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## Introduction

The roots of this book lie in the personal correspondence of the Quaker physician, scientist, and activist, Dr Thomas Hodgkin. Via Hodgkin's archive – through an exploration of his passions, projects, and relationships – it explores British conceptions of the 'rights of Aborigines' during the mid-nineteenth century. In 1837, in the wake of the Slave Emancipation Act, Hodgkin and the abolitionist Thomas Fowell Buxton co-founded the Aborigines' Protection Society. Their aim was to collect and disseminate information about how indigenous peoples' lives and livelihoods were being devastated by settler colonialism across the globe.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Hodgkin imagined that, alerted to the nature and scale of harm, abolitionists and supporters of missionary societies would create a public outcry, persuading the imperial government to prioritize the protection of indigenous peoples and their rights in British colonies. In fact, over the next three decades Britons would become wedded to policies of free trade, while concern for former slaves mutated into frustration with ailing Caribbean economies and the perceived laziness of those emancipated. Racialization and fear of the colonized 'other' intensified in the era of rebellions in India in 1857–8 and Jamaica in 1865. Meanwhile, emigration to settler colonial societies burgeoned, as Britons responded to famine and hardship at home by seeking landownership, mineral wealth, and political enfranchisement abroad. By 1866, when Hodgkin succumbed to a fever in Palestine, the impact of British settler colonialism on indigenous peoples was far more profound than thirty years earlier, while the imperial government had less power to intervene. Yet, the repudiation of indigenous rights in Britain's settler colonies was frequently dressed up in policies of 'protection', and colonial states drew on a discourse of 'humanitarian governance' to implement policies that entailed dispossession from land, family dislocation, and cultural denigration.

<sup>1</sup> Except in quoted source material, this book uses 'indigenous' in place of the generic nineteenth-century terms 'native' and 'aboriginal'. Where possible, specific indigenous peoples are referred to by the names preferred today by their descendants. The use of 'Indigenous' is reserved for the (often multiple) peoples of particular regions and for twenty-first-century activists and politics.

Via Thomas Hodgkin and the Aborigines' Protection Society, I offer a new perspective on these critical decades, examining both the extent to which British campaigners had any success in defending indigenous rights and the degree to which their construction of a 'civilized' indigenous subject actually contributed to indigenous dispossession and denigration. Like the Aborigines' Protection Society, this book is metrocentric with pretensions to an imperial (and at times even global) remit. In addition to Hodgkin's extensive and evocative archive, I have been driven by two concerns. The first is to improve understandings of activism in Britain itself, through an analysis of the metropolitan manifestations of what might be termed 'imperial humanitarianism'. Into this category fall some well-known campaigns: anti-slavery; missionary endeavours; protests against *sati*; and attempts to regulate and improve conditions for the empire's indentured labourers. While such campaigns shared much, including personnel, discourse and participants' fervour, they also diverged in terms of their supporter bases, popularity, aims and strategies, levels of success, and interaction with government. Many distinct facets of such activism have been subject to historical scrutiny, but more remains to be done, particularly in terms of differentiating campaigns and organizations in terms of their regional reach within Britain, international links, connections with different spheres of society (whether economic, scientific, or religious), and relationship to government. In the first half of *Protecting the Empire's Humanity*, therefore, I attempt to complicate the 'metropole' and to stress divergences as well as interconnections within 'imperial humanitarianism'. My other central concern has been to contextualize the Aborigines' Protection Society's efforts to protect the rights of indigenous peoples in Britain's settler colonies during the transition to settler self-government. The middle decades of the nineteenth century saw constant and profound assaults on indigenous lives and livelihoods in Australia, British North America, Southern Africa, and New Zealand. British-based non-government activists struggled to build and maintain reliable lines of communication with the colonies, frequently failed to comprehend or adequately respond to the intelligence they did procure, and were themselves subject to attack from government and settler parties regarding their 'interference'. The second half of this book thus explores how the Aborigines' Protection Society and Hodgkin understood concepts such as 'civilization', 'amalgamation', 'protection', and 'rights' between the society's foundation in 1837 and Hodgkin's death in 1866. By exploring how their views diverged from missionaries, the Colonial Office, colonial governments and, crucially, indigenous people themselves, I reassess those denigrated as 'telescopic philanthropists' and their limited, but illuminating, influence on policies attributed to 'imperial humanitarianism'.

