Name: *Triumph in the Tropics, 1959*

Section name: Part Two, Chapter XXIII, The Story of Sugar and the Kanaka in the Trash-Pile

Pages: 288–298

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE STORY OF SUGAR AND THE KANAKA IN THE TRASH-PILE

The sugar industry is Queensland’s greatest tropical industry, and ranks next to wool in the State’s economy. It is second only to wheat as Australia’s biggest crop and is fourth on the Australian export list.

The history of this great industry, which in 1957 produced one and a quarter million tons of raw sugar, worth £62 million, is full of colour, drama, and romance. Its highly organised efficiency has placed Queensland in the forefront of the world’s sugar producers, but the greatest social achievement to its credit is the effective settlement of the tropical north by white men and women and their children.

Sugar-cane is cultivated on the rich alluvial flats and valleys along 1,300 miles of Australia’s east coast, from the Clarence River in Northern New South Wales to Mossman, northernmost outpost of the industry, in North Queensland.

For forty years the Queensland sugar industry was a battleground politically and socially. Like the Southern States of America, which seceded from the Federal Union in 1861 to establish the short-lived Confederacy with slavery as its economic corner-stone, Queensland had its “peculiar institution.” The sugar industry in this State was pioneered on a system of indentured kanaka labour obtained from the Pacific Islands, which in the earliest years of the industry, as a result of the abuses of recruiting, was not far removed from slavery.

There was, indeed, a curious parallel between the attempt by the Confederate South to secede from the dominant Northern States of U.S.A. and the long-sustained political struggle by the sugar-cane

(132) "Kanaka" now accentuated by usage on the second syllable—KanAKKA—was originally a corruption of the Polynesian word "tangate" (men or people) and like it was accented on the first syllable "KAN·aka"—"TANG·ate."

(133) "The recruitment of South Sea Islanders by 'blackbirders' was described by Noel Deerr (History of Sugar, London, 1949-50) as 'conducted with a callousness and brutality equaling anything that happened in the course of the African slave trade.'" But Deerr also states: "Once landed in Queensland it does not appear that the labourers were ill-treated."
Cotton Plant
(By Courtesy of Dept. Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane)

Tobacco
(By Courtesy of the State Public Relations Bureau)

Wheat Farm in Pittsworth district.
(Contour ploughing at rear.)

PLATE LI.
(Courtesy of the Department of Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane.)
Kanakas, recruited for the Queensland canefields, being carried in boats to the brig "Para."

(From Picturesque Atlas of Australia.)

New cane farm being won from the jungle. Cane is planted right up to the edge of the jungle.

Kanakas on Sugar Cane Farm near Halifax.

(Courtesy Royal Historical Society of Queensland.)

Cane Cutting.—Teams of white men cut the cane on the farms. A fire is put through the field before cutting to get rid of the trash.

PLATE LII.

(By courtesy Colonial Sugar Refining Co.)

PLATE LIII.
Mechanical cane loader at work in the Mackay district.

A sugar mill locomotive hauling sugar cane to Mulgrave Mill, North Queensland.

PLATE LIV. (By courtesy of the Department of Agriculture and Stock.)
planters of North Queensland to secede from the dominant South, and to form their own State.\(^{(134)}\)

The first person who actually made granulated sugar in Queensland from sugar-cane grown in the Colony was John Buhot in 1862. The pioneer of sugar-growing as a commercial industry was Captain the Hon. Louis Hope (cadet of the Hopetoun family, a noble English house that subsequently gave the Commonwealth its first Governor-General). Captain Hope built beautiful old Ormiston House on Redland Bay; cleared, enclosed, and cultivated 20 acres of forest and scrub; erected a sugar mill (the first built in the Colony of Queensland); set up boiling vats for sugar manufacture, and crushed his own cane and the cane of a neighbour. In 1864 he employed fifty-four Kanakas who had been brought into the Colony by Captain Robert Towns.

