

"How Shall We Develop Australia's National Spirit?"

By DR. LLOYD ROSS



THERE'S a question mark in the title of this talk—and so a doubt:—How to get an Australian outlook? Suppose we could call up the men of our past who struggled to build up an Australian nation, like Henry Parkes and Henry Lawson, and ask them, what would they say?

"Why, haven't you got a national outlook yet? Didn't we lay the foundations for an Australian Commonwealth—taught the people of six colonies to be Australians; produced a constitution capable of being changed to suit new conditions; felt united under the Southern Cross; designed a flag; organized a national army; took pride in being the only continent that was a Nation? And yet you haven't an Australian sentiment. What, no uniform railway gauge? No national theatre; no faith in Australian culture? The desert unconquered; the outback undeveloped? Still droughts and bush fires—still the Darling runs wastefully to the sea? What have you been doing these forty years?" What have we been doing?—won the cricket ashes, brought home the Davis Cup; fought two wars as a nation; raised standards of living; reduced the death rate; lowered infant mortality; made books, paintings. Not bad, we're proud of such things. But much of what we have done is an earnest of future endeavour—an expression of appeasement rather than achievement. We honour the activity of Dr. Drummond and the Far West Children's scheme and forget that there should be no such need for valiant individuals struggling against malnutrition. We tell afar the story of the Flying Doctor and ignore the inadequacy of our medical services. We're proud of the way we rose to resist the invader just in time and forget the years when we ignored the warnings of the poet:—

I have seen so long in the land I love what the land
I love might be,
Where the Darling rises from Queensland rains and
the floods run into the sea,
And it is our fate that we'll wake too late to the truth
that we are blind,
With a foreign foe at our harbour gate and a blazing
drought behind.

Maybe, then, we have not a national sentiment because we tolerated slums, permitted malnutrition, allowed the desert to erode our precious soils, and only by building upon our best and eliminating our worst can we become a nation.

During this war we've done big things again—increased production, developed initiative, made difficult tools and commodities for the first time, transferred a democracy into a fighting nation and retained democracy. Yet we're dissatisfied with ourselves. We're wrangling; irritable; blaming one

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another; black marketing is leading to black melancholy; just at the time when there's a still bigger job in front of us—to win peace. And we're not sure what we want from the peace, but we do not want to return to the dark days of the depression. If that happens then we'll have failed and we will destroy in social bitterness the degree of national unity we have won. And since success in avoiding depression depends partly on winning a national sentiment, let's see what can be done. You remember the effect that Rupert Brooke's poem "These I have Loved" had on you in the last war.

You remember Dorothea MacKellar's

I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel sea,
Her beauty and her terror . . .

You can recall many such verses. You have heard Paul Robeson sing "Song of America" and you've sung "Waltzing Matilda" around the camp fire, on the troopship, along the tramper's road. Maybe you've sat outside the pub out west, on a clear keen night and stretched up to pluck down a star or two—there were so many millions, one or two would not be missed. There's much of Australia you have loved. You've fished and surfed and played with a song on your lips, so you will understand what I mean when I refrain from trying to describe why national unity must contain emotions, the feelings of our continent and its people. If we do not feel Australians—we will not be Australians. That's why we want books and paintings, music and bridges, verses and songs, orchestras, architecture by Australians, for Australia, about Australia.

That's why a major factor in the development of an Australian sentiment is the encouragement of our culture, but in too many of the words being printed in Australia to-day we're perpetuating the shoddy; we're disillusioning the growing hunger for literature with the products of the literary rubbish tip; we're missing great opportunities for vitalizing an Australian literature, we search in vain for books such as Bean's "Dreadnought of the Darling," Ratcliffe's "Flying Fox and Drifting Sand," Hancock's "Australia." We should be reprinting our classics, assisting the flow of the best from the world, encouraging our own best. For out of books can grow nations; from songs are born revolutions, the new order in the dream of poets.

But a very wise senior public servant quoted to me the first time we met recently,

"If you can dream and not make dreams your master!"

He was right, for we must make visions come true with effort, determination, drive, plans—national effort, Australian driving, Commonwealth planning.

