

## CAPITALISTS AND LABOURERS IN THE POST-EMANCIPATION RURAL CAPE — I

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The post-emancipation Cape presents a picture of a poor, pre-industrial colony, in which agriculture was the predominant economic activity. The division of society into propertied and unpropertied classes corresponded substantially with its division racially into white and black.<sup>1)</sup> Whites, as the Rev. Boyce noted<sup>2)</sup> at the end of the post-emancipation apprenticeship period, were "the capitalists of the country, and with some few exceptions, the sole proprietors of the soil". Conversely, coloureds were primarily wage earners, whose previous condition of servitude had precluded them from "the opportunity of accumulating any capital", and in whom habits of "independent resources and energy" needed to be created.<sup>3)</sup>

These coloured wage earners were generally employed as farm labourers in a system of cultivation which can best be described as primitive, and itself largely responsible for the frequent complaints of labour shortage and inefficiency that were to surface periodically after emancipation. This structural problem was, in the years immediately following the apprenticeship period, exacerbated by what can be termed a circumstantial problem, in which the legal position of blacks was out of phase with their actual position. The change in the emancipated slave's situation, necessitated a whole new way of behaviour on the employer's part. "The difficulty to obtain good servants, I have reason to think," a Grahamstown inhabitant wrote in 1849, "is in most cases not greater than it is to obtain good masters."<sup>4)</sup> Such altered behaviour did not come easily to employers, many of whom lived in isolation and needed constantly to be reminded that they should "speak civilly" to the worker;<sup>5)</sup> that they cease to regard him as "a labouring machine";<sup>6)</sup> and that they "give, in the shape of money, or in some other shape, what the labourers consider equal to the wages he can obtain by other kinds of employment",<sup>7)</sup> particularly in the towns.

The persistence of these attitudes, operating within a system which urgently

This term has been used as a shorthand description. It includes in the first instance the "genuine" Khoi; (known then as Hottentots, "a name ... quite foreign to their own language" — C J F Bunbury, *Journal of a Residence at the Cape of Good Hope* (London, 1848), p. 5); emancipated slaves; and the offspring of unions between whites and these groups, collectively known in the early 19th century as people of "mixed race", Bastards or "coloureds" — the last another shorthand term which has been retained in this article. Secondly "black" subsumes prize negroes and tribesmen from beyond the northern and eastern borders of the colony.

2. W B Boyce, *Notes on South African Affairs* (Grahamstown, 1838), p. 119.
3. A 53—59. *Documents in connection with the appointment of a Missionary of the late apprentices and heathen*, J. Adamson and G.W. Stegmann to Acting Governor Sir H. Pottinger, 25.6.1847.
4. *Cape of Good Hope. Master and Servant. Documents on the Working of the Order in Council of the 21st July, 1846*. (S. Solomon, Cape Town, 1849) — hereafter *M & S, 1849*, p. 178, N Smit.
5. *South African Commercial Advertiser (S.A.C.A.)*, 25.3.1839.
6. *S.A.C.A.*, 20.2.1839; see also *M & S, 1849*, p 71, work in gaol was "infinitely lighter than ... in private service".
7. *S.A.C.A.*, 23.3.1839.

needed modernisation, provided the framework for the capital/labour relationship in the rural areas during the decades immediately following emancipation. The scarcity of "domestic, and farm servants, mechanics and even common laborers"<sup>8)</sup> after 1838 resulted from the effect of compensation on the money supply which stimulated growth, so that production outran the labour supply. This labour shortage was exacerbated by the initial tendency of agricultural labourers to test their freedom by changing jobs. The employer soon found that without his former coercive powers he could no longer retain the ex-slave in his position of dependency and obedience. "The free laborer is less easily managed by those accustomed to command slaves," Michiel van Breda, a leading Cape Town farmer, noted, "than he was when in a state of slavery."<sup>9)</sup> Conversely, "the late slaves ... [had] as clear a notion of the relation of master and servant as any people in the world".<sup>10)</sup> Farmers vied with each other and townsmen for the labour of men who, freed from the constraints of slavery, were "unsteady and careless of pleasing";<sup>11)</sup> and "want of labour [was] the subject of universal complaint throughout the colony".<sup>12)</sup>

As the supply of cheap labour is always inadequate to demand, this complaint persisted throughout the following decade. In June 1840 the *Commercial Advertiser* noted that "ingenious poor men, whether laborers only or artizans ... many almost make their own terms with their employers ... They are in reality, at the present moment, persons of the first consideration".<sup>13)</sup> Already in 1841 it was recognised that "no one thinks of asking for a character, or who or what the applicant is";<sup>14)</sup> and this continued to be the practice throughout the decade. "It is hardly necessary to add," the Zwartkops River (Somerset East) Justice of the Peace wrote in 1849, "that it is customary to engage servants without reference to character, or families would most frequently be without any kind of assistance."<sup>15)</sup>

The large-scale introduction from early 1840 of prize negroes captured and liberated by the British navy, was regarded as causing the ex-apprentices to "lower their tone".<sup>16)</sup> A temporary increase in wages was, however, more material in disposing them to work, thus enabling the wheat farmers to obtain enough labour to cut down an "abundant" harvest at the year's close.<sup>17)</sup>

Complaints of a labour shortage were, however, expressed again in the spring of 1841;<sup>18)</sup> in 1844, when a visitor noted that "we have good reason to know that these complaints are not made causelessly";<sup>19)</sup> and in early 1846, when shepherds, agricultural labourers and to a lesser extent, domestics of both sexes, were still in

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8. C.323, XXXIII, (1840), Report from the Governor of the Cape re Children sent out by the Children's Friend Society, p. 7, Governor to Sec. of State, Lord J Russell, 24.2.1840; see also *Cape Archives (C.A.)*, Legislative Council Appendixes (*L.C.A.*) Vol. 11, M 67 of 3.8.1840.
  9. *S.A.C.A.*, 22.1.1840.
  10. *C.A.*, G.H. 28/24, Attorney General to Secretary to Government, 7.8.1843.
  11. *S.A.C.A.*, 22.1.1840.
  12. *S.A.C.A.*, 8.7.1840, report of public meeting on the subject of labour.
  13. 27.6.1840; see E Napier, *The Book of the Cape. Or, past and future emigration* (London, 1851), p. 311.
  14. 217, XLIII, (1849), Cape of Good Hope. Transportation of Convicts, p. 3, Capt. Wolfe, 5.10.1841.
  15. *M & S*, 1849, p. 70. See also p. 15, Colesberg Magistrate; p. 22, Malmesbury Magistrate; p. 24, Mossel Bay Magistrate; p. 32, Simonstown Magistrate; *Zuid Afrikaan (Z.A.)*, 4.3.1847.
  16. *De Ware Afrikaan*, 24.3.1840.
  17. *S.A.C.A.*, 26.12.1840.
  18. 217, Capt. Wolfe, 25.9.1841.
  19. J MacGilchrist, *The Cape of Good Hope* (Glasgow, 1846), p. 17.

