5

Loyalties

The Boer War began in 1899 just as the colonies were poised to federate: as an imperial experience it was well timed to expose the ambiguities of Australian loyalty. With Britain being portrayed as an imperial bully in Europe, the confrontation with the stubborn Boers was early seen as a test for the Empire. Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain therefore confidentially encouraged the colonies to be forthcoming with offers of support. The governments of the Australian colonies dutifully obliged, many leaders assuming that they could not question British policy; as the premier of Victoria confessed, it was 'difficult for us to say what the merits of this question are, because we are a long way off'. Soon public enthusiasm for the war had been drummed up, contingents despatched; the relief of Mafeking was the occasion for widespread rapture in the streets. Federation converted the war in South Africa into a potentially Australian cause. It seemed to many symbolic that the Commonwealth should be born in this moment of imperial truth. According to one politician, 'the moment the first drop of Australian blood was drawn and the first Australian life lost in South Africa, that moment Australia merged into an integral part of the Empire'.[1]

Yet the rituals of public patriotism disguised small but significant opposition together with elements of discreet apathy. Some radicals and a few Labor members questioned the morality of the British cause, and wondered aloud why the colonies should be expected to contribute to a war about which they had not been consulted. Such criticisms distressed the loyalists, but were at least debated; however they became cause for grave suspicion if voiced by representatives of the Irish Australian community. When Catholic newspapers impugned the war, it mattered little that Catholics nevertheless appeared to be well represented among those volunteering for service. Colonial convention required that the suspicion

of Irish disloyalty had to be expressed by inference, and many of the patriotic demonstrations were not so much spontaneous outbursts of imperial loyalty as accusations directed at the silence of the minority. While there is no doubt that the commitment to South Africa commanded the support of a substantial majority, the degree of enthusiasm is more debatable. The *Bulletin* took the unpopular course of opposing the war, yet its circulation did not appear to suffer unduly.

More than 16,000 men went to South Africa, compared to about 6,000 Canadians; the commitment, although small, was more than token. It was enough to give many Australians an agreeable feeling that their country was an active partner in the imperial enterprise. Yet the Australian participation in the war itself exposed a thread of anti-British sentiment. There was British praise for the military performance of the colonials until in 1901 the 5th Victorian Mounted Rifles suffered a bad defeat at Wilmansruist, and their British general was said to have described them as 'white livered curs'.[2] Mutinous mutterings amongst the Victorians led to three soldiers being court-martialled and sentenced to death, though Kitchener commuted the sentences to prison terms. Then in 1902 two Australian lieutenants were executed following court martial convictions for the murder of Boer prisoners and a German missionary. In both cases the Australian government and public were not informed until after the event. Colonial sensitivity about the Wilmansruist defeat gave way to some resentment towards the British military machine. Yet although the Commonwealth government nervously asked questions (which do not appear to have been answered) the three survivors, whose convictions were later quashed, allegedly for legal reasons, proved something of an embarrassment on their return to Australia. In the midst of colonial expressions of imperial enthusiasm they were unhappy reminders of an episode which many preferred to forget.

Nevertheless the South African war encouraged a perception of the distinctive qualities of the Australian soldier – what Lord Roberts had called colonial 'individuality', his bush skills, resourcefulness and lack of military formality. It also encouraged a certain respect for the Boers, dour settlers in a landscape not dissimilar to Australia's. There was a disparity between the official rhetoric of the war and the soldiers' own experience of it. 'Why did we ever come?' asked one disillusioned corporal. 'Where is all the "pomp and circumstance of war"? . . . Where's anything but dirt, and discomfort, and starvation, and nigger-driving? Who wants to participate in a shabby war like this?'[3] For the infant Commonwealth the South African experience rehearsed the questions of loyalty and war which were to be posed so dramatically in 1914–18.

In the second half of the nineteenth century there had been an element of republicanism in the colonies. As early as 1850 J. D. Lang had urged a republic, and there had been a hint of such sentiment at Eureka. The tendency to see the United States as a model had encouraged the notion that a republic was at least a possible future. British republicanism which surfaced during the years of Queen Victoria's extended mourning for her consort no doubt had an effect too, but the *Bulletin*, which espoused a republic, continued to blow raspberries at Royalty even through the years of her resurgence. Yet in the new century republicanism, which had never been a purposeful movement, withered away entirely. Perhaps federation made it seem irrelevant; perhaps the death of Queen Victoria and the succession to the throne of the jaunty Edward VII encouraged a more relaxed acceptance of the monarchy; but overall it would seem that rising imperial enthusiasm in Britain was transmitted to Australia, stifling any residual republicanism in the process. The *Bulletin* was hostile to the first celebration of Empire Day (which it called Vampire Day) in 1905, but thereafter it increasingly retreated into silence.

Empire Day was part of the marketing of the new imperialism. Stemming from Canada in the late 1890s, the idea was taken up by the British Empire League, an Australian branch of which had been established in 1901 to promote the Boer War cause. In 1905 the observance of Empire Day on 24 May (Queen Victoria's birthday) was officially recognised, although the League did not succeed in having it made a public holiday. From the beginning the emphasis was on inducting school children to imperial citizenship. There was an 'Empire Catechism' of facts and figures, and on the day, as the Victorian School Paper put it, 'the children of Great Britain and Greater Britain (the "Dominions beyond the Seas") will be reminded of the empire in which every one of them has a share'.[4] It was the era, too, of the Boy Scout movement, founded by Lord Baden Powell, the hero of Mafeking: its relaxed militarism and outdoors emphasis seemed suited to Australian conditions.

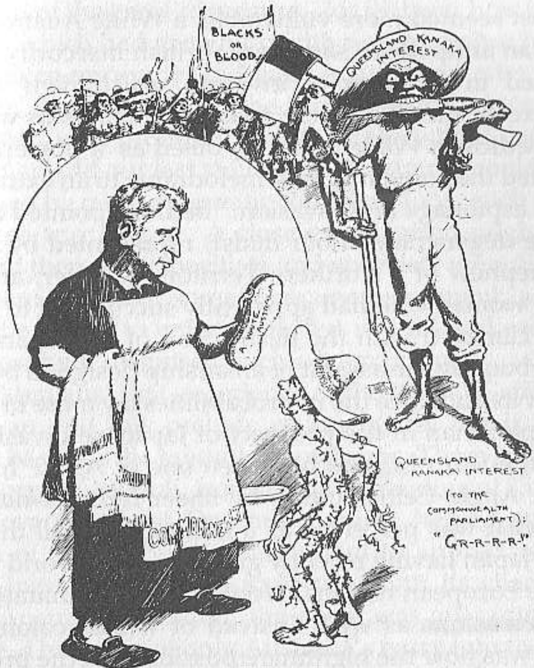
Catholic schools generally declined to take up Empire Day. Cardinal Moran of Sydney thought it 'out of place', and instead converted 24 May to 'Australia Day'. When St Mary's Cathedral marked the occasion by flying the flags of Ireland and Australia, the loyalist *Sydney Morning Herald* frostily headlined its report, 'NO UNION JACK IS FLOWN'.[5] The affair highlighted the ambiguity of Catholic promotion of Australian sentiment, as it was often a tactical

means of avoiding the rhetoric of imperial loyalty. Yet in the years before the Great War even Catholic suspicion of the Empire waned, particularly as hopes for Irish Home Rule increased. In 1905 the Commonwealth parliament had carried resolutions urging Britain to grant Ireland the self-government which the dominions already enjoyed.

