winter, and a series of living generations spring forth from them for as long as the summer lasts.^[16] Those well-versed in zoology will know that where a superfluity of dispositions exists, one often suppresses the others or confines them within narrower bounds. Reason no longer contends with the other human dispositions as does instinct in the animals.

Accordingly, where capabilities exist, fulfilment is achieved by means of their development. Cultural advancement is thus in the interests of mankind, and population of the whole earth with civilized inhabitants is the great goal which we above all see before us as worthy of our efforts. And is not the speed at which everything progresses toward this goal remarkable! The beginning of civilization in our part of the world is lost so far back in grey antiquity that we can do no more than conjecture or accept on faith what its initial impulse may have been. History teaches us only that its progress was prepared by a chain of events from one epoch to another. Only in later centuries did its progress clearly become faster. In each hemisphere of America [northern and southern], the first threads of morality developed a tender fabric of civilization; but this intellectual impulse was too feeble, too slow to fulfill what was required in those times, and the gap between the *quipus*^[17] and the alphabet remained great, perhaps unbridgeable. Then came Columbus, and civilization made giant strides in both worlds. Nowhere did it flourish more copiously than in the new Republic that is now rivalling Europe.

The appearance of a new discoverer, the immortal Cook, defines a second similar epoch in our day. His three intrepid voyages extended the field of geographical knowledge from pole to pole, and no significant island in the Ocean remains still undiscovered. The consequences of the powerful impulse that this one great man was able to give to his century are now seen to be taking place. Trade is already joining an intercourse between China and the recently discovered North West Coast of America, and Great Britain is already setting up a system to open up a new, large part of the world through colonies.

Extract from *Cook the Discoverer*, by George Forster, translated by P.E. Klarwill^[18]

If Cook's voyages of discovery have opened up new vistas for the prosperity of his fatherland, if they encourage his fellow-citizens to fresh activity and promote the general enlightenment of all civilized peoples; who, then, will rob him of the immortal glory of having striven for the happiness of many thousands, nay, of having sacrificed himself? This merit of the great navigator is not merely hypothetical, it is not the dream of a feverish imagination which dares to look into a dark and uncertain future; even now the fruits of the first and last voyage of the discoverer are beginning to emerge. Between China and the newly explored West coast of North America English traders have with the greatest success established ties of commerce and their first favourable attempt has proved the advantages of this new route. The furs of this new part of the world and in particular the sea otter furs, which opulent mandarins consider are almost worth their weight in gold, will maintain their value for a long time. These animals are bound to diminish in numbers, the more assiduously they are hunted by the [native] Americans prompted by barter. It can thus be forecast without needing any particular perspicacity, that the convenience of trading on this western American coast will soon lead to the establishment of trading posts and factories from which in time proper colonial cities will emerge. If we remember in this connection the rapid growth of the states which recently united in a great republican federation along the eastern coast of the same continent, we can expect that within a few centuries an important apparition will become visible in the political firmament in the West. It is in the nature of all colonies that, as soon as they are able to exist by themselves, they become emancipated and sever their connection with the parent tree. This, without fail, will sooner or later be the fate of all Spanish possessions in the whole of the Americas and could perhaps be accelerated by the foundation of a new trading state in New Albion. England could therefore exact the right of retribution from the Bourbon Courts which are now supporting the independence of the American states and which even try to usurp their trade, thus giving an entirely new aspect to the relationships between the Old World and the New by new revolutions.

New organisms arise out of the decay of organic bodies or out of their waste matter. First these are merely mould and fungi; however, they prepare the soil for the seeds of nobler plants. From the redundant or harmful members of a state which it

