

TWO  
CHAPTER THREE

## THE GOLD RUSH

The discovery of payable gold in Australia is usually credited to Edmund Hargreaves. After prospecting in California, he returned to New South Wales in January 1851, and within weeks, thanks to the knowledge acquired in America, discovered gold near Bathurst. Soon after, the younger colony of Victoria was to exceed New South Wales by far in the quantities of the precious metal yielded by its soil and rivers.

Frenchman J.L. Michel in July 1851 became one of the first prospectors to find gold in Victoria, at Anderson's Creek, near Warrandyte.

Reports of the discoveries reached Europe as fast as news could travel at the time. And the following year, ~~of~~ 1852, saw the arrival of some 35,000 seekers of gold, with the rate of landings of would-be miners in Australia rocketing to 3,000 a week in 1853. The number of disembarking prospectors later slowed down, but in 1854 up to 100,000 people were still trying their luck on the Victorian goldfields, sharing a slowly dwindling find. In "The Gold Seekers", Norman Bartlett writes that the French were the largest of the European groups come to find fortune. Population counts, however, show the Germans in 1854 outnumbered the French four to one - of 909 French in Victoria, 398 were on the goldfields. Another historian, Jim Davidson, says one of the Ballarat sites "became known as the French camp ... while in Bendigo a local newspaper began to print European news summaries in French".

Modern historians tend to play down the presence of the French in those days. In "The Victorians Arriving", 1984, Richard Broome devotes five lines to the French migrants of the time, 38 to the Swiss, who were slightly less numerous than the French, and 131 lines to the Germans, who would have deserved around 20 on a purely population pro rata basis.

At least two of the French gold-diggers left first-hand accounts of life on the fields. The earliest, published in Paris in 1855, is C. Brout's Guide des émigrants aux mines d'or en Australie (Migrants' guide to Australian gold mines). Brout is described on the title page as "a miner just back from Australia" - but is this true? In his "Analytical Checklist of First-Hand Accounts in French of Colonial Australia", Colin Thornton-Smith, one of the country's most outstanding researchers on the subject, says of the book that it "contains some exaggerations but seems authentic".

And exaggerations there are. In his opening lines, Brout says: "...beyond the seas exists a promised land where gold is in abundance, where you tread on gold, where you inhale gold in the dust, where gold is so widespread that it seems to grow like plants". The overstatements apparently were aimed at deciding the French reader to set sail immediately for the land of fortune, and the book contains no end of practical and even sociological advice. For hopeful gold diggers there is a map of the fields, and at the end of the book a French-English glossary that contains a few gems of inaccuracy. The word "cravate" (tie) is translated into English as "groat", "pantalon" (trousers) as "erowers", and "cela me fait plaisir" (I enjoy that) becomes "that does NOT please me".

The second of the French diggers-cum-writers is a remarkable personality in himself. Antoine Fauchery migrated twice to Australia, a feat at the time but not a record (see Chapter Seven). His Lettres d'Un Mineur En Australie came out in Paris in 1857, was translated into English a century later by A.R. Chisholm, and published in 1965 in Melbourne. Much of the research now available on Fauchery has been carried <sup>out</sup> over the last few years by Diane Reilly of Melbourne.

Born in Paris in 1823, Antoine Fauchery frequented the artists and writers of the so-called "Bohemian Circle" after befriending the poet Théodore de Banville. He was attracted by a wide variety of artistic fields, successively trying his hand in architecture, painting, wood engraving and dabbling at writing from time to time.

The Bohemian Circle included figures such as <sup>the</sup> poets Baudelaire and Nerval, Nadar, the pioneer of photography, and Henri Murger, who wrote Scenes de la Vie de Bohème, later immortalised in Pucini's opera. Banville said that Murger had modelled his character Marcel the Painter on Fauchery, "the most lively among the friends of our youth".