“most extensive demand”.<sup>20)</sup> By 1849, except in the Bathurst and Albany districts (where extra-colonial blacks were entering service),<sup>21)</sup> there was “such a demand for labor that servants of the worst character would be immediately employed. The competition ... all over the colony, is between masters for laborers, not servants for work”.<sup>22)</sup> In 1857 the governor, Sir George Grey, confirmed that artisans and agricultural labourers would still “find ready employment here”.<sup>23)</sup> Even the great influx of Xhosa following the cattle killing does not seem to have satisfied the demand. In 1876, John X Merriman was echoing views articulated three decades earlier when he expressed the hope that the introduction of “European wants and habits of industry to thousands of natives ... [would force them] to enter the colonial labour market to supply the wants thus created”.<sup>24)</sup>

As in the West Indies, where a similar situation prevailed,<sup>25)</sup> alternative sources of labour were investigated. Following the reduction of the East India Company’s St. Helena establishment in 1834, considerable numbers of labourers found immediate employment at the Cape, but failed to come up to the “high expectations which were formed of them”.<sup>26)</sup> The importation of Chinese indentured workers was deemed impracticable in 1854 and again in 1875.<sup>27)</sup> In 1839 the Cape Agricultural Society instituted a scheme to finance the introduction of free black labourers, particularly from Mozambique and Madagascar;<sup>28)</sup> opposition was expressed on the grounds that they would demand high wages, notwithstanding their ignorance of the “Cape way of farming”.<sup>29)</sup>

The enthusiasm with which the prize negro scheme was received, despite the affinity of many of these blacks with the less welcome free labourers, suggests that the employers were influenced by their own familiarity with servile labour. Adults were initially indentured for a year and children until the ages of 16 and 18 for girls and boys respectively.<sup>30)</sup> Thus the employer was assured of a cheap, tractable, continuous labour supply, attributes which balanced the “great risk to property” stemming from their initial ignorance.<sup>31)</sup>

The recruitment of blacks from areas just beyond the colonial borders was regarded, however, as a more attractive and practical proposal, combining as it did “an economical scheme ... for profit” with “one of the natural means ... for civilizing the barbarian and converting the heathen”;<sup>32)</sup> that is, it gave promise of most satisfactorily regulating the colony’s relationship with its eastern neighbours by combining the Victorian virtues of profit and good works. Already in 1837 the Agricultural Society

20. S.A.C.A., 4.2.1846; see also Z.A., 17.7.1840, 29.3.1842, 18.10.1844, 4.3.1847.

21. 1288, XXXVIII, (1850), Kaffir Tribes. Further Correspondence, Col. Mackinnon, 31.12.1849.

22. M & S, 1849, p. 6, Albert magistrate; also p. 230 for worst affected districts; C.A., G.H. 23/18, Sir H. Smith to Sec. of State, No. 127, 29.7.1848.

23. 389, XL, (1857–8), S.A., German Immigrants, p. 10, Grey to Labouchere, 23.3.1857.

24. G. 8-76, Report on Immigration and Labour Supply for the year 1875.

25. See *The Colonial Magazine*, Vol. 7, Jan. – April 1842, p. 269 ff; Vol. 3, May – Aug. 1843.

26. J C Chase, *The Cape of Good Hope* (London, 1843), p. 237.

27. *The Advertiser and Mail’s Parliamentary Debates, 1854 (Parl. Debs. 1854)*, (State Library Reprints, No. 33, Vol. 1); G. 8–76.

28. Z.A., 15.2.1839; 1.3.1839.

29. *ibid.*, 26.4.1839, “A farmer”.

30. C.A., G.H. 28/16, Attorney-General to Secretary to Government, 27.1.1843.

31. S.A.C.A., 1.6.1842, F.W. Reitz. See M & S, 1849, p. 166, J H Neethling, Neethlingshof, indicates only the prize negroes utilised the ground he gave all his labourers.

32. S.A.C.A., 31.1.1844; see also Z.A., 30.9.1847 – 28.10.1847.

had received over 1 500 applications for servants to be recruited from the Mfengu (Fingoes) who had been settled in the Peddie district during the 6th Frontier War. A cattle-keeping people, of acknowledged sobriety, and prepared to labour for even less than the Khoi,<sup>33)</sup> they were employed, like the prize negroes, as shepherds — initially, until about 1844, in the area east of the Uitenhage district. Some whites viewed the Mfengu as “a poor, spiritless weak-minded race”, even more despised than the San (Bushmen).<sup>34)</sup> Others, more perceptive, recognised that they were “more knowing in matters of bargain or self-interest, and [were] less likely to be imposed upon than Hottentots and other persons of colour”.<sup>35)</sup> Consequently, within a decade or so of their entry on a considerable scale into the Cape labour market, they were beginning to emerge as a self-employed group saving money to buy cattle,<sup>36)</sup> which adversely affected their performance as servants. “The Fingoes generally are becoming a most disorderly, idle, insolent race, fond of wandering and squatting on any land ... Some of them live by bartering in small quantities, guns and powder with the Kafirs for cattle. A number of Fingoe [sic] women support their families by cutting wood on private property without permission, and convey it on their heads to Graham’s Town for sale. All this has a demoralising tendency.”<sup>37)</sup>

Small numbers of Xhosa (referred to as “Kafirs”), together with Mantatees (Tlokwa), and Tswana speakers from beyond the Orange River, also entered the Cape labour market in the 1840s. While many of the Xhosa were cattle herds employed on a long term basis, the last two groups were mainly seasonal workers who came into the northern colonial regions in the spring in “great numbers” to “construct dams, kraals and etc”.<sup>38)</sup> “These people,” one landowner noted, “are of great service to the farmers;”<sup>39)</sup> “unlike the Hottentots, these natives are industrious and saving”.<sup>40)</sup>

