The ANZAC Tradition

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IN A LONG SURVEY of Australian historical writings published recently in The Pattern of Australian Culture, Professor John Ward does not mention the vast enterprise of the war histories. Not even in passing does he refer to the man who has published more words and reached more readers than any other Australian historian: C. E. W. Bean. Dr Bean has not been without personal honour for his work as official historian of Australia's part in the first World War, but the praise that means most to an historian is use; and his writings have not been much used by other students of our society.

If the war histories were written for the specialist student of military matters, their neglect would not be surprising. But they were not; 'our volumes', Dr Bean has said, 'were written for the general reader'. That was his purpose, and his achievement. His accounts of the battles of Gallipoli and France are intelligible to the reader who has no acquaintance with the theory or practice of warfare, and they have proved popular. Can it be, then, that the war histories are narrowly antiquarian, to be read as school magazines are read, to be savoured as family photographs are savoured, reminders of an experience to those who took part in it but having nothing much to say to the rest of us, aids to nostalgia rather than understanding?

That was not Dr Bean's intention. He wanted his history, it is true, to be a monument to the men who fought—a literary equivalent to the National War Memorial which he was dreaming of even before the war ended. But his memorial was to be an interpretation, an explanation, not simply a hymn.

The historian (he said in 1938) has to make up his mind what main questions he will endeavour to answer, and to build the rest of his work upon that structure. The first question for my fellow-historians and myself clearly was: How did the Australian people—and the Australian character, if there is one—come through the universally recognised test of this, their first great war? Second was the question: What did the Australian people and their forces achieve in the total effort of their side in the struggle? Third: What was the true nature of that struggle and test so far as Australians took part in it? How well or ill did our constitution and our preparations serve us in it? What were their strengths or weaknesses? And what guidance can our people or others obtain from this experience for future emergencies?

The key word here is character. 'If you think it out', he wrote at the end of the war, 'the big thing in the war for Australia was the discovery of the character of Australian men. It was character

which rushed the hills at Gallipoli and held out there during the long afternoon and night . . . ‘ Here he was writing fast and hot, a few days after the armistice; but years later, in the official history of the Gallipoli campaign, he returned to the question: What was it about the Australians that made them hang on at Anzac Cove after the terrible ordeal of the landing? The discipline of habit? No. Love of a fight? No. Not hatred of the Turk; nor purely patriotism; nor the desire for fame. The dominant motive lay in the mettle of the men themselves. To be the sort of man who would give way when his mates were trusting to his firmness . . . to live the rest of his life haunted by the knowledge that he had set his hand to a soldier’s task and had lacked the grit to carry it through—that was the prospect which these men could not face. Life was very dear, but life was not worth living unless they could be true to their idea of Australian manhood.’

These words are on the last page of the first volume of the war history, and it would be easy to hear them as mere ceremonial rhetoric. But Dr Bean believed that the character which he celebrated could be described and explained in terms of social experience. The Australian, he wrote, ‘was becoming to some extent distinguishable from the Englishman in bodily appearance, in face, and in voice. He also displayed certain markedly divergent qualities of mind and character’. The Australian nation was composed of a blend of British nationalities such as had not occurred elsewhere, except in New Zealand. Like colonists of all ages, ‘the Australians came of a race whose tradition was one of independence and enterprise, and within the race itself, from a stock more adventurous, and for the most part physically more strong, than the general run of men’. Their physique was improved by open air and good food. ‘An active life, as well as the climate, rendered the body wiry and the face lean, easily lined, and thin-lipped’. The life developed initiative and independence. ‘In them the characteristic resourcefulness of the British was perforce developed further’. The bush, then, is a large part of his explanation; but it has another ingredient. Not much has been written about the effect of the state school system on the personality of its graduates—except by Catholic authors who have associated it with such particular things as the decline of the birth-rate and with more general things; as Father Murtagh puts it, ‘the secularization of Australian culture, and in the long run a triple apostasy from religion, philosophy, and morals’. Dr Bean, who himself grew up outside the state school system, saw it as an important agent of social equality:

Men passed among Australians for what in themselves they were worth . . . The younger generation was largely trained in state schools, and such remnants of the old feudal class distinctions as had survived among the earlier colonists were daily losing their hold. Socially the Australian people came nearer than perhaps any other to forming one class without distinction of birth or wealth.

The conditions of Australian life had thus improved the stock. The Australians noticed it when they met English troops in Egypt on their way to war. ‘As they walked among the Cairo crowds, the little pinkcheeked lads from the Manchester cotton-mills, who had had the pluck to volunteer in the East Lancashire Division, looked like children when compared with the huge men of the Australian regiments. Australians had not realised that the physique of their force was anything greater than the average, until the contrast forced it upon them and upon everyone else in Egypt’. The Australians and these Englishmen did not, in Dr Bean’s observation, become intimate; for to the Australians these ‘chooms’ seemed naive, unworldly, deferential—in a word, a word which Dr Bean does not actually use—unmanly.

This comparison, early in the narrative, of Australian and English soldiers, foreshadows Dr Bean's analysis of an important military failure at Suvla in August, 1915—a British offensive that was the last serious throw at Gallipoli. Here he puts his explanation in the mouths of Australian soldiers themselves: '. . . the necessary quality of decision, which even a few years' emancipation from the social restrictions of the Old World appeared to have bred in the emigrant, was—to colonial eyes—lacking in the Suvla troops'. They were, Dr Bean observed, 'two well-defined types, the officers as a class being tall and well developed, but a majority of the men cramped in stature, presumably as the result of life in overcrowded industrial centres under conditions not yet operative to any marked extent in the great cities in Australia'.

