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Wentworth, William Charles (1790–1872)

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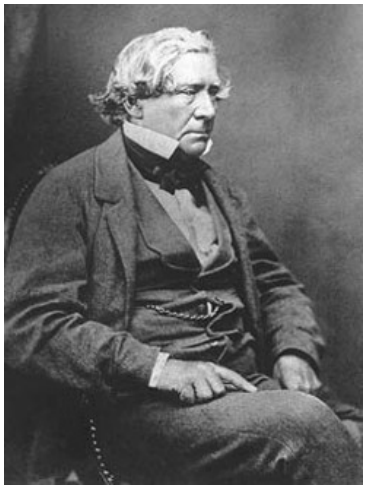
William Charles Wentworth (1790-1872), explorer, author, barrister, landowner, and statesman, was the son of Catherine Crowley, who was convicted at the Staffordshire Assizes in July 1788 of feloniously stealing 'wearing apparell', was sentenced to transportation for seven years, reached Sydney in the transport *Neptune* in June 1790, and in the *Surprize* arrived at Norfolk Island with the infant William on 7 August. Dr D'Arcy Wentworth, who also sailed in the *Neptune* and *Surprize*, acknowledged William as his son. He accompanied his parents to Sydney in 1796 and then to Parramatta, where his mother died in 1800. In 1803 he was sent with his brother D'Arcy to England. Writing home from their first school at Bletchley in 1804, he told of a visit to his father's patron and kinsman: 'We waited, one day, on Lord Fitzwilliam, at his request, he seemed glad to see us, and presented each of us with a guinea … We are going on in our Latin studies &c., to the satisfaction of our Master, and hope that we shall continue to do so, well knowing how essentially necessary a good education is to our future welfare in life'. In the holidays they stayed with their father's agent, Charles Cookney. In 1805 Mrs Cookney wrote of William to Dr Wentworth that 'a Surgeon is a very improper profession for Him as from the Cast in the Eye it leads Him differently to the object he intends'. They went on to the Greenwich school of Dr Alexander Crombie, a liberal scholar whose published works ranged over philology, politics, economics, agriculture, science, and theology.



***William Charles Wentworth**, c1861*

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Failing to win a place in the military academy at Woolwich or in the East India Co., Wentworth returned to Sydney in 1810 somewhat at a loose end. He was soon riding Gig, his father's grey gelding, to victory in the Hyde Park races. In October 1811 Lachlan Macquarie appointed him acting provost-marshal. He was granted 1750 acres (708 ha) on the Nepean, where his estate, Vermont, is still a Wentworth property.

He rapidly became a familiar figure around Sydney, with his tall frame, thick shoulders, Roman head, and auburn hair, his rugged and untidy person. He tended to speak in magniloquent abstractions, his harsh voice resounding with rhetoric and sarcasms and classical allusions; yet he showed a keen eye for detail. He seemed already something of a Gulliver in Lilliput. He knew that his father was slighted by the exclusives, that 'aristocratic body' who, he later wrote, 'would monopolize all situations of power, dignity, and emolument … and raise an eternal barrier of separation between their offspring and the offspring of the unfortunate convict': and the knowledge bred in him a determination to destroy their power.

Yet he was no leveller, no democrat. Men must be free, but free to rise—and his own family especially. Like his father he was a monopolist at heart. His adventurous spirit, drought, and the desire to discover new pastures led him in May 1813, in company with William Lawson, Gregory Blaxland, four servants, four horses, and five dogs, to take part in the first great feat of inland exploration, the crossing of the Blue Mountains. At the end of their twenty-one-day passage, as he later wrote,

> The boundless champaign burst upon our sight
> Till nearer seen the beauteous landscape grew,
> Op'ning like Canaan on rapt Israel's view.

Uncertain that they had really crossed the mountains, he wrote in his journal: 'we have at all events proved that they are traversable, and that, too, by cattle'. The discovery gave impetus to great pastoral expansion in which Wentworth amply shared. He was rewarded with another 1000 acres (405 ha) . On the mountain journey, according to his father, he had developed a severe cough; to recover his health and to help his father secure valuable sandalwood from a Pacific island he joined a schooner as supercargo in 1814. He was nearly killed by natives at Rarotonga while courageously attempting to save a sailor whom they clubbed to death. The captain died, and Wentworth, with knowledge gained on his earlier voyage from England and no mean mathematical skill, brought the ship safely to Sydney.

