

David Syme
The Father of Protection
In Australia

By

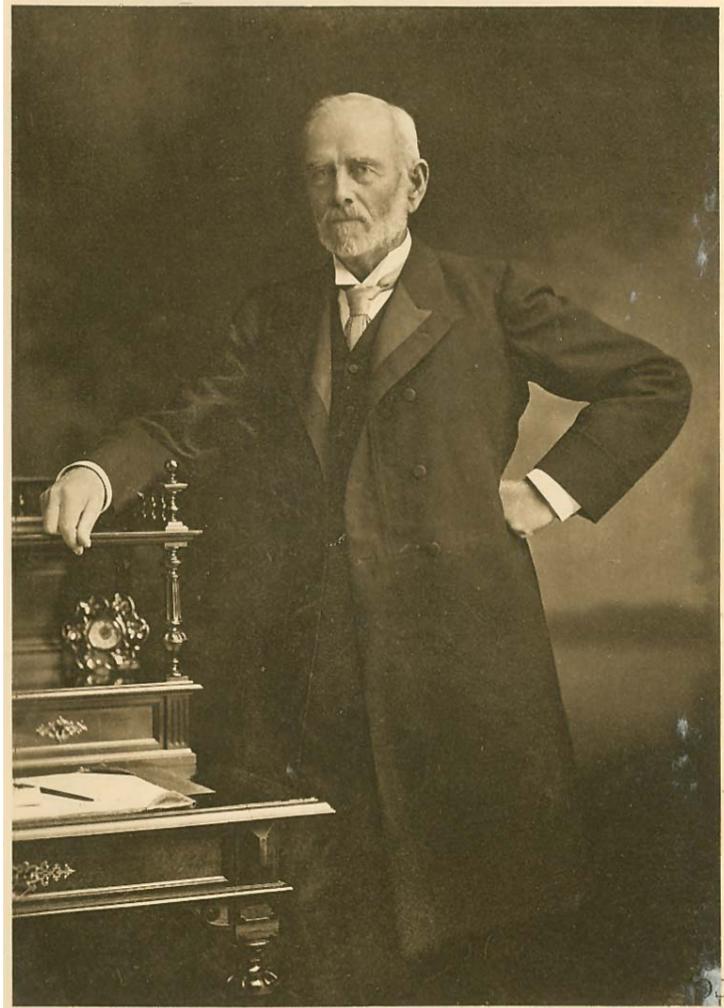
Ambrose Pratt

With Introduction By
The Hon. Alfred Deakin

Illustrated

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David Syme

Introduction

By The Hon. Alfred Deakin

When a final study of the career of David Syme appears, it must form part of the most memorable chapters in the history of the colony of Victoria and of the making of the Australian Commonwealth. These cannot be written until the lapse of time shall have furnished a sufficient perspective, an array of documents now unpublished, and also allowed the light of subsequent events to rest upon the work done by him during his long and fruitful life. No complete estimate, either of the man or his methods, being possible at present, the book to which these few paragraphs serve as an introduction makes no such pretence. Yet it possesses an immediate interest as well as the enduring value of original materials which cannot be superseded.

A biography of this character, published today, comes opportunely while the facts which it chronicles are more in men's minds than they are likely to be years hence, when the freshness of impressions still current will have died away. For many years *[begin page vi]* past, so far as the public knew, Mr. Syme was *The Age* and *The Age* was Mr. Syme. Most Australians had no other knowledge of his life. To him the paper owed everything; its survival, character and policy. It was a power because he was a power; or, in current phrase, a personality.

The story of the newspaper occupies by far the larger portion of this book, and properly, since to its issues we must look for the larger portion of his thought, of his labour and indeed of himself. Even an outline portrait of Mr. Syme cannot be attempted without adding an impressionist estimate of the influence of his journal; nor will it ever be possible to consider its achievements apart from the man to whom they were due. Its triumphs and shortcomings, whether arising from his direct action or endorsement of the actions of others, are his and his only. It is therefore perfectly natural and appropriate that after the first three chapters of reminiscence the life of the individual man should seem to be absorbed in that of his paper. Its thin veil of impersonality imposed upon no one and concealed nothing of him that the future has a right to know.

Unfortunately for myself, the invitation to add some personal reminiscences of Mr. Syme comes at a moment when even that is all but impossible. Without leisure to refer to diaries or documents of any kind for the refreshment of a jaded memory, it would be fruitless to attempt to give more than *[begin page vii]* a few cursory and hasty glimpses of him as I saw him when controlling his paper during the years 1878 to 1883, or at intervals afterwards down to his last days. How slight and fragmentary these recollections are is admitted without demur - too fleeting in my own opinion to be worthy of record. They merely offer a few very incomplete impressions. Added together they scarcely make a sketch. At best like casual snapshots, frank, though blurred, they may serve to recall to those who know something of his characteristics, the remarkable citizen of the Commonwealth "in his habit as he lived" while he wrought, hammer on anvil, at the building of this great State within the Empire.

The first three chapters of this book are to a large extent autobiographical, and these it has been possible for me to read. A glance at the remainder shows that they take a far wider range, dealing with the principal developments of the policy unfolded and enforced by *The Age* in circumstances which are certain to provoke prolonged examination. But the recollections of any of us who were acquainted with Mr. Syme, unless recorded now, will not be recoverable. Having been one of his friends for nearly thirty years, it is my obligation to add at once my little store of knowledge, such as it is, and so far as I can jot it down.

When introduced to Mr. Syme shortly after I was called to the Bar, he was at the height of his *[begin page viii]* fame, though not of his prosperity. *The Age office*, at that time in Elizabeth Street, was an old building of considerable size, inconveniently arranged and of dingy exterior. It was, however, already the mainspring of Victorian politics. Then as always Mr. Syme must have impressed any observant eye. A splendid physique, upright carriage, resolute step, and regular features firmly set, expressed a mind and character of unmistakable force and unusual penetration. Save for the slowly-increasing physical weakness manifested during the last five or six years he remained without notable change in appearance or manner until he died. The hair became greyer, the pace slower, the smile kindlier, and the manner easier, but the transition proceeded quite imperceptibly. His powerful frame, in spite of his ruthless use of all its resources, remained outwardly unimpaired, except by a slight stoop. In brief, beyond the effects of pressure relaxed and strength lessened, there was no special alteration of mood or mind. His ideas, aims and opinions were not materially modified.

Though his wealth and opportunities for leisure were multiplied, neither of these was noticeably enjoyed by him in the ordinary sense of that word. Perhaps he had been too long engaged in a fierce struggle for existence to relax into lighter recreation. At all events he valued his riches only for the power and independence they betokened, remaining as simple in taste, habit, dress and demeanour as he *[begin page ix]* was before his office expanded to its present dimensions in Collins Street. It was there that,

gradually becoming a regular contributor to *The Age* and the *Leader*, I was frequently in his company. Never holding an appointment on either staff or receiving a salary, my time was my own. As he lived for some years in South Yarra near my home, we sometimes walked out together and I visited him occasionally. At intervals I spent a few days at his country place - Macedon - since that summer resort was situated in the constituency represented by me early in 1879 and from 1880 onwards. Our business relations subsisted until 1883, when my connexion with the paper ceased, owing to the acceptance of other responsibilities.

During five years of journalism I probably saw as much of Mr. Syme in his office as anyone, except Mr. George Syme, his brother, or Mr. Windsor, who until 1900 was the Editor of *The Age*, and much more elsewhere than those not of his family. The strongest tie between us was supplied by our common enjoyment of the same books and interest in the same questions. Not that we shared all general likings. He was a slow, selective, reasoning student of scientific, sociological, economic, and political literature; of the monthly and quarterly magazines, of voyages, travels and explorations; and to a more limited extent a reader of biographies, and treatises upon current controversial issues, in most of which he took an active interest. He [begin page x] had dipped into metaphysics only to discard the principal systems. Beyond this wide area and its definite boundaries he did not go, or care to go. Within it he was always willing to give or take up a challenge to discuss. He kept a thorough grasp of whatever knowledge appealed to his understanding and had it always ready for use.

When he gave himself the rein, usually in dialogue, he spoke consecutively, forcefully and clearly, arguing at times with vehemence and energy, though as a rule briefly. A more interesting talker, sober-minded but fearless, or a more logical disputant, it would have been difficult to find. There was not the slightest arrogance in his intellectual altitude, though he was little tolerant of principles or persons that did not harmonize with his own views. He was sceptical both from choice and inborn caution. Despite his varying moods he was at all times prepared to meet those who would debate abstract questions on a footing of absolute equality, listening with eager attention to new facts or new interpretations. In most circumstances his manner discovered a modest diffidence, even when his fundamental doctrines were assailed. He was always most gracious and considerate to the very young man, whose enthusiasms he criticized with a generous simplicity conveying no hint of the legitimate authority to which his age, ability and experience fully entitled him. His good nature was, I fear not infrequently abused; but never at any time [begin page xi] or under any provocation did he become in the least ruffled by trespasses of this kind.

David Syme has often been described as cold stern, severe, and choleric; though these epithets were much more in vogue during the early years of *The Age*, when nothing but indomitable resolution stood between him and the wreck of his hopes. There was some justification for general impressions of this order, since his was always the reserved demeanour of a self-centred man. A glance at the sad story of his childhood and youth discloses the circumstances in which he put on an armour worn for the rest of his life. Nor was the world kind to him until after he had reached middle life. Robbed and deserted by his mate when apparently dying in the old diggings days (whose traditions of this kind relate almost wholly to chivalrous sacrifices), he was not exceptionally fortunate in anything except his marriage, till once and for all his nature had taken its ply. Grim experiences had made him grim, though underneath the rigour of his challenging scrutiny or the shadow of his frown was an inner spring of warmth and tenderness very near the surface and quite easily set free.

He was stern with the strong until they met him fairly and cold of necessity to most of the miscellaneous strangers, faddists, politicians and aspiring contributors who haunted

his office and dogged his steps. Passionate for his cause and his paper [begin page xii] he ever was, and so he remained in all fortunes. Flaming to a white heat when resisted, thwarted, or deceived, his emotions were usually associated with principles or events rather than with any personal attachment or animus, though some persons came in for a full share of his hostility when actively connected with an opposing camp. He was a warm friend, a strenuous partisan, and a fierce adversary; though I do not remember any vendetta that he was not willing to conclude if openly approached, and hardly an enemy with whom he remained continuously on bad terms. His estimates of men were not high nor his expectations sanguine. He was always seeking in public and in private for those who possessed sufficient ability to do the work of the country or of his paper. He was considerate to most of them and also extremely generous in his own way and at his own time. It is true, as stated in the third chapter that "he did not meet many people he really liked," yet he had none but friendly feelings for most of those whom he distinguished at all from the crowd in the background. Many misinterpreted his curt incisive remarks by way of reply to first overtures; but he was not harsh to any with whom he was often in contact. Hard trials had made him suspicious; reticent with intrusive strangers, and disdainful in the presence of insincerity, whether real or imaginary. All this was for the outer world.

[begin page xii]

As he grew older he grew more expansive, even with strangers, but at every period of my acquaintance he was extremely gentle to women and polite with dignity to all official or other persons whom he met socially. His mental vigour, fired by strong feelings, rendered him a doughty debater in his own office when discussing public policy, upon which at any instant he could become deeply stirred. Striding to and fro or standing with beetling brows and denunciatory gestures he could pour forth admonitions, explanations, and oburgations with volcanic violence - but only in the presence of two or three persons. Speak in public he would not. It was a torture to face any audience how ever amicable. In such cases he simply read remarks carefully committed to paper; a series of ranked sentences marching straight forward with regular strides direct to their goal.

An anxious writer, he hung jealously over his sentences, erasing the superfluous or inserting the accurate word. When he says of Mr. G.P. Smith, "he could not be called a brilliant writer, but he had the supreme merit of being able to put his points clearly and forcibly," he described his own ideal. In his books he often attained it with a compactness, weight and crystal clearness of exposition that left nothing to be desired. His own writing upon the paper during my experience was limited to a few short paragraphs. A critical faculty, abnormally developed by exercise upon his staff, [begin page xiv] deprived him of the rapid flow required for daily newspaper writing, if he ever possessed it. Until his confidence was won every new contributor was submitted to an ordeal by fire or something very like it. Every departure from familiar English, every new adjective or ornamental phrase, whether happy, vivid, or the reverse, was treated as an excrescence and struck out at sight. Slowly, as confidence came, alterations diminished. Probably Professor C.H. Pearson alone was spared this surgery because of his great reputation, wealth of ideas and literary finish. But even his qualities - could he have left some of them to the 'prentice writer would not have saved the recruit from vigorous compression, partly as a discipline for future guidance. What Mr. Syme wished to see in *The Age* was exposition of argument, strong, terse and virile; the criticism of a severe censor and the stinging irony of an offended advocate set forth in the simplest English. To this high standard he strove with endless labour and pains to bring his paper, sometimes groaning in body as well as in spirit as he sat for hours, blue pencil in hand, at his self-imposed task.

In spite of the co-operation of an editor admirably qualified for editorial work and in close touch with his principal upon every point of current politics, he declined to release himself from bondage. During the early eighties he still retained many other duties of managerial and business supervision that [begin page xv] could hardly have been delegated. As success crowned his efforts he employed his wealth in a variety of investments designed not merely for profit but to assist in the development of agriculture and mining. He gave a large portion of his time and money to farming, fruit-growing, irrigation, horse-and-cattle breeding, in a variety of experimental ways and on a great scale. He was a large shareholder in mining ventures of various kinds in several parts of the Commonwealth, and also interested in sundry manufacturing enterprises, inventions, and miscellaneous undertakings.

At the same time his leisure hours were being set apart for serious literature where he traversed a variety of fields of thought, economic, constitutional, biological and psychological, with results summarized in the later pages of this volume. His books were all scientific in method, and in each of them he sought to break new ground. He was in no instance a follower of the authorities he examined, but always a pioneer who had a new step to take, cautiously but boldly, beyond the accepted doctrines of his day. All that I need mention here is that in this direction alone he did as much work as any Australian thinker has yet accomplished, and always with a high aim. No one can appreciate his life who does not allow for this versatility. Notwithstanding manifold business occupations his intellect was applied to the unsolved problems of his time with patient labour, lucidity of exposition, [begin page xvi] individuality of aim and cogency of argument. Remembering the many contrasted and exacting employments in which his practical energies were poured, we may well marvel at the life work he accomplished, quite apart from his dictatorship in the Press and politics of his State, and its influence upon the broad fortunes of this young Commonwealth.

Needless to say, Mr. Syme carefully studied and chose his staff, and no better proof of his judgment can be quoted. His latest brief notes upon his principal early writers, published now for the first time, fall short of his own comments upon them when they were actually by his side. Indeed all the memoranda he has left are subject to some qualification, because they were recorded when mists had commenced to gather upon his memories. A more cultured, a more richly endowed mind than that of Dr. Pearson, a style more scholarly and more gracefully effective, has rarely been matched in the journalism of our time in any English speaking country. Nor has the Press of the Commonwealth enlisted, to my thinking, such a scintillating, speculative intelligence as that of A.L. Windsor, expressing itself in such sinuous, trenchant and closely-knit prose. During part of the period in which these two remarkable writers; were in full vigour there was a third, whose name cannot be omitted, the ever-varying, humorous Bohemian artist of genius and frailty - Marcus Clarke. Though [begin page xvii] doing scant justice to either gifts or opportunities here or elsewhere, he sparkled through many columns with a lightness of touch and brightness of colour separated by gulfs from the quaker drab of the adjoining columns. There were other capable writers and interesting characters in *The Age* office of the ' eighties; one, the loyal and generous George Syme, who, except in earnest gravity and other characteristics common to "brither Scots," bore little resemblance to his brother David. A beautiful conscientiousness, patient capacity and gentleness, such as he possessed, added little to the picturesqueness, but a great deal to the consistency and peace of the office in his day. Recalling these vanished men of mark and speaking with bated breath and whispering humbleness, I sometimes ask whether any of even the greatest papers of the Empire today command writers capable of outshining their combined excellence.

In yet another aspect the position of *The Age* in Victoria challenged comparison with that of other papers within or without Australia. The relations between its proprietor and

public men were intimate to a surprising degree. He enjoyed their confidence in and out of office, shaping their programmes from time to time, governing their selection of colleagues as incoming Premiers and enjoying afterwards a knowledge of the inmost secrets of Cabinets often undisclosed to many of the Ministers within them. Directly or indirectly [*begin page xviii*] most of the active politicians in Victoria took care to keep in touch with *The Age* office; though the best of them, even if they belonged to its own party, were treated with no special consideration in its columns. It had few if any favourites and these only for short periods, varying its policy regardless of their aims, whether private or public, in order to pursue its own ends. Taking all things into consideration, the position of *The Age* was without precedent among papers so far as my knowledge goes.

Mr. Syme himself shrank from personal publicity partly from reasons of temperament. He was a little proud of passing unknown among fellow-citizens to whom he was rather a legendary being than a creature of flesh and blood. On the other hand, he delighted always and everywhere in displaying the influence of *The Age* upon the electors and upon the Legislature; perfectly content to sink his own identity in the prestige of his paper, emphasizing his own aloofness and its close participation in all the doings and undoings of the day. None the less, a political plot was a delight, and a crisis the climax of his joys, when the journalist in him obtained for a season the upper hand of the severe stage-manager, carefully posted behind the scenes. But even as a propagandist, whose joy of living increased with the intensity of the struggle in which he was engaged, Mr. Syme stood back self-suppressed, whenever this seemed wise in the [*begin page xix*] interests of his journal. In stormy seasons his sanctum became a political confessional, and few there were who received complete absolution at his hands. While the atmosphere was charged with electricity he remained master of himself, courteous to the astute sounders of his intentions but never relaxing his demands in the matter of policy. No party leader ever satisfied him long; no programme was sufficiently ample for his appetite no advances went far enough or fast enough to gratify him in the old days. His ambition for *The Age* was to see it conducting a continuous campaign of resounding victories, won with or from either side as occasion offered. The legislation he desired he seized, whether it came as flotsam, jetsam, or cargo delivered in due course, so long, as it could be added to, the trophies of his multifarious activities.

Since Kinglake's fascinating picture of *The Times* and of the part played by its great editor during the war in the Crimea, potent newspapers and those responsible for them may be said to have entered into history. Even correspondents, when men of remarkable ability like the late M. de Blowitz in Europe, and the gifted Australian Dr. Ernest Morrison - (today *The Times* correspondent the Far East) - have attained a quasi-ambassadorial authority, occasionally overshadowing accredited representatives of the King. Having regard to the isolation of Australia and the smallness of [*begin page xx*] its population, it may easily be understood why the influence of *The Age*, while it was the mouthpiece of Mr. David Syme, placed him in a position of greater supremacy and endowed him with more prestige here than were attained in our time and in similar circumstances by any publicist in the Empire.

Perhaps the most exceptional illustration of the power of *The Age* and its function in politics was supplied by the agitation against the then Railway management of Victoria, begun in its columns and culminating in the historic case of Speight v Syme.

If there be any parallels to this besides that supplied by the famous "Parnell Commission," when the charges made by *The Times* in 1887 were tried, so to speak, before the whole Empire and indeed before all civilized peoples, I do not recall and have not time to search for them. Nor need I repeat the history of that case, which is

included in this volume. Towards the close of that extra ordinary State trial when the enormous costs incurred and imminent, threatened the financial standing of Mr. Syme and the future of *The Age* an incident occurred which illuminates his character and ambitions while it also explains the authority achieved by the paper. Towards the middle of the second hearing of the case another offer of compromise was made confidentially on behalf of the plaintiff so attractive in itself and coming at a time so critical for Mr. Syme that it was thought [begin page *xxi*] advisable for me to see him. Mr. J.L. Purves, K.C., was my leader, when, as second counsel and also as a friend, it became necessary for me to learn Mr. Syme's mind. A final resolution had to be taken. At the time he formed it we were alone. It must be recollected that he was not only fighting Mr. Speight but a battalion of opponents behind him who had adopted the defence of that able and courageous man, partly from sympathy but chiefly in order to cripple the Liberal paper and the proprietor, who had so often triumphed over them and their party. The jury were still, so far as we knew, undecided; anything might happen before the evidence closed affecting enough of them to bring about a decision ruinous to him and perhaps permanently staining the record of his paper. The terms tendered were most favourable, for both the purses open to Mr. Speight and his own resources were almost exhausted. *The Age* was to make neither withdrawal nor apology, but simply to admit that the plaintiff was not personally responsible for many of the railway blunders alleged and that his general ability and integrity were not impaired. The articles were to stand as published and remain uncontradicted, *The Age* simply exonerating its opponent from such incapacity or negligence as would disqualify him from appointment elsewhere. Each party was to pay his own costs. For a time Mr. Syme, weighing his load of crushing responsibilities, was tempted - [begin page *xxii*] as well he might have been - by an offer that left him the victor, consenting to nothing except the escape of an adversary who left him in possession of the field. So far as the conditions affected Mr. Speight only there was nothing in them which weighed with Mr. Syme in the last resort. Great persuasion had been employed by many friends to induce him to avoid further risks, since his challenge of the Railway system of management had been justified in the trial.

His last question to me, when all other matters had been satisfactorily disposed of, was whether this admission of Mr. Speight's personal freedom from reproach in certain cases would not be interpreted as in effect cancelling some of the charges made against him. Would not a settlement on such terms afford foothold for animadversions upon the reputation of the paper? He knew it would. I had to admit as much. There was a moment's pause. Then, nodding assent, he flung down the paper-knife he was holding as if it were a gage of battle, saying fiercely and finally that he would sacrifice all he possessed rather than leave the reputation of *The Age* to the jibes of his enemies.

Such was David Syme, as I knew him, with all disguises laid aside. The reputation of his paper was dearer to him than wealth and perhaps dearer than life. Because he was a man of this type, whose sphere of influence in our public affairs was of the widest, he takes his place among the greatest personalities who have made the Australia of 1908 and in a large measure continue to shape its coming destinies. For my own part, I remember among them no more masterful no more influential figure.

Preface

Of all the losses Australia has yet suffered at the hands of the Dark Angel, none more nearly concerns the vigorous young nation than that of David Syme. For Syme was *The Age*, and for nearly half a century there has been no influence so potent in Australian public life as that of *The Age*. Syme was the owner and dictator of that autocratic journal. He directed its policy and ruled its destiny; he founded its fortunes and created its power. For almost fifty years he was the most powerful person in Australia; it therefore, cannot be seriously questioned that to the Commonwealth his death is a matter of national concern in the fullest sense.

Syme did not become a journalist until approaching middle age. He was urged to the step by an irresistible desire to ameliorate the conditions of the working classes of the newly-made colony of Victoria. He had toiled among the people as a miner. He knew them and sympathized with them most deeply. In order to serve them he embarked the little fortune he had made in the mining field in purchasing *The Age*, at that time the only democratic journal in Australia, and a paper which, though ably con- *[begin page xxvi]* ducted, was hastening to its ruin, chiefly for lack of funds. Syme was therefore from the start not merely a writer and an editor, but a proprietary journalist. He brought to his new concern a talent for writing, an exceptional capacity for organization and an untried but profound business, sagacity. But above all he brought to his work a high ideal, an unflinching courage, an unquenchable tenacity of purpose; and an iron will. These were his most striking and unailing personal characteristics.

As a historic Australian figure, Syme must be judged by what he accomplished as a journalist. He cannot be separated from *The Age*. The measure of that journal's achievements is the measure of his success, in life. It is the purpose of these pages to discover the exact nature of his success. I do not think it will be found that he ever did a public act except from a public motive; or that the public motives which inspired him were ever tinged with selfish, personal or passionate considerations. I think that no other man set in a great place has ever more nearly attained to the high ideal fixed as his guiding star than Syme. His identification with *The Age* was complete -- absolute, indeed. He was personally responsible for everything appearing in its columns. I do not mean to say that he was the author of more than a small proportion of its articles: but he read almost every paragraph before it was inserted, and he regulated all the leading matter. It is consequently unnecessary to distinguish between the credit due to him for the success of *The Age* and that due to those associated with him in its editing and management. He has always been well served by his subordinates. His two most distinguished editors, Mr. A.L. Windsor and Mr. G.F.H. Schuler (the latter of whom still occupies the chair), were men of Liberal spirit, political judgment and literary ability; and some of his leader-writers, such as Professor Pearson and Mr. Benjamin Hoare, enjoyed extra-Australian reputations. But it was Syme who chose them all, and it was he who controlled their efforts and guided their pens.

As a journalist Syme was noteworthy for his energy and his alertness of mind. Apart from professing politics he neglected nothing to make *The Age* a great newspaper: that is to say, a great and trustworthy collector of news. Perhaps his supreme journalistic faculty was perseverance. When he had arranged a policy or determined upon a reform he moved towards his object on lines peculiarly his own. He never preached at his readers. His first step was to announce dearly and lucidly his ideas and to couch his announcement in a form that assumed, however startlingly original his views, that , he was merely expressing a settled public opinion.

There was no hurry, no flurry, no forcing, no impatience. He was often greeted with an outburst of popular derision. He ignored it, and when it was over he returned placidly to the charge. The pro- *[begin page xxviii]* cess often extended over years. But gradually his ideas fertilized. Each reiteration made them a little more definite, a little more familiar, a little more acceptable. With marvellous tact and skill, and an engaging air of detached indifference, he invariably persisted until, at last, what had formerly been scouted as absurd came to be regarded as sensible, and "sensible" became a synonym for "inevitable," and his ideas with all their consequences were publicly embraced.

In such a fashion he won all his unique political triumphs. And he never boasted of them. *The Age* never said, "I told you so." Syme was far too wise for that. He knew that in order to keep his hold permanently upon the public he must merge his identity in *The Age* and the identity of *The Age* in the sensitive spirit of popular opinion.

Outside of journalism Syme's life was one of almost Puritanical simplicity. During his latter years he multiplied his commercial interests. He became a pastoralist on a considerable scale, an agriculturist on a large one. At one of his farms he milked 300 dairy cows a day. He became a large fruit-grower and an extensive experimental cultivator of fodder grasses - an enterprise, the latter, which he pursued less for his own advantage than for the public weal. In all these concerns he took a keen personal interest and strove to render each a financial success. Yet he found time to be a great reader and to write several books. Socially he was *[begin page xxix]* extremely retiring. He spent the whole of his leisure hours at home with his family. He seldom attended a theatre or other place of popular amusement: and it was very rarely that he devoted an evening to social entertainment except in his own home. Most men thought him the embodiment of coldness and austerity. He seldom or never unbent even to his most intimate acquaintances. Yet he was neither cold nor austere. He loved all created things. He had a heart of gold for his friends and for the poor, the afflicted and the miserable. He was intensely reserved, and so diffident that he could seldom bring himself to volunteer a service, but he never refused one. All his charities were committed with the stealth of sins. He feared to be found out. He hated to be talked about. One day a member of his staff came to him and informed him that he was about to be married. "Very good," said Syme. The journalist plucked up courage and said, "I wonder if you would make me advance of £100 against my salary." Syme was writing. He seemed not to hear. The journalist repeated his request. Syme looked up. "No," he answered, then extended a piece of paper. "Hand this to the young lady - as a wedding gift from me but Mr. --- understand me - do not let this matter be mentioned." It was a cheque for £100.

The bent of Syme's mind was intensely serious. It was impossible for him to indulge in the slightest *[begin page xxx]* frivolity. He was fond of children and liked to listen unseen to their prattle and to observe them merry-making, but he could not play with them and never made overt demonstrations of affection even to his own offspring. He despised romances and he regarded novel-reading as a sort of drug habit, something very much akin to a vice. He took his mental relaxation in the study of abstruse problems of philosophy, natural history or the economic sciences. All his reading was serious and regulated with a thought to improve his mental furnishing for the public good. While lying on his death-bed he wrote a letter to *The Age* containing a valuable suggestion concerning the vexed question of a site for the New Melbourne Hospital. The letter was published anonymously, but the suggestion it embodied was almost immediately adopted by the Premier of Victoria. In the last days of his final illness he suffered greatly, but bore his pain with stoic fortitude. There came intervals of unconsciousness, but save for them, and in spite of his extreme physical prostration, his intellectual vitality continued unimpaired to the end: and his interest in *The Age* - that darling child

of his brain never abated. One of his last acts was to get his attendant to read aloud to him the current leading articles, which he criticized in a manner that proclaimed the indestructible ardour and vigour of his mind. His last thought was for the State which he had served so well and for which he had *[begin page xxi]* laboured so unselfishly, and almost with his latest breath he voiced an aspiration for the welfare of his countrymen.

Ambrose Pratt.
Melbourne, 1908.

Errata.

- Page xxxvi. Line 34 - omit words, "Duffy's pension."
 Page 53, line 23 - "mining, private property" should read "mining on private property."
 Page 66, line 23 - omit words, "Duffy's Pension."
 Page 79, line 23 - for "perscribed" read "prescribed."
 Page 81, line 13 - for "happen" read "happened."
 Page 163, line 14 - for "therefore" read "thereon."
 Page 205, lines 7-11 - should read "The Chief Commissioner, Mr. Richard Speight, was a man of unquestionable personal probity and of experience and skill in rail way management which he acquired in England as an officer of the Midland Railway Company."
 Page 206, line 15 - omit the words in brackets.
 Page 230, line 18 - omit the words in brackets.

List of Illustrations

David Syme	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
Melbourne, 1839	<i>Facing page</i>	14
Melbourne Wool Store, 1851	" "	28
Melbourne, 1853	" "	32
Ballarat: Gold Diggers. Issuing Licences	" "	34
George Syme	" "	48
Ebenezer Syme	" "	67
David Syme, 1856	" "	69
Old "Age" Office, Elizabeth Street	" "	82
David Syme, 1861	" "	118
Melbourne, 1871	" "	146
Cartoon published on Mr. Syme's Death	" "	174
Corner of Collins and Elizabeth Streets	" "	194
David Syme, 1880	" "	212
Melbourne, 1908	" "	220
Melbourne, 1908	" "	222
David Syme's Sanctum at the "Age" Office	" "	230
The "Age" Office Today	" "	246
David Syme in 1907	" "	266
David Syme's House at Lilydale	" "	282
View of David Syme's Lilydale Estate	" "	304
"Blythswood," David Syme's House at Kew	" "	314

Contents

	Page
Introduction. By Hon. Alfred Deakin	v
Chapter 1 Boyhood and Early Youth	1
Birth and parentage - His brothers - David Syme's peculiar education - Parental sternness - The unhappy conditions of his childhood - His father's disposition - Anecdote - His school days - Home life - Local churches and their Ministers - The Free Kirk - An election incident - Fiscal question; the Big Loaf and the Little Loaf - Father's death - Religious training - Doctrine - Studies - Becomes an Oriental linguist - His European travels - Heidelberg - Becomes a journalist - Goes to California - Stormy Voyage - Condition of San Francisco - Mining Experiences - Sails for Australia - Hardships of voyage - Arrives in Melbourne.	
Chapter 2 First Impressions of Victoria.	29
Melbourne in 1853 - Syme leaves for Castlemaine - Adventure on the road - Bendigo - Korong - Illness - Deserted by his companion - Beechworth - Adventure with Bushrangers - To Daylesford - Ballarat - Works hard as miner - Bad luck - Goes to Mount Egerton - Takes up valuable claim - Mine jumped - Invader expelled - Mine again jumped - Efforts to secure redress at law unsuccessful - Extent of his misfortune - Gives up mining in disgust - Returns to Melbourne - The trials of the gold diggers - Bad government and its effects.	
Chapter 3 <i>The Age</i> and its Early Editors	45
Syme joins his brother Ebenezer - The two brothers buy <i>The Age</i> - How <i>The Age</i> was started - Ebenezer in politics - David doubtful of the success of <i>The Age</i> - David temporarily gives up journalism and becomes a contractor - Oppressed by an engineer - The art of tendering for contracts - Marriage Death of Ebenezer - David gives up contracting and assumes control of <i>The Age</i> - His reasons - Hardships of journalism - His health fails - Adventures with physicians - The Boycotts - Protectionist headway - His fighting policy - The first editors of <i>The Age</i> - G.P. Smith - Judge Fellowes - A.L Windsor - Professor Pearson - The key to the success of <i>The Age</i> - Sir James McCulloch-Richard Seddon.	
Chapter 4 The Land Struggle.	66
Political condition of Victoria in 1856 - Government extravagance and incapacity - The land question - Dr. Lang's letter - Mr. Howitt's picture of the evil - The origin of the squatters' land monopoly - The Orders in Council explained - The country locked up - The people denied access to the land - <i>The Age</i> champions the people's cause	

- Its challenge to the monopolists - The battle begins - The First Parliament elected - The Haines Ministry - The first victory of *The Age* - The campaign for Manhood Suffrage - Haines defeated - *The Age* attacks O'Shanassy and Duffy - *The Age* boycotted by the merchants - The squatters pretend they own *The Age* - The Liberal Party increases in strength - The Nicholson Government - The Nicholson Land Bill and the squatters - The squatters in the Council reject the measure - The invasion of Parliament by the mob - Ebenezer Syme's death - David Syme carries on the struggle alone - He appeals to the merchants to support the people's claims - The Conference - The Nicholson Land Bill passes - The Act a pernicious failure - The Heales Government - Occupation Licences - The Duke of Newcastle's despatch - The electoral campaign of 1861 - The squatters buy votes and falsify the rolls - Mr. Duffy's Land Act and its defects - "Dummying" and its consequences - ~~Duffy's pension~~¹ - The Grant Land Act of 1864 - The land questions suspended by the Constitutional contest - The Land Act of 1869 - Its effects - The gradual aggregation in recent years of large estates - David Syme's policy of yeoman settlement - The Land Act of 1898 - The condition of Victoria today - The land question still an important issue - David Syme's latest proposals; compulsory purchase and a Land Tax - The prospects of the future.

Chapter 5	The Beginning of Protection	114
	David Syme's statecraft - His national ideal - The necessity of manufactures - The industrial condition of Victoria in 1859 - The importers and the squatters - The established order attacked by <i>The Age</i> - The principles of Cobdenism assailed and refuted - The duty of the State - First effects of David Syme's advocacy of Protection - Ridicule - The laughter ceases - The question studied by the people - Converts - The importers become alarmed - The trials of <i>The Age</i> begin.	
Chapter 6	The Personal Issue	129
	The cause of Protection dependent on David Syme - "David Syme must be destroyed" - <i>The Age</i> is boycotted - Attempts of importers to bribe David Syme to alter his policy - Paper forced to exist on its circulation - Price reduced - Circulation increases, influence grows - The rushes - Importers conspire with the O'Shanassy Government to ruin <i>The Age</i> - Government joins in the Boycott - Brings in a Libel Bill expressly designed to gag <i>The Age</i> - Further efforts to stem the tide of Protectionist opinion - Triumph of <i>The Age</i> .	
Chapter 7	The Constitutional Issue	139
	The Premier; James McCulloch, converted to Protection - Strong Protectionist Government - Protection found to be	

¹ See *Errata*.

impossible until Legislative Council reformed - First Protectionist Tariff introduced - Passes Assembly, rejected by Council - Tariff "tacked" to Appropriation Bill and returned to Council Again rejected - Business of country at standstill - McCulloch's expedient - Tariff Bill again submitted to Council - Again rejected-Dissolution granted - General election - McCulloch returns to office with great Protectionist majority - Tariff Bill sent to Council - Again rejected - McCulloch resigns - McCulloch resumes office - Tariff Bill for the fourth time sent to Council - Council consents to a conference and at length Tariff agreed to - The rage of the importers - They secure a victim - The Governor recalled by Downing Street - Parliament votes a grant of £20,000 to Sir Charles Darling's wife - Council refuses to pass the measure - Constitutional struggle renewed - Bill again submitted to Council, and again rejected Dissolution - Downing Street interferes to support the Council - Government resigns - Great public turmoil - No Government - Downing Street, alarmed, recants its instructions, but despatch withheld - McCulloch resumes office, again resigns - The Sladen Ministry - Its ineptitude - Downing Street pays Sir Charles Darling a large pension and reinstates him in order to allay the public anger in Victoria - McCulloch returns to office and forces the Council to reform its constitution on Liberal lines.