To explain differences in military performance, then, Dr Bean looks at differences in environment, in class relationships and in national ideals. He implies in the war histories and develops in other writings a conviction that the English ideal of the gentleman, though admirable, excludes the majority of the population, and is therefore far less adequate for military purposes than the Australian national ideal of the comrade, the mate. Australian society produced an army quite unlike Britain's.

Some who had been officers in the militia entered the force as privates. Many a youngster, who could have had a commission, enlisted in the ranks and remained there in order to serve beside a friend . . . for the most part the wealthy, the educated, the rough and the case-hardened, poor Australians, rich Australians, went into the ranks together unconscious of any distinction. When they came into an atmosphere of class difference later in the war, they stoutly and rebelliously resented it.

Every part of this account is anticipated in articles Dr Bean had written before the war for the Sydney Morning Herald—articles which were then published as two books, On the Wool Track and The Dreadnought of the Darling. These essays on the country near and beyond the Darling River were written, as Mr H. G. Kippax has said recently, 'from the point of view of the city and an urban middle-class awed by the outback on which so much of its prosperity depended, but separated from it'.

Like his war history, Dr Bean's pre-war journalism is both factual reporting and imagining. It has passages in a manner that anticipates the vision of later poets, novelists and painters. The Australian', he writes, 'one hundred to two hundred years hence, will still live with the consciousness that, if he only goes far enough back over the hills and across the plains, he comes in the end to the mysterious half-desert country where men have to live the lives of strong men. And the life of the mysterious country will affect Australian imagination much as the life of the sea has affected that of the English'. It impressed him to meet along the Darling the unusual Australians who seemed to him the real Australians. A boy in western NSW going out mustering will not put on a clean coat for his mother. 'But I don't want to be tidy—all the men are there'. 'And that', says the reporter, cis the spirit of Australia—the spirit of the bush which still sets the standard for the towns'. In some respects Dr Bean anticipated Dr Russel Ward as a student of the bush legend; in some respects he stood alongside the Bulletin writers as a maker of the legend. The passage I have just quoted is echoed in the first volume of the war history:

The bush still sets the standard of personal efficiency even in Australian cities. The bushman is the hero of the Australian boy; the arts of the bush life are his ambition; his most cherished holidays are those spent with country relatives or in camping out. He learns something of half the arts of a soldier by the time he is ten years old—to sleep comfortably in any shelter, to cook meat or bake flour, to catch a horse, to find his way across country by day or night, or ride, or, at the worst, to 'stick on'.

Russel Ward quotes this passage in his The Australian Legend (p. 213), and comments: 'One may doubt whether, even in 1914, most city slum-dwellers were wont to spend camping holidays in the country, but no one knew better than Bean that up-country values were not acquired mainly in such direct and material ways'.

The argument about differences in national character between England and Australia had been set down by Dr Bean before the war. England is a land of settled landscape, institutions and values. Australia, materially and mentally, is still in the making. 'The whole calibre of the people is still being altered by changes in their education'. And an important part of that education is to learn the ways and values of the back country, and especially the ideal of mateship. The miners of the outback vote Labor, not because they have anything in particular to get from a Labor government, 'but chiefly because it is a necessity to the miner to be what he considers loyal to his mates elsewhere'. Several years before the word 'digger' was ever applied to a soldier, Dr Bean writes: 'The average digger is the most loyal man on earth'. This loyalty, he predicts, will extend to the imperial motherland; should she ever be in trouble, she will find that 'there is in the younger land, existing in quite unsuspected quarters, a thousand times deeper and more effective than the more showy protestations which sometimes appropriate the title of "imperialism", the quality of sticking—whatever may come and whatever may be the end of it—to an old mate'. In a later edition of the book in which this passage was reprinted, the author added a footnote: 'The test of these words came four years after they were written . . .' Dr Bean was one of the first to say that on the 25 April, 1915, 'the consciousness of Australian nationhood was born'. Because such words have become part of the liturgy of Anzac Day, it is hard now to hear them fresh, to consider them as a proposition that might be discussed. But the war historian believed that what he saw at Gallipoli was an extension and a confirmation of what he had seen in Australia a few years before.

His account of Australians in arms is more candid than some readers might expect. Dr Bean's successor, Mr Gavin Long, has said that 'the Australian history of the war of 1914-18 was produced under probably a greater degree of freedom than any companion history'. Dr Bean was assured in his contract that there was to be no censorship except on certain technical matters; and it was on this understanding that the history was sold to ex-servicemen on a basis of subscription. So the official historian is allowed to make it plain that in his view the Gallipoli campaign was doomed. He records the onset of listlessness and malingering among the troops after months on Gallipoli, and the failure of their English commander, Birdwood, to understand that their morale was low. His candour is not limited to English generals. Although he has high praise for Sir John Monash as a commander, Dr Bean suggests that he did not understand his troops as well as he boastfully believed; and he concludes that on one occasion, Monash sacrified Australian lives in an excess of zeal to clinch a victory. Monash was by all accounts a bold and successful Australian general. Dr Bean records the boldness and the success, celebrates it proudly in an

Australian, but inspects his record with the wary scepticism which he brings to the examination of all generals.