As *Protecting the Empire's Humanity* is intended to disentangle the sometimes contradictory ideas and practices often bundled together as 'humanitarianism' (whether in metropolitan society or diverse colonial arenas), this

introduction begins to historicize not only concepts deployed by mid-century actors, but also the terminology subsequently used by historians to describe those actors and write their histories. It surveys important recent developments in historical understandings of empire, and its relationship to Britain, including the rise of both 'new imperial history' and settler colonial studies, as well as work on indigenous autonomy, imperial humanitarianism, and indigenous protection. First, however, I place Thomas Hodgkin's archive within its historical and historiographical context, and consider the opportunities that marginal and failing organizations and ideas present to historians of Britain's empire.

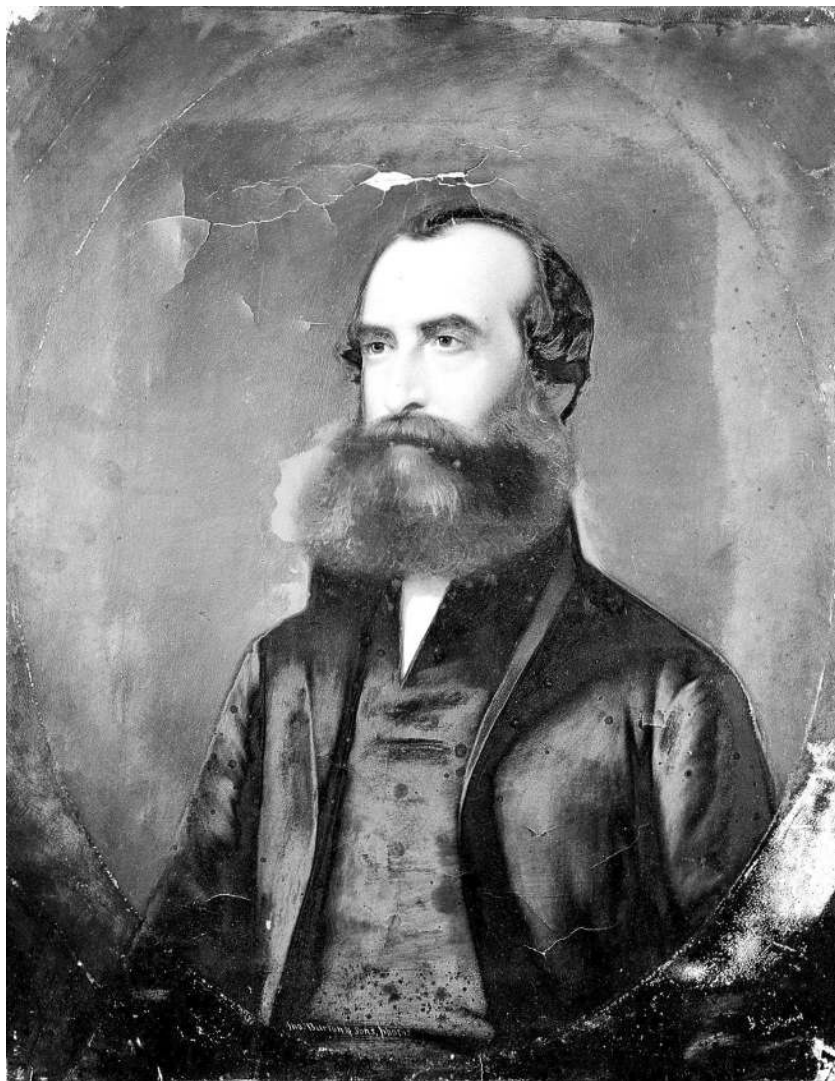
### An Activist's Archive

The exploration of Britain's imperial history presented in this book is profoundly shaped by Thomas Hodgkin's personal papers, today housed in the Wellcome Library in London, and what they reveal of his philanthropic, medical, and scientific interests and networks. The volume and the breadth of that archive has allowed me to trace and assess a wide array of influences on 'imperial humanitarianism'. Hodgkin's life is not a new subject for historians, and I have drawn heavily, and with gratitude, on the most important biography of Hodgkin, *Perfecting the World*, by the historian of medicine, Amalie M. Kass and her medical doctor partner, Edward Kass. Though written over thirty years ago, *Perfecting the World* was also grounded in Hodgkin's archive (then in private hands); it offers a rich and comprehensive account of Hodgkin's medical career, personal life, and activism.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Amalie and Edward Kass, I have not attempted to document or evaluate Hodgkin's medical achievements beyond considering their implications for his activities connected to indigenous rights. I have also benefited from intervening decades of advances and debates in the fields of British and imperial history, some of which are explored in this chapter and others later in the book.