- Chapter 8 Protection Accomplished 154**
The Age predominant in Victorian politics as a result of Constitutional struggle - David Syme reduces the price of his paper - Growth of its influence - The importers give up the boycott - Syme not satisfied with the Tariff - New campaign for complete Protection - McCulloch becomes Conservative - Hurlled from power - "King David" - The Duffy Government - The Francis Government - The Kerferd Government - The Berry Government - McCulloch returns to office - His intrigues - *The Age* denounces him and procures his defeat - Mr. Berry becomes Premier, and reforms the Tariff - The opposition of the Council - Black Wednesday - Syme and the Governor - Syme and the Cabinet - The fight renewed - General elections - The Council reformed - Protection accomplished - The Berry Tariff really Syme's Tariff - Its secret history - Secret history of formation of Service - Berry Coalition - David Syme's patriotism and how it benefited the state.
- Chapter 9 The Effects of Protection in Victoria 176**
 New South Wales and Victoria compared - The elements of progress - The test of the arts and sciences - The education test - The population test - The industrial test - The test of accumulated wealth - The test of diffusion of wealth - The cost of living test - The tests and comparisons reviewed - David Syme's life work vindicated.
- Chapter 10 The Struggle Against Extravagance 196**

The growth of extravagance - Land speculations-causes of the "Boom" - Methods of the "boomsters" - Folly of the Banks - The Demoralization of Parliament - Log-rolling - Railway spendthriftism - Colony hurrying to its ruin - David Syme resolves to save it - The magnitude of the task - He attacks the Government and vigorously assails railway administration - Execrated by the whole country but continues, his task - Forces people to stop and think - The "Boom," bursts - Government hurled from office - Parliament dismisses the railway commissioners - Mr. Speight brings libel action against David Syme claiming £25,000 damages - The greatest libel action of modern times - Offers of compromise - David Syme's reply - Tributes paid to his public services by Mr. Purves, K.C., and Mr. Alfred Deakin - Turner's History of Victoria - The benefits to Victoria of the struggle - The cost to Mr. Syme - The aftermath of the "Boom" - Victoria's wonderful recovery.

- Chapter 11 Democratic Legislation** **219**
 David Syme's consistency - Education system - Manhood Suffrage - State aid to religion - Old age pensions - Water conservation - Anti-sweating laws - Factories Acts - Income-tax - Indeterminate Sentences.
- Chapter 12 Federation and Afterwards** **226**
 David Syme's part in promoting Federation - The elections for the last Federal convention - David Syme selects ten delegates and Victoria approves his choice - After Federation *The Age* eschews provincialism and preaches nationalism - The first Australian Tariff not Protective - Campaign for high Protection - David Syme and Mr. Reid - The Tariff Commission David Syme forces on the fiscal issue - Triumph of his policy at the elections - Australia a Protectionist country - Mr. Syme and the "new" Protection - The Anti-Trust Act - *The Age* and the Northern Territory - National Defence - *The Age* and its position in the Commonwealth.
- Chapter 13 Newspaper Government** **241**
 David Syme's statesmanlike qualities - His fights with the people - His place in popular esteem - His sacrifices to obtain political power - His power founded on personal consistency and - integrity - *The Age* circulation - *The Age* rules the State by a process of suggestion - Its unswerving adherence to the democratic cause - King David's audience - chamber - Ministries made and unmade - Political secrets - James Munro and David Syme - Newspaper Government essentially a democratic form of rule - Its defects and virtues.
- Chapter 14 Characteristics** **253**
 David Syme's watchword - His forward-looking - His national ideal - His ruthlessness - His kindness to Mr. Speight - The mystery that surrounded his actions - His religious beliefs -

	Page
His capacity for hate - His friendships: instances of generosity, public and private - His public benefactions - Anecdotes - Mob enthusiasm - How Mr. Deakin entered politics - Syme's sense of humour - His passionate temper - His self control - The man as he was - Charge of hardness of heart refuted - The secret of his false reputation for austerity and pride - Syme and his staff - His philosophy - Simplicity the key-note to his character.	
Chapter 15 David Syme as a Writer	283
Syme's Books - <i>Outlines of an Industrial Science</i> - Its scope and aim - <i>Representative Government in England</i> - Its effect on Australian politics - <i>On the modification of Organisms</i> - Darwin's theory of natural selection disputed - <i>The Soul</i> : Syme's greatest literary work - His power of destructive criticism - His theories of design in nature - His theories of the hereafter - His lesser contributions to literature - His place in English letters.	
Chapter 16 Correspondence	291
Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister - Spiritualism - Theosophy, etc. - Robert Louis Stevenson - David Syme's daily life - The power of <i>The Age</i> - Essay on the working of Party Government - Syme's ideas of the Press and its functions.	
Chapter 17 Death and Appreciations	315
Index	329

"I never could see any virtue in *Laissez faire*. To let things alone when they had gone wrong, to render no help when help was needed, is what no sane man would do with his private estate, and what no sound statesman would tolerate as a State policy. It is simply an excuse for incapacity or inertia in affairs of State. It is a policy of drift. It is just what the company promoter, the card sharper, the wife deserter, and the burglar would like to be let alone. It can only lead to national disaster and social degeneration, when carried out in any community."

David Syme.

Chapter 1

Boyhood and Early Youth

Birth and parentage - His brothers - David Syme's peculiar education - parental sternness - The unhappy condition of his childhood - His father's disposition - Anecdote - His school days - Home life - Local churches and their ministers - The Free Kirk - An election incident - Fiscal question: the Big Loaf and the Little Loaf - Father's death - Religious training - Doctrine - Studies - Becomes an Oriental linguist - His European travels - Heidelberg - Becomes a journalist - Goes to California - Stormy voyage - Condition of San Francisco-Mining - experiences-Sails for Australia - Hardships of voyage - Arrives in Melbourne.

David Syme was born on the 2nd of October, 1827, at North Berwick, Haddingtonshire, one of the Scottish Lothians. His parents, George Syme and Jean Mitchell, came from Forfarshire early in the century and settled in North Berwick, where the father held the position of parish schoolmaster, "passing rich with forty pounds a year." How he managed to keep up an appearance of respectability and feed; clothe and educate a large family will seem little short of incredible to Australians of the present day.

Out of this sum he even managed to send three of his sons to a university, where each passed through the whole curriculum necessary to qualify them for *[begin page 2]* the medical and clerical professions for which they were intended. In addition to this drain, on his resources, he was carrying on a costly suit against the local minister of the Established Church, almost up to the end of his life, for the case lasted some fourteen years, and was settled only after an appeal to the highest Court in Scotland. The poor schoolmaster ultimately won, but it was a Pyrrhic victory.

David was the youngest of seven children, five boys and two girls: one boy and one girl died in infancy. His three elder brothers were sent to universities, where they passed creditably. The second, George, obtained the degree of M.A. at Aberdeen. The third, Ebenezer, served his course at St. Andrews. James, the eldest, qualified as a surgeon at Glasgow and subsequently practised at Bathgate, where he died when quite young, from an attack of typhus fever contracted while attending a sick pauper. George and Ebenezer were educated for the ministry. The former joined the Free Church and was accepted as minister by a congregation in Dumfriesshire, but afterwards joined the Baptists and for several years held the pastorate of a chapel in Nottingham. Ill-health forced him to retire from his office, and he came to Australia, where he was associated with David on *The Age* until his death.

Ebenezer was also educated for the ministry, but after a short experience abandoned it for the Press. His first position was that of assistant editor of the *[begin page 3]* Westminster Review, then in the zenith of its influence. This position he held for nearly two years, when he resigned, and soon afterwards joined David in Melbourne.

David had a more varied career than any of his brothers. He was educated by his father, who had a university training and was an excellent Latin scholar; but his father dying when he was sixteen years of age he was left to his own resources. His early training was peculiar. By the time he should have been taken in hand, as his brothers had been, his father seemed to have lost all interest in the education of his youngest boy. The lad had not the hardest of tasks put before him, but he never knew whether he did a lesson creditably or not. Summer and winter he had to get out of bed at 7 a.m.

and go to his books till breakfast-time. He went immediately afterwards to school, where he remained till 4 p.m., with from half-an-hour for dinner in winter to an hour in summer; but no time was allowed for play. After a short interval for tea he had to turn to lessons again till bed-time. It was dreadful drudgery, and the boy's health broke down under it; indeed, he suffered from the effects of this period to the last day of his life. Added to this he had no companions, either of his own age, or of any age at all. His elder brothers were at the university and only returned home occasionally, and he had no opportunity to make acquaintances amongst the boys of his own age, every attempt of this sort being *[begin page 4]* severely discouraged. Had he been able to make companions of his parents it would have been different, but there was no companionship in that quarter. Duty, not love, except to a certain extent on the mother's part, was the law of the household; and there was no room for anything else. It would have done the lad good to have had a laugh occasionally, but that was seldom permitted, or only under protest on the part of the elders, and with a sense of wrongdoing on the part of the son. Strange as it may seem to the indulged youth of the present day, there was no intercourse between father and son: the father never addressed the boy' except when ordering him to do something, and the boy never spoke to his father, save in answer to a question.

" I must confess," David Syme writes in a letter to the biographer, " that I do not look on those early years of my life with much pleasure. Evidently my father had no idea that it was necessary, or desirable, that his sons should find any pleasure in their work, or even in their life. It is difficult for me, even now, to account for his attitude towards us whom he held at arms' length and to whom he never addressed a word of encouragement. Even an occasional approving smile, how welcome it would have been to me in those days! I have no recollection of ever having addressed him directly in my life even to the extent of asking him a question. If the idea of doing so ever entered my brain, I never had the courage to carry it out. It had been firmly *[begin page 5]* impressed upon me that I had to do as I was told and ask no questions. Nor do I remember that he ever made a complimentary remark to me about anything that I had ever done, or had attempted to do. If I did anything well I had to understand that it was only my duty to do so, and I had to be satisfied with that. All this did not encourage me to do my best, nor did it tend to make my life a pleasant one.

"As I have said, it was difficult to understand my father's attitude towards us boys. He had naturally a kind disposition: he was a devoted husband, and no one ever asked him for help of any kind that he did not freely give. He was a sort of legal adviser for all the poor of the parish, there being no lawyer in the district. He was not unkind to us, but he certainly was inconsiderate. He denied himself every luxury and many of the comforts of life in order that he might have the more to spend on his family. He could not have done more for us as concerned our education, but his affection for us never found expression in words. His love seemed entirely overshadowed by his sense of duty, and he asked nothing from us except obedience. All the same I had an immense admiration for him, for his sterling, if stern, integrity and manly character. Yet he was by no means of a morose disposition. In congenial company he could keep the whole table in a roar. I once overheard him tell an anecdote which showed he had a grim sense *[begin page 6]* of humour. He had taken a fancy to one of his pupils, the son of a poor fisherman, and taught him Latin without any charge. Unfortunately the boy got drowned when out fishing with his father. On condoling with the father some days after the sad event, the only remark made in reply was 'Ay, and the puir lad had sic a guid edeication.' The wasted Latin grieved the poor man.

"As boys we were allowed no time for play, either indoor or out. Cricket, football and such games, so much in vogue in school nowadays, were not for us. We had no holidays. We commenced our tasks at seven in the morning and continued at them,

with short intervals for meals, till eight or nine in the evening. There was no relief even on Sundays. It was considered wrong to shorten that day by lying a little longer in bed in the morning, as is usual in most families. We had to attend church twice a day, morning and afternoon, the evenings being devoted to reading devotional books, such as Boston's *Fourfold Estate*, Doddridge's *Rise and Progress*, the *Life of the Rev. John Newton*; varied sometimes by more controversial books, as Jonathan Edwards on *The Will*. I recollect I had a perfect horror of this man's works. His extreme Calvinism was repugnant to me, while his logic seemed perfectly inexorable. It was quite a relief to me when Sunday came to an end.

"After my brothers went to college I was very lonely at home. I felt as if I were wasting time. *[begin page 7]* All the boys of my own age had gone to sea, and I was left without a single companion. I wanted to do something: naturally I preferred being a sailor. North Berwick being a seaport and all the boys of my own age having gone to sea, I broached the subject to my father through my mother, but he would not hear of it. So distasteful had home become to me at this time that I would have run away, only for my mother. I knew she would grieve over me. Meanwhile I hesitated, while I secretly qualified myself for a sea life by teaching myself navigation, and what I considered almost as important, learning to smoke - a habit I have retained ever since. Meantime nothing was done to prepare me for a profession or business career. Indeed, for the three years prior to my father's death I seemed to have been almost forgotten, and my father's ill-health put all idea of running off to sea out of my head.

"Our small town was fairly well provided with schools and churches. There was the usual parish school, provided by the heritors or land owners of the borough, and a parochial school subsidized by the ratepayers of the town. There were also two places for public worship, namely, the parish, or Established Church, and the Meeting House, as the United Presbyterian chapel was called. The minister of the parish church was an extraordinary character. It would be difficult to find a more unfit man for the position he held. He was pompous, vain, overbearing towards his equals and inferiors *[begin page 8]* and obsequious to a degree to his superiors. He read his sermons (an odious offence to a Scottish audience), mostly Blair's (then considered models of their kind). He had a form of prayer, never varied whatever the occasion, in which the King, the Royal family, and the nobility of the land held a prominent place. This he repeated every Sunday with his eyes wide-open and directed to the occupants of the gallery immediately in front of him, set apart for the heritors or gentry (the patrons who appointed him), smiling complacently all the time just as if he were addressing them. He had an immense opinion of his own importance in the scheme of things. He never visited the sick or the poor, and he walked abroad dressed, not in the garb of a Presbyterian minister, but in the full rig of an Anglican bishop *minus* the apron. My father, by virtue of his position of parish schoolmaster, was also clerk of the Kirk session which was presided over by the minister. My father soon quarrelled with him and was therefore deprived of his office as clerk. But my father was a fighter and appealed to the Law Courts for restitution of office. He gained his case after fourteen years' litigation.

"The minister at the Meeting House was a man of a different stamp. He came of a pious Presbyterian stock and did not belie his family traditions. He was tall and ponderous, both physically and mentally. He preached his own Sermons and prayed extempore with an unction all his own. But he was *[begin page 9]* dreadfully dull. I remember when quite a small boy I was induced to attend his Sabbath school. He had not the art of interesting children in the least, but he blundered through the lessons somehow. When we were about to break up he caught sight of one of the boys who, some days previously, had got adrift in a boat all by himself and might have been lost, and he said in his heavy-father style.

'Are you the boy that was drowned?'

"We all laughed but the minister, who was as solemn as a judge. That was the first and last time I attended a Sabbath school.

"After the Disruption, when nearly five hundred ministers of the Established Church in one day left their stipends, their manses and their glebes (rather than submit to the Patronage system, then the prevailing system of appointing ministers in the Kirk of Scotland) and formed what was called the Free Kirk, in due time our town was favoured by having a Free Kirk and a Free Kirk minister. I cannot say much on behalf of the minister. He was a pious, anaemic young man, full of zeal. He was absolutely saturated with a sense of the sinfulness of man, and his pulpit service was one long, tearful appeal to the Almighty for mercy, accompanied with the slinging of Scripture texts. It was painful to listen to him. The wonder was what the congregation could possibly see in him: and next how he could venture to stand forth as an instructor of grown men. If in the parish minister we had an illustration of the *[begin page 10]* perils of Patronage we had in the Free Kirk appointee an equally bad example of the evils of popular selection.

"An incident occurred about this time which may be worth relating. It was on the eve of a general election when party politics ran exceedingly high. My three brothers were at home for the summer vacation and, much to our surprise, my father consulted us about recording his vote. He was a thorough paced Tory and made no scruple about it: but the great bulk of the electors were (literally) Whigs to a man, for he was really the only Tory in the borough. He called us all together and fully explained the circumstances. He said he had intended voting for the Tory candidate, but, as the result of the vote might seriously affect our interests, he felt bound to consult us as to whether or no he should abstain from voting altogether. Of course there was no secret voting at that time and every one would therefore know how he voted. Perhaps it was because we felt flattered at being consulted, or because we held the crowd in contempt who tried to intimidate him: at any rate we unanimously recommended him to vote for the Tory candidate, which he accordingly did. But the vote had a disastrous effect on the school attendance, the school, in fact, being almost emptied. As the Tory candidate was returned by one vote, it was said and believed that it was my father's vote that put him in. This, belief exasperated the defeated party, who *[begin page 11]* turned savagely against my father. It was a terrible thing for us all. The whole family had to keep within doors for more than a week after the election. I recollect that after four or five days' confinement I thought I might venture to look out of a back gate leading from the garden into a lane, but I had no sooner opened it than half a brick struck the gate a few inches above my head.

"It was rather a curious coincidence that the turning-point of the election was the question of Free Trade and Protection. The big loaf and the little loaf argument did figure largely on that, as it did on a subsequent occasion. Two loaves, one very big and the other very small, were stuck on the top of two poles and paraded by excited crowds days before the election. Curious, too, that the name of the successful Tory candidate was Mr. Balfour of Whittingehame, father, I presume, of the Arthur J. Balfour of the General Election of 1906. The Whig candidate was Sir James Fergusson.

"My father did not survive more than three years after this event, and at his death our home was broken up. My brother George joined the Free Church and got a charge in Dumfriesshire. James, the eldest, was practising as a surgeon in the town of Bathgate, and Ebenezer, after some months' engagement with a Baptist congregation, gravitated

to London, where he became assistant editor of the *Westminster Review*, then the organ of the philosophical Radicals and in the zenith of its power.

[begin page 12]

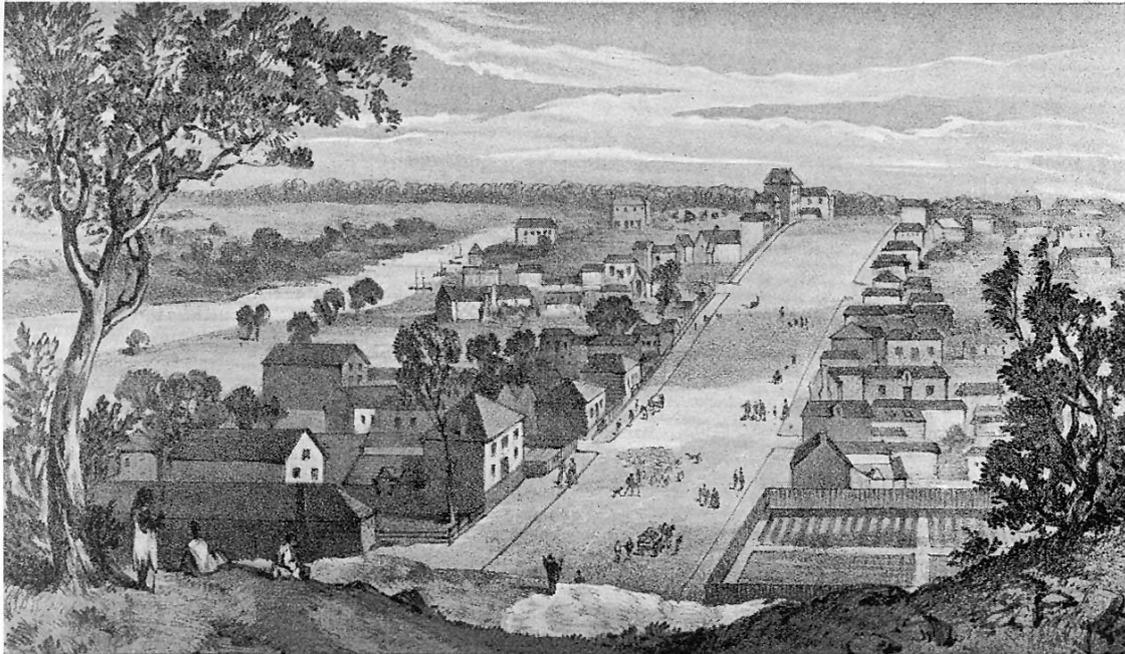
"As for myself, I was fairly stranded. I had received a sound English education and a fair knowledge of Latin, but I had no training whatever to fit me for a professional or business career, and no friends or relations to help me. I went on a visit to my brother James at Bathgate, and while there my religious views underwent a change. My calvinistic upbringing had not made me a Calvinist. Far from it. The more I thought over the dogmas of John Calvin the less I liked them. The doctrines of original sin, of predestination, of the arbitrary salvation of the elect and the equally arbitrary damnation of the non-elect, were utterly abhorrent to my sense of justice. Anyone who believes in predestination has no need to trouble himself about his soul. That matter has, of course, been settled for him long before he was born, and nothing that he himself can do can help him in the least. How to save his soul, therefore, need not give him the least trouble or anxiety. His destiny for good or for evil has been fixed for all time, and quite, irrespective of any merit or demerit on his part.

"Other creeds may not be so brutally frank, but they all teach very much the same doctrine; for they all agree that one can only be saved by Divine intervention. But the process of salvation is different, for, according to these other creeds, some preliminary effort is supposed to be necessary on the part of the inquiring sinner. He must be penitent and prayerful to commence with. And when his *[begin page 13]* nerves are worked to an extreme state of tension his imagination runs riot, his mind is ready to believe in signs and wonders. The poor sinner is told that he must repent, he must pray, and he must reform: but one may do all this and be no nearer salvation than before. How can one know that he is saved? He is supposed, or he supposes himself, to have some evidence that he has received Divine grace. This comes in a most mysterious manner and in a variety of ways. He may have a vision, he may hear a heavenly voice (Paul on his way to Damascus had both); he may have suddenly recalled to him some Scriptural text conveying the expression of God's love and mercy towards him individually; or he may simply attain to a blissful state of mind in answer to prayer. All these different methods of obtaining the assurance of salvation, are they not cherished in the lives of the Saints and in the histories of converts of all Christian denominations? It is because the penitent believes that God has conveyed some such message that he is assured of his salvation, and is in consequence overpowered with a sense of gratitude at God's condescension to him, a miserable sinner. Henceforth he is a changed man. He sees God under a new aspect. God is no longer the severe lawgiver or the stern judge, but the generous loving Father. He is converted.

"I came to know of a more rational plan of salvation from which the supernatural element was altogether eliminated. This was the plan formulated by the Rev. James Morrison, whose acquaintance I made in Bathgate, where his father occupied the pulpit of the United Presbyterian Church. This plan had the supreme merit of simplicity. It recognized no form of divine intervention on behalf of the individual. The only intervention of the kind recognized was the sacrifice on Calvary twenty centuries ago. It was a general amnesty to mankind which holds good now. To receive the benefit of this amnesty, the sinner had no need to grovel before the Throne of Mercy, or to grasp at some make believe message. He had only to realize the meaning of the Calvary sacrifice, that Christ died to save all mankind from the consequences of their sins. No one can believe in the Atonement and at the same time hold the creed of Calvin, or entertain unworthy views of God. If you realize the full meaning of the Atonement you will claim your right to the benefit of it. If Christ died for mankind, He died for you as an individual member of the human race. Believe that Christ died that you might be saved, and your attitude towards God will undergo a

change, and you will henceforth regulate your life according to what you conceive is the will of God.

"The doctrine of salvation by faith in its most literal sense was the basis of this new system. It was condensed in the words 'Believe and ye shall be saved.' Believe what? Believe in Christ not merely as a historical personage, but as the Saviour of mankind; and if of mankind, then of you or me. This is the cardinal point. *[begin page 15]*



Melbourne 1839

"I confess this process of conversion appeared to me to be both scientific and scriptural. What is perhaps more to the purpose, it was eminently effective, for the professors of this new faith were not undistinguished for their Christian virtues. This plan of salvation came to me as a relief and a revelation, and I accepted an invitation to attend a class for students opened by Mr. Morrison at Kilmarnock and for the two following years devoted myself to the study of theology and exegesis. Several of these students I have since met in Australia where they had drifted like myself, but none of them were preaching.

"For over two years I devoted myself to the necessary theological and linguistic studies. Latin and Greek I had already some acquaintance with, but Hebrew was new to me. Being, however, an easy language to learn I soon became a fairly proficient scholar. But believing that the interpretation of the Bible was an essential part of a student's equipment, I discovered that not only a knowledge of the original languages of the Old and New Testaments was necessary, but also an acquaintance with the cognate Semitic languages. So I began the study of Arabic. My ambition at that time was to become an Oriental linguist. A closer study of these languages had, however, a serious effect on me in more than one respect. I began to find out that I had no great aptitude for the acquisition of language. I had no ear for the nicer shades of sound either. *lin- [begin page 16]* guistic or musical. I rubbed along somehow by sheer hard labour. My study of the Old Testament also unhinged my faith in its inspiration. With this also went the romance of my studies. At one time the finding of a new reading of an important text was of more interest to me than the discovery of a new force in nature. Later my Biblical studies seemed to me a waste of time. My enthusiasm died out of me. I had overworked myself by unremitting study up to this time, and that,

together with my disappointment with the results, affected my health. I could take no interest in my work, nor, indeed, in anything else. I was advised to take a complete rest. I decided to take the water-cure treatment under Preisnitz at Grafenberg, then much in vogue. On my way I stopped at Berlin for some weeks with some students whom I knew in Scotland; then went on to Grafenberg where I stopped three months, and thence to Vienna, and up the Danube and to Heidelberg. There I remained during the session of 1849, attending classes at the University. By this time my views had broadened considerably, and I took more interest in Hegelism than in Theology. I returned to Scotland after a year's absence, having acquired a speaking acquaintance with German, a smattering of philosophy and restored health, but no settled views as to my future.

"After many applications for employment I at length took a situation as reader on a Glasgow newspaper. I found the work easy and I believe I *[begin page 17]* was giving satisfaction to my employers (it was a company affair). One day the manager, in quite a friendly manner, hinted to me that I need not be so severe on the leading articles (they were not to my taste as literary productions). This remark made me think. I concluded that, after all, my position was not very secure, poor as it was. My salary was barely sufficient to maintain me. And what were my prospects? There were quite as capable men on the literary staff of the paper, and twice my age, who were not earning more than I was. Even the editor had a comparatively small salary. The prospect was not alluring. Under better conditions I thought I might surely be able to accomplish something that might be a credit to me. But with no profession, or trade, with no business training and with no capital or influence of any kind, what could I do? I came to the conclusion that I must go to some place where it was not necessary to be a specialist or a professionalist in order to earn an honest livelihood. At that time I became interested in reading the letters of the special correspondent in California of the *New York Tribune*. 'Here,' I said to myself, 'is a country, where there is room for all and opportunities for all who are able and willing to work.' I determined to try my future there.

"After paying for my outfit and my passage to San Francisco and laying in a small library on geology and gold mining, I sailed at the latter end of *[begin page 18]* 1851 from London in the *Princess Royal*, 600 tons burden. The voyage lasted over five months, although we had no mishap and put into no port on the way. Off Cape Horn we encountered a furious south-westerly gale which compelled us to sail very much farther than usual to the south before we could change our course. I never, before or since, met with such weather. For days together we were hove to, as it was impossible to proceed. The height and force of the waves baffle description. I was familiar with storms on the coast of Scotland. Twice afterwards I doubled the same Cape (going in the opposite direction, however) and I subsequently encountered, more than once, phenomenal gales in crossing the Atlantic, but I never saw waves like those I met with on this occasion. I have seen it stated that in the severest gale in the Atlantic the waves never attain a greater height than 40 feet. An idea might be formed of these Horn waves when I mention that, in the trough between two seas, the crest of the waves was higher than the peak of the main topmast. When in this position the double-reefed topsail was flapping for want of wind, and the vessel, when she reached the crest, was almost thrown on her beam ends by the force of the gale. One felt like sailing over a series of snow-covered ranges: there was green water in the trough, blue higher up, and the white surf at the crest looked like a snow-covered peak. It was miserably cold; the rigging was covered with icicles and the deck with masses of ice. *[begin page 19]* I have passed through many gales in my time, but never anything like this before or since. The rest of the voyage was uneventful after we doubled the Cape till we approached the coast of California. We sighted land quite 100 miles to the north of San Francisco and we had a narrow escape from shipwreck. It was a foggy morning

and under a stiff breeze we were making straight for that rocky coast some half mile off, when the fog lifted; not a moment too soon. We shunted off just in time and reached port the same evening.

"I did not remain long in San Francisco. The place had just been burned down for (I think) the third time since the gold discovery, and everything was in a state of confusion. Building operations were being carried on at a tremendous speed. While some of the houses were still burning, others were going up alongside; one set of men could be seen removing the hot embers while a few feet farther on another set of men were erecting the framework of a new building. This process was going on in all the streets. Horses conveying materials were kept at a sharp trot and returning with empties at a canter. I made shift to pass one night there and started by steamer next morning for Sacramento. Here I got rid of my carefully selected outfit, before starting for the goldfields, taking with me a blanket, some underclothing and a gun. The rest I stowed in my trunk and left at a store marked 'To remain till called for,' but the call was never made." *[begin page 20]*

David Syme was now fairly adrift on the world, without a friend, with nothing but what he stood in, or could carry on his shoulders, and with little in his pocket. He did not even bring with him a letter of introduction. His first mining experience was on the American River, a branch of the Sacramento, where he remained only a few weeks. He happened to pitch his camp alongside a party occupying three tents. In two of these were a middle-aged Irish couple, their son and a negro: the third was occupied by two single men, an Englishman and a Scotsman. They were working a very good claim on the bank of the river; that is to say, when they were sober enough to work, which was seldom. One day the husband heard some story while at work, said not a word, walked straight up to his tent, took up his gun, loaded it and shot the negro dead. The story reflected on the man's wife, but whether it was true or not nobody seemed to care, the victim being only a negro. All the neighbours knew the deed had been done in cold blood, but no official inquiry was held, the body was thrown into a hole and that was the end of the matter.

After this David Syme moved to another neighbourhood. He tried several other localities and afterwards left the district for the southern mines, having been told they were not so much worked. His mining operations did not prosper. He had a lot to learn and a good deal to unlearn. To begin with, he was unused to hard labour and *[begin page 21]* found it far from pleasant, although he managed to do a fair day's work, blistered hands and strained back notwithstanding. He had brought with him from London some books on gold mining, mere compilations, as he soon discovered, although written by men who posed as experts. Gold, these writers insisted, being the heaviest of metals, would always be found in the lowest strata, or in the lowest or deepest part of a stream. It seemed reasonable enough, but David found the theory to be erroneous. Gold exists in all sorts of places as well as in streams, ancient or modern, on the surface as well as in the lower strata, and very seldom indeed in loose stream gravel, except in the form of fine grains and in small quantities. David wasted much time in prospecting for the deep deposits, which of course he never found.

He spent several months prospecting before he settled down to steady work. On one of these trips, which he had undertaken by himself, he had been out several days, somewhere about the head waters of the Tuolumne (then wild Indian country), but had found nothing, so he determined to finish up by climbing to the top of a high peak, in order to obtain a good view of the surrounding country. But it was more than he bargained for. On arriving at what he considered, when seen from below, must be the top he found he had to climb still higher, and when he got to a still higher elevation he had not then reached his goal. *[begin page 22]*

"Ah, the little more -
And how much it is!
And the little less -
What worlds away!"

But he reached it at last. Hot and tired he sat down to rest himself on a boulder, inwardly congratulating himself that here at any rate he had arrived at a spot where no white man had ever been before, when lying at his very feet, he saw - an empty sardine tin.

After this he returned to the nearest mining camp, some twenty miles distant, joined a party of two and started on his last prospecting expedition, in another direction. They took a week's provisions with them and pack mules to carry them and their tools. It was at the beginning of the rainy season. The first night they camped on the Tuolumne, lower down, and fortunately they chose a piece of high ground for their tent. They had hardly erected it when it began to rain in torrents and continued raining all night and all next day and the day following that.

They found themselves completely surrounded by water, with only the ground around their tent uncovered. They passed a week there waiting till the flood subsided. David Syme exhausted the conversational powers of his two companions during the first twenty-four hours of their imprisonment. He had no books with him and could take no exercise. It was the dullest week he had ever spent in his life. This was the last prospecting expedition. From *[begin page 23]* that time forth he abandoned scientific theories and settled down to steady hard work like an ordinary miner.

David Syme liked the country and climate of California immensely; but he confessed that the people he met there were not to his taste. Of course they were rough, for his experience was of mining camps only. He did not live in the towns or cities, or move in select circles, which probably did not exist there at that time. He was surprised at the kind of literature he found in circulation. On the goldfields cheap editions of translations of French novels of the Paul de Kock stamp were everywhere; and there was nothing else to be had, not even a newspaper. The people amongst whom he was thrown were young and middle-aged men of the farming class (he seldom met with a woman), chiefly from the Western states, who had trekked overland with their own teams. A lesser proportion came from the Southern states, mostly from Kentucky, Texas and Missouri; all tall, powerful-looking men.

The Missourians were a class by themselves, at least that part of them hailing from Pike county. One could recognize a Pike county man fifty yards off. They were all built on the same lines: immensely tall, often approaching seven feet, high cheek bones, heavy jaws, long face and features, sandy complexions, and not given to say much. Why Pike county men should be so differentiated from those around them he did not pretend to understand. *[begin page 24]* The few men from the Eastern states were mostly in business as storekeepers, with here and there a professional man and a graduate of a University. He did not meet with any people in California whom he really liked. This was his misfortune or perhaps his fault; of course he did not go to California to cultivate the graces. The Americans he encountered were far from being well informed. In fact their ignorance amazed him. It was impossible to keep up a conversation on any topic of general interest, and there was a parochialism about them which he did not expect. They felt no concern in anything outside America.

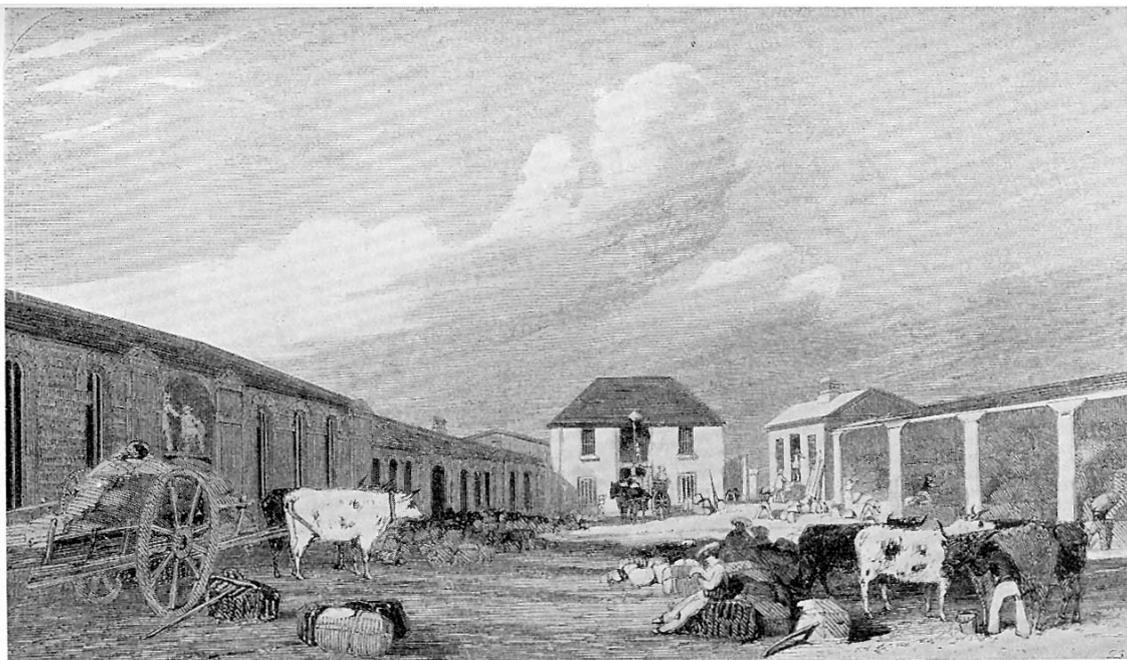
They believed there was no country like the United States in the wide world. But very often their vision did not extend beyond their own particular State. When an American met a stranger, no matter where or how, his first question invariably was "What State do

you come from?" David Syme often felt they resented the presence of strangers in their country, and this impression was confirmed by opinions he heard expressed in favour of a tax on foreigners. Even the newspapers advocated the tax. He was sure that Australians would never have recommended a tax on Americans who came to their country, nor would they have regarded them as foreigners, but would have welcomed them as belonging to the same race as themselves. In these circumstances it need not surprise that he did not feel bound to remain in California any longer than *[begin page 25]* he could help. When he learned that gold had been discovered in Australia, he soon made up his mind to go to a land where he would be among his own countrymen and would not be regarded as an intruder.