For he identifies himself with the man in the front line; and that stand governs his method as an historian. He believed that he was writing about an army which was unusually good because of the character, and in particular the egalitarian comradeship, of its members; and he wrote a history appropriate to this belief. His account of battles is therefore rather different from the versions given in Monash's book The Australian Victories in France. He has explained the method in words that have been relished by many who admire his work.

It has naturally been the tendency of military historians to regard the despatches of the high commanders as the most authoritative sources of information—and so they are, or may be, as to the matters that come within the commander's notice. But especially in the battles of the late War, the Commanderin-Chief–or even the commander of a battalion—had usually no personal knowledge of what happened where his troops were in contact with the enemy. All of us knew of instances—I personally found them to occur more often than not—in which the commander's report on an action contained important inaccuracies. Commanding officers, for example, constantly—and naturally—believed and reported that some movement made by their troops was the result of an order issued by them, when it had actually been initiated and carried out by a company commander or one of his men on the spot before the order from above arrived—if it ever did . . . these considerations determined the Australian writers that their subject should be viewed from the front line as well as from the rear, and that, as far as possible, the responsibility for the events described should be attributed to the men actually responsible . . .

Persorrally, also, when reading in military works, that, for example, the commander, 'by thrusting forward his right, forced the enemy to withdraw his left and centre', I had often longed to know just what this meant. What actuat experiences, at the point where men lay out behind hedges or on the fringe of woods, caused those on one side to creep, walk, or run forward, and the others to go back. This we Australian historians had the chance of discovering by finding out and questioning the men who were actually there; occasionally by watching the incident or even being there ourselves. To give the reader such information meant undoubtedly to furnish more detail than has been put into a war history, at least in modern times.

This, clearly is a democrat's war history. As Mr Stephen Murray-Smith said recently of Mr Geoffrey Blainey, Dr Bean is a democrat but not a man of the left. He could be described as a utopian nationalist; and it may throw some light on the argument and temper of Dr Bean's war histories to see them in the context of other writings beside those prewar newspaper articles.

At the end of the war Dr Bean took two weeks' leave and spent it, characteristically, writing a tract for soldiers and school-children about the future of his and their nation. As he recalled later, in a tract addressed to the next wartime generation, he had 'urged that we should apply . . . one lesson that seemed to stand out from four years' war experience—the need for planning and the possibilities that it offered. Here was Australia, an almost uncommitted country, with her future largely to mould. Given the intelligence, the youthful enthusiasm, and the patriotism that had marked Australians in the war, what a country they could make of it!' He called the tract In Your Hands, Australians.

We have to make up our minds, right here and now at the beginning of the struggle, whether we are going to work in life for ourselves or for Australia . . . We have done with the war, God knows—we are only trying to make the full and real use of the Peace for which our finest Australians fought that war and died; and that is a struggle in which we all can join, even those who honestly oppose the war. We want no divisions, no jealousies.

Did that mean no trade unions, political parties, churches? He would not have said that this was what he was urging; but such attachments would inevitably compete with the sort of patriotism he called for. Some men who thought as he did threw themselves into the RSL, Legacy, or one of the anti-political political organisations which converged to form the Country Party. Each of these organisations was hospitable to the ideology of Dr Bean's tract. It was an ideology hostile to the vulgarity and greed of commerce, the characteristic activity of the city. 'Why', asks the writer, 'should some city speculator, anxious for an extra i% profit, be allowed to raise a skyscraper that blots out from all the rest of the nation some particular favourite landscape?' It was hostile to the profit motive, or at least to the view that the nation would progress only by offering greater financial incentives to its best minds. Look at the Australians who invented new devices and procedures for the war effort. 'These were some of the most brilliant inventions ever made', he writes, 'and salaries and profits had nothing whatever to do with them. These Australians were working because . . . these inventions would help their nation in the terrible struggle, and the nation would honour the men who made them'.

'We failed . . .', he wrote 25 years later. Peace could produce no moral crisis comparable to war. Many members of the AIF, I think, shared Dr Bean's utopian vision and his later disappointment. Australians had been exhorted to respond as heroic individuals, to make a single, private decision to dedicate themselves to the nation, as if they could and would, by making up their minds, cast off all those other attachments which together constituted their social identity. To the inevitable disappointment of utopian patriots, the politicians, those symbols of a divided nation, took over again. As Dr Bean himself saw the years between the wars:

For the most part we kept our ideals to ourselves and left our country and its future to the political machines . . . we abandoned our youth to the mercy, too often, of political and industrial crooks, wreckers of every fine ideal with which young Australians had emerged from the hands of their underpaid and overworked schoolmasters and mistresses.

Then, after the decades of disillusion, came another war to show that Australians were still capable in a grave crisis of feats like those of 1914 -18. Dr Bean's robust spirit rallied, and he wrote in 1943 The War Aims of a Plain Australian. He reminded a new generation of the vision of 1918—a vision of 'clean, fresh idealism and outstanding comradeliness', and believed that they could 'see the possibilities of this still-young land and nation, comparatively free from differences of class, with its cities, its countryside still largely to be planned, freer for moulding than those of any other continent'.

