

tions the world has ever known. What could we do unaided against such a nation? We might die bravely in defence of our country — and I know that Australians would gamely face any odds — but ... victory lies in large battalions of men.

Maloney concluded with a torrent of imperial rhetoric:

The seat of the British Empire is in Europe; the heart of the race is in the capital of the English world. If that be injured or destroyed then all our hopes and ideals, the greatest the world has seen, must sink into the gloom of oblivion, and the world be the poorer, that our civilisation, with all its wider life and greater opportunities, was strangled ere it had a chance.

Not bad for a pro-Boer.

EIGHT Poets

Poetry is the true nation-maker; yea, mayhap at the Last Day the nations shall be judged by the poets they have produced!

Bernard O'Dowd, 1904

There are those whose historical good sense makes them doubt statistics, quotations, footnotes and other paraphernalia of scholarship. If any such have opened this book they will not have read any of the preceding chapters but, knowing gold from dross, will have turned to the chapter on poets who are the true measure of Australian radicalism and nationalism. Even readers who have followed the argument from the first page may be wondering what the balladists and versifiers thought about the goings on recounted, and it would be impolite to leave so many unconvinced through lack of their favourite evidence. Notice will be paid to three poets: Bernard O'Dowd, A. H. Adams and Henry Lawson.

It is difficult to disentangle O'Dowd the social reformer from O'Dowd the nationalist. Indeed, he often considered social reform as a step towards Australian greatness rather than as a good thing for its own sake. His most widely known poem, 'Australia', begins by counterposing possible futures:

Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,
Are you a drift Sargasso, where the West
In halcyon calm rebuilds her fatal nest?

Or Delos of a coming Sun-God's race?
Are you for Light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
Or but a Will o' Wisp or marshy quest?
A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?

The conclusion, however, is optimistic, since there is a

Cross upon your forehead sky,
A virgin helpmate Ocean at your knees.

This sonnet was written before 1901. Any doubts O'Dowd may have had concerning Australia's greatness were soon dispelled and in 'Our Land' Australia becomes a 'New Jerusalem':

From Northern strife and Eastern sloth removed,
Australia and her herald gods invite
A chosen race, in sternest oricals proved,
To guard the future from exotic blight.

Tesimony to O'Dowd's humanity and gentleness is legion. It is, therefore, indicative of the power of racist militarism that even he could write:

Yet on our margin other folk are set
Who, it is well, should keep a while away,
Too long apart to mingle wisely yet
(E'en I who love the Hindoo, Chinese, say!)
Yea, will we steel us to the death to fight —
In such poor means alone avail — whome'er,
Or Asian throng, or island brown, or white
Blood-brother e'en, would cloud our prospect fair,
To guard the future from exotic blight!

Combined with O'Dowd the pacifist and humanist there was, inexorably, O'Dowd the Australian who could not escape the passions that ruled his 'chosen race'.

O'Dowd's mistress and fellow-poet, Marie Pitt, had no qualms in demanding severe penalties for white Australians who had sexual relations with Chinese. First offenders were to be deprived of their citizenship rights while second offenders

were to be deported to China. In a slightly earlier verse, O'Dowd had been less reticent in his racism and recognised, in language reminiscent of Lawson's, Australia's position as the vanguard of European imperialism, which he called civilisation:

And not alone to feel the mouths of children at her breast
Australia wafts her sibyl call wherever white men are;
But, warden of the boundaries, lone outpost for the West
She dare not risk the paling here of splendid Europe's star.
Out in the night we seem to see piratic dangers sparkle,
And, on our moon's horizon growing, omens grimly darkle!
O come ye of the white race hither, come ye to her call!
'Tis not alone for us the word she sends you o'er the sea!
As ye shall rise while up we soar, our failure means you fall
The fall of truth, the fall of love, the fall of liberty!

Remote from O'Dowd's archaic style was the epigrammatic voice of A. H. Adams, who succeeded A. G. Stephens as editor of the *Bulletin* 'Red Page' in 1906 and later became *Lone Hand* editor. Much of Adams' verse was personal in character, but where social questions arose no one was more devastating for sustained racism. Adams described *The Jew* as

... the lord of all
The spoiler of his kind.
who

... now his retribution nears,
And now the tale is told,
And all the strokes of all the years
Must be repaid — in gold.
For him your armies win — and lose:
His toll he takes away.
The jackal of the world can choose
Disdainfully his prey.
He slinks about your trade, your wars,
His mouth is ripe to drain
The red wine of the conquerors —
The red blood of the slain.