His second voyage was eventful. He booked his passage from San Francisco for Melbourne, early in 1852, in the ship *Europe*. This vessel, as he learned afterwards, had been purchased by a speculative Bostonian for a mere song (five tons of onions represented the purchase price), being one of the many vessels deserted by their crews and lying idle in the bay. She was very old, quite unseaworthy, and badly fitted out in every respect, as the passengers were not long in discovering when they had put to sea. She took a full passenger list at very high rates. David Syme had not imagined that the American Government did not undertake the supervision of stores in passenger ships, as was done in British ports, so in common with the other passengers he made no inquiries about the quantity or quality of provisions. They had not been a week at sea when they were put on short allowance. Then it leaked out that the owner (who had ventured to come with them) had intended to, provision the ship at Honolulu, a port on one of the Sandwich islands some two weeks' sail from San Francisco. He fancied he could provision the ship there on a cheaper scale. At the same time he thought he would have to deal with mere savages who had no idea of the value of money; but who had on hand stores sufficient to *[begin page 26]* provide for some 300 people for a two months' voyage. Instead of cash, he had supplied himself before starting with a quantity of condemned United States muskets (bought at auction), some beads and trinkets, a few rolls of bright-coloured calicoes, and the discarded hangings of a San Franciscan theatre. It was with these that he proposed trading with the natives for provisioning the ship. But they never reached Honolulu. The captain, who did not possess a master's certificate, went out of his course and passed the islands without being aware of it. They had gone too far to turn back, so they proceeded southwards till they struck Tutuila, a small island in the Samoan or Navigator group. It was just in time, for the unhappy voyagers had used up everything eatable and had finished their last cask of water. Here they remained some days to provision. The natives were friendly and let the hungry passengers have what food they had: which was not much, consisting chiefly of cocoanuts and a few pigs, the progeny of animals left there by Captain Cook. The natives were a fine-looking race, tall and muscular, with light brown complexions, like the Maoris. The girls were tall and straight, many of them handsome and beautiful. After California Tutuila was enchanting. The islanders had been Christianised by British missionaries.

They next called at two other islands of the group, at one of which they found a British consul. The passengers appealed to him to compel the captain *[begin page 26]* to provision the ship, but he either would or could not render them any assistance; so with a few more cocoanuts and pineapples they made sail for the New Hebrides, reaching Vava in a half-starved condition. Then (as now) Vava had an evil reputation and, as they approached land, they could see hundreds of natives, armed with spears, rushing to the landing place. But the travellers had to land or die of starvation. They took it for granted there would be no difficulty in getting the ship's boats for that purpose. But not a boat was allowed to be lowered until they had deposited the value of it with the owner. This they did after some delay. Many of the passengers wished to take the owner with them and leave him on the island. Those who possessed arms, including

David Syme, manned the only two boats on board. They expected to have a brush with the savages, but for some reason they were not molested. At the same time they were careful to keep together, no one being allowed to stray. They procured some more cocoanuts and a quantity of yams of enormous size. This was the last island they called at, and Australia was still some three weeks' sail distant. Granted fine weather it was just possible they might reach their destination alive: but there would have been no chance at all had they encountered calms or adverse winds. Fortunately the weather favoured them; but even so they had eaten the last cocoanut two days before making the Australian coast. The day their pro- *[begin page 28]* visions ran out a call was made on the passengers to deliver up such private stores as they might possess, but no one responded. They caught a large shark that day, which was instantly disposed of. When at last they sighted land, some half a day's sail to the north of Port Jackson, but not till then, a married couple, who occupied a cabin by themselves, brought out their concealed stores in the shape of a basket of biscuits. The gift came too late to be appreciated. The same evening they were in Sydney. There they learned that two other ships had arrived from San Francisco, short of provisions, and that some of the passengers were so reduced by starvation that they had to be carried ashore. David Syme had booked himself for Melbourne, but he had had enough of the *Europe*. Promptly quitting the ship he took passage in the first steamer for Melbourne. The *Europe*, be it said, did eventually reach Melbourne and was appropriately converted into a coal hulk.



Wool Store, Melbourne, 1851.

[begin page 29]

Chapter 2

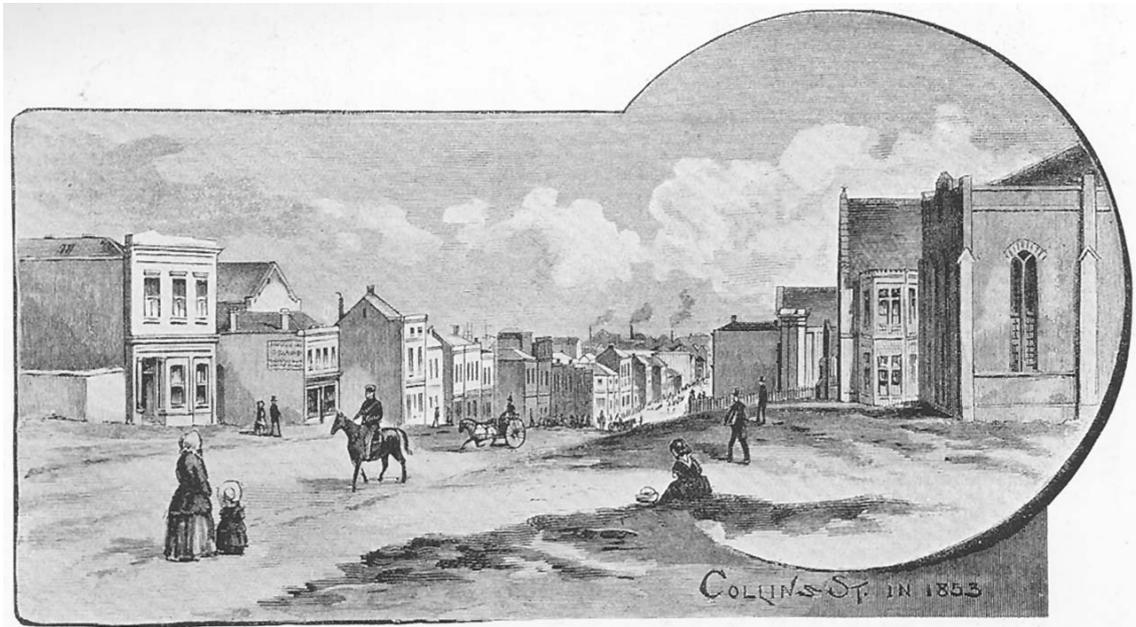
First Impressions of Victoria

Melbourne in 1853 - Syme leaves for Castlemaine - Adventure on the road - Bendigo - Korong - Illness - Deserted by his companion - Beechworth - Adventure with Bushrangers - To Daylesford - Ballarat - Works hard as miner - Bad luck - Goes to Mt. Egerton - Takes up valuable claim - Mine jumped - Invader expelled - Mine again jumped - Efforts to secure redress at law unsuccessful - Extent of his misfortune - Gives up mining in disgust - Returns to Melbourne - The trials of the gold diggers - Bad government and its effects.

"I landed in Melbourne," wrote David Syme, "in very much the same condition I was in when I landed in San Francisco: that is to say, with very little money in my pocket. At that time people were pouring into the country at the rate of a thousand a week (Melbourne did not have much accommodation for visitors as it was then a small place), and I was glad to secure a shakedown on a table in an hotel at the, top of Bourke Street East (the hotel is still standing at the time I write), for which I paid five shillings. All new arrivals except those who came out as agents for English or foreign exporting firms made straight for the gold-fields. Except as clerks and carters there was no work for *[begin page 30]* anyone in Melbourne. Next morning I started for Castlemaine with a companion picked up at the hotel. There were no coaches running, so we had to tramp it. When we reached the top of the hill beyond Flemington we were not sure about the track (there were no fences or metalled roads), so we crossed over to ask a man, apparently a digger from his soiled clothes and swag, going towards Melbourne. He turned to face us, but gave no reply to our question. He held something in both hands which he pointed towards us. Before we got near him he called out, in an unmistakable Irish accent, to keep off or he would shoot us. And he evidently meant it. What he was pointing, as we then discovered, was a huge horse pistol, more like a blunderbuss than anything of the kind I had ever seen. We managed to explain that we had no hostile intention. When he told us he had walked all the way from Bendigo by himself and carried this blunderbuss for protection, we concluded that he must have some gold in his swag which was worth protecting, but we asked no frivolous questions, he looked so terribly in earnest.

"At Castlemaine we did not stay long. . . . Finding, after a week's trial in the bed of the creek, that we could only get about half an ounce of gold a day, we agreed to move on. Bendigo was our next stage. This was no better. Evidently it had seen better days. Judging from the deserted camps everywhere about it, at least half of its former *[begin page 31]* population had left it. Hearing of a new discovery at Korong we determined to be the first this time, so I joined the rush to that place, which turned out to be a fraud. I had as companion on this trip a young French-Canadian who was quite a gentleman so far as speech and manners were concerned, and I took a liking for him. On our return journey we stopped at an abandoned diggings (Myers Flat or the Whipstick, I forget which), with the intention of prospecting the neighbourhood. We found a habitable slab hut with no owner, and took possession of it. Not a soul was to be seen in the district. Here I caught a severe cold and in addition had a severe attack of quinsy which prevented me from swallowing. In a few days I was reduced to such a state that I was unable to go about or even to speak. When in this condition my Canadian friend came to my bedside with his swag strapped up and said, 'Good-bye, I'm off.' I was too far gone to understand what he meant, as he had not said a word to me about going. Although I had but little money with me, I did not even ask him to leave me my share of

the gold which he had kept on joint account, or demand the return of the £20 I had lent him before leaving Bendigo. He left me sure enough, and I have never caught sight of him since. I suppose I must have had a good constitution, for I recovered, much to my surprise. I believe I caught my illness from sleeping in a draught, for I found that I had been *[begin page 32]* lying with my face close to a chink in the wall of the hut, the slabs being open at that place.

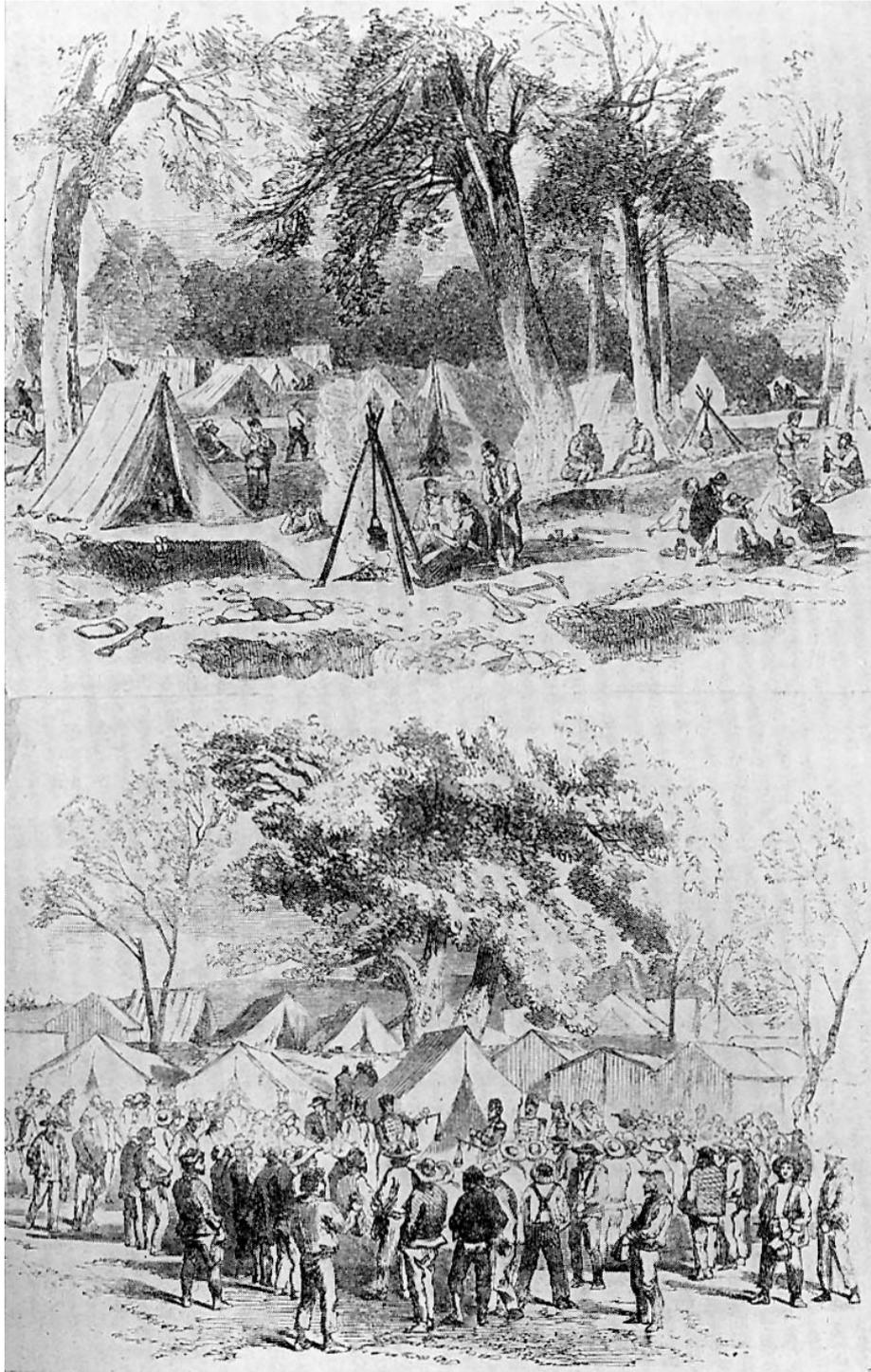


Melbourne, 1853.

"When able to walk I started for Bendigo. There I learned that Beechworth was the centre of attraction, and that an immense quantity of gold had been obtained. To Beechworth accordingly I went next; but again I was too late, for on the way up I met a large number of miners who informed me that the diggings were worked out. That did not prevent me from going on, however. One morning my companion and I reached a refreshment house beyond Wangaratta. We found the inmates in a great state of excitement. They said they had had a visit from mounted bushrangers who had just left, but had not molested them. We had breakfast there, and were about to proceed on our journey, when the people strongly advised us to remain for a while, as the rangers had gone up the road and we would be sure to meet them if we started then. We were told they were well mounted and armed with guns. But as we were armed with very serviceable Colt's revolvers, we thought we were capable of taking care of ourselves, two Colt's revolvers being more than equal to three guns. So we started. We kept a good look-out for the bushrangers, fully determined, whatever happened, not to be taken by surprise. We gave a wide berth to every clump of trees along the road and saw no sign of the bushrangers, when, suddenly, while passing a small group of saplings, *[begin page 33]* about three miles from the hotel, which I never imagined could shelter them from observation, three horsemen sprang forward and almost surrounded us. I sidled backwards towards the trunk of a tree, and was ready for emergencies. I knew how to handle my weapon, as the chief amusement I had in California was in shooting at a mark. They halted about a dozen yards from us, and, after exchanging a few words among themselves the foremost asked me in a bantering tone if I took them for bushrangers. I said I did. He then asked if that was a revolver I held in my hand. I said it was. He remarked he had never seen one of that kind before, and would I let him see it. He laughed when I told him I never let it pass out of my hand. They then bade us good-day, put spurs to their horses, and cantered off.

"We heard they had stuck up and robbed two other parties in the course of the day. That was the only adventure I ever had with bushrangers while in Australia. The lesson to me was never to be cocksure of anything. I was perfectly certain that I could not be taken by surprise on that occasion, and yet I was.

"We put in a week or two at Beechworth, but found what we had been told was true - that the best of the ground had been worked out. Here I met with a fellow passenger by the *Europe*, an American, with whom I entered into partnership which continued as long as I remained on the gold *[begin page 34]* fields. From Beechworth we made our way to the Daylesford district, where we did very well. I only wished we had remained there longer. But we could not resist the attractions of Ballarat, then in the zenith of its glory. The deep leads, which have been worked so long, were just discovered, and immense quantities of gold had been taken from them; or rather they were not deep leads then, the richest deposits having been obtained at from 20 to 30 feet in depth. So we went to Ballarat and took up two claims, one on the Canadian Gully and one on the main lead, as it was called. In both places the gold was found in gutters, or in the bed of an ancient creek which had been filled up so that there was no indication of gold on the surface. When we arrived on the ground we found the surface pegged out into claims for nearly half a mile ahead of the claim which had last struck the gutter, and about a quarter of a mile wide. These claims were of a uniform size, 24 feet by 24 feet, which was the limit allowed for four men, 12 feet square for each. As much as £20,000 had been taken out of one of these claims, at least, so it was reported. It will be understood that mining was much of a lottery in these circumstances. Our claim on the main lead was quite half a mile from where gold had been found, so that the chances were about fifty to one against us. Our position on the Canadian Gully was much the same. Here we engaged four men to sink one shaft and two *[begin page 35]* other men with ourselves to sink the shaft on the main lead. Except for the two or three claims next to where gold had been found, all the rest were shepherded; that is, a merely nominal compliance with the working regulations was observed, the claim-holders putting in an hour or two each day, waiting till they saw whether the gutter was likely to come in their direction, the gutter being only about 20 feet in width. As my partner and myself had no taste for shepherding and wanted to know our fate as soon as possible, we set vigorously to work on both our claims, little thinking what was in store for us. We had no expectation of meeting with any serious difficulty in sinking our shaft, but we found out our mistake when we had sunk about 100 feet. I well remember arriving at the shaft in the evening to take my turn at the night shift (a twelve hours' shift in those days). To my surprise I found both the day shift men on the top of the shaft waiting for us. One man had come up from below because he had struck water. The water, he said, had risen about 2 feet in the shaft. This did not seem serious; he admitted he had not put in the slabs (the shaft was timbered from the top downwards) at the bottom of the shaft. This of course was a serious omission. I said I would go down and put in the slabs and then we would wait events. I went down, and had managed to put one set in all round when, without the least warning, I found myself enveloped in water and *[begin page 36]* sand which, after ascending some height, came pouring down on my head. The clay at the bottom of the shaft had given way with my weight, and I had sunk above my knees into a stratum of silt which held the body of water which burst in upon me. I got into the bucket at once, by this time full of sand, and signalled to be hauled up. In a few minutes the water rose to the surface of the shaft, almost as soon as I did, and overflowed in a large stream into the main road for a fortnight afterwards. We had struck a subterranean river. The same day an equally large body of water was met with in the shaft adjoining ours in the Canadian Gully, and the man who was below at the time was drowned. We got no gold in our claim on this lead.



Ballarat
Gold Diggers. - Issuing Licences

On our main lead claim we were allowed a suspension of work for a month, ostensibly to enable the shafts around to be sunk to the water level and assist in the drainage. But the shafts continued to be shepherded as before and we had no help whatever from the shepherds. In one or two instances a little more vigour was shown; but every claim was careful to stop sinking before reaching the water line, and the consequence was that the whole work of draining the water was left on our hands. We might have played the same game as the others, but we preferred working to waiting. It took us over four months, night and day work, to reduce the water in our shaft till we could resume, sinking. There was a body of silt and sand about 10 feet *[begin page 37]* below

where the water came in upon us; and, as we sank, this material was drained into our shaft, leaving an immense cavity which we had the greatest difficulty in timbering as there was nothing behind to support the slabs. We practically overcame the difficulty by filling up the cavity with bundles of straw and other material, but it was always a danger to work below this, as the whole mass was liable to collapse at any moment. We got bottom at last, found the ground stoping into the adjoining claim, which was sunk without difficulty owing to our draining the water away from it, but we found no gold. To make sure we were not leaving anything behind us we drove to both sides of our boundary, but discovered nothing. The claim on the left was bottomed nearly as soon as ours, and got the gutter and the gold in it. But the worst of our bad luck has not been told. Needless to say we had enough of this lottery business; so, after squaring up matters, we left for Melbourne, uncertain what to do next. Up to the time we left the gold deposits had been confined to the gutter, now on the stoping ground; but a couple of months after we had abandoned our claim a party of men went down our shaft, drove beyond our boundary on rising ground, and discovered even more gold than had been found in the gutter on the other side of our claim.

"My next mining adventure was of a different kind. After a short stay in Melbourne, my partner *[begin page 38]* and I took up a quartz reef at Mount Egerton, at that time a very quiet and out-of-the-way place. There were not more than half a dozen people there altogether, and only two of these were working on the reef. We pegged off ground sufficient for eight men (including ourselves), being the same as in the alluvial claims, viz. 12 feet by 12 feet, a ridiculous area, considering that quartz mining required expensive crushing machinery which it would not pay to erect on a small claim. However, we brought up six men from Melbourne to work the mine, and ordered, through an agent in Melbourne, a Berdon crushing machine from England, paying one-half the cost in advance, intending to purchase an engine in the colony when the crushing machine arrived. Six months passed and we heard nothing of the machinery and suspecting (which was true) that it had never been ordered, we demanded back our money, which we succeeded in getting after considerable delay. Meanwhile we had to keep our men at work opening up the reef, or we should have been liable to have our claim forfeited. The quartz, which accumulated on our hands, and which we had no means of disposing of till we got our machinery at work, was stacked on the ground. As the reef was rich the gold-bearing quartz thus was visible to the naked eye, and attracted the attention of visitors. The consequence was that our claim was jumped, or at least that part of it which we held by hand labour, leaving us the remainder and, of *[begin page 39]* course, not the best part of the claim. As we had complied strictly with the law and were, as we imagined, among a law-abiding people, we were not much disturbed by this action. We showed the invaders that we held the ground according to the mining laws of the district; but it was of no use. So we informed the Commissioner, whose headquarters were at Ballarat, of what had taken place, and requested him to come over and adjudicate on the case. He came the following day. We produced the men we had in the claim, and we also produced their licences. The other side had nothing to say, and the decision was promptly given in our favour. The jumpers were not pleased with the verdict, and one of them surlily told the Commissioner that we had no right to so large a claim, and they would jump it again. The Commissioner was somewhat nettled, and told the man if he dared to do so he would probably get twelve months on the roads. The Commissioner was hardly out of sight when the same man again took possession. We were not alarmed, as we thought the Commissioner having already decided in our favour could not give a different decision when the case came before him again. We accordingly informed the Commissioner of what had taken place and once more requested his interposition. He promised to come, but he never made his appearance. We waited day after day and kept reminding him of his promise, but still he never came. We then *[begin page 40]* tried to get a territorial magistrate to settle the case, but they all had the same story -

they had no jurisdiction in mining disputes. Failing redress from the constituted authorities we ultimately put our case before the Government. Mr. Haines, the then Chief Secretary, was interviewed, and he, even at that time, gave the stereotyped reply that he would consider the case and send us a reply. But we got no reply. I suppose the matter had never been looked into, for we never heard from him. We waited long and patiently for some action on the part of the Government till at length it became plain enough to us that we were to have no redress, so we sold the small interest we had and left the district. Had we kept alive our claim against the Government we would by this time have been able to demand something like a million sterling compensation for the loss of our property; for what was afterwards known as the Great Mount Egerton mine was the claim of which we had been defrauded. This same claim has since turned out, in profits and dividends alone, more than £1,200,000, and is still being worked.

"The Ballarat riot is an unpleasant episode in the history of Victoria. I took no part in that unfortunate affair, but I knew the mining population well, and entirely sympathized with them in their grievances against the Government. My brother, Ebenezer, who had recently arrived in Melbourne and was then on the editorial staff of *The Age*, [begin page 41] strongly advocated their cause in the columns of that journal. Never was a colony nearer being lost to the empire than was Victoria at the period referred to, owing to the ineptitude and gross blunders of the Government officials. One of these officials has written a history of that period, which one has only to glance at to realize the spirit which animated his class in its dealings with the mining population. He habitually calls them 'Gold scrapers,' describing them as turbulent, as consisting largely of convicts or ex-convicts from the neighbouring colonies, and often the scum of foreign countries. Nothing could be farther from the truth. No doubt there were a few convicts and a few turbulent persons who came to the surface when trouble arose, but what young country has ever been without such people? Man for man the miners were physically, mentally and morally equal to any people in the British dominions. Indeed, the immigrants whom the gold discovery attracted were rather of a superior class. It was not everyone who had the courage or the means to undertake the voyage from England to Australia in those days. Only those who felt a noble discontent with their native surroundings, and men who were self-reliant and enterprising to a degree, could be induced to sever their home ties and emigrate to the Antipodes. As a matter of fact, I know that nearly all the emigrants were comparatively well-to-do, many being members of the [begin page 42] learned professions and graduates of English and Scottish universities who, from want of sufficient capital or influence, had been unable to make their way in the crowded ranks of the mother country. These men on arrival as a rule went straight to the goldfields, where they hoped to better their condition by means of honest industry.

"But the officials, from the Government downwards, treated them as if they were the scum of the earth, and did everything in their power to make life unbearable. Assuming the miners would spend their earnings in drunken orgies, no intoxicating liquor was allowed to be sold; regarded as intruders, they were not permitted to occupy the lease or purchase any land, and were even refused leave to cultivate a patch of ground around their tents for growing their own vegetables. They had to pay thirty shillings a month as licence fee for permission to dig for gold, and this was collected by an armed constabulary. If a miner had not the licence in his pocket, or was too poor to possess one, he was marched off to the camp like a criminal; and, as there were no gaols on the goldfields in those days, he was chained like a dog to a log or tree till the Commissioners had time to try his case. Can it be wondered that people with British blood in their veins should resent such treatment?

"Gold was discerned in Victoria first at Clunes and next at Anderson's Creek near Melbourne in [begin page 43] 1850, but it was on the 8th of September, 1851, that the

mineral resources of Ballarat were brought to light. The necessity of maintaining order amongst a large floating population such as that on the newly-discovered goldfields entailed the raising of additional revenue, and to provide this a licence fee of thirty shillings a month on every resident on the goldfields was charged. But the revenue could not be collected owing to the roving disposition of the miners. At the latter end of 1852, out of a population of 100,000, only 27,000 licences were collected, while the expense of collecting was considerable. To meet this deficit Mr. La Trobe, the Governor, proposed to double the licence fee, making it £3 per month instead of thirty shillings. The incredible folly of this proposal apparently never struck the Governor, but there was a method in his madness nevertheless. In doubling the licence tax he declared that this additional impost would 'throw additional impediments in the way of those frequenting the goldfields.' Knowing the difficulty there was in collecting the thirty-shilling licences, and anticipating that the difficulty would be increased if the amount were doubled, the Governor, immediately on issuing his proclamation, sent urgent appeals to the Governors of New South Wales and Tasmania for the loan of troops. It would be hard to find such another exhibition of truculent incapacity on the part of any governing body in the Imperial dominions. *[begin page 44]*

"The proclamation drove .the miners into a frenzy of indignation. Public meetings were held at Forrest Creek (now Castlemaine), Bendigo and other goldfields, at which resolutions were carried condemning the Government proposal. Even the citizens of Geelong met and denounced the action of the Government. These meetings had their desired effect, for the Government withdrew its order almost immediately, much to the disgust of the lesser officials and older residents, as indicating weakness on the part of those in authority."

[begin page 45]

Chapter 3

The Age and its Early Editors

Syme joins his brother Ebenezer - The two brothers buy *The Age* - How *The Age* was started - Ebenezer in politics - David doubtful of the success of *The Age* - David temporarily gives up journalism and becomes a contractor - Oppressed by an engineer - The art of tendering for contracts - Marriage - Death of Ebenezer - David gives up contracting and assumes control of *The Age* - His reasons - Hardships of journalism - His health fails - Adventures with physicians - The Boycotts - Protectionist headway - His fighting policy - The first editors of *The Age* - G.P. Smith - Judge Fellowes - A.L. Windsor - Professor Pearson - The key to the success of *The Age* - Sir James Culloch - Richard Seddon.

Shortly after his unpleasant experiences at Mount Egerton, David Syme removed to Melbourne and joined his brother Ebenezer, who was editing *The Age* (then, as now, the only Liberal paper in Melbourne) for a co-operative society of journalists, printers and workers. It had been founded some two years earlier by another proprietary.

In the middle of 1854, when the disputes between the diggers and the Government in regard to mining were increasing in intensity, it occurred to John and Henry Cooke, two local merchants and stock-owners, that there was an opening in [begin page 46] Melbourne for a third daily newspaper; and, having decided to embark on the enterprise; they started a journal which they named *The Age*. The proprietors had no very definite views upon the great political questions of the day; but hoped to make their newspaper more readable than its rivals; and they took the side of the Nonconformists in the agitation which was at that time beginning against State aid to religion.

The first number of *The Age* was printed on the 17th of October, 1854, in a building that had been erected in William Street (near the site of the present Mint) for the purpose of an Exhibition; which was held in Melbourne before the Paris Exhibition of 1855. Mr. Ebenezer Syme, Mr. David Blair and Mr. T.L. Bright were responsible for the leading articles and general control of the paper, and Mr. James Smith was the dramatic critic.

The proprietors announced that the journal was to be devoted to "politics, commerce and philanthropy"; that it was "to be a record of 'great movements'," and to be dedicated to the advocacy of free institutions; the diffusion of truth; and the advancement of man." Despite these ambitious aims, the new paper failed to make any immediate impression. Indeed, *The Age* would probably have been discontinued after a few weeks but for the fact that the anti-licence agitation at Ballarat culminated suddenly in the attack upon [begin page 47] the Eureka stockade. The most absurd reports were circulated in Melbourne about the diggers; who were said to contemplate founding an independent republic. The traders, merchants and other well-to-do residents of the metropolis became seriously alarmed. *The Argus* up to the date of the dramatic episode at Bakery Hill, Ballarat (where the diggers burned their licences and declared that they would not take out any more), had advocated the miners' cause and had even gone so far as hotly to attack Sir Charles Hotham and Mr. Vesey Foster for their methods of dealing with the mining trouble. But immediately these rumours were circulated it reversed its policy and was amongst the first to call for measures of repression and a proclamation of martial law in the district around Ballarat. *The Age*, on the other hand, pointed out that the miners. had no desire to levy war upon the

Queen or to change the institutions of the country: that they had been treated with great harshness and cruelty by the authorities; and that their armed resistance against the collection of taxes at the point of the bayonet; if not justifiable, was at any rate excusable.



George Syme

It was mainly owing to the vigorous writing of *The Age* that a public meeting was held in Melbourne to protest against the action of the Government; and that Sir Charles Hotham receded from the position he had taken up and revoked the martial law proclamation. Throughout these *[begin page 48]* troublous times *The Age* led the opposition to the policy which Sir Charles Hotham, backed by the Attorney-General, endeavoured to carry out; and the acquittal of the Ballarat rioters, several of whom were tried for high treason, and the appointment of a commission to inquire into the grievances of the miners and to initiate more liberal legislation for the goldfields, were largely due to its exertions.

But the attitude of *The Age*, more particularly during the early portion of the crisis, did not commend itself to the first proprietors. At an early period they withdrew, and the paper was then carried on by a sort of commonwealth, the literary department continuing under the control of Mr. Ebenezer Syme, Mr. T.L. Bright and Mr. David Blair. Ebenezer Syme contrived to raise *The Age* to a higher literary level than its rivals, but he could not save it from financial failure. After maintaining for eighteen months a desperate struggle against two long-established papers, the co-operative company was on the point of dissolution when David Syme reached Melbourne. David had not been by any means fortunate as a miner, but he had, nevertheless, contrived to amass a little fortune. On Ebenezer's advice he invested this in journalism; and *The Age*, having been brought to the hammer, was purchased by the two brothers for the sum of £2,000. At that time Ebenezer Syme had more faith in the future success [begin page 49] of *The Age* than David had. David Syme really did not believe there was room for a third morning paper in Melbourne. The population was then comparatively small and there were no railways to carry newspapers to the goldfields, so that the circulation was almost exclusively confined to the metropolis. David, however, threw himself with energy into the new enterprise and strove to bring the paper through its troubles. The first issue under his management was printed on the 12th of June, 1856.

Ebenezer Syme stood and was elected representative for Mandurang in the first Legislative Assembly of Victoria. He did not seek re-election when his term expired, because he found that his Parliamentary duties, under the system of Party Government, conflicted with his journalistic work. As member of a party he was not only expected to vote with his party, right or wrong, but also to support it in the paper, a course of which neither he nor David approved. After a trial extending to about the middle of 1857 the brothers found that the income of *The Age* was not sufficient to support them both, so David generously resolved to seek other employment for himself until the fortunes of the journal might improve, and to leave Ebenezer to manage and edit it on the lines of the policy that he had laid down.

David was not long engaged in looking for work. He had hardly concluded the arrangements with [begin page 50] his brother, when a friend, who had been given a contract for making some miles of roads for the Government on the Keilor plains, asked his assistance in carrying it out, as other contracts elsewhere required his attention. This offer David accepted, and he obtained sufficient experience to enable him to undertake contracts on his own account. These he found to be fairly profitable, and as he liked the work he determined to proceed with it. Ebenezer was at first somewhat alarmed, because he had been informed by an acquaintance, a contractor on a large scale, that it would be simply suicidal for David, a stranger, to enter into competition with established firms for Government contracts, as the district engineers, under whose supervision the work was carried out, had an understanding with these firms, and friction would be certain to arise with any interlopers. David concluded, however, that he had nothing to fear as long as he did honest work, which he was determined to do. Nor did he have occasion to complain of unfair treatment on the part of the engineers for some time. But they were biding their time. He had obtained a contract for the construction of several miles of a metal road in the western district, the specifications stating that the metal was to be broken to a size to pass through a ring two inches in diameter. He sublet the crushing of the metal which was to be broken to this standard, and saw that it was carried out in the [begin page 51] usual way before paying for it; but the engineer condemned the whole of it. As a consequence he had to go over the work again; but it was condemned a second time, the engineer insisting that each individual stone must pass through the two inch ring, a thing which had never been heard of before. Needless to say there were no profits out of that contract, and he made up his mind never again to take work under this engineer, which was no doubt precisely what

the man wanted. However, he got on pretty well with other engineers and gradually acquired a sound knowledge of his business; not in road-making only, but in bridge-building and all manner of brick and stone work.

He soon discovered there was an art in tendering as in everything else. When tendering for the supply of one item, for instance, such as earth work, or metal, at so much per cubic yard, he found it was not advisable to work out the bulk sum (at which the contract is let) in the ordinary way (especially when quantities are supplied at so many thousand yards and so much per yard), because some competitor might have tendered at the same price. In the best contract he ever had of this kind it happened that he had adopted the same price as the next lowest tenderer, but he knocked off a shilling from the bulk sum and secured the contract, his tender being just below the next lowest.

There was one drawback in this business - the [begin page 52] occasionally long intervals between contracts; for the contractor was obliged not only to keep his staff of workmen and overseers and horses together, but to secure regular work for them, although the contracts were by no means regular. However, by tendering for a much larger quantity of work than he was likely to be allotted, and always at highly remunerative prices, he contrived to obtain as many contracts as he could undertake, and always on profitable terms.

On the 17th of August, 1858, David Syme married his wife, Annabella Johnson.² She was born in Yorkshire and arrived in Melbourne with her parents in 1853. Mr. Syme says of his wife in a note to an intimate friend which he wrote in 1907:- "I shall never cease to bless the day I married her." Mr. and Mrs. Syme had five sons and four daughters of their marriage. All the sons and two daughters are now living; two daughters died in infancy.

David Syme was just beginning to see his way to assured success when his brother Ebenezer died. He had then to decide whether he should continue at his contracting business, or give it up and take over the management of *The Age*. He accepted the latter alternative. This undertaking was not [begin page 53] to his liking, but he had sufficient reason for the change. In the first place it was impossible to sell the paper. He could only give it away and from first to last he had invested a considerable amount of money in the concern. In second place, his brother's family had no income but that which was obtained from the paper, and to have discontinued it would leave them wholly unprovided for. In the third place, David Syme believed he knew what the country required. His political views were very decided, and he felt it to be his duty to put them before the public. At that period thousands of people were leaving the Colony every week, many of them successful miners who would gladly have settled on the land had it then been available; many others were unsuccessful and were leaving because they could find no employment in their own vocations. To open up the land for settlement and create employment by the imposition of protective customs duties were, in his judgment, absolute necessities. He also held strong views in favour of free, compulsory and secular education, as well as on mining, private property, and many other subjects.