Mr Gavin Long has said that 'one objective of the Australian war histories is frankly a nationalistic one—to contribute to the statement of a national tradition . . .' Given this aim, it would be surprising if Dr Bean and his colleagues, and their successors, did not sometimes exaggerate the part played by their own countrymen and the unity of their patriotism. There are

passages in which Dr Bean does, I think, indulge in rhetorical exaggeration both about the feats of the soldiers and the dedication of the civilians at home. The habit of finding a single, national response, of personalizing the nation, does tend to pervade his writing. Life often blurs into legend, especially bush legend. 'Most Australian soldiers', he writes, 'had never in their lives known what it was to be given a direct order undisguised by "you might" or "would you mind"? Since the discipline of the much-harassed bush school-teacher, they had never known any restraint that was not self-imposed'. The unromantic fact is that most Australian soldiers had gone to school in suburbs.

A writer who invokes national character as an explanation must expect to be challenged to separate fact from legend, to be precise about just how the national character was formed and how it can be discerned in action. A severe scrutiny of Dr Bean's account would still leave large facts standing after the legend had been cut away from them. The AIF was peculiar in a number of ways. After 1916 it was virtually the only force engaged on either side of the war composed entirely of volunteers. Its members were paid more than any other soldiers, including the Americans. They were, as Dr Bean said, bigger and healthier than most others. And policy on promotion was different from that of the British Army. As Monash put it in his book:

. . . violence was done to a deep-rooted tradition of the British Army, which discouraged any promotion from the ranks, and stringently forbade, in cases where it was given, promotion in the same unit . . . There was thus no officer caste, no social distinction in the whole force. In not a few instances, men of humble origin and belonging to the artisan class rose, during the war, from privates to the command of battalions. The efficiency of the force suffered in no way in consequence. On the contrary, the whole Australian Army became automatically graded into leaders and followers according to the individual merits of every man, and there grew a wonderful understanding between them.

Some old soldiers might smile at this general's eye-view of the AIF; but the general himself, son of a Jewish trader from Poland, was living evidence that the mobility of Australian society was reflected in its army.

Other parts of Dr Bean's interpretation might be tested by means more rigorous than he himself employed. If it is true, for example, that men from the bush made the best soldiers, the difference ought to show up in an analysis of the regional distribution of honours awarded for fighting achievement. Comparative examination of Australian and other armies, especially the American army, could be done more fully and precisely. And so on.

But by and large his work has been not criticized, but ignored. His question: 'How did the Australian people—and the Australian character, if there is one—come through . . . their first great war?' has not seriously interested other historians. If the general historian tells the military part of the story at all, he tends to make it self-contained except for one link with the story of society at home—the controversy over conscription. When he comes to the aftermath of war he follows W. M. Hughes to Versailles and returns to the story of Australian society in the 'twenties as if it were hardly affected by the facts that about a quarter of its men had gone away to fight, that of them one in six was killed and of the remainder more than half were wounded, and that

most of the nation's households had been touched by the experience of participation in a terrible peoples' war.

One of the rare passages in which an historian does wonder about the effects of war on Australian life is in Professor R. M. Crawford's recent book An Australian Perspective: 'in those years after the war when I was a schoolboy and an undergraduate, I can think of only one of my teachers of note who belonged to that generation of soldiers. We were taught by the middle-aged and the aged, and we too much lacked the bridge between of those nearer our own age who might have guided us safely past some of the pits into which we fell'. If historians have lacked interest in Dr Bean's questions, it may be partly because the generation of soldiers produced so few teachers, and partly because those who grew up after the war felt excluded from it.

There are of course sources of reluctance to study the war which are not peculiar to Australia, though they have been strongly represented here. Peace-loving liberals do not find it easy to believe that the history of war is continuous with the rest of history, and for various reasons do not enjoy examining it. In the case of World War I, a generation of scholars impressed by the analysis of J. A. Hobson's imperialism could see in the pages of military history nothing but a ghastly pageant in which the young men of all nations were sacrificed to the squalid designs of capitalists lusting for markets. It was a subject for angry tears rather than for investigation; it was certainly not, as it was to Dr Bean, a crusade made necessary because the enemy adopted a creed alien to Christian civilisation. If the scholar is someone who has abandoned liberalism for Marxism, if he has chosen to give allegiance to a class rather than a nation, he is unlikely to see much point in studying the actual course of a war between nations which is not a class war. In Australia, both the bearers of left-wing folklore and serious historians have accepted a view of World War I which leads them to take no interest in any part of the official war history except one section of Sir Ernest Scott's volume on events at home.

In an exhibition of labour and radical documents at the Public Library of Victoria recently, a show-case full of propaganda against conscription issued in 1916-17 had on it the following legend: 'The Working Class generally has been anti-militarist and anti-war. It has believed the causes of war lie deeply rooted in the economic and social system which it desires to change. This sentiment for several reasons was strong in the 1914-18 War and led most Labor industrial and political organisations to oppose the introduction of compulsory service for war overseas'.