The success achieved by Captain Hope in the cultivation and manufacture of sugar was recognised officially by the Queensland Parliament which voted him its thanks in 1867, and made him a grant of 2,560 acres of land on the Coomera River.\(^{(135)}\)

Captain Robert Towns, a Sydney pastoralist and merchant with Queensland interests, was responsible for the introduction of Kanakas into Queensland in 1863. Cotton-growing boomed in Queensland during the American Civil War, when cotton intended for Manchester piled up on the wharves of the blockaded ports of Savannah and Charleston. Towns acquired 4,000 acres of land on the Logan River forty miles south of Brisbane, and called this first cotton plantation “Townsvale.”

His schooner, Don Juan, on 17 August 1863, dropped anchor in the Brisbane River, bringing sixty-seven Kanakas. They had been hired at 10/- a month plus rations to do “light field labour or what may be required of them.” Towns was violently attacked by the Press of the day and accused of introducing the “slave trade” to Queensland. He retorted that the natives were properly hired and well provided for in the barracks he had built, and that they were “British subjects” and “full colonists for twelve months.”

When cotton planting slumped with the close of the American Civil War in 1865, the Kanakas met the demand for labour for cultivators and cane-cutters in the growing sugar industry and as station hands in the pastoral districts.\(^{(136)}\)

From 1865 onwards cane was grown extensively in the Logan and Albert districts and upon the flats of the Brisbane River; in 1868

\(^{(134)}\) See Shann’s Economic History of Australia, pp. 247-248. “So long as Queensland was a separate colony the planters fought with success to retain their coloured labour... They forged in the North Queensland Separation Movement a weapon which (like the Confederate States of Jefferson Davis) gave their purpose the guise of a crusade for self-determination.”

\(^{(135)}\) Captain Hope is commemorated by a granite memorial cairn in the grounds of Ormiston House on the site of the old mill.

\(^{(136)}\) By 1868 there were 700 kanakas in station employment.
Donald Coutts, of Toolburra Station, cultivated cane on a large area of farm land at Bulimba, and nearly 2,000 acres were then under cane in the Brisbane district.

Nine mills in 1868 produced a total of 60 tons of sugar (which would be about two hours' output from the present Victoria Mill in the Ingham district, one of the largest in the Southern Hemisphere!). The most important sugar mill and plantation in the Brisbane district was that of Gibson and Sons at Clydesdale, Doboy Creek; the mill used upright rollers worked by horse power. All the early mills were of primitive type; many were only "juice" mills, i.e., they crushed the cane but pumped or carted the expressed juice elsewhere for manufacture.

For some years from 1868 the Queensland Government grew sugar-cane with penal labour on the island of St. Helena in Moreton Bay. The horse-driven mill, supplied by a Brisbane foundry, turned out half a ton of sugar a day.

By 1875 the area under cane in Queensland had increased to 6,500 acres; twenty years later the area was 33,000 acres. In 1872-73 some sixty-five mills manufactured 6,266 tons of sugar and 161,473 gallons of rum. The Colony's own needs were already met and an export trade was established. The consumption of sugar in Queensland in 1878 (with a population of 210,510) was 92.13 lb. per head—higher than any other Colony and any other part of the world.

Mackay, Ingham and, subsequently, the Johnstone River, Cairns, and Mossman, in the late 'seventies and early 'eighties. (In the 1870's a succession of severe frosts practically killed the industry on the Brisbane River—the exodus began in 1874 when the Gibson clan migrated from Clydesdale, on Doboy Creek, to Bingera on the Burnett River.) A boom set in for sugar land in the northern areas and so great was the rush of selectors for homesteads under the Douglas Land Act of 1876, at 2/6 an acre, that the Mcllwraith Government reclassified the land.

In spite of trebled prices, 240,000 acres of sugar land were sold between October 1881 and March 1887. The consumption of sugar in Queensland in 1878 (with a population of 210,510) was 92.13 lb. per head higher than any other Colony and any other part of the world.

In 1880 the Mackay district had sixteen sugar mills, chiefly on the Pioneer River. There were two mills on the Herbert River in the Cardwell district, and another two mills were located in the Cairns. Of the eighty-three mills in Queensland twenty-three were in the Bundaberg and Maryborough districts and twenty-three in the Logan district.

