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**Edward Gibbon Wakefield Prophet of
Colonialism - II**

Lead: His prison term changed Edward Gibbon Wakefield from a self-indulgent dilettante to one of Britain's most perceptive social critics. He helped fashion the world's largest colonial empire.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: While imprisoned for kidnapping a rich 15-year old heiress in order to marry her and thus further his fortune and political career, Edward Wakefield was awakened to a different world. He

met fellow inmates sentenced to death for minor crimes such as sheep stealing and forgery. Wakefield was so incensed that he composed a brilliant critique of the contemporary use of the death penalty. *Facts Relating to the Punishment of Death*, like all but one of his major works, was published anonymously to avoid diminished impact because of his own sorry reputation. It received enthusiastic reviews and helped build support for the elimination of the death penalty in England.

Yet it was in helping shape a new approach to colonialism that proved to be the matter on which Wakefield had his greatest impact. In prison he met men sentenced to transportation

to Australia for their crimes and began to read voraciously on colonization. Despite the loss of its first empire, the colonies of North America which became the United States, England still had no rational approach to colonial management. There problems in Canada, Australia, South Africa and the West Indies. These were used as dumping grounds for undesirables such as prisoners. There was ethnic unrest and very poor land management. The colonies were expensive, troublesome and unproductive. Wakefield thought he had a solution. Next time: the Wakefield plan for Commonwealth.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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