One could devote a whole essay to the mistakes and illusions embodied in those three sentences. To read them is to be reminded that there have been in Australia two main streams of national tradition, the one radical and the other patriotic. Do they flow together or remain apart? Are loyalty to class and nation compatible? Can you celebrate both the unfurling of the Southern ChM by diggers at Eureka and the Planting of the Union Jack and Southern Cross by diggers at Anzac? Can you regard as your hero both the Peter Lalor who lost an atm at Eureka and his grandson, another Peter Lalor, who lost his life on the first day at Gallipoli? Can you have a family feeling both for the shearers who fought the squatters in 1890 and for the soldiers who fought the Turks and Germans 25 years later? Some say you can. One of Dr Bean's colleagues on the war history, Dr A. G. Butler, wrote in a little book, The Digger: 'throughout the long struggle of the settlers, against nature, and against the entrenched "rights" of big property, we can discern not only the courage, enterprise, and independence of the diggers of the 1850s, but

also the Digger spirit of the AIF'. Dr Russel Ward, near the end of his exploration of the bush legend, suggests tents- tively, and with tantalizing brevity, that it is continuous with the Anzac tradition. But there is a head-on collision of legends when somebody asserts that the Australian working-class is anti-militarist and anti-war and somebody else, such as Dr Bean, asserts that Australians to a man were loyal to the cause of empire in 1915.

It is easy to think of individual historians who have contributed to the view of history expressed in those three sentences about the working class and conscription. It is harder to think of historians whose net catches much of the Anzac tradition, who show their readers how and why the word digger was, as it were, nationalized. A start has been made towards showing how it happened, how radicals could welcome an army called the Australian Imperial Force, in Dr Robin Gollan's study, Radical and Working-Class Politics; but much of the story has still to be filled in.

For the historian who sees class-conflict as the stuff of history, the contest over conscription will appear to be the high point of our history between 1914 and 1918. The most accurate, though not the most influential, account of the struggle, is I think the one by Sir Ernest Scott. It is worth recalling, in the light of the left-wing legend, that if some 36,000 people had voted Yes instead of No in 1916-36,000 out of 21 million—then the AIF would have been reinforced by conscripts; and it is worth taking seriously Scott's argument that conscription might have come had there not been fighting in the streets of Dublin that Easter.

The radical legend of conscription is misleading in a number of ways.

First, by telling the story as one of ideological conflict within Australia, by cutting it off from the story of the war itself, it distorts the attitude of a number of participants, and especially of Hughes and Pearce. Second, it understates the range of opinion in favour of conscription. Many Catholics were for it, including some bishops. W. K. Hancock at eighteen was for it at a time when on all other issues, he has said in Country and Calling, he was with the Labor party or to the left of it. Henry Lawson at fifty, having volunteered and been rejected, wrote verses telling readers of the Bulletin, 'Conscription has to be', even before Hughes decided that it had to be. Third, the radical legend does not make clear that many who voted against conscription believed whole-heartedly that the war was just. Most of the soldiers in France voted No. Interpreters differ about why; but nobody has offered any evidence that they lacked confidence in the cause for which they had volunteered to fight.

There is perhaps no way now of discovering why the soldiers, or for that matter the civilians, voted as they did about conscription; and there are other questions one would like to ask about what Australians thought and felt and did fifty years ago which there may be no point now in asking. But there may be fresh ways, even now, of exploring the experience of war and the effects of that experience on peace-time Australia. We could look, for example, at the writings of Australia's most popular versifier, C. J. Dennis (the Anzac laureate, as he was called) . Dennis's themes and opinions were designed to be liked by as many people as possible. In writing the Songs of a Sentimental Bloke, published as a book in 1915, Dennis guessed that many Australians shared his hazy romantic attraction to the larrikin type. He judged his market well, and sold 50,000 copies in the first nine months. Then he began to write a book of verses about a

member of the AIF, The Moods of Ginger Mick. Again, Dennis was trying not to express a private poetic vision but to succeed as a mass entertainer. He seems to have thought that even the timing of Ginger Mick's death might depend on tit length of the current casualty lists. He wrote to his publisher: 'I have decided to kill Mick, but I don't know whether to finish him up on Gallipoli or not. If any further news comes through about the Australians I shall have to'. The Moods of Ginger Mick sold more than 40,000 copies at 4s in Australian and New Zealand in less than six months of 1916. There was a pocket edition of each book for the trenches; and both were welcomed warmly by the troops. Dennis's biographer tells the story of a soldier back from the war showing Dennis a copy of Ginger Mick and saying: 'Look at this. It has been through the hands of every member of my crowd'. It seems a fair inference that Dennis was expressing attitudes popular both among the troops and at home. What were they?

Four things happen in The Moods of Ginger Mick: 1) Mick, the larrikin of Spadger's Lane, becomes the hero of Gallipoli; 2) Experience at Gallipoli makes Mick think of himself not as a member of a class but as a member of a nation and race; 3) The Bloke and Mick talk in letters about the relation of soldier and citizen during the war and the prospective place of the returned soldier in the nation after the war; 4) Mick is killed.

In setting out the first theme, the transformation of larrikin into hero, Dennis suggests at one point that by carrying on at his peace-time sport of bashing, but hitting Turks instead of Johns, he has become a credit to his country instead of a nuisance to it; but elsewhere it is implied rather that Mick has been changed; he has been ennobled by warfare. He gives up the booze for his country, gets physically fitter, becomes a corporal, and reflects: ‘I know wot I wus born fer now, an’ soljerin’s me game’. Some people long before the war had said that the larrikin might make a fine soldier, and there is evidence from real life that the war gave the larrikin for the first time a socially valued skill. Dr Bean says that there may have been many larrikins in the first contingent of the AIF, of which Ginger Mick was a member. The worst of them gave such trouble in Egypt that General Bridges sent 300 home to be discharged in January, 1915. These were the AIF’s first returned soldiers. The remaining larrikins, and more broadly the larrikin element in the Australian troops, seem to have contributed to the Australians’ reputation among enemies and friends as formidable fighters. The relation between the war and the disappearance of the larrikin ‘pushes’ might be worth examining.