The diffusion of imperialist ideology was complemented by a growing sense of national vulnerability which stimulated consideration of defence needs. Partly this reflected the intensifying imperial rivalries of Europe – hence the 1909 dreadnought scare, when raucous concern that Britain was falling behind Germany in naval strength reverberated throughout the empire – but partly it stemmed from regional sensitivity, particularly in the wake of Japan's 1905 defeat of Russia. It was in this context that the Labor Party joined those advocating compulsory military training, at a time when conscription was not favoured in Britain or the USA, though it existed, of course, in much of Europe. Labor, with a traditional radical suspicion of a standing army, saw compulsory military training as the basis of a democratic 'people's army'. In 1911 a Labor government presided over the introduction of compulsory cadet training for boys and youths between twelve and seventeen. Alfred Deakin, the Liberal leader who also supported what came to be called 'boy conscription', hoped that enthusiasm for the training would 'to some extent, take the place of those sports on which our young people look and speculate every Saturday without otherwise participating in'.[6]

This new emphasis on defence could be promoted, as it was by Labor, in nationalist terms, but it assumed an imperial framework, and was increasingly infused with the sentiment attaching to that. So the English journalist, John Foster Fraser, wrote in 1910 that 'you drop from Imperialism to something like parochialism in Australia, with little of the real national spirit intervening – though it exists and must increase'.[7] Federation had not abolished old colonial loyalties, but merely provided new structures within which they could compete.

The main focus for 'real national spirit' was that sense of race summed up by 'White Australia': as the radical H. B. Higgins put it, 'if Australia has any national question this is it'. When, in the early days of the federal movement, Parkes had invoked 'the crimson thread of kinship', it was the British heritage which he saw as uniting the colonies. In 1902 nearly all Australians would have agreed with Deakin in seeing 'unity of race' as 'an absolute essential



5.1 A *Bulletin* 1901 comment on White Australia. A black-infested, errant Queensland is about to be cleaned up by Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton. The original caption has Barton saying to Queensland 'You dirty boy!'

to the unity of Australia'. While some tactfully argued that it was the low living standards of non-white races which were objected to, 'the possibility and probability of racial contamination' (as Labor leader, Watson, put it) became the dominant concern. White Australia meant not only an immigration policy which excluded non-whites, but a corresponding policy of, in Deakin's words, 'the deportation or reduction of the number of aliens now in our midst'.[8] Although the term 'White Australia' was never officially endorsed in the legislation, the strength of the sentiment ensured that it was one of the first issues addressed by the new Commonwealth parliament.

In one sense racism itself was part of the British heritage, but there is no doubt that the advocacy of White Australia revealed a new and nasty stridency. Yet it was a cause which could evoke emotional commitment and even idealism. As the international climate became more unstable, and as Australia as an isolated Euro-

pean outpost seemed more vulnerable, a White Australia acquired the aura of an antipodean sanctuary. British insecurity at this time was reflected in fantasies of invasion; Australians had similar fantasies, except that they were racial nightmares as well. In 1909 Randolph Bedford's *White Australia*, billed as 'a powerful patriotic play', adapted the conventions of melodrama to an extravagant tale of Japanese espionage and invasion.[9] Bedford pointed an accusing finger at the degeneracy in our midst, represented by Cedric, the traitorous nephew of a Northern Territory squatter, and Pawpaw Sal, a white woman who had apparently succumbed to the tropics. The drama climaxed with the destruction of the Japanese fleet in Sydney Harbour by the assault of an airship designed by the squatter hero. For its audience the improbabilities lay more in the mechanics of the plot than in the prospect of Japanese invasion.

Whilst the fear of China had been one of Asian 'hordes' submerging an Anglo-Celtic culture by sheer force of numbers, the Japanese threat was perceived as a military one, all the more immediate for Japan having recently graduated as a world power on a par with the European nations. Would not Japan imitate Europe in imperial pretensions as well? Instead of whites colonising other races, there was now the nightmare possibility of the process being reversed. It was a matter of acute embarrassment that Japan was an ally of Britain's. In instituting the White Australia immigration policy it had been necessary, out of imperial tact, to follow the Natal practice of using an arbitrary dictation test, to maintain the pretence that race was not at issue. At the outset of the Great War the sleazy *Truth* lamented:

> The war drums beat! The scene is changed! The brown man is a brother!
> Alas, for dear Australia White! The Japs are pals of Mother![10]

Australians did not need to be told that it was better to have Japan as an ally than a foe. The real, if implied, complaint was that Britain was abdicating its imperial responsibilities in the Pacific. From this point of view the Japanese alliance did not strengthen the Empire so much as expose its weakness.

The coming of the war of necessity pushed such doubts into the background: the Empire now was everything. Unease about Australia's own position gave way to what the Governor-General, Munro Ferguson, called 'indescribable enthusiasm' for the British cause in Europe, and by the end of 1914, more than 50,000 men had enlisted. Even in union towns like Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie there was a

rush to be part of the great adventure – for that was how it seemed to a generation which had grown up with no experience of war other than the uneven encounter in South Africa. And after all it was a Labor leader, Andrew Fisher, the Scottish-born miner soon to be prime minister, who promised that Australia would defend Britain 'to our last man and our last shilling'.[11] Enlistment could, of course, be encouraged by more pragmatic considerations, such as the prospect of a free trip abroad. A close examination might have also revealed that there were pacifists and socialists who did not share the excitement, and that sometimes unemployment, as in Broken Hill, could be a spur to enlistment. But in 1914 and early 1915 the festive atmosphere disguised such undercurrents.

The Australians' first experience of the War at Gallipoli in 1915 brought to an end this prelude of innocence, but it also was to provide the basis for the mythology of Anzac. There is no need here to tell the story of Gallipoli, from the dawn landing of 25 April to the successful evacuation of December which helped subsume the humiliation of defeat: but it is important to appreciate the subtle mixture of ingredients which gave the myth its character. Even before the Australians landed, the event was guaranteed national significance. This was not only Australia's entry into the Great War but history as well: South Africa could now only be regarded as a rehearsal. And because Australia was offering its best – for the first eager recruits were recognised as being physically fine specimens – it offered a splendid opportunity to present a flattering portrait of the Australian as a national type. The British generously cooperated in this venture. The dramatic account of the landing by the London *Daily Telegraph* correspondent, Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, claimed that there had been 'no finer feat in this war'. Bartlett's tour of Australia and New Zealand in early 1916 consolidated his role as a publicist of Gallipoli. One of the most striking accolades was that given by the poet, John Masefield, who praised the Anzacs, 'those smiling and glorious young giants', for their 'physical beauty and nobility of bearing'.[12] Such tributes facilitated the more deliberate myth-making in Australia itself.