casts off, new societies will soon sprout which by and by grow to considerable size and strength. A few men of large mental stature who under favourable circumstances will excel in this new political organization give shape and consistency to this as yet plastic mass and infuse into it a formative instinct developing it in all its parts and organizing it further. The free states in America had no other origin and their legislators arose out of their own midst. The new British colony which it is planned to found during this year on the eastern coast of New Holland has the same modest beginnings. New South Wales, discovered by Cook on his first voyage and Botany Bay, where the naturalists during a period of three weeks found almost four hundred new plant species, have been assigned as the future abode of the criminals who for some years now have thronged the English prisons. There an immense land which might well be called a new continent lies open to them, uncultivated and uninhabited, offering them a mild climate, a coast rich in fish and soil suitable for easy cultivation. The interior of that country, as yet unexplored, possibly contains a multitude of remarkable and perhaps valuable products. The small number of miserable humans who, naked, dispersed and without permanent abode roam around the sea coasts, are neither dangerous to the settlers, nor do they have anything to fear from them. Thus, the beginning of this new colony could be without bloodshed; it will be able to live through the years of its childhood quietly and without disturbance and, far from the motherland, must seek its sustenance with even greater zeal in agriculture, which is the only source of true wealth. However, as soon as the population of New Holland will have made only a little progress, the cultivation of the nearby islands of New Zealand, so rich in building and commercial timber, plant products of all kinds and fish, will become closely connected with the interests of the new colony. The soil there and the climate is excellently suited to the cultivation of our cereals and the vine. The *Phormium* plant, similar to the hyacinth, which is a native of that country and which supplies the inhabitants with an indestructible, silky, soft and shiny white flax, a plant which at the same time has the advantage that it thrives very well on rocky or even swampy soil which otherwise could not be utilized, offers material for making sail cloth, ropes and even all types of linen. The resinous and spicy trees from whose sprouts Cook had beer and tea made and several herbs which apparently are rich in curative properties open new prospects for trade, either through the inherent wildness of the indigenous barbarians becoming mitigated in time, or by armed colonists of European origin settling among them. For the northern region of New Holland, which is closer to the Equator, the products of the island groups scattered in the Pacific between the tropics are of greater importance. The breadfruit tree, whose fruits provide such ample, healthy and tasty food, the coconut palm with its nuts and wine-like sap, the banana, the Tahitian myrobalan apple, the yams and arrowroot, the sweet potato, sugar cane and, in one word, the fruits and edible plants of these archipelagoes might well in future be cultivated with profit in the new country. Even along the coasts there are places suitable for planting and in the valleys which lie further into the interior of the country such places may be expected with even greater probability. The cajuput tree, which supplies the famous oil of this name, and a large number of trees from which valuable resin similar to dragon's blood oozes grow wild in that country. Perhaps it might be possible to bring from the Friendly Isles to New Holland also a new species of cinchona tree, whose bitter spicy taste seems to prove fairly clearly that it too, like its American relatives, is not devoid of curative powers. Who nowadays does not know of the importance of this American product and who does not realize that its discovery alone

has made the bond between Peru and Europe indissoluble? A second kind of cinchona bark from the Caribbean islands has started to become famous through similar although different powers which, however, in certain cases are even more effective. The third species, with their beautiful and aromatic flowers, adorns the gardens of the islanders in the South Seas and is planted, possibly because of its healing powers, around their huts. The planting of this shrub and trading in its bark could in future link people who without this would remain apart for a long time.

One notices with surprise that the peoples of Asia, whether they remained independent of Europe like the Chinese, or whether they were subjugated by our merchants like the peoples of Bengal, Java, the Moluccas and the Philippines, remain static at the stage of civilization which they have reached, do not intermarry with Europeans and retain their own customs, languages and practices. It seems that the antiquity of their institutions, the density of population of all those Asiatic lands and the rapacity of the foreign merchants who forget everything except their own profit, combine to maintain this peculiarity of their character; indeed, the climate has a strong effect on the conquerors, who, from laziness and ease, have come close to the customs of the vanquished. However, in a country where the number of aboriginal natives is insignificant; where nobody saves the new arrivals the trouble of tilling the fields; where no indigenous manufactories exist to clothe them in cotton or silk; where hence the growth and prosperity of the new colony must depend exclusively on their own endeavours; there one should be able to expect with some confidence the endurance of the European spirit of industry. Thus, together with agriculture, arts and crafts will by and by originate and will spread and be perfected by trade; industry and luxury must go hand in hand and even science cannot fall entirely into abeyance. How much would not a state in the Southern Hemisphere, whose inhabitants were so enterprising, active and stimulated by the multitude of their wants and so clever in inventing the means for satisfying them as are the peoples of our part of the world and the North American free states, change the conditions of all near and far away nations? New Holland, considered as a centre of trade, appears to be favourably situated for linking India and America and, as it were, for maintaining dominance over the East Asian archipelagoes.

[1] With the invaluable assistance of Michael Grunwald and Stephanie Pfrommer; responsibility for any errors or mistakes remains entirely with Robert J. King.

[2] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Rhetorici libro duo qui vocantur de inventione*. Liber primus, 1,2: "A certain great and wise man knew what unworked material was in the minds of men, and of how it could be put to the greatest purposes if someone could draw it out and by instruction improve it." The rest of the passage makes clear what was in Cicero's mind, and why Forster considered it an appropriate epigraph: *Qui dispersos homines in agros at in tectis silvestribus abditos, ratione quadam compulit unum in locum et congregavit et eos in unam quamque rem inducens utilem atque honestam; primo propter insolentiam reclamantes, deinde propter rationem atque orationem studiosus audientes ex feris et immanibus mites reddidit et mansuetos* [Men were scattered in the fields and hidden in huts in the woods when he made them come together in one place, and in accordance with a plan he introduced them to every useful and honest occupation; and although at first they cried out against it because they were not used to it, afterwards they listened

carefully to his reasoning and persuasion, and he had transformed them from wild savages into mild and civilized people]. The final sentence of Forster's essay echoes Cicero's words.