Fear of Asia and the militarism that it provoked are evident in 'One Hour — to Arm':

Along the frontier of our North
The yellow lightning shudders forth;
But we have shut our eyes.
Yet in the tropic stillness warm
We hear the mutter of the storm
That all too soon must rise!
After the flash the thunder comes,
And now the menace of the drums
Wakens this pregnant calm.
Prolong this hush of warning, Lord,
That we have time to clutch the sword:
Grant us one hour — to arm!

The discussion now concentrates on Lawson. H. M. Green, author of a massive *History of Australian Literature* (1961), claimed that 'If we were set the impossible task of finding some single work to represent Australia it would have to be one of Lawson's. For an Australian to read him in another country is to breathe the air of home'. Russel Ward included Lawson in his trinity of nationalist authors alongside Paterson and Murphy.

It will be a somewhat novel Lawson who appears in the following pages. Some of the themes to emerge will be racism, and anti-democratic temper, anti-intellectualism, militarism, and anti-semitism. The combination of these in any other writer would place him in the category of 'fascist'. Indeed, in 1969, an Australian Nazi declared:

If Lawson had written in this style today, he would definitely have been classed as a bigot, a racist and a 'Nazi' ... Lawson stood for his White Race, his People and strong Nationalism against the Communist policies of integration and internationalism.

This is not to say that Lawson and Hitler were as one. Rather Hitler might have had to dispose of Lawson as he did the leaders of the SA (the Brownshirts) who wanted to push ahead

with the anti-monopolist part of their program. Lawson was a fascist in the sense that fascism is a movement of protest against big business and Jewish financiers. That this kind of fascism rarely comes to power, and when it does is promptly squashed by the traditional conservatives (as in Rumania in 1941), does not mean that it is not one of the many varieties of fascism.

The usual view is that Lawson was a socialist. On the centenary of his birth in 1967, the Communist Party's paper *Tri-bune* devoted eight pages to a 'celebration' of 'one of Australia's best known and loved writers'. Evidence for Lawson's socialism comes from poems such as 'Faces in the Street'. Yet there is nothing specifically 'left' about this kind of sympathy. Numerous passages in *Mein Kampf* deplored the suffering of ordinary people:

The peasant boy in the big city walks the streets, hungry; often he pawns and sells his last possessions; his clothing becomes more and more wretched; and thus he sinks into external surroundings which, on top of his physical misfortune, also poison his soul. If he is evicted and if (as is often the case) this occurs in winter, his misery is very great.

What is important is an author's view of why these sufferings occur and how they can be eliminated. Lawson's occasional calls for 'revolution' have led some critics to see him as aggressively class-conscious. This is not so. Like the rest of the radical movement in the 1880s and 1890s, he was a firm supporter of the old middle-class leaders such as Jack Robertson and Sam Lilley.

Moreover, Lawson's disapproval of the 'rulers' was never complete. They were not pictured as wholly bad or as irrevocably so. He had a Dickensian view of kings and squatters as being good men at heart: the fire in 'The Fire at Ross's Farm' is eventually beaten because of the arrival of the squatter. Nor was Lawson always opposed to English gents:

Let bushmen think as bushmen will,
And say what e'er they choose,
I hate to hear the stupid sneer
At New Chum jackeroos.

And in 'After the War' Lawson told his readers that he:

... never believed that a dude could fight till a Johnny led us then,
We buried his bits in the rear that night for the honour of
Pitt-street men.

The first man to volunteer to remain on the sinking *Seabolt* is:

... a merchant stout,
His face was brown and tan:
'I'll volunteer to stay on board,
For I'm an Englishman'

Lawson's support for unionism did not outlive the century. 'I'm Too Old to Rat' has been misinterpreted: the speaker is saying that he is seriously disturbed at the trend of events in the labour movement but cannot bring himself to leave it. It is a cry of resignation, not defiance. By 1899 Lawson was describing the union creed as 'narrow', that is, not national. Ten years later in 'The Land of Living Lies' his account of the strikers is that:

They were men professing nothing, yet Australians through and through,
And their every act was hampered by the canting 'Comrade' crew,
and further on:

(Socialist be damned! for: 'Ists' and 'Ism's' are as naught to me —
Our ideal was a real and broad Democracy.)

Here are hints of his nationalism and anti-intellectualism. Yet surely the final line contradicts the earlier claim that he was anti-democratic? Lawson was in favour of government 'for the people', but not of government 'of or by the people'. Instead, he longed for a strong ruler, as in 'Cromwell', who

... in my country's hour of need
For it shall surely come,
While run by fools who'll never heed,
The beating of the drum,
While baffled by the fools at home
And threatened from the sea —
Lord! send a man like Oliver —
And let me live to see.