Gallipoli offered one giant problem – it was not only a defeat, but, in the end, an irrelevant sideshow. This, however, allowed for a subtle anti-Britishness to intrude itself into the saga. The defeat could not be laid at the feet of the heroic Anzacs: the failure of Gallipoli was a failure of British strategy.* Hidden in the Anzac myth

* This, too, had been Ashmead Bartlett's message, delivered in the United States, though he was warned off repeating it by authorities in Australia and New Zealand.

is a feeling that the Anzacs had been sent on a fool's errand. But the sense in which Gallipoli was a sideshow also had the effect of giving the Anzacs a slightly proprietorial attitude to the campaign, ignoring the fact that British soldiers were in the majority.

That Gallipoli had a special significance for both Australia and New Zealand created a further historical dilemma. The very word 'Anzac' fused the military identities of the two countries: how, then, could the myth be subdivided? New Zealand had had close ties with the eastern colonies in the nineteenth century, and in the early 1890s appeared a more likely participant in federation than Western Australia. In the event, the difficulties in uniting the Australian colonies proved great enough without attempting to include New Zealand, which went its own way. In spite of Australia and New Zealand sharing much in heritage and experience, the artificial creation of separate national identities in 1901 was a starting point for cultural divergence. Anzac was an uneasy reminder that the two countries could, nevertheless, not escape being involved in each other's destiny.

The theme, ultimately, of the Gallipoli legend is tragic: the death of innocence, and heroic sacrifice in the midst of stupidity. When C. E. W. Bean, later the official war historian, and another correspondent were discussing the evacuation they had just witnessed, Bean's colleague complained that the problem, 'from a journalistic point of view', was that there was no battle. Bean disagreed, saying that battle stories were 'almost commonplace nowadays' and that 'the spectacle of our whole position gradually left bare' was just as good.[13] The Gallipoli myth which Bean was to play a major part in constructing was no ordinary tale of battle bravery: the almost ghostly image of the evacuation gave the event a dramatic unity, offsetting the heroics of the landing against the skill and cunning exercised in defeat. It was the ultimate achievement of the myth that in spite of its inner ambiguities it could nevertheless be firmly committed to the imperial cause.

The myth that evolved from Gallipoli was, like all national myths, designed to be unifying. But even while its foundations were being laid, the war, on another plane, was proving a divisive experience. After the retirement of Fisher in October 1915, the Labor government was led by W. M. (Billy) Hughes who was ardently committed to the war. In 1916, Hughes, London-born of Welsh parents, visited England where his fervour and energy made an impression; he returned, convinced that Australia would have to countenance conscription to sustain its commitment. The issue provided an immediate focus for gathering trade union discontent which had been stimulated by inflation and unemployment. Hughes sought to by-pass dissent in his own party by putting the conscription proposal to a referendum, assuming that simple patriotism would ensure its endorsement.

The Labor Party split, Hughes eventually leading his supporters into a new anti-labor amalgam, the National Party. But opposition to conscription was not limited to the trade union movement and pacifists. Some farmers, pragmatists as ever, saw conscription as a threat to their labour supply at harvest time, while an emotive campaign was launched to persuade women to reject the 'blood vote'. The whole issue then became coloured with sectarian bias when, in the wake of the British reprisals against the leaders of the Dublin Easter Rising in 1916, the Irish question resurfaced. Catholics found in Melbourne's Archbishop Mannix, who had arrived fresh from Ireland in 1913, a leader eager to revitalise their historic commitment to Erin. Most Catholic clergy preferred to stay out of the conscription debate; a few, like the archbishops of Perth and Brisbane, were advocates. But Mannix, although he offended some Catholics, particularly the well-to-do who saw him as wilfully reactivating sectarianism, served as a focal point for Irish suspicion of British motives. Protestant activists, who generally supported conscription, saw Mannix as a traitor; Hughes himself believed that Mannix was a Sinn Feiner, and seriously considered moves to deport him. That the first referendum, against all expectations, was closely defeated exacerbated tensions. At the 1917 elections Hughes, to help secure his return to office, promised not to introduce conscription without another referendum; so, later in the year, the community was forced to go through the whole divisive experience again. This time the proposal was defeated more decisively.

Imperial loyalists were shattered by these twin defeats, and felt humiliated in the eyes of the land they called 'Home'. The targets for their bitterness were the trade union movement and the Catholic Church, the former identified with Bolshevism, the latter with Sinn Fein. These two disruptive forces merged into a composite revolutionary ogre dedicated to undermining the Empire; that the departure of Hughes and his supporters from the Labor Party left Catholics in a strengthened position in Labor politics gave some plausibility to the perceived alliance. When, in the 1918 St Patrick's Day procession, Archbishop Mannix doffed his biretta for a banner inscribed 'To the Martyrs of Easter Week' but failed to do so for a band playing 'God Save the King', the loyalists were outraged. As

the Great War ended and Ireland sank into chaos, there were bizarre Australian echoes as stories circulated of arms being secretly stockpiled in convents; loyalist organisations mushroomed, some with a paramilitary flavour. So the soldiers who had left a country apparently united in enthusiastic support for the war returned to a society racked by disillusion and division. Some had been away from home for four years or more; having survived the horror of the trenches they now faced a difficult adjustment to the realities of survival at home. There were diggers who rioted at the sight of a red flag, seizing on Bolshevism as a betrayal of their cause; sometimes the restless discontent was evidenced by less specific rowdyism, which fixed on symbols of civilian authority, such as those other wearers of uniforms, the police, as their immediate oppressors.

It was in this context of dislocation – and the wider context of fears of racial degeneration* – that the myth and ritual of Anzac were developed. In 1916 the landing at Anzac Cove was commemorated at church services throughout Australia, though the occasion was also linked to fund raising and recruitment. In contrast, soldiers in Egypt marked the anniversary in a much more relaxed manner. Monash, later to be corps commander and Australia's outstanding general, records how he 'turned out' his whole brigade at 6.45 a.m. for a 'short but very dignified Service' after which the day was spent at sport, culminating in 'a great Aquatic Carnival' in the Canal, with 'one teeming mass of naked humanity – at times there were over 15,000 men in the water'. There were also unscheduled 'comic items' including 'a skit on the memorable landing', something that would have been unthinkable in later years.[14]

With the coming of peace commemoration took on a new significance, for Anzac now had to serve as an expression of the whole experience of Australia at war. The commitment, the absence of conscription notwithstanding, had been immense; out of a total population of about five million, some 417,000 enlisted and 330,000 actually sailed off to battle; more than 59,000 were killed and about 174,000 wounded. The casualty rate was a very high 68.5 per cent, compared to Britain's 52.5 per cent. While occasions such as Armistice Day would have their due importance, Anzac alone could provide a national focus for such a sacrifice. Yet there was no immediate agreement as to what form the commemoration should take. There was often tension between civic authorities who assumed that they had jurisdiction and the organisations of ex-servicemen which saw

* See Chapter 7.

Anzac Day as 'theirs'. Gradually over the next decade the elements came together, though in each State the amalgam would vary slightly. Commemoration would take place on the exact day, in spite of church resistance when it fell on a Sunday; Anzac Day would thus be distinguished from frivolous public holidays, of which employers complained there were too many, taken on a Monday. The march would bring all the diggers together, even if Catholics hived off for a separate service afterwards. The main service would be Protestant in tone but deliberately avoid any specific Christian references. The dawn service, inspired by the hour of the Anzac landing, also would become part of the day's cycle, and provide a religious experience even more devoid of Christian content. Anglican and Protestant clergy sometimes resisted this trend, but had increasingly to go along with the kind of ceremonies which the Returned Servicemen's League, as it came to be called, deemed appropriate. It was as if the ex-servicemen leaders wanted Anzac to have a kind of religious autonomy, which would ensure that it would not be swallowed up by conventional Protestant pietism. It would also become accepted that while the morning would be dedicated to the solemnities, a certain amount of old-soldierly abandon was permissible in the afternoon. Police would turn a blind eye to the illegal schools of two-up (a simple form of gambling using pennies) which sprang up in the streets.