The Colonial Sugar Refining Company

The company purchased freehold land in the Mackay and Herbert River districts, and to permit this, the Queensland Parliament passed the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's Act of 1881, the company undertaking to spend £200,000 within five years on the clearing and cultivation of land, and the erection of buildings and plant, for the manufacture of sugar. Less than eight years after the passage of the Act, the C.S.R. had a total of 38,000 acres in its three plantations at Homebush, Victoria, and Goondi, about 6,800 acres being under cane. Meanwhile, by the 'eighties, there were some 47,000 Kanakas in the sugar industry. The recruiting system was open to serious abuses and the Polynesian Labourers' Act, passed on 4 March 1868, was the first of a series of similar Acts. On the seas, "blackbirding" had risen to enormous proportions; there was unscrupulous evasion of the provisions of the Act by recruiters and others; and savage and sanguinary retaliation by Pacific Islanders was frequent; atrocity was countered by atrocity. In Queensland itself, on the other hand, the great plantations, from the 'seventies onward, resembled in their "benevolent feudalism" the old plantations of Louisiana and Florida. The consciences of many men were stirred by the evils of the "blackbirding" system and none more than that of William Brookes, who was an early apostle of "White Australia."

Brookes was member of Parliament for North Brisbane from 1864 to 1867, but did not enter Parliament again until 1882. Throughout those fifteen years, however, he was a zealous, even fanatical, leader of the crusade for abolishing Kanaka labour, inspiring the "abolitionist" movement in Queensland.

In 1884 atrocities committed in New Guinea waters during the voyage of the ironically-named recruiting schooner "Hopeful" caused international repercussions. The German Government protested to Great Britain against the traffic, and sought British aid "to prevent any transgression of the limit which divides the lawful traffic in Polynesians from slave trading."

When the Hopeful returned to Australia on 17 July 1884 from the Bismarck Archipelago (with 103 recruits) grave charges, including one of wholesale murder, were laid against the master, the recruiter, the Government agent (who was aboard to see that all was legal and fair), the bo's'un, and members of the crew. The recruiter and the bo's'un were sentenced to death; the sentences being commuted to life imprisonment; the master and the Government agent were sentenced to life imprisonment, the first three years in irons; the mate to ten years' imprisonment, the first two in irons; and two seamen to seven years, the first in irons. These severe sentences shocked public opinion even more than the crimes of which the perpetrators had been found guilty. A petition asking for a reprieve was signed with 28,000 names and the men were set free on 20 February 1890 (with the exception of the Government agent, who died while undergoing his punishment in irons).

A Royal Commission of Inquiry into recruiting methods was set up by Sir Samuel Griffith in January 1885. Its findings, delivered in May 1885, provided a terrible indictment of "deceit, cruelty, treachery, deliberate kidnapping, and cold-blooded murder."

(137) Established on 1 January 1856. In 1866 the C.S.R. had erected sugar mills on the Mackay and Clarence Rivers. In 1886, Condong mill on the Tweed, and in 1881, Broadwater mill, on the Richmond, commenced crushing.
Griffiths' Liberal Government thereupon determined to abolish the system. An amendment to the *Polynesian Labourers' Act* declared that after 31 December 1890 no more licences to recruit Polynesians would be granted. The decision was in accordance with Griffiths' convictions and his policy of a "White Australia." The public (including the workers, who saw Kanaka labour as an ever-present threat to their wages and conditions) was solidly behind Griffith, but the planters and allied interests remained a resolute and determined minority in the face of the increasingly hostile public opinion.\(^{[138]}\)

The planters accelerated a drive to obtain the maximum number of Kanaka labourers before the time limit expired, and at the same time began a crusade for Separation. Plantations were operating at a loss and many small mills went under. Unemployment, aggravated by an influx of migrants, was extensive. The large planters saw another threat to their supremacy in the inauguration of the Central Mill system, which had its genesis in a petition from the Mackay district to Parliament in November 1885. (The petition set out the difficulties of cane farmers in being confined to mills of plantation owners, and made a powerful plea for assistance by asserting that cane growing could be made a white man's industry.) The Griffith Government voted £50,000 to groups of farmers at North Eton and Racecourse in the Mackay district to erect central mills: the cane to be brought to them had to be grown solely by white labour.