In 1848, Nadar, Fauchery and a few others set out on an expedition aimed at liberating Poland, but were stopped in Germany. Antoine's next adventure in travel began in July 1852, when he sailed from London on a boat bound for Port Philip bent on making his fortune on the goldfields. He spent about half of his four-year stay in Australia working at the Ballarat mines, and with the 60 pounds saved, headed for Melbourne, where he bought a billiard table and opened a <sup>French style</sup> ~~a~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~place~~ <sup>the Cafe de Paris</sup> cafe. ~~The place, he said,~~ was soon to become the favourite rendez-vous ~~spot~~ of foreigners in the city. But luck and custom slowly drifted away, and a second visit to the goldfields at Daylesford, this time as a wine merchant, failed to bring in much cash. So in 1856 Fauchery returned home. In Paris, his Lettres d'Un Mineur were published at first in instalments in a newspaper, then in book form, where they enjoyed no small measure of success. He married Louise Gatineau and the couple sailed for Melbourne, where Fauchery settled once again in late 1857, this time as a photographer.

He had had Nadar as a teacher in the art, and the photographs he left behind, particularly of the miners, constitute an astonishing artistic and historical contribution to the knowledge of the country during the days of the Gold Rush. His photographic portraits of the Aborigènes also have been widely acclaimed and are the earliest the country possesses.

Although Fauchery was not particularly impressed by Australia - enough to return however - his "Letters of a Miner in Australia" make interesting reading. His major gripe, and one that would be shared by many French migrants then and later, was with Australia's fundamental "Englishness", compared to the unashamedly international feeling of California. "From the ship's stern down", he wrote, "you read London and Liverpool. We are still in England".

He found the <sup>young</sup> city of Melbourne unattractive, with its low, and square buildings. If one was "a few yards higher than the others", he said, "rest assured that it is a church or a public house". Neither did he appreciate the inhabitants and their lack of friendliness: "everywhere the same cold faces...don't expect any smiles". As for the landscape, "everything seems to be null and void in the nature here...where are your green shores, purple corals, mysterious forests?"

As a Frenchman, Fauchery met many other fellow-nationals emigrated to the continent, and in his book describes a visit to a French priest in Heidelberg and their discussion on their compatriots. He was fairly critical of the French and reports that "more than ~~one~~ <sup>one</sup> after a day spent in Melbourne, re-embarked the following morning. They had just finished a voyage of more than four months". No reasons are given for this immediate disenchantment.

Adventurer par excellence, Antoine Fauchery was not destined to take roots or even pass any length of time in any one place. Despite his success as a photographer in Melbourne, he left the city for Manila in February, 1859. He had been assigned as a war correspondent to follow the British-French expeditionary forces in China, and his reports duly appeared in Le Moniteur under the title Lettres de Chine in 1860 and 1861.

In January 1861 Fauchery sailed to Japan, where he died in April that year at the early age of 38. But in the short span of his life he succeeded in adding "a touch of class" to the often ~~worldly~~ <sup>worldly</sup> attractions of the gold rush.

CHABRILLAN

Another colourful seeker of gold was Lionel, Comte Moreton de Chabrillan, who arrived on the diggings ~~field~~ as early as 1851 but lacked the patience to wait for a fortune to come his way. Back in France, he used his aristocratic origins and place in society to win a posting as <sup>the first</sup> French Consul in Melbourne, where he returned in August 1854. But in the meantime he had married his former mistress Céleste, known as "La Mogador", a onetime registered prostitute who later graduated to become one of Paris' most popular courtesans.

CHABRILLAN

But Céleste's reputation had preceded her, and Melbourne society decided to cold-shoulder the Chabrillan couple. Céleste's revenge took the form of a novel, Les Voleurs d'Or (The Gold Thieves), in which she vilified the colony of Victoria. Having discovered her literary talents, she returned to France where she produced no less than 12 novels, three of them set <sup>wholly or partly</sup> in Australia, 26 plays and seven operettas. Chabrillan ended his life in Melbourne and was buried in the Carlton general cemetery, where his grave appears to have become a place of pilgrimage. His most famous contribution to Australian history is a proclamation of 2 December 1854 to French residents of the Colony recommending them "in view of the trouble in Ballarat ... to abstain from any act that would deny the authority of her Majesty's agents". He even went as far as offering to try to obtain satisfaction on any complaints filed by French citizens.