By the mid 1920s this pattern of observance was taking shape, but it was already clear that Anzac required its own monuments. There were often proposals for 'useful' memorials – club houses for returned servicemen, or, as was suggested in Melbourne, a city improvement in the form of an Anzac Square. But the digger lobby generally came to the view that the commemoration of Anzac would be demeaned by such utilitarian considerations, just as anything triumphal in character was also unsuitable. The results were often monumental and often curious. In Melbourne there arose a massive Shrine of Remembrance, a 'visible manifestation of the people's grief', which, inspired by the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, resembles a pyramid crossed with a Greek temple. The inscription on the west wall, which commences 'LET ALL MEN KNOW THAT THIS IS HOLY GROUND', was written by Monash himself. Sydney chose not a Shrine but a Memorial, similarly proportioned, but contemporary art-deco in style. Entering the Hall of Memory one looks down into the Well of Contemplation, dominated by a sculpture of Sacrifice, a surprisingly erotic nude male figure borne on a shield by three women. According to its architect the Memorial was designed

5.2 The Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance, photographed at its dedication in 1934, which was witnessed by a crowd estimated at 300,000.

'to outlast any drab depression which might arise out of personal grief for the fallen'.[15] Canberra, the national capital from 1927, eventually followed with the Australian War Memorial, with a garden court, complete with a Pool of Reflection, leading into another Hall of Memory. Its three windows contain fifteen figures in uniform, a nurse being the only female. Each figure represents one of the qualities of Australian servicemen and women, ranging from candour, curiosity and independence to comradeship, patriotism and chivalry. The nurse, of course, is devotion, and has as a symbol of charity the pelican feeding her young from her bleeding breast. The importance of the Memorial is emphasised by its position on a direct axis facing the old (and new) Parliament House. But just as significant as these major monuments were the memorials erected in the main streets or parks of cities, towns and villages across the country – sometimes just a simple obelisk recording the names of the fallen, but often presided over by the symbolic digger, depicted not as a larger-than-life hero going into battle but as a very human survivor reflecting on the meaning of it all.

These developing patterns of ritualised remembrance were complemented by a growing body of myth about the Australian ethos, particularly as epitomised in the digger. The digger was capable of serving as a symbol of Australia itself. Before the War *Bulletin* cartoonists had often depicted Australia as a cheeky but rather spoilt child: now he could be discarded in favour of the mature, even world-weary, digger. The fleshing out of the digger as a national type owed much to the remarkable *Official War History* edited by C. E. W. Bean. The first of its twelve volumes, *The Story of Anzac: The First Phase*, was published in 1921; the last appeared in 1941 when the world was at war again. Bean, an English-born journalist who had already developed before the war an admiration for what he perceived as bush values, wanted to produce a people's history, written, as much as possible, from the viewpoint of the ordinary soldier. To a large extent the *History*, its index packed with the names of soldiers of all ranks (though officers of the lower echelon predominated), achieved this purpose, but Bean's generalisations about the digger were flavoured by nationalist romanticism. For Bean the essential qualities of the digger – his resourcefulness, independence and egalitarianism – derived from the bush. In the face of the plain facts of urbanisation he offered little evidence to support his thesis, beyond such assertions as that 'the bushman is the hero of the Australian boy'.[16]

The popular verse of C. J. Dennis, which enjoyed a great vogue amongst the diggers themselves, offered a different perspective. Dennis's first great success, *The Sentimental Bloke*, affectionately satirised the urban larrikin sub-culture, but in its sequel, *The Moods of Ginger Mick*, the war has a transforming impact. The Bloke's mate, Ginger Mick, goes off to war lured by 'the call of stoush' (fighting), but becomes a hero, even 'a gallant gentleman', and dies at Gallipoli. The *Bulletin*, which was also a convert of the war to the imperial cause, hailed *Ginger Mick* as 'a finely patriotic book, a uniquely Australian book'.[17] Dennis paid lip service to the rural dream – both the Bloke, and, later on, the returning *Digger Smith* seek independence on the land – but his characters were essentially urban. His larrikins were creatures of a middle-class imagination, and his sense of the vernacular inaccurate, but as urban fantasy Dennis's works amused and entertained. Moreover, in conveying a mood and humour which many identified as Australian, they suggested that Bean's invocation of the bush was not necessary to the new ethos.

Some have argued that the Anzac mythmakers took over a native, radical ethos and effectively harnessed it to a conservative

5.3 Ginger Mick before and after: [on the left] looking very disgruntled as he pauses 'loadin' up 'is truck' at the 'markit' to 'blarst the flamin' war!'; [on the right] transformed into a daredevil fighting soldier, one of 'the Southern Breed' who 'could play the game for keeps'.

purpose. But, as we have seen, the nineteenth century ideology of the bush was not necessarily radical; the Billabong children's books of Mary Grant Bruce had already offered popular evidence of a conservative celebration of the bush. Nevertheless it is true that Bean, Dennis and the many others who helped assemble 'the digger' drew eclectically on the traditions to hand, whether rural or urban, and dedicated the new hero to the imperial cause. In a sense they had no choice: if the war was not justified in imperial terms then it had, for distant Australia, no meaning at all. So in spite of its anti-English undertones the ethos could only be 'Australian' insofar as it was also 'British'. Hence it was appropriate that the Duke of Gloucester should dedicate Melbourne's Shrine on Armistice Day 1934 and that Kipling should mark the occasion with an ode which told how the soldiers returned to

> The kindly cities and plains where they were bred –
> Having revealed their Nation in Earth's sight.[18]

Although Anzac had, by the late 1920s, become a powerful focus for patriotic sentiment, as a *national* myth it contained the seeds of its own decline. There were few, in those early years, who

would not have gone along with the portrayal of the democratic digger, particularly in his implied superiority to his British brother. But the rituals and monuments of Anzac had full meaning only for the diggers themselves: while an attempt was made to reach out to women (as in the nurse's devotion, and the three women bearing Sacrifice) they were summoned to the ceremonies not as participants but as a respectful chorus. The monuments, carved with the names of foreign battlefields, told of an experience which was, literally, remote from those who had not fought. Indeed, that the young diggers made a pilgrimage to old Europe – for 60,000 a pilgrimage of death – was part of the essence of the Australian war. The diggers, as volunteers, were an elect, and Anzac was something that they shared, and in many cases, felt a need to go on sharing. But how could those who had, for whatever reason, not volunteered to serve, partake of it? The divisions of the war could not be obliterated by shrines and memorials. When the Melbourne *Argus*, reporting the dedication of the Shrine, headlined that 'ALL CLASSES PAY TRIBUTE TO SELF-SACRIFICE' it was a claim that implied the fear that there might not be unanimity.[19]

Anzac was also a generational experience. Schools inculcated children in the solemnity of the occasion, but the rhetoric which stressed what 'we' owed to 'them' widened rather than narrowed the gap. Donald Horne writes of his childhood in the 1930s:

> In the bottom right-hand drawer of his side of the dressing-table Dad kept the symbols of his most important beliefs. When there was no one in the house I sometimes took them out and wondered at them. There was his Masonic apron, his Bible, his war medals, a bedouin's knife he had brought back from the Palestine campaign, an army revolver, his spurs. One day I put on the Masonic apron and the medals. Holding the revolver in my hand, with the bedouin's knife at my waist and the spurs on my feet, I looked at myself in the mirror and saw an Australian.[20]

But an Australian, necessarily, of that generation: Horne's theatrical image suggests how the child could never be the father, except in mirror pastiche. Horne's own experience of war would be a rather different one. While the Second World War would renew and even expand the appeal of Anzac, it would also serve to dilute it.