Born in 1798 to a respected Quaker family, Thomas Hodgkin grew up in Tottenham and studied pharmacy and medicine in Brighton, London, Edinburgh, and Paris, before touring Europe, initially as personal physician to the Jewish magnate and philanthropist Moses Montefiore. Returning to London in 1825, Hodgkin began private medical practice from a house at 20 Finsbury Circus, which he shared with another Quaker doctor, Henry Tuckett. Hodgkin's studies and his London life were supported by a series of legacies, which rendered him financially secure, indeed comfortable, despite 'constant lamentations of penury'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kass and Kass, *Perfecting the World*. See also Rose, *Curator of the Dead*; Rosenfeld, *Thomas Hodgkin*.

<sup>3</sup> Kass and Kass, *Perfecting the World*, p. 509.



**Figure 1.1** ‘Thomas Hodgkin’, portrait by John Burton. Credit: Wellcome Collection, London. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

Most notably, the 1818 inheritance of the estate of his great-uncle and namesake, Thomas Hodgkin, included property, stocks and cash worth over £8,700, which paid an annual income. On his father’s death in 1845, Hodgkin inherited his childhood Bruce Grove home, a further two houses

and at least another £2,000 in cash.<sup>4</sup> In the late 1830s, Hodgkin moved from 20 Finsbury Circus to 9 Lower Brook Street, near Grosvenor Square, before buying the spacious 35 Bedford Square in 1850 for £1,400.<sup>5</sup> Hodgkin's financial security allowed him both to be generous – supporting numerous individuals and organizations over his lifetime – and to indulge his notoriously poor business sense, whether undercharging his private patients, or embarking on new investments. As a young man, he became embroiled in a long-running and expensive saga over property in the Champs Élysées and a Parisian brickworks; later he lost money in Syrian mulberry plantations, whilst also dabbling in British and American railways.<sup>6</sup>

Alongside his private practice, Hodgkin began a glittering career as medical researcher and hospital physician, associated particularly with the Guy's Hospital Anatomy Museum, the burgeoning world of professional medical societies, and the new University of London. He researched, taught, published, and organized on cholera, lymphomas, poisons, public health, and the use of microscopes. His interests and concerns, however, ranged far beyond medicine. As a teenager, Hodgkin had been alerted to the impact of British rule on colonial subjects, fuelled by encounters within his Quaker milieu with free people of colour and Indigenous Americans. In the early 1830s he favoured unorthodox action against slavery. He actively advocated the gradual, rather than immediate, emancipation of Britain's slaves, and promoted (voluntary) Afro-Caribbean emigration to West Africa, to establish exemplary self-governing 'civilized' communities. Hodgkin also sought to provide a scientific proof of human unity that could accommodate and explain human diversity. In this pursuit, he published for the Philological Society, urged the British Association for the Advancement of Science to introduce an Ethnology Section and later co-founded the Ethnological Society of London. Hodgkin twice gave evidence to the 1835–7 House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), the 1837 report of which historians regard as one of the most significant articulations of humanitarian thought on Britain's nineteenth-century imperial policy. In the wake of the select committee, and a mental and physical collapse that incapacitated Hodgkin through much of the year, Hodgkin co-founded the Aborigines' Protection Society, a London-based voluntary organization devoted to protecting the rights of indigenous peoples across and beyond the British Empire. The society's co-founder, Thomas Fowell Buxton, had been both the parliamentary champion of the Slave Emancipation Act and the chairman of the Select Committee on Aborigines; high-profile, well-connected, and ceaseless in his efforts on behalf of the

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 36, 48, 428, 434, 509.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 329, 434.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 102, 120, 126, 129, 330, 371, 428, 437.

