UNGARDED COMMENTS ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES, 1839-46: THE GIPPS-LA TROBE PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE

In 1836 a most valuable gift reached the Victorian Public Library in the form of Charles Joseph La Trobe's papers. They were presented by his granddaughter, Mme. la Baronne de Blonay. These comprise letters, a journal of tours, copies of despatches, memoranda, and other miscellaneous material. One suitcase was filled with private letters written between Sir George Gipps (1789-1847), then Governor of New South Wales, and La Trobe (1801-75), at the time Superintendent of Port Phillip District. They are of great importance as frank and unguarded comments on the administration during a vital period, 1839-46, of what today is eastern continental Australia. Unfortunately, as is so often the case, we have one of the correspondent's letters, but not the other's. There are almost four hundred by Gipps, and only twenty-one by La Trobe, and these are either first drafts or copies of the originals. It is obvious that La Trobe wrote as often as Gipps, but to date these letters have not been found. It is also obvious that Gipps wrote more than were saved in this collection.

Son of a Kentish Anglican minister, Gipps was an engineer, a seasoned soldier, and a first-rate administrator. His successful participation in the Lord Gosford Commission in Canada and the consequent parliamentary report brought him the governorship of New South Wales in 1838. La Trobe was also the son of a minister, a cultivated Moravian missionary. Born in London, but educated in Switzerland, he travelled widely, including some months in the United States, and in 1835 he married the daughter of a Swiss Councillor of State. Lord Melbourne's government appointed him to visit the West Indies and study the state of negro education. Like Gipps, his parliamentary reports were impressive, and aided his selection as Superintendent of Port Phillip District. He arrived in Melbourne in October 1839, and immediately began a private correspondence with his superior in Sydney.

The letters are notable for the close, cordial, personal relationship which developed so quickly between the two men. Each liked, respected and trusted the other, and there is a warmth that is lacking in their official papers. There are many instances when Gipps counsels the younger and less experienced administrator; more important, he offers La Trobe complete support. 'I think the course of proceedings which you have adopted is right,' he wrote, for example, in 1842, and you need not be afraid of my leaving you in the lurch.' It is equally remarkable that Gipps came to rely on La Trobe's judgment and frequently solicited his opinions. However, one is in no doubt that Gipps is the superior, and La Trobe the second in command. La Trobe never fails to show deference to Gipps. Their relationship was brightened by humour, even to the point of Gipps pulling La Trobe's leg occasionally. From time to time the letters become intimate, sharing family news and private thoughts and secret hopes for the future. Distance seemed to create a special bond, as each was always aware of his solitary position and their isolation from Whitehall. How often Gipps' letters used the phrase 'anxiously waiting', whether for despatches, a letter from his boy at Eton, or an answer from La Trobe.

Gipps had much to say concerning the government of New South Wales as a whole, and he expressed his personal philosophy of government on more than one occasion. Replying to La Trobe in 1844, he wrote: 'My whole official experience teaches me, that in Downing Street at least the governor who keeps his government out of debt is the best.' He was even more specific in 1844:

I think, however, I am resolved on two points: first, that I will not get my government into financial embarrassments, by engaging in expenditure of any sort beyond the probable amounts of the revenue. Secondly, that my most imperative duty is to preserve the peace of the country...

On the difficulty of making good appointments, he wryly remarked: 'It is hard that though I am tormented almost out of my life with applicants for office, I never know when I want a good man where to put my hand on.'

Gipps and La Trobe kept in touch with each other over the activities of the Legislative Council. In 1840, when one member became very ill, Gipps asked La Trobe for a list of qualified residents of Port Phillip. The coming of representative government brought fresh headaches for Gipps. The imperial act of 1842 added a two-thirds proportion of elected members to the Council on a moderate franchise, and thirty-six members took their seats in the chamber in August of 1843. The Council almost constantly opposed Gipps until he left the colony four years later, and his resentment often spilled over into his letters to La Trobe. He felt the Council talked too much, worked too little, and it was soon difficult to get a quorum because 'more members are quitting Sydney for sheep shearing.' In November 1843 he wrote rather sadly:

There are about five or six men in the Council who are personally my enemies (not more) and with the exception of Mr. Wentworth for no better reason that I am aware of, than because they were not received (prior to their election) at dinner guests at Government House. There are others (and they are many) who having felt severely the pressure of the times, look with jaundiced eye, upon everyone who receives a salary from the Government—I might almost say on everyone who is able to pay his butcher's bill.