The extent to which Anzac became the preserve of the RSL pointed to a further limitation on its national potential. In the years between the wars the RSL became a powerful lobby group, but for most of the period it could not claim to represent the majority of diggers. In the mid 1920s, when the Anzac rituals were being established, its membership hovered around the 25,000 mark, though by the outbreak of the Second World War it had expanded to 82,000. There were always many diggers who preferred not to identify themselves as such, and who therefore did not join the League, or did not march.

Anzac was a powerful emotional and religious expression for many, but primarily for a proportion of the diggers themselves; in spite of its public rhetoric, it could not encompass all Australians. Yet Anzac emerged in the 1920s largely unchallenged by its potential critics. (Most of the controversy concerned the mode of commemoration, and was engaged in by its professed supporters.) There was, it would seem, a question of tact and respect involved. Few of those who had resented the jingoism of the war years would now deny the diggers 'their' day. Those who did not bow their heads before the shrines and memorials nevertheless accepted that for others they were 'holy ground'. This was one of the silent accommodations reached by post-war Australian society, which gave the impression of a greater unity than in fact existed. The old divisions would be expressed in other ways and through other avenues.

This sense of Anzac being important, yet somehow segregated from real life, perhaps helps explain the curious neglect of the war

by writers of the 1920s and 1930s. Apart from a little verse, which only in a few cases rises above the banal, and one or two novels, the principal literary monument was Bean's emerging *History*, the volumes of which, in their distinctive maroon binding, were to occupy a place of importance on many an Australian bookshelf. Although from 1916 official war artists, of whom George Lambert was perhaps the most significant, dutifully put the war on canvas, the gathering of most of their work in the War Memorial in Canberra reinforced its separation from the cultural mainstream.

There was a tendency, too, in looking back to identify the horrors of the war with the decadence of Europe. For Vance Palmer, who had enlisted in 1918,

> Europe is very old,
> It has known wars and death,
> The live past stirs within the mould,
> Yet chill cometh its breath.

Palmer turns his back on a Europe which, although 'pensive, subtle, profound' is a captive of its past:

> I will go south and south,
> There Life has scarce begun.[21]

The suspicion of the disruption and disjunction which seemed rife in Europe – particularly in the various 'isms' of art with their bizarre extremes – stifled artistic innovation in Australia, but it also encouraged a modest re-assertion of bush values. Although the Heidelberg vision had met with some official resistance – the Victorian Gallery did not buy its first Tom Roberts until 1920 – it was now in the process of being institutionalised in the popular imagination. The sometimes sentimental landscapes of Elioth Gruner and the stately gumtrees of Hans Heysen became accepted national images. Heysen, who was six when his family had arrived in South Australia from Germany, suffered some anti-Hun prejudice during the war, but was nevertheless patronised by governors and, even more significantly, by Dame Nellie Melba, now a *grande dame* of the local scene. Heysen saw the gumtree as 'a poet's tree, a painter's tree'[22], and some of his paintings were almost portraits of trees, depicting gnarled, massive trunks, with flaking skin of crumpled bark.

This painterly elevation of the gumtree as *the* symbol of the bush was complemented by a growing interest in Australian flora and fauna generally. While evident in the late nineteenth century, this

5.4 Dame Nellie Melba photographed at her home, Coombe Cottage, near Melbourne, not long before her death in 1931. Melba claimed that she raised £100,000 for the war effort, and in recognition of her work was awarded the DBE in 1918. At the time it was announced, Melba was in America, in her private railcar. Her secretary, going to Melba to congratulate her, found her prancing naked around the room, gleefully chortling 'I'm a Dame! I'm a Dame!'

interest now took more concerted forms. In the early 1900s there was a movement to promote the wattle as a national flower – in its golden innocence it was said to stand for 'home, country, kindred, sunshine, and love' – and a sprig was incorporated in the Australian coat of arms in 1912.[23] After the war home gardening took more systematic notice of native flora, and wildflower shows became popular. In children's literature the gumnut babies of May Gibbs and Dorothy Wall's mischievous young larrikin of a koala, Blinky Bill, reflected and themselves contributed to the new environmental awareness.

There was also a revived market for books about the frontier, which now meant either the centre or the north, thus focusing on the Northern Territory, Queensland and Papua-New Guinea.

Usually documentary in style, and ofter influenced by the *National Geographic* tradition, these books evince admiration for pioneers, a fascination with environmental extreme such as desert and jungle, a neo-anthropological interest in Aborig nes, and often an ideological commitment to developmental polici es. Amongst the landscape writers, as they have been called, Ion I driess was one of the most successful, becoming, by the late 1930 , a proven best seller. His subjects ranged from the myth of the l st gold reef (*Lasseter's Last Ride*), to the Flying Doctor (*Flynn of the In land*) and the Aborigines or 'stone-age man' (*Over The Range*). He als published a much praised account of the Australian Light Horsem en at Gallipoli (*The Desert Column*), and what was almost an e xpedition manual for the Depression unemployed, *Prospecting for Gold*. Like many other such writers he was an ardent proponent of great water diversion schemes which partook of technological fantasy. Idriess sometimes took liberties with his facts, and his po pular success galled some, though not all, more serious writers, b ut he had cleverly helped locate and exploit a popular curiosity ab ut the 'real' Australia – that is, the Australia where few Australians actually lived, and which therefore they knew little about.

The creative writers who saw then selves as inheritors of the *Bulletin* tradition remained convinced th at the bush was the proper inspiration for a national literature. In M lbourne, Vance and Nettie Palmer tried to provide a radical contin uity, seeking to encourage younger writers, but in spite of the ap parent promotion of bush values going on around them, they tend ed to feel embattled. Partly this was because of the sheer difficu ty of making a living as journalist-cum-writers in a society which still lacked so much of the cultural infrastructure of literary journal and patronage; but partly, too, it stemmed from their feeling that the war had ideologically blighted the earlier nationalist promise. The war-time transformation of the *Bulletin* from a broad radicali m to a conservative populism pointed to their dilemma; the *Bulle tin* maintained its role as a guardian of literary nationalism, but th ere was now a disjunction between its political and literary pages.

