

## DEGENERATION AND EUGENICS: LATE-VICTORIAN DISCOURSES OF THE ENDING OF THE RACE

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The pairing of “eugenics” and “degeneration” in my title may seem somewhat misleading, for eugenics is not a discourse about the ending of the race; in the words of Francis Galton, coiner of the term and a tireless advocate, eugenics is “the cultivation of [the] race” (*Inquiries* 25)—the breeding of a better race. The perceived need for such “cultivation,” however, does suggest an anxiety about the race, a fear that it is not evolving but degenerating. For Galton “every human race” (*Inquiries* 3) has elements—some “the result of degeneration”—that “admit of large improvement”; hence it is a “duty” to “further the ends of evolution” and to do it by means of eugenics. In other words eugenics attests both faith in evolution *and* a fear of degeneration. There is a similar ambiguity in the concept of race involved in this fear: in nineteenth-century texts the term “race” often has an ideological slipperiness, sometimes embracing the entire human race, sometimes just a white race, so that fear of “the ending of the race” may in fact connote anxiety about the ending of a *white* race.

My analysis of the contradictory discourses of evolution, degeneration and race tests Anne Summers’s adaptation of Louis Hartz’s “fragment thesis” about the development of colonial ideologies by posing the question: if Australia can be seen as “a fragment of the parent nation” and if it therefore “exhibit[s] in a pure, crystallized form some of the . . . conflicting ideologies fighting for hegemony in the parent nation” (Summers 294), did discourses of the ending of the race “crystallise” differently in Australia than they did in Britain. I suggest they did, that the presence of aborigines in Australia crystallised a set of anxieties about race-degeneration different from those in Britain. I also suggests that these colonial anxieties were addressed through the process that Terry Goldie calls “indigenization.”

Unlike Orientalism, which serves the need of the *conqueror* for reflection of himself, indigenisation serves the need of the *settler* “to become ‘native’” (Goldie 13). If colonial settlement can be described as “a person moved to a new place and recognized as Other as having greater roots in that place” than himself (14), then the “felt need” of the settler may be to reject the Other, it may also be to “incorporate the Other” (12) in some way. Indigenisation is the latter operation, the semiotic process of non-indigenes incorporating indigenes in order to themselves “become native.” In the discourse of indigenisation this essay traces for Australia, settlers incorporate aboriginals and thereby become native Australians by default. The following analysis commences at the root of that discourse: in 1830s humanitarian and scientific discourses of the ending of the aboriginal race.

**Indigenisation**

In 1835 Thomas Buxton, successor to William Wilberforce as leader of the English Parliament's humanitarian anti-slavery forces, convinced Parliament to establish a Select Committee on Aborigines. Its aim, according to Buxton, was to look into measures "with respect to the Native Inhabitants of Countries where British Settlements are made, and to the Neighbouring Tribes, in order to secure them the due observation of justice and the protection of their rights, to promote the spread of Civilization among them, and to lead them to the peaceful and voluntary reception of the Christian Religion" (qtd Stocking 241). If the Committee aimed to protect races of "Native Inhabitants" it also, in effect, aimed at the ending of those races, at revamping them into civilised Christians.

A slightly different problem appears in the discourses of the Aborigines Protection Society, founded in 1837 by supporters of the Select Committee in order to continue the committee's work. The Society's aims were both humanitarian *and* scientific; two discourses which soon came into conflict. On the one hand the Society was concerned with "protecting the defenceless" (qtd Stocking 244): its "first object" was to collect "authentic information concerning the character, habits and wants of the uncivilized tribes" (242) and then disseminate that information in order to create a public opinion in favour of an imperial policy "of persuasion rather than of force." On the other hand the Society was simply concerned to "record the history" (244) of the Aborigines just in case force prevailed and they were exterminated. Eventually the latter more "scientific impulse outweighed the humanitarian" (Stocking 243). The Society initially emphasised that "it did not wish to maintain aborigines "in the purity of their race" as "objects of interest to the natural history of man" (244). However, in 1842 a scant five years after its founding, the Society dropped "protecting the defenceless" from the printed statement of its aims. While it would be going too far to say that it had a vested interest in keeping a death-watch over the aborigines, certainly this shift away from "protecting" and toward "recording" suggests a diminution of interest in preventing the ending of the race.