Plantations were already being cut up into small farms and it was Griffith's intention that these new mills should make sugar for the small farmers. But such a policy was found to be impracticable at this time. Nevertheless, some initial progress was made. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company, which had erected a mill on its estate at Homebush, near Mackay, subdivided part of the estate into moderately-sized farms, and the land was quickly taken up by small farmers. Many of the larger planters subsequently followed suit, by cutting up their holdings and selling farms to cane-growers. This was the beginning of the complete absorption of the industry by white men as owners and workers in all its aspects.

**The White Man Challenges the Tropics**

The planters, meanwhile, raised the cry that Griffith was ruining the sugar industry. The price of sugar continued to be low, and Kanaka-labour costs had increased, as a result of the prohibition of the importation of Kanakas at the end of 1890. A special Commission appointed in 1889 to inquire into the condition of the sugar industry reported, in a Majority Report, that if all coloured labour was withdrawn, the extinction of the industry must quickly follow, and they recommended that the introduction of Kanaka labour be permitted for some years longer than the period fixed for its cessation.

As a result, Section II of *The Pacific Islanders Act* of 1885, prohibiting the further entry of Kanakas, was repealed by the McIlwraith-Giffith coalition Government in 1892. In effect, Griffith repealed his celebrated Act of 1885, to the bewilderment and dismay of his friends and the jubilation of his opponents.\(^{[139]}\)

In 1899 Queensland voted for Federation (although its majority was the smallest of any of the States) and the Commonwealth was proclaimed on 1 January 1901.

The new Act restored the recruiting system, but under its strict application, many of the evils associated with the employment of Kanakas ceased. Proper accommodation, food, hospitals, and medical attention had to be provided for them on the plantations; their wages were paid in the presence of Government inspectors, who ensured that any moneys they wished to bank were safely deposited.

In February 1893 the Northern planters petitioned for separation and autonomy, but in the general election of that year the new Labour Party, representing the miners, station hands, and workers of the coastal towns, who were antagonistic to Northern separation, polled so strongly in the North that they would have dominated a separated Northern Parliament.

On 4 November 1897, by the casting vote of one of the leaders of the movement who was sitting in the Speaker's Chair, the Queensland Legislative Assembly carried a resolution that "the time had arrived" when the Central and Northern divisions of the Colony *should be constituted separate colonies* in compliance with the petitions of the inhabitants.\(^{[140]}\) It was a hollow and negative triumph. Federation was in the offing, and national support of a "White Australia" policy was assured and inevitable.

Commonwealth legislation prohibited the further entry of Pacific Island labour after 31 March 1904.\(^{[141]}\)

The year 1893 was a milestone in the history of the industry, for it was in that year that *The Sugar Works Guarantee Act* became law. Under its terms Central Mills were built in eleven centres scattered...
North Eton, which, with Racecourse, was erected before the passage of the Guarantee Act, enjoys the distinction of being the first Central Mill to manufacture sugar in Australia, and it was claimed that its foundation was the commencement of the White Australia movement in the sugar industry. Racecourse Mill was the first owned and controlled by farmers to pay off its liability to the Government.

Under the 1893 Guarantee Act, some £500,000 was advanced by the Government for the erection of Central Mills. Farmers lodged their deeds as security for repayment of principal and interest, the loans to extend over a period of fifteen years.

The Sugar Experiment Stations Act of 1900 was enacted to provide for the establishment and control of Sugar Experiment Stations and Dr. Walter Maxwell was appointed the first Director; he took over his existing Sugar Experiment Station at Mackay which had been established in 1898.

The system of farmers' co-operative mills had made more progress in the Mackay district than elsewhere in Queensland. Before Federation, Mossman (1897), Mulgrave (1896), and Proserpine (1898) had been established as Central Mills north of Mackay. Under The Sugar Works Act of 1911 co-operative central mills were established at Babinda, south of Cairns (1915), and at South Johnstone (1916). In 1926, a co-operative mill was built at Tully, south of Innisfail, and the district settled with 300 farmers. To-day, Tully, which in 1921 was a cattle run, has a population of 2,000 and is a progressive town, with all modern amenities.

Tully provides a striking illustration of the growth of self-contained townships in North Queensland around co-operative and proprietary mills, and the great incentive the sugar industry has given to decentralised settlement. Other notable examples of prosperous "sugar towns" are Ingham, Gordonvale, Mourilyan and Babinda, in North Queensland; Home Hill in the Burdekin district, and Sarina in the Mackay district.