So David Syme betook himself exclusively to journalism. To manage, finance and conduct a daily newspaper is no light matter at any time but to do so without ample

² John William Johnson, his wife and four children, one daughter and three sons, left Liverpool in the sailing ship *Africa*, 1435 tons, on the 30th of November, 1852, and arrived at Melbourne on the 16th of April following.

means, without a competent business or literary staff (which could only be secured by the expenditure of more money [begin page 54] than he could afford), with a comparatively small circulation, and with two established rivals in the field, seemed almost foolhardy. It was killing work. He could never have survived it had he not possessed a good constitution. For more than a decade he never worked less than fifteen hours a day and never had a holiday, except a compulsory one when his medical advisers ordered him to take a voyage to England and back. Within these years the work began to tell on him as it had on his brother, who died of consumption brought on by overwork. Mr. Syme tells the story of his adventures with the physicians in a letter that has been preserved:-

"My medical advisers considered that I was seriously ill and sent me to a specialist for chest diseases. He examined me carefully and pronounced that my lungs were affected and that my only chance of recovery was to take a long sea voyage, at that time the usual remedy recommended by the profession in such cases. So I set my house in order as best I could. Fortunately my brother George had come out to Melbourne and I left him in charge of the paper and, accompanied by my wife, set sail for England via Cape Town. A Melbourne specialist had recommended me to a specialist in London, whom I consulted on arrival there, and he confirmed the previous diagnosis. I spent three months in England and returned by the Cape of Good Hope, being absent [begin page 55] altogether about eight months. Eight months' rest had improved my general health, but had not cured my cough or removed the other symptoms. On consulting my specialist I got no comfort from him, for he pronounced that my lungs were much the same as when I left, and that there was nothing for it but that I should abandon sedentary work and live in the country. This was easier said than done. All my capital had been invested in *The Age*, which I could not realize, so I had to resume work on the paper even if I should have to die at my post. I resumed work accordingly, but I did not die at my post, as I ought to have done according to the medical opinions.

"I decided to insure my life if I possibly could, as I wanted to have something to leave to my family. I applied to all the leading insurance companies in Melbourne and was duly examined, but none of them would insure my life at any premium. To each of these medical gentlemen I had put the question with an air of as great indifference as I could command, as to the seat of the disease. They all alleged that it was the lungs. On further questioning them as to the precise locality, one mentioned that it was the right lung, another that it was the left, a third that it was the top of the right lung, a fourth that it was the base of the left lung, and so on; no two of them agreeing as to the precise spot affected. I thought this peculiar. Evidently they could not all be correct, and I had [begin page 56] a faint hope they might all be wrong. I determined to consult another doctor. I had noticed the first batch of doctors seemed greatly impressed with the fact that one of my family (my brother Ebenezer) had died of consumption, so I decided to consult some doctor who knew nothing of my family history. I accordingly consulted a young man who had just arrived in Melbourne. I refused to give him any information about myself or family beyond describing my symptoms. After a long and, to me, exhausting examination, he pronounced that my lungs were perfectly sound - at the same time informing me that my liver was the cause of all my trouble. For this he gave me a prescription which I never used. His diagnosis was correct: at any rate I was quite disposed to believe it to be so. But whether or no, this much is certain, that my health improved from that day forth. So I went to work immediately as if nothing had happened, and my work at that time was no child's play. It was even more severe than it had been before I left. I had of course a lot of leeway to make up and my financial troubles were far worse, since, during my absence, the paper had been the subject of a boycott."

The following little sketches of the boycotts to which *The Age* was subjected, of Mr. Syme's earlier editors and colleagues, and of his political principles are from his own pen. They have been extracted from private notes and letters to personal friends [begin page 57] and transcribed verbatim. In later chapters many of these subjects will be dealt with again and more fully by the Biographer.

"*The Age* held and advocated, much against its interest, very pronounced views on the fiscal question, being strongly Protectionist, which naturally gave grave offence to the mercantile community. Almost all of them were importers of goods; they were Free Traders to a man and, naturally enough, resented the views advocated by the paper by refusing to support it with their advertisements. This action on the part of the importers was a serious menace to the paper, as they were large, almost the only, advertisers, and a modern newspaper cannot exist without advertisements; and as at that time there were no local industries, everything being imported, there were no trade advertisements to take the place of those which had been withdrawn. When, however, it was seen that this action on the part of the importers had no effect on the policy of the paper, after some time the bulk of the advertisements gradually returned.

"Later a much more serious boycott took place. There was a much stronger organization formed than on the previous occasion. The whole city was canvassed by agents of the same class, and a strong endeavour was made to include other advertisers who did business with them in the boycott, in some cases successfully. In fact, a regular raid [begin page 58] was made against the paper, and almost every firm who advertised in *The Age* was waited upon and asked to join the combination. Many complied, but there were some honourable exceptions. On the previous occasion the paper took no notice of the boycott; but this was an altogether much more serious affair, and some action appeared to be necessary. There was one person who took a very prominent part in the demonstration, and he was singled out for exposure, not in connexion with the boycott, but on account of a discreditable matter in which he was mixed up. It was not necessary to state why he was singled out, everyone understood. Our comments were resented by many of the combination and especially by the person referred to, who brought an action against *The Age* for libel which resulted in a verdict for the plaintiff. But the exposure had a salutary effect, and the public handsomely subscribed the amount I had been out of pocket by the prosecution."

"Why such a determined set was made against *The Age* was owing to the fact that Protectionist views were beginning to make progress and that *The Age* was the only Melbourne paper which advocated them. In fact at that time *The Age* was the only Protectionist paper, not only in Melbourne, but in the whole of Australia. Even now, in the Commonwealth, the number of Protectionist papers is extremely small. Almost the whole of the provincial press in all the States is still Free [begin page 59] Trade. As a rule, the circulation of these papers is limited and they cannot live without advertisements, and these they get from the local storekeepers, merchants and shire councils, so they naturally cater for this class. The lesson taught *The Age* by those boycotts was not to rely too much on advertising as a means of support for the paper.

"Not only did *The Age* at the period I speak of stand alone as an advocate of Protection, but I recollect the time when I myself stood alone as a Protectionist. I knew of no one in Australia who believed in Protection except myself. Of course others may have, held the same views, but they were unknown to me. Protection, therefore, was not adopted by *The Age* because it was popular, or because it was profitable, for it was neither; and had I consulted my own interests I would have given it a very wide berth. I had to fight for it inch by inch from the start and against immense odds, as the whole community, myself included, had been reared on Free Trade pabulum, and thoroughly believed in the cult."

As to the forward policy of his paper, Syme wrote:-

"I never could see any virtue in *Laissez faire*. To let things alone when they had gone wrong, to render no help when help was needed, is what no sane man would do with his private estate and what no sound statesman would tolerate as a State policy. It is simply an excuse for incapacity or *[begin page 60]* inertia in affairs of State. It is a policy of drift. It is just what the company-promoter, the cardsharper, the wife-deserter and the burglar would like - to be let alone. It can only lead to national disaster and social degeneration when carried out in any community. Why should the development of the material resources of a country alone be deemed unworthy of the notice of a statesman; especially when, by a system of import duties, this can be done with perfect safety and almost automatically and with a minimum of interference with private interests, every person being at liberty to accept or reject the advantage offered? A tariff may be imposed either to encourage industry or for revenue purposes: but may also serve both purposes, but not at the same time: if it is high and drives out imports it will protect the local producer: if it is low it will bring in revenue. But if a high tariff fails to be protective (and it will take some time to produce this effect) it will act as a revenue tariff. Low duties can only bring revenue, and if they do not provide that they will be useless."

Syme's memoranda about his early editors and contributors are, journalistically at least, interesting:

"My first editor, Mr. G. Paton Smith, came to me in a rather strange way. He was a reporter on the staff of *The Argus* (April, 1864) when John O'Shanassy, the Premier, delivered what was long known as his Kilmore speech at Kilmore. Mr. *[begin page 61]* Smith went to report this speech, but for some reason he did not wait until the end of the address. In consequence he arrived in Melbourne long before the reporters from the other newspapers. He had plenty of time to write out the speech, which appeared in *The Argus* at the usual hour of publication, while the other papers were very late. It happened, however, that the most important announcement of O'Shanassy's speech was made after G.P. Smith left the meeting and duly appeared in the reports of the other papers, much to the disgust of *The Argus* and its reporter. Mr. Smith's connexion with *The Argus* terminated about this time. This episode was only known to a few persons interested in it, who for obvious reasons did not care to make it public.

"Mr. Smith afterwards sent an occasional contribution to *The Leader* and later joined the literary staff of *The Age*. He proved to be an acquisition. He could not be called a brilliant writer, but he had the supreme merit of being able to put his points clearly and forcibly. Without doubt he was the best all-round contributor *The Age* had had since I undertook the management of the paper, and the first to whom I could entrust the carrying out of its policy. For the first time I was able occasionally to go home at night and leave the office in his charge. Henceforward he was recognized by Ministers and politicians as the editor of the paper. While on *The Age* he qualified himself for the Bar, which was *[begin page 62]* much to his credit. But this did not satisfy his ambition. He aspired to a seat in the Legislative Assembly in the Ministerial interest (Mr. McCulloch being then in power) and was elected to the fifth Victorian Parliament early in 1866. Mr. Smith was not popular with members, but was offered and accepted the Attorney-Generalship in the McCulloch Administration, when of course his connexion with *The Age* terminated. On the breakup of the Government Mr. Smith sought practice at the Bar and was fairly successful. But he soon broke away from the Liberal party, although there was no quarrel between them. I continued on friendly terms with him. He, without giving me the offer of his services as counsel on my behalf, accepted a brief

from the other side in an action for libel and very bitterly attacked me in his address to the Jury. . . .

"For nearly a year before his death Judge Fellowes was a frequent contributor to the leading columns of *The Age* - chiefly on legal subjects. Considering how opposed he and the paper had been during the long conflict over the Darling Grant affair, his offer to contribute was as unexpected as it was acceptable. . . .

"When G. P. Smith left I had to resume the editorial chair till that position was occupied by Mr. A.L. Windsor. Mr. Windsor had been engaged in London by Mr. Edward Wilson, one of the proprietors of *The Argus*, to edit that paper, but when [begin page 63] the engagement terminated he came to *The Age*, first as contributor and then as editor. Mr. Windsor was a man of rare ability and an experienced journalist. He was a graceful writer and at the same time an incisive critic. He was more at home with the rapier than the bludgeon. He remained editor until 1900, when he retired. He was a lovable man, full of humour, but very shy. He invariably declined all invitations to parties and made very few acquaintances. That was no advantage to him as editor of a newspaper, but very much to the contrary, as he was totally unacquainted with the views and idiosyncrasies of the people around him and, as a rule, had little respect for them. He took little interest in commercial matters, but threw himself with vigour into social and political questions. . . .

"*The Age* was fortunate in securing the services of Professor Charles Henry Pearson as a contributor to its leading columns. He came to Australia for the benefit of his health. After following pastoral pursuits in South Australia for a while he accepted the position of principal of the Presbyterian Ladies' College in Melbourne. After joining *The Age* staff he stood in February, 1877, as candidate for Castlemaine and was, with Mr. James Patterson (a local man), elected for that constituency. He was a ready speaker, and as a debater stood head and shoulders above any member in the House. In 1880 he joined the Berry [begin page 64] Ministry as Minister of Education, and retired from politics when that Ministry resigned on the 9th of July, 1881. In conversation he was full of anecdote. Tactful and dignified though he was in his relations with members on both sides of the House, he, nevertheless, was not popular. He was modest and reserved. He had none of that loud, assertive manner which goes a long way with many people. It was said of him by those who knew him best that he was so far above the average member in capacity and knowledge that he was disliked for that very reason. He was a man who would have been a credit to any Legislature in the world. He returned to England after his resignation and died shortly after his arrival there. He is best known in the literary world by his *History of England in the Fourteenth Century*, which though published in England, was written before he left Melbourne. The colony suffered an irreparable loss when he left its shores. . . .

"So far it cannot be said that *The Age* owed its success to its brilliant writers) as with the exception of Mr. Windsor and Professor Pearson the literary staff was commonplace enough. It succeeded, not because it was able to interpret and represent public opinion on the questions of the day - for, truth to tell, it was generally in advance of public opinion, and necessarily, for a newspaper that wishes to be up-to-date cannot wait for public opinion to express itself, but must pronounce promptly on events as [begin page 65] they arise; not follow but guide the public - but because it favoured no section of the community, while attempting to do justice to all. It was outspoken and fearless to a degree. It called things by their proper names, regardless of consequences. Naturally, it made many enemies. Every man *The Age* had occasion to criticize was an enemy for life. But at the same time, and for that very reason, it made more friends. It gained influence with the public because the public believed in its honesty of purpose and the policy it advocated.

"Sir James McCulloch, the wisest and most courageous Premier the State ever had, George Higinbotham, and Professor Pearson, were all Free Traders till they came under the influence of *The Age*, and Richard Seddon acknowledged to a friend of mine who had congratulated him on his successful career in New Zealand, that he had to thank *The Age* for it, as he had only carried out *The Age* policy, of which he had been a careful student. *[begin page 66]*



Ebenezer Syme

Chapter IV

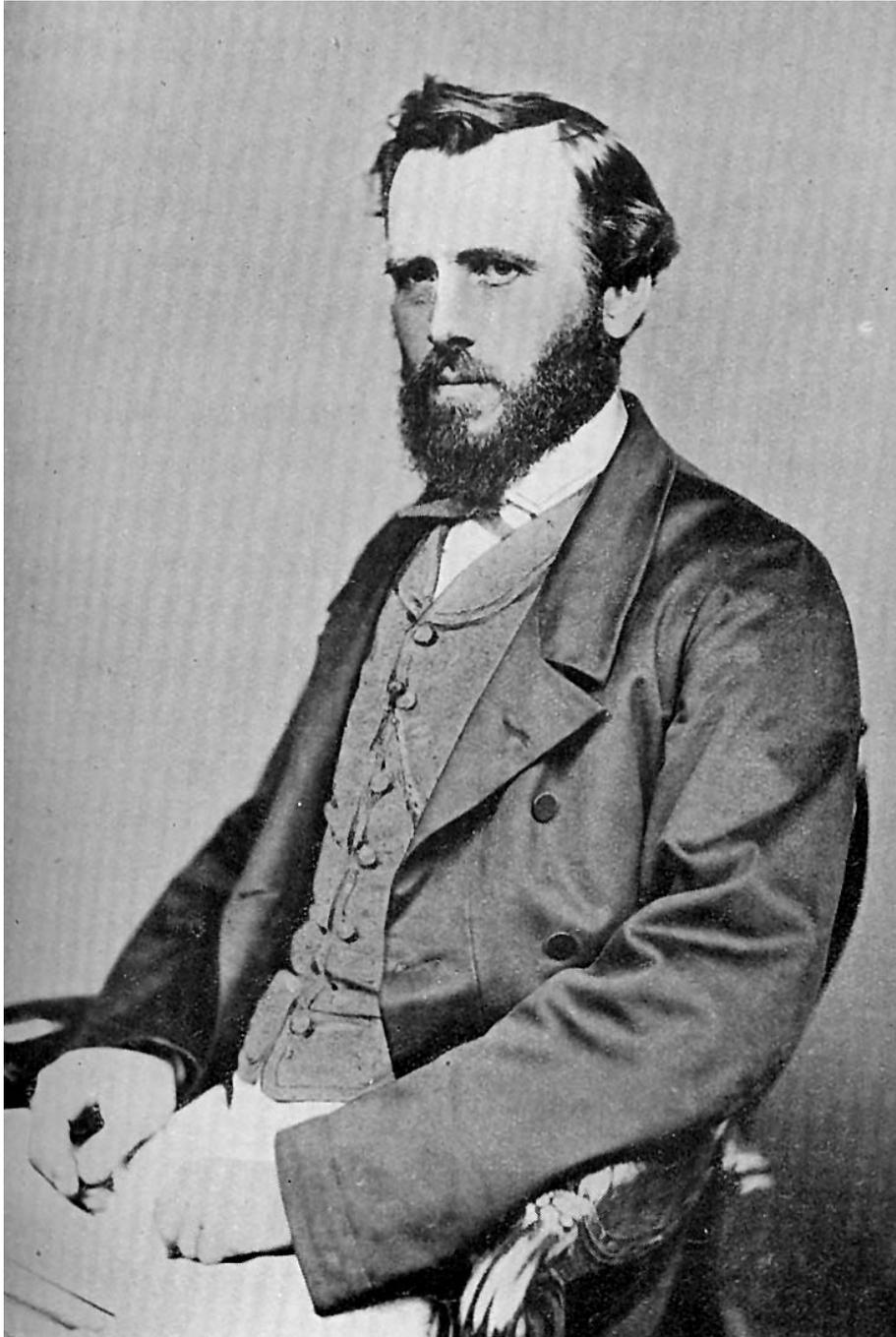
The Land Struggle

Political condition of Victoria in 1856 - Government extravagance and incapacity - The land question - Dr. Lang's letter - Mr. Howitt's picture of the evil - The origin of the squatters' land monopoly - The Orders in Council explained - The country locked up - The people denied access to the land - *The Age* champions the people's cause - Its challenge to the monopolists - The battle begins - The First Parliament elected - The Haines Ministry - The first victory of *The Age* - The campaign for Manhood Suffrage - Haines Defeated - *The Age* attacks O'Shanassy and Duffy - *The Age* boycotted by the merchants - The squatters pretend they own *The Age* - The Liberal Party increases in strength - The Nicholson Government - The Nicholson Land Bill and the squatters - The squatters in the Council reject the measure - The invasion of Parliament by the mob - Ebenezer Syme's death - David Syme carries on the struggle alone - He appeals to the merchants to support the people's claims - The Conference - The Nicholson Land Bill passes - The Act a pernicious failure - The Heales Government - Occupation Licences - The Duke of Newcastle's despatch - The electoral campaign of 1861 - The squatters buy votes and falsify the rolls - Mr. Duffy's Land Act and its defects - "Dummying" and its consequences - ~~Duffy's Pension~~³ - The Grant Land Act of 1864 - The land questions suspended by the Constitutional contest - The Land Act of 1869 - Its effects - The gradual aggregation in recent years of large estates - David Syme's policy of yeoman settlement - The Land Act of 1898 - The condition of Victoria today - The land question still an important issue - David Syme's latest proposals; Compulsory Purchase and a Land Tax - The prospects of the future. [*begin page 67*]

When David Syme and his brother Ebenezer purchased *The Age* in 1856, Victoria was on the verge of entering the first great crisis of its history. The discovery of gold in 1851 and the revelation of the mineral treasures of Ballarat, Castlemaine and Bendigo, had drawn a great stream of immigrants to the colony's shores. The population had doubled in the first twelve months following the gold discovery, and thenceforward it had advanced with amazing rapidity. But the political rulers of the country had taken no pains to turn the flood of immigration to permanent national account. They thought only of today and not at all of tomorrow. Their chief ambition was to outrival the improvident class of lucky diggers in "knocking down" money. The public revenue had increased from £380,000 in 1851 to £1,577,000 in 1852. This expansion induced the authorities to institute an era of extravagant expenditure. The consequences were serious. The Budget of 1854 exhibited a deficiency of more than £1,000,000, and that of the following year a deficiency of almost £3,000,000; notwithstanding the fact that the revenue, all the time, had increased *pari passu* with the population. There was nothing to show for this large outlay. The money had been frittered away, and in 1856 the results of the Government's neglect to establish the people on the soil began to be felt. The lands were locked up in the hands of a few squatter kings, and the successful diggers began to [*begin page 68*] emigrate in thousands. Quite naturally they withdrew from a colony where they could not obtain anything they wished, except gold, to invest their gains among more sensible communities.

³

See *Errata*.



David Syme, 1856.

In order to illustrate the gravity of the land question in the early days a few quotations may be permitted, the length of which will be excused for their importance. The Rev. Dr. Lang, author of the standard *History of New South Wales*, in a letter to the *London Daily News*, published in the year 1854, observed:

"People will tell those going to Victoria that if they do not succeed at the diggings they can procure situations as clerks, shopmen, storekeepers, etc., but there is not one situation of these kinds for twenty who may wish to take them. They will next be told that they may take to pastoral pursuits. They must do so, however, either as masters or as men. In the one case they will find that every acre of land in Victoria is part of somebody's sheep station or cattle run; and that in order to get into that sort of occupation at

all, they must purchase the entire stock and station of some actual squatter who may be willing to sell out; and this may not be done for less than thousands of pounds, which will probably be altogether beyond the means of the great majority of immigrants."

William Howitt in his book, *Two Years in Victoria*, remarks:-

"If we had been told of a nation of lunatics, who [*begin page 69*] had a splendid extent of rich and pleasant country, which they were anxious to populate as speedily as possible, and who, while they sent over the whole world the most bewitching descriptions of its charms and its fertility, steadily refused, on the arrival of the people they wanted, to sell them a yard of it, to settle and farm on, we should say it was very lunatically correct and should enjoy our laugh at their insanity. But to admit that this nation is a nation of Englishmen, and that such a government is the Government of our colony of Victoria, is naturally a concession which makes us look very foolish and dreadfully ashamed of our countrymen in office; especially when we cast our eyes across the Atlantic and see how wide awake our relatives there are to this folly and how immensely they are profiting by it. They are drawing daily from us the sinews of a gigantic empire, which, in Australia, we are repelling by all the force of idiotic folly."

Howitt elsewhere in the same work goes into fuller details and writes with an indignation which is infectious:

"All local interests must fall before the general interests and the prosperity of the people; and the effect of the settlement of the colony would be incalculable on both domestic and foreign trade. In these vast territories, a vast population would create as vast a demand for manufactures. On the other hand, imagine 650 individuals holding the whole of this colony at a rental of 20,000*l.* for the [*begin page 70*] whole. Imagine these individuals holding each from 50 to 100 square miles, for some nominal sum of £10 or £20, and charging for their beef and mutton from 6d. to 9d. a lb - as much as the graziers of England get, who pay from £2 to £5 per acre, besides land-tax, county-rates, highway-rates, Church rates, poor-rates, property-tax, and a host of other imposts. The thing is preposterous, and makes the condition of the Australian squatter appear a fable and a fairy-tale! There never was anything like it from the foundation of the world: for the ancient patriarchs, with all their free-grazing flocks and herds, had no race of diggers and traders to eat mutton at 9d. a lb.

"And yet these gentlemen talk, and talk loudly too, of COMPENSATION! Compensation! For what? For the serious injury of having grown immensely rich at the public cost! They desire to be paid for all their - Improvements! *All their Improvements*, consisting, for the most part, of a slab hut in which they live, a few slab huts for shepherds and stockmen, and the posts and rails of a paddock or two or rather the mere cost of cutting and putting down, for the timber stood at hand, on the Crown lands.

"Will it be believed that, when these gentlemen talk of improvements, they are actually forbidden to make any? That the Orders in Council, by which they hold their runs, strictly prohibit their cultivating any more land than what is absolutely necessary for corn, vegetables, etc., for their estab- [*begin page 71*] lishments, but not to grow anything for sale or barter? Yet such is the case, and these conditions they have very exactly fulfilled. They

simply let their flocks and herds feed on the waste and grow rich upon them. Government has been the first to tempt them to break their engagements, or rather to absolve them from them, so far as it alone is concerned, and to sell hay and corn to the diggings: and in these cases the benefit of the squatter would appear wonderful to the ears of English farmers. These squatters, who give £10 a year for a run equal to an English county, sell hay at £60 a ton to the Government from its own waste lands. I have already spoken of that famous contract, by which a squatter on Charlotte Plains gives £10 a year for his station and lets to his landlord, the Government, one paddock out of it for £500 a year! Yet these are the gentlemen who are clamorous on the score of compensation. The answer lies in a nut-shell. They are allowed to purchase at £1 per acre the whole square mile on which their improvements stand. 'But,' say they, 'our runs are grown so much more valuable in our hands; and, in proportion to their present value, we ought to be compensated, if they are taken away.'

"The answer is: 'They are grown valuable, not by your *improvements*, but by the influx of a public; and it is that public which demands, and has a right to enjoy, the advantage. The gain has been yours; the occasion of it has been theirs. You *[begin page 72]* have *paid no more* on that account, and you have no claim to ask more now. It is the Government who may justly complain that they made a very bad bargain with you. Your £10 or £20 a year has still been all you have paid; while you have been benefiting tenfold. You have not even paid the headmoney on your stock.

" 'But,' say they, 'see what we have suffered in opening up and establishing this great wool-field; we are the pioneers of the forest.'

"The answer is:- 'You have suffered nothing. In the words of Scripture, "Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labours." The first race of squatters *were* great sufferers. They penetrated the, then savage, wilderness. Without houses or homesteads they had to encounter the elements in rude tents or under the mere shade of the gum trees. The natives attacked them and their cattle, and the troops of wild dogs seconded the natives. In the arduous life of watching and defending themselves against their numerous enemies, they were the victims of rheumatism, fevers and dysentery. When they had conquered the blacks and the dogs and made themselves comfortable homes, they found no customers for their meat; wool was low; and the crisis of 1842 put the climax to their ruin. They were obliged to give way and you stepped in; stepped into good huts and houses; large flocks at ninepence or a - shilling a head for sheep; ten or twelve shillings a head for cattle; about the same *[begin page 73]* for horses, which, in fact, were unsaleable at any price. Corn and hay were equally a drug. A friend of mine records hay at thirty shillings a ton; wheat, three shillings and sixpence a bushel; barley, half-a crown; oats, one and sixpence; butter, sixpence to ninepence a pound; beef and mutton, three halfpence per lb. He gave up farming in despair. See the colonial newspapers of 1842. In June, 1843, it was announced that by boiling down for the tallow eight to ten shillings per head could be made of sheep, including tallow, skin, and wool. From that moment your profits began to advance and have continued, till you now command, through the advent of the gold, twenty-five shillings per head for sheep, valuation price on giving up stations; £12 to £15 per head for cattle, and from £50 to £150 for horses! Macgubbins and Macfiggins - the real pioneers - retired from the field, ruined in purse and constitution; you have had nothing to do, but

on their ruins sit still, let your flocks and herds graze, and grow fat with them. Is that a case for compensation?"

"Now, you are aware that I have no prejudice or ill-feeling against the squatters of this colony. Quite the contrary. As a class, so far as I have become acquainted with them, I have a high respect and esteem for them. They are, for the most part, gentlemen of good family and education. In private life they are simple and unostentatious, kind and hospitable. But private regard and public right are *[begin page 74]* two things. It is not these gentlemen who are to blame, but the Government. Human nature is everywhere the same. Put into men's hands a good thing and they will grasp it firmly; the better it is, the tighter."

Howitt paints a striking word picture of the trials and hardships of immigrants seeking land:

"This land question is a great question; and will have yet to be stoutly fought out in the colony. We shall find another opportunity to state fully its history and general bearings; here we now only notice it as it presents itself to the mind of the digger; and we cannot do that more clearly than by simply repeating the remarks which we have heard made by American diggers. They, of course familiar with the liberal and sagacious system of their own country, are proportionately astonished at the features of ours here. I have heard numbers of them say, who had made money at the Victoria diggings, 'We like this country, and we should not be at the trouble of going all the way back to the States, if we could settle here on anything like equal terms; or if, indeed, we could settle at all. But see how they treat us.

" 'No sooner do we land than we find ourselves pulled almost limb from limb in Melbourne to make all they can out of us. They seem as if they would chop us up and make money of us. California was nothing to it. We have to pass through the purgatory of Hobson's Bay, through boatmen, lighter *[begin page 75]* men, wharfingers-all clutching at our very life with their unheard-of demands; and escaping them, we fell into the hands of the Melbourne tradesmen. And surely, never in the history of the world did such a system of ruthless rapacity show itself as in Melbourne. We assure you that it struck dismay to our hearts; and never will they cease to remember the harpies of the capital of Victoria. Whether we wanted to lodge, to refresh at an inn, to purchase anything at the shops, it was all alike; and Government had not done a single thing to facilitate our escape from the place. There was no quay for landing our effects; and we had to wait a month to get them out of the ship. Once clear of the town, the same utter neglect of Government met us on the roads. Roads! there was not a yard of road - but a frightful bog, a mile wide, and seventy miles long. The carriage of our effects up to Bendigo was at the rate of £150 per ton.

" 'Once there, with weary limbs and empty pockets, before we could dig up a grain of gold the police were down upon us for £1 10s. each for licences. We did not object to the licence, that was quite just and fair; but we thought it hard to be dragged off to the camp at a moment's notice, and expected to pay before we had had a single day allowed to get the means. Here, however, we found a true gentleman, Mr. Commissioner Gilbert, who, seeing that we were honest, paid the money for us out of his own pocket, and gave us ten days to refund it. God *[begin page 76]* bless him! That was

the only drop in our bitter cup on landing in Victoria. It nerved our hearts again, and we got gold and repaid him in less than a week.

"Well, we have done pretty well and would stay here; but, strange to say, the people who allured us hither by their praises of their Colony, won't allow us to settle here - they won't sell us land. If we land in America with £100 in our pockets we can have 400 acres of land from the Government for that money, and we can select it where we will, and the Government will make a road to it. But here we cannot get it at all. We have been to the Commissioners of Crown Lands, and they say there is none to be sold. So we must go home again.'

"Is not this a beautiful system? Is it any wonder that Americans are astonished when they come into a fine country, all lying open and waste, and find nearly its whole extent of 93,000 square miles, or 60,000,000 acres, handed over to 1,000 squatters for a mere £20 a year each? That, with a vast population pouring into the country, and who want to settle, there should be more than 60,000,000 of acres still unsold, and yet not one acre to be had? That 1,000 men, for the small aggregate sum of £20,000, should hold the whole from the public, who would pay millions of money for it, and establish a population upon it, trading to the amount of millions every year with England? That each single man, for £20 a year, shall enjoy on an average nearly 93 square miles or 60,000 acres?'

"What, it may be asked, have these men done to merit this wonderful favour? How have they become the particular darlings of the British Government, that they should be thus actually overwhelmed with good fortune? The only answer is that their merit and what they have done is, that they managed to get on the blind side of the English Government and persuaded it that Australia was such a poor, barren country, and so utterly unfit for agriculture, or for anything but grazing a few sheep and cattle upon, that the Government, with the same sagacity which lost America, was actually glad to make it over bodily to these obliging squatters who were willing to take it off their hands."

The brothers Syme were quick to perceive that the future of the Colony was imperilled by these conditions. They realized that the bone and sinew, the enterprise and spirit, whose presence, employment and fixity could alone render prosperity and national progress possible, were slipping out of the country in a wholesale fashion. They made serious endeavours to arrest the exodus. The land question was at the bottom of the trouble; that and the cupidity of the squatters. Seeing this they struck at once at the root of the evil and began a campaign against squatterdom in the columns of *The Age*, which was unceasingly waged until the people of Victoria had recognized the danger, and parliament, in obedience to the public will, had placed the inhabitants in possession of their rights. *[begin page 78]*

The history of that great struggle is charged with momentous interest to Australians and, although no blood stains soil its records, it was contested with furious bitterness on one side and grim unswerving determination on the other.

In order to be intelligible it will be necessary to explain the rise of the squatter in Australia. Squatting derived its being from certain Orders-in-Council - issued by the British Government in March 1847 and promulgated in Australia in October of the same year.

These Orders-in-Council took official cognisance of the absence of population in Australia to occupy the lands of the Colonies and, because of it, provided for the tenure of those lands for a specified limited time by the few local residents who had sufficient capital to begin the business of grazing sheep and cattle on the natural grasses. The advantages of such a system at that time were real and obvious. It was better in every respect that the natural herbage should be converted into beef, mutton, wool, tallow and hides than rot uselessly or be wastefully consumed by bush fires. Therefore, the temporary occupancy of the soil for the purpose of utilizing valuable produce, which otherwise would have been lost, was not objectionable in itself, nor was it objected to by the small community then forming the population of the State.

Of these Orders-in-Council the handful of men living at the moment in Victoria immediately *[begin page 79]* availed themselves. They took up immense pasturages under lease or licence at a nominal rental and proceeded to utilize them for grazing. Four years later the influx of population, which began under the influence of the gold discovery, completely put an end to the condition of things that had been assigned as the sole grounds upon which squatting was permitted at all, namely, the unpeopled and desert state of the country.

Had the rulers been honest, public-spirited statesmen, they would have abolished squatting there and then as a matter of course: for there was present in the Colony an abundance of people to occupy the land on a national scale as freeholders and agriculturists. The peopling of Victoria had in fact begun, and the population would soon have attained to millions if there had been no misgovernment to check the flow of immigration which had so marvellously and so auspiciously set in.

But instead of throwing open the soil on easy terms for agricultural settlement, the Colonial authorities continued to hand it over to the squatters, in open violation of the conditions ~~prescribed~~ prescribed⁴ by the Orders-in-Council. As a consequence of official indifference, by the year 1856, more than one half of the surface of Victoria had sunk noiselessly into the gulf of squatterdom. Forty-two million acres of the public estate, comprising the best lands of the Colony, were locked up in the hands of a chosen few. These men were not settlers in any sense. They *[begin page 80]* were birds of passage. It was not to their interest to improve the lands they held, or to put them to any but the usage of nomadic grazing. A wilderness was their proper field of action. They wanted but little labour and that of the cheapest sort. Their ambition was to keep the country unsettled and undeveloped, and to shut out the people for ever from the land, save as serfs.

Such was the state of affairs when the brothers Syme bought *The Age*. The people who could, and would gladly, have developed its resources were denied the opportunity of doing so, and were compelled for lack of that opportunity to dig for gold, to emigrate, or to starve. As the goldfields were no longer providing sufficient employment for their energy, they were departing in a steady stream. It was the self-appointed mission of David Syme and his brother to teach the unthinking masses the suicidal folly of submissiveness to the unjustifiable policy of the State; to prove to them that they had the power, by concerted action, to wrest from the squatters the monopoly of the soil, and force them to restore the public estate to the usufruct of the nation.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the magnitude of the task which these courageous journalists undertook. Had they been guided by self-interest, they would never have essayed it. The machinery of Government was almost exclusively in the hands of the squatting class. The popular cause was unrepre- *[begin page 81]* sented and held in

⁴ See *Errata*.

contempt, not only by the authorities, but by the powerful commercial interests which directed the channels of advertising and all else that could make or mar a newspaper. It would have paid the brothers and strengthened the fortunes of *The Age* to have swum with the current and have allowed the masses of the people (as they were in fact disposed to do) to sink into a condition little removed from bondage and slavery. But there was in David Syme and his brother the stern Scottish blood of a race of fighters, which, for ages past, had never tamely submitted to a wrong or countenanced, whatever happen happened,⁵ even the appearance of injustice.

The brothers perceived a great wrong being done to their adopted country, nobody opposing it. They saw the rights of the people being sacrificed to the advantage of a class. The instincts of their race forbade them to suffer its consummation. Disregarding their personal interests, nay in clear defiance of them, they did what they conceived to be their duty, and *The Age* threw out a challenge to the squatters that rang throughout the Colony.

"The land must be unlocked," was the burden of their message. "Squatting is inconsistent with the national development. The population must be admitted to the soil. The land must be cultivated and brought within the poor man's reach; it must be rendered accessible, even to those who have nothing to pay for it except the sweat of *[begin page 82]* their brows. It belongs to the people. The squatters who now hold it and, without the shadow of a title, presume to claim it for their own in perpetuity, are robbers and public enemies."

At that moment the country was preparing for the first general election under the Constitution by which responsible government had been granted by Queen Victoria to the newly-made Colony of Victoria. The Constitution opposed an almost insurmountable barrier to the immediate realization of Liberal hopes; for it prescribed a property qualification of £300 a year from real property to make a candidate eligible for the Legislative Council, and £300 a year for the Legislative Assembly; and it furthermore required that no man should be permitted to exercise the franchise for the Upper House unless possessed of an income from land amounting to £100 per annum.

The Age vehemently attacked these undemocratic restrictions. It announced a popular programme comprising five cardinal points:

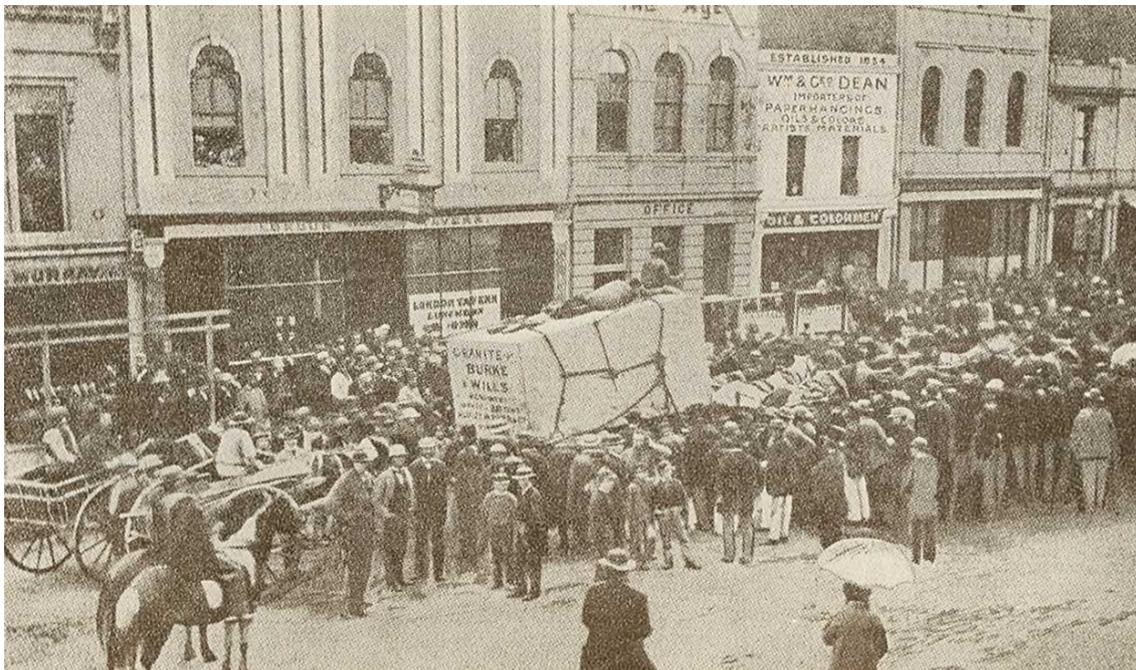
1. Electoral reform on the basis of manhood suffrage and the abolition of property qualifications.
2. The abolition of squatting and the opening of the public lands to free selection by the people.
3. No compensation to the squatters.
4. The abolition of State aid to religion.
5. Compulsory, free, secular education.