Such a man would become 'The King of our Republic' and
If you find him stern, unyielding, when his living task is set,
I have told you that a tyrant shall uplift the nation yet;

The connection between a popular dictator and militaristic nationalism was thus made clear. But it was an old theme of Lawson's, one which he expressed in 'Australia's Peril', written five years earlier in 1905:

Listen through House and Senate — listen from east to west
For the voice of one Australian who will stand above the rest;
Who will lead his country's dawning, who will lead in his
manhood's noon —
The man will come with the hour — but the hour may come too soon.

Lawson's objection to 'democratic politicians' was that they factionalised and divided the nation. His view of nationalism was the organic one common to fascism. He objected to:

... *thirteen* little kings
Of thirteen Parliaments.

Attacks on those who opposed the oneness of Australia, political as well as geographic, became more frequent in the poems Lawson wrote from 1905 to 1910. His paramount concern was not a class one but a national one. He believed that the destiny of Australia was to produce the 'Dynasty of Man'.

Yet this destiny was imperiled by a combined assault from

international Jewry and Japanese monkeys. The Jews planned to use the Japs to destroy this new paradise. ('The East is backed by the Jews'.) There was a heavy populist strain in these writings as, for example, in 'Freedom on the Wallaby', where the promise is to 'make the bankers feel the sting', or in 'Australia's Peril', which contends that 'with the Jews we belied the farmers'.

Lawson's account of the Boer War was that:

... the dirty Jewish talon reached from palaces and slums
Till a hundred thousand English died to stop the farmers' drums.

Indeed, he believed that most wars are engineered by the 'Syn-dicates and a monarch "in" with the Jews'.

Jews were also blamed for Australia's economic distress in the 1890s and Lawson suggested that 'If the crimson flag was hoisted 'twould be bad for prophets such as Jacob'. All the references to Jews in his poems were unfavourable except in 'Joseph's Dreams and Reuben's Brethren' which, having painted the Jews as people who sell their brothers, and that 'For more than twice his worth', fell back on to the cliché ('My best friend is a Yid').

Late in 1893 Lawson published a pseudonymous poem defending 'Arthur Desmond', an anti-semitic revolutionary who saw himself as the literary reincarnation of Wodin. The substance of the defence was that Desmond merely had the courage to say what everyone else felt.

The anti-Semitism of European fascists festered not only on the supposed financial power of Zion but also on the image of the Jew as the carrier of the new ideas associated with the liberal professions. This element did not arise in Lawson's anti-intellectualism, perhaps because of the level of intellectual life in Australia. He none the less warned that when things were better organised 'the rich an' educated shall be educated down' and he objected to the psychological dramas of 'Ibsen and Pshaw'. Australia's future, he maintained, rested with:

Boys who are slight and quiet, but boys who are strong and true,
Dreaming of great inventions — always of something new;
With brains untrammelled by training, but quick where reason
directs

Boys with imagination and unclouded intellects.

These intellectuals would do something manly and useful by becoming Australian engineers on Australian ships to drive away the Japanese.

Fear and detestation of Asians was the central theme of Lawson's political verse and it infected everything he wrote in this connection. The threat from Asia was at the base of his militarism but it was not its cause. Long before the rise of Japan, Lawson was praising war as a good thing for its own sake, irrespective of the cause:

From grander clouds in our peaceful skies than ever were there
before,
I tell you the Star of the South shall rise — in the lurid clouds of
war.

It ever must be while blood is warm and the sons of men increase;
For ever the nations rose in storm, to rot in a deadly peace.

And thus we learn from the libelled past, though its methods were
somewhat rude —

A Nation's born where the shells fall fast, or its lease of life
renewed.

We in part atone for the ghoulish strife and the crimes of the peace
we boast,

And the better part of a people's life in the storm comes
uppermost.

('The Star of Australasia')

When searching for an image of life and manhood Lawson turned time and time again to war and the battlefield, as in 'The Friends of Fallen Fortunes' and 'Fall in, My Men, Fall in'. In 'The Dons of Spain' Lawson praised heroism for a cause he opposed:

And here's to the bravest of Freedom's foes who ever with death
have stood —

For the sake of the courage to die on steel as their fathers died on wood;

Some of these poems were written in the 1880s long before Lawson became a drunkard and a psychotic and cannot be attributed to these personal traits. Moreover, his poems were printed by some of the most widely read journals in Australia, especially the *Bulletin*, where his ideas found a receptive audience.