vulnerable, he was an ideal first president. However, Buxton and Hodgkin diverged on the best way to tackle the ill-effects of British imperialism, and Buxton's attention was re-directed from the APS to other causes, including the African Civilization Society. Hodgkin was, and until his death in 1866 would remain, the central figure within the Aborigines' Protection Society: to a significant degree, its campaigns were shaped by priorities he identified, drew on his correspondence networks, and were often supported by his financial largesse. Frequently, first from Lower Brook Street, and then from Bedford Square, Hodgkin hosted the society's committee meetings, library, and visitors, and provided a base for its work. After Hodgkin died, the society continued to operate until 1909 when it merged with the Anti-Slavery Society, today known as Anti-Slavery International.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the organizational records, whether minutes of committee meetings, account books, or registers of correspondence, that documented the early decades of the Aborigines' Protection Society no longer exist. Their remnants – mainly correspondence with informants – are housed within the Anti-Slavery Society collection at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. However, together with the society's extensive publications, and, above all, Thomas Hodgkin's exceptionally rich personal archive, those remnants connect the stuttering, but highly revealing, Aborigines' Protection Society to the domains of empire and imperial humanitarianism, as well as medicine, science, religion, trade, and politics. Alongside the society's scant early records in Oxford, its memorials and addresses to imperial and colonial governments remain in national collections, and were almost always also published by the society. In general, the society's publications were numerous: they included both annual reports and accounts of annual general meetings, and a range of stand-alone pamphlets. From 1847, the society published a periodical, *The Colonial Intelligencer or Aborigines' Friend*. This appeared at intervals varying from monthly to (in 1863–4) biennial; its name also fluctuated: for consistency it is referred to as the *Colonial Intelligencer* throughout this book.<sup>8</sup> Before 1847, the society had episodically published *Extracts from the Papers and Proceedings of the Aborigines' Protection Society* (hereafter *Extracts*) and sought to place accounts of its work and findings in different newspapers and periodicals, as is explored in Chapter 2. Taken together, these sources hint at networks that included colonizers and colonized in every inhabited continent.

<sup>7</sup> Bourne, *The Aborigines Protection Society*; Swaisland, 'The Aborigines Protection Society' (2000); Swaisland, 'The Aborigines Protection Society' (1968). The most recent account of the APS is Heartfield, *The Aborigines' Protection Society*.

<sup>8</sup> *The Colonial Intelligencer*; or, *Aborigines' Friend*, 1:1 (March 1847) – 4:21, 22 (July–December 1854); *Aborigines' Friend*, and the *Colonial Intelligencer*, new series, 1:1 (1855) – 3:9 (December 1871). Hereafter, in notes, *CI*.



But it is Thomas Hodgkin's personal archive – located in the Wellcome Library on Euston Road in London – that constitutes the backbone of this book. It contains correspondence between Hodgkin and more than one thousand individuals and organizations. Hundreds of these letters relate to the subject matter of this book and were sent to or received from all over the globe. While many of the individual exchanges they document are dishearteningly one-sided, brief, incomplete, or bereft of necessary context and detail, the archive as a whole reveals the complexity, nuances, and contradictions of early Victorian colonialism across a broad geographical canvas. In particular, the archive echoes the clamour of mid-century London, its anxious engagements with provincial Britain, and often interrupted and fragmentary relations with the rest of the world. It documents the personal and intellectual intersections between officials, politicians, abolitionists, imperial speculators, physicians, ethnologists, and geographers, and leading representatives of Britain's Anglican, dissenting, Quaker and Jewish communities, both as individuals and through the voluntary and learned societies they formed and utilized. Hodgkin's archive is also populated – if in some cases frustratingly sparsely – by the opinionated voices of Ojibwa, BaSotho, and Māori chiefs; emancipated slaves; West Indian planters; Indian lawyers and doctors; the African-American colonizers of Liberia; indigenous missionaries and clerics; white missionaries and explorers in the Middle East, Africa, North America, Asia, and Australasia; and colonial merchants, public servants, and settlers. Its study reveals fifty years' worth of unlikely connections, sustained relationships, and closely argued, if sometimes contradictory, cases.

