

AUSTRALIA REVISITED

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MY first visit to Australia took place in the end of October 1884, and my second visit early in May 1924. The intervening forty years saw great changes take place in the world for good or ill, as good and ill are understood by our limited reason and vision; but nowhere, perhaps, were those changes more happy than in Australia. The silence of her vast solitudes of forty years ago is now broken by the hum of many industries and the tumultuous noise of romping school-children. Her rural villages have multiplied in numbers, many of them have become substantial towns; and her cities have developed into vast populations. Sydney has reached the million mark in the judgment of her enthusiastic citizens; Melbourne is not far behind; while Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth are vying with one another "to catch up" in the race.

I took a berth in the third class of that stout Australian oil-burner, the S. S. *Niagara*, that left Vancouver in April last, bound for Sydney, New South Wales. The motive which caused me to choose a berth among the third class passengers was not alone that which can be understood by those who have sold their labour power all through life and reaped poverty in old age as their reward. I remembered also that on a third class deck in a modern ship, travelling over wide spaces, one meets with men, and sometimes women, who afford a wonderful study in psychology and character.

On this trip I met men of the working class, young and middle-aged, some of whom—born out of the empire, but long resident in some part of it—had travelled over a large part of the world; others of whom, born in some part of Great Britain or Ireland, had been in all the republics of South America, and through many parts of the United States and Canada. Many of these men had learned to look on life as a place where the race is not to the swift, but to the strong. One could easily make a book out of their philosophy of life. In some respects it reminded me how the philosophy of every youth who grew up in my part of Southern Ireland, outside the ranks and influence of Dublin Castle, was that nothing was to be had from any supplication to a sense of justice in our rulers, but everything was to be obtained from the fears for their own safety which we could produce in them. This constituted the wisdom

of not a few of the travelling working-men whom I met on my second voyage to and from Australia. They had rid themselves through hard experience of the current opinions and customs prevailing in their early environments, and had elaborated for themselves an outlook upon life bold enough to question the wisdom of much of that knowledge which is derived by us from authority. Theirs was not exactly a happy frame of mind. But who can blame them for being sensitive to all the stimuli of mind and body to which they had been subjected, and for not realizing the advantage to character of suffering in a life of toil? Is suffering a benefit to character, for a life spent in toil, or lived for any purpose except that of personal sanctification? I think it engenders in most people, not possessed of the nature of a slave, a spirit of stubborn rebellion.

A few of these men, after years of wandering abroad, were returning to their native habitat of the Kangaroo to join the ranks of the Communists, and proclaim red-hot revolution against government by force in the interest of high finance. Horrid and rooted discontent with the present industrial world, with its iniquities and inequities of wealth and its inequalities of opportunity, was a consuming fever with all of them. I am still trying to put much they said to me through the process of mental digestion. The modern thinking and reading artizan shatters many of our beautiful theories with the rough pummelling of hard facts.

And so for three weeks travelling toward and beyond the equator, over calm unruffled seas, I heard thoroughly earnest men discuss in language sometimes eloquent and vigorous, but always intelligible, those great problems that confront the world to-day. I perceived, too, that many of those men gave themselves in the evenings to the silent contemplation of the heavens and the wonderful effects of glorious sunsets upon both sea and land (for we sighted land very often), proving that the fountains of poetry and sentiment were not wholly dried up within them by the stern realities of a hard life. Hard and cold indeed, from whatever cause, must be the heart that could contemplate unmoved the wonderful and changing scenes we witnessed during the going down of the sun and the gradual decoration of the heavenly dome with countless stars, diversified in endless sparkling and glinting beauty, and the pale silent moon sailing among them as Queen of Night through lakes of shimmering blue and green. Along the horizon for many miles where sky and water seemed to meet and touch each other, apparently not two miles distant from where I stood on deck, I could see what had all the appearance of the gentle lap of the waves on the sand, while for miles along what presented the aspect of a great white beach there

