

Australia's Nobler Manhood— “Lo, the Unploughed Future”

By Noelene Isherwood, CEC 25th Anniversary Conference, May 18-19, 2013

Part 2 of 3

To My Young Countryman D.H.D.

by Charles Harpur

Who doubteth, when the morning star doth light
Her lamp of beauty, that the day is coming?
Or, where prime odours track the breezes' flight,
That rare flowers in the vicinage are blooming?
Or, where the wild bees all about are humming,
That honey's stored in some near cedar's height?
Or, that the sea is heaving into sight
When more and more long surgy rolls come booming?
And surely, as the observer understands
What each of these foretokens in its kind,
Thy manhood's mental amplitude expands
Before me in its omens, when I find
Something of promise fashioned by thy hands,
Some blossom breathing of thy forming mind.

This sonnet is one of a number that Charles Harpur wrote in honour of his Republican friend “Little Dan Deniehy”, as he called him.

Daniel Deniehy (1828–1865)

Let me introduce another of our historic collaborators—
Again, a devoted friend to Charles Harpur and a genius
in his own right—Daniel Deniehy.

Deniehy is probably most renowned, at least among students of Australian history, as a fiery intellectual member of parliament, whose most famous political contribution was his stinging defeat of William Charles Wentworth's attempts in 1853, to create hereditary titles for an Australian House of Lords, which he scathingly dubbed a “bunyip aristocracy” (See page IV).

But there was much more to this incredible young Australian. Born in Sydney, the son of Irish convicts who had prospered after their term expired, he was educated at the best schools in Sydney before travelling with his parents when he was 14 years old, on an educational tour to Europe.

Deniehy paid close attention to the art treasures and architectural wonders of these celebrated centres of culture. The family then spent a “swallow's season” in Ireland, meeting leaders of the Young Ireland party and intersecting the political ferment around Daniel O'Connell's attempted repeal of the Union between Britain and Ireland.



Daniel Deniehy (1828–1865)

Upon their return to Sydney in 1844 Daniel took up studies as a lawyer, under the guidance of one of Australia's leading intellectuals and literary patrons, Nicol Stenhouse. And less than a decade later, at just 25 years of age, he was already so highly respected, that he was elected to the NSW Legislative Council even though he believed he was not yet “wise enough” for political office.

A few years later in 1856 with the highly contentious “Land question” on the political agenda, he again reluctantly ran for election telling his constituents: *I would fain have known more of mankind ere I undertook to legislate for them.... But a crisis is at hand.... When the signal fires are reddening the hills at midnight, when the sharp tuck of the drum and the fierce, taunting invitation of the trumpet are abroad, is it for the recruit to plead that his drill is incomplete?* [A question that more than a few of us, may have asked from time to time!]

In his book, “**The Life and Speeches of Daniel Deniehy**” Edward Alfred Martin wrote regarding Deniehy's character: *this man's passionate love for his native land, his loyalty to her best interests, his earnest endeavours to benefit her, and his efforts to teach the growing youth that there was a better and nobler aim in life than mere sensual enjoyment of*

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the present, deserve gratitude and recognition....What limitless credit, then is not due to one who, barely arrived at manhood, had yet contrived to master difficulties which were little less than insuperable, who not only passed from one language and one literature to another, conquering as he went, but made himself familiar with painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and those minor arts in which human ingenuity is most happily displayed....

He continued: *The feeling for abstract and idealistic beauty appeared in Mr. Deniehy to be almost an additional sense; he seemed actually to taste the beautiful; his mouth watered at words as if they were luscious fruit, he appeared to have a sensuous impression of the ideal, with such fullness and force did his imagination realise a graphic thought; and yet he had so well stored and practical an intellect and understanding, and so keen and subtle a knowledge of men and things, that he might have risen to the highest position in the Government of his native land....*

Deniehy may have loved beautiful art and literature, but for him the greatest work of art, truly was, as the great German poet Friedrich Schiller said, "political freedom". And to achieve this, education was essential. Not only did Deniehy have a massive library of books weighing over four tons, but he helped establish the Mechanics Institutes in Australia, primarily for adult education for the working classes. Like many of his Republican heroes, he understood that democracy is susceptible to mob rule, and therefore an intelligent and informed populace is essential for the nation-state. Deniehy penned a series of Editorials addressing these concerns, which were published in the *Goulburn Herald* during the mid 1850's.