In August of 1844 Gipps warned La Trobe that he would dissolve the Council and advised certain moves that the Superintendent should make. However, when he received some helpful despatches from Lord Stanley two weeks later he changed his mind. 'The strong manner in which he [Stanley] has supported me,' wrote Gipps, 'in the two important matters of the schedules and the police and gaols places me in a position in which I can better afford to yield, than I could before I received the despatches.' He concluded the letter by anticipating that the Council would act hastily and carelessly: 'My own course will be to avoid any rash or precipitate act—and especially to avoid being run into expenses. The object of the Legislative Council evidently is to weaken the government: and at the same time to run it if possible into debt.' Finally on 12 October he wrote: 'Our amicable
Council took it into their heads last night to adjourn for six weeks,' which suited Gipps because 'it will enable me to get out of Sydney.' 28

Commenting on his opening address to the Council in July 1845, Gipps wrote 'very frankly that he had done so 'with a very civil speech'—carefully avoiding every topic which might lead to any thing unpleasant,' but hastily added that he could not 'but doubt whether our mutual civilities will last long.' 29 Not all the news about the Council was black, however, and a month later he wrote happily to La Trobe of his gratification at the results of the Port Phillip elections, 30 and three months later he laconically remarked: 'The English packet brings no answers to any important addresses of the Legislative Council. I shall therefore be able to dismiss them with a very civil speech.' 31

Although the Council was a constant thorn in his side, Gipps had other worries, not the least of which was the one which besets all officials—the fear of dismissal. As early as September 1841, he wrote to La Trobe that he felt Downing Street was going to throw him overboard, especially if he did not balance his budget. 32 A year later he was very relieved to predict that he would not be removed for the time being, 33 and by 1845 he was talking about his retirement. 'For my own part I am looking homeward, and I seek no new favours,' he wrote, and continued that he expected a new governor shortly, adding 'I have been here nearly eight years and my doctors tell me that I ought not to stay much longer.' 34 A month later he said with finality:

At length I am able to announce to you with certainty that my administration of the affairs of this colony is about to close.

An intimation to this effect has been made to me in the handsomest possible terms by Lord Stanley, and there is no secret in the communication. 35

Just before Christmas he learned, not from England, but from New Zealand, that 'FitzRoy, now Governor of Antigua, has been offered and has accepted the Government of New South Wales.' 36 This was no rumour, though Gipps often passed on rumours to La Trobe, labelling them as such. 37

When corresponding on political matters of a strictly district or local nature, the two officials were unusually anxious not to hurt the other's feelings. 'I am afraid you will not like the official answers,' Gipps wrote in 1841, 'which I have given in the matters of the health officer, and emigration agent.' He then went on to warn La Trobe against the continual creation of new officials, reminding him that the Colonial Office has 'thrown Colonel Gawler overboard' in South Australia for 'his extravagance,' and that they will do the same for anyone else. Gipps also quite candidly stated his policy towards those who exerted pressure for raises: 'When a person applies for an increase of salary under a threat of resignation I always accept his resignation immediately.' 38

Five months later Gipps was critical of La Trobe's estimates:

Your estimates (frightful though they be) I shall present, ... I have struck something off the amount for buildings, ... we may be assured that in Downing Street an extravagant governor will find no mercy. ... I assure you that I say this out of good feeling only—I have too sincere a regard for you not to be anxious for your success. 39

Three weeks later Gipps continued to express his concern, and added: 'When I see the great fluctuations which are constantly occurring in private as well as public affairs in this colony, and in the colonies around us, I can hardly consider that any man is safe.' 40

A month later Gipps made a personal visit to Port Phillip, and in preparation told La Trobe that he wanted to keep on the move for five or six days, adding: 'You know that I do not mind a ride of 20 miles—or even 30 if occasion require.' 41

In May 1845, Gipps frankly stated how low the treasury was, even to the point of having to draw upon the Port Phillip balance, and urged 'the absolute necessity of reducing our expenses.' 42 In 1846, La Trobe defended his estimates vigorously, but resignedly concluded:

I should be glad to be employed elsewhere.

Don't suppose I say this because I have made my fortune! The fact is that whenever I leave the district, I shall never take up what I have laid down in it, but go a poorer man than I came. ... 43

Probably the height of concern for the other's feelings was reached in the correspondence over the purchase of land for La Trobe's house. The Superintendent had brought the parts of the house out with him from England. 44 In Sydney he had applied to the Surveyor-General for a block of crown land, which was the usual procedure, and which would have cost £6/10/- per acre. Gipps was concerned because of the applicant's status and vetted the sale. However, he permitted La Trobe to buy the land at public auction, and then urged him to accept reimbursement, so that the land and house would become the residence of the Superintendents of Port Phillip. But La Trobe refused. 45 This later proved to be a sound business acumen as La Trobe was able to purchase the land for a very modest figure because no one would bid against the Queen's representative. He then built the house at his own expense. Gipps became very upset, and wrote as follows in a confidential letter of 11 July 1840:

The abstaining from bidding against may appear at first sight to be only the manifestation of a kind feeling towards you on the part of the people of Melbourne, which is equally creditable to you and to them, but unfortunately we have no security that such a feeling will last for ever—and the time may come when the matter will be made to appear in a very different light from that in which it is now viewed.