arose from the shore a great wall of dark cloud to a height of ten or twelve feet, shutting off the sea, and enclosing behind itself a vast demesne where great oaks and elms spread out their leafy branches and limbs from giant trunks. Here and there, but away in the distance, one might see small blue lakes in the open spaces flanked by white chains of hills on whose summits bits of golden cloud are set as for a crown of glory. Here and there, too, might one see small groves of trees on the slopes of these hills, and large groves clustering together in vast open clearings that looked like meadows of waving hay. And as you let your eyes wander along the top of the wall of cloud, now and anon you caught a glimpse of a great white way, or avenue, running straight on under an arch of tall trees formed by the meeting of their branches, till you sighted a vast and wonderful mansion standing on the ridges of a mountain that ran behind it like a gigantic fortification. In front were lawns and flower beds of various designs, whilst golden sunlight danced upon the windows of the castle and upon the whole landscape, varying the scene from time to time as if some magic artist had his brush in hand and were painting some wonderful picture, colours chasing colours in endless variety and delicacy of shading. Once too in the great wall of cloud there appeared for fifteen minutes a great golden arch under which a mighty gate swung back on its great hinges and closed against all comers, whilst over all this scene of indescribable splendour the stars shone down like so many lamps of various designs burning with flames of green and white and blue.

Was all that I was looking at a mere fairy land and delusion of the senses, produced by sunset, and moonlight, and starlight, and fog-bank, and vapour, and sky, and sea, and masses of white pillowy cloud moving through the air? Well, what matter if it were, so long as my sensations for the time being were very real and pleasant. They were, I suppose, somewhat like those of the Magi who believed that they saw a wonderful star, with a wonderful message, move before them in a path high up under the heavenly dome until it stood over where He was born who was to be King of the Jews. All this, of course, may be only a poetic description of that which is nowhere more intensely felt than when one stands on the deck of a moving ship, on a clear, cloudless night, and watches some luminous heavenly body keeping pace and maintaining its relative position with the movement of the vessel. At such times, indeed, one thinks of the sun standing still over the hills of Gibeon, or of the retrograde movement of the shadow on the sun-dial of Ahaz.

It is unnecessary to say that hardly any one of us felt during those hours as Ovid did on his enforced voyage to Tomi. There were no mountains of ocean rolling round us and reaching to the stars, and no great gulfs dug out in the waters beneath us; for withersoever we looked, we felt that there was something more to be seen than sky and sea and sunlight and stars. For some of us at least there were things invisible clearly seen through the things that were made, even eternal power and majesty, for the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.

Our stout Australian ship, that had comfortably housed us and had gallantly ploughed the main for more than three weeks, reached the mouth of Sydney Harbour early on Sunday morning, May 5th, just as Sol was sweeping dark clouds away before his shining face, and our passengers were filling the decks to scan the panorama that rose before us on every side. Two great arms of land stretched out at full length from the great island-continent opening, wide apart at the entrance of the harbour, as if they were extended to clasp us in a fond embrace to Australia's bosom. As the ship glided slowly on, we soon perceived in the distant inner harbour, covered in their grey coats of war-paint, the ships of the Australian navy lying side by side as peaceful to-day as a sleeping lion or the placid kangaroo.

It was winter, but the great arms of land were covered with trees clothed with massive foliage that are apparently for ever green and enjoy an immortal life. Through this leafy shroud we could discern the red tiles and chimneys of innumerable houses where a vast portion of Sydney's denizens spend happy hours in their quiet suburban homes. As mile by mile we were slowly borne along, numerous little bays and coves came into view where tiny beaches of white sand were laved by the warm, silent, blue waters. At short intervals also we could see the shiny, white streets that gave access to bathing spots along the shores, running away from the water far inland till their course was lost in the distance and by the shading of the trees that lined the way. Numbers of ferry boats, filled with crowds of happy pleasure seekers, were speeding in various directions to all sorts of frequented resorts, and especially to the famous Manly Beach which is distant by a run of only seven miles from the Sydney Ferries.

The peace of Sunday lay over the city as I wended my way through its silent and almost deserted streets in my haste to reach St. Mary's Cathedral in time for Mass. But if the great business centres of the city, such as Bridge Street, and Pitt, and Castlereagh,