The *Sydney Gazette* was then subject to official censorship. The nearest approach to a free press in Governor Macquarie's régime were the anonymous 'pipes', of which the most celebrated was the one directed, in 1816, against Colonel George Molle, the lieutenant-governor, for his hypocrisy towards Macquarie. The furore resulting from it lasted for more than a year, till Dr Wentworth revealed that William, on his way to England, had written from Cape Town admitting authorship. Other 'pipes' are in his hand. Their political importance was greater than their literary merit, though it is not fanciful to see Wentworth as a key figure in early Australian literature. The alliance between literature and politics was close, each needing freedom in which to breathe. He helped to keep satire alive in the time of Macquarie and was later to lead it from darkness into light.

In 1816 Wentworth arrived in London and enlisted Fitzwilliam's aid in persuading his father that the army was no longer a feasible career for him now that the Napoleonic wars were over. In February 1817 he entered the Middle Temple to prepare himself to be 'the instrument of procuring a free constitution for my country'. He wrote to Fitzwilliam of 'the more remote objects' of his ambition: 'It is … by no means my intention in becoming a member of the Law to abandon the Country that gave me birth … In withdrawing myself … for a time from that country I am actuated by a desire of better qualifying myself for the performance of those duties, that my Birth has imposed—and, in selecting the profession of the Law, I calculate upon acquainting myself with all the excellence of the British Constitution, and hope at some future period, to advocate successfully the right of my country to a participation in its advantages'.

This remained the master-plan, but for a time he was characteristically restless. He unsuccessfully petitioned the Colonial Office to allow him to explore Australia from east to west. He spent more than a year in Europe, chiefly in Paris, to the benefit of his French but the annoyance of Fitzwilliam. His health improved but he was very short of funds. He saw much of the Macarthurs. In 1819 he published *A Statistical, Historical, and Political Description of the Colony of New South Wales and Its Dependent Settlements in Van Diemen's Land, With a Particular Enumeration of the Advantages Which These Colonies Offer for Emigration and Their Superiority in*

Many Respects Over Those Possessed by the United States of America. Young John Macarthur had suggested that he write it, and it owed much to conversations with old John, who with little sympathy with Wentworth's constitutional ideas later denounced the book, but whose faith in Australian wool was infectious. Wentworth hoped ardently to marry Elizabeth Macarthur. He envisaged a great Wentworth-Macarthur connexion at the head of the pastoral aristocracy dominating the New South Wales of his dreams, and he seemed about to achieve 'a union' which he described to his father as 'so essential to the happiness of your son and to the accomplishment of those projects for the future respectability and grandeur of our family, with the realisation of which I have no doubt you consider me in a great measure identified'. But his hopes were dashed by a quarrel with her father over a loan of money.

A new blow fell. In 1819 H. G. Bennet declared in his *Letter to Lord Sidmouth* that D'Arcy Wentworth had been sent to Sydney as a convict. Mortified by this slander, William rushed to his father's defence, ready to spill the last drop of his heart's blood in reparation. His own investigations proved disquieting. They revealed that his father was never a convict but had indeed been tried four times in England for highway robbery, though finally acquitted. Wentworth rebuked Bennet and later Commissioner John Thomas Bigge, who repeated the slander in his report, but his pride had suffered a rude shock, though not a shattering one. The greatness of his family and the glory of his country were the two almost synonymous preoccupations of his mind: and the two now became one as Wentworth, wounded in heart and pride, resolutely identified himself with the interests of the Australian-born.

