

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY SIR ZELMAN COWEN,
AK, GCMG, GCVO, KStJ, QC,
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE "LA TROBE MEMORIAL SERVICE"
AT THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST PETER, EASTERN HILL, MELBOURNE,
THURSDAY, 4 DECEMBER 1980.

This service honours the life and work of Charles Joseph La Trobe who was born in London in March 1801 and who died in Sussex on this day in 1875. He was appointed Superintendent of the Port Phillip District in 1839, in the very early days of the settlement, and in 1851, on separation from New South Wales, he was named as the first Lieutenant-Governor of the colony of Victoria. He left Victoria in 1854 after one of the longest and most wearing periods of administration any Australian colonial governor has undertaken.

La Trobe laid the foundation stone of this church on 18 June 1846. That stone cannot be found. A former Vicar of St Peter's, Canon Maynard, who is well remembered, wrote in 1956, in his account of St Peter's, that the stone may have been swallowed up when the transepts were added eight years later. Bishop Broughton, Bishop of Australia, provides us with a record of what was said on that occasion. The church was named St Peter's, 'to be set apart for the teaching of the right Catholic Faith'. Canon Maynard also records that the marble font was given to the church in its very early days by La Trobe. It is told that he had a vision of 'Church Hill' with churches and places of worship of many denominations on this high point of what became the City of Melbourne. It was from St Peter's in January 1848, that the Letters Patent, designating Melbourne a city by virtue of being the seat of the Bishop of Melbourne, were read on the arrival of the first Bishop, Charles Perry.

Charles Joseph La Trobe was the descendant of French Huguenots who left France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes; later generations of the family were clergymen in the Moravian Church. One of them was La Trobe's father who is said to have been an accomplished musician, a friend of Haydn, and to have introduced recent English sacred music into England. La Trobe was a worshipper at St Peter's; he is recorded as being 'a communicant member of the church with Sophie, his wife'. I have a note from the Vicar in which he tells that they worshipped in the church with their servants, and that this was an atypical practice. Sophie La Trobe was Swiss in origin, and she is said to have been a strong influence in the life of the congregation, and to have contributed to the program of social outreach which has long been part of the tradition of St Peter's. The form and philosophy of worship at St Peter's was in harmony with the outlook and beliefs of Charles Joseph La Trobe and his wife.

It was decided that a La Trobe Memorial Service should be held to mark the centenary of his death, and on that occasion His Excellency the Governor of Victoria gave the address. Five years later, on this anniversary, another such service is held, and I was pleased to accept the invitation to attend and to speak. I was born, grew up, and spent much of my life in Melbourne, and I wish to pay my respects to the memory of a man who played a historic and honourable role in the early history of this Australian settlement. Only a few weeks ago I was invited to speak about Sir Redmond Barry on the centenary of his death. He came from Ireland to Melbourne in 1839, the year in which La Trobe became Superintendent; he became Solicitor General on the separation of the colony in 1851, and in 1852 he was appointed a founding Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria. He was associated with La Trobe in important

activities in the life of the young colony; among them, the founding of the University of Melbourne, in which I spent many years of my life.

This is a happy opportunity to speak at the invitation of the Vicar of St Peter's, the Reverend John Bayton. He and I have been friends for years, and I have a lively affection and admiration for him. We met when he was Dean of Rockhampton, and I know how well he served that community in his church office and as a committed citizen. On 6 June 1979, I visited Rockhampton to speak at the celebration of the centenary of the laying of the foundation stone of the Rockhampton Cathedral and, on the same day, to open the Rockhampton Art Gallery and Civic Theatre complex. John Bayton was closely and actively concerned with all of these events. I am pleased that he is now Vicar of St Peter's; it is a distinctive church and it has been served by vicars of long standing and notable influence.

I have known of St Peter's for a very long time. I have passed by on numberless occasions, but I now visit it for the first time. Canon Maynard wrote a quarter century ago of the church's faith and style. He spoke of the 'movement which began in Oxford in 1833 and spread throughout the Church of England to the ends of the earth', and he wrote sensitively of the meaning of the revival, which, he says, carried no new truths, but compelled attention to forgotten truths which, when grasped, had to find expression in forms of worship, familiar enough in former days, which had been omitted or disused for long. Now I speak with little knowledge, and I was born into and grew up in a different and ancient faith, but I was a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, which, rather more than a hundred years before I came to it, was the heartland of the

Oxford movement. I looked again at a book which I had read long ago, Geoffrey Faber's *Oxford Apostles*. He tells of the Oriel to which Newman came as a Fellow:

The society of which he was now the youngest member was the ablest collection of individuals in Oxford. But it was more than a collection of able men: it had a unity of spirit, even of religious opinion, which gave it almost the character of a school ... it must have seemed that the intellectual future of Oxford and of England was theirs. And so perhaps it might have been, if they had not made the fatal mistake of thinking that they were strong enough to digest such men as Keble, Newman, Pusey and Hurrell Froude.

When I came to Oriel, not long after the war's end, the portraits of these men looked down on me. The decade of the 1830s was a historic time for them, and it was at this time that La Trobe came to the Port Phillip District. Then, in the latter 1840s, St Peter's was founded and it was and is the mother church of the Catholic revival in Victoria, and is one of the great parishes which still stand within that tradition. It was not, as you well know, the tradition of the first bishop of Melbourne: Charles Perry's doctrine and outlook were very different.

