

EPILOGUE

THAT the war was the pivotal event in the history of Australia is beyond dispute. Older countries, built upon foundations centuries deep, might survey the vistas of years and point to many crises vast in their significance and potent in their consequences. France, Italy, Germany, whose small towns, often, were wrapped in romance and whose capitals were invested richly with unfading charm; the explosive Balkans; Turkey tottering to a doom which would not fulfil itself till the Sultanate vanished into limbo with the collapse of the Powers in whom Mohammad V so fatally confided; Russia rotten with corruption and riddled with revolution after three centuries of Romanov rule; Austria the crazy-quilt of empires—all emanated from histories teeming with great men, great tragedies, and the great forces which mould the destinies of mankind. Nations once important in their independence but fallen victims to their own follies or the aggressions of stronger Powers, emerged during this war as though it were a time of national resurrection, clamant for the re-establishment of their ancient freedom. Poland appeared again upon the map of Europe; and the snows of Australia's highest mountain, bearing the name of Poland's darling hero, might have melted for joy at the news thereof. Bohemia, extinguished since the Thirty Years War, regained that independence which the Hapsburg emperors had destroyed. Most of all Great Britain the mother of many nations and the inspiration of many more which were not of her own family, looked back over a thousand years glittering with splendours and crowded with occurrences so large and far-reaching in their import that even the Great War counted but as one of many from which she had emerged with her laurels still green and her will unshaken.

But Australia was, if of unimaginably ancient geological age, politically one of the two youngest of countries inhabited by people of European stock. Her past was, historically speaking, a matter of yesterday. She had never felt the hot blast of war upon her face. She was hardly known to exist when some of the great earth-shaking movements which have shaped the histories of nations occurred. Not an inch of the

coastline of Australia had been marked on the maps of the world when the storms of the Reformation swept over Europe. The Hollanders were piecing together outlines of the west and north coasts while the Thirty Years War raged. Dampier formed a reluctant acquaintance with her aborigines in the year when the last of the Stuart kings of England was ousted by the Prince of Orange, and made a second voyage upon these shores in somewhat more respectable circumstances just before the fateful War of the Spanish Succession broke out. The American War of Independence was at least one cause of the first move to colonise in this country. The Napoleonic wars brought a tinge of danger—no more than a tinge—when Napoleon instructed the Governor of the French colony of Ile-de-France (Mauritius), who had been pressing for supplies to “take the English colony of Port Jackson, where considerable resources will be found”; but he might as well have told General Decaen to take the moon, for his colony was being closely invested by British men-of-war, and he had no equipment for an oversea enterprise.

All these wars, and those which came later, left Australia unscathed. True, it was very important for her well-being that the enormous prestige gained by Great Britain, by sea and land, during the Napoleonic wars, enabled her to make good a claim to the entire continent of Australia—a boon to this country which could not have been secured in less advantageous conditions; but still, though to this extent the political integrity of Australia was a consequence of the success of the Mother Country in war, it remains true—and it is a striking truth, unmatched in the history of any other country—that six States had grown up here, and had been welded into a federation, without a foreign foe affecting her career even to the smallest extent.

And then, in August, 1914, came the call to arms; and the response was immediate, it was jubilant, and it was unanimous. An examination of the journals of the period does not reveal a questioning or doubtful note. The pledges given by leaders of political thought, of all schools, were firm and unequivocal. Thousands of young men offered themselves for training in the earliest contingents. The attitude of every person in

Australia whose thought found expression anywhere was, that inasmuch as the Empire was at war, and Australia, as a part of that empire, was consequently at war, it was the duty of this country to enter the war with as much vigour, as large a contribution of men, and as full an acceptance of responsibility in every sense, as was possible within her resources.

The war did not, indeed, become a party question, or a question entailing any deep severance, until the strain made demands which were admittedly severe. It would have been a happy circumstance if the unity of feeling which had characterised the early period of the war could have been preserved, but in view of the differences of opinion about policy, and attendant circumstances which were alien from Australian politics, such a result would have been wonderful to the point of the miraculous. The war thus threw parties and leaders into the melting pot and recast them in fresh moulds, with a heat more intense than had been experienced at any previous period.