[begin page 83]

The masses were not slow to respond to so vigorous a championing of their interests. Politicians professing Liberal views began to stump the electorate. Amongst the more prominent were Mr. John O'Shanassy and Mr. Charles Gavan Duffy. The latter, who had been a prominent member of the Young Ireland party and a member of the House of Commons, had arrived in the country a few months before from Great Britain. His fellow countrymen and co-religionists were so determined to have him in the new Parliament that they collected sufficient funds to overcome the difficulty of the property qualification. On the 20th of August, 1856, they presented him with the title-deeds of a

⁵ See *Errata*.

small estate they had purchased for him. Mr. Duffy promised to support *The Age* policy and he was returned. Sectarian influences, however, largely swayed him, and it was alleged that he had been "nobbled" by the Conservatives and that his secret sympathies were with the moneyed classes, the land-holders and the merchants.



Old "Age" Office, Elizabeth Street.

The elections were held early in November. The results were such as might have been looked for. A fair sprinkling of avowed Liberals was returned to the Lower House, including Mr Ebenezer Syme, James McCulloch, James Service and Richard Heales, but in the Upper House, owing directly to the heavy property qualification, the successful candidates were all representatives of the squatting and mercantile interests. *[begin page 84]*

Mr. Haines immediately formed a Ministry of staunch Tories and proceeded to govern the country on the old lines. The Opposition, led by O'Shanassy and Duffy, took up the role of Ministerial critics; and, under the regis of *The Age*, proclaimed their resolve to widen the franchise and bring the influence of the popular will directly to bear upon projected legislation.

Early in 1857 Gavan Duffy brought in a Bill to abolish property qualifications for membership and carried it in the teeth of the uncompromising opposition of the Government.

This political victory was the more significant because the question had been stoutly contested by the forces of Conservatism. The vested interests had spared no efforts to convince the people that they were asking for something downright revolutionary in desiring to have the doors of Parliament opened to the representatives of the poor and rich alike. The people, however, declined to listen to these selfish counsels. Awakened to a proper understanding of their rights they gave unmistakable evidence of their determination to exact them, and, when the vote was taken, a majority of members crossed to the Liberal side.

But the Haines Ministry did not resign. It continued for some weeks longer to occupy the Treasury Benches, finally to meet its doom on the Immigration Bill. This was a

measure designed to flood the colony with pauper European immi- *[begin page 85]* grants brought out to lower the price of labour in the interests of the merchants and the squatters. It would probably have been carried, in spite of the widespread indignation which *The Age's* exposure of its real purpose had excited, for the Government had a large following in both Houses. But Mr. Haines had rashly obtained on account of immigration a vote of £150,000 more than he intended to spend, and the mystery in which this colossal grant was wrapped procured his downfall. Mr. O'Shanassy moved a vote of censure and the Government was ignominiously defeated.

Mr. O'Shanassy thereupon attempted to form a Ministry, but failed. The task was then taken up by Mr. James McCulloch, who succeeded in forming a coalition Administration with Mr. Haines. This Government was, of course, far from being Liberal, but it was compelled by the great body of public opinion to pass, late in 1857, a Bill providing for universal manhood suffrage in all subsequent elections to the Assembly.

Mr. Haines next endeavoured to gain the good will of the people by introducing a Land Bill which he strove to persuade the electors would permit of the agricultural settlement of the country without detriment to the squatters. *The Age* instantly denounced the measure. Having laid bare its underlying scheme to confirm the squatters in their usurpation of the public estate, it demanded that the whole question of land settlement should be *[begin page 86]* postponed until after the election of a reformed Parliament.

Since the existing House had been elected by less than half of the adult male population of the Colony, the justice of this proposal was almost universally admitted. Mr. Haines, however, ignored the public demand and forced the measure through the Lower House. But his trouble was wasted, for the squatters in the Upper House were not satisfied with his compromise, greatly as it favoured their supposed rights. They were short-sighted enough to throw it out and, over-reaching themselves, unwittingly served the popular cause to their own ultimate destruction.

A little later, on the 23rd of February, 1858, Mr. Haines was unexpectedly defeated on a proposal to increase the number of members of the Assembly, and he resigned. Mr. O'Shanassy and Mr. Chapman then formed a Government, with Mr. Duffy as Minister of Lands, which procured the enactment of a small instalment of electoral reform. This Act reduced the duration of Parliament from five to three years, enlarged the number of members of the Assembly to seventy-eight, and diminished the property qualification of the electors of the Council.

The first Constitutional Parliament of Victoria was dissolved on the 24th of February 1859. It had not touched the land question in the smallest degree, but by broadening the franchise, as it were in spite of itself and in defiance of the wishes and *[begin page 87]* interests of the majority of Tory members who composed it, had prepared the way for a settlement of the problem by the straightforward declaration of the people's will. The Symes had good reason to be satisfied with their efforts. In the short space of three years *The Age* had succeeded in arousing the masses from their apathy; it had compelled the people to realize the danger of the undisputed political domination of the mercantile and squatting classes; and it had cultivated a healthy public opinion, determinedly resolved on legislative reform and economic progress.

The Age now embarked upon the second stage of the struggle. It sought to secure the election of a Parliament that would throw open the lands to settlement and give standing-room in the young Colony for farmers and for other people who were neither squatters, not merchants, nor diggers - the three classes of which the community was till then almost exclusively composed.

The Age began the campaign by repudiating the claims of O'Shanassy to lead the popular Cause. Reviewing his work in the last Parliament, it showed that he had broken his pledge to pass an electoral Reform Bill, extending the franchise on a basis of population and that he had passed, instead, an Act retaining the abuse of a property qualification. He had also brought the Liberal party into disrepute by placing a number of illiterate men on the roll of Justices of the Peace, thus sacrificing the interests [begin page 88] of the country and straining his patronage to secure votes.

At the same time Gavan Duffy was attacked for his equivocal attitude on the land question. By a searching analysis of his professions, *The Age* declared that his aim was to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds; or, in other words, that he proposed to confirm the squatters in their illegal privileges and to throw open only poor and limited tracts of country to agricultural selection.

The Age then proceeded to prove to the people the danger of compromise with the squatting interests and the folly of electing representatives who were not whole-hearted advocates of right. The immediate outcome of these stirring appeals was the formation of Reform Associations, Democratic Leagues and Land Conventions in all the constituencies.

The squatting and mercantile classes now for the first time perceived that their long-established supremacy was seriously menaced. Their nascent dislike of *The Age* and its proprietors flamed into ardent hatred. They took all the means in their power to suppress the journal and to ruin the two Scotsmen who had dared to champion the democracy. They immediately formed themselves into a secret league, the members of which were pledged not to advertise in or subscribe to, *The Age*, but to support the Conservative organ. The brothers Syme did not view these dispositions with equanimity. They [begin page 89] were poor men and the withdrawal of the advertisements reduced them to depend on the circulation of the journal for the continued existence of the paper - a prospect which most journalists would have considered hopeless. But the Symes' answer to the challenge of their adversaries was the prosecution of the struggle with redoubled energy. In another chapter more will be said on the ever increasing difficulties against which *The Age* had from this point onwards to contend. The subject more properly pertains to the Protectionist campaign (of which it is an integral feature) on which David Syme presently embarked; and it will, therefore, be dealt with under that head.

It should be remarked, however, that the squatters did not only attempt at this period the financial ruin of *The Age*. They did their best to besmirch the reputation of its proprietors for straight forwardness and veracity. They spread abroad a rumour that *The Age* was not really owned by the Symes but by the squatters themselves, and they pretended that in publicly advocating the unlocking of the lands in *The Age* they intended to lead the democracy to disaster and ruin.

There is no doubt that these tactics did the paper serious injury and considerably checked the growth of its influence with the masses. There is also no doubt that the slander assisted the re-election of Mr. Duffy and Mr. O'Shanassy, who made the utmost use of it, and whose chances of [begin page 90] return had been reduced to a minimum by *The Age's* strong indictment of their maladministration. The fact is the brothers Syme had not yet had sufficient time to prove to the country the stuff of which they were made. The public knew that they were capable, but it also knew that they were poor. Judging them, therefore, by the customary cynical standard, it considered that the story might be true and that, perhaps, the Symes had sold their pens to the squatting interests.

But not all the citizens of Victoria were misled by the squatters' cunning invention, and the second Parliament, which assembled on the 13th of October (the product of the first trial of manhood suffrage), contained a fair proportion of successful democratic candidates committed to further *The Age* policy. These members, headed by Mr. William Nicholson, assailed the O'Shanassy-Duffy Government with a motion of no confidence immediately the House assembled and, after a prolonged debate, carried it by a majority of 56 votes to 17. The Government thereupon resigned, and the Governor, Sir Henry Barkly, commissioned Mr. Nicholson to form a Ministry.

Mr. Nicholson assumed office in the 29th of October, 1859, and Mr. James Service, who had accepted the portfolio for Lands, immediately prepared a Land Bill to give effect to the popular will as advocated by *The Age*. The leading principle of this measure was to abolish the old system of *[begin page 91]* sale by auction of the public estate and in lieu thereof, to survey and throw open for selection some 4,000,060 acres to bona-fide agricultural applicants. The Bill, however, was not permitted to pass in its original form. Almost every member of the Legislative Council was opposed to it, and the O'Shanassy and Duffy faction in the Assembly fought it tooth and nail. For nine months Mr. Service strenuously contended with the Conservative forces, but, when, at the end of July, 1860, the Bill was returned from the Council amended out of recognition, he resigned. He had wished to enforce the Orders-in-Council so that the people might be put on the land in defiance of the recalcitrant Council, but the Ministry was afraid to support him. His resignation, however, left the Government benighted and a few days afterwards, on August 10th, Mr. Nicholson followed his example.

Mr. Ebdon, Mr. O'Shanassy and Mr. Heales in turn unsuccessfully attempted to form a Ministry. Meanwhile popular feeling grew inflamed. The populace fell under the sway of a group of reckless demagogues who held a mock Parliament daily in the Eastern Market. Persuaded by these incendiaries that there was a Parliamentary conspiracy afoot to uphold the squatters' interests and cheat the people of their rights, the mob at length burst all bounds and on August 28th invaded Parliament House, during a sitting of the Chamber. The frenzied rabble broke in a door *[begin page 92]* and, driving back the policemen on duty, proceeded to demolish the building and to assault the Members who opposed them. The Mayor was hastily summoned and the Riot Act was read. A large body of mounted police ultimately dispersed the crowd, but not before several serious casualties occurred. *The Age* denounced this disgraceful demonstration as being not only untimely and wicked, but likely to prejudice the popular cause and postpone the people's triumph on the land question.

In March of this year (1860), Ebenezer Syme's useful career came to an untimely end. He died in the prime of his manhood in the heat of the great struggle for political freedom and the vindication of the cause of the democracy, in which his able pen had been so notable a factor. Thenceforward the whole burden of the journalistic campaign which he had initiated fell on David Syme's shoulders. David felt the loss of his brother very keenly, but he made it his high purpose that the people of Victoria should not suffer from his private misfortune, and the condition of the State today bears eloquent testimony to the capacity with which he addressed himself to his patriotic charge.

David's first act, on assuming control of *The Age*, was to make a stirring appeal to the mercantile classes to assist the people in getting justice. In the leading article, published on the 2nd of July, 1860, he painted the condition of the Colony and suggested the proper steps to take for its improvement:- *[begin page 93]*

Nothing doing in town or country trade - business utterly prostrated - stagnation everywhere and in every branch of industry - doubt, uncertainty, vague fears pervading the entire commercial community - apprehensions of

the Snowy River rush - perplexity of opinion as to whether this latter disturbance of our population from its wonted abiding-place will make or mar the internal trade of the colony-gloomy anticipations of the future - each and all of these depressing conditions and causes are painfully and palpably at work, at the present moment, to throw people in Melbourne and at the goldfields into "the horrors." And at the same time the insolvent list goes on increasing from day to day, without any prospect of its ceasing to appear each morning in the journals, where it regularly presents itself as if to indicate the slowly but surely ebbing tide of our former prosperity. This is a lamentable state of things. But it is a state of things which we ourselves have laboured arduously and persistently to bring about. The insensate disregard which the mercantile public have ever evinced of the actual condition of the great consuming and producing section of our community located at the goldfields, is being avenged most fully at the present moment. So long as the miners continued patiently to dig and delve in the bowels of the earth for the golden wherewithal to purchase their imported goods, the merchants and storekeepers of Melbourne observed the most stolid indifference to the wretched, unsettled, homeless condition of their customers on the goldfields. They were content to let them toil on for the production of the precious metal, which they-the dealers, wholesale and retail - were certain ultimately to gather into their own possession. They paid no more regard to the deprivations and sufferings, the discontent and the "misery of hope deferred," which the mining population endured in the search for gold, than the sutlers and camp followers of a great army in the field ever cared for the wounds, sickness, and death, which decimated the ranks of the combatants in the organized ranks of bloodshed and battle. So long as they found customers for the canteen, they little heeded those miseries of the troops, from which they were themselves exempt. Just so it has been with our mercantile men. So long as the miners traded away their last grain of gold-dust for the necessaries of life, which the commercial purveyors brought within their reach, the men of trade viewed with indifference *[begin page 94]* the wretched and impoverished condition of the toilers at the diggings. It was in vain that the latter, on every occasion that called for it, and in every way that their disorganized and unsettled state of social existence admitted of made marked demonstrations of their desire to obtain a sure footing in homes upon the soil. It was in vain that they "agitated" for an alteration in the restrictive and monopolist land-system, which put the attainment of homesteads beyond their reach. It was in vain that both in Melbourne and in the mining townships the more earnest of the population repeatedly assembled in public meeting and demanded, as a matter of right to themselves, and as a matter of immediate interest to all-traders, owners of fixed property, and everyone concerned in the permanent welfare of the colony - to have, without delay, put within reach of all classes, a ready and practicable means of engaging in settled and reproductive industry upon the unoccupied public lands. Those who were appealed to for co-operation on the subject heeded not the appeal. They turned a deaf ear to all remonstrances and demands of the kind.

We now see the "first-fruits" of this ungenerous, this unnatural, this short-sighted neglect of the primary duty of good citizenship. Gradually the energies of the miners have become relaxed. Dispirited at finding themselves no better off at the end of the seventh year of their gold-mining toil than they were at the outset, they do not enter into the quest for gold with that zest and enterprise which formerly characterized their exertions. Each "new rush," as it gradually dies out, leaves scattered at various points

over the face of the country a residuum of poverty-stricken, disappointed, disgusted, despairing men, who in vain look around them for one ray of hope, and find it not. They ask where all this marching to and fro, and camping, and toiling to no purpose, is to end? And they can find no reply. With a population in such a mood of mind, it is no wonder the yield of the precious product which absorbs their labours begins to dwindle down. Hope no longer nerves their arms nor stimulates the spirit of discovery within them; and many an undiscovered goldfield, which under happier auspices would have been brought to light, remains unknown and unworked. It is little wonder, then, the yield of gold diminishes apace. But diminished yield of gold brings with it disastrous consequences not only to the miner, but to the *[begin page 95]* trader and to the owner of lands and houses. Little gold means little trade and few tenants - it means insolvency, it means the depreciation of property, it means a general decline in the prosperity of the whole community. And all this we now witness practically and in full operation. Trade and the sources of trade are utterly paralysed. Prosperity has fled the golden colony; and with gaunt poverty have come the most hideous of the vices which it has ever generated - fraud, falsehood, trickery, gambling schemes of mining adventure, commercial demoralization. The traders assemble in solemn conclave to concert measures of redress, and take counsel together with the Head of the Government; but the only measure which would produce any tangible and lasting improvement in the existing deplorable state of things, is not so much as even hinted at. It seems never to have occurred to these unthinking merchants that the speedy settlement of the land question in a way favourable to the poor man would wholly change the present very unpromising aspect of affairs in the country.

Do they require still more disastrous "signs and wonders" to make them conscious of the impending collapse of the glittering but unreal prosperity of a community like ours, founded by, and resting solely upon, the evanescent wealth of a mere gold-mining country? Let them at once - unless they are wholly lost to reason, and if they would prevent the total wreck of their declining fortunes - let them unite with the more earnest and thoughtful of their fellow colonists in exacting, even at the eleventh hour, from the Legislature, a land system which will give hopes and homes to the working classes, and retain them in thriving contentment within the borders of Victoria.

If they do, success will attend their efforts. Let them not continue to entertain the strange and servile notion that their "respectability" prohibits their assembling in public meeting, like true and free-born men, to demand of "the powers that be," as a matter of justice and of sound policy, that the hard-handed workers for daily bread should be domesticated on the soil, in order that there might at length be established in the country a fixed basis for industry, commerce, and prosperity - that there may be, in fact, a permanent foundation for the stability of society. In the event of such a settled state of things they would have no reason to dread an exodus across the border. The miners with homes might go for a time, but *[begin page 96]* they would return with their golden gains to improve and extend their homestead lands, and enrich the country by the profitable outlay of their augmented capital.

Still more urgent appeals were made to the traders, but in vain, and the result was the dangerous *emeute* already referred to.

Three days after the riot Mr. Nicholson was prevailed upon by the Governor once more to assume office. He appointed a Committee of both Houses to sit in Conference upon the disputed points of the Land Bill, and 250 amendments of the original measure were agreed to. The Bill then became law on September 13th, 1860, whereupon the Assembly was prorogued. *The Age* promptly condemned the Act as "a misshapen emasculated thing" which scarcely altered the existing system at all. "It is a sham which offers no facility to industrious men of small means to settle on the soil. It is of a kind to satisfy no person or party. It raises hopes in the popular mind only to produce public disappointment and vexation. It has damaged the political reputations of all concerned in it. It leaves the squatting incubus which presses so heavily and ruinously on the material interests of the community untouched. It places the lands at the mercy of the speculator and jobber."

Within two months every criticism on the Nicholson Land Act was justified. Immense tracts of the finest and most fertile areas in the Colony were taken up under its provisions by rich squatters [*begin page 97*] and speculators. The people, on the other hand, who honestly wished to settle on and till the soil were denied the smallest opportunity to do so; for the squatting interests had maintained in the Act the pernicious principle of sale by auction instead of free selection pending survey - the original intention of the authors of the measure. When, therefore, the Nicholson Ministry met Parliament in November, 1860, it suffered the consequences of its ineptitude and was defeated by the popular party.

Mr. Nicholson was succeeded in office by Mr. Richard Heales, who brought in a Bill to provide for free selection before survey. Pending the passage of the measure, Mr. Heales made available for settlement and cultivation a considerable area of fertile land by virtue of a somewhat recondite clause in the Nicholson Land Act, which allowed the Minister to grant "Occupation licences" of a limited size to small farmers. This device had been suggested by *The Age* as a means of immediately effecting, to a certain extent, the public will and of enabling a few settlers at all events to acquire holdings. But the adoption of this expedient was the signal for a furious outcry by the squatters. The Legislative Council asserted that the granting of occupation licences was an illegal straining of the Act, and the squatters sent a petition to the British Government praying that they should be confirmed in the absolute possession of their runs. The answer to the squatters' petition arrived [*begin page 98*] early in the following year in the shape of a despatch from the Duke of Newcastle, who was at that time Colonial Secretary. This despatch informed the squatters, firstly, that since 1847 (by virtue of the Orders-in-Council which permitted them to "squat" on, the public lands), they had been in exclusive and undisturbed enjoyment of the grazing tenure of those lands and of all the other advantages the British Government had intended to give them; secondly, that, if they had not acquired leases, as they might have done, the fault was their own and not the Government's, because they had not complied with the antecedent conditions; thirdly, that in spite of their dereliction, their squatting privileges had been respected by the authorities as leases; fourthly, that they had been in possession for fourteen years, the maximum period allowed by the Orders-in-Council even for pastoral leases; and, finally, that the squatters had no cause to complain, as they had obtained everything which they had any right to expect.

The despatch, in fact, took pains to let the squatters know that squatting had had its day and was not applicable to the new order of things in the Colony; and that the Victorian Legislature must be freely permitted to substitute a new mode of Land disposition suited to the needs and desires of the population. It proved to the squatters that they had no hope of assistance from the British [*begin page 99*] Government in the

assertion of their supposed rights, and it sounded the death-knell of the squatters' Land monopoly.

The despatch was received with consternation by the squatters and by the people with the greatest joy. But the squatters still possessed the power to delay and defeat its purpose, and they did not hesitate to use it. Every attempt made by Mr. Heales to secure the passing of his Land Bill was combated by the squatting representatives in both Houses. At length, after a protracted and bitterly-contested struggle, the Reform Government was defeated on 13th June. The Governor granted Mr. Heales a dissolution and an appeal was made to the country.

As was to be expected, the squatters fought the election with extreme bitterness. Their privileges were menaced and they resolved to make a tremendous effort to retain them. The future of the country mattered nothing. They were blocking settlement, preventing the increase of population, obstructing political and industrial progress. But they were enriching themselves at the expense of the common weal, and that seemed to be the only thing they cared for. They began the contest with an insidious appeal to the people on economic grounds to stay the work of destroying £30,000,000 worth of vested pastoral interests in the doubtful experiment of introducing an agricultural population. *[begin page 100]*

David Syme was at his best in answering this attack. He showed that when the squatters boasted of the extent of the riches they had acquired under the Orders-in-Council, they simply adduced further reasons why these Orders should be repealed for the public good. He pointed out that cries of vested interests and of the destruction of accumulated wealth had always and everywhere been put forward by monopolists. The abolition of the slave trade had been opposed on similar grounds by the Liverpool and Bristol merchants. Some of his phrases may be quoted:

"It is the essential quality of improvement to imperil and frequently to destroy that on which the improvement is effected. Once, however, ascertain that the substitution is conducive to natural progress and neither the extent nor importance of the threatened interests is of any consequence."

"The squatting interest is not deserving of the least consideration. It is a monopoly, and it can only be perpetuated by the perpetuation of monopoly."

"The magnitude and growth of the interest is the strongest possible argument for its suppression, inasmuch as its overwhelming nature makes it incompatible with the growth of other industries."

This manner of plain speech carried all before it. The squatters' manifesto was universally derided and *The Age* policy everywhere ascendant. In despair the former resorted to bribery, using *[begin page 101]* their enormous wealth in a wholesale purchase of votes; nor did they scruple to countenance personation on an extensive scale. As a result they secured the return of several candidates pledged to serve them; though they were not always successful in hiding the traces of their handiwork. With a House thus packed, the Heales' Government was defeated.

Mr. Heales was succeeded by Mr. O'Shanassy, and Mr. Gavan Duffy returned to his old post as head of the Lands Department, on November 8th, 1861.

Mr. Duffy had contested the election as an advocate of the people's cause and had pledged himself to devote all his energy to the abolition of the squatting system. He

assumed office with the support of a large section of the community, attracted by his advocacy of liberal reforms, but it soon became apparent that he was at heart a Conservative. On the 18th of December he brought in a Land Bill which failed to make any provision for the termination of the squatters' tenure. It was an attempt to please all classes. It first preserved the squatters in their illegal privileges as to the bulk of their estates, and then sought to placate the public by reserving for selection picked blocks here and there of agricultural land for farming purposes, amounting in the aggregate to about 2,000,000 acres. The conditions of selection were, that selectors should be required to pay £1 per acre by eight yearly *[begin page 102]* instalments of half-a-crown and to execute certain improvements on their holdings, the conditions, however, being only mandatory on the original selectors and not on their assigns.

The Age immediately expo-sed the defects of the proposal and strove to secure its defeat. But this at the moment was impossible. In 1862 the Bill became law, but was hardly placed on the Statute book before all of the gloomy predictions of *The Age* were verified. The failure to make the improvement obligations mandatory on the selectors' assigns played into the hands of the wealthy monopolists. No sooner had a poor farmer selected a piece of land than he was approached by a squatters' agent with an offer of purchase which his indigence forbade him to refuse. It paid the squatters handsomely thus to buy back their runs. But that was not all. They themselves entered the field as selectors by "secret servants who came to be known as dummies"; and as these men acquired selections in their own names which they subsequently transferred to the squatters, the people were swindled out of large tracts of the national estate in flagrant violation of the spirit of the Act. In consequence of these operations within a very short time some 2,000,000 acres reverted unimproved to the squatters, who thenceforth held this land by an unassailable title.

Informed by *The Age* of this infamous squandering of the public estate the indignation of the people burst *[begin page 103]* into flame, and at length, on the 19th of June, 1863, the O'Shanassy-Duffy Ministry resigned. Thereupon Mr. James McCulloch, at that time a true Liberal, animated with a genuine desire for reform, was sent for by the Governor. He succeeded in forming a fairly strong Cabinet, with Mr. Heales as Minister of Lands. Five years, nevertheless, elapsed before the land question reached any degree of finality. But this was not the fault of the Government. As will be shown in another chapter, the period was occupied with a stiff Constitutional struggle between the two Houses. Mr. Heales brought in several Land Bills devised to amend the Duffy Act on sound lines, but each was contemptuously thrown out by the squatters in the Legislative Council, who made any progress impossible. All that the Government could do in the meanwhile was to suspend the operation of the Duffy Act and thus prevent further spoliation of the people's estate. It did this on the suggestion and advice of *The Age*. The monopolists stormed and prayed by turns; it was said that capital was leaving the country and that the Colony was going to ruin in consequence. But the Ministry ignored these dismal prognostications, and at length Mr. James McPherson Grant (who had succeeded Mr. Heales, on the death of the latter, as Minister of Lands), on the 28th of November, 1864, introduced an Amending Land Bill which, although far from perfect, conceded in plain terms the principle that settlement should precede aliena- *[begin page 104]* tion of any description. The Council, at first, could not be prevailed upon to entertain the notion. The Bill passed to and fro several times between the two Houses. Finally, however, a conference between the Chambers was arranged, and the Council agreed to accept the measure with certain amendments favouring the squatters; and on the 28th of March, 1865, it became law.

The main provisions of the Grant Act were, that, each selector should be obliged to reside continuously on his selection for three years, and that he should effect improvements to the value of £1 per acre, before he could acquire the right to be

granted a freehold title on a further payment of a like sum. Meanwhile the selector was granted a lease for seven years of his allotment at a rental of two shillings per acre, and was permitted to select up to 640 acres on those conditions. This Act was the nearest approach to a liberal measure which had yet been wrung from the Legislative Council; and, during the next four years, it enabled 13,000 poor farmers to obtain possession of and cultivate 786,000 acres. But the Act had this radical defect: it forced poor farmers, during their period of probation, to pay a rent of two shillings per acre to the Crown, while wealthy squatters were permitted to retain their vast runs at a rental of twopence.

Against this injustice *The Age* indignantly declaimed and, during the next four years of contention between the Chambers, although constructive legis- *[begin page 105]* lation was temporarily hopeless, David Syme never ceased to plead the popular cause. His untiring championship at length produced effect. In 1869, during the temporary occupancy of the Treasury Benches by the McPherson Ministry (the Legislative Council in the meanwhile having been shorn by the constitutional struggle of much of its former powers of retarding Liberal legislation), a Land Act was passed which, for almost a decade, fairly satisfied the aspirations of the people.

This Act fixed the period of probationary holding at three years at a rental of two shillings (as formerly) per acre per annum; but it provided that the rental should be accepted as part payment of the freehold of the land if the improvement and residence conditions were carried out. It reduced the size of selections from 640 to 320 acres and it threw the whole of the Colony, not previously alienated, open to selection before survey. In a word the Act embodied all the principles and legal machinery for agricultural settlement which *The Age* had for more than fourteen years untiringly demanded in the public interest, and was a Vindication of David Syme's far-sighted policy. Between 1869 and 1878, 11,000,000 acres of agricultural land were acquired by small resident pastoral and farming settlers; and the area under actual cultivation increased to 1,400,000 acres, producing enough to feed the Colony and to leave a large surplus for exportation. During that period scores of towns sprang into existence *[begin page 106]* and became flourishing centres of commercial and industrial activity as the direct product of the settlement created and fostered by the Act.

For the next twenty years it was not found advisable to make any vital alteration in the Land Law. Towards the close of that period, however, it was noticed that a steady aggregation of large estates in the hands of wealthy squatters had been quietly proceeding, which threatened ultimately to re-convert the Colony into a series of depopulated sheep walks. Many causes operated in this direction. The great and steady increase in population had enhanced the value of land all over the Colony, and numbers of selectors, who had acquired holdings at £1 per acre, were tempted to accept the large profit circumstances had placed within, their reach.

By the end of 1898 it was found that, of the 23,000,000 acres alienated from the Crown, an area of only 3,000,000 acres was under cultivation. The small farmers still possessed about 13,000,000 acres; but, as more than 16,000,000 acres had been actually selected, it was evident that fully 3,000,000 acres had already reverted to the Sheep Kings, to the manifest disadvantage of the State, whose highest interests required that the whole arable area of the Colony should be put to its best use and support men rather than sheep.

David Syme's views on the question are embodied in the following article published in *The Age* on the 29th of December, 1876. *[begin page 107]*

The most recent apology that has been put forward on behalf of the large estates by the organs of the land monopolists is that large estates contribute just as much to the general prosperity of the country as small, and that their owners, by the consumption of the luxuries which they furnish for themselves, put into circulation the profits they derive from their possessions, and to that extent are the employers of labour, and the promoters of the industrial arts on which it lives. And at first sight this proposition is sufficiently specious to recommend it to the superficial. Money is money: The purchasing power of a shilling is the same whether it is in the pocket of Dives or of Lazarus; and if Dives spends his income of £70,000 a year on objects of art and luxury, he does nothing more nor less than Lazarus, who dissipates his earnings of £70 a year. But this is only a superficial way of looking at the transaction. The question is not whether the rich man furnishes employment to the poor by the expenditure of his income, but whether the general prosperity of the community would not be increased if his income were divided and shared in by others. This question is now answered in the affirmative by political economists, with an emphasis that leaves no doubt about it. The poor gain their livelihood, as a matter of course, by ministering to the numberless wants of the rich; but, says one writer on the subject - "there has been no more preposterous and no more common fallacy than the belief that the greater the consumption of luxuries the better for industry." As Mr. Dudley Baxter remarks in his work on the Taxation of the United Kingdom: "Rich men are not the only employers of labour. Every workman, with respect to the articles that he consumes, is an employer of the producer. A thousand workmen, each with £70 a year of earnings, are as large as and far more constant an employer than a single millionaire with £70,000 a year income." If this is the case, what becomes of the theory which has been so sedulously presented to the Victorian proletariat within the last few months, that the monopoly of land and the wealth which it entails in the hands of a few is not an evil to be deplored and legislated against, but a blessing which the friend of industry ought to contemplate with uplifted hands and eyes? If it be true; as any one upon a moment's consideration must see, that it is true, that the wealth of a country does not depend upon the number of its wealthy men, it cannot be also true that it is *[begin page 108]* a matter of indifference whether the means of accumulating wealth, such as are offered by the possession of the soil, are in the hands of a few or of many. The owner of a hundred thousand acres will build a palatial residence for himself, and stock it with costly furniture and pictures, and pay wages to a crowd of lacqueys and stable-boys; but if the land were divided between the lacqueys and stable-boys they would consume more, and most probably produce more, than their master singly, and to this extent would provide more remunerative employment for labour.

But perhaps we shall be told that they would not be necessarily larger producers. In fact, the apologists of the large estates systematically tell us as much. A man with a large property at his disposal can do more with it than a man with only a small one, because he can spend more upon its cultivation. In the first place it is clear that those who argue in this way argue on the assumption, not only that it will be to the interest of the large estated man to turn his property to the most profitable account, but that he will always and necessarily consult his interest and do so. This assumption, however, is utterly disproved by experience. There is a satiety point to the rich man beyond which he will not exert himself to go. He is contented to put sheep upon his land rather than people, not because the

sheep are a greater source of wealth to him than the people would be, but because they return him the maximum of wealth that he cares to enjoy. We see by the last mail that the Duke of Sutherland is only just beginning to turn to account the deposits of coal in his estates in Staffordshire. If these estates had been in the possession of a man in possession of fewer sources of wealth of other kinds, does anybody suppose that their mineral treasures would have been left unutilised till now? And if they had been utilized, will anybody say that the country generally would not have been the gainer by it? But if there is one thing which society has been educated up to by modern political economy more sedulously than another, it is that large estates are neither so productive to the individual nor so beneficial to the community as small ones. It is a very trite observation that the concentration of landed property in a few hands has been the prolific source of revolutions all the world over. It was the source of the revolution in France; and if it is not the cause of a revolution in England it will be because the English *[begin page 109]* people will win by the pacific force of public opinion what the French had to fight for. It would be easy to fill columns with extracts from writers widely differing from each other on other social and political subjects, who nevertheless agree thoroughly as to the extraordinary effects produced by the abolition of land monopoly and the subdivision of the lands in the former country. But we may refer to the well ascertained fact that in this subdivision, and in the substitution of a class of peasant proprietors for the seigniorial lord, is to be found the source of that marvellous recuperative power to which it owes its rapid recovery from the terrible disasters inflicted by the war with Germany. The peasant proprietor is not a consumer of luxuries. He does not build baronial halls, and furnish princely incomes to artists and actresses, while the deer browse in the solitude of the manorial forest, and the partridge and pheasant make employment for the inglorious industry of half a dozen gamekeepers. But he works his plot of ground as though his life depended upon it, and turns the forest into a garden for his children and dependents. And the consequence is written in the history of his country, and stands for ever a crushing rejoinder to those superficial people who argue as though it were a matter of no consequence and no difference whether the soil of the country were parcelled out into the hands of a few monopolists, who spent their incomes on the luxuries of life, or whether it was in the possession of the many, who had to cultivate it for a living, and in doing so put in motion numberless reproductive industries to supply their needs.

David Syme faced the new phase of the land problem with customary incisiveness and energy. It was one of his dearest ambitions to populate the country permanently with a productive and prosperous yeomanry. He had assisted thousands of poor men to acquire homes and farms. Numbers of those men had been senseless enough to hand back to the squatters the land which David Syme had enabled them to possess. But he refused to be *[begin page 110]* discouraged, and allowed nothing to move him from his purpose. He saw that the aggregation of large arable areas in the hands of the sheep graziers was not only acting as a bar to farming immigration, but driving the dispossessed farmers out of the Colony in thousands. Between 1895 and 1898 Victoria actually lost 50,000 adults, mostly of the farming class, by emigration. David Syme saw that unless this process of aggregation were stopped the further progress of the colony would be barred. Plenty of good farming land must be available for sale and settlement to tempt yeoman farmers into Victoria to replace those who had emigrated. But how was such land to be obtained? The squatters held the bulk of the best arable land of the Colony. They would neither cultivate it nor part with it. True, there was still an area of 33,000,000 acres in the possession of the Crown; but most of it was of an

unattractive character and unsuitable for agriculture. David Syme thought out the problem and decided that the highest good of the State demanded the subordination of pastoral to agricultural pursuits.

His paper, therefore, advocated that the Government should take power to repurchase from the squatters large blocks of farming land, not being used in cultivation; and that the blocks, thus rescued from the wilderness, should be cut up in small farms for resale and closer settlement. Sir George Turner's Ministry adopted this suggestion, and the principle was embodied in the Land *[begin page 111]* Act of 1898, under which a Closer Settlement Board was afterwards appointed by the Bent Government to carry it into practical effect.