Lawson's response to the Boer War was ambiguous. In 'Ballad of the Cornstalk' he told of a restless bushman who was killed, and of the girl who waited for him. It combined sympathy for the soldier's motives in going with compassion for the woman left behind. Though 'The Blessings of the War' was patently ironic, it cannot conceal Lawson's longstanding beliefs:

I'm in favour of the war, and of half-a-dozen more;
And I think we should have had one long before —
There is nothing to deplore; I'm in favour of the war
Independent of all statements made by Briton or by Boer.

'Tis a healthy stirring up of the dregs of sorrow's cup;
'Tis a joyful thing, as I have always held,
For it brings us something new. And I'm looking forward to
The festive time when Sydney shall be shelled!

Lawson supported the Boers, whom he saw as the prototype of the bushman who would have to save Australia.

Some of Lawson's poems at this time indicated that his militarist views had not been as popular when he started to write:

And they lounged on the rim of Australia in the peace that
had come to last,
And they laughed at my 'cavalry charges', for such things
belonged to the past;

('The Heart of Australia')

After the Russo-Japanese war, the outlook changed and, in

1905, triumphant though still fearful, he combined militarism with racism in a poem 'For Australia':

Now, with the wars of the world begun, they'll listen to you and me,
Now while the frightened nations run to the arms of democracy,
Now, when our blathering fools are scared, and the years have
proved us right —
All unprovided and unprepared, the Outpost of the White!

Lawson's sympathies were evident in 'The Vanguard':

'Tis the first round of the struggle of the East against the West,
Of the fearful war of races — for the White Man could not rest.
Hold them, IVAN! Staggering bravely underneath your gloomy
sky;
Hold them, IVAN! we shall want you pretty badly by and by!

Fighting for the Indian empire, when the British pay their debt,
Never Briton watched for Blucher as he'll watch for IVAN yet!
It means all to young Australia — it means life or death to us,
For the vanguard of the White Man is the vanguard of the Russ!

The seemingly anti-war poem 'Nemesis' has to be seen in its context. It was designed to cool down the demands for war between Russia and Britain after Russia's fleet had sunk some British fishing vessels, mistaking them for Japanese torpedo boats. Thus he opposed 'War because of one poor blunder made in panic far away'. He was concerned to form an alliance of all the white nations against the East, especially Japan.

The victory of the Black Jack Johnson over Tommy Burns in Sydney on Boxing Day 1908 provided Lawson with a premonition of race war:

For 'money' and 'sporting' madness — and here, in a land that was
white!
You mated a black-man and white-man to stand up before you
and fight
And many — God knows how many! — sons of a white man's
son
'Backed the nigger to beat him' — and *flocked to see it done*.

You thought about, talked about, raved about nothing else under the sun —
 In a time of National danger with National rights to be won!
 While madness made laws for madmen, and the soul of Australia
 moaned,
 And the paltriest Acts were 'parried', and the great State Question
 postponed.
 You flocked to your fairest city, for a Thing that you would not
 miss —
 To see a sight that could never be seen in a land but this.
 You paid and you cheered and you hooted, and this is your need
 of disgrace;
 It was not Burns that was beaten — for a nigger has smacked
your face.
 Take heed — I am tired of writing — but O my people, take heed,
 For the time may be near for the mating of the Black and
 the White to *breed*.

('The Great Fight')

The vision of race-war recurred over and again, as in 'To Be Amused' where he saw

... the stricken city fall
 The fathers murdered at their doors,
 The sack, the massacre of all
 Save healthy slaves and paramours —
 The wounded hero at the stake,
 The pure girl to the leper's kiss —
 God, give us faith, for Christ's own sake,
 To kill our womanhood ere this.

I see the brown and yellow rule
 The southern lands and southern waves,
 White children in the heathen school,
 And black and white together slaves;
 I see the colour-line so drawn
 (I see it plain and speak I must),
 That our brown masters of the dawn
 Might, aye, have fair girls for their lusts!

Lawson's interweaving of sex with race again indicates that economic competition was not the sole source of prejudice.

In 1912 the government introduced military training for all boys between twelve and eighteen years of age. There were almost 30 000 prosecutions for failure to attend the drill parades, and several parents, including prominent socialists, were gaoled. Lawson's response was:

There's many a schoolboy's bat and ball that are gathering
 dust at home,
 For he hears a voice in the future call, and he trains for the
 war to come;
 The schoolboy scours of the White Man's Land are out on the
 hills today;
 They trace the tracks for the sea-beach sand and sea-cliffs grim
 and grey;
 They take the range for a likely shot by every cape ahead,
 And they spy the lay of each lonely spot where an enemy's
 foot might tread.