Yet transcending the bitterness and fury was one emotion which blended all sections in one compact whole—pride in the achievements of the Australian soldier. From every social strata came the men of the A.I.F., and every rank in the army contained officers from the same wide variety of classes as formed their companies. A more thoroughly democratic army never fought, not even that which turned the tide of fortune for France at Valmy in 1792, after the disastrous opening of the revolutionary war, or that which Washington commanded and Paine inspired in 1776. On three occasions they voted, while German cannon were thundering at the lines, with the same facility as they would have voted had they been in their own towns in Australia: and if they had not been able to vote they would have considered that they had a grievance. For it was essentially a citizen army, hardened by training into a fighting engine which gained from the critical Marshal Foch the praise that it consisted of shock troops of the first order. A true citizen army it proved itself to be in its deepest instincts when the war was over and the time came for men to slip back into the avocations of peace.

Pride in these men went, too, with a wholesome respect for their coherency. They were of all shades of political thinking,

but they had only one way of thinking when a question arose affecting their comradeship. The war had hammered them into compactness, to which political power paid deference. But they were the most manageable of men. The dissolution of an army has ever been a problem fraught with anxieties, and there were a few uneasy moments for the civilian authorities during the weeks when the troopships were bringing back their thousands. But no mass of men at this time proved intractable to the word of advice of an officer whom they respected, as was proved on an occasion when the general affectionately known in the ranks as "Pompey" Elliott¹ calmed an irritated crowd of soldiers with a few wholesome words. Civilian witnesses saw at once how idle was the reproach that the Australian troops were ill-disciplined; and the boast that "we never go against the word of anyone with stars on an Australian shoulder-strap" sounded like a confession of faith.

Legislative evidence of the deep respect for the troops was shown in the permanent prohibition of the use of the word "Anzac" for any unauthorised purpose. Soon after this name blazed into fame, persons began to employ it for painting on garden gates and distinguishing commodities offered for sale. There were Anzac cakes, Anzac villas in the suburbs of cities, and Anzac companies would soon have sprung up like mushrooms. In England a venture in real estate, advertised as "Anzac on Sea," provided something like a passing scandal. The name was likely to become vulgarised. But it stood for memories too sacred to permit that to occur. As long as Australia was covered by the network of the War Precautions Act the prohibition was imposed by a regulation forbidding the employment of the word without the permission of the Governor-General—which, it was certain, would not be given—for any private residence, vehicle, boat, building, trade mark, trade, business, or calling.² Then, when the War Precautions Act was repealed, Parliament gave power for the continuance of the prohibition, which was effected by a statutory rule in 1921, for the "Protection of the Word Anzac."

¹ Major-Gen H. E. Elliott, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., D.C.M., V.D. Commanded 7th Bn., A.I.F., 1914/16; 15th Inf Bde, 1916/19. member of C'wealth Senate, 1919/31. Solicitor, of Melbourne and Ballarat, Vic., b Charlton, Vic., 10 June, 1878. Died 23 March, 1931

² *Manual of War Precautions, 1918 edition, p 158*

The rule provided that³

No person shall, without the authority of the Governor-General or of a Minister of State, proof whereof shall lie upon the person accused, assume or use the word "Anzac," or any word resembling the word "Anzac," in connection with any trade, business, calling or profession, or in connection with any entertainment or any lottery or art union, or as the name or part of the name for any private residence, boat, vehicle, or charitable or other institution, or any building in connection therewith. Penalty £100, or imprisonment for six months, or both.

The British Parliament also, by a law enacted in December 1916, made the use of the word for purposes of trade illegal. "Anzac" thus became a rare instance of a word reserved by law against common employment.

The patriotism evoked by the war was singularly bright and pure. Australia was far removed from the scenes of conflict. Distance conferred upon her an immunity of which probably no other part of the habitable globe could have felt more sure, had she chosen to rely upon her geographical advantages. Yet there was never a moment's hesitation about the part she was called upon to play. Mr. Hughes wrote with truth that "the distance which divides us from other citizens of the Empire creates the illusion of independence"; but he hastened to add that the welfare, the very existence, of the people of the dominions is bound to the welfare of Great Britain.⁴ It was not only that dependence which was recognised when the call to arms sounded, but a warm, enthusiastic response to the magnetism of kinship thrilled the country as it had never been touched before in its most profound emotions. That evocation of patriotic feeling was good for Australian nationality as well as for the immediate occasion. The conviction that the duty of service justified the most extreme sacrifices, spiritualised the life of the people. It is a precious benefaction for a nation to possess men whom it is proud to admire—heroes who have wrestled with death in a great cause. The war gave such men to every hamlet in the land; and scarcely a place which had sent forth soldiers who shed their blood failed to commemorate their deeds by some public record of their names. The magnitude of the sacrifice was great, but its compensations were noble.

³ Commonwealth Statutory Rules, 1921. No 2 (amended by S.R. 1921 No 216).

⁴ Hughes, *The Splendid Adventure*, p. 335.