It seems to me that we may be attacked, first for letting under any circumstances land go for £20, which according to the opinions I now hear generally expressed, is worth £500 per acre—and secondly that the transaction is on the whole equivalent to the acceptance of a present, which every Governor is within the limits of his government forbidden to take.

When you first proposed to have the land put up for sale, I felt afraid that you might be run up to a price absolutely ruinous—and it was to avoid this, that I offered the alternative of waiting the result of an application which I promised to make in your favour to the Secretary of State; if, however, you keep the land at £20 per acre, I must say I think it should be in lieu of any claim for a residence during the time you may hold your appointment.

It may be as a matter of record, I think I must bring this whole matter before the Executive Council, and until that is done, I can say no more than to assure you that I am anxious to serve you in every way that I can consistently and properly do. 46

Clearly the Governor had no misunderstanding. La Trobe replied expressing surprise and distress, and went into a long justification of his purchase. He felt he had not sacrificed any principle of duty, and continued:

... but I sincerely wish and pray, whether rich or poor, that I may be enabled to do what is right. As long as I hold the post I do, I must never forget the respect I owe to you and to your c
opinion. How any hesitation on your part to acknowledge my full and just title to my land may affect me here in the discharge of my official duty it is not for me at present to inquire.

He concluded by begging the favour of an immediate judgment in the matter.97

Still worried, he wrote again to Gipps a day later, continuing his protestations:

If I have been led to take a false step in your eyes whatever may have been the reasons which led to it, it must be retraced at whatever personal sacrifice—whether I consider the view which you have taken of the subject perfectly just or not.

He would rather give up the land than "place myself" in "a false position towards you".98

Gipps was equally anxious that La Trobe receive the correct impression of his reaction to the whole matter and he replied in detail on 8 August:

You did not hope that I would consider the observations which I made on the subject of your land, and I was not surprised to find that anything improper had been done by you in respect of it. I meant to assure you that I have had the opportunity of which transactions of public men are misrepresented after the lapse of a few years, convinces me that some precaution of this sort is necessary,... and that abstracted from considerations of public duty, there is no one of your friends who is more glad than I am to hear of anything that is advantageous to you.99

When it came to the administration of the law, Gipps had much to say on various occasions about judges (especially Judge Willis), magistrates, police, and even gaols. To select at random, he was opposed as a general principle to military officers being magistrates, but willing to make an occasional exception.100 Another general restriction was "that I do not make any man a Magistrate who has not been at least one year in the colony—nor anyone under the age of 24 years."101 There were an understandable high number of references to Willis, an inescapable and unusually controversial figure. Judge John W. Willis had been dismissed from the bench in Canada, transferred from the bench in Sydney, and finally removed by Gipps from the bench at Melbourne.102 Gipps first mentioned him in a letter to La Trobe on 1 September 1841.103 La Trobe handled Willis well for a time, but finally (and inevitably) they clashed. "I am rather disposed to think," wrote Gipps, "you will find yourself on more comfortable terms with the judge after having quarrelled with him than you were before."104 By December 1842, Gipps had decided to place the case before the Executive Council, and wondered whether he should still "give him the option of taking his leave, or whether we suspend him at his grace."105 A confidential letter the following month reported that the Council had strongly recommended that the Colonial Secretary remove him from office. La Trobe was asked to notify the judge, and warn him that on further complaint he would be suspended forthwith.106 On 4 February 1843, Gipps recommended to Lord Stanley that Willis should be removed from his post.107

That very day Gipps wrote to La Trobe saying that the packet sailed and it is what I hope I may term the Quietus of your judge. I am anxious to hear what he himself says to it. That he will call it an inquisitorial, ex-parte proceeding taken behind his back I have no doubt, but I think I am prepared to meet him on all points, and face to face if he choose.108

A month later he observed: Your judge is evidently bent on doing as much mischief as he can—but let him do his worst, I am not afraid of him.109 On 17 June Gipps was forced to remove him from office. His successor was Judge Jeffcott, and Gipps let slip a prejudice when he wrote: 'He is a man of mature age, very quiet, and I hope prudent in his demeanour, though an Irishman. . . . Hoping that you will now enjoy a quieter life, than Mr. Willis has allowed you to have for a long while past.'110

II

Economic development and expansion in Port Phillip during this time was considerable. The rich land of Australia Felix attracted many a squatter, and they inevitably fought Gipps for security of tenure on their sheep runs during the 'forties. Banks were established, immigration flourished and brought in much needed labour, and public works sprang up in Melbourne and elsewhere.