The decades covered by Hodgkin's archive – essentially those of his adult life, from the 1820s through to the mid-1860s – were transformational for both Britain and the British Empire. While Hodgkin, in the early 1820s, took advantage of the European peace to travel abroad for the first time, studying in Paris and then touring the continent, Britain struggled with the social and economic aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. Later in the decade, as Hodgkin inserted himself within professional and scientific networks in London, Britain's Catholics, Dissenters and Jews achieved a new level of 'emancipation', and the opportunity to enter more fully into the nation's civic life. In the 1830s, when Hodgkin began to agitate more directly on behalf of the empire's colonized subjects, Whig governments – as well as emancipating slaves and opening up vast colonial 'wastelands' to British emigrants – legislated for unprecedented domestic political, welfare, and workplace reforms. The economic distress and political agitation that marked the 1840s in Britain and Ireland would directly affect Britain's commitment to its colonies: pressure from the domestic working class, vulnerable to the revolutionary fervour of Europe, took precedence over the lives and livelihoods of emancipated slaves, displaced indigenous peoples, and also Irish peasants. In the wake of the mid-century, new forms of economic orthodoxy and political organization took

hold, while Britain confronted complex foreign policy issues – and their consequences – whether in the Crimea or the war-torn United States. Both shaped Hodgkin's interests, as he sought to re-organize medical education and professional connections via the Provincial Medical Association (forerunner of the British Medical Association) and operated on the periphery of Britain's diplomatic affairs, accompanying Moses Montefiore on his missions to Egypt and Palestine in 1857; Rome and the Vatican in 1859; Morocco in 1863–4; and the Middle East again in 1866.

If metropolitan Britain was changing, so too was its empire. Between 1830 and 1870 most settler colonies became largely self-governing, many with electoral franchises significantly wider than Britain's. Elsewhere, imperial rule from London became more, rather than less, intrusive. Thus, after the Indian rebellions of 1857–8, the British government assumed direct control of India from the East India Company. In the West Indian colonies, economic stagnation and social dislocation followed the 1830s' emancipation of slaves, undermining the 'great experiment' of free labour. Even before the 1865 Morant Bay rebellion and its harsh suppression by Governor Edward Eyre, Jamaica's planter class favoured direct British rule over the possibility of a black majority in its legislature. Jamaica's 1866 reversion to Crown Colony government, a transition soon followed by most other British West Indian colonies, was indicative of both repression in the colonies and the increasing prominence of 'race' and race-based explanations within British culture. Many metropolitan Britons seemed at once complacent about justifications for empire, citing Britain's role in ending slavery and the slave trade, and yet highly anxious about its possession, as was most evident during periods of violent challenge to British rule in Canada, the Cape Colony, Ceylon, and New Zealand, as well as India and Jamaica. British emigrants to the settler colonies were likely to share these views, but also sought to assert their own 'rights' in distinction to both Britons and indigenous peoples.

These imperial shifts, at home and abroad, shaped Thomas Hodgkin's life and colonial interests. His work through the Aborigines' Protection Society arose in the aftermath of slave emancipation, as notions of 'free labour' came into apparent conflict with the increasingly dominant commitment to 'free trade'. By the 1850s the society's effective capacity was shaped, and in Hodgkin's view, undermined, by the transition to responsible government in the settler colonies: self-government tended both to intensify and to enshrine in law the dispossession of indigenous populations, while boosting settler colonizers' sense of their own 'rights'. Tracing these events – sometimes explicit, and sometimes implicit – through Hodgkin's archive provides a particular kind of access to the mid-nineteenth century. The result is neither a straightforward history of humanitarian activism on behalf of indigenous peoples, nor a chronological study of the Aborigines' Protection Society, nor, indeed, a traditional biography. Instead, Hodgkin's archive is used to



reconstruct a series of incomplete but extensive interlocking networks. That archive shows us how ideas about humanity, race, civilization, colonization, human rights, land, religion, class, gender, and society were conveyed between different parts of the world and in relation to quite different topics. It provides us with the opportunity to connect the rise of settler self-government and the effects of Britain's changing world role to critical shifts in terms of British attitudes to race and assessments of the 'potential' of non-Europeans.