In the 1840s another chronicler of the Aborigines seems to reflect a similar conflict about the ending of the race. In 1841 Sir George Grey published an account of his travels in Australia, including some 200 pages on aboriginal laws, customs, and languages. Grey's concern at this time was to record, but he also used the information to support his argument that aboriginal society although "'ingeniously designed' by the Deity" (qtd Stocking 84) was nevertheless destined by the same Power to give way to the "progress of civilization," namely, British Christianity and commerce. If the "peculiar code of laws" of the aborigine were to be replaced by British rule, thought Grey, then the Aborigines would assume their proper "rank among the civilized nations of the earth" (85); if not, they would become "a despised and inferior race"—assuming that they survived at all. However, despite his view that civilisation must and would supersede aboriginal society when he became governor of South Australia (in the same year that his book was published), his policy toward the aborigines seems to have been relatively humanitarian. In Grey's view the white man had come to Australia to prevent the "progress and prosperity of one race conducing to the downfall and decay of another" (qtd Clark, *History* 3: 77); accordingly he responded to the battles between settlers and aborigines at Murray River by appointing a Protector of the Aborigines.

In the 1840s such Protectorates were one method of implementing the humanitarian concerns of Parliament and the Aborigines Protection Society. Another method was to focus on the next generation of the race: according to Lord John Russell, for instance, the best chance of preserving the aborigines of New South Wales lay in training their children toward “the capacity of the race for the duties and employment of Civilized life” (qtd Clark *History* 3: 127-28). By the mid-1840s, however, the reports of several Protectors indicated a general feeling that the end of the race was at hand and in 1849 the Protectorate of New South Wales was abolished. From this point on a humanitarian discourse continued but was turned to new ends: those of indigenisation, of settlers incorporating Others in order to displace them as “native.”

In one form of this reconfigured discourse what we might call the “poor black-fellow” trope serves the ends of indigenisation by simultaneously representing the aborigines as a dying race and the displacing settlers as responsible caretakers. The anonymous *Plea on Behalf of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Victoria* (1856) is our example, a text that assumes that the ending of the race is imminent by recording amongst other things that “the few that remain” are “wholly uncared for” (4); that they are “so effeminated<sup>1</sup> by the vices we have taught them” (6) that they catch cold and die; that prostitution is “so fearfully prevalent” (9) that there have been fewer than six aboriginal births in six years. The writer insists that the remainder should be “cared for” because we are “intruders in the land of the black-fellow” (4). This is “not for a moment” (6) to say “that our taking possession of their territory cannot be justified”; still, those who remain have “claims upon us” (5), and “we owe the poor aborigines something . . . for depriving them of their country.” To discharge that debt, the author recommends transporting the aborigines from the mainland to one of the Straits Islands where they can be guarded from “the contagion of moral pollution” (9), eventually “taught,” perhaps even “Christianized.” If the possibility of Christianising the “poor black-fellow” recalls an 1830s humanitarian discourse and if the recognition of responsibility seems equally humanitarian, the advocacy of care via transportation serves the ends of a self-interested indigenisation: “our taking possession of their territory” is even more “justified” once “they” have been exported and “we” are the indigenes.

Another form of indigenisation appears in the operations of mission stations. The Reverend George Taplin was appointed missionary agent of the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association in 1859 and he founded the Point Macleay mission in 1860; that indigenisation had already proceeded apace is suggested by the relatively small scale of his endeavours there: where the *Plea* had planned to export the aborigines, Taplin only chooses a “very isolated” place for his mission of “instruction and evangelisation” (66); where 1830s humanitarians foresaw wholesale conversion of “Native Inhabitants” to Christianity (qtd Stocking 241), Taplin hopes only that the Gospel may save the “remnant” (xlii) from “extinction”; and where Thomas Buxton was concerned to secure for aborigines “the protection of their rights” (qtd Stocking 241), Taplin is concerned only that the settlers meet their “moral obligation” (147). Thus focus has shifted from

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<sup>1</sup> *Plea* is the only instance I have found of aboriginal weakness and decay being feminised, and I do not know quite what to make of this anomaly.