It is interesting to recall that the background from which La Trobe came to difficult, early colonial administration was an unusual one. His biographer, Jill Eastwood, observes that unlike the 'usual' colonial governor, he had no army or naval training, and little administrative experience. His talents and interests, high principles and serious mind marked him out as a cultured gentleman rather than an intellectual or an executive. He had travelled widely and had wide ranging interests. Washington Irving wrote of him that 'he was a man of a

thousand occupations; a botanist, a geologist, a hunter of beetles and butterflies, a musical amateur, a sketcher of no mean pretensions; in short a complete virtuoso; added to which he was a very indefatigable, if not always a very successful sportsman'.

The infant Port Phillip District in which La Trobe arrived as Superintendent, presented him with many difficulties. He came to a newly established settlement caught up at first in the grip of land speculation and then of collapse and depression, which persisted for several years. In his first public speech he stated his belief that it was not through material success and achievement but 'by the acquisition and maintenance of sound religious and moral institutions' that a 'country can become truly great'. He was subordinate to and readily acknowledged the authority of the Governor of New South Wales, and his relations with Governor Gipps were very good. During the 1840s, he was confronted with many problems: with the issue of and demands for separation from New South Wales, and on this he was criticised for not taking a sufficiently active line. There were issues of policy with regard to the admission of convicts, and issues of land policy. Long afterwards, in the 1870s, Anthony Trollope, recording in his *Australia* what he had observed in his travels of 1871-2, recounted disputes in which La Trobe had been involved long years before. He spoke of the sword of the squatters' interest which at that time was 'specially sharpened against Mr La Trobe, the first Governor of Victoria' who was thought to have supported the cause of the small farmers and free selectors against the squatters.

He was given limited resource, both personally and for the administration of the district and, subsequently the colony. The separation of the colony presented special

problems, since all people concerned in government, those elected as well as officials and the lieutenant-governor himself, were completely inexperienced in the affairs of government. With separation came the discovery of gold, and this confronted government with unprecedented crises. Thousands of diggers poured into areas hitherto unoccupied, formerly the haunt of sheep, cattle and kangaroos; the public services and administration were stretched to and beyond the limit and were threatened with breakdown. The influx of unprecedented numbers of people into the colony posed immense difficulties: in the provision of wharves for ships and goods, of roads and of places in which to live. There is a contemporary description of the situation in Melbourne in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 4 November 1852. The correspondent wrote:

that a worse regulated, worse governed, worse drained, worse lighted, worse watered town of note is not on the face of the globe; and that a population more thoroughly disposed, in every grade, to cheating and robbery, open and covert, does not exist; that in no other place does immorality stalk abroad so unblushingly and so unchecked; that in no other place does Mammon rule so triumphant; that in no other place is the public money so wantonly squandered without giving the slightest protection to life or property; that in no other place are the administrative functions of government so inefficiently managed; that in a word, nowhere in the southern hemisphere does chaos reign so triumphant as in Melbourne.

That was Sydney reporting on Melbourne; if in some measure it was hyperbole, it still told a story of appalling problems and difficulties to be faced by La Trobe

and his administration, not least in the maintenance of law and order. In retrospect, and in writing of these early days of separation and gold fever, La Trobe noted that 'none can know how difficult but those who were in that fierce struggle for the maintenance of order under so many disadvantages'. It was said of La Trobe, at this and other times in his administration, that he was uncertain and indecisive, and inexperience and doubt about his own abilities contributed to his massive difficulties. There were problems in raising a revenue; the imposition of licence fees on miners produced inequities and raised resistance, and this at a later time provoked confrontation. La Trobe's biographer judges, however, that despite blunders and great difficulties, his was a 'profound achievement' in keeping government functioning, and in maintaining the rule of law. Eventually he coped with the problems of the immense and rapid physical and numerical expansion of the colony.

He sought to resign his post as early as December 1852, but he was not relieved until May 1854. His ailing wife had returned to Europe earlier; she died some months before he left the colony. In October 1855, he remarried, and his second wife was his deceased wife's sister. In 1858 he was awarded the C.B. and in 1864 he was granted a pension. He planned to write a record of his Australian experience, but failing eyesight prevented this and he died, as I have said, on 4 December 1875. There is an interesting account of La Trobe in the early years of Melbourne, in Paul de Serville's recently published *Port Phillip Gentlemen*. Despite the fact that he struggled with inadequate personal provision, he commanded respect and regard for his exemplary private life, his sense of honour, his amiability and his civilized tastes. It was said that he stood in this respect head and shoulders above the

general run of the colonists. Like Redmond Barry, who lived for forty years in the colony, La Trobe was an important contributor to the institutions of the colony. He played the leading role in the establishment of the Botanic Gardens which adorn this city, and his support, leadership and initiative aided the establishment of the Mechanics' Institute, the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the Benevolent Asylum, the Royal Philharmonic and, of great importance in the lives of many of us, the University of Melbourne. He was, it is said, an active leader or supporter of all the religious, cultural and educational institutions established in his time.

He has his place in the history of this historic church, and it is fitting that he should be honoured and remembered here. As a son of this city and one who owes much to it and to its institutions, I am grateful that you have given me this opportunity to remember La Trobe, and to remind this society of our debt to him.