### **The Aborigines' Protection Society: An Illuminating Failure?**

Thomas Hodgkin's archive reveals patterns of concern, blame and resignation emerging from his response to a changing empire and new evidence of the derogation of indigenous rights. Between the society's 1837 foundation and Hodgkin's 1866 demise, that archive offers a window onto some of the empire's ethical, political, and social dimensions. The society's persistence and success in disseminating evidence of colonial conditions and injustices, and its particular critique of the premise and manifestations of settler colonialism stand as a rebuff to the notion that accepting indigenous dispossession, or indeed colonialism, was an inevitable consequence of life in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. As this book demonstrates, Thomas Hodgkin and the Aborigines' Protection Society were inconsistent, Eurocentric, chauvinistic, paternalistic, and unclear in their denunciations of imperial policy and practice. Nevertheless, the criticisms of colonialism they made underline the fact that British policy makers chose to pursue policies known to be destructive and dehumanizing for indigenous peoples, while the British public chose not to object to those policies.

As this suggests, the study of the Aborigines' Protection Society is most revealing precisely because it did not achieve its aim of securing the rights of indigenous peoples in British colonies. While long-lasting, the society stemmed very few of the many gross injustices visited on Britain's colonized indigenous subjects during the nineteenth century. In comparison, for example, to some of its anti-slavery counterparts and the missionary movement, the society had little impact. Yet its support for indigenous rights was widely noticed, and its influence sometimes exaggerated at the time by both settler colonizers and indigenous peoples and subsequently by historians. Moreover, the society's very marginality meant that Hodgkin and its committee spent considerable time agonizing over reasons for its successes and failures, and comparing the Aborigines' Protection Society to other organizations in similar fields. In itself, this introspection can be illuminating.

However, while the society's reflections on the dimensions of its failure and the reasons for it are revealing, they must be treated with caution. Hodgkin, in particular, portrayed the society as small, unorthodox, and unpopular. He elided these real vulnerabilities with a sense of moral superiority to other

Britons and colonizers, constantly reiterating, for example, that the Aborigines' Protection Society was non-sectarian and presented only objective intelligence, when in fact it was highly influenced by metropolitan attitudes, mores, and prejudices even when it sought to disrupt them. Moreover, the society had more confidence than was warranted that it invariably, or even ordinarily, pursued policies that were desired by, or would have had desirable consequences for, indigenous peoples. While the positions articulated by the Aborigines' Protection Society were constantly evolving, this book examines areas of particular tension in its programme. First, the uneven degree to which the society actually treated, or regarded, all humans as equal, or indeed all indigenous peoples as equal is apparent across the period considered in *Protecting the Empire's Humanity*. Through its first three decades, the Aborigines' Protection Society was reasonably consistent in maintaining that all humans possessed the same rights – indeed, 'human rights' – but equally, it routinely differentiated between classes, populations, and genders when it came to recognizing individuals' (or societies') capacities to exert these rights, or their capacity to exert them 'well' or appropriately. Like other British humanitarians, Thomas Hodgkin tended to propose arguments for the unity of humanity that were dependent on flattening imperial diversity. As Alan Lester argues, such generalization played a 'crucial role in situating Britain's diverse overseas colonies within a common humanitarian narrative', whether in relation to a universal 'British settler' or to 'Aborigines'.<sup>9</sup> Ideas developed in relation to one region of empire were routinely applied to a series of other colonies, sometimes of quite divergent types. While it proved (unsurprisingly) problematic to apply in practice ideas generated in response to one set of problems to other, vastly different, contexts, such reductionism was thought unproblematic in itself; indeed, as this book will show, it was celebrated by the Aborigines' Protection Society. The society's consciousness of its insecurity, while illuminating, would also prove paralyzing in some respects. Feeling, from the outset, that stemming colonization was impossible, the society argued – sometimes as much to convince itself as to persuade others – that forms of colonization, which were mutually uplifting for indigenous peoples and colonizers alike, were possible. It sought to explain what these would look like, and how they should be implemented, to its metropolitan, colonial, and indigenous audiences. Across the decades, the society and Hodgkin continued to collate, to disseminate, and to hector despite almost constant setbacks. By so doing, they helped shape the nineteenth-century discourse of 'humanitarianism', and thus – if sometimes in unexpected and undesirable ways – the nature of British colonialism. Historians have characterized the Aborigines' Protection Society as either contributing to colonialism (if perhaps

<sup>9</sup> Lester, 'Humanitarians and White Settlers', 64.