the indigene—the rights assumed in 1835, the “claims” (*Plea* 5) asserted in 1856—to the settler, and to the permanence of settlement: where the *Plea* admitted that European “intruders” (4) had “depriv[ed]” the aborigines of their land Taplin simply assumes that British settlers occupy the land as “successful colonists” (146). It is worth noting that Taplin himself was a successful colonist/coloniser: in 1865 he leased 730 acres from the South Australian government to provide employment at the mission so aborigines could “remain with us and be instructed” (108). In other words missionary strategies of indigenisation provided not only the means to Christianise and civilise but enabled economic exploitation as well. As Taplin records “the power of Christianity to break down native customs” (116), he also notes that “the influence of the Gospel” (117) makes the aborigines, in that familiar concatenation of mid-Victorian adjectives, “more cleanly, more industrious, more moral.”

A second missionary-based strategy of indigenisation relied on the civilising powers of cricket. As early as 1850 aborigines at the Poonindie Anglican Mission—“long[ing] for change of scene” and “tempted to stray back into the Bush” (qtd Mulvaney and Harcourt 20-21)—were being taught cricket to keep them at the mission. In 1879 in a later attempt at indigenisation Bishop Salvado encouraged the aborigines at New Norcia to take up “this new form of group ritual activity” as a substitute for “traditional ceremonial life” (22). He was unsuccessful, but the game may have provided other rewards because as Mulvaney and Harcourt suggest, cricket favoured the keen-eyed, offering aborigines “a unique position of advantage” over Europeans and earned them a “grudging admiration” (23). Yet “grudging” seems the operative word: one journalist admitted that an aborigine could learn cricket “if properly managed and instructed” and “however deficient he may be in other respects”; for another journalist “proficiency” at cricket signified only that aborigines were “capable of learning the arts and sciences of civilized life,” if “cultivated” (qtd 45, 61). And where the admiration was not grudging, it hints at the confidence of successful indigenisation, whether achieved by civilising the aborigines or by exterminating them. If the *Ballarat Star* enthused that making the aborigine into “a smart cricketer” had raised him “above his natural level as a savage,” several commentators on the England tour of 1867-68 expressed regret that these “smart cricketers” were a dying race (Mulvaney and Harcourt 121, 105). Indeed Mulvaney and Harcourt suggest that British enthusiasm for aboriginal cricket waned precisely as humanitarians became “obsessed” instead with “smoothing the dying pillow” (151)—with the ending of the race.

### **Degeneration**

To those Darwinists for whom Australia seemed “a store-house of evolutionary facts” (Mulvaney and Harcourt 3), living aborigines were of interest mainly in evolutionary terms: either as the possible “missing link” (Massin 96) or as evidence of degeneration, of the theory that “man in a state of barbarism . . . inevitably and invariably goes downward towards extinction” (Taplin 121). As indicated earlier this essay will argue that the discourse of race-degeneration “crystallised” differently in Australia than in Britain because in the colonial context it became a tool of indigenisation. Francis Galton, organic intellectual and eugenicist, plays a significant part in that argument partly because of his influence on his cousin Charles Darwin. *The Descent of Man*



(1871) was indebted to Galton's *Hereditary Genius*—not least for Darwin's eugenic view that “the most able should not be prevented by laws or customs from . . . rearing the largest number of offspring” (919). As scientists both also shared concerns about the ending of the race.

Galton's main significance here, however, lies in his status and function as an “organic intellectual.” According to Antonio Gramsci each new social group “creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals” (301) who serve as “organizer[s] of society” not only in economics but in the political and social fields as well. Organic intellectuals are thus “functionaries” (306); that is, they are “the dominant group's ‘deputies’ exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.” This essay does not, however, consider the political function of defining, crafting and implementing social policy;<sup>2</sup> it focuses instead on the creation of social hegemony, “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (306-07). This consent is “caused by the prestige . . . which the dominant group enjoys” (307) and one of the functions of intellectuals is to create that prestige. “‘Gentleman’ status still served as an important professional qualification” in late-Victorian England (Barkan 22) and some intellectuals derived prestige from this class status: Galton, for instance, made a point in his autobiography of featuring his landed-gentry forebears. Intellectuals also built on “an ideology of the ‘expert’” (MacKenzie 28) in part by “the production of various branches of intellectual specialization” (Gramsci 306), thus constructing a professional expertise which conferred prestige. Rob Watts has noted the “elective affinity” between “the ethos of professionalism” (324) and eugenics, and one area of professional expertise particularly crucial to the discourse of eugenics was the specialisation of the statistical sciences. Pioneered by Galton these quantifying sciences claimed to document the process of race-degeneration; with this “privileged status of science” (Shaw 539) they were deployed by intellectuals such as Galton against Victorian social anxieties.