His book did much to stimulate emigration and was reissued in revised and enlarged editions in 1820 and 1824. The various strands in his education are clearly seen in it: the classical, in its rhetorical style and arguments from ancient history; the mathematical, in its calculations about wool as 'the most profitable channel of investment offered in the world'; the scientific, in descriptions of the natural scene; and the legal, in the reforms proposed for New South Wales. After the 'description', he attacks the existing autocracy and presses for a nominated legislative council and an assembly elected on a small property franchise: ex-convicts are not to be denied either membership or the vote. No taxation should be imposed without parliamentary sanction. There should be trial by jury, a proper process of appeal, and free migration. Such reforms will realize the emancipists' dream: to raise Australasia 'from the abject state of poverty, slavery, and degradation, to which she is so fast sinking, and to present her with a constitution, which may gradually conduct her to freedom, prosperity, and happiness'; its future will then be theirs, and Wentworth's. Yet the book is no tract for democracy. Landed property is 'the only standard' he conceives 'by which the right either of electing, or being elected, can in any country be properly regulated'. The council 'bears many resemblances to the House of Lords': 'It forms that just equipoise between the democratic and supreme powers of the state, which has been found necessary not less to repress the licentiousness of the one, than to curb the tyranny of the other'.

He was called to the Bar in February 1822, and decided then to 'keep a few terms' at Cambridge. Soon after entering Peterhouse, he competed for the chancellor's gold medal for a poem on Australasia. His poem, placed second to W. M. Praed's, was speedily published, with a dedication to Macquarie. Rhetorical and realistic, it ends with a bold prophecy of the day when Britain is vanquished and her spirit rises again in the antipodes:

> May all thy glories in another sphere
> Relume, and shine more brightly still than here;
> May this, thy last born infant, then arise,
> To glad thy heart and greet thy parent eyes;
> And Australasia float, with flag unfurl'd,
> A new Britannia in another world.

He returned to Sydney in 1824, determined 'to hold no situation under government': 'As a mere private person I might lead the colony, but as a servant of the Governor I could only conform to his whims, which would neither suit my tastes nor principles'. In the third edition of the *Description* he had attacked the report of Commissioner Bigge as 'nauseous trash': it was hostile to Macquarie and it played into the hands of the exclusives. He had some influence on the New South Wales Act of 1823, which instituted a nominated Legislative Council and permitted trial by jury in civil actions only when demanded by both parties. With him came Dr Robert Wardell, a lawyer who had edited the *Statesman*. Their plan was that each in his sphere, Wardell in journalism and Wentworth at the Bar, should champion the emancipists and smaller free settlers and campaign for a free press, trial by jury, and self-government.

On 14 October 1824 the first issue of the *Australian*, the plant for which they had brought from London, boldly declared: 'Independent, yet consistent—free, yet not licentious—equally unmoved by favours and by fear—we shall pursue our labours without either a sycophantic approval of, or a systematic opposition to, acts of authority, merely because they emanate from government'. Audacity triumphed. They had not sought permission to publish the paper, but Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane thought it 'most expedient to try the experiment of full latitude of freedom of the Press'; despite Colonial Office objections approval continued well into the reign of his successor. The exclusives bitterly prophesied 'a nation of freebooters and pirates', but they could do nothing while the *Australian* retained Government House favour.

Meanwhile Wentworth seized every opportunity to attack the exclusives, and awaited a pretext for attacking autocratic government. In October 1825 he arranged a meeting for free inhabitants to consider a farewell address to Brisbane, acknowledging his emancipist sympathies. He called the first draft a 'milk and water production', and in the revised document the 'two fundamental principles of the British constitution' were demanded: trial by jury and representative government. He spoke passionately against the exclusives, the 'yellow snakes of the Colony'.

The wind turned in November 1826 with the death of Private Sudds in circumstances partly arising from the commutation by Governor (Sir) Ralph Darling of the sentence on him and Private Thompson. Wentworth seized on the alleged illegality of Darling's act and with violent invective demanded his recall. The affair rapidly developed into a bitter feud.

At a crowded meeting on Anniversary Day in 1827, which resulted in a petition calling for an elective assembly of at least a hundred members, Wentworth also called for trial by jury and taxation by consent. The newspapers inflamed public opinion against Darling, whose alleged treatment of Sudds Wentworth described as 'murder, or at least a high misdemeanour'. Convinced that Wentworth, a 'vulgar, ill-bred fellow' and a 'demagogue', was 'anxious to become the man of the people' by insulting the government, and that 'nothing short of positive coercion' would curb the licentiousness of the press, Darling submitted to the Legislative Council two bills, to regulate newspapers and to impose a stamp duty. Chief Justice (Sir) Francis Forbes refused to certify the licence clauses of one as 'not repugnant to the laws of England'. Wentworth attacked the other because blanks had been left for rates of duty to be inserted later; when they were filled in Forbes would not certify it and the Act though passed by council was suspended and later disallowed. Darling saw no alternative but to prosecute for seditious libel.