But they were still too alien for total acceptance. Whereas the Mfengu rapidly adopted European customs and were “ambitious of being dressed in European clothing”,<sup>41)</sup> Xhosa retention of customs such as dancing, wearing the kaross and decoration with clay, irritated many farmers.<sup>42)</sup> As late as the 1860s Xhosa males were criticised for still refusing to do agricultural work.<sup>43)</sup> If the Xhosa, like the Mfengu, were admired for their perspicacity “in matters of bargain and self interest”, the obverse of this was their lack of “fear or respect for the white man”.<sup>44)</sup>

Although the indigenous white *knecht* was regarded with some contempt (“You cannot depend upon him ... [the Africander jongen] ... too much”),<sup>45)</sup> from 1840 on-

33. Chase, *op. cit.*, p. 238; *M & S*, 1849, p. 162, J Kidd; W M MacMillan, *The Cape Colour Question* (London, 1927), p. 253.

34. MacGilchrist, *op. cit.*, p. 22; E. Napier, *The Book of the Cape. Or, Past and Future emigration* (London, 1851), p. 313, the Mfengu “would only work when it pleased them”.

35. *M & S*, 1849, p. 20, Cradock magistrate.

36. J M Bowker, *Speeches, Letters and Selections from Important Papers* (Grahamstown, 1864), p. 48.

37. *M & S*, 1849, p. 181–2, J.H. Smith, Grahamstown Field Cornet and superintendent of roads and convict labour.

38. *M & S*, 1849, p. 15, Colesberg magistrate.

39. *M & S*, 1849, p. 156, A Gilfillan, Stormbergs Spruit Field Cornetcy of the Orange River.

40. 1288, Kaffir Tribes, p. 28, Memo from C. Bell, 31.1.1850 encl. in Bell to Sec. to Government, 31.1.1850.

41. J M Bowker, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

42. *M & S*, 1849, p. 110, p. 96.

43. G. 24–63, Educational Commission, p. 95; Bishop Gray; Appendix VI, p. 4.

44. *S.A.C.A.*, 5.2.1848, “An English farmer”.

45. A 3–83, Report of the Select Committee on Colonial Agriculture and Industries, p. 89, P.A. Myburgh.

wards the idea of European immigration began to receive a good deal of consideration among "the principal merchants, and landowners ... and other most respectable inhabitants" of Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.<sup>46)</sup> While the governor, Napier, refused to countenance assisted immigration on the grounds that importation of capital for improved communications must precede such immigration, his successor Maitland did approve a grant for the introduction of English labourers in 1848–9; but on a modest scale, the problems associated with such an importation being complex and remaining so.

A white labouring class "formed of enlightened and industrious persons without any feeling of hostility"<sup>47)</sup> and "in a superior state of civilization",<sup>48)</sup> nevertheless came to be regarded by liberals as the ideal way of improving the "character of the laboring class in the colony",<sup>49)</sup> and eradicating "all idea of servitude and a black skin being inseparable".<sup>50)</sup> As late as 1876 Merriman was emphasising that the "advancement of the country and the civilizing of the native population ... depended on immigration".<sup>51)</sup>

But if such "superior" Europeans were physically "incapable of continuing at *field* labor in this sultry and changeable climate",<sup>52)</sup> would they not automatically become overseers or employers, thus defeating the object of their importation? If immigration were promoted simply in order that the Cape should "not then be so dependent on the coloured classes whose labour is not of that kind that can ever render the master comfortable in his circumstances",<sup>53)</sup> would coloureds not "be treated with more contempt and degradation than ever and ... continue to sink"?<sup>54)</sup> In sum, would not the importation of white labour compound the danger of "creating an aristocracy ... the wretched aristocracy of skin"?<sup>55)</sup>

The suitability of European manual labourers was further queried on two contradictory counts; either they were too ambitious, or lacked ambition entirely. All arrived "generally poor"; some "too often form[ed] connection [sic] with the coloured people and become drunkards".<sup>56)</sup> But the more energetic "after working a little while, start for themselves ... They will not stop with the lower class but try to come up to the higher".<sup>57)</sup> In 1849 G Nicholson, an Englishman who had settled in Graaff Reinet, expressed the opinion that immigrant labourers would "experience some humiliation in reconciling themselves to be looked upon as belonging to ... black people ... in a colony where all white people, even the most humble, consider themselves superior to and avoid contact with, the coloured race".<sup>58)</sup> Three decades later, Pro-

46. C.A., L.C.A., Vol. 11, M 67 of 3.8.1840.

47. S.A.C.A., 15.4.1842, Legislative Council, H. Cloete.

48. *ibid.*, 7.5.1842.

49. 1862, XXXVII, (1851), Establishment of a Representative Assembly, p. 135, Sir H. Smith, the governor, to Sec. of State, Earl Grey, 21.1.1851.

50. S.A.C.A., 1.6.1842, F.W. Reitz, prominent Swellendam farmer.

51. G. 8-76.

52. Z.A., 27.7.1838, "A disinterested party"; see also, S.A.C.A., 14.4.1842, P.L. Cloete.

53. *Parl. Debs.*, 1854, p. 89, Collett. See also p. 87, Pote, who recommended immigration to show the coloureds "you can do without them".

54. S.A.C.A., 16.3.1842, "Hudibras".

55. W Porter, *The Porter Speeches* (Cape Town, 1886), p. 62.

56. W Irons, *The Settler's Guide to the Cape of Good Hope and Colony of Natal* (London, 1858).

57. A 3-83, p. 112, Prof. P D Hahn.

58. G Nicholson, *The Cape and its Colonists* (London, 1849), p. 162. See also S.A.C.A., 8.8.1840, extract from *The African Colonizer*, 11.4.1840. "No European ... can be expected to remain contentedly there as a labourer".

fessor Hahn noted that German immigrants (with whom he was familiar) soon acquired the ruling white outlook, and considered “coloured people ... below them ... out of their social level ... [and would try to] raise themselves from that position ... and keep away from them”; conversely, those who remained in “the same social position as blacks ... [were] the most contemptible of individuals”.<sup>59)</sup>