Two of Galton's statistical texts, *Hereditary Genius* (1869) and *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (1877) in particular, can be read as constructions and resolutions of Victorian anxieties about reproduction. Between 1880 and 1914—and even earlier, if Galton is any indication—Britons experienced “twin crises of reproduction” (MacKenzie 37). One crisis occurred in the middle and upper classes; as Galton put it even descendants of a race's higher types tend to “revert towards the typical centre of their race” (*Inquiries* 305), and as long as a race thus remains “radically the same” it is in fact degenerating toward “delicacy of constitution” (306) and “diminished fertility.” Furthermore, according to one eugenicist woman doctor, the offspring being produced by “the refined and highly-organized but neurotic mothers of our cultured classes” were increasingly “of the crude, rough hewn, and unintellectual peasant type” (qtd Soloway 113). The other crisis of reproduction was the perceived degeneration of the working classes. In *Hereditary Genius* Galton was already worried about the physical deterioration of working-class women, and similar anxieties were encouraged later in the century by the studies of Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree

<sup>2</sup> See Watts on the pervasiveness of eugenicists in the “bio-political governance” of Australia (319).

on the lower-class residuum (McLaren 15). Following Britain's poor showing in the Boer War and several pessimistic Parliamentary reports about the physical condition of the working classes, the perceived problem of degeneration peaked with fears that, as one Liberal MP observed, "Empire cannot be built on rickety and flat-chested citizens" (qtd Shaw 540). The more pessimistic social Darwinists came to see modern society as evidence of an unnatural selection which required "'eugenic' intervention in the evolutionary process" (Stocking 233).

In other words the eugenics movement was a response by organic intellectuals to these crises of reproduction and degeneration. As early as *Hereditary Genius* Galton recommended that "the birth rate of the unfit should be checked and that of the fit encouraged through early marriage" (qtd Shaw 528)—a breathtakingly simply statement of what became known as "negative" and "positive" eugenics. Positive eugenics involved encouraging both the "selective breeding" (Popenoe and Johnson 162) and the fertility of "better types" (qtd MacKenzie 18). In 1869 Galton was already anticipating "what an extraordinary effect might be produced on our race if its object was to unite in marriage those who possessed the finest and most suitable natures, mental, moral, and physical!" (*Memories* 315), and as late as 1909 he continued to advocate this form of "race improvement" (310). Negative eugenics involved "diminishing the birth rate amongst [the] inferior" (qtd MacKenzie 18) by methods which ranged from contraception, to sterilisation, to detention in colonies of the unfit.<sup>3</sup> As late as 1909 Galton was recommending "stern compulsion" (*Memories* 311) to cull the working classes of "degenerate stock," by "prevent[ing] the free propagation" of those "seriously afflicted by lunacy, feeble-mindedness, habitual criminality, and pauperism." Similarly in Galton's unpublished utopian novel "Kantsaywhere," "the very inferior" are "segregated" in Labor Colonies and required to "live in celibacy" (qtd Karl Pearson 3: 416). The deployment of the prestige of intellectuals toward support of such methods is most apparent in Galton's *Inquiries* when he explains the scientific techniques such as anthropometry that he developed to study "human faculty," whereby his demonstrated expertise translates into a prestige which he uses to make his case about racial degeneration and the need for eugenics.

#### **Degeneration Discourses in Australia**

Nils Roll-Hansen provocatively asserts that "racism was not an issue in eugenics debates before the First World War" only because racial prejudice "was shared by most people" (303). One function of organic intellectuals was to create social hegemony on the issue of race, and we see this process at work in analyses of the ending of the aboriginal race by Galton and ethnographers of the 1880s. It is this concern with race that produces a discourse of degeneration peculiar to Australia and its imperative of indigenisation.