The trouble referred to by Chabrillan was of course the Eureka stockade, Australia's only blood-shedding <sup>rebellion</sup> ~~riot~~, when some 35 men lost their lives on 3 December 1854. As to the question of whether any French nationals joined the rebel cause, the only French name listed among the dead is Robert Julien, a French Canadian. But a report by Officer Rede to Governor Hotham describes the stockade as comprising "about five hundred determined men and the greatest scoundrels in the Colony, one third French, Swedes and Germans, and the rest Irish and Vandiemonians".

Raffaello Carboni, in "The Eureka Stockade", the only existing first-hand account of the rebellion, mentions "le père Duprat, a well-known old hand and respected French miner on Ballarat, who was with me within the Eureka Stockade and whose proposed plan for the defence I interpreted to Lalor, ~~as a living witness~~..." Carboni was a polyglot and former teacher of languages in England. From his text, it appears that he was more often called upon to speak French than any other foreign language.

Later gold rushes, such as the find at Palmer River in Queensland in the 1870s, or at Kalgoorlie in the 1890s, attracted few French miners. Home-base for the Palmer River field was Cooktown, in northern Queensland, and at least one Frenchman made a name for himself there: Charles Bouel ran a highly-popular hotel-restaurant plus brothel. Hector Holthouse in "River of Gold" describes him as "one of the greatest rogues who ever dodged the guillotine, but he was a man of such polish, such taste and such unbounded enthusiasm that, on the whole, France's loss was Cooktown's gain." There was "no better

food to be had in Cooktown - or probably in Australia in those days - than at French Charley's". Holthouse describes how Charley "hand-picked" his girls in Sydney and Melbourne, taught them French manners and accents, and gave credit to his best customers against future gold finds, which in fact meant that hundreds of prospectors were working for him.

The longterm impact of the gold rush days on the French has been to leave an image of Australia to this day of an Eldorado, a place to go to seek gold and make a fortune. While the visions of nuggets awaiting discovery have faded from contemporary dreams, the modern-day French <sup>have a perception, albeit blurred,</sup> of <sup>as</sup> Australia as a place to go to become rich overnight. As recently as May, 1986, one of France's leading reporters, Thierry Desjardins of the conservative daily newspaper Le Figaro, ran an unusually lengthy full-page ~~fronted~~ report under the title Australie: Un Eldorado ignoré par la France (Australia: An Eldorado ignored by the French). Desjardins recounts with a touch of disappointment that he managed to track down only a handful of French migrants in Australia who had made fair amounts of money, mostly in the retail trades. And he takes to task the 22,000-strong French community for being left so far behind the likes of a Robert Holmes a Court, himself an immigrant from South Africa, who probably has amassed more millions than all of the French in Australia put together.

His recriminations highlight the irony of the French attitude towards Australia and its migrant community. In France itself, the idea of seeking riches has never been very well considered, and those lucky enough to possess a sizeable fortune generally tend to cover up the fact. Yet just the opposite is expected of a migrant, especially to Australia: if the aim of expatriation was not to make money, and heaps of it at that, then why have gone away at all, and why so far?

By 1870 the Australian colonies had left behind the days of pioneering and the gold rush, but were yet to experience the great economic and cultural surge of the eighties. According to the press of the day, times were still pretty rough: in the countryside there were frequent reports of bushrangers; many city dwellers felt threatened - Protestants by Catholics, whites by Chinese; and debates were raging over free-trade versus protectionism and over education issues. But perhaps ~~the conflicts~~ <sup>closer to</sup> were more imaginary than real, and that the truth lies <sup>in</sup> Manning Clark's suggestion that Australia in the 1860s and 70s was "The Kingdom of Nothingness".

#### NATIONAL PRIDE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The news of a Prussian military victory over France at Sedan, on 2 September 1870, reached Australia within days. (At that time overseas "intelligence" ~~an expression then much in vogue~~ took weeks to arrive here, but "headline" news was sent by cable.) Australians also learnt that the French Emperor, Napoleon the Third, had been taken prisoner and that France had become a Republic on 4 September.

But despite the Prussian victory, many French people did not really feel defeated in this <sup>a war</sup> war declared by their deposed Emperor, in which they had fought unprepared, for less than six weeks. Instead, they counted on the new Republican government to repulse this invasion, which in their eyes was completely unjustified. However, as stated in <sup>Part 1</sup> Chapter One, during its early years the Third Republic was ruled by ultra-conservative and mostly royalist representatives of the wealthy classes, headed by Adolphe Thiers and Jules Favre. This government was neither responsive to popular expectations, nor was it in any mood to risk itself against an awesome invader. It allowed the Prussians to advance right to the walls of Paris.