This Act for a while did something to remedy the mischief and the Closer Settlement Board (by purchasing and cutting up several big estates) settled on the soil a considerable number of genuine yeoman farmers. The system carried, however, an unforeseen evil in its train. The presence of the Government as a buyer gradually caused an undue appreciation of land values all over the country. As a result of this inflation, settled farmers began once more to sell their holdings to the squatters and to emigrate to other States, where land of equally productive capacity could be purchased at a lower price. The Government's policy in course of time was thereby practically nullified. It certainly attracted farming immigrants from abroad; but as fast as it settled these on the land, Victoria lost a corresponding proportion of her old farmers, and the farming population instead of increasing showed signs of diminishing. At all events between 1900 and 1907 it remained practically stationary. Meanwhile, the price of land has steadily advanced and, generally speaking, good farming land in Victoria is now beyond the reach of all farmers save those possessed of considerable capital.

Such was the position of affairs in Victoria at the date of Mr. Syme's death. The Government in power (under the leadership of Mr. Thomas *[begin page 112]* Bent) was, supposedly, a Liberal Administration, but it had strong leanings towards the large landowning class. The force of public opinion obliged it to pursue the policy of providing land to the people for Closer Settlement on easy terms; but its manner of carrying out its trust continued the appreciation of land values in the interests of the jobber and the squatter. Faithful to his life-long principles, David Syme was the Government's resolute opponent in its schemes against the democratic interest. Experience had convinced him that, in order to inhibit the aggregation of large estates and to ensure the settlement of the country by a numerous, small yeomanry, it was necessary, on the one hand, to prevent the inflation of land values by the States' purchasing operations and, on the other, to compel all landowners to put their land to its best productive use. His latest proposals were worthy of his great constructive reputation. He urged that the Closer Settlement Board should be invested with unfettered powers of compulsory purchase, and that a tax on unimproved land values should be imposed of such a nature as to make it unprofitable for any man to hold cultivable land without turning to full account its productive capacities.

The consequences of enforcing such a policy are obvious. Compulsory purchase would save the State from being fleeced by unscrupulous landowners, and the Land Tax would at the same time *[begin page 113]* bring down the price of land to its intrinsic productive worth and force all the arable land of the State into cultivation. The unearned increment would go, not as now, to the speculator and the idle, wealthy landlord, but to the State; and the entire community, rich and poor alike, would reap the benefit.

Chapter V

The Beginning of Protection

David Syme's statecraft - His national ideal - The necessity of manufactures - The industrial condition of Victoria in, 1859 - The importers and the squatters - The established order attacked by *The Age* - The principles of Cobdenism assailed and refuted - The duty of the State - First effects of David Syme's advocacy of Protection - Ridicule - The laughter ceases - The question studied by the people - Converts - The importers become alarmed - The trials of *The Age* begin.

David Syme is remarkable among Australian statesmen for the clarity of his vision of the future and the wide reach of his endeavours. He held no brief for any particular industry. His aim was to promote under State regulation a coincidentally proportionate development in all spheres of human activity; and the goal of his policy was the creation of a nation which should be able to supply the whole of its needs and be independent of other countries for its means of subsistence. He no sooner began to be assured of the ultimate success of his campaign against the squatting monopoly than he foresaw in the fruition of that reform the unfolding of another problem. The unlocking of the land would provide employment [*begin page 115*] for thousands of people, but that would not be sufficient to lay the foundations of permanent national well-being. At the moment, the whole interests of the State were in the hands of two classes—the squatters and the importers. Agricultural settlement of the land would, doubtless, have added to these a third class of farmers, but a country given up purely to pastoral and agricultural pursuits would afford no scope for men of artistic and constructive talents. The capacities of a people are multifarious. Some men are adapted for indoor occupation, others for outdoor.

David Syme perceived that a society confined to a limited number of allied staple industries which sought to force all men, however diversified their natural and acquired abilities, into the same mould, apart from the economic waste involved, would only be an imperfect and impermanent thing. He reasoned that society could only approximate perfection in so far as it carried diversity of occupation to its fullest possible development, so that all the talents of its members might be utilized to the general advantage and advancement. He was faced with the fact that, in the years 1858-59, more than 45,000 persons had emigrated from Victoria. Many of these would have remained had there been land to occupy and cultivate; but a large proportion were trained artificers and artisans, to whom land would have been useless even although acquired gratuitously, [*begin page 116*] and whom no society could hope to retain as its citizens unless it could offer them remunerative employment in the manufacturing arts and industries. These men had come to Victoria attracted by the gold discoveries. In nine years £100,000,000 worth of gold had been extracted from the soil and the population had increased from 97,000 to 1,000,000. But in 1858 the gold yield slackened and the inevitable reaction set in. As the goldfields gave out, hordes of homeless men were thrown out of their vicarious digging occupation and had nothing to do. The land was locked up in the hands of the Shepherd Kings and local manufactures were not. Thousands of people were speedily brought to destitution, and the Colony was burdened with a population for a large part of which it had no means of sustenance.

From its inception the Colony had run an uninterrupted course of Free Trade. Free imports had prohibited the possibility of industrial expansion. Several manufactures had been started by enterprising spirits, but the importers had strangled them at their

birth. The importers were bringing in foreign-made goods and food stuffs to the value of £15,000,000 a year in exchange for Victoria's gold, wool, hides and tallow. The gold-digging population and the pastoral employés had to give up this money in order to live, and it passed into the pockets of the importers and the squatters. The Colony was visibly enormously rich in its *[begin page 117]* resources, but the land was a primeval wilderness. Ship-loads of flour poured in from abroad while tens of thousands of men who could have grown the wheat and ground it into flour stood idle in the streets - the helpless victims of the two monopolist classes. The importers and the squatters divided the interests of the State between them. They filled the Assembly, they dominated the Council. They preached and rigidly enforced the gospel that the Colony was theirs and all that it contained, and that it was their divine right to enslave the masses by land monopoly and foreign trade for ever.

David Syme had long foreseen that a society dependent exclusively on raw products was as a house built on sand which must topple over at the first blast of misfortune. That misfortune arrived when the gold-yield suffered its first decline and, at a blow, brought the people to the brink of ruin. The crisis gave him the opportunity he had been waiting for. At that moment nobody, not even the veriest pauper among the workless and destitute, had ever dreamed of questioning Free Trade. Cobdenism was the established order. It was the orthodox and universal fiscal religion of the Colony, indeed of all Australia. No voice had ever been raised against it. A well known Free Trade historian of those times, Mr. Henry Giles Turner, remarks in his *History of Victoria*:- "In the early 'sixties no educated *[begin page 118]* man. . . would have cared to pose as an advocate of Protection to native industry which was so soon to sweep everything before it at the polls. If they thought about it at all it was as a gloomy memory of desperate times in the old land where its monopolistic tendencies drove the labouring classes to the verge of revolution; where it was a synonym of the most hateful form of the oppression of the capitalist and was broken down and routed by the Parliamentary champions of the working-man."

That is a faithful picture of public opinion in Victoria at the moment David Syme stood forth as the prophet of a new fiscal creed; and presented as it is, by the pen of an avowed Free Trader and a hater, of Protection, it furnishes convincing testimony of the courage of the man who dared, alone and single-handed, to urge Protection to native industries as essential to the commercial progress of the community.

David Syme began the greatest struggle of his career soon after his brother's death. One morning *The Age* contained a leading article referring to the critical commercial condition of the Colony, inquiring as to the causes which had produced it and suggesting a new fiscal system as the proper remedy. This was the first unequivocal Protectionist article in any Australian newspaper.

If we produce, in abundance, the raw materials of any manufactures, we should shape our internal policy so as to encourage *[begin page 119]* the domestication of these manufactures amongst us, unless there is some inherent predisposing cause, permanently or temporarily, in the condition and circumstances of the country itself and of the people who inhabit it, which (predisposing cause) would prevent or render unprofitable the establishment of these manufactures. Thus, we produce tallow, wool, and hides in abundance. It is, then, a question for our consideration whether there is anything in the present state of Victoria which should cause its inhabitants to set a ban upon any attempts here to manufacture these commodities respectively into cloth, leather and the various articles into the fabrication of which tallow largely enters - such, for instance, as sperm candles, patent lubrication for railway-carriage axles, and other similar

products; - and thus give an impetus to the enjoyment of domestic skill or "native industry," as the phrase is, in the handicraftsman's arts of tailoring, boot-making, and other occupations of the kind. We cannot perceive that there is anyone predisposing cause at work in this country to prevent us making such an attempt, and certainly none which should induce us to put a special ban upon that attempt.



David Syme, 1861.

Nevertheless that is what we do, when we wholly expose any effort on the part of our fellow-colonists here to localize any of those branches of industry referred to, to the overwhelming competition of the multitudinous, inferior, low-priced (not cheap) articles, made of refuse material especially for the Australian market, with which we are inundated from the crowded factories and workshops of Great Britain. By this system of naked competition, our manufacturers or mechanics are prevented from even

making a beginning in the work of opening up new sources of industry amongst us. A ban is put upon the attempt at the very outset; and in a few short years hence, if this prearranged practice of national industrial abortion is continued amongst us, the people of Australia will be as utter strangers to all scientific skill and practical dexterity in the arts and manufactures of highly civilized nations as are the Bedouins of Barbary, or the Tartars of Central Asia. Is that a desirable result? Is it desirable that, instead of carrying with us the arts of advanced civilization from the parent State in Europe to this remote land, we should purposely, and as it were with "malice aforethought," upon quitting the shores of that parent State, cast behind us and abandon the knowledge and the practice of those great industrial *[begin page 120]* arts, which have constituted and still constitute the sole groundwork of her characteristic pre-eminence in trade, commerce, and wealth? Is it not on the contrary rather desirable that we should endeavour to perpetuate amongst us, in our new home, that civilizing and enriching skill and trained industry which is a part of our national inheritance, and that we should try rather to rival than to fall behind that European progress in the midst of which we ourselves were bred, and up to the tone of which it should be our ambition, as it is for our profit, to train our children in this far-off land?

But do we reap any present profit as a community from this abandonment of all fiscal protection to domestic industrial enterprise? We do not. It we had made a serious effort some six or eight years ago, to fix population permanently in this country, so that the great bulk of the immigrant masses brought here by the gold discovery should, in a short time after their arrival, have felt themselves settled and "at home" on the soil of Victoria, a commencement on a large scale would undoubtedly have been made to domesticate those mechanical arts and manufactures already referred to in the land of gold. And had that been the case there is no one can without absurdity assert that either individuals or the community at large would have gained in sending away ready money to Great Britain for slop manufactures, instead of expending that same money in the purchase of industrial fabrics produced here in the Colony by resident capital and skill. The articles generally with which the Victorian market has been deluged during this period, would, have been dear at any price. They were, and they continue to be, of a kind all but worthless, becoming unfit for use with a month's wear-and-tear; and however low in original price - they are a source of constant and therefore excessive expenditure, and their purchase-money in the end turns out to have been but a profitless and wasteful outlay. This is no exaggeration; it is the simple fact, which is obvious and patent to all. The vast sums, then, which have been disbursed by the people of Victoria during the last six or eight years, in the purchase of these slop importations from Great Britain were, in great part, money wasted; and none, except a few importers and "middle-men" in the trade, has benefited by the outlay; whilst the great bulk of the colonial community - the consumers - have all suffered from it, both in pocket and in general con- *[begin page 121]* venience. This large amount of hard cash has, in fact, been laid out by the colonial community for the purpose of employing the labour and swelling the capital of Europe and America, at the very time when the demands of our own resident colonial labour for employment were wholly unsatisfied, and when, to find temporary employment for a fraction of it, we are obliged to look abroad for foreign capital to be advanced to us on loan at high interest. Thus, neither; as a community possessing one general public interest in common, nor as a body of

individuals in a separate capacity, can it be correctly said that we have gained in anywise by the import system which has been let loose on this country. At the same time it is certain that from a political, social, and national point of view, our loss has been immense, seeing that by this "free and vicious" system or fiscal misrule, we have, for the time being, shut the door to the possibility of commencing any new channels of industry, in which the spare capital and unemployed skill and labour of the colony might both expend and expand their present and future growth, adding layer after layer of skilled productiveness and solid prosperity to the wealth, commerce, and greatness of Victoria.

But there are other branches of industrial occupation, for which Australia, by its soil and climate, is in an essential manner fitted, but which we have not the less neglected, as completely as if this magnificent country were a stony wilderness, incapable of cultivation or of yielding those peculiar crops which are the offspring of semi-tropical climates. This country is in an especial degree suited to the production of the choicest wines, brandy, oil, malt-drinks, preserved fruits, vegetable dyes, and other similar articles of commerce; and instead of directing our attention to producing these commodities ourselves from our own soil, and exporting them as being articles which are always and everywhere marketable, we contentedly send away our ready-money to foreign, countries to purchase articles of the same kind far inferior to what we could make ourselves; and we even stimulate, by the absence of all but a nominal import duty, this foreign trade, to the utter prohibition of the rise and growth of that domestic commerce and export trade for which we possess such advantages, and which could be made so great and sure a source of individual gain and national wealth.

Is there either Wisdom or common sense in such a course? *[begin page 122]* Is it a course that we ought to continue one moment beyond that in which it was brought under our notice? Above all, at the moment when the settlement of population upon the soil is at length on the eve of being accomplished, should we forego the opportunity which this new turning-point in our career offers of establishing a fiscal system which shall cherish and protect, instead of annihilating, our nascent and national internal industrial enterprise?

From that day the economic issue was fearlessly and steadily pursued. Quietly, unostentatiously, but plausibly, David Syme depicted the structure of a fully-developed and well-ordered community. He showed that national development requires manufacturers and traders, as well as farmers and pastoralists. It is a question at bed rock of the stewardship and good husbandry of the national estate. The national well-being demands not a lopsided but a symmetrical development. A nation of specialists, whether of farmers or importers or manufacturers, lacks the pre-requisite and fundamentally essential condition of permanency which can only be supplied by a society of varied enterprise and multifarious employments. Its prosperity is absolutely dependent upon its intercourse with foreigners. If this intercourse should by any means be dislocated disaster is the inevitable consequence. Such a nation is the predestined victim of its own misfortunes, of the misfortunes of its friends, of the malice of its rivals and the caprice of strangers.

Victoria possessed a pastoral industry; the unlocking of the land promised her a farming *[begin page 123]* industry, but she needed a manufacturing industry. How was she to obtain the last without a Protectionist policy? David Syme showed that a restrictive tariff would create a town population to support the rural population, to the

mutual benefit of both, since the artisans would consume the fruits of the fields, giving the farmers in exchange the produce of their labour. He showed that the best market the farmers could have is the home market, because it would substitute for the uncertain demand of foreigners a steady unfluctuating demand for the produce of the soil. The establishment of manufactures, made possible under the fostering care of customs duties, would enable every man desirous of earning his living to earn it in a manner suitable to his training and character by furnishing scope for the diversity of talent and disposition. It would give a choice of employments to the rising generation, the sons and daughters of farmers, who without it would be condemned to follow the profession of husbandry. It would stimulate the immigration of good citizens who would flock into the young Colony to assist in expediting the national development, once assured that, on arrival, they would be able to find employment for their technical skill and experience.

With patient effort David Syme persuaded the people to realize the need of manufactures to the national progress. He painted Victoria as it was *[begin page 124]* and as it might become, and contrasted the poverty-stricken dependent Colony that existed with the Colony of his enthusiastic vision- "a nice-balanced industrial community, composite, stable and progressive; a self-contained, self-supporting, independent nation." How might that engaging dream be made real? And he answered his own question. "It is the duty of the State," he declared, "to crush the land monopoly and at the same time to discard Free Trade and the policy of free imports, which have brought the Colony to the verge of destitution, and immediately to provide inducements for the people to engage in manufactures. It is, furthermore the duty of the State to support the manufacturing industries once they are established against the devastating attacks of unrestricted foreign competition and to sustain them to maturity with a consistent and vigorous policy of national protection."

It is difficult at this date to convey anything like an adequate presentment of the convulsion into which these articles threw the community. In order dimly to appreciate the excitement they occasioned we have to remember that society in Victoria as then constituted has no present parallel in any British State. It was of a particularly primitive character. It was composed of men of a strongly adventurous disposition, not necessarily lawless, but yet nervously impatient of control and frankly contemptuous of convention- *[begin page 125]* ality. The vast majority of the colonists were Britons who had emigrated 'to Victoria, not only to better themselves, but because they despised the sheeplike passivity of their fellow-countrymen who endured poverty, dependence and oppression as if these were in the order of things. The conditions of life in the old land had driven them forth, a band of passionate pilgrims, to seek a more tolerable environment at the Antipodes. They were, in good truth, the cream of the British race, ideal pioneers and soldiers of fortune in the fullest sense; sturdy, courageous, self-dependent and vigorous nation-builders, with hearts to feet, with souls to dare and do, with minds quick to see and to plan, and hands strong to execute.

It was these men and their like that David Syme urged to inquire into the origin of the depression of the Colony and for their own sakes to find a way out. They had no leader. They were enslaved by a false economic doctrine, which they had accepted as unthinkingly as children and which had bound them under the heels of the coterie of land monopolists and importers who were exploiting them for their own benefit. Moreover, they did not realize they were enslaved. They were too simple to perceive it. All that they saw was their growing indigence, but its cause they were unable, unaided, to discover.

David Syme supplied them with the help they lacked, and at first his reward was universal ridi- *[begin page 126]* cule. What! Preach Protection when Britain had just

cast off the trammels of that stupid system! His audacity was really amusing. Men laughed until their sides ached. The laughter was so contagious and David Syme's presumption so obviously and pathetically ludicrous, that the monopolists were not in the least alarmed. Instead of rending him they rallied him in their press on his exquisite conceit and vanity. "Who is David Syme?" they asked. "Has John Stuart Mill, has Adam Smith ever heard of him?" Then they bade Cobden in mock heroics beware of his Antipodean opponent.

David Syme knew how to wait - how to work. He proceeded doggedly with his appointed task. He began to analyse the Free Trade tariff of Great Britain and to show that it was a sham; that it actually gave ample protection to most of the industries, except agriculture, which the United Kingdom wished to preserve and foster. He proved that Adam Smith had admitted the superior merit of a home to a foreign market, and that John Stuart Mill had emphasized the necessity of all young countries establishing new industries and securing their growth by means of a protective tariff that would repress importations and encourage domestic manufactures. The laughter ceased by and by, and was followed by a period of painful silence and strained attention.

The Colony, *nolens volens*, was compelled to *[begin page 127]* put on its thinking cap. Public men began to make inquiries and to study the question seriously. Very soon they were wondering what they had found to laugh at a few weeks ago, and the whole community was presently passionately engaged in investigating the subject. Suddenly a public man of note stepped into the arena and announced his impending conversion in a letter published in *The Age* which has since become famous. "Free Trade sounds well," he observed. "But is it more than a sounding phrase; a mere theory? Is it a science? Is it anything more than a mere expedient of the domestic policy of a State?"

David Syme replied in an article which contained the following pregnant sentences:- "The object of industry, or that labour by which men live, is not the greatest development of foreign trade; it is the comfort, wellbeing, and moral progress of the masses of each separate nationality. Under no circumstances therefore can it be the duty of any Government to give up the care of the labour that is of the labourers, of the country."

This article completed the conversion of Mr. Graham Berry and cast the Colony into a ferment of revolt against the established order. During the next few weeks conversion followed conversion. A dozen Protectionist leagues sprang into existence, and the Protectionist campaign was fairly launched.

The trials of *The Age* almost simultaneously *[begin page 128]* began. The land monopolists and importers knew whom they had to thank for their threatened downfall. They knew whom they must crush if they wished to preserve their privileges. For a little while they were pre-occupied with uttering invectives, but presently they settled down to business - and their weapon was that which at a later date became known as boycott. *[begin page 129]*

Chapter VI

The Personal Issue

The cause of Protection dependent on David Syme - "David Syme must be destroyed" - *The Age* is boycotted - Attempts of importers to bribe David Syme to alter his policy - Paper forced to exist on its circulation - Price reduced - circulation increases, influence grows - The rushes - Importers conspire with the O'Shanassy Government to ruin *The Age* - Government joins in the Boycott - Brings in a Libel Bill expressly designed to gag *The Age* - Further efforts to stem the tide of Protectionist opinion - Triumph of *The Age*.

At first the fight was between physical rather than political forces. A Tariff Reform Committee was appointed and began its work of inquiry without delay, but all the interests in the struggle centred around David Syme. It was agreed that, without his championship, the hopes of the democratic cause must perish in their cradle. He alone possessed the knowledge of affairs requisite to confound and refute the pretensions of the oligarchy and really believed in the efficacy of the reform principles he advocated. For the masses were so accustomed to accept the ready-made opinions of their masters that, although touched to their hearts by the spectacle of a man not of their own class striving so strenuously and so unselfishly for their emancipation, *[begin page 130]* they hesitated for a time to submit to his guidance. The rapidly-increasing distress of the Colony, however, as the gold yield diminished, compelled the democracy to put aside its fears and to listen to David Syme. Perceiving this his enemies began to organize. The great mercantile, financial and pastoral interests met together and determined to put him down.

"David Syme must be destroyed! "Their plan was simple. They controlled all the great channels of advertising in the State: cut off this source of supply, then, and his paper must perish of inanition. They struck hard and without warning. They withdrew every advertisement within their control and confidently expected that *The Age* would not live a month. In a single day the journal shrank to half its size and was constrained to depend exclusively upon its circulation.

This was one of the darkest hours of David Syme's career. The wonderful vision he had conceived of building up a strong, self-supporting nation by fusing all conflicting interests in the fire of unselfish patriotic purpose, through the enlightenment of education and the application of a new industrial and economic science to the conditions of the country, was tumbling in pieces round his head. He saw his own hard-won fortune threatened and the cause of the people extinguished for ever in the ridicule of his triumphant adversaries. Then came temptation from the foe. "Give up your campaign against *[begin page 131]* the land monopoly, abandon your Protectionist ideas," their emissaries said, "and you shall have back your share of the advertisements."

It must be remarked, injustice to the conspirators, that they did not wish to ruin David Syme for the mere pleasure of witnessing his downfall; indeed they were content to help him to fortune, provided only he would serve them, whether with or without the sanction of his conscience.

Picture the grim-faced Scotsman listening to these disinterested appeals to regard his bread and butter. He heard them calmly. He was never impatient, this man who had

learned in his dour and unlovely childhood the true philosophy of waiting. And he heard them courteously. It was never his way to give wanton insult; and he knew how to discriminate. He knew there was a modicum of sincerity and perhaps some real human kindness at the back of these appeals. Therefore he listened both patiently and civilly and replied that he "would think over the matter!" But his mind was made up. He could have sold his paper to his opponents on advantageous terms and wooed Fortune again in some other field of effort, a matter of ease and certainty to a man of his strenuous nature and ability. But he had put his hand to a particular plough; he had undertaken to plough a particular furrow; the task was barely begun and the interests of thousands of helpless men and women were involved in its completion. David Syme considered the consequences, [begin page 132] crushed down the temptations, and shook his fist in the face of fate. He would fight on. He was not at the end of his resources.

The Monopolists had boycotted his paper and forced him to depend on a declining circulation - for the circulation of a paper must wane when it contains no advertisements. Well, he would depend on his circulation and thrive by increasing it. He reduced the price of *The Age* from sixpence to threepence, thus bringing it more readily within the reach of the multitude, and nailed his colours to the mast in a series of articles on the land monopoly and the fiscal issue.

Even his worst enemies admit him a heroic figure in those days. The circulation of *The Age* increased sufficiently to enable it with the most rigorous economy to exist independently of the boycotters. David Syme, however, was compelled to reduce his staff and to be at the same time his own editor, leader writer, and manager. He was forced to toil like a galley slave - and to work eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, With his back to the wall, fighting for more than life, he plodded on, a prodigy of physical endurance and mental productivity. His leaders, conceived in turmoil and scribbled down on odd bits of paper in moments snatched from his meals and in the intervals of business cares, display a fire and a passion, a love and faith in the democracy, that stir the blood even now. And there is not one of them which does not charm conviction with its [begin page 133] plausibility and defy criticism with the cold precision of its logic. His unselfishness pointed the selfish greed of his adversaries and held it up to public scorn. He proved to the people that the, squatting monopoly was bound, unless destroyed, to prevent the settlement of the Colony. He showed that, without Protection, the Colony would lapse into its primeval state.

"The merchants and importers," he declaimed, merely see here a host of mouths to be filled with bread made of imported flour, of backs to be clothed with imported slop tailoring, and of feet to be shod with imported shoes; and they look only to the profits to be made out of these imported articles. It never occurs to them that the day will come when the toiling consumers of these imports will no longer furnish them with a profitable market; when the army of gold-seekers, wearied of battling with blind chance and ill-luck, will draw off and decrease in numbers. They seem to think that the miners will be ever young, ever thoughtless, ever hopeful and untiring in the search for gold and that they, the men of commerce, will ever continue to gather in the golden profits of the miners' toil. The expectation is short-sighted and stupid. It is a deceptive and mischievous mirage."

He had hardly spoken before circumstances proclaimed him a true prophet and hammered home the moral of his teaching. Great "rushes" ensued from place to place of the half-desperate, landless [begin page 134] diggers; and each "rush left them more bankrupt of energy and money. Government was obliged to come to their assistance to start relief works to keep them from starvation; and to bring back to the settlements thousands who were left stranded and destitute at the scenes of the rushes. Then the

exodus set in and, in a few weeks, 12,000 men left Victoria for New Zealand and 8,000 for New South Wales. This loss of population caused hundreds of insolvencies; the last appearance of prosperity fled the Gold Colony; and trade and the sources of trade were utterly paralysed.

The people now seriously inclined to listen to David Syme. They had had painful proof of the folly of disregarding his warnings and were disposed anxiously to follow his advice. Observing the growing influence of *The Age*, and the rapid adoption by the masses of the new fiscal creed it inculcated, the monopolists resolved upon another effort to humble Syme. An instrument to their hands was John O'Shanassy, who, between 1860 and 1864, was the dominant force in the Assembly.

John O'Shanassy hated David Syme for sectarian reasons and because *The Age* had frequently exposed the hollowness of his Liberal professions. The squatters and the foreign traders easily induced him to further their plans; and, in December, 1862, at their solicitation, in defiance of a resolution of the House, his Government ceased to advertise in *The Age*. The Administration thus became a party to [\[begin page 135\]](#) the commercial boycott which the Monopolists had relentlessly waged for two years against the Liberal journal. Syme replied by reducing the price of his paper to twopence, and prosecuted the fiscal controversy with renewed vigour and enthusiasm.

Nor did he rest silent under the injustice of political oppression. He attacked the O'Shanassy Administration with that most deadly of all weapons ridicule - and so merciless were his quips, so penetrating his jibes that, on the 17th of April, 1863, O'Shanassy sought to rid himself of his enemy by bringing in a Bill which made it a criminal offence to edit as well as to print or publish libellous matter; which constituted the mere writing of a libel irrespective of publication a misdemeanour, and which compelled all editors, printers and publishers to give security to the Government to the extent of £500 against all possible libels.

The scheme was so manifestly intended to suppress *The Age*, or alternatively to gag it, that the country rang with indignation. O'Shanassy was not brave enough to face the storm. He dropped the Bill - but persisted with the boycott, and *The Age* frequently appeared thereafter with only a column or two of advertisements. But the circulation of *The Age* advanced at a bound; it became the Bible of the masses and, although anything but a financial success, it survived the storm.

Failing in their latest design to starve him into [\[begin page 136\]](#) submission, the Monopolists employed less questionable tactics. They used their wealth to pour into the country vast floods of Free Trade literature, and subsidised a number of lecturers to preach the Cobdenist doctrine in the highways and byways of the land.

An argument that was levelled at this juncture (and for a time with telling effect) against Syme's Protectionist proposals concerned the cost of Protection. The importers asserted that the effect of a comprehensive Protective Tariff would be to raise the price of goods all round against the consumer to the full extent of the customs charges. They also declared that local production would be surcharged to the amount of the duties. Taking these assumptions as incontestable verities they proceeded to condemn Protection as a "drag," "burden," "fraud," "slavery" and "robbery," and warned the people that the pestilent doctrine was intended to tax the entire community for the benefit of the few manufacturers whom Protection might encourage into a "febrile industrial existence."

David Syme admitted that Protection might for a time involve a sacrifice, but showed that the admission was not to the detriment of Protection. It was obviously to the public

interest that industries should be planted in Victoria, and he argued that the initial expense of starting them would soon be recouped. Next, he attacked the logic of his critics. He analysed their conclusions and *[begin page 137]* proved that they had omitted two essential factors, namely, the effect of internal competition created and fostered by Protection, and the chance that the foreigner might pay the whole or part of the evidence from all parts of the world to support his views, he showed that the ultimate effect of all successful domestic manufactures established by Protection had been to lower the price of goods: and that internal competition had not only destroyed monopoly but reduced the price of the article to the minimum of reasonable profit on the capital employed. He then predicted that the effects of Protection In Victoria would be firstly, to create local production; secondly, to create internal competition; thirdly, to compel the foreigner to pay the whole or part of the duty as a toll for the privilege of entering the market; and finally, for all those reasons combined, to reduce the price of goods to the consumer.

Syme lived long enough to see his predictions verified and vindicated by experience. Moreover, in 1895 a board of public experts examined the whole Protective system of Victoria and made a report to the Government in which the following sentences occur:-

"On the vexed question of whether goods have been made dearer or cheaper by the imposition of Protective duties, we have a, deal of evidence. It is an established fact that such goods are, as a rule, *[begin page 138]* cheaper to the public than they were before the imposition of such duties."

"Many instances have been brought under our notice where the establishment of a local factory has at once brought down the price of the article produced in a remarkable degree. All calculations based upon the price at which goods could be sold if the import trade were not restricted or prohibited by duties are valueless in face of the direct evidence before us that when such duties are not imposed the goods are not sold at the anticipated low prices."

The importers made every effort which self-interest could suggest and money stimulate to arrest the march of public thought to the Protectionist goal. But it was to no purpose. The people had been forced by *The Age* to think for themselves. They sat in judgment on the rival policies, and although one had the benefit of the large advocacy of the ruling classes and the other was supported only by *The Age*, they at length pronounced in favour of the latter at the polls. After four years of desperate struggling against overwhelming odds David Syme had the satisfaction, at the general election of August, 1864, of seeing the return of a large majority of members unequivocally pledged to secure Tariff Protection to Australian industries.

[begin page 139]

Chapter VII

The Constitutional Issue

The Premier, James McCulloch, converted to Protection - Strong Protectionist Government - Protection found to be impossible until Legislative Council reformed - First Protectionist Tariff introduced - Passes Assembly, rejected by Council - Tariff "tacked " to Appropriation Bill and returned to Council Again rejected - Business of country at standstill - McCulloch's expedient - Tariff Bill again submitted to Council again rejected - Dissolution granted - General election - McCulloch returns to office with great Protectionist majority - Tariff Bill sent to Council - Again rejected - McCulloch resigns - McCulloch resumes office - Tariff Bill for the fourth time sent to Council - Council consents to a conference, and at length Tariff agreed to - The rage of the importers - They secure a victim - The Governor recalled by Downing Street - Parliament votes a grant of £20,000 to Sir Charles Darling's wife - Council refuses to pass the measure Constitutional struggle renewed - Bill again submitted to Council and again rejected - Dissolution - Downing Street interferes to support the Council - Government resigns - Great public turmoil - No Government - Downing Street, alarmed, recants its instructions, but despatch withheld - McCulloch resumes office - Again resigns - The Sladen Ministry - Its ineptitude - Downing Street pays Sir Charles Darling a large pension and reinstates him in order to allay the public anger in Victoria - McCulloch returns to office and forces the Council to reform its Constitution on Liberal lines.

James McCulloch, the Premier at this time, was a Scotsman, a native of Glasgow, who had emigrated to Victoria in 1853. He had all his life been a strong Free Trader and only a few months earlier he had publicly declared to his constituents: "I am opposed to Protection. What this Colony wants," he said, "is to buy in the cheapest and to sell in the dearest market." Nevertheless, the exodus of population, the general depression of the State, the spectacle of thousands of people unemployed and starving for want of industries to absorb their labour and convert it into wealth, and the convincing logic of David Syme had irresistibly induced him to compromise with his predilections. He remained a Free Trader at heart to the end of his days, but reason forced him to admit that new countries might require the aid of a Protective system, and he confessed that this was the case with Victoria. His conversion earned him the detestation of the Monopolists, but it procured for the Colony the great boon of a strong and united Government.

The policy Mr. McCulloch put forward embraced three leading features - a reform of the Legislative Council, a new Land Bill, and a revision of the Tariff on Protectionist lines. The Legislative Council needed reforming urgently. Members were then elected for ten years, by persons owning landed property of the clear annual value of £100; and the qualification of a member was £5,000 in real estate. These restrictions made the Council a purely Conservative body. For years it had been a *[begin page 141]* lead-weight upon progress. It had passed several resolutions declaring that it would consent to no modification of its constitution. It was composed almost exclusively of elderly gentlemen, squatters and importers, who had spent their lives amassing money, and who frankly voted upon all public questions to further their own interests. As they had no public responsibility they were insensible to the popular demands. "We are not going to tax ourselves," was the reply made publicly by one of its leading members when asked what was the Council's objection to the Liberal proposals.

Government proposed to reduce the qualification both, of members and electors by one-half and to shorten the period of service to five years. The Bill was passed by a large majority in the Assembly, but, as it is almost needless to remark, the Council promptly threw it out. Mr. McCulloch pocketed the rebuff for the moment and, with the help and support of Mr. Graham Berry, now the acknowledged leader of Protection in the Assembly, devised a Tariff which offered a fair measure of encouragement to the, establishment of native industries and to the extension of agriculture, through a customs tax on imported flour and other eatables. This, the first Protectionist Tariff ever introduced into Australia, was passed by a large majority in the Assembly on the 19th of January, 1865; and the collection at the Customs of the duties was forthwith begun.

The importers viewed these proceedings in a, state *[begin page 142]* of frenzy. They petitioned their Chamber to reject the Tariff Bill, and the Council, incredible as it may appear, replied that the importers need suffer no apprehension, as it was its intention to refuse to pass the duties. In these circumstances Mr. McCulloch, rather than jeopardize a measure which had the support of the community and which had been passed almost unanimously by the people's representatives, decided to include it in the Appropriation Bill; an expedient that would throw upon the Council the responsibility of rejecting the Appropriation Bill and thus bringing the public business of the Colony to a standstill.

Pushing through the estimates, McCulloch passed the Appropriation Bill through all its stages and transmitted it, tacked with the Tariff, to the Council. But the Council did not hesitate. True to the pledge it had given the importers, it "laid aside" the Bill and defied the Assembly and the country.

This high-handed proceeding threw the Colony into a ferment. The payment of public salaries, accounts and contingencies was suspended, and all public business came to an abrupt stop. Meanwhile the importers and merchants who had been paying the duties since their imposition immediately began actions against the Government for their recovery, and when, the Supreme Court gave judgment in favour of the merchants, the ire of the people was inflamed. Government announced its determination to continue collecting the duties, and *The Age* *[begin page 143]* championed its right to do so even in technical violation of authority. The Assembly, having the support of a well-known English precedent, contended that it was not a question of the legal interpretation of an Act, but a matter of political usage in which it behoved the Assembly to be its own guide and, judge. The Council, taking the side of the merchants and importers, denounced the Government for its flouting of the judiciary, and the two Houses were at *outrance*. The *impasse* was fraught with grave possibilities, and so high did the feeling of the people run, that an armed revolution might easily have been precipitated and the Council brought by force to realize and repent its presumption. But *The Age* appealed to the patience of the citizens, assuring them that they had only to keep pegging away in order to win at last, and showing them that they would be putting themselves in the wrong if they allowed passion to supplant judgment.