On 5 August, 1854 he wrote: *The education of a man is never at an end....The possibilities of moral and mental growth which God has endowed his human creature with, have an awful grandeur worthy of that mysterious spiritual existence placed under material conditions in a material theatre, which our Lord Christ came down to redeem. The wonders of the starry heavens are less stupendous in the eye of the meditative mind than the fathomless and boundless capabilities of development in the mind and soul of a human being....The ethical cultivation and mental improvement of the mechanic—additions to his knowledge, and the opening up for him of faculties of profound and beautiful and lasting enjoyment in objects and pursuits that connect themselves with his immortal existence as a moral being, are matters we know, quite beyond the range of [our opponent's]*

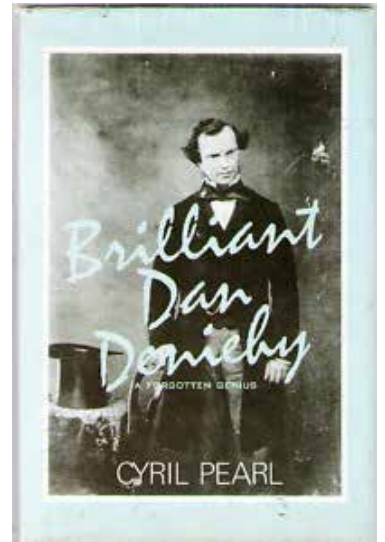
mental vision. That they can see no possible benefit accruing to a carpenter from lectures on astronomy, or to a stonemason from reading poetry, is quite in character. (Editorial, Goulburn Herald: "Legislative Advancement of Knowledge", 5 August, 1854).

In speaking of the quality of leadership required for the future, he wrote: *Our colony has been cursed with bad legislators and bad laws, and unless constituencies are reminded of the duties that they owe to themselves and to the state, we see no prospect of change for the better. The country requires at this juncture, men of enlarged views and of statesmen-like abilities. She stands sadly in need of patriots, true lovers of her soil, of her climate, and of her worth; such who know what she would be capable of under a genial rule, and who would, without one selfish desire, shape her destiny. She does not need the mere demagogue 'whose unthinking rage, Maddens for a moment and expires' but those men of progress who, utterly and unreservedly despising the abominations which have disfigured her government, retarded her power, and stunted her growth, are ready and prepared to lay the axe to the very root of imbecility and corruption. (Editorial, Goulburn Herald: "The Duty of the Country", 7 February, 1857).*

I want to conclude this profile by reading several excerpts from Deniehy's 10 June, 1854 Editorial, entitled "Our Country's Opportunity". It is a brilliant policy document on the development of a true political economy—one worthy of our close attention. [Copies available from CEC].

So irresistible is the onward course of man in the march of improvement that even the trammels which the despotism of a northern dynasty has for centuries been weaving to enthrall the human mind in a state of perpetuity, will at no distant day snap asunder, and regenerated and intellectual man proclaim ... the triumph of a great social and moral revolution.

Man, the great Reformer, is abroad; the seeds of knowledge have been scattered on every wind and sown deep in every soil.



The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts and its reading room established in 1833. "By the Community, for the Community" – this idea was the foundation stone for thousands of Mechanics' Institutes built across Australia. Daniel Deniehy helped establish the Institutes, primarily for adult education to elevate the working classes.

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However faint and weary the philanthropist may be made by his efforts to disenthral and regenerate the prostrate and degraded nations of Europe, he is cheered and heartened to a commensurate degree when he turns his face to the new world. As he spans the mighty Atlantic and nears the American shore, he can discern through the dim atmosphere of slavery the outlines of a better order of things—he there finds the great master spirits of the age working with an energy and zeal not to be restrained for the sacred and holy cause of man's elevation in the scale of created being.