- [3] The other two "continents" being the Old World and the New World.
- [4] Numa Pompilius, the second King of Rome, her lawgiver.
- [5] Cf. "Numa" writing in *The Public Advertiser* of 13 October 1786: "It is an excellent thought in A[dm]inistratio[n] to people this new colony in the very same way their forefathers did America.... But why mention the grandeur of America from an offspring of convicts, when we have all heard of Rome? Who peopled imperial Rome? Thieves, villains, robbers and murderers. And why Botany Bay may not yet make as brilliant a figure in the historic page, I defy Dr. Price to prove." [Richard Price (1723-1791), author of *Observations on Civil Liberty and the Justice and Policy of the War with America* (1776)].
- [6] "Here, my dear friend, you have the requested essay on New Holland. I have done what I could in a short time, all gathered from what I read in Hawkesworth and in Cook's last Voyage" (Forster to Karl Philipp Spener (his publisher), 20 November 1786, *Georg Forsters Werke: sämtliche Schriften*, Berlin, Akademie-verlag, Bd.14, *Briefe, 1784-1787*, 1978, S.591).
- [7] German miles, which equalled five English miles. Forster probably should have said leagues, which equalled three miles. Daniel Fenning, in *A New System of Geography* (London, 1780), gave the estimated area of Europe as 2,749,349 square miles.
- [8] John Andrew Peyssonel, "An account of a manuscript treatise intituled, *Traité du corail ... par le sieur de Peyssonel*", *Philosophical Transactions*, vol. 47, 1753 pp.445-37.
- [9] J. C. Fabricius, *Systema Entomologica*, 1775.
- [10] Cf. William Dampier, "The inhabitants of this country are the miserablest people in the world" (*Journal*, entry for 4 July 1688).
- [11] Cf. *The Daily Universal Register*, 20 September 1786: "It is impossible that the inland country should subsist inhabitants at all seasons without cultivation; it is extremely improbable that the inhabitants of the coast should be ignorant of the arts of cultivation which were practised inland; and it is equally improbable, that if they knew such arts, there should be no traces of them among them."
- [12] Triptolemus, who in Greek mythology bestowed on humanity knowledge of the cultivation of grain (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, V, 646, 653). Cf. John Peter Purry, *A Method for Determining the Best Climate of the Earth* (London, 1744, p.53): "the Rustic Savages love a Life of Laziness above all Things....Add to this, that a Country inhabited by this sort of lazy Savages is never much peopled. Thus there is Reason to believe, the Establishing a good colony of *Europeans* would be so far from being any Detriment to the Inhabitants of the *Land of Nights*, and from driving them out of their Possessions, that on the contrary it would procure them all Sorts of Advantages, as well from a civilised Life, as from the Arts and Sciences it would bring among them, provided this was done with Mildness, and we looked upon them as poor Creatures, who tho' stupid and ignorant don't cease as well as we to be Members of human Society."
- [13] Arthur Phillip; cf. *The St.James's Chronicle*, 26 September 1786: "Capt. Phillips is appointed Commodore of the Squadron which is to sail with the Convicts to Botany Bay"(also in other newspapers, such as *The London Chronicle*, 26 September, *Journal Politique de Bruxelles*, 14 Octobre 1786).

- [14] These philosophical Reflections formed the introductory paragraphs to Forster's essay. Johann Karl Philipp Spener, his publisher, had wanted to delete this section, as Forster related in a letter to a friend: "Herr Spener castrated my essay on New Holland: to save space, he cut out the Reflections, which are the only part that I can call my own. Luckily, he wrote to me, and I protested so much that he has now allowed the suppressed sheets to be printed" (Forster to Christian Gottlob Heyne, Vilna, 21 January 1787; *Georg Forsters Werke: sämtliche Schriften*, Berlin, Akademie-verlag, Bd.14, 1978, *Briefe, 1784-1787*, S.624). As Forster explained to Spener: "As far I am concerned, it is the Reflections that I made in the introduction which alone can entitle the essay to take its place in the *Taschenbuch* and that allow me to justify to myself being involved with this trivial matter." (Forster to Spener, Vilna, 21 December 1786; *Georg Forsters Werke: sämtliche Schriften*, Berlin, Akademie-verlag, Bd.14, 1978, *Briefe, 1784-1787*, S.606).
- [15] A reference to the work of Otto Friedrich Müller, *Von Würmen des süßen und salzigen Wassers*, Copenhagen, 1771.
- [16] A reference to the work of Charles Bonnet, *Traité d'Insectologie, ou Observations sur les Pucerons*, Paris, 1745; Johann August Ephraim Goeze, *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte de Insekten*, Leipzig, 1776-1783.
- [17] The knotted cords used by the Incas for record-keeping.
- [18] "Cook, der Entdecker", Vorrede für *Des Capitain Jacob Cook's Dritte Entdeckungs-Reise...* Berlin, 1787; *Georg Forster's Kleine Schriften: Ein Beytrag zur Völker- und Länderkunde, Naturgeschichte und Philosophie des Lebens, gesammelt von Georg Forster*, Erster Theil, Leipzig, Kummer, 1789, S.1-223. Translation by P.E. Klarwill, The Alexander Turnbull Library, P O Box 12349, Wellington, New Zealand (Ref. No. MS-Paper-1485 Forster).