The Wakefield system of selling land dearly was an integral part of the squating system in that the grazier preferred to squat on crown lands because he felt he could never afford to purchase the land to keep his sheep. The Wakefield system, with modifications, was introduced when South Australia was founded in 1836. In a letter marked 'very confidential' Gipps wrote to La Trobe in November 1840, that he had just received orders to introduce the South Australian plan of selling land, and that he would refer it first to the Executive Council 'as some parts of it must be postponed, or very great confusion would be the result.'111 The following January he wrote: 'You will receive by this post an order about opening land for selection at £1 per acre.112 Gipps always opposed the Wakefieldian idea of a fixed price, instead favouring sale by auction. On 5 June 1841, he emphasized this position to La Trobe. Referring to a land sale in New Zealand where 100 acres realized £21,000, he expostulated: a pretty commentary this on a fixed price of £1 per acre.113 A month later he frankly summed up his opinion of Wakefieldian theories by expressing his hopes to La Trobe that Port Phillip would outstrip South Australia 'and avoid the errors and absurdities that have grown out of the crude theories of their Colonization Doctors.'114 The imperial act of 1842 brought the auction system into universal operation.

The real battle over greater security of tenure for the squatters came when the new Legislative Council became squatter-dominated after 1842. Gipps made a bold attempt to solve the problem in his important despatch of 3 April 1844: it described and explained his regulations, published the day before, for preserving the rights of the crown against mere land-grabbing, while still securing runs for genuine sheep farmers.115 These 'occupation' regulations were violently opposed by the squatters as inadequate. They immediately called an enormous public meeting. Gipps' comments to La Trobe were deeply felt and clearly stated:

You will see by the newspapers that there was a great HUDDLE and much abuse at the meeting of squatters on Tuesday last.
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I feel, however, perfectly sure that I shall beat them, and that they will in the end be sorry for what they have said and done.

It cannot escape any one’s observations that the chief object of the recent notice was to make squatters pay for Crown land in proportion to what they occupy—and not to allow, as is the case at present, some few large occupiers to hold four or five hundred acres of land for one penny per annum and to compel others to pay the same large sum of one penny for 37 acres. No one at the meeting, however, had the courage to look at the notice under this point of view. It was far easier to talk trash about despotic power, cruelty and oppression.

Gipps continued the letter in this vein, justifying his position, and concluded:

I am now passed the usual term of a Colonial Government and may expect a recall ere long—but had I quitted this colony without bringing forward the subject of squatting, and left it to my successor to meet the present storm instead of facing it myself, I feel that I should really have been the cause of my own undoing.

Again I say I have a perfect assurance that I shall beat them all—even though their names be “Legion.”

Gipps felt the barbs of Wentworth, Benjamin Boyd, and the other wealthy squatters. On 20 April 1844, he commented to La Trobe on Boyd’s active part in the squatters’ agitation, and asked La Trobe for information on Boyd’s land stock in Port Phillip. ‘Also any other Monster squatters you may have’ Gipps at the same time regretted that he could not ‘lay my despatches before the public until I have received answers to them’, particularly the ones pertaining to squatting, and he fretted under the handicap of having to postpone placing his side of the controversy before the public. Nevertheless by 15 May he thought that the great squatters were ‘the only ones now who are much dissatisfied’.

Just how deeply and tensely Gipps was affected by the squattting struggle is apparent from subsequent letters to La Trobe. After wishing him a Happy New Year in 1845, he wrote:

I have a fair prospect of its being an easier one to me than the last—though not perhaps in retrospect a more satisfactory one.

If I carry, as I think I shall, my squattting measures, I am inclined to think that 1844 will have been one of the most important years of my official life.

I am in the agonies of a bag—and a very important one, as it contains many of the late proceedings of my amiable Council.

There were men I think who did more in six months to prove their want of wisdom.

Less than three weeks later he wrote that the October (1845) packet had arrived and brought ‘nothing of any importance: not a word as yet have I received about squatting. This, however, I consider favourable—for when there is any fault to be found, there is seldom any time lost’.