and George, and Elizabeth Streets—names ominous to an Irishman—make a solitude on Sunday forenoon, save that the voice of the news-boys is heard shouting their wares in their unique Australian accent, a strange compound of cockney and some peculiar mixture of guttural and nasal twang of their own creation, probably the result of too close acquaintance with cockatoos and laughing jackasses, they become a vast hive of human beings when the work-a-day week begins on Monday morning. There is scarcely anything else, except his climate, of which the Australian is so proud as of his eight hour work-day and his forty-four-hour-labour week, although this law is by no means uniform throughout the several States. It gives him an opportunity to read his newspapers and talk politics to his heart's content; and politics, newspapers, and magazines occupy all the idle hours of the worker of Australia. If you want to study this element of the population at first hand, go to the Government Domain, a vast park, separated from Hyde Park which runs through the heart of the city only by the width of St. James Road. Here, from 2 to 6 p. m. every Sunday afternoon, you see thousands of powerful, well-dressed men, divided into ten or twelve separate groups, listening to ten or twelve soap-box orators delivering themselves of their grievances against Church and State. There are Socialist groups and Communist groups and Nationalist groups and Labour groups of many varieties; but do not suppose that these groups, which wage a wordy war on one another in the Government Domain, are thus divided at the polls on election day, for they are not. On that day the workers of Australia are united as an army in battle array in presence of the enemy, and the enemy to Labour is any other political party or coalition of parties, by whatever name they may be called. I heard the Communist orator use these words in the course of his speech:

We believe that the workers of Australia, or of any other part of the empire, will never attain their objective by any constitutional methods or parliamentary representation, but only by red-hot revolution; but we believe that it is our duty on polling day to cast our votes on the side of Labour, Socialist and Constitutional Labour, in order to defeat the capitalist and take the reins of power from his hands. Nevertheless, the great battle for the permanent supremacy of Labour must be fought and won through red-hot revolution.

The inflated eloquence of the orator throughout his speech was not wholly devoid of argument; but it was pregnant with that controversial, economic, and political stuff, which has become wearisome platitude on the lips of these gentlemen, and appears to pall upon

their audiences deeply interested as they evidently are in all political and national problems.

Great crowds give a patient hearing to every speaker, numbers of people passing back and forth alternately from one to another group; and though there is some heckling and bantering, the speaker takes his medicine with right good humour, and when he is sometimes hit hard, he hits back in return. One of the speakers with a rubicund, fat, good-natured face, who was combatting some of the extravagant demands of Labour, said in answer to a pugnacious questioner: "Yes, the capitalist is a bold, bad man, a tyrant and a robber. Look around you here to-day, and you can see the evidence of it. Look at how many of these men are in rags, how many of them are wearing the same suit of Sunday clothes for ten years, how many of these women have shawls upon their heads and no boots on their feet." The voice of the speaker was soft, and his manner quiet, but the blow was a heavy one, and the sarcasm was evidently felt, for the silence with which it was received made one realize that it would be hard to find such large numbers of working men and women better dressed and apparently better fed. The effect produced upon the crowd reminded me of Cardinal Newman's words: "Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma; no man will be a martyr for a conclusion."

When one made a study of those crowds of earnest men absolutely free from any signs of violence or passion, one did not think of Talleyrand's words: "What is democracy often-times but the aristocracy of blackguards?" But one did recall those of Madame de Stael: "This revolution (1789) may in the long run contribute to the spread of greater enlightenment among a considerable number of people; but the vulgarity of expression, of manners, and of views, must be fatal to good sense and higher culture for years to come." This was particularly noticeable when one passed from the Labour groups to where the anti-Roman and anti-Christian orators were pouring forth the vials of their wrath, some of them against popery and priests, and others against ministers of all religions. The no-popery orator was a North-of-Ireland man, about whom you felt that here was an unconscionable conscience, stuffed through and through with unfathomable egotism.

If you have patience and strength to continue for four hours listening to the various orators, including the Evangelical element, who are there to defend Protestant Christianity as the one and only remedy for social evils, you will hear

Assertion and denial oscillate
Till truth is lost amid a whirl of words
That rivals Babel.

After having spent four or five Sunday afternoons in the Government Domain studying the doctrines, politics, and purposes of Labour, you will probably ask yourself—"What is it that is forbidden by law in this part of the world?" But you will soon discover that the question should be made to read: "What is there that is not forbidden by law?" You find law on every side of you threatening you with its penalties, and with "drastic measures" if you do this, that or the other thing. "Drastic measures" is the gentle term, and it is to be seen on the walls of public buildings, latrines, railway stations, and even on the inside walls of the Salvation Army Hotel!