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that political liberalism (or socialism, or feminism) was no guarantee of intellectuals' opposition to these uglier programs. That eugenic theory was used to "buttress" progressive as well as conservative arguments (Allen 32) is clear in feminists' hopping on the race-motherhood bandwagon (Jones, Davin) and in Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb's belief in 1911 that "what we have to do is to search out and permanently segregate, under reasonably comfortable conditions and firm but kindly control, all the congenitally feeble-minded" (56).

According to Galton the fact that humans have not “intelligently directed” (*Inquiries* 308) their influence on the race is particularly clear in colonial societies with an “aboriginal” (309) population such as Australia. He argues that like most areas Australia has been occupied successively by “very different races” (310), thus any “sentiment” (308) against the “gradual extinction of an inferior race” of aboriginals is “for the most part quite unreasonable”; while inferior races themselves may “dislike being elbowed out of the way,” still “it may be somewhat brutally argued” that every contest must have a victor, and better it should be the superior race (309). Where “a low race” is being preserved under conditions requiring high efficiency then “rigorous selection” is essential: only the best can be “allowed” to breed and only a few of their descendants can be “allowed to live” (307). Furthermore there is a “merciful” (307) way of ending the inferior race, namely, positive eugenics: “watching for the indications of superior strains or races,” such as “energy, brain, morale and health” (324), and “favouring” these superior strains so that their progeny will “outnumber and gradually replace” the inferior (307). Indeed, “if the races best fitted to occupy the land are encouraged to marry early, they will breed down the others in a very few generations” (323) for emigrants tend to be “men of considerable force of character” (308) and thus are likely sources for “new strains of race.” Leadbeater was later to demonstrate a similarly optimistic view of Australia’s “new strains of race.” The point here is that Galton’s colonial eugenics in which the white immigrants “breed down” the black indigenes is a form of indigenisation.

Another form of indigenisation appears in the early 1880s in the discourse of ethnographers tracking the end of the aboriginal race. Like Galton’s this is a discourse of traditional intellectuals and thus dependent on professional expertise, and like Galton’s it is informed by a belief in evolution which has no time for “sentiment.” True, a form of the “poor black-fellow” trope did return with the recurrence of a humanitarian discourse in the late 1870s and early 1880s when a new Association for the Protection of Aborigines was founded in 1880, an Aborigines’ Protection Board established in NSW in 1883, and several clergymen set up new mission stations. Many missionaries, however, were ambivalent about such methods of “protection.” In 1884, for instance, the Reverend J. B. Gribble felt that the Gospel could and should prevent “the rapid extermination of the blacks” (16) and that the British owe “a debt” (7) to “the suffering nation” from whom they have “taken Australia”; but he also believed that the Australian aborigines were “about the lowest type of humanity” (20) and that their children, “a race of wild half-castes” (22-23), were degenerating even further. Gribble, like Taplin and other missionaries, was an ethnographer so humanitarian concerns might sometimes be subordinated to scientific interests. In any case if a humanitarian missionary discourse opposed the ending of the aboriginal race, the discourse of ethnographers views it as a *fait* all but *accompli*.

Ethnographers like these make their case with various strategies of indigenisation. One strategy is the discourse of degeneration: according to Carl Lumholtz in 1889 for instance, “degeneration and demoralisation” (337) are “already far advanced” (338) among the Queensland natives, and within a few generations they will have succumbed to “the inexorable law of degeneration” and “disappeared from the face of the earth” (349). Another strategy is “chronopolitics” (Goldie 152), the “time manipulations”

which construct “an indigenous past without a present”; even though indigenes do exist in the present, chronopolitically they function as “an historical value” (148), “a residue of a pre-white past.” This strategy is particularly apparent in a collection of essays on *The Native Tribes of South Australia* (1879). Even the essays which do not state this view suggest it by their focus on aboriginal “mythology” (Meyer 200), “superstitions and traditions” (Schürmann 234); in this way they represent existing aborigines as a sort of ambulatory pre-history. Other ethnographers sound the now-familiar note of the ending of the race. William Wyatt affirms the “almost entire disappearance” of the aborigines (159); Samuel Gason sees his researches as “a record . . . of a race fast dying out” (255); according to J.D. Woods, the aborigines of East and South Australia are now “almost entirely” extinct except in the interior (ix). Some, Woods admits, were shot, and some who died of scrofula might have been sheep-dipped against it except that “no one liked to risk a trial for murder or manslaughter” (xiv). Mainly, however, the aborigines just seemed to “vanish before the white settler” (ix) and “the process seems to be invariably the same everywhere” (xxv); it is almost “a fixed law” (xxvi), Woods muses, that nothing can avert “the fate which seems inevitably to hang over all uncivilized nations when they are brought into contact with Europeans.”