The resulting cases occupied the Supreme Court through 1828 and 1829. Wentworth surrendered his shares in the *Australian* and acted as defending counsel. He overwhelmed the lamentably weak Crown prosecutors with torrents of invective and brilliant marshalling of his facts. Darling wrote that he and Wardell kept 'the Court and the Bar by their effrontery and talent equally in subjection'. When Wardell was tried, he challenged the jury as nominees of the governor, who could deprive them

of their commissions if they failed to convict. Finally in 1829, as a result of Wentworth's insistent demands, civilian juries were allowed in civil cases on the application of both parties and the approval of the Supreme Court.

A draft of 'impeachment' prepared by Wentworth against Darling did little damage to the governor's reputation at the Colonial Office, but it certainly undermined Wentworth's, so intemperate was its language. Darling served his six-year term, and departed in 1831 to the accompaniment of a riotous celebration at Wentworth's estate overlooking the harbour. The *Australian* reported: 'upward of 4,000 persons assembled at Vaucluse to partake of Mr Wentworth's hospitality and to evince joy at the approaching departure. The scene of the fête was on the lawn in front of Mr Wentworth's villa, which was thrown open for the reception of all respectable visitants, while a marquee filled with piles of loaves and casks of Cooper's gin and Wright's strong beer, was pitched a short way off. On an immense spit a bullock was roasted entire. Twelve sheep were also roasted in succession; and 4,000 loaves completed the enormous banquet. By 7 p.m. two immense bonfires were lighted on the highest hill … Rustic sports, speeches, etc., etc., whiled away the night; and morning dawned before the hospitable mansion was quitted by all its guests'.

By taking up the fight against autocracy and by his imperious courage and oratory in the defence of emancipists at the Bar Wentworth had awakened a political instinct among the smaller people of Sydney and become their hero. He had touched both journalism and the Bar with the fire of his brilliance and given them definition, direction, and the vision of greatness: he may justly be called their prophet in the Australian nation, if not the prophet of that nation itself. The larger fight remained: for the great goal of self-government. But, even as the people of Sydney were flocking out to Vaucluse to join with the popular hero in celebration of the tyrant's departure, changes in Wentworth's own life and activities were beginning to cause disillusion among many who only partially understood his aims. With the swelling tide of immigration into New South Wales, the exclusive-emancipist issue was receding into the background of politics. So fast were events moving that in 1835, when Darling was cleared of Wentworth's charges and knighted, there were few in Sydney who showed concern.

By his father's death in 1827 Wentworth added greatly to his landholdings. In that year he bought Vaucluse, about six miles (9.6 km) from Sydney on the south side of the harbour, and later enlarged it to 500 acres (202 ha) . The cottage there was rebuilt into a stately mansion which, in the years after Wentworth's marriage in 1829, provided the setting for both his family life and his activities as statesman. It was adorned with riches from the old world and became a sign of the new time, spacious and leisured, that was coming to the rich in New South Wales. With his large legal earnings, Vaucluse, his father's estate at Homebush, and one sheep station after another (he acknowledged fifteen at one time) Wentworth more and more felt himself the prototype of a new nobility, a governing class which would adapt to Australian conditions the way of life of the Whig aristocracy of eighteenth-century England. His own way of life became spacious even to the point of lapses from his marriage vows.

With Darling's successor, Governor (Sir) Richard Bourke, a kinsman of Edmund Burke, whose patron Fitzwilliam had been, Wentworth had much in common, though not even Bourke could persuade him to accept nomination to the Legislative Council, in which the governor's own liberal measures were frequently frustrated by the exclusives. In London there was growing support for Wentworth's policies: the Reform Act and events in Canada were fostering a climate of opinion favourable to constitutional change. After the murder of Wardell in 1834, William Bland stepped into his place as Wentworth's chief supporter. At the foundation-day meeting in 1833 another petition for self-government was drafted, which was presented to the Commons by Lytton Bulwer.