There is, perhaps, no other class of government so prone to make laws as Labour government, and Labour governments in Australia are now five to one, if we leave out the federal government and include Tasmania. A little more than a year ago, only Queensland had a Labour government, and that had only a majority of two in the parliament. To-day it has a majority of fourteen. In October, 1923, Tasmania elected a Labour government; in March 1924, Western Australia, and in April 1924, South Australia followed the example of Tasmania. Labour has been continuously in power in Queensland since 1915, and is gradually displacing capitalistic institutions in favour of co-operative or socialized organizations. The government of Queensland no longer grants a freehold estate in land; only a lease for ninety-nine years, with renewal clauses.

The political and commercial life of Australia strikes one as being exceptionally complex. Steam and electric railways, all owned by the States, are run apparently on a principle of confusion, and of giving employment to as many as possible. The railways in some States are wide-gauge, in others narrow, which, when the border line is reached, necessitates transference of goods. All these railways, steam and electric, carry the old time box cars, where men and women are often uncomfortably huddled together, especially in suburban trains. On the electric city trams are no transfer tickets: the journey is cut up into sections, and you must buy another ticket at the end of every section as you go along until you reach your destination. This, to a stranger, is absolutely confusing. You are ordered to bring your baggage to the railway station thirty minutes before the train leaves; but if you have it there two hours,

you must pay storage, and excess baggage if it is more than seventy-five pounds in weight. If you put some money in the bank for a month, you pay five shillings for a Bank Book; or if you decline it, you pay five shillings for leaving your money in the care of that precious institution, which pays you no interest unless you leave it with them for six months at least. And the various Labour governments sustain by law those oppressive institutions, although of course they have created banks under their own direct control, to counteract as far as possible such evil influence. The people still cling tenaciously to almost every English usage and custom, such as serving one's time under contract as an apprentice to learn any trade or business.

Where white people of Anglo-Saxon descent live in a sunny climate under the British flag, one expects to find them—at least outside the confines of crowded cities—a very happy people; but I cannot say that the Australians impressed me with their sunny dispositions. Their reputation for honesty, religion, or morality is not high. Some widely travelled gentlemen told the late Cardinal Moran of Sydney that Melbourne and Sydney were the two worst cities in which they had ever been, but I confess I did not see things to be as black as that.

In Ireland it was at one time considered to be a duty to "get drunk like a gentleman", but that practice has come to Australia in the form of an etiquette, not a duty. The Australian drinks with all the gravity of a man who makes it a part of the business of life, without letting frivolity or riotousness have any share in his potations. If you have any taste for this kind of thing, you must wait for that blissful hour when the legal work-day ends at 5 p. m., and the bars close their doors at 6 p. m. to all but the initiated. During this hour there are people who "run in the race" to fill themselves full, and you are lucky if you do not meet with someone who—spoiling for a fight—challenges you as a stranger to the combat; for the Australian has a wonderful eye for picking out the stranger or foreigner, especially when the pupil of that organ is distended with the energy of spirits, and the blood is aflame with alcoholic fire. And if the Australian drinks like a gentleman, so does he also eat like a gentleman—leisurely, care-free, pleasantly chatting with all the vivacity and good humour of one for whom to live is a pleasure, not a weariness of the flesh. This pleasant manner of life, however, you do not find in those cafés where the proprietor may have been that morning in court to answer for the condition of his kitchen; but you must not be repulsed by soiled table-cloths

and the absence of any kind of napkin where twenty-one meals of two courses are served for less than eightpence each.

If there is any part of the British Empire less governed by force and more by good sound community sense than Australia, I know not which it is. Nowhere is the policeman in uniform less visible. Now, if this is due to the influence of Labour in parliamentary and municipal politics, it will prove a refutation of Burke's statement that "Parliament is a place to contract the narrowness of men's ideas, confirm inveterate prejudices and influence vulgar passions." But however that may be, it is certain that no more in Australia than elsewhere are all classes united for the common good. The war in Australia as everywhere else is between national prosperity and the liberty, happiness, and welfare of the individual. The individual does not care a pinch of snuff for the solidarity of a nation, if that solidarity is to be secured at the expense of the happiness of himself and his family. And yet is not coercion the fundamental principle of trade unionism, and is not that absurd and tyrannical law called the 'Law of Necessity' invoked to justify it? The true unit of society is the family, for the family was before the State. Sovereignty of the State, carried too far, produces the degradation and enslavement of the family. The people of Australia ought to have a better comprehension of this than some other people, for the Commonwealth is a group of States, and every State a group of families. If therefore the working classes of Australia are still in bulk Christians, believing in their Bible, they must recognize that Christian parents can never divest themselves of their prerogatives and responsibilities at the express command of a socialistic State. And yet the socialistic State is apparently the direct aim of Labour in Australia, notwithstanding the fact that State ownership has proved a financial failure. Many of the great industries run by the State, such as the Federal Woollen Mills at Geelong, the State Bakery, State Trawling Industry, State Saw Mills, Timber Yards and Power Station, and many other works started by Labour under the Industrial Undertakings Act, have been sold to private interests, as the only alternative to "closing down" through sheer incompetence of government ownership and control. The running of these industries involved enormous financial losses to the government, and did not at all put an end to unemployment. When the Dooly-Socialistic-Government went out of office two years ago, there were then 14,500 men out of work in New South Wales alone, and according to the local newspapers there were 18,500 men idle in the city during my visit in May last.