The several sketches which you have sent me put our Crown Commissioners to shame: they are a careless set of fellows, if not worse than careless, and I have almost made up my mind to get rid of half of them.

It is most provoking that I get nothing from Lord Stanley: Here is the 1 July almost at hand and nothing yet settled, at least no definite orders given.

By June he told La Trobe that he would bring the new squatting regulations into force unless prevented by despatches from home. A few days later relief was very evident from his letter:

At length I have received answers to my despatches about squatting and they are quite satisfactory. The principal despatch, entirely approving of my squatting regulations, will be published in a few days in the Government Gazette. I have also reason to hope that the subject of squatting will be brought before Parliament by the Government.

Other letters followed which underscored Gipps’ anxiety, and his disappointment was apparent in December when he learned of the postponement of the Crown Lands Amendment Act. When Gipps left the colony six months later, his health ruined, he did not know that the graziers had won most of their demands in the imperial act of 1846. The act was reinforced by the order-in-council of 1847, which gave the squatters in ‘unsettled lands’ a leasehold of fourteen years with rights of pre-emption.

Gipps never wrote regarding other economic problems with the intensity of his involvement with the squatting issue. He took a tough attitude towards the Port Phillip Bank, writing in 1844:

I am not quite easy about your Port Phillip Bank—or rather about our money, that is deposited in it.

The Bank has not forwarded the quarterly returns that are due from it—or rather required by the Act of last year 4 Victoria No. 13, and for their default they are liable to a heavy penalty. Unless they complied he threatened to proceed against them and withdraw the deposits.

The economic depression of the early ‘forties greatly upset the bounty system of emigration, since proceeds from the land sales, which provided the emigration fund, were sharply diminished. In a confidential letter of 29 November 1841, Gipps feared that he had overextended himself:

I am getting very uneasy about our immigration—more so indeed than I like to tell anyone except in strict confidence.

I was imprudent in giving such extensive permissions as I did in the year 1840, and I greatly fear that the results will be very serious.

From all I can learn, we may expect on an average ten ships a month for the next six months—and supposing them to come in the proportion of six to Sydney and four to Port Phillip I want to know what you can do with your share of them... We have for some time past been much more strict here than you are in respect to the bounty—and we disallow all that are not claimed strictly under the regulations.

In respect to the proper protection of single women, we in particular have become very rigorous. Can you sell any land?

He continued to worry, yet he did not see how the policy towards unmarried women could be much improved, and admitted there would always be ‘bad women’. He told La Trobe not to be any less strict than himself because the agents would then send Port Phillip the bad ones the next year, and added that La Trobe should check on and control immoralities on board ship, and defer payment of gratuities to the surgeons and officers for a month and withhold bounties if necessary.

Gipps took a great interest in the public works of Port Phillip. Although he criticized the plan of the Melbourne Court House with the precision of a trained engineer, finding the court room and the windows too large, and the verandah too expensive, he was anxious that the hospital and the lunatic asylum be built. In 1845 he recommended the architect William Ginn, remarking that Ginn was a good architect in spite of the mistakes made on the Sydney Public Library. Gipps also reported that when some had turned against Ginn, the architect had distorted the truth in self-defence. In that same year Gipps was genuinely happy to write La Trobe the good news: ‘I think we shall be able to allow you at least £10,000—and possibly £15,000 for public works in 1846.’
The convict problem and the movement for separation in Port Phillip were intertwined during the Gipps administration. Penal transportation had been discontinued to New South Wales in 1840; but in effect was renewed in 1844 when the Port Phillip system was expanded to the mainland of New South Wales. They received conditional pardons after serving a term at Pentonville, the 'model prison', and were shipped aboard. But they only enjoyed freedom as long as they did not return to Great Britain, and therefore it was sheer sophistry to say they landed as free men. Port Phillip had received few very convicts since its settlement, and bitterly resented the thought of receiving 'exiles'. This was one important reason why they wished to become a separate colony from New South Wales. Its sturdy economic development also bred a spirit of almost arrogant self-confidence, and the district resented being called the 'southern province' and having to live under the centralized government at Sydney. When representative government came in 1842, they received six seats in the new Council; but it was hard to find representatives willing to go to Sydney since the six were sure to be outvoted. As early as 1844, the six members petitioned the Crown for separation.

Even La Trobe seemed irritated by some of the details of transportation in 1840, and Gipps felt he had been unfairly criticized by La Trobe over assignment: In your postscript you say convict servants continue to be assigned in the Port Phillip district by favour, I can only say that I never have shown favour to any one individual in the whole of the colony. On the contrary, I have consistently refused to assign convict servants—and I have repeatedly stated that if favour be shown by any officer of the district, he does it at the risk of his office—or rather with the certainty of dismissal before his eyes.