To-day more than half of Queensland's cane crop is crushed in co-operatively owned mills. (143)

Sugar production was hard hit during the Second World War, there being an inevitable decline from 391,000 tons to 286,000 tons from 1939 to 1943. North Queensland had become the advanced base for Military, Air and Naval operations. More than 400 heavy tractors of the sugar industry were employed in the building of roads and aerodromes. (The two principal aerodromes from which fleets of bombing planes roared out to the crucial Coral Sea Battle were built within two weeks with the material assistance of men and machines from the sugar districts.)

(142) The mills were—Marian, Pleystowe, Plane Creek (Mackay district); Proserpine Mill (at Proserpine); Mulgrave (Cairns); Mossman (Port Douglas district); Gin Gin (Bundaberg district); Mount Bauple (Maryborough district); Moreton (Nambour); Nerang (Southport district).

(143) These mills are—Mossman (Douglas Shire, 50 miles north of Cairns, N.Q.); Mulgrave (Gordonvale, 14 miles south of Cairns, N.Q.); Babinda (35 miles south of Cairns), South Johnstone (South Johnstone River, 7 miles from Innisfail), Tully (Cardwell Shire, N.Q.), Proserpine (N.Q.).

(144) Conditions of delivery and sale are determined by the Cane Prices Board (consisting of an independent chairman, a grower and a miller) which determines the price scale for sugar-cane and makes an annual award providing for the time, place, manner and condition of delivery of cane to the miller.

The Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations provides exclusive research and advisory services with research laboratories in Brisbane and four zonal experiment stations.

In August 1895 the late Henry Tryon, Entomologist and Pathologist to the Department of Agriculture, collected a large number of sugar-cane varieties in New Guinea. The sixty-six varieties he brought back included the famous "badilla." Disease and pest control within particular districts is vested in cane pest and disease control boards, which are financed by direct levy, on millers and growers in each district. Most of the pests and diseases to which sugar-cane is subject were introduced into Australia with imported cane cuttings. Insecticides have been used with increasing effectiveness. The cane borer has been controlled by breeding canes with a harder rind and pre-harvest burning.

(144) This Mill Peak Scheme was introduced in 1930 by proclamation under The Sugar Acquisition Act of 1915.
The giant South American toad, *Bufo Marinus*, imported in 1935, has been a valuable control agent of the beetle borer.

Queensland cane has the world's highest sugar content, the average yield being $3\frac{1}{2}$ tons of sugar per acre, compared with $1\frac{1}{4}$ tons to the acre in 1900. As a result of increasingly efficient methods, production per acre has been lifted from 2.0 tons in 1923 to 3.1 tons in 1938, and 3.4 tons in 1939. From 1923 to 1939 the tons of cane required to make a ton of sugar declined from almost eight to somewhat less than seven, the latter ratio being easily the best in the world.

Marketing

Before 1915 the marketing of sugar was controlled by the C.S.R. Co., prices being related to world markets, and the millers, in turn, determined the price they paid growers for cane. In 1915, under war-time conditions, the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments agreed to control the marketing of sugar under the *Sugar Acquisition Act*. The Queensland Government acquired the entire sugar output, and another measure, the *Regulation of Sugar Cane Prices Act*, regulated the prices paid by millers to farmers for cane. The Commonwealth Government then purchased the sugar and made arrangements with the C.S.R. Co. and the Millaquin Sugar Co. to refine the sugar and sell it. In 1920 the Commonwealth Government granted producers a remunerative stabilised price, and as a result of the embargo placed on imported sugar, Australia became self-supporting; and, in 1925, became a considerable exporter of sugar. By 1939 total sugar production was 928,351 tons.

In 1923 the Commonwealth declined to review the agreement. Since then marketing has been based on a series of three-year and later five-year agreements between the two Governments, whereby the Commonwealth agrees to impose an embargo on the importation of sugar, and the Queensland Government acquires and purchases through the Sugar Board (its agents) all sugar produced in Queensland and New South Wales.