We have premised thus much as to the moral certainty of the human family attaining, at no very distant day, the realisation of the glorious dream of man's perfectibility as divinely shadowed forth in the typical manifestation of social elevation in this world and ultimate redemption beyond the gloomy portals of time.

And now, having approached that part of our subject which brings us to the Australian shore, we will take up the text of 'our country's opportunity' ... whose only obstacle in the way of triumphing over the imperfections of all preceding communities, is the difficulty that may and probably will be experienced in finding Trustees adequate to the task...

By cutting out a new line of policy—the adoption of a new and enlightened code of political economy, based upon principles of truth and justice, they will anticipate the labours of their successors ... The subject of public works is one that will come before the Legislature, ... and we are of the opinion that this matter, joined with the questions of education and immigration, is paramount to all others, and will conduce more immediately to the prosperity of the colony than anything else that could be devised by the most fertile imagination. By public works, we wish it to be clearly understood we do not mean a few undertakings of questionable utility in the neighbourhood of Sydney, but the construction of good roads...

Deniehy then elaborates the virtues of the American system of immigration compared to the British system,



The above sketch of Daniel Deniehy was drawn by his friend Adelaide Ironside (1831-1867). Ironside was not only a renowned painter, but also a republican activist and poet.



Noelene Isherwood presenting *Australia's Nobler Manhood* at May 18, 2013 - CEC National Conference.

inciting representatives of our colonial Legislature:

Let it be proclaimed loudly and widely through the British Isles, from the Mull of Kintyre to the shores of Cornwall, that the moment the Emigrant sets his foot on the shores of Australia, he will find plenty of employment on the public works of the colony for two years at a rate of ... 6s. per day with a house for his family and the certainty of his children being educated in a manner consonant to his feelings; and a guarantee that at the end of the two years he will obtain a grant of land sufficient to make a comfortable homestead for himself and his heirs in perpetuity. Let this, we say, be widely proclaimed not only throughout the British Isles, but along the plains of Hungary, Poland, aye and Germany too, and we will soon have a mighty population rolling in upon our shores, whose energies under bright auspices will soon convert our immense tracts of forest land into cultivated fields, and whose necessities will compel the construction of sectional lines of road that will bring the most remote parts of our colony in almost immediate commercial contact with each other, and as a consequence the interchange of all those finer though abstract qualities of the human character which when fully developed and blended together form a social and humanizing charm that like the radiant and mellow glow of an Australian summer's evening, casts a holy and sacred influence on every heart...

In conclusion, we call upon our readers to demand ... from our legislators now assembled the immediate application of their powers to achieving the great objects we have pointed out, the establishment of which will work out the moral, social and political regeneration of the colony, and ultimately succeed in 'making laws and institutions on a scale of proportion equal to the majesty of nature,' and that ... the objects which dimly float before the mind's eye, far down in the hazy distance, can be realised or brought into form by the plastic power of mental organization. (Editorial, *Goulburn Herald*: "Our Country's Opportunity", 10 June, 1854).

To be continued...

Excerpt from Deniehy's 1853 Bunyip aristocracy speech

(As reported in the press at the time. Also note that Deniehy had a habit of writing speeches and articles that addressed himself in the third person.)

And having the right to frame, to embody, to shape it [our Constitution] as we would, with no great stubborn facts to work upon as in England, there was nothing but the elective principle and the inalienable freedom of every colonist upon which to work out the whole organisation and body of our political institution.

But because it was the good pleasure of Mr. Wentworth and the respectable tail of that puissant Legislative body, whose serpentine movements were so ridiculous, we were not to form our own Constitution, but instead of this we were to have an Upper House and a Constitution cast upon us, upon a pattern which should suit the taste and propriety of political oligarchs who treated the people at large as if they were cattle to be bought and sold in the market; or as they indeed were in American slave States, and now in Australian markets, where we might find bamboozled coolies and kidnapped Chinamen.