In 1844 the convict problem almost brought on a crisis in Port Phillip because the first group of 'exiles' shipped direct from England were landed without warning in the district, amidst a wave of excitement and popular indignation. However, they were absorbed into the labour-force. La Trobe must have written to Gipps that they were acceptable, because on 7 December 1844, Gipps acknowledged a letter and agreed that 'it will be an advantage to the District to have them'. Their disposal, however, preyed on Gipps' mind, so that six days later he wrote:

If my paying a visit to Melbourne be likely to facilitate the disposal of the Exiles . . . I am quite ready to go; but I doubt whether you would not do better without me. I am really anxious that you will state your opinion on this point candidly. It is of great importance that the Exiles should be disposed of.

I will withdraw all the convicts as you desire provided you take the first cargo of Exiles, that is to say I will withdraw all in Government employment. Two months later he again wrote to La Trobe explaining why he wrote to Lord Stanley as he did on 13 December 1844, and added that the first shipload would be sent to Geelong. Gipps was anxious to learn during the next few months how the 'exiles' had been handled. But by June 1845, he wrote: 'The whole matter of the Exiles is now virtually in your hands.'

Gipps commented more frankly than at any time in his official despatches on Maconochie's penal reforms on Norfolk Island, 1840-44. Maconochie's basic idea was that punishment should not be the aim, only the instrument of penal policy. He felt that the fixed and irremovable time sentence was the worst enemy of the prisoner, and instead he proposed that labour and good conduct be made deter-
I cannot exactly authorize you to speak in my name—but you can in your own name say, if you like, as our friends the Yankee say, that you guess or you calculate, that such must be my opinions—and that I am not averse to separation.94

In January 1846, he was quite confident of eventual separation:


Nobody here comes forward to oppose separation—nor does anybody seem to care whether it takes place or not.

People laugh only at the idea of your wanting to keep up the connexion for the sake of your money.

Let the people of Port Phillip be moderate and good humoured and they will be most likely to get what they want.95

On 29 April of that year, shortly before he left the colony, he wrote a despatch to Lord Stanley recommending that separation be granted Port Phillip.96

IV

Alan Gross, in his recent biography of La Trobe, devotes an entire chapter to the aborigines and their problems.97 He shows how zealously La Trobe pursued the Colonial Office's benevolent policy, and how poorly it worked in practice. He describes the plan for native welfare: George Augustus Robinson was the chief protector, and the district was divided into four provinces under four assistant protectors; they were part-time missionaries and school-teachers, and full-time defenders against the land greed and the vindictiveness of the less responsible squatters and station hands. The Gipps-La Trobe correspondence throws light on the aboriginal problems to the extent of measuring the depth of their concern for tribes which were becoming broken, landless and decimated.

As early as 4 April 1840, La Trobe, in one of his rare letters to Gipps in the collection, reports clashes between whites and aborigines in the 'distant parts' of the district, 'and fears it is only the beginning of troubles'.98 Two weeks later Gipps expresses sorrow on learning of the depressing state of affairs between whites and blacks, and firmly adds:

I hope that you will understand that you have full authority to incur any expense you think necessary, in order to preserve the peace of the district, as well in the ordinary police, as in that expressly instituted for the mutual protection of squatters and the blacks.99

Gipps was provoked that at times the protectors' reports were believed in England over official ones. His annoyance is apparent in the following letter to La Trobe:

Their (Protectors') representations we know in England will be credited (I do not mean by the Government—but by persons perhaps more powerful than the Government) whilst the reports of all persons filling official stations here, will be received with suspicion—or entirely disbelief.100

Not quite two months later Gipps gave some rather sound advice to La Trobe on the reports of protectors, which sometimes included non-aboriginal matters:

I think you should not allow them to trouble you with such matters. They do not properly belong to you—and if I were in your place I think I should make the Protectors confine themselves in their reports to the Government, to matters on which they have been desired to report. At the same time it is necessary to do this with great caution, as [they] are evidently trying to get up a case for England.101

Gipps was quick to investigate any charge of mistreatment of the aborigines,102 and he had strong ideas as to how the executive government should be involved:

I have just received your letter, with the report of the enquiry instituted at your request into the circumstances which attended the escape of the Blacks—and the shooting of two or three of them.