This first theme, the transformation of the man who was almost an outlaw into a dedicated soldier, overlaps the second: the shift of identity and allegiance from class to nation. Why did Ginger Mick join the AIF? His friend the Bloke explains that the call of stoush got him. In Dennis’s world, the natural man can be redeemed either by lovin’ or by fightin’. The Bloke is redeemed by lovin’. He leaves the push and the slums for Doreen and the farm. He does not become a soldier. In case readers were thinking of sending the Bloke white feathers, Dennis lets him explain that he volunteered but was rejected for having flat feet. Mick has a girl, Rose, but she is no redeemer. He is to be redeemed by fightin’. He joins up because he cannot resist a stoush; but he is not, at first, a patriot. Even after he hears with horror of German atrocities, Mick has proletarian misgivings about the war:

If I don’t work they’d pinch me on the vag; But I’m not keen to fight so toffs kin dine

On pickled olives . . . BLARST the flamin’ war! I ain’t got nothin’ worth the fightin’ for.

The first stirrings of patriotism affect Mick when he reaches dirty old Egypt:

Then Pride o’ Race lay ‘oh on ‘im, an’ Mick shoves out ‘is chest To find ‘imself Australian an’ blood brothers wiv the rest.

Here in Egypt for the first time he sees the qualities of people outside his own class. ‘I never knoo . . . that toffs wus white men till I met ’em over ‘ere’. He meets a toff, named Keith, who has nice manners and never swears. Mick picks at him, pinches his effeminate hair brushes and sells them for booze in Cairo, fights him and of course thrashes him, Keith having learnt his boxing at a culcher school. ‘They likes each other better after that’. But ‘pride o’ class’ keeps them from getting thick. Then, on Gallipoli, their officers are all knocked out; and Mick, who led pushes, becomes a leader again, and behind him comes Keith, ‘owlin’ and cursin’. Mick feels his Dream uv Stoush come true. He and Keith ‘felt like gawds wiv ev’ry breath they drew’. Ginger is hit, and tells Keith to leave him. But Keith says ‘I’m an Australian’.

An’ pride took ‘old o’ Mick to ‘ear that name—A noo, glad pride that ain’t the pride o’ class—
An’ Mick’s contempt, it took the count at lars’.

The suspicion entertained by Mick in 1914 and discarded later, that he was fighting so toffs could dine on pickled olives, became rather more widespread at home as the war went on. It became so for several reasons: because many Irish Catholics were alienated at Easter 1916; because the controversy over conscription gave an opportunity for all kinds of misgiving, from pacifism to Bolshevism, to cluster around a single unexpected issue; and also, more simply, because the balance of opinion and prejudice among working-class people in Australia was affected greatly by the departure of a very large proportion among them for the war. The working man who joined up was more likely than the working man who stayed behind to let pride of race overcome pride of class. As Sir Ernest Scott put it, in a passage which deserves more attention than it has had from students of civil discord: ‘the removal from Australia of over 200,000 of what may conveniently be called the trade union class necessarily affected the political complexion of that portion of the same class which remained in Australia’. Those who stayed must have been much likelier than those who went to respond when such men as Archbishop Mannix and Frank Anstey encouraged working-class people to believe that the burden of war would fall on the poor while the undeserving rich would benefit from it. As Anstey wrote in his pamphlet The Kingdom of Shylock (1916) : ‘Men come back armless, legless, maimed and shattered—money comes back fatter than it went.

(Fifteen years later the author of those words was federal Minister of Repatriation and had to defend to angry returned soldiers a reduction in pensions for the maimed and shattered.) To the patriotic, what Mannix and Anstey were saying sounded like treason. Within the Labor Party people faced a painful choice by the end of 1916. To Hughes and those who followed him out, the question was whether one remained loyal to the empire or deserted it; to those who stayed in the party it seemed rather that one had to decide whether or not to remain loyal to the traditions of Labor. The accusations that each side hurled at the other were terrible; for it was no easy matter in 1916 and 1917 to decide between pride of class and pride of race.

In The AIF, as we saw, Dr Bean found that the experience symbolized in the encounter between Mick and Keith was common; he believed, and so did Monash and others, that in this army pride of class was no barrier to a military comradeship which rested on pride of race.

How would the returned soldiers see themselves, and how would they behave, when they went back to home and work? Would the suspension of class-consciousness be carried over into civilian life? Sir Ernest Scott says that it was not. He notes the large increase in trade union membership between 1918 and 1920 and writes: ‘As soon as the rifles were handed in and the war-worn uniforms with the honoured colour patches were laid aside, these companions in arms returned immediately to the associations of industrial life’.