In 1835 the Australian Patriotic Association was formed to agitate for an amended constitution. Sir John Jamison was president, Wentworth vice-president, and Charles Buller its agent in London. With Bland's assistance Wentworth drafted two alternative bills for the consideration of the British government: one providing for a nominated council and an elected assembly on the model of Canada; the other for a single house of fifty members, one-fifth nominated and the rest elected on a property franchise similar to that of the 1832 Reform Act in Britain. With support in Sydney from Bourke and his successor, Sir George Gipps, and in London from Buller, Wentworth's second bill was adopted, with modifications, in an Act granting a degree of representative government in 1842. In an enlarged Legislative Council the proportion of nominees became one-third, and the property qualification for electors of the remaining twenty-four members was high enough to exclude two-thirds of the adult male population. Though the governor retained control of colonial revenue, he ceased to preside over the Legislative Council and was replaced by an elected Speaker.

In his book Wentworth had commended simultaneously a wide franchise and a property qualification for electors. The 1827 petition had demanded suffrage for 'the entire of the free population'. Now the eighteenth-century Whig in him was running stronger and he was more apt to equate political capacity with property and poverty with ignorance. He had given up his legal practice and was concentrating on his landed interests. Though he was still far less wealthy than James Macarthur, who had gone to England on behalf of the exclusives to oppose the demands of the Australian Patriotic Association, Wentworth's riches were increasing rapidly, and the onset of middle age, his experience of the crowd, and the shift in the balance of population caused by assisted migration all tended to strengthen his conservatism. The intention of the British government to abolish convict transportation and to raise the price of crown land drew the exclusives and Wentworth into a common opposition to any change in the condition allowing them cheap land and labour.

The leading emancipists now found themselves together with the exclusives on the side of the rich. Wentworth now belonged to the pastoral aristocracy he had envisaged in 1819 and it was faced with stern threats. When he expressed approval of the idea of importing coolie labour from Asia, he alienated many former supporters together with the radicals among the recent immigrants. In January 1842 the *Australian* summed up the popular feeling: 'Mr Wentworth … was an influential man. His day is gone by. His opinion is worth nothing … Certainly he first taught the natives of this colony what liberty was, but he has betrayed them since and they have withdrawn their confidence from him'.

In 1839 Wentworth was recommended for appointment to the Legislative Council by Gipps, but was soon at enmity with the new governor. In 1840, in direct opposition to declared British policy, humanely conceived, Wentworth and some associates bought from seven Maori chieftains, for a song, nearly a third of New Zealand, urging them, moreover, not to acknowledge Queen Victoria without proper safeguard. Gipps, aghast at such a 'job', blocked the scheme in the Legislative Council. But he misunderstood Wentworth. This bid was no jobbery, but Elizabethan in spirit and characteristically splendid and defiant. It would have made him the greatest landowner on earth; frustrated, he swore 'eternal vengeance'. The enmity between Wentworth and Gipps bedevilled almost every issue until the governor's departure in 1846. It was comparatively easy for Wentworth to lead others against Gipps. As with Darling, he set out to wreck his opponent's policies, but although he was frequently depicted as an unscrupulous politician his powers were bent passionately on ends that seemed to him greater than person or reputation, his own or anybody else's.

Wentworth entered the Legislative Council in 1843 at the head of the poll for Sydney. He wished to be Speaker but was passed over in favour of his enemy, Alexander McLeay. However, with his unrivalled knowledge of parliamentary procedure and colonial affairs, he immediately assumed practical leadership of the council. His achievement was already remarkable. He was an orator of immense power, whether bludgeoning an opponent, or fumbling and growling and calling for his 'extracts', or rising, with harsh and rasping voice, to a broken sublimity of language which moved and enlightened even his enemies. All were affected by the

impact of his personality. Robert Lowe, mellifluously, dartingly, could mock what he had said, but the twain never really met, for they were of two different orders of being. Though he could marshal arguments brilliantly Wentworth relied little on subtlety or logic. He created a mood and stormed rather than seduced the mind. Careless and even slovenly in manners and dress (he now wore corduroys with his badly-fitting morning-coat), he had, while knowing his power, an unconscious arrogance and was in all things the observed of all observers.