Truly if we think that an Australia without slums and suffering can arise like a mirage over the desert, our hopes will disappear and leave us stranded, thirsty and lost. We will be inspired by our poets, but we must build not to music but by planned effort, national effort. Blueprints as well as poets, music and engineering; architects and artists—maybe architects who are artists; anyway, "Waltzing Matilda" and "Plans of Post-War Reconstruction."

No wild, covered-wagon rush out west can solve problems of soil erosion, drought, tree destruction. The isolated industrialistic laissez-faire man outback died and left his bones in the sands—or he frenziedly ring-barked trees in a desperate attempt to earn a living. No group of men, no single State can hope to dam the rivers, grow the forests, conquer the desert—and those are the things we must do if we would build a national sentiment.

You see, having stressed the need for sponsoring our culture if we would develop an Australian nation, I hesitate to add as a corollary, not a contradiction, that nationality cannot be obtained by blowing on Aladdin's Lamp—though often it has suffered by snuffing out the flickering light of scepticism and criticism. There's no aboriginal geni that will create a new Australia, but there are many Pied Pipers playing tunes of national ease, and apathy.

The word—and the deed.

We must build cities, community centres, rural homes—build with bricks and mortar; build with our hands even if we're building our dreams. Bulldozers and trucks and engines—even if the inspiration is a poet, a novelist.

We can't develop an Australian sentiment merely by talking it; nor by declaring we are united Australians and if you don't agree you're disloyal; nor by demanding that governments do this and do that for us—and do it without bureaucrats also!—nor by dividing ourselves into "we" and "they;" nor by excusing ourselves that we're young and so we could not expect to have a national sentiment yet—when it's clear that we were nearer achievement in the 'nineties than in the period before this war and that we're slipping back because we were moaning loud instead of building big.

There are many things we could set about building. I select the two that seem to me most important. You select your own, provided you do some building. My two are social security and national development.

I know that there are very learned men who argue that if people are not in fear of disease or unemployment or death, they will lose the drive that makes for progress. I don't think that Australian sentiment can be built in that way, but suppose you say to several men, "You want a job? We're sorry but you cannot all have one job since a certain amount of unemployment is good for a nation. You may have been fighting for security, but national security can be won only if some citizens are living in constant fear. Some of you must pay the price for the nation by living in slums, being unemployed."

Of course, we don't say that. Well, let's stop talking nonsense about Australian ingenuity depending on unemployment and Australian independence resting on insecurity.

Service men and women—they want a home; they rush for land to develop; they want security, they hope for a job in rebuilding Australia. I'm reading dozens of letters at the moment. They're all like this, typical of hundreds.

"To-day we are fighting for our lives; to-morrow we must be prepared to fight for our way of life—our philosophy

born of these hot rocks and sands and tinged with the flavour of our eucalyptus."

"The prospect which will confront the Federal Government at the conclusion of the war, though regarded by some as a situation of difficulty, is actually a Gift from Providence—in the shape of a unique opportunity for complete re-organisation of our national life. When the 'Cease Fire' has sounded over the battlefields, there can follow a fuller and more abundant life than any Australian has ever previously known, for every man, woman and child in this country."

There's no sign of weariness in such letters, is there? No frittering away of nationalism in petulant complaining about difficulties and inevitabilities. These men and women are not "light half believers of a casual creed." They have faith in their country and they're impatient to get back to the job of sharing in building Australia. They're weary but not exhausted. They're critical, but they also write poetry like these lines of Ian Mudie.

Once we have seen the sun through eucalypt leaves,
Once we have drunk the scent of all the bush—
Once we have felt this land, this land alone,
As our whole world, our wealth, our strength, our
life,
Then living blood shall course our veins anew,
This land shall then know patriots worthy of its
vast soil,
Bent to the building here in nationhood
Of new life in this South; New life, indeed,
Might with national purpose,
Strong with Australian need.

You remember that after emphasizing that by reading, thinking, circulating and producing words such as those in our quest for a national sentiment, we must also produce practical things—like social security and a planned national rebuilding.