But things did not happen as smoothly as that. There was severe conflict over whether first preference in employment should go to a man who had served his nation and empire or to a man who belonged to a trade union. Some returned soldiers found it impossible to return to ‘the associations of industrial life’. In Sydney a Returned Soldiers’ and War Workers’ Industrial Union of Australia was formed in 1919 because, its founders said, ‘the existing Trades Unions

have refused to grant to Returned Soldiers and their dependents those benefits to which, by virtue of their service to their country, they are undeniably entitled . . . In Brisbane that year there was a Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Labor League whose purpose was exactly the opposite: 'to organise Australia's fighting men as part of the Labor Movement, because the overwhelming majority of those who volunteered for active service abroad came from the ranks of the workers, and, now that the war is over, are once more among the masses who have to labour for a livelihood'. The founders of this body deplored the loss of class-consciousness by 'a section of returned soldiers' who had come from the working class but were now 'trying to separate themselves from other workers, trying to form themselves into a caste, and trying to obtain special privileges and advantages for themselves. This attitude is a clear sign that these returned soldiers do not understand their economic position. . .' In this view Ginger Mick was right to have his suspicions about the toffs and their pickled olives; and people like Ginger Mick were wrong if they let pride of race drive pride of class from their minds except for the duration. What was the most appropriate and congenial social identity for the returned man? Should he join the union? The RSL? Both? Neither? Sould he think of himself as a returned soldier all the year round, or only on one day of the year? Such questions concerned Australians in the 'twenties and 'thirties and affected their political and social relationships more than one would guess from the published accounts.

How Ginger Mick would have answered them we do not know, because he had to die at Gallipoli. But the relation of soldier and citizen is raised by the Bloke, who writes to Mick that the feats of the soldiers have turned civilian Australia suddenly from a community bent on recreation into a serious place. He goes on:

When orl the stoushin's over, Mick, there's 'eaps o' work to do: An' in the peaceful scraps to come we'll still be needin' you. We will be needin' you the more fer wot yeh've seen an' done; For you wus born a Builder, lad, an' we 'ave jist begun.

Dennis now decided to devote another series of verses to the story of a soldier who returns. His next venture on the Anzac market was called Digger Smith (1918)—a title which showed how fresh his products were, since the book was out less than a year after the word 'Digger' was first generally applied to the Anzac troops. Smith, like Mick, is a transfigured larrikin. When he is invalided home, he goes not back to Collingwood but out to the country—another timely perception on Dennis's part. He works on the farm next to the Bloke's, and the book ends with a dialogue between the Digger and the Bloke called 'A Square Deal'. The Digger says:

'You coots at 'ome 'as small ideer Uv wot we think an' feel.

We done our bit an' seen it throu', An' all that we are askin' you

Is jist a fair, square deal.

We want this land we battled for

To settle up—an' somethin' more.

We want the land we battled for To be a land worth while.

We're sick uv greed, an"ate, an' strife, An' all the mess that's made uv life . .

'E stopped a bit to smile. got these thoughts Out There becos We learnt wot mateship reely was.'

It is a matter of taste whether one finds this passage uplifting or nauseating or bogus. But in real life similar sentiments were expressed widely in 1918 and after. The demand for a square deal, a fair go for the man who has risked his life; the feeling, half boast and half complaint, that the people at home do not understand the soldier's vision; the disapproval of the acquisitive spirit and of contention; a utopian concern to put into practice wartime thoughts and hopes about what is right and best for the country; a search for forms in peace-time Australia that will hold the wartime spirit of fellowship: all these things can be found in the tract Dr Bean wrote in November, 1918. They can be seen in the statement of objects drawn up by the federal executive of the new RSSILA in August, 1918: 'To induct members as citizens to serve Australia with that spirit of self-sacrifice and loyalty with which, as sailors and soldiers, they served Australia and the Empire, and to maintain an association, non-sectarian and non-partisan, in relation to party politics'. This attitude to party politics by the founders of the RSL showed not merely a prudent determination to barter votes for benefits but a serious indifference to or even distaste for party politics—an attitude that is shared by Dr Bean, and that has in it much of Digger Smith's conviction that politics is a game and that it is dirty.

The most durable and expensive outcome of Anzac utopianism was soldier settlement, urged on politicians by the RSL and espoused most ardently by the new Country Party, which had in it a strikingly high proportion of returned men and which was led by men who returned from the war discontented with the politics of the civilians and their cities. All too often the soldier settlers failed; and the story of their disillusion deserves to be told in its ideological as well as its agricultural context. Perhaps some were lured out to the land by the precedent of the Bloke and Digger Smith, or by the Bloke's letters to Ginger Mick:

Fer the green is on the paddicks, an' the sap is in the trees, An' the bush birds in the gullies sing the ole sweet melerdies; An' we're 'opin', as we 'ear 'em, that, when next the Springtime comes,

You'll be wiv us 'ere to listen to that bird-tork in the gums.

But when the next springtime came, Ginger Mick was in a grave on Gallipoli. That is the last thing that happens in the book, which is 'Deditated to the boys who took the count'.

A 'parson cove' breaks the news to Rose, and does it with feeling. 'But' (asks the Bloke) "ow kin blows be sof'n'd sich as that?' There is no suggestion that they can be softened by the consolations of Christianity. The Bloke's epitaph expresses no hope of resurrection, has no reference to the supernatural, and is perhaps characteristically Australian in referring to war as play:

'E found a game 'e knoo, and played it well; An' now 'e's gone. Wot more is there to tell?