According to the government statistics of unemployment for the several months of 1922 and 1923, the number of idle men in the former year ran from 11,000, the lowest in any one month, to 14,500 the highest, and in the latter year from 6,000 the lowest to 11,500 the highest, in the one State of New South Wales during the course of twelve months.

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The present capitalistic system promises only further unemployment, poverty and war. . . . All that Labour seeks to do is to supplant this with a system by which those who actually produce will receive the full value of the wealth produced—not as individuals or syndicates, but as a community whole. . . . There are two methods of gaining the objective. The one is to dispossess the present owners by force, which. . . does not appeal to some people as practicable. The other is to get possession by legitimate or constitutional means—by using the capitalist machine. And that is the policy of the Australian Labour Party.

These words are a quotation from a speech made by Mr. A. C. Willis, President of the A. L. P., in the Southern Cross Hall at Sydney, October, 1923, and are, I presume, a fair indication of the ultimate aim of Australian Labour. Meantime, before the objective be attained, if ever, Labour and Capital will castigate each other, class war will become more and more acute, economic life will be perpetually disturbed, industry crippled, and progress impeded. Who in fact can tell what will happen when the "leaders" of one great union are described by their own president, vice-president, and secretary, in a signed document, as "industrial jumping jacks, hopping from one position to another, with no thought of anything other than their own skins and positions"? (*Guardian*, October 26, 1923).

The Labour unions of Australia, grouped and organized under various names and with very different platforms, by no means live in peace, but make open war on one another through their many Labour newspapers. Some of these papers own fine buildings and expensive plants, and some of the gentlemen connected with them are drawing salaries as high as £2000 (\$10,000) per annum. Patriotism and altruism in Australia, as elsewhere, are very often only cloaks for selfishness and profiteering, so that one may venture to say of all political parties in Australia, Labour included, what Lord Bryce has said of political parties in the United States, that not one of them "has any principles or any distinctive tenets." "All have been lost, except office and the hope of it."

Of course the Labour party of Australia, like the Labour party lately in power in England, has a very large political platform;

but the former, like the latter, studiously abstains from attempting to convert it into law, lest it might endanger parliamentary salaries. Political platforms in Australia, as in Canada, are framed only for electioneering purposes: they are the baits on the hook to catch the votes of the proletariat. At the present moment Capital and Labour in Australia, by means of organization and an unscrupulous press agency, are able to set aside all other interests and to convert parliament itself into a mere autocratic machine. Neither appears to have any standard of ethics: right and wrong are only relative terms.

It would be folly to deny that some excellent legislation has been passed by the parliaments of Australia, but many people maintain that more credit for this is due to the Nationalist than to the Labour governments, except perhaps in the State of Queensland. A great deal of law has been enacted concerning courts of arbitration, and the regulation of wages and hours of work; law too regarding the welfare of mothers and children, and of the unemployed, and concerning the establishment of rural banks for assistance to farmers, and the Correspondence School for sparsely settled districts, and old age pensions, and many other matters of considerable interest to the people. Australia is nevertheless a great school of blatant demagogues, who muddle the brains of a people proud of their own wisdom with all sorts of economic fallacies. One need only remember that Sir Henry Parkes prophesied and boasted in his speech on the third reading of his Education Bill that it would "bring death to the calling of the clergy." Here was an Australian Bolshevik, nearly forty years before the birth of Bolshevism in Russia. In conclusion, one may venture to say of Australian politics:

I have seen corruption boil and bubble
Till it o'errun the stew, laws for all faults
But faults so countenanced, that the strong statutes
Stand like the forfeits in a barber's shop
As much in mock as mark.