Perhaps the crux of their problem was that, unlike populists such as Idriess, they were uncertain of t eir audience. Whereas the earlier *Bulletin* school, so much centred o n the ballad and slice-of-life short story, had deliberately maintained a popular dialogue with its readership, the Palmers and their circle were attempting to intellectualise this tradition, yet somehow with expectations of retaining its mass appeal. Nettie Palmer discerned t his:

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> Confidence is surely one of the main things lacking in our writers up till now [she wrote in 1927] particularly our novelists. They never seemed quite sure of themselves or their public, never were fully convinced of their own point of view, or that there were people to communicate with whose minds were as adult as their own.[24]

She was too loyal to have been thinking of her husband Vance, whose often laboured novels succeeded neither as high art nor popular fiction. In fact her remarks were made in the context of praising the novel *Working Bullocks* written by their friend, Katharine Susannah Prichard. Prichard was notable for her attempt to imaginatively encompass Aboriginal experience, as in *Coonardoo* and the play, *Brumby Innes*, but she, too, seemed unsure of the terms on which she should engage the reader, the preachiness of her naïve but missionary Communism at times sitting oddly with the clichés of historical romance.

The self-conscious attempts in the 1920s to found a national drama, with which these writers were associated, amply demonstrated the gulf between artist and audience. Louis Esson, whose particular ambitions were as a playwright, had been persuaded by the Irish writers, Synge and Yeats, and the example of Dublin's Abbey Theatre, that what was needed were 'plays on really national themes', plays that would 'help *to build a nation* in the spiritual sense', rather than 'so-called intellectual drama, abstract and cosmopolitan', by which he meant Galsworthy, Bennett and Shaw. Yeats advised them to get a theatre going 'no matter how small', and this they did with the aptly named Pioneer Players.[25] Although some productions had a modest success audiences were indeed small and the theatre necessarily amateur. The Players petered out after a few years, disappointed not so much by the size of their audiences as by the lack of ferment in the stalls. There was no simple formula for creating a national drama, and Dublin's Abbey Theatre, a product of a unique Anglo-Irish culture, could not be transplanted in Melbourne.

There were writers, of course, who were not interested in these nationalist assertions. Norman Lindsay, and the group which gathered round him in Sydney, disowned, at least in theory, the importance of place. Introducing a collection, *Poetry in Australia*, Lindsay wrote in 1923:

> . . . we must accept the accident of geographical isolation, and label our poetry 'Australian'.

> Beyond that we have no concern for these variations in degree of rock and mud which pass for national distinctions on Earth.[26]

Yet Lindsay was, in his own way, a cultural isolationist who rejected contemporary Europe, seeing modernism in art and literature as symptomatic of a collapse in civilised values. In this sense he was much less cosmopolitan than the nationalists, who kept open their European lines of communication. Lindsay himself was an artist and writer of many talents, a perpetual adolescent who saw paganism as a liberating force, but whose artistic creed was conservative and imaginatively constricting. He was also an anti-nationalist who made a profitable sideline out of charming cartoon characterisations of Australian animals, and whose children's book, *The Magic Pudding*, set in the bush, has been hailed as an Australian classic.

Lindsay shared with the nationalists a deep suspicion of American cultural influences which seemed to be reshaping the urban environment. For Vance Palmer the suburb with its 'picture theatres, gramophones, motor cars and villas' was 'without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity', and he deplored jazz and cinema (though he was later to do some film reviewing). Lindsay, who by the 1920s was living in the Blue Mountains, disliked visiting Sydney where he saw in people's faces apathy and defeat; he also personally resisted the new technology of telephone, radio and motor car. It became fashionable to regard suburbia as the Australian blight. D. H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*, published in 1923, contributed with its depiction of 'this litter of bungalows and tin cans scattered for miles and miles'. Lawrence's *alter ego*, Somers, and his wife Harriett, travel to their first home in Sydney in a hansom cab, down 'the long street, like a child's drawing, the little square bungalows dot-dot-dot, close together and yet far apart, like modern democracy': their house, they discover, is called 'Torestin', which Somers at first takes to be an Aboriginal word.[27]

The new technology which was changing suburban life was American-dominated, but the American influence was evident in other spheres too. The search for an Australian style in house architecture had in the 1890s resulted in a local adaptation of 'Queen Anne' style, the 'federation villa', as it has come to be called. Whilst sometimes incorporating elaborate embellishments, including art nouveau, the federation villa drew on the country homestead tradition, and flowed on into a 'Colonial Revival' style. But in the 1920s builders and architects turned increasingly to the American West

Coast for marketable styles appropriate to Australian conditions, and the new post-war suburbs were created in the image of the Californian bungalow and, to a lesser extent, the Spanish Mission house.

Yet whatever the American influences, this suburbia had already acquired its own character, as Lawrence's appraisal indicated. Californian bungalow and Spanish Mission house, as much as art-deco picture houses, electric trams and soda fountains, were incorporated into and became part of its culture. This was the environment in which most Australians lived, yet intellectuals, seeing only a mediocrity of sameness, preferred to ignore it. A few writers such as C. J. Dennis and the novelist, Louis Stone, had exploited the larrikin pushes of the inner suburbs of the pre-war period, but it was a children's writer, Ethel Turner, who had probably written more about urban life than anyone else. Vance Palmer's *The Swayne Family* confronted Melbourne suburbia, but from a position of hostility. 'Was there something about the town itself', young Ernest Swayne wonders, 'with its dull, middle-class dignity, its geometric streets, flat suburbs, featureless surroundings, that sucked all the passion out of people except the passion for conformity . . .?'[28] Palmer, if not his readers, knew the answer. Even fiction inspired by the Depression often focused on the bush, rather than the city where hardship was greater.

It is possible that this alienation from their urban environment helps explain the failure of 'serious' writers to communicate with a larger audience: they were not writing about the Australia with which most of their readers were familiar, runs the argument. Yet, as has been pointed out, the popular landscape writers succeeded for apparently the very same reason – that they were introducing readers to the unfamiliar, even the legendary. What is involved here is a question of genres and the expectations attaching to them, and, more generally, the level of cultural engagement. When one considers the popular successes in Australian writing – the *Bulletin* literature, the children's books of Ethel Turner, Mary Grant Bruce, May Gibbs, Dorothy Wall (and Norman Lindsay), *The Sentimental Bloke* and his successors, the travel adventures of Idriess, Frank Clune and company – one is reminded that their authors all *chose* to locate them in popular literary traditions, and to that extent avoided the expectations of high culture. A reader choosing a travel book or a children's book already had an appreciative context in which to place it, while the digger, for example, with a paperback copy of *The Sentimental Bloke* in his pocket, did not have to worry whether this

exercise in comic verse was in any sense 'literature'. Even the images of the Heidelberg school – the gumtree, or the river meandering across a bleached landscape – could be incorporated in a popular vision of Australia which had little need for the aesthetics of high art.

The lack of confidence which Nettie Palmer discerned in Australian novelists stemmed from their increasing literary seriousness, because this immediately raised questions of cultural expectations. And here the Australian artist – whether writer, painter or performer – was faced with the old dilemma of a colonial culture, the continuing cultural ties with the metropolitan society. The myth-building engendered by the Great War did not weaken ties with Britain, it only made them more complex. It certainly did not diminish the widespread belief that London was still the Empire's cultural capital, and therefore that cultural standards had their ultimate source and legitimation there. On the one hand this created difficulties for the Australian public in evaluating the work of local artists which made claims as 'art'; but it was also a potent cause for cultural schizophrenia among the artists themselves.