The sugar is sold by the Board to Australian refineries and also overseas. The agreement fixes the wholesale price of sugar and requires it to be the same in all State capital cities. From this price are deducted all costs of transport and distribution, packaging, insurance, refining and management. The remainder is distributed to the mills for the payment of themselves and the growers.

Australia's export sugar markets are practically confined to the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand. The first full International Sugar Agreement to control sugar marketing on the world markets was signed in 1938. Export quotas were allotted, Australia receiving a yearly quota of 412,000 tons. The agreement was suspended with the outbreak of the Second World War. From 1939, the United Kingdom Government purchased the whole of Australia's exportable supplies of sugar at prices negotiated annually. This agreement continued up to and including the 1952 season. In December 1951 the British Commonwealth Sugar Agreement was signed: it had a currency of eight years and provided two quotas for each exporter, a United Kingdom market quota at a price to be negotiated annually, and a second quota to be offered on the United Kingdom and Canadian markets at world prices, plus preferences. Australia's two quotas under
Gibson’s Clydesdale Mill. Earliest type of sugar mill.
(By courtesy Queensland Survey Department.)

Victoria Sugar Mill, Ingham. Latest type of sugar mill.

PLATE LV.
(By courtesy Colonial Sugar Refining Co.)
Mackay bulk sugar installation from the air.

(By courtesy Colonial Sugar Refining Co.)
Schematic Diagram showing how raw sugar is shipped from Australian mills

Legend:
- Raw sugar mill
- Raw sugar mill owned by CSR Co
- Raw sugar port
- Sea and river transport by lighter
- Railway transport (includes some road transport)

Text Figure 15.
(By courtesy of the Colonial Sugar Refining Co. Ltd.)
this agreement were 314,000 tons and 286,000 tons, but after New Zealand's withdrawal in 1956 from the United Kingdom purchase pool each became 300,000 tons.

In December 1957 the British Commonwealth Sugar Agreement was signed, establishing a long-term agreement for supplying sugar to the United Kingdom, for developing the production of sugar in the Commonwealth countries, and for the orderly marketing of that sugar. The period of the agreement was eight years and the term has now been extended. Great Britain takes 300,000 tons a year until 1965, at a "negotiated" price which is substantially higher than the market price.

The overall quota or limit of exports for Australia is 600,000 tons, of which 314,000 tons is at the "negotiated price"; the other 286,000 tons sells at the "world price" plus the value of the preference in the United Kingdom and Canada. As approximately half of Australia's raw sugar is required for domestic consumption, about one-fourth of total production is exported at the "negotiated price," and the remaining one-fourth is exported at the "world price."

Recently there has been an over-supply of sugar with an inevitable "stand over" of cane—a source of loss and dissatisfaction, especially among small growers. The answer would seem to be the development of new products from sugar—there are many that would respond to the energy and enterprise in research that, so far, has made sugar the greatest evidence of the white man's success in the tropics of Australia.

In October 1953 a new International Sugar Agreement was negotiated and signed in London by most of the important sugar exporting countries aiming at equitable and stable prices. This objective is to be achieved by adjustable export quotas. British Commonwealth exporters have an "irreducible" combined export quota which ensures to them the total export rights under the British Commonwealth Sugar Agreement.

The Australian domestic market has generally provided a satisfactory price for nearly half the total output of Australian millers.

**Bulk-handling**

The most dramatic recent advance in the sugar industry is the change from manual to mechanical handling and bulk loading of raw sugar. The first bulk handling terminal was established at Mackay in 1957. On 1 August 1958 the Premier of Queensland (Hon. G. F. R. Nicklin) opened the Lucinda Point bulk handling terminal, which now handles the sugar from the Victoria and Macknade mills at Ingham, and the Tully mill. Lucinda Point terminal, which has storage space for 80,000 tons, deals with 200,000 tons of raw sugar each season. The port of New Bundaberg was opened as a bulk handling port later in the year, and Townsville and Mourilyan are also to be equipped with bulk handling installations.

At the turn of the century the total Australian production of raw sugar was 112,000 tons, of which 40 per cent. was made at C.S.R. mills in Queensland and New South Wales. This contrasts with 86,000 tons made in 1954 at one C.S.R. mill alone, in Queensland, and a total Australian production in that year of 1,300,000 tons.