I write this privately to say, that it seems to me, in matters of this sort where there has been a loss of life, the loss the Executive Government interferes the letter. The depostions ought not therefore to have been taken at your request or by your order, but the magistrates should have acted of their own motion, and in the ordinary discharge of their duties; and the depostions taken should have been forwarded to the Attorney General.103

La Trobe replied, admitting the justice of Gipps' remarks and thanking him for his opinion.104 Nor did Gipps want La Trobe to give public notice that might be construed 'into a license to shoot Blacks'. He felt that squatters are 'not at all in want of a permission from the Government to do this'.105 Gipps expressed relief and satisfaction at Stanley's long despatch of 20 December 1842.106 He was particularly happy that 'it leaves the whole matter in my hands, and authorizes me to discontinue the Missions and the Protectorate should I think it proper to do so'.107 Other letters relating to the aborigines repeat his unhappiness at the frequency of border clashes, and the general helplessness of the aboriginal at the white man's superior strength.

V

Probably the most interesting parts in the entire private correspondence between Gipps and La Trobe are the very warm, friendly, intimate comments of a personal nature that passed between the two. Quite a different side of Gipps is revealed in these letters than appears in his official correspondence, and it sheds a new light on Gipps' personality. The apparently quiet, unassuming, modest, and government official, with the keenly penetrating, first-class mind, mirabile dictu! has a rather whimsical sense of humour, and a very deep quality of warm and loyal friendship.

Many of his letters mention Mrs. La Trobe, and his admiration for her. On 30 April 1842, he congratulated La Trobe on the birth of his second daughter, and rather waftfully and revealingly added: 'We have always wanted a little girl so much that I think Lady Gipps feels a little envious—her chance is, however, I fear altogether passed.'108 In 1843, he wrote about his son's voyage to England in order to obtain the proper schooling,109 and in 1845 he wrote: 'My boy want to Eton in April and our accounts of him are very satisfactory.'110 The two families shared this experience, because La Trobe sent his daughter to Switzerland for a more adequate education. With a certain poignancy Gipps wrote:

We pity you and Mrs. La Trobe who are about to send your eldest girl home. We know what it is to part with a child under such circumstances—but we know also that we did right, in sending our boy home. Give my best regards to Mrs. La Trobe, and tell her, the same feeling will be her consolation.111

Besides intimate family remarks, Gipps quite often admitted feelings and hopes to La Trobe that went below the surface of mere courtesy. Even as early as 30 December 1839, he wrote:

A happy New Year to you—and may it be both to you and to me a quieter one than that which is gone....

People are certainly in better spirits—and they say the colony is improving—but I have learned not to be too sanguine.112
UNGUARDED COMMENTS ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF N.S.W.

Some chance of a rebellion in Ireland.

Some chance of Parker's being sorry for himself.

No chance of my ever having the time to write a long letter.

The second example comes from a letter of 20 March 1846: 'I wish,' wrote Gipps, 'there was a clause in the squatting act, to fine Commissioners for writing foolish letters, or making a bad use of the Queen's English.'

It is often recognized in Gipps was his generosity. He gave often and handsomely to charities and to worthy causes. In 1843 he sent La Trobe £10 to be given to a distressed family 'without saying from where it came'. In 1845 he sent a cheque for £50 as his contribution to the building of the Melbourne Hospital.

The close relationship between Gipps and La Trobe can slow be illustrated by the letters that passed between them as the time came for Gipps leave the colony. 'Thy thoughts and wishes turn homeward I do not wonder,' La Trobe wrote on 31 October 1845, and he praised Gipps for having acted with dignity and credit. 'I think there is no doubt the colony has fairly passed the crisis,' he went on, adding that he regretted the day Gipps would depart because it would break a close and happy relationship would be ended, and he did not look forward to having to adjust to a new superior. This letter is interesting for the number of corrections and deletions. Clearly La Trobe's despatches, which are models of their kind, only came after much patient writing and rewriting.

On 29 May 1846, Gipps wrote: 'With the Queen's Ball of Monday I feel as if I had finished my career in New South Wales. It went off extremely well. On 3 July he was not too rushed to say:

My hour is all but come. My embarkation is fixed for Saturday, the 11th instant—at 2 o'clock on which day I shall cease to be Governor of New South Wales, and hand over all my cares to Sir Maurice,' unless indeed which I do not expect, Sir Charles FitzRoy should sooner arrive. I am greatly hurried and worried as you may suppose—but I shall write you twice more—and then good bye, until we meet in England.

Then on 7 July came as fine a tribute as La Trobe may ever have received, and it came from a strict, reserved and Victorian gentleman:

This is not absolutely my last letter, for I shall send you a few last lines on Friday—but I will not defer until then the expression of the very great satisfaction I feel in looking back on the long course of our official intercourse to find that I cannot call to my recollection a single instance in which any thing approaching to complaint or dissatisfaction has been expressed by either of us towards the other.