For the mass of Australians at this time travel abroad was out of the question (the diggers, of course, being a unique case). But for the artist and intellectual travel was a challenge – and temptation. Most writers and artists and many performers travelled at some stage of their careers, usually to London, though for painters it was sometimes Paris and for musicians Germany. There was an understandable urge simply to experience the world – to behold the sights and landscapes which English and European literature had told them of, to see the paintings which had only been glimpsed in reproductions, to hear the music of the masters performed in its original European context. They travelled also to test their competence as artists by universal standards; and sometimes they travelled to make the living which was denied them at home. Some, like Lawson and Lindsay, stayed only a year or so and then scuttled back to familiar surroundings. Some, like Streeton, Roberts, the Palmers and Esson, went for longer periods but returned to resume their work in Australia. There were others who left virtually for good. The pianist and composer, Percy Grainger, left at the age of thirteen, eventually settling in the United States; Henry Handel Richardson left at seventeen to pursue a musical career before turning to novel writing; novelists Martin Boyd and Christina Stead spent most of their creative lives abroad, though Stead returned in her last years.

Expatriatism became an issue in Australian culture, and one

which could divide the artistic community. Where lay the artists' loyalty? To their country, their art, their careers? It was also divisive in the sense that expatriates were often dispersed and lost sight of by the artists at home. So it was possible that Richardson's epic Australian trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, passed largely unnoticed until Nettie Palmer's advocacy drew attention to it. Christina Stead, settled in the USA and removed from her Australian background, gave her best known novel, *The Man Who Loved Children*, an American setting, though it drew essentially on her childhood experiences. Her 'Americanisation' seemed symbolically to confirm the neglect which her works suffered in Australia.

Yet the expatriates often added an important critical dimension to the Australian experience. Richardson's *Fortunes of Richard Mahony* is not the conventional salute to colonial pioneers but an exploration of Mahony's decline and fall: in doing so she established that Australian literature could encompass the tragic. Living out a comfortable upper-middle-class life in England, Richardson did not cease to see herself as Australian, no matter how 'out of touch' she might have grown. Martin Boyd's novels, particularly *The Cardboard Crown* sequence, depict the dilemma of those who saw themselves as Anglo-Australians, and add a distinctive view both of provincial cultural deprivation and metropolitan arrogance. Perhaps the oddest case was that of Grainger, who returned only to make concert tours and supervise the building of his own eccentric museum and archive at Melbourne University. Yet this last gesture indicated how important he considered his oft-reiterated Australianness, which incorporated his own curious Nordic variant of race consciousness.

When journeying to England, the Australian, whether artist or not, already had an image of 'Home', instilled by upbringing and education. Robert Menzies, visiting England for the first time in 1935 to attend the Imperial Conference, recorded his arrival: 'At last we are in England. Our journey to Mecca has ended, and our minds abandoned to those reflections which can so strangely (unless you remember our traditions and upbringing) move the soul of those who go "home" to a land they have never seen. . . .' Mecca, indeed: and the first beholding of England could have almost a religious awe to it. The study of English history and literature prepared the visitor, but the experience of the countryside, particularly in spring, was still often a revelation. The educator Frank Tate, making his first visit to Britain at the age of forty-two, marvelled at bluebells and primroses, and observed of the countryside that 'there was nothing

ragged and unfinished and new', the farms seeming to have been 'fertilized for centuries by human contact'. Yet he pointed out that Buttermere was not new to him; he 'had been there often enough through the magic of Wordsworth'. Menzies, still under the spell of it all, professed to understand England anew: 'The green and tranquil country sends forth from its very soil the love of peace and of good humour and contentment'. He was also enchanted to have tea with the Duke and Duchess of York, and to watch the royal children having a dancing lesson: amazingly, this was 'a real family, with real and intelligent people in it'.[29]

Menzies was an Anglophile, but there were many others whose sentiments were more confused, but for whom England nevertheless was an important experience. Yet sometimes a reaction set in, the sense of Old World decay displacing the wonder at countryside and historic monuments. English poverty seemed more chilling, more permanent, than that which Australians were used to. Tate was appalled by 'the hell of the slums' in the north, and the fatalistic acceptance of such pervasive misery: 'I can't imagine how an Australian can rest content in such a place as this'.[30]

The image and the reality did not always match. Even the dream-like perfection of English scenery could pall, and be subtly invoked to point up a contrasting vision of Australia. In one of the best-known salutes to Australia, a poem recited by whole generations of schoolchildren, Dorothea Mackellar set the precedent:

> The love of field and coppice,
> Of green and shaded lanes,
> Of ordered woods and gardens
> Is running in your veins;
> Strong love of grey-blue distance,
> Brown streams and soft, dim skies –
> I know but cannot share it,
> My love is otherwise.[31]

Although the paean of praise for Australia which follows is remembered for its evocation of a 'sunburnt country' and 'The wide brown land for me', the poem stresses not only the expansiveness of this 'opal-hearted country', but its variety of scenery and moods, ranging from 'sapphire-misted mountains' to 'her jewel-sea', as if implying, with a nice reversal of images, that it is England, with its 'ordered woods and gardens', which is guilty of sameness. Yet the poem, written around 1908, was first published in the London *Spectator*, and for all its Australianness, was addressed in the old

colonial manner, to an English audience (hence 'Is running in *your* veins').

For the great majority of native-born Australians who did not visit England, their attitude to 'Home' depended not only on the images purveyed through the various media but on their experience of the English in Australia. Immigrants were one thing, but there was also a traffic of quite a different order. Royalty began to tour more frequently: the young Prince of Wales in 1920, the Yorks in 1927 (when they inaugurated Canberra) and the Gloucesters in 1934. Such tours were epic presentations of the imperial link. Governors-general of the Commonwealth and State governors were regarded as Imperial appointments: when, in 1931, a Labor prime minister would nominate only Sir Isaac Isaacs, a native-born High Court judge and former radical politician, George V acquiesced but let his displeasure be known. (The fact that Isaacs was also a Jew did not help.) England provided the Anglicans with their archbishops and many bishops as well (just as Ireland did for Catholics): the presidential voice at an Anglican synod was likely to be refined southern English. The universities, still small institutions, had many English – and Scotsmen – on their staff, particularly occupying prestigious chairs. Private schools of note often looked to England for their headmasters. Many such visitors integrated themselves into Australian society, even identified with it, yet their voices carried a message of which they themselves might have been unaware, namely, that in an important sense cultural authority still resided in England. When in 1935 P. R. Stephenson published his cultural manifesto, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, he was provoked by an article written by 'an Englishman resident in Australia', Professor O. H. Cowling, in which he dismissed the possibility of an Australian literature, claiming that 'literary culture is not indigenous like the gum tree, but is from a European source'.[32]

This deference to the European, and specifically English, source was later dubbed 'the cultural cringe'.[33] Yet if one took the imperial link seriously – as middle-class Australia professed to do – it was understandable to seek, through such English appointments, to maintain ties with 'Home'. Anti-labor was in office federally for most of the period between the wars, and its leaders still tended to assume, and perhaps rightly, that an empire had no meaning without a hierarchical structure; consequently they did not embrace the Statute of Westminster, which proclaimed the autonomy of 'dominions', with enthusiasm. Although Australia had an External Affairs minister it had no diplomatic service of its own until the eve of the

Second World War. Australia made its representations to Britain which was then assumed to implement an imperial foreign policy. In 1931, in the depths of the Depression, the Anti-labor leader, Joe Lyons (who had recently defected from Labor), urged Australians to 'tune in with Britain', a slogan which neatly deployed the new language of radio in the imperial cause.