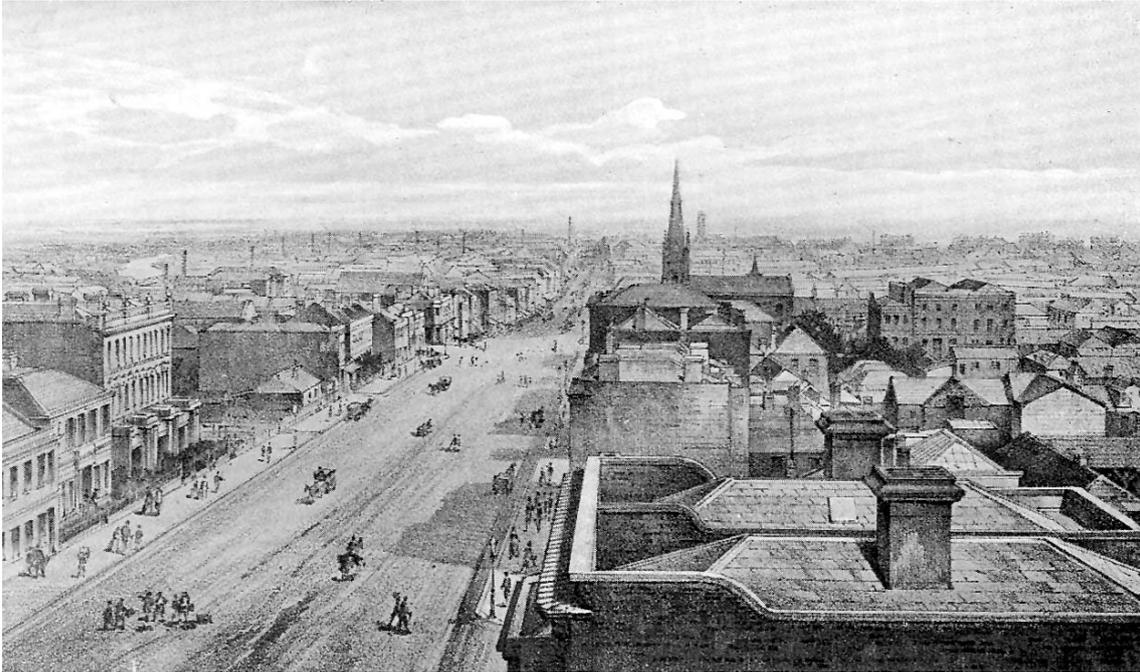
The struggle now became a war of wits. In order to obtain money for supplies, Mr. McCulloch adopted the expedient of making an arrangement with the London Chartered Bank of Australia. This bank agreed to advance £40,000 to the Government for the immediate needs of the State and, when it had done so, issued a writ for the recovery of the sum. The Government confessed judgment for the debt, and the Governor, Sir Charles Darling, signed a warrant (under the advice of his Ministers) for the *[begin page 144]* payment of the amount out of the Consolidated Revenue. This process was repeated every few weeks for a period of four months.

It must be admitted that the device was a questionable and even a lawless proceeding, and as such it appears to have been recognized even by those who lent it their countenance. But it lay not with the Council, which had just trampled on the rights of the people and still declined to obey the popular mandate, to bring a charge of malfeasance against the Assembly for attempting, however deviously, to carry out its election pledges. The Council, however, not only did this, but forwarded a petition to the British Government praying for the maintenance of the Constitution; and it also put forward a suggestion that armed force should be resorted to by the Queen to hold the Assembly in check. It was evident to David Syme that the Ministry, in the best interests of the democracy, should discontinue its irresponsible juggling with the State finances; and he urged the Government to give up the practice. McCulloch was at first disinclined to recede from his position, but wiser counsels prevailed and the Government played the game with a rigid observance of constitutional rules and formulae, so that the enemy might not be provided with any unlooked for weapon or adventitious succour. In furtherance of this aim *The Age* advised the Government to undo, the "tack" forthwith and send up the Tariff Bill as a separate mea- [\[begin page 145\]](#) sure to the Council, asserting its conviction that the Council would still refuse to pass it although members had protested that the "tack," was the principal cause of their objection to the Bill. McCulloch ventured the experiment on the 8th of November, and David Syme's prediction was instantly fulfilled. The Council exposed the hollowness of its former pretensions by rejecting the Bill almost unanimously.

McCulloch immediately applied to the Governor for a dissolution, and his request was granted. A few days later Parliament was dissolved and an appeal made to the country. The electors were asked to decide two things: First, did they wish for protection to native industry? Secondly, did they desire their rights to be maintained against the schemes of the Council? The answer of the people was unmistakable; they returned fifty-eight Ministerial Liberal Protectionists and twenty Conservative Free Traders. McCulloch at once re-introduced the Tariff Bill. It was passed quickly through all its stages in the Assembly and, on the 2nd of March, 1866, it was once more sent to the Council, which as promptly rejected it - by twenty votes to eight.

The Premier tendered his resignation, whereupon the Assembly passed a resolution pledging the House to withhold its confidence from any Administration which might be formed unless it forthwith adopted the Bill of Supply containing the Tariff which had already been thrice submitted to the Council. A [\[begin page 146\]](#) change of Government was in the circumstances an impossibility, and although the Leader of the Opposition was sent for by the Governor the negotiations came to nothing. On the 28th of March, McCulloch met the House again and consented informally to administer the offices of Government. But the situation was unparalleled and growing desperate. There was no legally available money; no properly appointed Government; and the people were growing out of hand. The Council now began to get alarmed. It hastily assembled and sent word to McCulloch that it was prepared to meet the Assembly in conference with a view to the arrangement of the matters in dispute.

The Government consented, and after a short prorogation the Tariff Bill was once more passed through all stages in the Assembly and for a fourth time was transmitted to the Council. The two Houses then met in conference on the 13th of April and in a few hours came to an agreement. The Government abandoned its claim to make the Bill retrospective and amended the preamble to the measure. The Council gave way on all other important issues, thus confessing the injustice of its protracted resistance to the people's will. Protection became the law of the land. But the Council though defeated was still a power for evil, and, looking around for a scapegoat, chose to wreak its vengeance on the Governor.



Melbourne, 1871

Sir. Charles Darling, throughout the struggle, had *[begin page 147]* followed the advice of his responsible Ministers. He had not taken sides at any time; indeed, he had laboured to preserve the strictest impartiality in his actions and decisions; but, conceiving it to be his duty, under the Constitution not to thwart the counsels of his advisers, he had not interposed his authority to counter their policy; and his attitude had, therefore, contributed to the victory of the Assembly. The Council, as a consequence, detested him and, the crisis over, joined forces with the Monopolists to bring about his ruin. Already, indeed, it had sent several petitions to the Crown protesting against his demeanour and praying for his recall. They now sent others making various unfounded accusations against his probity.

When the answers to these petitions reached the Colony, it became evident that the Colonial Secretary had, on an *ex parte* statement, judged and condemned the Governor, without permitting him an opportunity to speak in his defence. The Council and its supporters could not contain their glee. They had been beaten, but Downing Street had flung them a victim. *The Age* undertook the vindication of Sir Charles Darling and stemmed the tide of reprobation with which his enemies pursued him. It showed that the Colonial Secretary's action in recalling Sir Charles was an insult to the Colonists and to the free democratic institutions of the State. The settlement of the constitutional struggle between the two Houses had proved the wisdom of the course *[begin page 148]* the Governor had pursued. His punishment, therefore, after the settlement was effected, demonstrated that Downing Street had all along secretly desired the defeat of the democratic cause and was disappointed at its triumph. It was tantamount to a denial of the self-governing rights of the Victorian people and an intimation that Downing Street considered that the Governor should have lent himself as an instrument to the Upper House, to suppress popular institutions. *The Age* then called upon the people to express their sympathy with a man whose courage had impelled him to resist clique, tyranny, to risk the displeasure of the Colonial Office, and to incur martyrdom in their interests.

The response was instantaneous. A mass meeting of the citizens assembled in Melbourne - the largest and most important ever seen in the Colony. Other meetings

followed in every town and city. Torchlight processions were held and the whole country resounded with condemnation of the Council and appreciations of its victim. Monster petitions were signed, and despatched to Downing Street, indignantly inveighing against the injustice of the Governor's recall and insisting on his reinstatement. Public addresses by the score were conveyed to the Governor by deputations of the citizens, intimating their confidence, admiration and sympathy.

But *The Age* was by no means satisfied. It was impossible to secure Sir Charles Darling's reinstatement- [begin page 149] for his successor had been appointed, and he was under orders immediately to proceed to London. David Syme declared that it was the duty of the people to do something more substantial for the man who had been broken in their service than proclaim their indignation at his disgrace. At his instance, Government appointed a Select Committee of the House to prepare an address and to formulate a plan of compensating the Governor. The Committee drew up an address thanking Sir Charles Darling for his "steadfast adherence to the principles of Constitutional Government," which had saved the country from anarchy; and recommending that, a grant of £20,000 should be made to Lady Darling for her separate use.

The address was carried in the Assembly by a vote of forty to nineteen, but the consideration of the grant was postponed until the Imperial sanction should be obtained to Lady Darling's acceptance thereof. The reply from the Colonial Office to this request arrived on the 19th of February, 1867. It was an emphatic declaration that so long as Sir Charles Darling remained in the Imperial Service he could not receive any payment; but as by the same mail news arrived that Sir Charles had resigned from the service, Government at once introduced the £20,000 grant to Lady Darling in the Estimates. The debate began on the 1st of August and the grant was carried by a majority of forty-two votes to fifteen. It was transmitted to the [begin page 150] Council which, not unnaturally perhaps, rejected the Bill, but was unwise enough to state that it did so on the grounds that the measure "tended to corruption in the public service."

The McCulloch Government promptly resigned, but, on the 10th of September, it again took office, because the Leader of the Opposition's efforts to form a Ministry were futile. After a short prorogation Parliament again assembled on the 18th of September, and the new Governor, Sir J.H. Manners-Sutton, sent a message to both Houses urging them to concur in the vote to Lady Darling, because Sir Charles had thrown up his appointment in reliance upon receiving it, and a refusal to grant it would wear the complexion of repudiation. But the Council declined to give way and once more rejected the Bill. Acting on the advice of David Syme, who had never ceased to advocate Sir Charles Darling's claims upon the country, McCulloch applied for a dissolution. His request was granted, and once more the people were requested to decide which chamber should rule the country - the popular Assembly, or the oligarchy in the Council?

The issue was never for a moment in doubt. The Ministerialists swept the polls, and in the House that met on the 6th of March the Opposition numbered only eighteen. But on the very day the Assembly met the Governor received a despatch from the Colonial Secretary practically directing him to use his authority to support the Council [begin page 151] against the people and their representatives. The Governor passed on these instructions to his Ministers and received in exchange their resignations.

There followed a period of turmoil and confusion unexampled even in the history of this troubled Colony. The Governor applied in turn to almost every member of the Opposition, but each in vain sought to form a Government. A solid phalanx of sixty Liberals vowed to uphold the people's rights. Parliament was convened, but nothing

could be done. There was no policy, no money, no Ministry. Two months passed in formal meetings and adjournments of the Assembly, the business of the country remaining at an absolute standstill. The Governor then appealed to the Liberal ex-Ministers to withdraw their resignations and return to office. But McCulloch refused unless he was given a free hand in dealing with the Council.

The Governor had just received a second despatch from the Colonial Office in which his previous instructions were cancelled and he was directed to inform the Council that it should "no longer oppose itself to the ascertained wishes of the community." But the Governor was a Conservative by disposition. Smarting under the sting of McCulloch's refusal to comply with his request, he temporarily suppressed this despatch and continued his hopeless search for another Ministry. He was spurred to desperation in his efforts by the public clamour. The people were weary of having their wishes flouted [begin page 152] by the Council, headed half-openly by the Governor. They began to assemble in public meetings, to denounce angrily the waste of time and to urge recourse to revolutionary methods. In a sort of panic the Governor made a vehement appeal to the Opposition to come to his aid, and on the 6th of May he succeeded in inducing Mr. Sladen to form a Ministry. In the Ministerial elections that ensued two of the selected Ministers were defeated at the polls. The Sladen Government was a mere absurdity. It could not even form a quorum, and the Liberal Party had only to absent themselves to reduce its proceedings to a farce. But the Liberals adopted other tactics. When the House met on the 6th of June they met the Government with a vote of no confidence and carried it with a huge majority.

Over-persuaded by the Governor, Mr. Sladen declined to resign and clung tenaciously to office. He was thereupon subjected to every species of indignity. The formal business of the House was taken out of his hands and the Governor was petitioned to dismiss him. But he hung on like a limpet, and at length, after sixty-six days, during which time he had made the Victorian Parliament the laughing-stock of the world, *The Age* declared, that it was necessary in the public interest to remove him, even if he and his colleagues, should have "to be, scraped from the Treasury Benches." *The Age* pointed out how this might be done, and the House, [begin page 153] speedily adopting the suggestion, passed a resolution declining to grant the Ministry any supplies.

This was the end of the Sladen Administration. The Governor was compelled to dismiss the Government, and once more McCulloch came into office, but invested now with the power given him by the temporarily suppressed despatch from Downing Street to deal with the Council as he deemed proper. He was, however, spared the unpleasantness of having to use that power by the opportune arrival of a despatch that the Imperial Government had decided, in compliance with the wishes and remonstrances of the Victorian people, to avail itself again of Sir Charles Darling's services and to grant him a pension of £1,000 per annum dating from the actual day of his recall from the Colony. It was further intimated in the despatch that in his altered circumstances neither he nor Lady Darling could accept the generous bounty of the citizens.

This "climb down" of the Colonial Office, combined with the Imperial recognition of the Assembly's right of absolute rule without foreign or domestic interference, brought the contest between the two Houses to an end. But the session was not allowed to close before a Bill was passed widening the franchise of the Council and reducing the property qualification of both members and electors by one half. The Council bitterly resented the reform but, taught by experience, no longer ventured to oppose the popular will, and the measure became law. [begin page 154]

Chapter VIII

Protection Accomplished

The Age predominant in Victorian politics as a result of Constitutional struggle - David Syme reduces the price of his paper - Growth of its influence - The importers give up the boycott - Syme not satisfied with the Tariff - New campaign for complete Protection - McCulloch becomes Conservative - Hurlled from power - "King David" - The Duffy Government - The Francis Government - The Kerferd Government - The Berry Government - McCulloch returns to office - His intrigues - *The Age* denounces him and procures his defeat - Mr. Berry becomes Premier and reforms the Tariff - The opposition of the Council - Black Wednesday - Syme and the Governor - Syme and the Cabinet - The fight renewed - General elections - The Council reformed - Protection accomplished - The Berry Tariff really Syme's Tariff - Its secret history - Secret history of formation of Service - Berry Coalition - David Syme's patriotism and how it benefited the State.

The four years of constitutional struggle between the two Houses of Parliament, extending from 1864 to the 29th of September, 1868, securely established *The Age* as the predominant factor in Victorian, politics. It had, in the first instance, precipitated the conflict and, the fight having begun, it had acted consistently until the end as the guide, philosopher and advocate of the people, who battled under its aegis for their rights and their Parliament- *[begin page 155]* ary representatives. It is not too much to say that all the more notable expedients employed by the McCulloch Government to vindicate the popular Chamber's rights and privileges were conceived in David Syme's brain. It was his advocacy which determined their adoption: his support which supplied their efficiency. *The Age*, moreover, throughout the struggle, exercised a moderating influence on the passions of the people, and more than once its counsels availed to avert anarchy and violence. There were times when a word of encouragement would have sufficed to produce civil war and a bloody revolution. That word was never spoken. On the contrary, the voice of David Syme was raised on every crisis advising, requiring, and even commanding patience: and although the faces of the poor were being ground under an almost intolerable despotism, the people listened to their mentor and, at his bidding, trusted to the quieter means he advocated to rid themselves of their tyrants.

The peaceful triumph to which his far-sighted wisdom led them compelled their grateful recognition and exalted *The Age* in popular esteem. It was thenceforth recognized as the mouthpiece of humanitarian sentiment and Reform, while Syme became the leader and champion of the democracy. He precluded his next step in the Protectionist campaign by reducing the price of *The Age* to a penny. This brought his journal within the reach of the poorest workman in the community, and finally put the seal *[begin page 156]* up-on his title to be regarded as the people's friend. The response of the public to this bold and liberal experiment was immediate. In one week the circulation more than doubled, and from that moment it continued to expand. The importers and merchants observed this with a concern bordering on consternation. For five years they had boycotted *The Age* with remorseless persistency. They had spent large sums of money, spared no efforts, and exhausted every means their ingenuity could devise to ruin the journal. They had even enlisted the aid of Governments to crush or to silence it. Yet in spite of all their exertions the journal had survived. It had never swerved from

its policy: it had never ceased to expose their selfish and unpatriotic aims, to combat their intentions and to hold them up to contempt.

But *The Age* had not only survived. It was a growing force, increasing almost daily in strength and influence. All this appeared in the light of a prodigy to the Monopolists. They could not understand it - It was beyond their comprehension that the genius and singleness of purpose of one man could have withstood and defeated the resources their wealth and influence and animosity had concentrated on his destruction. Yet the wonder had been wrought before their eyes. The Monopolists took council then of their own interests. Being traders, money talked to them with a voice not to be denied for long. They put *[begin page 157]* their pride in their pockets and once more sent their emissaries to David Syme. They confessed that they were beaten. Protection, was now the law of the land. Well, they were willing to bow to the inevitable. Let him be content with the existing tariff and not ask further to prohibit foreign imports by raising the tariff wall and they would give him their advertisements.

David Syme's reply was, characteristic. "The present, Tariff," said he, "is a thing of no account. It is merely a beginning. It is not by any means a Protective Tariff. It does not place Australian manufacturers in a position to compete on even terms with the foreigner. I will never, rest until Victoria is encompassed with a tariff wall that will enable the local manufacturer to pay the local artisan a fair living wage and at the same time enable him successfully to compete in the local market with the imported productions of underpaid foreign labour. That is my fixed and unalterable resolve. Quarter I have never asked in the past. Quarter I do not ask now. Quarter I will not give!"

It was an answer calculated to inspire an ineradicable hatred of its utterer. The Monopolists have never forgotten it. But business interests forbade them to resent it as they would have wished, and within a few weeks the same interests compelled all save a few irreconcilables to give their advertisements without conditions to *The Age* and to pay *[begin page 158]* the price for them which Syme demanded. Their money was forthwith applied to expedite their undoing. Syme employed the swelling revenues of his journal to surround himself with a band of kindred spirits whose pens under his direction began to clear the path which his intellect and energy had opened, and to prepare the way to the goal of his ultimate ambition - a self-contained, self-supporting, self-respecting nation.

The immediate difficulty before *The Age* and the march of Protection was, paradoxically enough, Protection itself - that is to say the McCulloch Tariff and the measure of Protection which it had introduced, judged by modern instances the McCulloch was merely a revenue tariff, and indeed, beyond producing revenue, it had very little virtue. It was nevertheless a tariff, and to a people who had been born and bred Free-Traders and whose conversion to Syme's views was of such recent occurrence it spelt Protection in large capitals. Syme, however, regarded its meagre extent and modest incidence with the greatest contempt. He foresaw that it could not build up a large manufacturing industry, and viewed it as a hardly perceptible instalment of the comprehensive fiscal reform he desired to establish.

Without delay he began a fresh campaign against the foreign trading classes not less vigorous and even more uncompromising than that which had just terminated. As before he had to combat two forces - the opposition of his foes and the apathy of his *[begin page 159]* friends. The importers fought, him tooth and nail in order to retain their trade: and the people, while not opposing him, offered him nevertheless the passive resistance of tired minds which desired a period of surcease of strife and demanded the most convincing reasons for the necessity of renewed activity.

This curious weariness of spirit found expression in the Assembly in a series of working alliances between Free Traders and Protectionists. The McCulloch Government was presently defeated by such a combination and gave way to Mr. J.A. McPherson, a young squatter and a staunch Tory, who succeeded in forming a nondescript Ministry composed almost equally of Protectionists and Free Traders who had mutually agreed to sink the fiscal issue. But Syme, in spite of them, forced that issue to the front, and his stirring appeals and convincing arguments so wrought upon public opinion that after an existence of little more than half a year the McPherson Government was defeated on the 9th of April, 1870. McCulloch then returned to power, but it soon became evident that his Protectionist sympathies had weakened and that he was returning to the economic love of his youth - Cobdenism. He urged that a number of manufacturing industries had been established in consequence of the tariff of 1868, and that there was no need either to increase or to extend the customs duties.

The Age reasoned with him for a time but, unable [\[begin page 160\]](#) to persuade him that the interests of the country required a broader outlook, Syme reluctantly, proceeded to oppose the man whom he had guided and supported and carried through half a score of brilliant campaigns to as many brilliant victories. The community was impressed when it saw *The Age* turn upon and relentlessly condemn its old friend and collaborator. But the incident afforded one more proof of David Syme's strength of character and single-hearted consistency of purpose. It showed the people that he advocated measures not men, and that his guiding star was principle not party. McCulloch fought desperately to retain his hold upon the helm of affairs, but one by one his oldest and most attached supporters drew away, and at length he was compelled to bow to the will of an adverse majority and to vacate the Treasury Bench. His downfall following so rapidly on the defeat of the McPherson Government created a great sensation. Before such practical demonstrations of the influence of the Liberal journal the Tories raged in vain. They denounced its sway as a public menace and, in the hope of rousing the democracy to resistance, declared it was David Syme's ambition to erect a new despotism on the ruins of the old and to appoint himself its chief ruler and autocrat. They next dubbed him "King, David," cunningly seeking to work upon the fears and jealousy of the masses. To their disgust however, the people seized upon the sobriquet. "King David," they cried, that exactly [\[begin page 161\]](#) expresses him," and the title was soon in universal use as a tribute of their attachment to the unselfish man who had devoted his life, fortune and genius to the democratic cause.

Charles Gavan Duffy now came forward as the Premier of the Colony. He was a declared Free Trader and had never pretended to hold other views, but he realized the futility of resisting the ever-growing demand for Protection and appointed Graham Berry - the platform champion of Protection and - David Syme's friend and protégé - to be his Treasurer. Berry succeeded during the next twelve months in procuring a small revision of the tariff and the extension of protective duties over the range of soft goods and hardware: but he could effect no more than this, nor wring further concessions from his chief. Immediately the fact became manifest the Duffy Ministry was swept from power.

Mr. J.G. Francis, a vigorous Protectionist, succeeded, but he committed the initial error, like so many of his predecessors, of forming a Free Trade and Protectionist Cabinet, and although he, too, brought in a revised Tariff it was a hybrid measure. As soon as it appeared that no greater instalment of Protection could be looked for at his hands he was called upon to retire. He resigned at the end of July, 1874, and was followed by Mr. Kerferd, his Attorney-General, who now assumed the Premiership. Mr. Kerferd's Government was a complete failure. The new Premier signalled himself at [\[begin page 162\]](#) the outset by obliging the most obdurate Free Trader in the Cabinet, Mr. Langton,

to resign from the Treasury, but he replaced him with a still stauncher Cobdenite, Mr. James Service, who a few months later submitted a Budget in which he actually proposed to remit or reduce a number of the duties which for five years had afforded some measure of protection, however inadequate, to several young industries. *The Age* forthwith counselled the rejection of the Bill and the expulsion of the Ministry. The struggle was short and sharp, but the first test vote determined it, and at the close of July, 1875, Mr. Kerferd was forced out of office.

Sir James McCulloch (he had just been knighted) had actually moved the resolution which produced Mr. Kerferd's defeat, but, acting on the advice of *The Age*, the Governor did not send for him. It was pointed out that the continuous changes of Government which had taken place with such injurious effect on the direction of public affairs were all directly attributable to the futile ambition of successive Premiers, by forming coalitions between Free Traders and Protectionists, to reconcile the irreconcilable. It was urged that due consideration should be paid to the patent fact that the whole Colony was Protectionist and that, established precedent to the contrary, a squatter like Sir James McCulloch with growing Conservative tendencies, who did not possess the confidence of the people, should not be entrusted with the task of forming [\[begin page 163\]](#) a Ministry whatever his technical claims, but that an open and avowed Protectionist should be sent for. The Governor accordingly nominated Graham Berry and thereby aroused the displeasure of Sir James McCulloch, who, conceiving himself affronted by the negation of his pretensions to office, proceeded to cabal for Berry's downfall. Graham Berry formed a Ministry, but he only held office for two months. He was met at the outset of his Administration with a no-confidence motion, and Sir James McCulloch, throwing in his lot with the Kerferd Ministry which he had just helped Berry to overthrow, the motion was carried by a small majority.

Sir James McCulloch therefore formed a Ministry which contained four members of the Kerferd Cabinet. The means by which he had gained office after successively turning two Governments out of power and wasting many months of public time earned for him the contempt of the people: but when, as presently occurred, Sir James sought to pass the very legislation which he had denounced Mr. Kerferd for venturing to introduce, contempt changed to execration. His Parliamentary majority enabled him to cling to office until the end of the term, but his doom was foreshadowed in the energetic campaign waged against him by *The Age* throughout the electorates. During the interval McCulloch introduced the closure in order to silence the Liberal Opposition, and, by the free use of this weapon, he contrived to carry on the Government.

[\[begin page 164\]](#)

As the life of the Parliament waned the whole country clamoured for its dissolution, but Sir James finally went to the constituencies proudly asserting his confidence in a great electoral triumph. Never was man more completely self-deceived. The general election was held on the 11th of May, 1877. It resulted in Sir James McCulloch's overwhelming defeat. Mr. Berry was returned at the head of a solid body of sixty members pledged to a policy of high Protection, and the Conservative leader who had gone to the country with a considerable majority, was left with the pitiful following of twenty-six. He did not wait for the House to meet but forthwith tendered his resignation. Berry thereupon formed a strong Protectionist Cabinet and immediately proceeded to fulfil the mission with which the people had entrusted him. The Council, however, had in the meantime determined upon another effort to obstruct the march of the Democracy.

Untaught by the lessons of the past, this plutocratic body fancied that it could resist the declared policy of the country and impose its wishes on the people. It condemned unheard Berry's Tariff Reform proposals and, during the passage of the Land Tax Act,

gave such unmistakable evidence of recalcitrancy that the Liberal Party realized that true progress necessitated a drastic reform of the Constitution. At this junction Berry had a long consultation with David Syme, who, advised him to preface his attempt to reform the Council by passing *[begin page 165]* in Act for the payment of members. Syme had good reasons for giving this counsel. He foresaw that the fight with the Council would be a protracted one, and he desired that the Liberal legislators of the Assembly, most of whom were poor men, should be placed on terms of comparative equality during the struggle with their adversaries who were using their wealth to resist progress.

Berry accepted the advice and brought in a Bill providing permanently for the payment of Members. It passed through the Assembly and was submitted to the Council, which rejected it by a large majority. Two days later the Assembly returned the measure to the Council "tacked" to the Appropriation Bill. On the 13th of December, 1877, the Council formally laid aside the Appropriation Bill and thus brought the business of the country to a halt. Berry now declared that the Council must be compelled to obey the will of the people, and he adjourned the House. In consequence of the Council's action there were no funds to pay the servants of the State. Berry accordingly brought matters to a crisis. On the 8th of January, 1878 (a day afterwards known as Black Wednesday), he dismissed all the heads of Departments, the judges, Police Magistrates, Coroners, Crown Prosecutors, and the holders of other public offices.

The proceeding was bold in the extreme, even revolutionary; but it was felt to be both excusable and necessary. The two Chambers were irreconcil- *[begin page 166]* ably opposed, and the public interest demanded that a supreme test should be made which was to rule the country - the Council which represented a small faction, or the Assembly which represented the people. The economic effects of Berry's expedient were, disastrous to the public weal. There was an immediate shrinkage in property values and commerce was paralysed. But the people enthusiastically supported the Government. Instead of complaining of the hardships to which they were subjected, crowds cheered Berry wherever he appeared. The Council, however, refused to give way, and on the 5th of February, when the Assembly resumed its sittings, the crisis was still undecided. Berry became impatient and, against Syme's advice, procured a resolution to be carried by the Assembly, - "That all votes passed in Committee of Supply become legally available for expenditure immediately the resolutions are agreed to by the Assembly." He then proceeded to draw money from the Treasury in defiance of the Audit Act.

The Governor, Sir George Bowen, was thereby placed in a very difficult position. Berry wished him to sign the Treasury warrants. It was his duty to follow the advice of his responsible Ministers, and yet he doubted the legality of their proposals. After a good deal of hesitation the Governor resolved to seek counsel from the man, who wielded the greatest influence in Victoria. He sent for David Syme.

It may be doubted whether any British Viceroy, *[begin page 167]* before or since, has taken so strange and so apparently unconstitutional a step as to ask a private citizen for guidance in a great political crisis. But it is also to be questioned whether a private citizen has ever exercised as absolute power in any British State as David Syme. The circumstances were unprecedented, and Sir George Bowen must be judged in the light of them. He was well aware that *The Age* really ruled the country and that the Government was merely the channel through which its influence was expressed. It seemed essential to him to, learn Syme's views, and hence his action.

David Syme declined to meet the Governor in person, but sent Mr. Windsor, his editor, to Government House as his representative. Sir George Bowen entertained Mr.

Windsor at lunch and very frankly requested to be informed of Syme's opinion. Mr. Windsor replied as frankly. He told the Governor that David Syme did not approve of Berry's expedient and deemed it unnecessary, because he believed the Council would have no choice but yield to the pressure of public opinion if the Government would only exhibit a little patience. Urged to be still more candid, Mr. Windsor counselled the Governor to take expert legal advice before signing the warrants.

Sir George Bowen accepted this advice and applied to the Law Officers of the Crown. Assured by them that he might legally sign the warrants, he did so, and Berry thus obtained supplies to carry on the *[begin page 168]* business of the country. But David Syme was not satisfied. He considered the proceeding illegal and notified Berry to that effect. The Premier asked him to attend a Cabinet meeting and arrange a course of action with his colleagues. Syme declined to do this, just as he had declined to meet the Governor; but he sent Mr. Windsor as his ambassador, and Mr. Windsor, taking a seat at the Cabinet table, announced to the Ministry that the Government must either abandon its device for drawing money from the Treasury or retire from office.

David Syme's ultimatum was implicitly obeyed. The illegal practice was immediately discontinued, and only a few days later the Council, terrified by the ever-increasing anger of the people, capitulated as Syme had foreseen. It passed the Bill for the payment of Members on the 28th of March and, on the 3rd of April, the Appropriation Bill. Berry thereupon re-appointed the officers of the Crown whom he had dismissed on Black Wednesday. Shortly afterwards he brought in a Bill for the reform of the Constitution on Liberal lines. This Bill was passed in the Assembly and sent to the Council in October of the same year. Incredible as it may appear, the Council rejected it by a large majority. It seemed as if the Council would never be warned by experience. In its conflicts with the popular Chamber it had always been forced in the long run to bow to the people's will. Yet it was ever ready to resume its efforts to block progress. *[begin page 169]*

Berry sought to get over the deadlock by proceeding with one of his colleagues to England to request the intervention of the Imperial Parliament. Unsuccessful in this, he asked for and obtained on his return from the Mother Country a dissolution of Parliament. But the Council remained obdurate, and another appeal to the country a few months later was necessary to reduce it to submission. The great measure of reform which he had striven for so long at last became law and in 1881 found a place in the Statute Book. It increased the number of electors privileged to vote for the Council from 30,000 to 100,000, reduced the property qualification of members to £100 per annum, shortened the tenure from ten years to six, and increased the number of members from thirty to forty-one. Its effect was to invest the Council with a reasonably representative character and to compel it to admit and reflect the public will. It was the greatest triumph the Liberal Party had yet achieved.

The long struggle had given the country a sound Protectionist Tariff and a Land Tax Act, and it had securely established that "Keystone of Democracy," the payment of members; all of which measures *The Age* had initiated and by vigorous advocacy forced into effective operation. The defeated plutocrats issued a solemn warning to the People that the Colony was about to plunge into an abyss of ruin. They implored the nation to pause before committing itself irrevocably to so fearful *[begin page 170]* a calamity. They denounced *The Age* as a public enemy, Protection as a national curse; and declared the Colony had only a few years to live if it continued its "unspeakable folly" of a high Tariff and persisted in its "blind subjection" to the dominance of "King David." The people laughed at these melancholy forebodings and proudly followed the counsels of the man who had led them out of political and industrial servitude into freedom and self-government. It will be seen in an ensuing chapter how the

predictions of the deposed oligarchy came to be fulfilled and to what species of ruin Protection brought Victoria and its people under "King David's" leadership.

It is worthy of mention that the-so-called Berry Tariff owed very little of its Protectionist virtue to the man who gave it its name. When the Constitutional Reform Movement had advanced to such a stage as to ensure the acceptance by the Council of a scientific measure of Protection, Berry, the Premier, and Lalor, the Minister of Trade and Customs, drafted a Tariff Amendment Bill between them. In principle both statesmen were sound Protectionists, but neither had much practical knowledge of the incidence of Custom duties. Being aware of this David Syme attended Parliament on the evening that Berry had promised to make his financial statement and took a seat between Mr. Windsor and Mr. Robinson in the Press Gallery. When the statement was delivered the three journalists *[begin page 171]* adjourned. Mr. Syme turned at once to his Editors.

"Well Windsor, what do you think of it?"

"Won't do, replied Mr. Windsor.

He turned to the other; "You, Robinson?"

"A revenue and not a Protectionist proposal," said Mr. Robinson.

"Exactly my opinion," commented David Syme. It will have to be taken back."

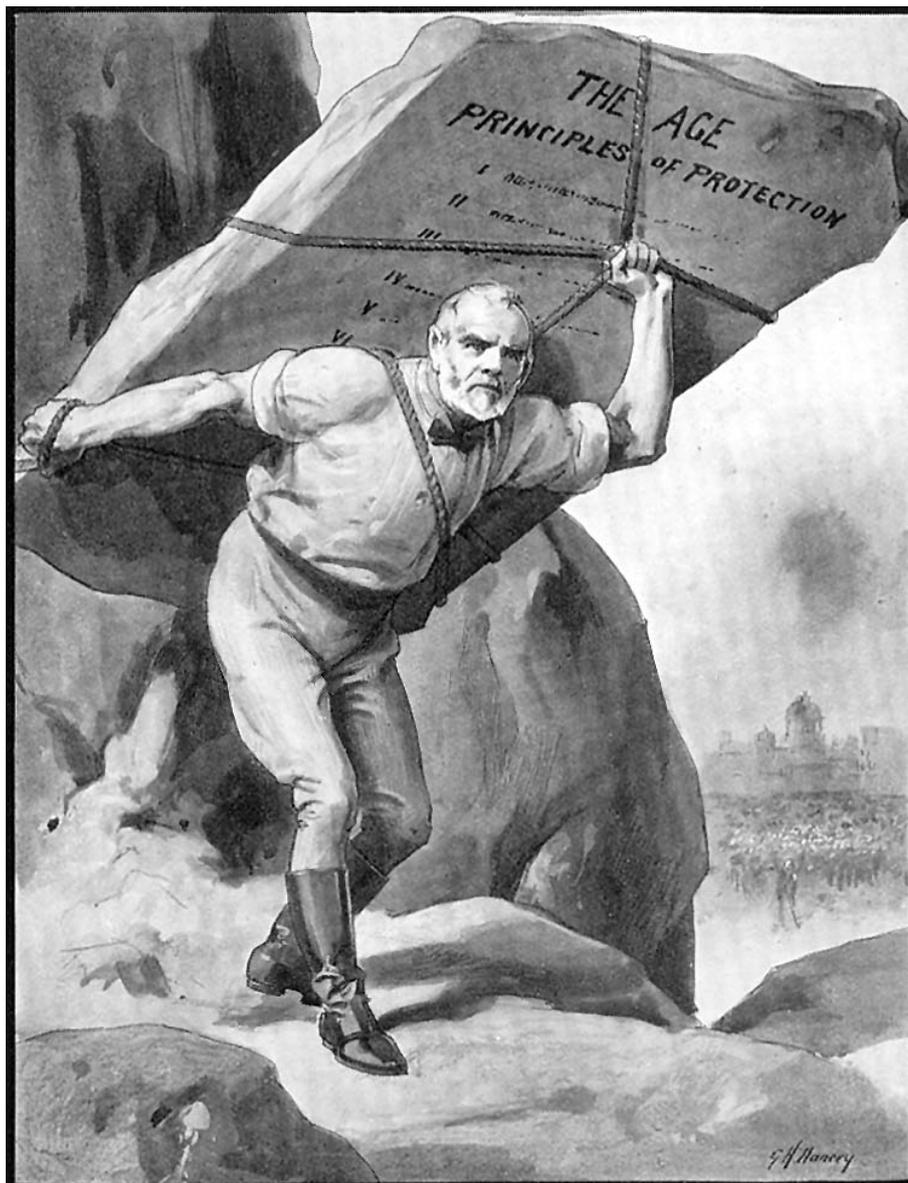
Next morning *The Age* contained a leading article condemning the Ministry's scheme in unmeasured terms. This brought Berry and Lalor to the office of *The Age* at 10 o'clock. Both were angry; but Lalor was in a white heat of rage. Bursting into the Editor's room Lalor cried out to Mr. Windsor:-

"That article must be retracted. I'm certain Mr. Syme could not have approved of it."