Building means men and materials and unfortunately, in the first days of the peace there's little chance of having sufficient men and materials to satisfy all the demands for building—roads and town halls; sewerage systems and electricity schemes; schools and hospitals and colleges; houses and houses and houses. What shall we do, confronted with a demand? Put the projects into a hat and draw out the order? We won't build a nation that way, will we? Another way: let the wealthiest municipality, state, or individual compete for the men and materials in a mad scramble of whirling prices and growing dissatisfaction—and if that's the mood of post-war Australia, we'll dissipate our national unity in jealousies and hatreds. And so we're thrown back to choices, decisions, priorities. A town hall in X because X needs it most, a housing scheme out west before another picture-show in the city: either . . . or . . . ; this . . . or that; these things in this order.

That's not exciting, nor easy, because we don't see these choices and priorities as parts of a national achievement, a national selection for Australia.

Let's look at the problem in another way: Australia our nation, Australians our people; jobs to be done in Australia; houses, dams, community theatres, libraries, national theatres to be built somewhere in Australia. All for Australia, built, guided, inspired by Australians to a national plan. Let's develop plans—our plans—your plans—the plans of the people, developed by and criticized by the people.

Let's have a master plan for Sydney, for Melbourne, for all our cities. Let's develop a master plan for outback. Let's make our blueprints and our models, and then show them around so that we all can see the Australia of tomorrow. Let's take also books and paintings and plans on a grand national circuit. We could use the service so that in a few months every city, suburb, village or railway siding had a chance to see on paper the plans for electrification, housing, irrigation.

So many men for this; so many bricks for that, this dam before that town hall—but the town hall also, all in good time, if we work as a nation. Impossible? Well, haven't we had exhibitions of the tanks and the planes we have made; haven't our soldiers united us by marching through our streets—why not exhibitions of our plans; democracy on the march; the people planning, participating, re-planning, co-operating; travelling art galleries of our dreams?

Why not, oh ye of little faith?

Anyhow, those are my ideas—the nurturing of our literature; the freeing of our people from fear; the preparation of a grand national achievement; the participation of the people in every phase of planning.

"How Shall We Shape Australia's Outlook on the World?"

By PROFESSOR K. H. BAILEY



NOW, how on earth can I answer that? Hadn't somebody better begin by telling us what the world is going to be like in the post-war? A canary's outlook on a garden full of thistles and tom-tits would change abruptly if you turned a couple of cats into it.

Think back a little. In the 'twenties, the small democracies of the West played an active part in the effort to organize peace through the League of Nations. Under the Nazi menace, they turned their backs on the Covenant, and withdrew into an insecure, terrified neutrality. "When the hawk enters the wood," said an Englishman, describing it afterwards, "the little birds fall silent."

We had better begin by trying to get for ourselves some kind of picture of the post-war world, around the shores of the Pacific especially. So let's turn that searchlight off Australia for a minute or two.

In our region, the outstanding fact about tomorrow's world will be the industrialization, and the political independence, of mainland Asia as a whole. We shall ourselves live on a peninsula only semi-detached from the thousand millions that inhabit the south-east of the continent. Around the huge hollow square that runs north-west from Panama, south-west along Soviet Siberia, and south-east by way of China and Indonesia to Australia and New Zealand, the two great civilizations of the modern world lie as neighbours, with common frontiers despite the great sea-gaps.

West or East or North of Suez, World War II will have put a curb on the independence of small sovereign States. They will not be subjugated, and annexed against their will. But they will group themselves, for security and probably for some economic purposes as well, in the orbit of one or other of the Great Powers. These constellations of States may in many ways resemble the British Commonwealth of Nations.

For ourselves, we shall not do anything to interfere with our membership of that Commonwealth. Nor shall we disturb the Stars and Stripes by becoming the 49th State of the Union. But we shall have learnt that our remoteness is a post not of security but of exposure; that a nation with a small population cannot take its protection for granted; that we must concert our own action with that of others if we are to secure either freedom from want or freedom from fear. We cannot be indifferent to what happens to Britain and in Europe. But most of all our future will depend upon the extent to which, in the Pacific region, we can co-operate with the United States and with China.