There was also an implied accusation here that Labor was not on the imperial wavelength. In the wake of the war, isolationism tended to suit the mood of political Labor. With the setting up of the Irish Free State that issue faded into the background, many Catholics having been perplexed and alienated by the civil war which inaugurated it. But in any case the cultural horizons of working-class Australia were more constricted, and workers had little to do with the local representatives of English authority in the form of governors, archbishops and professors. It was convenient for Labor to proclaim an isolationist Australianism, yet tacitly accept the forms of imperialism: here was another of the silent accommodations of the period.

The 'cultural cringe' gained much of its force from the growing dichotomy between high and popular culture which was itself a creation of the period between the wars. As has been remarked, the new agencies of mass entertainment were often characterised as degenerate, but it is salutary to recall the venom which the cultural elite could direct, for example, at popular music. W. Arundel Orchard, the English Director of the NSW Conservatorium of Music, inveighed against the wireless giving air to 'that abomination known as crooning, with its nauseating chromatic slides and verbal twaddle', adding dismissively that it was 'no excuse to say that some people like it'.[34] Mass entertainment was seen as endangering true cultural values, and a potent cultural snobbery was born. But in Australia the snobbery had added edge, in that it encouraged a turning to England, the source, as the arbiter of high culture.

In areas where these cultural standards were not seen as relevant, sport for example, an Australian ideology could be promoted with compensating enthusiasm. For a small nation which prided itself on the healthiness of its population, sport was ripe for myth-making. There was a tendency, when heroes failed, to seek scapegoats abroad. In the case of Les Darcy, the boxer, and Phar Lap, the racehorse, the United States was cast as the villain, popularly accused of destroying both. But the preferred enemy remained England, and cricket provided the classic confrontations. The 'Bodyline' tour of 1932–33 aroused considerable ill-feeling, culmi-

5.5 One local hero was the aviator Kingsford-Smith seen here seated in front of the radio microphone, with his partner, C. T. Ulm, casually on the edge of the desk. They all study the shrinking globe. Air travel could be seen as tightening the bonds of empire. Kingsford-Smith and Ulm were both members of the New Guard, discussed in Chapter 6.

nating in the Australian Board of Control's accusation that the MCC team, in its use of 'leg theory' bowling, had been guilty of 'unsportsmanlike' play. There were political repercussions, involving prime minister Lyons and British Secretary of State for Dominions, J. H. Thomas. But the claim, sometimes made half-seriously, that the controversy endangered the whole imperial relationship, misses the point. It was necessary for Australia to play England at cricket: the Australian anger was in large measure the expression of frustration in realising this. Hence in the end the Board of Control capitulated and withdrew 'unsportsmanlike'. The usual enmity could now be resumed, even if, for a time, without the customary good humour.

Nowhere, perhaps, was the oddity of the Australian relationship with England more evident than in the question of accent. A distinctive pattern of colonial speech dated back to the Currency generation, though its precise character then is hard to establish; but by the twentieth century the 'Australian accent', as even Australians

tended to call it, had stabilised, with very little in the way of regional variation. Yet local attitudes to the accent were truly contradictory. Most people spoke with such an accent (even if the heaviness of it varied), yet few could accept it in a cultural sense. On the stage, for example, and on the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) radio, the standard accent was Southern English. Partly this stemmed from the respect accorded touring companies despatched from the West End, and partly from the ABC's infatuation with its parent model, the BBC. But Australian actors and announcers never questioned the need to acquire the proper accent; usually they could turn it on or off at will. The Australian accent was only acceptable on stage (and cinema screen) in vaudeville and in 'low' comedy, such as the 'Dad and Dave' neo-hillbilly genre. This was a provincialism born of distance and dependence.

The ambivalence of Australian attitudes to Britain seemed magnified and dramatised by the events and concerns of the inter-war years, from the myth making of Anzac to the passions of the cricket pitch. There seemed, too, an element of gathering but inarticulate tension in the relationship, particularly as in the late 1930s the crisis in Europe escalated, and the vulnerability of the Empire was more than ever apparent.

For creative artists the question of loyalties was particularly disturbing, for the provincial-metropolitan nexus seemed more problematic, yet more confining than ever. At this time the young A. D. Hope wrote a poem which was, like Mackellar's 'My Country', to become something of a classic, though of a different order. It managed to combine some of the oldest cultural myths about Australia with an intellectual discontent which seemed utterly contemporary. So, in its opening line, the poem, in identifying 'A Nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey', draws on the colonial image of a landscape of gumtree monotony. Not only the land is monotonous, but its people too:

> The river of her immense stupidity
> Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.

But the anti-urban tradition is also endorsed: her 'five cities' are 'like five teeming sores'. Hope offers for our contempt

> a vast parasite robber-state
> Where second-hand Europeans pullulate
> Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

It is, he alleges, a land 'Without songs, architecture, history'. Yet the poem concludes by deftly exploiting anti-European isolationism:

> Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
> From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
> The Arabian desert of the human mind,
> Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come,
>
> Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
> Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
> The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
> Which is called civilization over there.[35]

It is all there – the suspicion of 'modern thought', even a Mackellar-ish dissatisfaction with 'green hills'. It mattered not whether the poem was, in a literal sense, true. (Even then Australia had songs, architecture, history.) But in it Hope had distilled a mood, a frustration, a vision. He called it 'Australia': the year was 1939.

6

Political institutions

The unique and, to many, the perplexing achievement of Australian democracy has been to combine an egalitarian tradition with the politics of class. The contradiction is more apparent than real. Lacking a titled aristocracy and leisured class colonial society encouraged an egalitarianism of manners. Such manners reflected not the absence of social stratification, but a means of coming to terms with it in the new setting. The egalitarian society became a popular myth capable of various uses – it could be handily deployed in comparisons with 'class-ridden' Britain, and similarly invoked to condemn the perceived absurdity of class rhetoric in Australia; but perhaps most importantly it influenced the form and style of political solutions to social problems. Hence industrial arbitration, which has become such a significant and distinctive institution of Australian society, owes much of its character and rationale to the legacy of social egalitarianism. For whilst recognising class conflict in its industrial form, arbitration purported to replace the inequalities of social structure with a system which magically transformed bourgeoisie and working class into legal parties, equal before the law.

Arbitration was also a political solution in the sense that it emerged from a party system in a state of transition. When the colonies federated in 1901 their political structures varied. In New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia something like a party system existed, aided by the emergence of vigorous Labor parties, but the structures still seemed provisional. In Victoria the severity of the 1890s depression and the political emphasis on recovery had discouraged polarisation, and the Labor Party lacked organisation. In Tasmania and Western Australia parties hardly existed at all. Yet within a decade those States with parties had moved from three- to two-party systems, and Tasmania and Western Australia