It could be queried whether “English servants [were] beyond all comparison to be preferred to colonial, whether as domestic or agricultural servants”.<sup>60)</sup> Despite their apparent social pretensions, English labourers in any new colony appear to have given an inordinate amount of trouble,<sup>61)</sup> manifesting similar tendencies to those we shall find the farmers constantly complaining of in their indigenous work force. Far from immigrants gradually raising the standards of the labouring class, teaching “the coloured population ... the advantages of the European manner of farming, of cleanliness, honesty and steadfastness in service”,<sup>62)</sup> many who arrived under indentures deserted and caused “constant interruption and annoyance to their employers”.<sup>63)</sup> MacGilchrist did find wealthy English settlers who had brought out, at their own expense, “men of a superior description — Scotch shepherds for instance — who manage their sheep stocks and act as general overseers upon their farms”;<sup>64)</sup> and many farmers regarded the English regiments at the Cape as potential sources of labour.<sup>65)</sup> But on the whole MacGilchrist — very accurately — described English farm labour as “few in number and inferior in kind ... worthless characters ... unsettled and unsteady in their habits ... they wander about the country ... seldom remaining long in the service of one master”.<sup>66)</sup> “The Hottentot,” he added, “is actually the better man in so far as general service and bodily labour goes.”

The evidence of a witness before the 1883 Select Committee investigating colonial agriculture and industries could be applied throughout the years between 1838 and 1883. “It is very difficult for farmers having black and white labourers to get them to work together.”<sup>67)</sup> Stated crisply, it was the very presence of the coloured labourer — living in “squalid poverty and wretchedness”<sup>68)</sup> — who negated any scheme to transform the composition of the labouring class at the Cape, and to give it “respectability”.

If a significant residue of the Cape’s dependence for so many years on slave and Khoi labour was the disinclination of whites to work as wage labourers,<sup>69)</sup> so conversely was the employer’s preference for indigenous black labour, with all its imperfections, above the imported variety.<sup>70)</sup> “I do not think,” the governor, Napier, informed the Secretary of State “that European laborers are suited to the generality of masters in

59. A 3-83, p. 112 ff.

60. *M & S*, 1849, p. 210. H Rutherford, Cape Town merchant, financier and member of the board of the Cape Town auxiliary to the London Missionary Society.

61. *S.A.C.A.*, 4.3.1840.

62. *M & S*, 1849, p. 125, H T Vigne, J.P. Tygerhoek, Swellendam district.

63. *S.A.C.A.*, 20.2.1839; *Z.A.*, 28.5.1841; MacGilchrist, *op. cit.*, p. 16 ff.

64. *op. cit.*, p. 14. See also *M & S*, 1849, p. 73 ff, T B Bayley, enterprising Caledon farmer, had 13 European and 16–20 Khoi servants. “Nothing would induce me to continue farming operations, if I had to depend entirely on Hottentot labor.”

65. Napier, *op. cit.*, pp. 301–2, 310; *Z.A.*, 16.12.1840.

66. See also *M & S*, 1849, *passim*, for numbers of, and complaints against, immigrant labourers.

67. A 3-83, p. 50.

68. Boyce, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

69. *S.A.C.A.*, 8.8.1840, qu. *The African Colonizer*, 11.4.1838.

70. *C.A.*, G.H. 23/11, Napier to Sec. of State, 21.12.1841.

this colony.<sup>71)</sup> In some instances this was a question of practical considerations. Among the Cape English-speaking farmers in general, there was a good deal of discussion as to whether the agricultural nous of the English labourer might not “be absolutely useless here”.<sup>72)</sup> “Newcomers,” a Beaufort West colonist claimed, “have to *unlearn* as much as to *learn*.”<sup>73)</sup> Indeed, the very term “agricultural labourer” had a different connotation in South Africa and England. There it meant “one employed exclusively in the cultivation of arable land”; here it was someone who “makes himself generally useful on a farm”.<sup>74)</sup>

For the Dutch farmer the issue generally revolved about cultural differences. “The Boer ... would rather have the African for nothing than the English man for nothing,” William Porter, the Cape Attorney General, claimed. “The Boer and the [European] labourers do not speak the same language; their way of working is different; their way of living is different; all their manners and customs are dissimilar.”<sup>75)</sup> Many of the Dutch feared that immigrants “were not the sort of people they ... [could] work with”;<sup>76)</sup> and that they might “elbow them out of their lands”.<sup>77)</sup>

Conversely, the Cape could never realise the immigrant labourer’s expectations. He demanded wages which few employers were able or willing to pay;<sup>78)</sup> “Hottentot competition would keep down the price of English labour.”<sup>79)</sup> Nor would the newcomer find the social conditions which had made his life in rural England more tolerable; the “comfortable cottage and garden”, or the nearby village with church, friends, school and doctor.<sup>80)</sup> Taking everything into account, the Cape farmer and the English immigrant “could not, with comfort to either, stand in the relation of master and servant”.<sup>81)</sup>

Thus in the immediate post-apprenticeship period, few of these immigrants found their way to the country districts. The Cape’s “very considerable class of the labouring population” continued to be coloured, comprising between 30—40 000 slaves, reinforced by some 4 000 prize negroes and an indeterminate number of Khoi and extra-colonial blacks. Together they formed “an assemblage of poor, ignorant people”,<sup>82)</sup> much despised by employers,<sup>83)</sup> who resented the loss of their former authority.

Already too, a rudimentary form of segregation existed. On a visit to the Cape, Arbousset, French missionary with Moshoeshoe, found at Worcester, some 90 miles from Cape Town, land — both private and government — “on which to stand a cer-

71. C.A., G.H. 23/13, Napier to Sec. of State, 12.1.1842.

72. Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

73. W. Irons, *The Settler’s Guide*, p. 69.

74. Irons, *op. cit.*, p. 66; R. Godlonton, *Sketches of the Eastern Districts of the Cape of Good Hope* (Grahamstown, 1842), p. 164.

75. W. Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 58, Legislative Council, 6.6.1844; see also Irons, *op. cit.*, pp. 48, 53, 63, 98 for evidence of strong prejudice against English immigrants.

76. Z.A., 22.3.1844; also C.A., G.H. 23/13, Napier to Sec. of State, 21.12.1841; Irons, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

77. S.A.C.A., 14.5.1842, “Observer”.

78. C.A., G.H. 23/13, No. 19, Napier to Sec. of State, 15.3.1841; Porter, *op. cit.*, pp. 60—1; Godlonton, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

79. MacGilchrist, *op. cit.*, p. 14; see also Napier, *op. cit.*, 15.3.1841. “If the supply increased, the demand remaining the same, the probability is that even the present low rates would fall still lower.”