You have during the long period of more than seven years, been in the uninterrupted possession of my entire confidence; and I hope, trust and believe, that you have entertained towards me equally kind and confidential feelings.

We shall meet again some day I hope; in the meantime accept my sincerest good wishes for yourself, Mrs. La Trobe and family—and the no less sincere ones of—Lady Gipps.

If I can do anything in England for you or for your children—write me—or write me at any rate and address me at the Colonial Office: I will not fail to serve you if I can in that quarter.

And closed the letter 'Ever very truly and affectionately yours'. Three days later came this final farewell:

These are really my last words—they must be few but they are sincere.

You have my perfect esteem and confidence—and to you Mrs. La Trobe and your children, I wish every good that the Almighty can send you.
VI

Much as we would wish that there were as many La Trobe letters as those by Gipps in the Gipps-La Trobe Private Correspondence, we shall infer much that La Trobe said. In closely reading and checking the despatches by both during the period, no errors or contradictions appear when compared with the private correspondence. What we do receive is a frank and charming commentary on the affairs of the time—international, national, and personal—flowing freely between two unusually compatible people. Gipps simply unbent, and so did La Trobe. Historians can be very grateful for this collection.

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NOTES

1. There are about 391 letters by Gipps, several enclosures, and a few digests of Gipps' letters made by La Trobe, besides the 31 La Trobe letters. The Library has identified each item with the letter if followed by four numbers.

2. For example, Gipps wrote to La Trobe on 7 Sept. 1841: ‘I have been so occupied all the morning, that I have not had time to read more than your private letters.’ H.7825.

3. The only extensive account of La Trobe's work is Alan Gross, Charles Joseph La Trobe, Melbourne, 1962.

4. 6 Sept. 1840, H.7165. Marked ‘Confidential’.

5. 28 Aug. 1840, H.7176, and 13 July 1844, H.7242.

6. 29 Aug. 1840, H.7265.

7. See Gipps to La Trobe, 23 May 1843, H.7087.

8. 17 Nov. 1840, H.7292, or 4 Nov. 1840, H.7299.

9. 12 Nov. 1840, H.7424, or 18 Nov. 1844, H.7244.

10. 12 May 1841, H.7394. Marked ‘Confidential’. For an example of La Trobe's recommendations see H.7394.

11. La Trobe to Gipps, 6 Sept. 1841, H.6694.


13. 22 Nov. 1842, H.7234. Marked ‘Confidential’.


16. 30 Nov. 1844, H.7280.

17. 25 Nov. 1844, H.7285.

18. 26 Dec. 1844, H.7288.

19. 25 July 1845, H.7390.

20. 30 July 1845, H.7436.


22. 12 Jan. 1846, H.7190.

23. 9 Feb. 1846, H.7219.

24. 5 March 1846, H.7299.

25. 18 March 1846, H.7302.

26. 21 March 1846, H.7305.

27. 29 March 1846, H.7308.

28. 28 July 1845, H.7290.

29. 28 July 1846, H.7291.


31. 29 Jan. 1846, H.7310.

32. 5 March 1846, H.7313.

33. 9 March 1846, H.7315.

34. 23 March 1846, H.7318.

35. 23 March 1846, H.7320.

36. 29 March 1846, H.7320.

37. 30 March 1846, H.7321.

38. 25 March 1846, H.7322.

39. 26 March 1846, H.7322.

40. 25 March 1846, H.7323.

41. 21 April 1846, H.7324.


43. 1 Sept. 1846, H.7063. In the next two years Gipps mentioned the Willis problem in at least 53 letters. 30 letters.

44. 1 Oct. 1847, H.7122.

45. 26 Dec. 1847, H.7123.

46. 22 Jan. 1847, H.7135. Marked ‘Confidential’.


48. 4 Feb. 1847, H.7154.

49. 17 March 1847, H.7177. See also ibid., 17 April 1847, H.7187.

50. 11 Aug. 1847, H.7187. When Jeffcott resigned in 1844, Gipps offered the position to Robert Jeffcott, his nephew: ‘He is a well disposed man—and shrewd an Irishman and a Catholic, discreet and moderate.’ Gipps to La Trobe, 1 Dec. 1844, H.7298.

51. 28 Nov. 1847, H.7013. Marked ‘Confidential’.

52. 16 Jan. 1848, H.7017.

53. 5 June 1848, H.7042.

54. 24 July 1848, H.7053.