The people of Paris reacted by forming a committee to organize resistance and counter-attack from within the capital: <sup>of</sup> the <sup>The call was for the establishment of</sup> Commune de Paris.

The 1789 Revolution had witnessed the original Commune de Paris, and most likely it was the memory of those heroic times, when union of the people had been instrumental in organizing a successful resistance against the invaders, that now prompted a call for similar action under the same name.



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Meanwhile the French government demonstrated further "appeasement" of the enemy by signing first an armistice, on <sup>28</sup> January 1871, and then a provisional peace treaty, on February 26. The treaty ceded to the Prussians Alsace and part of Lorraine, without consulting the inhabitants of these two regions. In an attempt to forestall popular opposition to the moves Thiers, who had installed his government at Versailles, near Paris, attempted to remove artillery guns under the control of the Paris National Guard.

It is generally considered that this move, which ended in failure for Thiers on March 18, marked the government's final break with the Paris rebels. The National Guard occupied the City Hall and other strategic points, and the citizens of Paris were asked to elect delegates to the Paris Commune. The elections were held on March 25 and the Commune (\*) was officially proclaimed on March 28.

The Paris Commune immediately voted in a form of government with "Delegates", who were the equivalent of Ministers. Later in this chapter we meet two of these Delegates - those for Foreign Affairs and for Finances - in Sydney, following their escape from New Caledonia. Elected members of the Commune included the painter Gustave Courbet, author Jules Vallès, and popular songwriters Jean-Baptiste Clément and Eugène Pottier (the latter wrote the words for l'Internationale). A few parliamentarians from the Versailles National Assembly joined the movement, the best-known being Henri Rochefort, an aristocrat who had discarded his title of marquis de Rochefort-Lugay to become a "man of the people". Thousands of Paris women became Communardes, but none left a greater impact <sup>than</sup> Louise Michel, a teacher in a Montmartre primary school whose book, La Commune, had all but disappeared until it was reprinted for the 1971 Centenary of the Commune. Many artists, such as Felice Nader, were sympathisers.

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(\*) La Commune (in English, the Paris Commune) refers to both the 1871 movement and to the elected body of about 60 committee members. All those who supported the movement are Communards.

Typically, the first three legal acts of the Commune were to:

- . forbid sales of pawned goods;
- . abolish the budget des cultes (that is, remove any state financing of established churches);
- . abolish conscription.

In other words, to end exploitation of the poor by rich pawnbrokers, to make religion a private affair, and to make military service voluntary.

The Paris Commune lasted only three months. The Versailles government made a deal with the German military to obtain both the return of French troops held prisoner in Metz, and free access to Paris. On May 21, Thiers unleashed against his fellow countrymen and women the kind of force he had not been prepared to show against the foreign invaders. The Versailles troops, far superior in numbers to those of the Commune, entered Paris. It was all over in one week, going down in History as the Semaine Sanglante (Bloody Week). The troops had orders to shoot anybody who could be suspected of having held arms, and though the Commune had no more than 15,000 "active" soldiers to begin with, estimates of people killed vary from 17,000, the official figure, to 30,000, with reports of terrible atrocities.

The repression did not stop there. Some 36,000 persons were arrested, and up until 1874 specially established tribunals passed 10,137 sentences, about half of them for transportation, with or without penal servitude, to New Caledonia.

THE PEOPLE'S "PR"

Now our part of the world became *unavoidably* involved with France's only forced political emigration since 1800. How many of the 4,500-odd deportees, or other partisans of the Commune, actually reached our shores and stayed? We have tried very hard to find an answer to this question, and the conclusion is that though only a handful can be traced, there were certainly more. (The then necessary mystery surrounding their existence has made contemporary research extremely difficult.)