Turning to real life, it is hard to see much more of Christianity in the monuments of Anzac than in the sentiment of Dennis. Elements of Christian symbolism were seldom admitted. Consider the Shrine in Melbourne, the Anzac Memorial in Sydney, the National War Memorial in Canberra.

The Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne was thought of in 1921, begun in 1927, and dedicated on Armistice Day 1934. The dedication is not Christian or even theist: 'To the glory of service and sacrifice'. The same is true of the inscriptions on the west and east walls. The legend on the west wall reads: 'Let all men know that this is holy ground this shrine established in the hearts of men as on the solid earth commemorates a people's fortitude and sacrifice ye therefore who come after give remembrance'. The message is not from the Bible but from the tradition of stoic patriotism. As it happens, the winning design was chosen by a Jew, Sir John Monash; but Christian assessors elsewhere were no more inclined than he was to admit Christian words or shapes into the war memorials. The Shrine in Melbourne derives from a Greek building, or rather from two Greek buildings: a tomb at Halicarnassus (353 BC) and the Parthenon. An official account of the memorial says that the Australian soldier was exactly like Odysseus.

The Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, Sydney, was opened in 1934, like the Shrine in Melbourne. The architect thought of the project, as the Melbourne architect did, in Greek terms. He entertained no Hebraic or Christian notions about war as a judgment of God or a crusade. He saw it rather as a heroic ordeal in which all participants might be ennobled. He wanted the building to show, he said, that 'War, like fire which purifies, engenders emotions and actions whereby the magnificence and beauty of human nature so gloriously overshadow the more unfortunate and lesser characteristics of Man's combative instincts'. C. J. Dennis had put a similar sentiment into the mouth of Digger Smith:

Crowds uv these lads I've known, but then They 'ave got somethin' from this war, Somethin' they never 'ad before, That makes 'em better men.

The glory of the soldiers this architect saw as 'Homeric . . . Courage, Endurance, Sacrifice—these were the thoughts of which I determined my design was to be worthy'. At the centre of the Memorial is a Hall of Silence, over which is a Hall of Memory. In the Hall of Memory the bronze figure of a dead and naked warrior lies on a shield, supported by mother, wife and sister, one of whom is carrying a child. The observer is required to look down, not up as in a Christian building. As a brochure about the Memorial puts it: 'All who gaze upon the group from this place of Memories must bow their head in acknowledgement of those whom it symbolizes—the heroes and heroines of N.S.W. in 1914-18′. When the observer does look up he sees the heroes and heroines again in a dome filled by 120,000 stars—one for every man or woman in the state who went to the war.

The Australian War Memorial at Canberra was foreseen in 1918 by C. E. W. Bean. The Federal capital will, of course, hold . . . that perfect, simple, solemn exquisite building which . . . will stand, if all goes well, on some hill-top—still, beautiful, gleaming white and silent, a sacred reminder throughout all ages of the men who really created the Australian nation'. The origin and purpose of the Memorial are described in an official account of it: 'Conceived at Anzac on Gallipoli, born amid the thunder of the guns at Bullecourt in France, the Memorial has been

raised by the living members of the Australian forces to their fallen mates'. Unlike the memorials in Sydney and Melbourne, it is a museum as well as a monument—and a museum of the services, not of the nation. There are no relics to suggest any continuity of effort and sympathy between soldier and civilian during the two world wars. The architect's proposal to have a central symbol relating the soldier to the nation was at first accepted and then rejected. It was opened in 1942. There was a speech by John Curtin, who had chosen not to join the Army whose deeds the Memorial celebrates, and who would have been imprisoned had the referendum on conscription been carried in 1916. 'The memorial', he said at its opening, 'would give continuity to the Anzac tradition and the basic impulses of the nation'.

At the centre of this Memorial is a Hall of Memory, the windows of which depict, according to the official booklet, 'what were judged to be the outstanding qualities of the Australian serviceman and woman'. West Bay: Social Qualities. Comradeship, Ancestry, Patriotism, Chivalry, Loyalty. South Bay: Personal Qualities. Resource, Candour, De-votion, Curiosity, Independence. East Bay: Fighting Qualities. Coolness, Control, Audacity, Endurance, Decision. The only reminder of Christianity appears in the window called ancestry, where accompanying cricket stumps and other things is a church spire representing, the official notes say, 'the European tradition of Christianity'. (The phrase suggests a civilization as much as a religion.) There is a faint reminiscence of Christian architecture within the Hall of Memory. More or less where an altar might be in a Christian church, it was intended to place a female figure standing behind a stone sarcophagus, to symbolize Australia in mourning for her sons. But the plan was changed. Instead of the woman, a warrior was put there. The observer looks up at him; his feet are 9 feet from the floor and he himself stands 18 feet high.

Looking at these temples of the Anzac spirit, these monuments to the dead warriors, one would expect to find that the relation between their custodians and the bearers of the tradition of Christian worship has been complex. How did this come about, and how after the war did the guardians of Anzac get on with the leaders of the Christian religion to which 90 per cent of Australians profess allegiance?

The theme of death and the Anzac tradition is too large to pursue here. Australia and New Zealand are, I think, the only countries in the world whose most popular national day commemorates the death of citizens in a war fought abroad. A study of the ceremonies of life and death performed on Anzac Day should tell much about our society; and a national history which does not explore the meaning of these ceremonies is too thin.

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