('Here Died')

The inevitability and nobility of war were as persistent in Lawson's poems as was the danger from the East. In 1913 he warned:

Beware of the East, O Christian, for the sake of your fairest
 and best;
 It is written, and written, remembered, *that the tide of invasion*
goes West.
 You builded a wall, O China! to keep your enemies out;
 You cradled the mightiest river and you conquered the flood
 and the drought.
 Patient and peaceful and honest — children of Industry —
 Wise with the wisdom of ages — yet they could not let you be!
 Nor wall nor mountain nor ocean justice or peace could win.
 You builded a wall, O China! *Let them see that it keep you in*.

('The Old, Old Story')

This stanza shows that Lawson realised that the Europeans had provoked the Asians, but his conclusion was that it would

result in a war of races, not of classes. Moreover, he was not blind to the virtues popularly attributed to Asians — patience, endurance, industry. Like so many others, he feared those very virtues most; they were virtues only as long as the Chinese remained walled-up inside China.

Lawson once pictured a Chinaman in a favourable light, in the story *Ab Soon*. Commenting on this tale he wrote:

I don't know whether a story about a Chinaman would be popular or acceptable here and now; and, for the matter or that, I don't care. I am anti-Chinese as far as Australia is concerned; in fact, I am all for a White Australia. But one may dislike, or even hate, a nation without hating or disliking an individual of that nation.

Some of his best pals were Chinks: he had used the same defence against the charge of anti-semitism. It is a part of racism that the 'race' should possess characteristics not found in individual members of the race.

When war broke out in 1914, it was not the war Lawson had looked forward to. It was not race war, but a war between Europeans. Hence, he has 'The Foreign Father' tell Austrians:

... who make sport your ideal, down there by the Southern Sea;
*There's a menace more deadly and real than ever the
German could be.*

He nonetheless supported the war and Britain — and conscription — since it would

Make men of weeds! Give muscle thought and feeling!
Reduce the Fat (and here and there make men!)
Give brains to brawn! The pregnant time is stealing
Close to our shores — Ah! you shall know it then!
Fear not the plunge! — If we can only strike it,
The track is clear to perfect nationhood.
And — you'll get used to discipline and like it,
For I was disciplined and found it good.

('Conscription, 1916')

Some twelve months earlier, Lawson had put the same ideas in different words, through the mouth of a German:

You say that our discipline's brutal, because you are paying
the debt,
You say that conscription is deadly; it hasn't killed Germany
yet.
See the weeds in your Southern cities hawk and spit between
race-board and pot!
Would discipline make them or mar them? Or your citizens
miss them, or not?

Lawson was convinced that war, violence and discipline would produce 'men'. His view of 'man' is purely physical, the view that Mussolini had of himself.

Events in Russia in 1917 confirmed Lawson's fatalistic view of history and of the inevitability of war:

'Tis the Great Law Periodic till the stars shall be no more:
War, and war, and revolution — and then, after that, the War!

Lawson maintained a sympathy for ordinary people and some of his most effective lines describe the horrors suffered during war, as in 'Antwerp' (1914):

Blue smoke from the embers curling, and the morning is fresh
and fair;
And the dead and the charred and the mangled, and the
wounded are everywhere.
And out on the paths of the fleeing, where remnants are
scattered like chaff,
The terrible silence of children, and a soldier's hysterical laugh.

Yet, on Armistice Day he wrote:

Now is all business stopped, and work and traffic,
To give a doubly needless holiday;
Now do cold-footers howl and yell and 'maffick',
And 'flappers' fling all modesty away.
This is the Anti's day, the day for shirters,
And racecourse scum, and touts — and worse than they —
For monkey tricks that shame all honest workers,

And pranks no decent lartikin would play.
 I raise my window sash, and sit and wonder,
 While gazing upwards at the starry dome,
 Will men say in their hearts, that grand sky under —
 'If this be peace, God send us war at home?'

('Peace')

For, as Lawson's anthologiser, Colin Roderick, summed it up: 'Lawson always praised war as the maker of nations, peace as the canker that rotted the national frame, and he welcomed the holocaust of 1914-18 as the fulfilment of his prophecies.'

To recapitulate: an investigation of Lawson's verse has revealed the following characteristics:

- 1 an organic concept of the nation
- 2 idealisation of manly virtues
- 3 hostility to finance capitalism
- 4 elitist notion of leadership
- 5 racism, including anti-semitism
- 6 militarism.

If these concepts demand a reinterpretation of Lawson, how much more do they demand a reappraisal of the Australia that Lawson has for so long epitomised?

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