Woods’s statement, and indeed his book as a whole, gives professional sanction and intellectual prestige to a new strategy of indigenisation. This twist on the discourse of the ending of the race is the idea of inevitability, the assumption that an indigenous people will “inevitably be replaced” (Goldie 153). Where Galton advocated engineering the end of the aboriginal race via positive and negative eugenics, these ethnographers simply wait for the inevitable. This specifically *colonial* “crystallisation” of an ending-of-the-race discourse functions to clear a space for another race—for the settlers’ indigenisation. Hence although rumours of the aborigines’ death were greatly exaggerated, by the 1890s this was a matter of decreasing anxiety. Granted, there were fears that the aborigines were degenerating; if this was “an inevitable result of the march of civilization” (Lumholtz 338), it might nonetheless pose a threat to the *soi-disant* higher races through Komboism (cross-race sexual relations). By and large, however, a more optimistic inevitability discourse seems to have predominated. In his “enormous best seller” of 1894 (Crook 1) Benjamin Kidd noted that in Australia as in other British colonies “the representatives of this vigorous and virile [Anglo-Saxon] race are at last in full possession,” that the aboriginals are “retir[ing] before the invader,” and that this process is “inevitable” (48-49). Also in 1894 Charles H. Pearson in *National Life and Character: A Forecast* included the Australian aborigines among the “weak” and “evanescent” races which “seem to wither away at mere contact with the European” (34).

But it would be a mistake to assume, says Pearson, that “Australasia is British” (32), and his doom-laden bestseller articulates an anxiety about race which proved less amenable to strategies of indigenisation than had anxieties about the aborigines, an anxiety that spawned the White Australia movement.. Although its concern was that a large influx of Chinese and Pacific Island labourers without capital would lower wages (Rivett 15), its objections to “belonging to a ‘mongrel nation’ or breeding ‘a piebald people’” (Clark, *History* 5: 201) also point to a fear of race degeneration. In the 1890s Australia was experiencing its own version of Britain’s twin crises of reproduction, and

while it too was concerned about a declining birthrate (Day 220-23), the White Australia movement suggests that Australia's anxiety about degeneration crystallised differently from that of Britain: in Australia this anxiety was based on race as well as class. It is this fear that produces Charles Pearson's doubt about the Britishness of Australasia: because "the lower races of men increase faster than the higher" (68) there is a "disproportionate growth of what we consider the inferior races" (48); hence the Chinese are "spreading" (50) despite Australia's "vigilant opposition"; eventually there will be "intermarriage" (90) then a "decay of vital power in the race" (276) and finally "the lower races will predominate" (363). Small wonder that "Australia wafts her sibyl call wherever white men are" (O'Dowd 1.32): the 1913 call for immigrants "of the white race" (1.37) is a particularly desperate statement of the fears of White Australia.

### Positive Eugenics in Australia

In 1915 theosophist C. W. Leadbeater proposed a form of positive evolution in a series of lectures titled *Australia and New Zealand as the Home of a New Sub-race*. For some late Victorians spiritualism merely provided new doubts, since if one could not "hypothesiz[e] an extension of scientific law" (Stocking 191) to include spiritualist phenomena one had to dismiss them altogether. For others, however, it provided a bridge from the secular and scientific world to the spiritual, and there seems to have been a fair amount of interest in spiritualism in Australia. According to Arthur Conan Doyle Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten, "the female St. Paul of the movement," (1:40) and her husband came to Australia in 1878 as "missionaries for Spiritualism" (1:142); the slate-writer Henry Slade visited, as did several well-known mediums. Doyle included among the "great modern mediums" (2:194) a Mr. Bailey of Melbourne, and Cesare Lombroso regarded the Diujerie tribe of South Australia as "true mediums" (130); Ruby Rich, leader of Australia's "race improvement" and "sexual hygiene" movements, was also a theosophist (Watts 329). Given Australia's "reputation as a 'social laboratory'" (Garton 163) for what Leadbeater calls "great experiments" (26), perhaps this interest in spiritualism and theosophy is not surprising. What is striking in the context of an Australian fear of degeneration is that, at least in Leadbeater's version, theosophy functions as a form not only of evolution but of positive eugenics.