80. C.A., G.H. 23/13, Napier to Sec. of State, 15.3.1841.

81. S.A.C.A., 6.4.1842.

82. 217, XLIII, (1849), Transportation of Convicts, p. 13, Memorials dated 1842 and 1843 from several colonists.

83. See Irons, *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 68, 95; Chase, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

tain number of Hottentots [and slave] habitations". These settlements he called by their modern name — "locations".<sup>84)</sup>

E P Thompson, in his monumental *The Making of the English Working Class*, has distinguished four categories of farm labour in England in the early 19th century: skilled specialists such as ploughmen; a regular labour force employed throughout the year on a large farm; farm servants hired by the year; and casual labour paid daily. At the Cape the first two groups were small in number, the result primarily of the nature of the agricultural system, reinforced by the fact that coloured labour was loath to tie itself down with long-term contracts. Immediately after the end of apprenticeship farm labourers realised the advantages of casual daily work;<sup>85)</sup> it gave them unwonted mobility and the means of commanding higher wages at a time when food prices had risen.<sup>86)</sup> Over a decade later, in 1849, Capt. Buchanan, a Swellendam farmer, noted that "daily labourers are in general to be had, if allowed to take their own way, and go and come as they please".<sup>87)</sup>

Exercising that freedom of choice which gave emancipation its essential meaning, the freed slaves refused to work for individuals who had treated them inhumanely,<sup>88)</sup> and avoided certain types of labour. Coloured females showed a particular aversion for domestic service,<sup>89)</sup> the combined effect of observing the idleness of middle class white women, and being the recipients of their excessive demands.<sup>90)</sup> At least one farmer claimed, however, that coloured families disliked sending their daughters into "constant" domestic service for fear they would commit adultery with the farmers and produce bastards!<sup>91)</sup> As "the better [viz. white] classes of men and still more, the women, would not become servants on any terms",<sup>92)</sup> "a great scarcity of house servants [resulted] in the most respectable families"<sup>93)</sup> and wages were "exorbitantly high".<sup>94)</sup>

Emancipation produced in the employers two complementary sets of attitudes. The one was based on inchoate feelings of class antagonism; the other reflected specifically racist attitudes, forged in the earlier slave period when possession of a black skin had become identified with servitude.<sup>95)</sup> Thus there were employers who castigated the whole labouring class, without mention of colour, as a worthless and idle bunch. Asked to comment on the efficacy of contracts under the 1841 Master and Servants Ordinance, the Caledon magistrate answered: "It is wholly unnecessary and absolutely useless to make distinctions between native servants, emigrants, eman-

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84. S.A.C.A., 29.11.1845.

85. Z.A., 28.12.1838, A.J. Louw, Koeberg wheat farmer.

86. S.A.C.A., 22.1.1840.

87. M & S, 1849, p. 82.

88. S.A.C.A., 22.1.1840; 29.1.1840, Capt. Blanckenberg, who could keep neither white juvenile nor freedman labour.

89. S.A.C.A., 3.3.1839; see G. Nicholson, *The Cape and its Colonists*, pp. 75—6.

90. Irons, *op. cit.*, p. 66, "General usefulness being the domestic rule."

91. S.A.C.A., 25.11.1848, C van der Schalk.

92. M & S, 1849, p. 100, W Kinnear, Beaufort (West) J.P., municipal commissioner, member of road board, secretary of the School Commission.

93. M & S, 1849, p. 150, J F Malan, J.P. Ecksteen (Field Cornet, Slot van de Paarl).

94. W Newman, *Biographical Memoir of John Montagu* (London and Cape Town, 1855), p. 50, qu. the Governor, Maitland to Sec. of State.

95. Compare the West Indies. An article in *The Colonial Magazine*, Vol. 1, Aug.—Dec. 1842, p. 576, enjoined the colonists to "divest themselves of every remnant of the prejudice which attached to colour, and was nurtured during the existence of slavery".

cipated slaves or liberated Africans whose apprenticeship has expired;"<sup>96)</sup> even white servants, it appears, found "a fixed servitude of years ... irksome".<sup>97)</sup>

But since the composition of the labouring class continued to be overwhelmingly black, the employers' discussions about the work force focussed primarily on purported racial characteristics. There were champions of the indigenous peoples, such as John Fairbairn, editor of the *S.A. Commercial Advertiser*, who insisted that "Europeans in similar circumstances exhibited precisely the same *character* as that ascribed to the worst of our native labourers — or rather a character decidedly worse". "Have the European labourers on distant farms," he enquired of his readers, "been found more steady in this colony than the natives? Either as domestics or as out-of-door servants? Circumstances made both what they were." Put Europeans in the position of coloureds at the Cape, and they would "soon show the superiority of their race, or rather of their training, by conduct immeasurably more heinous".<sup>98)</sup> The Cape's labouring population was "more docile, less encroaching and more easily satisfied than the labouring classes of any other country we have seen ... Considering their poverty, the manner in which they have been brought into the colony, the state in which they have been held in it, and the great change suddenly made in their social condition, we think their conduct without a parallel and beyond all praise".<sup>99)</sup>

Fairbairn's enthusiasm did not reflect the norm among Cape rural employers. The employers' determination to retain a cheap labour force manifested itself in attacks on the labourers' behaviour, on the grounds of supposedly inherent characteristics, which made him incapable of being anything but an unskilled labourer. "The offspring of former colonial slaves are seldom inclined to steady hard work ... The facile Hottentot is well disposed but easily led astray."<sup>100)</sup> Paradoxically this was coupled with the belief noted before that exposure to "civilization" would obliterate these less agreeable qualities, without somehow affecting the willingness to work. Inconsistency was, however, avoided in practice, by doing little to improve the labourers' situation and consequently the change in the social condition of ex-slaves and Khoi was hardly a substantive one. In 1845 Arbousset still found among whites an "obstinate ... desire to retain them in chains of ignorance and in the bonds of poverty".