Thirty years before the war, Joseph Chamberlain, still the audacious hope of English Radicalism, but with an idealism touched by that imperial spirit which had never been absent from his political make-up, said a remarkable thing. Commenting upon the disappointment of the Australian colonies, as they were then, with the reluctance of the British Government to secure New Guinea for the Empire, he said⁵:

It does not need a prophet to predict that in the course of the next half-century the Australian colonies will have attained such a position that no Power will be strong enough to ignore them. . . . and for my part I cannot look with any confidence on any settlement which may be made in those regions in defiance of their united opposition.

In less than the period envisaged by Chamberlain the Australian Prime Minister and a colleague were taking part in the conference which settled the terms of peace after a war which shook the world. Much had happened since he was a commanding figure in British politics to change the status of the British daughter-nations; and he was no inconsiderable force in forwarding the process of change. In 1887 Lord Salisbury was hardly prepared to concede to the States represented at the first Colonial Conference the right to have an opinion of their own on imperial and foreign relations.⁶ Now they were makers of treaties affecting all the Powers. The price they had paid was too high for their claims to be ignored. And so rooted had the change of status become in the minds of the Australian people that they would have been shocked if their ministers had not taken a full part in the peace settlement. Perhaps nothing relating to the war could have conveyed so strong a sense of dominion nationality as did the fact that the Treaty of Versailles was in part the work of representatives of what were formerly called dependencies; and in Australia this international recognition of her claim to share in shaping the terms gave profound satisfaction.

No country, perhaps, nourished less of the spirit which is called "militaristic" than Australia. Chauvinism is a weed which never flourished on this soil. It is indigenous in those lands where during centuries never free from war, and the

⁵ Quoted by J. L. Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, Vol. I, p. 542, with the comment: "Thirty years before the Great War this is a startling passage both in its far-reaching instinct and its dauntless faith."

⁶ See Lord Sydenham, *My Working Life*, p. 72.

ever-present fear of neighbours similarly subject to panics, a psychology has been generated which is apt to manifest itself in a *too-ready disposition to take offence or give it*. "Running over the pages of history," said Frederick the Great of Prussia, "I see that ten years never pass without a war. This intermittent fever may have moments of respite, but cease, never." So much inherent is this war-temperament in peoples whose history on nearly every page is illuminated by the red flame of battle, that it is possible to cite by the hundred such perverted opinions as that of Moltke that "war is an essential element of God's scheme of the world." But the psychology of a people whose shores have never been scorched by war is so radically different that to them the war-spirit appears as a kind of mania.

All the more remarkable was it, therefore, that the Australian soldier proved himself to be so terribly efficient, and that the nation which sent him forth leapt with such apparent alacrity to the demands made upon it. Nevertheless, to those tall, hard, lithe men who by 1918 were veterans who "knew the game" as well as any troops in the field,⁷ war was never for a moment in danger of becoming what Mirabeau said it was to the Prussians, "a national industry." "It is well that war is so terrible," said Lee of Virginia, "or else we might grow fond of it." One never met an Australian soldier who ran any risk of that infatuation. Nor did he fight with bitterness. Did anyone ever hear an Australian soldier say anything ill-natured about the Germans? He left "mouth-fighting" for those with aptitude for it. Being in the war he fought to win, but "Fritz" was not a bad fellow to make a pal of in other circumstances.

That the war cut deep furrows is not open to doubt. It was affirmed by dependable witnesses within the last thirty years that the marks of the waggon-wheels of Major Mitchell's expedition when he made his famous journey in 1836 to "Australia Felix" were still visible in parts of the Wimmera Plains. Probably the marks of the war-chariots will still be visible in political and social life for a longer span of years.

⁷ In 1918, when American troops were going into action with Australians, an American general, addressing his men, said: "Those lads over there always deliver the goods. We expect you to do the same."—*New York Times Current History*, Aug. 1918, p. 237.

The political effects were the most deeply cut. "When the Labour party expelled its leaders," writes a shrewd observer, "it condemned itself to long wanderings in the wilderness; when the Liberal party accepted them it condemned itself to defend and even to enlarge the gains of Labour."⁸ That was one post-war furrow. The coherency of the soldiers concerning anything which impugned their spirit of comradeship was another; and the fur was easily ruffled. A certain weariness concerning even prudent measures of defence was, at all events temporarily, a third. But no war-spirit was engendered, nor was it likely to be. Australia's most heartfelt wish was to rehabilitate the stricken nations, to heal the scars of war, and to obliterate by international methods the causes which conduce to one of the worst scourges of humankind.

⁸ W. K. Hancock, *Australia* (1930), p. 229.