And being in a figurative humour, he might endeavour to make some of the proposed nobility to pass before the stage of our imagination, as the ghost of Banquo walked along in the vision of Macbeth, so that we might have a fair view of these Harlequin aristocrats, these Botany Bay magnificos (laughter), these Australian mandarins.

Let them walk across the stage in all the pomp and circumstances of hereditary titles. First, then, in the procession stalks the hoary Wentworth. But he could not imagine that to such a head the strawberry leaves [a reference to the decoration on a Duke's coronet] would add any honour.

Next came the native aristocrat Mr. James Macarthur, he would he supposed, aspire to the coronet of an earl, he would call him the Earl of Camden, and he suggests for his coat of arms a field vert, the heraldic term for green— (great cheers and laughter) —and emblazoned on this field should be a rum keg of a New South Wales order of chivalry. There was also the colonial starred Terence Aubrey Murray, with more crosses and orders—not perhaps orders of merit—than a state of mandarinhood.

Another friend who claimed a colonial title was George Robert Nichols, the hereditary Grand Chancellor of all the Australias. Behold him in the serene and moody dignity of that portrait of Rodius' that smiled on us in all the public – house parlours – the gentleman who took Mr. Lowe to task for altering his opinions; this conqueror in the lists of jaw, and the victor in the realms of gab. It might be well to ridicule the doings of such a clique, but their doings merited burning indignation—yet, to speak seriously of such a project would too much resemble the Irishman's kicking at nothing, it wrenched one horribly.

But, though their weakness was ridiculous, he could assure them that these pygmies might do a great deal of mischief. They would bring contempt on a country whose interest he was sure they all had at heart, until even the poor Irishman in the streets of Dublin would fling his jibe at the Botany Bay aristocrats. In fact, he was puzzled how to classify them. They could not aspire to the miserable

and effete dignity of the grandees of Spain.

They had antiquity of birth, but these he would defy any naturalist properly to classify them. But perhaps it was only a specimen of the remarkable contrariety that existed at the Antipodes. Here they all know the common water mole was transferred into the duck-billed platypus, and in some distant emulations of this degeneration, he supposed they were to be favoured with a **bunyip aristocracy**.

He trusted that this was only the beginning of a more extended movement, and from its auspicious commencement he augured the happiest results. A more orderly, united, and consolidated movement he had never witnessed. He must say that he was proud to belong to Botany Bay....

But it is to yours to offer them a land, where man is rewarded for his labour, and where the law no more recognises the supremacy of a class, than it recognises the predominance of a religion. But there is an aristocracy worthy of our ambition. Wherever man's skill is eminent, wherever glorious manhood asserts its elevation, there is an aristocracy that confers honour on the land that possesses it. That is God's aristocracy.

That is an aristocracy that will grow and expand under free institutions, and bless the land where it flourishes. He hoped they would take into consideration the hitherto barren condition of the country they were legislating for. He was a native of this young but glorious continent. Its past was not hallowed in history by the achievements of men whose names reflected a light on the times in which they lived. They had no long line of poets, of statesmen, and warriors; in this country art had done nothing, but nature everything. It was theirs to inaugurate the future.

Daniel Deniehy contribution to the "Southern Cross" – Australian Federation (1860)

"We have men, worthy men no doubt, but altogether out of place, entering Parliament latterly, whom not only no employer would trust in matters requiring intelligence, capacity, and experience, matters of any profound, complex, or comprehensive kind—but who, themselves, would claim no higher endowments than those which are loosely generalised under the phrase 'common sense', which means, in fact, the skill to drive a good bargain, to purchase store bullocks, or to do a 'stroke' in land jobbing." ... "In the administration of federal government on a larger arena we should have larger men' on a national platform we should have powers and sentiments of national bulk and comprehensiveness. Noble ambitions would have a noble field."