It was the employers who felt ill-used. "Want of kindness is not chargeable upon the white inhabitants as a body," W Armstrong, J.P. in the Somerset East district, claimed, "and I think the want of sympathy between them and the laboring classes is attributable mainly to the unsatisfactory behaviour of the latter."<sup>101)</sup> The undoubted labour shortage (far more severe in the Eastern than Western districts of the colony)<sup>102)</sup> was blamed primarily on what were conceived as the moral shortcomings of the work force. The accusation that the "otherwise rising settlement at Port Elizabeth" was being severely affected by the "idle, dissolute and wandering habits of the labour-

96. *M & S*, 1849, p. 10; p. 42, Richard Wolfe, Wynberg magistrate.

97. *M & S*, 1849, p. 98, W Kinnear.

98. *S.A.C.A.*, 25.7.1840.

99. *ibid.*, 23.3.1839.

100. 1288, XXXVII, (1850), Kaffir tribes, C Bell to Sec. to Government, 31.1.1850; see also MacGilchrist, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

101. Compare *The Colonial Magazine*, Vol. 3, 1843, p. 474. "None of the evils which have arisen in this colony can be imputed to the hostility of the planters."

102. *C.A.*, L.C.A., Vol. 12, M 90 of 12.10.1841, Napier to Sec. of State Russell, 15.3.1841.

ing population and more especially of the colored portion of it",<sup>103)</sup> was supported by the governor, Napier, himself.<sup>104)</sup>

The list of misdemeanours was endless. They were improvident,<sup>105)</sup> and drank to excess.<sup>106)</sup> "Keep brandy from a Hottentot and he is an obedient man, give it to him and he becomes saucy and worthless,"<sup>107)</sup> was a commonly expressed belief. They were inordinately insolent to their employers. "It is astonishing to one going from this colony to England," John Molteno, later the Cape's first premier, told the House of Assembly at its opening session in 1854, "to see the deference and respect which the servant class show towards their employers ... the difference is really very striking."

Khoi "fecklessness, ingratitude, dishonesty" were, MacGilchrist complained, "displayed in a constant proneness to the commission of petty thefts".<sup>108)</sup> "The lower ranks of life" would rather steal than work, the Legislative Council was told by the Cape merchant, Hamilton Ross.<sup>109)</sup> The coloured people of the colony were "addicted to lazy indolence ... supporting themselves and families on palmiet and tortoisés gathered by the riverside rather than take work which was offered to them".<sup>110)</sup>

This last statement indicates a failure to realise that the Khoi might be reluctant finally to abandon a way of life which had traditionally served their needs. For above all, it was the refusal to establish a settled, contractual relationship with an employer which most irked the proprietors. Some saw this as an independence which the labouring poor of whatever colour had no right to possess;<sup>111)</sup> others as an inherent, and therefore ineradicable, restlessness. However its causes were defined, physical mobility was the distinguishing characteristic of the Cape's labour force to the extent that the coloured population's numbers could "not be ascertained with any accuracy".<sup>112)</sup>

These charges were widespread and continuous in the decades following emancipation, and were generally linked with accusations of contract-breaking which cost the farmer money. "Coloured people ... do not fulfil their engagements," wrote a Dutch farmer, J S Du Plesie [sic] of Worcester.<sup>113)</sup> A farmer's labourers would frequently abscond after they had received advances on their wages; and because this occurred most often at ploughing and harvest time, or before the end of the month, employers believed this was a deliberate ploy to sabotage farming operations. "They try to thwart us ... by leaving us suddenly when we feel most the want of their services."<sup>114)</sup>

Accusations that the missionaries were party to such obstructionism inevitably resulted in a reassessment of the latter's rôle by both friend and enemy. As none of the mission stations had sufficient lands to support the great increase in their population

103. *C.A.*, L.C.A., Vol. 11, M 67 of 3.8.1840.

104. *C.A.*, L.C.A. Vol. 12, M 90 of 12.10.1841; G.H. 23/13, No. 20, 15.3.1841.

105. *S.A.C.A.*, 1.6.1842, F.W. Reitz.

106. *M & S*, 1849, p. 180, Rev. N Smit, Grahamstown. This evil was exacerbated after 1847 when a change in the licensing system enabled more canteens to open.

107. *M & S*, 1849, p. 97, W C Hobson, Uitenhage J.P.; *S.A.C.A.*, 16.1.1841, claimed one-tenth of the labour force was being destroyed by drink.

108. *op. cit.*, p. 23.

109. *S.A.C.A.*, 12.2.1840, Legislative Council debates.

110. *M & S*, 1849, p. 81. Capt. Buchanan, Swellendam; see also p. 23, Malmesbury magistrate, on the indolence of the females particularly.

111. See Godlonton, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

112. 1851 Census.

113. *M & S*, 1849, p. 174.

114. *S.A.C.A.*, 15.5.1841, letter from a Tarka landowner.

after emancipation, ex-slaves as well as the older established residents depended on farm — and to a lesser extent, town — labour requirements for a living.<sup>115)</sup> This practice of going out to work may have been at least partly responsible for Khoi-ex-slave dissension at the Zuurbraak mission towards the end of the 1840s.<sup>116)</sup> A small minority of farmers recognised the missions' value as "reservoirs of laborers, where in seedtime and harvest, every good farmer can obtain that supply of laborers which he is in need of".<sup>117)</sup> MacGilchrist approved the missionaries' inculcation in blacks of a taste "for bodily comfort ... a settled home ... domestic affection and ... kindred ties", all of which "must contribute to their civilization, by drawing betwixt them and the wandering savage, a marked line of demarcation; and it ought ... to promote amongst them industrious habits".<sup>118)</sup>

The farmers thus had good reason to be grateful to the mission stations. By housing the families of seasonal workers they subsidised the low wages paid for agricultural work; to that extent, the missions were analogous to the 20th century African reserves. Yet the generally accepted attitude was to attack them for *depriving* farmers "of one of the surest means of securing laborers and domestics",<sup>119)</sup> thus creating an artificial labour shortage.<sup>120)</sup> The Khoi, even MacGilchrist claimed, used the missions as "a refuge, not from oppression, not from suffering, not from want, but from labour".<sup>121)</sup>

This accusation that the missions siphoned off labour and encouraged idleness perpetuated their earlier reputation of harbouring runaway slaves.<sup>122)</sup> Complaints that Genadendal particularly, "unsettled" its inhabitants, and "render[ed] them unpleasant and troublesome servants";<sup>123)</sup> that some missionaries forced their congregations to attend catechism classes "at very inconvenient hours";<sup>124)</sup> or that "ultra philanthropic views ... [would further break down] that feeling of respect which coloured people have for the white man ... [and] give the natives a feeling that they are equal to white people";<sup>125)</sup> were all simply the responses of employers faced with labourers who had a legitimate, but unwontedly enhanced view of their own worth.