He led the squatters in their demand for new land regulations and, since imperial control over crown land was an obstacle to their interest, for a surrender of that control to the Legislative Council. The squatters wanted security of tenure so that they could improve their runs without fear of displacement. Through a Pastoralists' Association, a select committee of the Legislative Council, a paid agent in the House of Commons, and in other ways they waged unceasing war against Gipps's policies. They won most of their demands in the Imperial Act of 1846, which gave them security, for varying periods in the 'settled', 'intermediate', and 'unsettled' districts, unless someone would pay £1 an acre for the land they leased, and this they could thwart by purchasing key-points on their runs, such as around the waterholes. In a sense the squatting age was now over. Henceforward the graziers could build spacious homesteads and develop the way of life of a landed, governing class, whatever political power Wentworth and his followers might win for them.

Because pastoral interests were strong in the part-elective Legislative Council Wentworth was able after 1843 to establish again a leadership of the colony as a whole. He was never again popular as he had been in 1831. At times he was distinctly unpopular but the power of his personality continued to sway even the crowd. In the 1848 election, after a public outcry over the renewal of transportation, he again headed the Sydney poll, though Bland was defeated altogether. In 1851, when his unpopularity stood at its height through his insistence on a preponderance of squatter-controlled rural representation over that of Sydney and his opposition to a wide franchise and to the 'spirit of democracy abroad', he came in third, but was still returned.

Though frequently accused of inconsistency, Wentworth followed unswervingly the same ideals throughout his career. He believed profoundly in intellect, and his fury at unintelligent officialdom, military autocracy, and the social pretensions of the unimaginative exclusives (the imaginative, such as John Macarthur, he admired) sprang from the same source as his distrust of mob rule: a hatred of anything which would prevent the human mind and spirit from developing their latent powers. He at no time denied the right of the intelligent poor to aspire to the seats of government, but they must first become 'men of substance', participating in one of the great interests on which the welfare of the community depended. Pre-eminent among these was the landed interest which, because of his realistic appraisal of the Australian economy no less than his inherited or acquired Whiggism, he believed was the one to which, as he told them in 1851, the inhabitants of Sydney 'were indebted for all their greatness, all the comforts, all the luxuries, that they possessed'. He told them, too, with no little courage, that he 'agreed with that ancient and venerable constitution that treated those who had no property as infants, or idiots, unfit to have any voice in the management of the State'. The way out of infancy, or idiocy, was through intellect and property: but essential to these, and to the management of the state, was education — and Wentworth's pioneering of both primary and university education in Australia is among the noblest of his achievements.

He played a leading part with Lowe, his erstwhile opponent, in establishing in 1848-49 the first real system of state primary education in New South Wales. Hitherto primary teaching—and most of the children of the colony had none—had been conducted predominantly by the various religious denominations, with much sectarian bitterness. New South Wales was on the brink of gaining responsible government; but this, he argued, would be workable only through national education. Should they fail to give the youth of the colony 'the education which would furnish them with the knowledge of the responsibilities they undertook, the achievement of responsible government will be not to achieve a blessing, but to achieve the greatest curse it is possible to conceive'. He went on in 1849-50 to lead the movement that resulted in the founding of the first full colonial university in the British empire, the University of Sydney. He saw this as serving two ends: 'to enlighten the mind, to refine the understanding, to elevate the soul of our fellow men'; and to train men to fill 'the high offices of state'. He deplored the religious bigotry which had obstructed education: the university should be 'open to all, though influenced by none'. But he denied vigorously that his university would promote infidelity: he believed that 'the best mode of proving the divinity of the great Christian Code was to advance the intellect of those who trusted and relied upon it … It was not by stinting the intellect that Christianity was to be promoted'. The university would leave religious education to constituent colleges which he envisaged 'in every part of the colony'. Wentworth also helped to endow the university and was a member of its first senate.