In 1934, German-born writer Egon Kisch came to Australia to be guest speaker at a congress "against war and fascism". As Kisch writes in his book "Australian Landfall", while in Perth he was approached by an elderly man who showed him a red flag inscribed "Commune de Paris, 1871. Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité ou la Mort.". The man's name was Roger Grenier, the flag was his most cherished possession, and his father had been a Communard deported to New Caledonia. In 1873, after a long battle with the Administration, six hundred wives and children of deportees had obtained permission to join their husbands or fathers, and young Roger was one of them. They boarded the frigate Fénelon and upon "dropping anchor in Port Jackson ... experienced something which they had not expected: demonstrations of love and solidarity ... every Australian democrat, during the two days when the ship lay in the harbour, sought personally to entertain at least one family whose father had fought for freedom". It was that enthusiastic welcome that decided Roger Grenier, after his father's liberation, to settle in Australia. To Kisch he introduced his daughter and grand-daughter, who still spoke French.

Melbourne had a different Commune visitation. With some 600 prisoners on board, the vessel L'Orne berthed at Melbourne on Saturday April 19, 1873. The following Wednesday, the local press announced that French prisoner Michel Serigné had escaped from the ship, and that the Victorian government was anxious to recapture him. The next day, however, the ship prepared to sail and the search was called off.

As a "public relations" exercise in favour of Communards, Serigné's escape was sensational. The papers were full of it for weeks; not only the Melbourne papers but papers in other colonies, and even the London Times mentioned it. They commented on the escape, on the harsh treatment of prisoners, and even on a bottle washed ashore containing a history of the Commune. Only two days after his escape, and at the request of readers, a subscription was opened by the Argus on Serigné's behalf. Marcus Clarke, already well-known, wrote long letters to the Argus supporting the Commune. It soon transpired that the French consul had played a part in hiding Serigné and in passing on assistance to him. Lissagaray, the most celebrated historian of the Paris Commune, reports that in a few hours Melbourne's population had collected forty thousand francs (at least \$80,000 in today's money) to buy food and clothing for the prisoners on board L'Orne, but that the captain refused the collection.

Likes

On May 20, the Argus' Supplement featured a whole page devoted to the Communards and to the escapee, with all the previous letters reprinted in French and English. Copies of Serigné's portrait were circulated and sold.

For those Communards who avoided arrest and escaped abroad, England was the country that took most, according to Lissagaray. Many exiles were highly skilled craftsmen who promptly found work. For intellectuals, it was a little more difficult, but fortunately a large number of the English found a sudden urge to take French lessons. At least four exiles taught in English universities.

None of the few names quoted by Lissagaray can be connected to French immigrants in Australia in the 1870s. We note however that Wroblewski, a Polish-born aristocrat who was one of the Commune's top officers and also known to have escaped to England, bears the same surname (slight differences in spelling often appear in transcription of Slav names) as the founder, in 1892, of Le Courrier Australien (see Chapter Nine).

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Communards who went to live in Sydney include Lucien Henry, a well-known artist, and Henri Coutouly, who married another passenger from the Fénelon, Juliette Lopez. She had previously been married to Doctor Rastoul, who lost his life trying to escape from the New Caledonia penitentiary to join her in Sydney. Louise Michel in her book mentions a certain Duserre, a caterer in Noumea who was gaoled for providing assistance in the escape of the Rochefort group in 1874 (see below), and who migrated to Sydney where, by 1879, he had become quite prosperous.

Sydney can also boast a distinguished descendant of a Communard: Suzanne Mourot, whose grandfather Eugène Mourot was secretary to Henri Rochefort, the "ex-aristocrat" Communard, and was arrested with him. Sentenced to transportation to New Caledonia, Mourot was one of only 140 Communards who chose to stay on there after being pardoned. Once free, he became a journalist again and founded a local paper. He was elected a Noumea city councillor and headed the anti-clérical (anti-church) movement.

His grand-daughter Suzanne was born in Noumea in 1918, studied in France and Australia, was a tutor at the <sup>Women's College</sup> University of Queensland, and qualified as a librarian in 1949. After working in various capacities in the <sup>State Library of</sup> New South Wales, (in 1973) she became Mitchell Librarian, remaining at the helm of Australia's most prestigious "Australiana" collection until her retirement in 1979. Suzanne Mourot is also an author: she has written two French school readers; Un an à Noumea (1939) and Un an en Australie (1941); and also Vaucluse House (1950), This was Sydney (1969), and ... is joint author of The Great South Land: Treasures of the Mitchell and <sup>Dixson</sup> Libraries and <sup>Dixson</sup> Galleries (1979). She told us that "I have become an Australian because I like the Australian way of life".