The numbers of purported idlers were grossly exaggerated, as Judge Menzies found in his investigation of Genadendal and Elim; on the contrary, the Moravian work ethic actively discouraged idleness.<sup>126)</sup> Moreover, despite the inadequacy of the rewards, the mission inhabitant who hired himself out at harvest time was beginning to learn "something of the relative value of money and labour",<sup>127)</sup> and thus to enjoy the possession of cash.

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115. B Krüger, *The Pear Tree Blossoms* (Genadendal, 1966), p. 213; Bunbury, *op. cit.*, p. 122; J. Backhouse, *Narrative of a Visit to the Mauritius and South Africa* (London, 1844), pp. 78, 98, 108, 620.
116. *C.A.*, L.C.A., Vol. 26, M 2 of 28.1.1852, R. Southey, Swellendam Magistrate, 8.1.1852.
117. *S.A.C.A.*, 25.11.1848, C. van der Schalk.
118. *op. cit.*, p. 24.
119. *S.A.C.A.*, 19.11.1845, Arbousset.
120. *M & S*, 1849, Clanwilliam magistrate.
121. *op. cit.*, p. 25.
122. See for example, *M & S* 1849, p. 80, M J van Breda, Zoetendalsvallei, Caledon J.P.; p. 103, A J Louw, Koeberg; p. 171, G Rattray, secretary to the board of public roads, Swellendam; p. 207, R W Eaton, broker, shipping agent and M.L.A.
123. *M & S*, 1849, p. 123, H T Vigne; also p. 212, J.J.L. Smuts.
124. *M & S*, 1849, p. 189, P J de Vos, Worcester.
125. *Parl. Debs.*, 1854, p. 86, J. Molteno.
126. Krüger, *op. cit.*, pp. 196–7.
127. Backhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

Yet increasingly, from the mid-1830s, even friends of the missions questioned their underlying philosophy. Did they not encourage “a want of that independence and energy of character among the people to the formation of which, an independent possession of property greatly conduces”?<sup>128)</sup> Ten years later, in 1854, Charles Fairbridge, Cape liberal and member of the first House of Assembly, asserted that “while these institutions exist under the present system, the Hottentot has a constant temptation ... [to retire thence] ... to the detriment of himself and to the injury of his employer”.<sup>129)</sup> In sum, had not the time come to abandon the traditional paternalism of the missionaries, confine their activities to spiritual duties and declare their stations “open villages”?

In 1836, J Fawcett, soldier-missionary, while admitting that these institutions encouraged improvidence among the Khoi, coupled the need for their continued existence with the illiberalism of whites “and their disparagement of men on the grounds of their being clothed in a different colored skin”.<sup>130)</sup> A century later, the historian, W M MacMillan, carried this point a logical step further. Were, he asked, “the principles of an individualist political economy ... applicable even to a backward people?”;<sup>131)</sup> for such individualism implied that the mission inhabitants were able to compete on open markets against whites who had structured the social system so as to dominate it.

Until the profound social changes postulated by these questions took place, the mission inhabitants were a landless proletariat requiring protection; and casual labour, with its hazards to the moral well-being of the labourers, remained the norm. The Moravians, for example, continually found that in January, after harvesting, and again between May and July during ploughing, many of their charges “had to be put under church discipline for drunkenness and immorality because the farmers had given them as much intoxicating liquor as they desired”.<sup>132)</sup>

When in 1848 the Legislative Council tested the attitudes of officials, missionaries and proprietors towards breaches of contract under the Master and Servants legislation, only the missionaries indicated that they found the legislation too severe. All the magistrates, and 33 out of the 39 J.P.s (“glorious unpaid gentlemen”) agreed that the existing punishments were unsatisfactorily lenient. A typical reply was that of the Albert (Burghersdorp) magistrate. “Forfeit of a month’s wages is inadequate and in most cases here, impossible to be inflicted ... Imprisonment with hard labor is salutary and flogging in aggravated cases, much to be recommended.”<sup>133)</sup>

Spare diet, solitary confinement, the stocks — anything but forfeiture of wages was recommended as condign punishment. Yet at the same time, because it was felt that the Cape’s labour force was so unutterably degraded, all punishment was viewed merely as retributive rather than ameliorative. “[They] have no respect for themselves ... think it is no degradation to be dismissed or imprisoned for theft, intemperance, in-

128. *ibid.*, p. 110; see also A R Booth (ed.), *George Champion. The Journal of an American Missionary in the Cape Colony 1835* (S.A. Library, Cape Town, 1968) pp. 17–18.

129. *Parl. Debs.*, p. 199, 3.8.1854.

130. J Fawcett, *Account of an Eighteen Months’ Residence at the Cape of Good Hope in 1835–6* (Cape Town, 1836), p. 57.

131. *The Cape Colour Question*, p. 275.

132. Krüger, *op. cit.*, p. 213, qu. Diary of Groenekloof/Mamre 7.1.1841, 13/14.1.1842, 13.1.1843, 29.1.1843.

133. *M & S, 1849*, p. 6.

solence or neglect of duty."<sup>134</sup>) "The moral effect that imprisonment would have on most white men ... is lost to many of the colored tribes here and especially the Hottentot," an Eastern frontier farmer maintained.<sup>135</sup>) Ten years later the same complaint was being brought against those Xhosa who had entered the colonial labour market as a result of the 1857 cattle killing.<sup>136</sup>)

In the period 1846—1848 employers brought before the magistrates 1 026 complaints against servants of all kinds.<sup>137</sup>) The greatest number of charges were in the Colesberg district (210), Stellenbosch (123), Wynberg (102), Malmesbury (82), Caledon (78) and Beaufort West (69). The figures suggest that dissatisfaction was mainly rural, and equally rife among pastoralists and agriculturists; and that the complaints subsumed "indiscriminately, all classes", irrespective of whether the employees were extra-colonial blacks (as in Colesberg and Beaufort West) or local Khoi and ex-slaves. Few Europeans were charged because of their small numbers. The majority of the Wynberg cases, for example, were against emancipated blacks, followed by coloureds (especially Khoi), Europeans and "Africander-Dutch" in that order.