According to Leadbeater Darwin's and Wallace's theories of evolution and Madame Blavatsky's explorations of "spiritual evolution" (3) are all "part of one great plan for the world's enlightenment." In other words humans experience "a double evolution" of spirit as well as of body, and theosophy charts the operations of "spiritual evolution" in the individual and also in the race. The spiritual evolution of the individual proceeds by the reincarnation of the soul, which not only takes many bodies but also "passes from one race to another" becoming "finer, more perfectly rounded" (5). Thus while there used to be "a great many savages" (6) and there are still "plenty" (7) of them about, "the world is evolving" and "the general level of humanity is higher." The spiritual evolution of the race proceeds by the development of new sub-races from the six original root-races. The root-races had been eugenically sound ("some of the best of the existing physical bodies" [11]), and they had also been racially pure, for they did not "intermarry with other races." Sub-races, in contrast, are mixed—aborigines for instance, are descended from the Lemurian root-race but also have "touches of other and

later races" (9)—and that mixture is an evolutionary plus. Leadbeater admits that "all races deteriorate physically when their prime is past" (11), that the Aryan root-race in particular is "at a transition stage," and that "in quite a number of ways we seem to have come to the end of things" (20). This process, however, is inevitable: a race "begins to die out" (18) when no more souls need it since a race exists only "for the sake of the souls who are passing through it" (19).<sup>4</sup> Crucially, the purity of a root-race gives way to the mixture of sub-races; Leadbeater's "ending of the race" discourse foresees degeneration for root-races but evolution for sub-races. In fact, "a new and distinctly Australian [sub-]race" (5) of the Aryan root-race is "obviously showing itself" (4) in Australia precisely because of its racial mixture. That is, Australia is "a decidedly mixed community" and "for the production of bodies suitable to express the characteristics of the new [sub-]race a mixture is frequently necessary"; furthermore, because the new sub-race will be "an admixture of all," its evolution will "select by degrees the good qualities of all" (31).

At first glance Leadbeater's view of productive admixture seems very different from Galton's vision of whites "breeding down" indigenes. But Leadbeater cautions that the new mixture must not include "those who are too far apart" (34), and he adds that this may be "the occult reason" (34-35) for "the prejudice in favour of 'White Australia'" (35); because "the Great Ones behind" want to avoid "too much of a motley in the population," they often "use existing prejudices . . . to keep the nation just as They wish it until their new sub-race is well established." It is not surprising, then, that Leadbeater's lectures often suggest an affinity between developing a sub-race and eugenic breeding: "likely parents" (37) of the new sub-race will be "selected" for physical health, heredity, and various moral qualities, and he stresses that such traits must be "intensified or helped along" (15). Moreover although his theory lacks White Australia anxieties about a "mongrel" nation and "piebald" race, it does raise the spectre of "motley" and it does not clarify how much, or even whether, aboriginal admixture would be acceptable in what is after all a sub-race of the Aryan root-race.

If Leadbeater's theosophy is finally as troubling as so many Victorian discourses of race, it also suggests that at least some of those discourses did "crystallise" differently in Australia and in Britain. And this in turn suggests the need to recognise the nuances in analyses of degeneration discourses, to recognise how race and class and gender all factor into those discourses but with a greater or lesser resonance depending in part on specifically national anxieties about the ending of the race.

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<sup>4</sup> In Leadbeater's sunny view even the Great War offers "the possibility of benefit": the dead "are not lost to the nation," as a superficial observer might think; instead "they will be brought back to the motherland," and in fact, "a special new department of astral work," run by "one of your own officers," is operating even now to "train" the dead and "fit them" for rebirth (28).

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