In 1844, after a collision between Gipps and the Legislative Council, Wentworth had advocated 'that control of the Ministers and the Administrators of the Colony … which can only exist where the decision of the majority can occasion the choice—as well as the removal—of the functionaries who are entrusted with the chief executive departments'. He lost enthusiasm for this kind of responsible government after Governor Sir Charles FitzRoy eased the friction between executive and legislature, and turned instead to demands for self-government with full control of crown lands and colonial revenue. These demands, expressed in the Remonstrances of 1850 and 1851, remained urgent when gold was discovered, but the pastoral ascendancy seemed likely to be seriously threatened by 'pure democracy'. Although in 1852 the Colonial Office finally agreed that New South Wales should have responsible government, only a limited form of individual responsibility of some members of the executive was provided by the select committee which drafted the constitution in 1853. With Wentworth as chairman it recommended a lower house of fifty members elected on a £10 property franchise, and a nominated upper house consisting of members of a hereditary colonial peerage. The rural bias of the proposed lower house and the idea of a peerage were vociferously opposed in Sydney, by the press and by orators representing nearly every shade of political and social opinion. Wentworth vigorously defended his peerage scheme—which was a logical outgrowth of his basic ideas and assumptions and by no means the ridiculous proposal it has been represented as, then and since—but public opinion was so strongly against it that the bill, as eventually passed, contained in its stead provisions for a legislative council shorn of the hereditary principle altogether. Wentworth, with Edward Deas Thomson, colonial secretary for New South Wales, with whom he had been much associated through the lack of interest shown by Governor FitzRoy in colonial politics, sailed for England in 1854. In July 1855 he had the satisfaction of seeing the new Constitution made law, despite the deletion of his favoured safeguard against rash amendments to it, and the early death of the General Association of the Australian Colonies which he conceived as the forerunner of a 'Federal Assembly with power to legislate on all internal subjects'.

His life's work triumphantly achieved, he spent his remaining days in England except for a brief return to Sydney in 1861-62, when he was prevailed on to accept the presidency of the Legislative Council during a crisis, and stood out for the nominative as against the elective principle. He had consolidated his fame more by staying away, and being remembered for his great achievements, than if he had returned and been drawn—as he must have been—into the political fray and tried—as he would have done—to stem the democratic tide. In England he became a member of the Conservative Club, and lived at Merly House, near Wimborne, Dorset. There he died on 20 March 1872, survived by his wife Sarah, second daughter of Francis Cox, an emancipist blacksmith, whom he had married in 1829, and by five of their seven daughters and two of their three sons. His probate was sworn at £96,000 in Sydney and £70,000 in London. As he had wished, his body was brought to Sydney, and after a state funeral on 6 May 1873 was laid to rest in a vault excavated in a rock on his estate at Vaucluse. A chapel erected over his tomb, portraits by Richard Buckner in the chamber of the Legislative Assembly in Sydney and by James Anderson in the Mitchell Library, and a statue in Carrara marble by Tenerani in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney are his tangible memorials.

His intangible, and truer, memorial is much more than can easily be estimated in present-day Australia. With all his apparent contradictions, more than any other man he secured our fundamental liberties and nationhood. He looked backward in many things to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; yet he built, with the strength that his sense of history gave him, for the future. He was a child both of the English past and of his own time. He was an heir to the Whig tradition, with its faith in aristocratic and classical values and in British political institutions as established, more or less, by the Glorious Revolution and the politicians of the eighteenth century, and at the same time a child of the romantic movement. The chief intellectual influence upon him was Burke's oratory, with all its rhetoric and splendour and its evocation of the greatness of Augustan Rome and England. Emotionally, however, he was more Byronic, a force of nature of the kind which blazed in the sky of his boyhood in the person of Napoleon. He had breathed the air of Liberal Toryism abroad in England in the early 1820s. The subjection of his proud and romantic nature to the classical restraints of law and politics, though sometimes imperfectly achieved, increased rather than diminished his achievement. In his determination to secure in his own country those free institutions which in eighteenth-century England bore an aristocratic form, he may have regretted that their very freedom would allow them to become democratic; but their freedom was more important to him than their form. His love of Australia was, he confessed, the 'master passion' of his life. He felt a natural kinship with the founding fathers of the United States. It is his chief claim to greatness that, more than any other, he secured in Australia, in one lifetime, the fruit of centuries—what he, in common with other men of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, revered as the fundamental liberties of the British Constitution.

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- review of portrait medallion of Wentworth sculptured by Thomas Woolner, Sydney Morning Herald, 25 February 1854, p 2
- departs for England, Sydney Morning Herald, 21 March 1854, p 5
- letter-to-the-editor from James Macarthur praising Wentworth, Sydney Morning Herald, 21 March 1854, p 5
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- will, Argus (Melbourne), 27 August 1896, p 5
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