The belief among whites that blacks were obliged to serve them died hard; hence the idiom used to express annoyance at missionary activity — "the blacks are escaping from us".<sup>138</sup>) Surrounded as they were by labourers satisfied with modest material demands, the landowners failed to appreciate the burgeoning of a small class of independent coloured peasants, struggling to accumulate livestock. A Khoi, Damon, who had saved enough to buy 8 trek oxen only did so, it was maintained, "with a degree of industry and frugality rare among his class".<sup>139</sup>) In the Colesberg district, Backhouse was told how San were accumulating stock, in one case to the value of R1 000.<sup>140</sup>) Asst.-Field Cornet Steenkamp of Colesberg was indicted in 1844 for assaulting Daniel, a San, who had, during 40 years service, saved money to buy a herd which he grazed on a Winterveld farm with the owner's consent. Daniel was regarded, not as a man of property, but as a vagrant whom Steenkamp could not allow "to live in his ward without being in service". The magistrate, acting in the spirit of the law since the passing of Ordinance 50, disputed Steenkamp's action. "He did not see why such people should be compelled to enter service which they did not desire — it was not because they had black skins they were to be thus treated — and because they did not possess a farm they were to be coerced — such characters should receive the same indulgence as other classes, and be allowed to graze their stock on the government ground."<sup>141</sup>)

This was the ideal, in a society where all men were now legally equal; where, in liberal circles, the relationship between labour and capital was seen, in terms of the current *laissez faire* philosophy, as an intrinsically symbiotic, balanced one. Thus while property might be regarded as "a divine institution",<sup>142</sup>) labourers and artisans also played an important and acknowledged rôle in the economy. They were "the means, the strength, the power, the stock in trade of the capitalist. Without them his

134. *M & S, 1849*, p. 81, Capt. Buchanan, Swellendam.

135. *M & S, 1849*, p. 155, A Gilfillan.

136. A 31-59, Petition of certain sheep farmers and others residing in the division of Somerset East.

137. See *M & S, 1849, passim*.

138. *S.A.C.A.*, 19.11.1845, Arbousset.

139. *S.A.C.A.*, 30.10.1847. It should be emphasised that "class" as used here signified "race".

140. Backhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

141. *S.A.C.A.*, 8.6.1844.

142. 1362, XXXVII, (1851), Establishment of a Representative Assembly, p. 44, J Fairbairn.

gold, his skill, his talents, his genius, his knowledge, his foreign connections ... [were] utterly useless".<sup>143)</sup>

In the Utilitarian book, the regulation of this peculiar relationship was the business of the two sides alone; the law must not interfere with "this most natural of all rights — the property a man has in his own hands and brain ... [it was] a robbery ... to compel a man to labor for less than he demands".<sup>144)</sup> "Labor being property as much as anything else," H McLachlan, committee member of the Stellenbosch Agricultural Society, agreed, "the proprietor has a right to dispose of it, or not, at such times, and in such proportions as he may think fit, and any interference with this right would evidently be an act of injustice."<sup>145)</sup> This ideal nexus could, however, be disputed by those actually involved in it. E P Thompson quotes a Manchester weaver who perceived the key fact "that labour is always sold by the poor and always bought by the rich, and that labour cannot by any possibility be stored, but must be every instant sold or every instant lost".<sup>146)</sup>

Unlike Europe, with its growing experience of "crowded populations and combinations and strikes",<sup>147)</sup> at the Cape it was feared that the "divine institution" might be endangered, not by working class violence, but by indolence and false pride. "The farmer and his property," wrote "an English farmer" in 1848, "are at the mercy of lawless, idle, unskilful and unprincipled vagrants."<sup>148)</sup> Thus "in the country districts the *masters* are more dependent on their *servants* than the *servants* are dependent on the *masters*. This is an *unnatural state*".<sup>149)</sup> This threat to the established, "natural" order was a frequently heard argument. "With the present scarcity of labor, and as the law now stands, servants are lords over their masters and hold them in perpetual fear; thus inverting the natural order of things."<sup>150)</sup> The question "why are the farmers deprived of their servants?" inevitably tended to receive the answer: "I fear the idea of becoming a 'baas' has induced many servants to leave their employers."<sup>151)</sup>

The possibility that a labouring man "looks to get higher than a labourer"<sup>152)</sup> was anathema to a ruling class, nurtured in the Protestant ethic, with its central belief that society could best be served by everyone "doing his duty in that state of life to which God has called him".<sup>153)</sup> Hard work as the entrée to "civilization" was given a religious significance. "To be a true Christian," J. Vintcent maintained, "I ought to be an industrious, useful member of society."<sup>154)</sup> "Hard labour," said Robert Godlonton, editor of the *Grahamstown Journal* and member of the Legislative Council, "is the wicket-gate by which we all enter into civilization: ... work is the only thing that can lead to civilization."<sup>155)</sup>

(To be continued)

143. *S.A.C.A.*, 26.6.1840.

144. *ibid.*, 10.7.1839; see also *S.A.C.A.*, 7.10.1848, "all that government has to do is to hold ... [both sides] to their agreement".

145. *M & S*, 1849, p. 169.

146. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

147. 1362, Representative Assembly, p. 54, W Porter, Attorney General; c.f. Molteno's comment above.

148. *S.A.C.A.*, 29.1.1848.

149. *M & S*, 1849, p. 127–8, J Vintcent, Mossel Bay J.P. (his italics); see also p. 100, W. Kinnear.

150. *M & S*, 1849, p. 153, Dr. G Eveleigh, Riversdale district surgeon.

151. *Parl. Debs*, 1854, p. 405, C L Stretch.

152. *C.A.*, L.C.A., Vol. 25, M 15 of 19.12.1851, Rev. Stegmann.

153. *C.A.*, L.C.A., Vol. 10, M 28 of 7.9.1839.

154. *M & S*, 1849, p. 126.

155. *Parl. Debs.*, 1854, p. 401–2, 30.8.1854; see also p. 404, Fairbairn.

156. G 24-63, Report of the Education Commission. Appendix VII, p. 15, Rev. J Baker, Swellendam; see also *Infant Schools*, 4th Annual Report, 1834.