AN EVEN MORE SENSATIONAL ESCAPE

On (March 20) 1874, having first obtained the cooperation of the Australian skipper of the ship P.C.E. - who was rather well paid for his services - six Communard deportees set sail for Australia. The "coup" had been thoroughly prepared, mainly by Achille Ballière, an architect who subsequently wrote a book about the escape. The other five escapees were <sup>Bastien</sup> Granthille, Olivier Pain, Henri Rochefort, Francis Jourde and Paschal Grousset. The latter two were the only "government" members of the Commune in New Caledonia; Jourde was Delegate for Finances and Grousset was Delegate for Foreign Affairs. On the whole, the <sup>members of the</sup> escape group were the V.I.P.'s of Deportation.

While the escape may have been clandestine, the arrival of the group in Newcastle a few days later certainly was not. In his memoirs, Rochefort quotes from the Newcastle paper: "... by the time of landing, all the vessels anchored at port had raised flags to salute their return to freedom". Their next reception was at Maitland, where quite a few French people had settled, such as the Terrier "exiles from the Napoleon III coup d'état" (mentioned again in Chapter Ten). According to Rochefort, everybody wanted to meet the escapees and hear about their ordeal. Rochefort, Grousset and Ballière spoke English quite well.

They then continued to Sydney, where they had to wait several weeks until funds came from London, their final destination. One of the escapees' aims was to tell the world about the suffering of their comrades still in detention, in order to arouse international sympathy. In his book Un Voyage de Circumnavigation ... (see illustration), Ballière writes that rather than Sydney, he would have preferred to visit "the republican (sic) city, Melbourne, which had given such a tremendous welcome to Serigné, the escapee from L'Orne". Ballière had himself been a prisoner on L'Orne, and was the author of one of the letters smuggled ashore and published by the Argus. Ballière nevertheless was impressed by a "republican" event in Sydney, the celebration of the eight-hour day, which then took place on April 21. But he found New South Wales lacking in "le côté artistique", and made use of his time and architectural training to design a theatre project for Sydney.

Like Serigné's Melbourne "visit" one year earlier, the Rochefort group created quite a sensation. The French consul, Eugène Simon, tried to explain in the Sydney Morning Herald that these men were really sentenced and transported criminals, and that the "inhabitants of Sydney [should not be] carried away by their generous impulse". The replies poured in. David Buchanan, a Member of Parliament, wrote eloquently in their defence: "... it is fashionable to denounce them as Communists; not one man in a thousand knows the exact meaning of this term ... Communistic principles are taught most clearly and emphatically in the New Testament Scriptures ... I congratulate Rochefort and his friends on their restoration to freedom and to the world."

In their 1987 book Communards en Nouvelle Calédonie, Baronnet and Chalou stress how Australia remained ever present in the minds of the deportees as the bright hope of a successful escape. Although a great many attempts were made, the bid just narrated appears to have been the sole successful one, with other endeavours foiled, escapees <sup>being</sup> recaptured at sea or drowning during their flight. Only three men are said in the same book to have succeeded in embarking secretly aboard ships bound for Sydney - Henri Coutouly, mentioned earlier, Ernest Robin, a photographer who left extremely interesting photos of the old Noumea, and one Deslandes. The last two could not be traced in Australia.

FIVE YEARS LATER ...

By early 1879, the majority of deportees were still in New Caledonia. Some now had a freer life, such as Louise Michel, who was teaching the native Kanak population and who became one of the Europeans they most admired and trusted. Then, on February 5, important news arrived in Noumea via a copy of the Sydney Morning Herald dated January 17: "2000 communists have been pardoned by Presidential Decree". Freedom at last! Not for all as yet, but this would come, and return voyages home now began.

"Australians as a people were too wedded to the petty-bourgeois ideal of the ownership of property to create the first Paris Commune in the New World". This opinion of Manning Clark's may be even truer today than it was in 1871. However it should also be said that the events narrated in these few pages show that many Australians are sometimes prepared to "stand up and be counted", and that the Communards provided them with an opportunity to do just that.