David Syme entered at that moment. He had heard Lalor's angry exclamation. "On the contrary," he said, "I cordially approve of every word of it, and if you desire to retain the support of *The Age* you will have to take back and drastically amend your fiscal proposals." Berry and his colleagues attempted to argue the point, but Syme was inexorable and finally the Ministers withdrew, heatedly declaring that they would not recede an inch from the position they had taken up and defying Syme to beat them if he could. Within a very few days, however, prudential counsels prevailed. The objectionable revenue tariff Berry had fondly im- *[begin page 172]* agined to be thoroughly Protective was withdrawn and one was substituted which had been carefully prepared under the supervision of David Syme. Needless to say, it was a Protective Tariff in every sense of the expression.

Shortly after the Reform Bill was passed Berry was defeated by Sir Bryan O'Loughlen, an ex-member of his Cabinet with whom he had quarrelled. Sir Bryan was a man whom David Syme had introduced to politics. Some years earlier, by the death of Sir Charles McMahon, a vacancy had occurred in the West Melbourne electorate. This was the greatest Free Trade stronghold then remaining in Victoria, and David Syme was particularly anxious to win it over to the Protectionist cause. As a large proportion of the voters consisted of Irishmen he considered it advisable that an Irish Protectionist should stand. He, therefore, sought about for such a person and found Sir-Bryan O'Loughlen.

Sir Bryan was immediately sounded. He expressed his readiness to follow *The Age* policy, and next morning *The Age* announced his candidature. He won the seat and eventually became Attorney-General in the Berry Government. He was not satisfied, however, with a subordinate position and, after Berry's return from the mission to England, withdrew from the Administration and awaited a chance to overthrow his old leader. David Syme was not very pleased at O'Loghlen's success in ousting Berry, but, as Sir Bryan was a Liberal and [begin page 173] a Protectionist, *The Age* did not oppose the new Government until it became evident that O'Loghlen had no capacity for affairs of State and that he was plunging the country into serious financial straits. From that moment O'Loghlen's downfall was decreed. *The Age* demanded his dismissal, and at the next general election (1883) the Ministry not only lost its majority but O'Loghlen, the Premier, lost his seat.



Cartoon Published on Mr. Syme's Death.
(By Permission of Melbourne "Punch.")

It then became, a question to whom the administration of the country should be entrusted. Berry was still available, but while Syme liked, him very much personally and considered him a good man in periods of stress and storm to attack, dangerous abuses, he did not regard him as a sufficiently careful Administrator in the piping times

of peace. The fact is, Berry was in many respects a reckless visionary. His capacities were rather destructive than constructive; and David Syme feared to confide the public interests to his keeping. The fight for Protection was over. The Constitutional struggle was also at an end. Victoria required above all things - a wise and stable Government, one that could be trusted to follow-up the great democratic victories with calm deliberation and rule the country in such a manner as to conserve and foster the prosperity made possible by the imposition of scientific Protection duties. David, Syme did not believe Berry could form or lead such a Government unaided or, rather, unchecked. There was too much sensa- [begin page 174] tionalism in his character. He was a political stormy petrel, and loved fighting too well to tolerate a merely peaceful role.

It need hardly be said that the situation was a subject of earnest discussion in the editorial room of *The Age*. One day Mr. Windsor observed that the proper remedy was to form a coalition Government with James Service as Premier and Berry as second in command. He made the suggestion with a good deal of nervousness, for two reasons. One was that Service, although a strong and capable politician with pronounced statesmanlike abilities, was, a staunch Free-Trader. The other reason was that Syme's private relations with Service were of such a hostile nature as to make the idea of supporting him almost inconceivable. David Syme, however, hardly hesitated. He hated Service and had good reason to hate him; but the interests of the State were always paramount with him. After a little thought he announced his decision. "Let Service give us an assurance that he will not interfere with the declared economic policy of the country and he will do," was what he said.

Mr. A.B. Robinson, the, commercial editor of *The Age*, was thereupon deputed to wait on Service and ascertain his views. When Service heard what Mr. Robinson had to say he refused for a time to believe the proposal serious. Convinced at length that it was he agreed to take office on the terms suggested by Syme, but emphatically declared that [begin page 175] he would in no circumstances move a step unless he were unequivocally assured of the support of *The Age*. This was promised him. Syme then approached Berry and explained the course that he should follow. Berry was furious at the idea of having to take second place, but knowing full well that no Government could last which had not *The Age* behind it, he at length reluctantly gave his consent, and the Service-Berry coalition thus became an accomplished fact.

Events justified Syme's prescience and his unselfish subordination of personal to patriotic considerations. With Service's strong hand at the helm the coalition Government ruled Victoria ably and well for several years. Service faithfully kept his pledge not to interfere with the Protectionist policy, and the consequence was an immense industrial expansion which caused unparalleled prosperity all over the country.

[begin page 176]

Chapter IX

The Effects of Protection in Victoria

New South Wales and Victoria compared - The elements of progress the test of the arts and sciences - The education test - The population test - The industrial test - The test of accumulated wealth - The test of diffusion of

wealth - The cost of living test - The test and comparisons reviewed - David Syme's life work vindicated.

How has Protection affected the progress of Victoria? Progress being essentially a relative thing, this question can only be satisfactorily answered by comparing the advancement of Victoria with that of some, neighbouring State governed by different fiscal conditions but otherwise of an approximately similar character. Such a State is New South Wales. Victoria and New South Wales have grown up side by side. Their differences are chiefly in area and mineral resources. Victoria has only 87,884 square miles. New South Wales has 309,175 square miles. Victoria's gold resources have in the past, roughly speaking, balanced New South Wales' coal. In nine marvellous years of gold production, between 1851 and 1860, Victoria produced £100,000,000 worth of gold. But that *[begin page 177]* was in her Free Trade period. The corresponding disadvantage of rapid gold decline came into her Protectionist era. The following table will make this clear, it being understood that the Colony adopted a Protectionist Tariff in 1870.

		£
Value of Victorian gold raised in	1871	5,421,908
" " " " " "	1881	3,435,400
" " " " " "	1891	2,305,600
" " " " " "	1901	3,102,753

That means a decline from £7.9 per head in 1871 to £2 per head of the population in 1891; a remarkable, declension it will be admitted in a great natural national industry. On the other hand, while New South, Wales has never produced more than £2,660,946 of gold in any one year she has maintained a steady output averaging about £1,000,000 per annum, and her ever-expanding coal extraction and copper production have more than made up the difference. Her production of coal is now, roughly speaking, worth £2,500,000 a year, as against Victoria's insignificant annual coal output valued at £41,000.

As to the matter of Government, except for a short interval of four years of semi-Protection, New South Wales has, continuously followed the doctrines of Cobden; while Victoria, ever since 1870, has lived under a Protectionist Tariff. A fair comparison of these States must necessarily, therefore, furnish instructive data to determine whether Protection has retarded or assisted Victoria's progress. *[begin page 178]*

In order to forestall objections to the manner and matter of the conclusions which will of necessity result from the comparisons I propose to institute, I will limit the comparisons to those particulars which, as all economists agree, are the "main elements of progress." And in order to obviate any cavilling at my figures I will confine myself to reproducing the figures of Mr. T.A. Coghlan formerly the New South Wales Government Statist and afterwards Agent-General of New South Wales in London, author of *The Seven Colonies of Australasia, Australia and New Zealand*, and other valuable works - a man whose accuracy and statistical ability are generally recognized, who is universally accepted as the most eminent authority on Australian affairs and conditions, and who is a Free Trader. In so doing I am obliged by force of circumstances to restrict my inquiries to the year ending 1903, as Mr. Coghlan ceased about that time to publish the results of his statistical investigations. But as the Commonwealth Tariff superseded the Victorian Tariff and extended Protection to New South Wales from 1902 and onwards, thus gradually extinguishing in effect a fiscal standard of comparison between that State and Victoria, it will be seen that my inquiries should in any case have properly come to a pause by the date in question. Protectionist critics will doubtless object that I ought not to have carried the comparison past 1902, when the Commonwealth Protectionist Tariff gave *[begin page 179]* an immense and immediate

impetus to the manufacturing industries of New South Wales; causing an unparalleled increase in production and employment, as a glance at the more recent official statistics of New South Wales will prove. But to such I would reply that I prefer to meet Free Trade objections, and can use no better means than to concede in advance all moot points to my Free Trade critics.

The following headings constitute the main elements of progress:-

1. Application of the arts and sciences.
2. Education, moral, primary and literary;
3. Population - volume and density
4. Industry - scope and development
5. Accumulated wealth
6. Diffusion of wealth
7. Cost of living.

I will take these headings one by one.

1. Application of the Arts and Sciences.

Under this division railways should be the first item of discussion, for, as Mr. Benjamin Hoare, author of *Preferential Trade*, remarks, " facilities of transportation form one of the very-first elements of modern civilization."

The railway comparison between Victoria and New South Wales may be appreciated from a moment's consideration of the appended table, compiled from Mr. Coghlan's figures in the Seven Colonies. *[begin page 180]*

Railways	Victoria	New South Wales
Mileage open 1871	276 Miles	358 Miles
" " 1881	1,247 "	1,040 "
" " 1891-2	2,903 "	2,266 "
" " 1895-6	3,122 "	2,616 "
" " 1903-4	3,383 "	3,220 "
Mileage per square mile of territory, 1903-4	1 railway mile to serve 26 sq. miles	1 railway mile to serve 96 sq. miles
Mileage to population	1 railway mile to 355 people	1 railway mile to 420 people.

Here we see that in the matter of railway facilities Victoria has 163 more line miles than New South Wales, a much more extensive mileage per head of population, and more than four times the railway access to land settlement.

Next in the order of importance to railways come the Post and Telegraph Offices. Here are the figures:

Post Offices	Victoria	N.S. Wales
Number of Post Offices, 1861	369	340
" " " " , 1894	1,719	1,895
" " " " , 1903	1,649	1,693
Number of people to each Post Office	721	800
Square miles of territory to each Post Office	53	182

Telegraph Offices	Victoria	N.S. Wales
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Number of Telegraph Offices, 1903	880	983
Number of -people to each Telegraph Office	1,364	1,378
Square miles of territory to each Telegraph Office	99	314

These comparisons need no remark. They demonstrate past gainsaying that Victoria, when her inferior area is reckoned, has something more than kept pace with New South Wales in providing her people with postal and, telegraphic facilities.

2. - Education.

The possession and diffusion of literature palpably constitute an important factor in determining the mental and moral progress of a race. We may therefore profitably examine the provision made in these directions by the two colonies

Literature	Victoria	N.S. Wales
Number of free libraries, 1903	342	340
Number of free books	752,191	520,000

Let us now turn to a comparison of the literate and, illiterate conditions of the people:

[begin page 182]

Education	Victoria	N.S. Wales
Number of schools, 1894	1,956	2,508
" " " , 1903	2,041	2,846
Scholars in attendance	228,241	212,848
Illiteracy of population, 1871 ¹	252,956	207,240
" " " , 1891 ¹	231,638	238,384
People who could not sign the marriage register, 1871 ¹	992	1,341
People who could not sign the marriage register, 1894 ¹	123	292

¹ The last figures available.

These figures show that there is less illiteracy in Victoria, a greater school attendance; and, when the area served is considered, a very much larger school accommodation than in New South Wales.

3. Population-Volume and Density.

The following table will show the relative growth of the two States:-

Year	Population in Victoria		Population in N.S. Wales	
	Total.	Per Sq. Mile	Total	Per Sq Mile
1871	731,528	8.32	503,981	1.62
1881	862,346	9.81	751,468	2.42
1891	1,140,405	12.98	1,132,234	3.65
1903	1,206,098	13.76	1,441,441	4.61

[begin page 183]

That is a most significant table. Since 1871, New South Wales has brought to her shores more than 60,000 assisted immigrants at a public expense exceeding £200,000. Victoria, in the same period, has only assisted some 5,547 immigrants, at a tithe of the above expenditure, to settle within her boundaries. Victoria, moreover, of recent years has lost a large proportion of her best blood owing to emigration caused by the gold discoveries in West Australia and the natural tendency of population to overflow from places densely peopled to places of less density, where land is available on easy terms.

Mr. Coghlan's figures above set forth prove, nevertheless, that in spite of these drawbacks and the fact that the area of New South Wales is almost four times greater than that of Victoria, the Protectionist State has steadily increased her population and that she now possesses a density of population more than three times as great as her Free Trade rival, New South Wales, which was, it must not be forgotten, a settled community nearly half a century before Victoria as a Colony was born.

4. Industry - Scope and Development.

First let us take the Pastoral and Dairying Industry. The following table shows how each State has progressed in the raising of sheep:- [begin page 184]

State	Number of Sheep		
	1871.	1891.	1903.
N.S. Wales	16,278,697	61,831,416	28,656,501
Victoria	10,002,381	12,928,148	8,774,731

The great decrease in each State between the years 1891 and 1903 was due to an almost continuous succession of unfavourable seasons and also, as regards Victoria, it was owing, as Mr. Coghlan explains (P. 410 *Australia and New Zealand*), to the important strides made in agriculture by the Victorian people during that period, which caused diminished attention to sheep farming. Nevertheless Victoria is by far the most closely stocked State in the Commonwealth, with 2.3 acres per sheep as against New South Wales with 3.8 acres per sheep, Tasmania next with 4.4 acres per sheep, Queensland with 11.5 acres per sheep, South Australia with 45.4 acres per sheep and West Australia with 74.8 acres per sheep.

I now turn to cattle:-

State	Number of Cattle		
	1871.	1891.	1903.
N.S. Wales	2,271,923	2,597,348	1,880,578
Victoria	628,092	1,286,677	1,552,265

[begin page 185]

This table shows that, although New South Wales has almost four times the area of Victoria and started in 1861 with a preponderance of cattle exceeding 1,500,600, her production of cattle has declined, while that of Victoria has steadily forged ahead.

Horses.

State	Number of Horses		
	1871.	1891.	1903.
N.S. Wales	233,220	398,577	458,014
Victoria	84,057	278,195	376,548

This table shows that, although New South Wales started with almost three times as many horses as Victoria and possesses more than three times the extent of territory, the Protectionist State has far outstripped her in the rate of production of horses.

Dairy Cows - 1903

State	No. of Dairy Cows	Quantity of Milk Produced
N.S. Wales	480,108	131,977,000 gallons
Victoria	516,000	142,431,000 "

This table speaks for itself. *[begin page 186]*

Swine.

State	Number of Swine.		
	1871.	1891.	1903.
N.S. Wales	213,193	258,189	221,592
Victoria	177,447	286,780	315,333

This table speaks for itself. I now append a table showing the value of the milk and its products, butter and cheese; and the value of the return from swine, together with the total value of dairy produce for the two States in 1903:-

State	Value of Milk, Butter and Cheese	Value of Return from Swine.	Total Value of Dairy and Swine Produce.
N.S. Wales	£2,027,000	£399,000	£2,426,000
Victoria	£2,289,000	£623,000	£2,912,000

The great advantage held by Victoria in the dairying industry, here revealed, will be enhanced if we remember the difference in area between the two States.

I turn now to Agriculture. The following table shows the number of persons engaged in agricultural pursuits during the years 1891 and 1907 - the last figures available.

[begin page 187]

State.	1891.	1901.
N.S. Wales	74,598	77,619
Victoria	79,090	95,920

This table surely puts it beyond question that Protection has not retarded the agricultural progress of Victoria. The following table will make this fact still more apparent:-

Agriculture	Victoria	N.S. Wales.
Total value of farm crops, 1902	£8,625,000	£6,687,000
Area cultivated, 1902 (acres)	3,246,568	2,249,092
" " , 1903 (acres)	3,389,069	2,542,919
Total value of crops, 1903	£10,156,000	£8,859,000
Acreage cultivated per head of population	2.8 acres	1.8 acres
Value per head of population, 1903	£8 7s 10d.	£5 17s. 6d.
Proportion of land under crop to total area of territory	6.03 percent	1.23 percent
Value of orchard and garden crops, 1901	£1,470,200	£474,500
Value per acre	£25	£8 9s. 8d.
Production of primary industries per sq. mile.	£248 14s. 9d.	£100 2s. 2d.
Number of persons engaged in industry.	95,920	77,619

A review of these tables establishes beyond the region of dispute that, except in the case of sheep alone, the Protectionist State has in the pastoral *[begin page 188]* industry surpassed the Free Trade State in progress, both in the ratio and the comparative extent of development; that in the dairying industry Victoria has left New South Wales far in the rear; that in agriculture she has immeasurably outstripped the mother Colony; and, as Mr. Coghlan remarks, that she occupies the first position among the States of the Commonwealth.

I turn now to the manufacturing and commercial industries:-

Manufacturing and Commercial Pursuits.	Victoria	N.S. Wales
Number of industrial workers, 1903	146,233	146,688
Number of persons engaged in trade, 1903	64,871	66,299
Number of persons engaged in commerce, 1903	79,048	77,664
Capital employed in manufacturing industries, 1903	£20,406,841	£19,396,504
Registered factories	4,151	3,476
Breadwinners	534,049	564,799
Proportion percent of breadwinners	44.64	41.76
Dependents	662,355	787,800
Proportion percent of dependents	55.396	58.24
Hands employed in factories	73,229	65,633
Value of production	£9,368,000	£9,600,000
Value per capita of production	£7 14 11	£6 14 11
Total value of industrial production per square mile.	£355 6 8	£131 0 2
Number of unemployed, 1903.	16,422	24,403

[begin page 189]

It is apparent, then, that Protectionist Victoria has a larger proportion of her population employed in industrial pursuits than New South Wales; that, relatively speaking, a much greater percentage of her people are breadwinners and a lesser percentage are dependents; and that her industrial production is almost equal in volume and value, and much larger in proportion to population. It may further be observed that Victoria has a pronounced superiority in regard to diversity of trade. Mr. Coghlan remarks on this head, in his *Seven Colonies* (p. 268): "The Colony of Victoria is of all the Colonies the possessor of the most varied classes of industries."

5. Accumulated Wealth.

This test is one of the most important of all; for, to a very large extent, it epitomizes and re-tests the results of those preceding. I have shown that Victoria has more people to the square mile than New South Wales, that she has a greater agricultural and a more extended system of manufactures. I have also shown that the landed area of New

South Wales is almost four times greater than that of Victoria and that New South Wales possesses overwhelmingly greater and more valuable mining land pastoral resources. Let us now inquire which State possesses the more opulent inhabitants. The following table will make this clear:- *[begin page 190]*

Wealth.	Victoria	N.S. Wales
Value of land privately owned, 1903	£126,078,000	£136,417,000
Value per capita, 1903	£104	£94
Value of property privately owned, 1903	£332,210,680	£346,651,320
Value per capita, 1903	£275	£241
Total deposits in banks, 1903	£41,771,779	£45,488,330
Amount of deposits per capita, 1903	£34 12 8	£31 9 3
Friendly society funds, 1903	£1,364,290	£802,609
Average amount of funds per member	£13 6 7	£8 6 1
Public debt, 1903	£53,749,738	£80,970,961
Public debt per capita, 1903	£42 19 4	£55 7 2

To remark on these figures would be superfluous they explain themselves.

6. Diffusion of Wealth.

In Australia and New Zealand 1903-4 (P. 517) Mr. Coghlan remarks:- "Victoria has the widest diffusion of wealth of the Individual States." The great aims of Protection in fostering varied industries are to provide diversified pursuits for a diversity of talents to stimulate the widest variety of domestic production; to distribute over as wide a human area as possible the general stock of acquired wealth; and thereby to lead to the highest development of men in community. Mr. Coghlan's quoted sentence, therefore, affords an eloquent testimony *[begin page 191]* to the virtue of the policy which David Syme devoted so much time and labour to induce his country to adopt. But let us proceed to the figures:-

Diffusion of Wealth.	Victoria.	N.S. Wales.
Number of estates for eight years ending 1903	29,524	20,092
Value of estates.	£51,154,370	£48,360,869
Proportion of estates per 100 deaths of population	24.55%	16.69%
Proportion of estates per 100 adult males	64.1%	46.1%
Proportion of estates per 100 adult females.	37.0%	27.9%
Number of adults possessing property sufficiently large to be made the subject of specific bequest and subject to stamp duties, 1903	230,000	193,000
Percentage which total incomes bear to value of production.	173.5	158.2
Number of depositors in Savings Banks, 1903.	432,867	331,956
Average amount of deposits per capita	£8 15 6	£8 12 5
Depositors per 100 of population.	36	23

7. Cost of Living.

Unfortunately there are no trustworthy statistics available to institute an exact comparison between the cost of living in Victoria and New South Wales for the year 1903, for Mr. Coghlan neglected to *[begin page 192]* bring these figures to date in his latest publication. But in his *Seven Colonies* he remarks:- "The conditions of life and the standard of living are much the same in all the Colonies, and he then gives the following table, showing all Protectionist Australia under one head' and Free Trade in New South Wales under the other:-

Divisions of Expenditure	N.S. Wales			Victoria		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Food and non-alcoholic beverages.	13	15	2	12	15	11
Fermented and spirituous liquors	3	4	2	2	19	8
Tobacco	0	16	10	0	15	7
Clothing and drapery	5	10	3	5	2	7
Furniture	0	11	0	0	10	3
Rent at value of buildings used as dwellings	4	8	10	4	2	7
Locomotion Fuel and light	1	7	5	1	5	6
Personal attendance, services and lodging	1	17	5	1	14	10
Medical attendance, medicine and nursing	1	3	5	1	1	9
Religion, charities and education	0	14	7	0	13	6
Art and amusement	0	17	2	0	15	11
Books, newspapers, etc.	0	12	5	0	11	6
Postage and telegrams	0	4	5	0	4	2
Direct taxes not falling on trade	0	11	4	0	10	6
Household expense's not elsewhere included	1	11	0	1	8	10
Miscellaneous expenses	0	19	5	0	18	3
Total	£39	14	11	£36	19	5

[begin page 193]

Than this there could not be a more triumphant vindication of the policy of Protection, Mr. Coghlan, the Cobdenist Statist of the Free Trade State, first admits that the standard of living is the same in all the States and then he confesses (to the confusion of the economic doctrine he holds) that under Free Trade the people of New South Wales consume less food, less drink and lodge in inferior houses than the citizens of the Protectionist States; that it cost them 19s. 3d. per head more for their less food; 4s. 6d. per head more for their less drink and 1s. 1d. more for their charity and education. These figures prove beyond dispute that while the standard of living is equal throughout Australia, the cost of that standard was less by £2 15s. 6d. under Protection than under Free Trade, and that the New South Wales house-father was taxed to that amount for the privilege of living under an importing regime rather than buy the products of his own fellow-citizens.

To sum up:-

1. It has been shown that all the institutions which give comfort and stability to society have received greater life and greater vigour of development under Protection in Victoria than under Free Trade in New South Wales.
2. It has been shown that Protectionist Victoria is a more educated and more enlightened State than her Free Trade neighbour. *[begin page 194]*
3. It has been shown that Protection has given Victoria an incomparably greater density of population than Free Trade has given New South Wales.
4. It has been shown that, in all the industries, except mining and pasture, which are independent of Protection, Victoria has made enormous progress under Protection and far outstripped her Free Trade neighbour.
5. It has been shown that Victorian citizens have accumulated more wealth under Protection than New South Wales citizens under Free Trade.
6. It has been shown that Victoria has the widest diffusion of wealth of all the States of the Commonwealth.

7. It has been shown that the cost of living up to the date of Federation was less in Victoria than in New South Wales.

Here, then, is the answer to the question propounded at the beginning of the chapter. Experience has demonstrated that David Syme was a true prophet and has amply justified his life work. He gave Protection to Victoria. Some say he forced the gift upon his fellow citizens. That may be, but the gift was worthy of acceptance and the proof is in the fact that it has made Victoria the richest, the most populous, the busiest, and consequently, the happiest of the Australian States. These are truths which are too self-evident for the most ingenious investigator, however partisan his feelings, to deny.

[begin page 169]



Corner of Collins and Elizabeth Streets.
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Chapter X

The Struggle against Extravagance

The growth of extravagance - Land speculations - Causes of the "Boom" - Methods of the "boomsters" - Folly of the Banks - The demoralization of Parliament - Log-rolling - Railway spendthriftism - Colony hurrying to its ruin - David Syme resolves to save it - The magnitude of the task - He attacks the Government and vigorously assails Railway Administration - Execrated by the whole country but continues his task - Forces people to stop and think - The Boom bursts - Government hurled from office - Parliament dismisses the Railway Commissioners - Mr. Speight brings Libel Action against David Syme claiming £25,000 damages - The greatest libel action of modern times - Offers of compromise - David Syme's reply - Tributes paid to his public services by Mr. Purves, K.C., and Mr. Alfred Deakin - Turner's *History of Victoria* - The benefits to Victoria of the struggle - The cost to Mr. Syme - The aftermath of the Boom - Victoria's wonderful recovery.

From the advent of Protection until about the year 1887 the history of the administration of Victoria was associated with prudence, economy and circumspection. The Colony by that time had advanced, under the stimulus of the new fiscal system, in progress and prosperity beyond the other Australian States; so greatly, indeed, that Victorian citizens began to lose their caution. There followed an era of extravagance.

[begin page 196]

Everybody wanted to grow suddenly rich. The people plunged into the wildest gambling. High and low, rich and poor, indulged in a spirit of emulative speculation and expenditure never paralleled in any community of Victoria's size, importance and population. The whole country seemed to have been smitten with a sort of frenzy. Economy was denounced as parsimony, and no man dared to raise his voice in warning lest he should be accused of wanting faith in the grand future which the lavish present seemed to promise. Parliament and the constituencies were equally demoralized. Each man in the electorates urged upon his representative in Parliament the duty of obtaining some advantage from the general community in favour of some particular person or district. In a few years the Civil Service swelled so enormously that by 1890 there were 32,000 public servants drawing salaries aggregating £3,500,000; and one in every thirty-two of the entire population was in receipt of Government pay.

Parliament, with a swelling revenue, acquired the ambition to live beyond it. It borrowed enormous sums from abroad and scattered *largesse* broadcast. It voted itself high fees. It spent hundreds of thousands on an Exhibition; and in other ways reflected and even rivalled the prodigal expenditure of the community. Large fortunes had been made by Victorian citizens in the Broken Hill Silver Mines and the tin, gold, and *[begin page 198]* copper mines of Tasmania. Still bigger fortunes had been suddenly amassed by bold operations in the Stock Exchange, in city properties and real estate. The fever was in men's blood. It permeated every stratum of society. New companies were floated every week. The transactions on the Stock Exchange often exceeded £2,000,000 a day. Everybody had money to spend and spent it without heed for the morrow. There was no corner in the wide domain of finance that speculative companies did not invade; and the keen competition of their methods induced the established banks and building societies to follow suit.

Those companies assumed the most multifarious combinations, from the genuine land mortgage bank to the share investment trust, and by enabling the poorest men to buy their shares and participate in large dividends they were material factors in the growth of speculation and expenditure. There was a perfect carnival of spendthriftism and luxurious living. Trade thereby acquired an artificial stimulus. Houses, cottages and splendid villas embellished with all the decorations purchasable by money, sprang up like mushrooms everywhere. Men who yesterday were paupers, today built themselves mansions and surrounded themselves with retinues of servants. The most pessimistic persons dreamed roseate dreams and would not believe that the omnipresent marvellous prosperity they saw around them could *[begin page 199]* be impermanent. Years passed, yet the prosperity only seemed to increase; and ever, the gambling mania grew. At length Parliament threw off all the shackles of common sense and, spurred on by the electorates, began to construct a chain of non-paying railways all over the land, and to connect almost every little village with the metropolis.

There were so many contributing causes to the Boom, as this wild era of extravagance came afterwards to be called, that it would be difficult precisely to locate its origin. It is indisputable, however, that it could not have started but for the financial recklessness of the Government. This occasioned an inflow of population, especially from neighbouring-Colonies, greater than private enterprise could readily absorb in permanently reproductive industries; and, in consequence, the Government was induced to heap extravagance upon extravagance and to begin a great number of public works (many of which proved quite unproductive and useless) in order to open up the country for industrial development. There were, besides, immense importations of private capital into the Colony for investment. During the five Boom years, 1886 to 1890, the prodigious sum of £31,500,000 (Coghlan's *Seven Colonies*, P. 416) of private capital was introduced into the State; and when we remember that the public borrowings in the same period exceeded £19,000,000 it will *[begin page 200]* be the easier to comprehend the extraordinary supervening inflation.

Every branch of industry was affected. The local capitalists and those persons entrusted with the disposition of foreign capital were equally desirous of investing the money in their coffers. But while there was money in plenty investments were at first limited in numbers, and hence the price of land went up with a run. There followed a sympathetic rise in rent and wages, and very soon everybody had money to spend and appeared to be extremely prosperous. These were conditions eminently favourable for the operations of financial adventurers. The opportunity evolved such sharks, first in scores, later in hundreds. Jobbers, company-promoters and exploiters of all sorts and classes appeared as though by magic. They mostly hit upon land-dealing as a means of enriching themselves. It was the simplest and readiest instrument to their hands; for land was universally desired and was steadily increasing in value under the competition of legitimate-investors. Moreover, it was easy for them to persuade men who would have scorned to gamble, under that name (always a majority in any community), that to make a profit on a land transaction of purchase and sale was not speculation but business.

Once the ball started rolling the whole country was speedily engaged in buying and selling land. *[begin page 201]* The process varied in details but, generally speaking, was carried out on fixed principles, of which the following will afford an illustration. A certain man, whom we shall call A, some time before the Boom had bought a few acres of land in the environs of Melbourne for £5,000. Then came the Boom and one day he awoke to find his estate worth (on paper), at market rates, £10,000. Perhaps he did not desire to sell, but he was not allowed to remain without tempting offers, and presently he was prevailed on by a speculator to part with his holding for £12,000. The purchaser B, of course, had only bought it to sell again. B, in his turn, was soon approached by C, a

jobbing syndicate of four or five persons. They bought the land from B for £15,000; of which sum they paid him £5,600 in cash and gave him bills for the balance.

C next sold the land to a Land Company D which paid C £20,000 - £6,000 in cash, the balance in bills. As yet nothing had been done to improve the land, and it was still in its primeval state. D soon discovered that it had bought at the top price and that it must do something in order to make a profit. It accordingly turned over the land on credit to E, another company, whose particular business it was to subdivide estates and sell to small investors. There followed a land sale.

On a certain day a number of buyers were col- *[begin page 202]* lected by the auctioneers on the land. There was a tent with free refreshments, solid and liquid, for the entertainment of the crowd and a brass band to supply music. Within an hour the auction sale was over and the whole estate had been parcelled out among small speculators at prices ranging from £5 to £30 a foot. But not even here did the game end. The small speculators could only pay down a part of the purchase price; and to obtain the balance (credit was cheap) they went to the investment companies and building societies, which not only negotiated with the Land Sale Company for their titles but ran up buildings for them (on credit) on the various allotments, and presently transformed what had been a wilderness into an apparently thriving suburb. It will have been remarked that all these various exchanges, save the first, were partly or wholly on a paper or credit basis; and that the ultimate responsibility of liquidation was imposed on the shoulders of the final purchasers.

There were hundreds and hundreds of almost exactly similar transactions, and they all rested on the same foundation the ability of the small men who had bought the small allotments to meet their engagements. This ability in its turn depended on the indefinite prolongation of the Boom and the maintenance of the high wages the Boom had caused. The whole thing was a house of cards. It only needed a check in the importation *[begin page 203]* of foreign capital or a cessation of the inflow of population for the airy edifice to tumble down. This disaster was expedited by the big jobbers. Not satisfied with the sort of dealing illustrated above - which, although flagrantly unsound financing, was nevertheless within the pale of the law - and not content to grow reasonably rich, they aspired to become millionaires by illicit operations.

Many of them were men of high social position, members of the Legislature and dignitaries of State. All of them were directors of some Land Company, Bank, or Building Society. These institutions were interwoven in the most curious ways. Many had the same directors. The directors began to lend to themselves and to each other large sums for purposes of speculation without adequate security. They also began to pay dividends to their shareholders, not out of the profits (which were mostly on paper) but out of the capital invested. The old-established Banks (the head offices of most of which were in London and which mostly dealt in foreign capital) do not seem to have been aware of these indefensible proceedings, but nothing can absolve them from the charge of insanely-reckless conduct. Instead of combining to arrest the public fever of speculation they entered the swim with the land-jobbing institutions and, by their loose actions in competing for business with the latter, they positively encouraged it.

[begin page 204]

They appeared to care for nothing except to lend out their money. They financed the big jobbers beyond all reason, advanced vast sums, up to and often beyond the limit of value of the land and notes of hand offered in pledge, and in divers other ways assisted to inflate values and at the same time to promote in the body politic a false-sense of security. But for them the Boom would have burst long before it did. The banks foresaw the crash but, upheld by a vain Micawberlike hope of something turning up,

they stood shoulder to shoulder to postpone the day of reckoning, meanwhile bolstering up with credit the jobbers who had drawn them into the whirlpool.

As a direct result of their folly the Boom acquired fresh life. Land in and around Melbourne, having attained to values beyond which further efforts at appreciation could not force it, the jobbers went farther afield and began dealing in country properties. Their favourite plan was to pick out some likely locality for a settlement, buy up land for a song, and then persuade the Government to attach the district by a railway to the metropolis, so that they might seize the increment produced by the building of the line and sell out at a profit.

The Government, deeply infected with the financial malaise of the community, was only too easily persuaded, and railways began to be constructed here, there and everywhere. It was the duty *[begin page 205]* of the Railway Commissioners, whose voice in such matters was wellnigh supreme (for they were statutorily independent of Parliament and patronage), to have vetoed the great majority of these projects. But they neglected their duty.

The Chief Commissioner, Mr. Richard Speight, was a man of experience and skill and of unquestionable personal probity in railway management, which he acquired in England as an officer of the Midland Railway Company. But he was not a statesman, and the jobbers succeeded in convincing him that the prosperity was stable and that his proper course was to embark on a career of railway construction. Indeed they succeeded so well, that, when an expenditure on new railways amounting to £41,000,000 was proposed and Mr. Speight was asked by the Government for his advice, he declared that in his opinion the entire expenditure was advisable.

Fortunately there was at least one man who preserved his senses in this seething cauldron of gambling and that was David Syme. Parliament was disorganized; the constituencies, were lunatic; the country was racing headlong to ruin. Syme thought the matter out and conceived it to be his duty to stand between-the frenzied people and the precipice towards which they were rushing.

In order to do this Syme had to oppose the citizens, the constituencies, and Parliament. He *[begin page 206]* had to reckon not only with a fever-smitten populace. The whole Civil Service was ranged against him, and he knew that he would also have to combat the embittered forces of his oft defeated political enemies. But David Syme was in the, truest sense a patriot, and was not to be deterred by fear or disadvantage from doing his duty as he saw it. He prepared and published a series of articles in *The Age* that were destined to bring the nation to a pause in its calamitous career. The father of the Victorian bar, Mr. J.L. Purves, K.C., at a later date thus publicly described the series:- "In my opinion no such series of articles has ever been published in any daily publication [in Australia] since the great series which was published in regard to the Reform Bill. They are among the most powerful ever written. We have never had such another series published in Victoria. Never. The whole of the articles were of the highest class of journalism. They pointed out expenditure that was utterly unauthorized from any point of view. The most sanguine enthusiast among the general public could never have approved of the expenditure referred to in any of those articles and could never have believed that within the time of any generation in which we take a personal interest that expenditure would ever be of any value. Mr. Syme pointed that out. He also pointed out that the result to the country would be perfectly ruinous." These *[begin page 207]* articles were written by Mr. G.F H. Schuler, afterwards Editor of *The Age*.

The first few of the series provoked a storm of public protest directed against the publisher. He was reviled and lampooned in Parliament, on the platform, and by many

journals in the Colony. David Syme made no reply to his assailants, but continued to publish the articles. He showed that the Civil Service was over-manned and overpaid, and that useless public works were being carried out with lavish and appalling recklessness. He particularly attacked the Railway Department. He charged this department with scandalous mismanagement and the wildest squandering of public money. He impeached the policy of unnecessary construction, the equipping of the railways beyond the needs of the districts they served, the costliness of maintenance, and the incapacity of the railway administration.

The Ministry of the day had just introduced a Bill for the construction of 1,677 miles of line at a cost of £14,712,663. It had also brought in a supplementary list of other lines, at the instance of private members, for the building of 2,953 additional miles, at a cost of £26,362,458. The total projected expenditure was, therefore, £41,075,121. The whole of these schemes had received the approval of the Chief Railway Commissioner) Mr. Richard Speight, and, his colleagues. Syme declared that the introduction of these *[begin page 208]* measures proved the Government unfit to hold office, and that the endorsement of the schemes by the Commissioners demonstrated the necessity of their dismissal as unfaithful guardians of the public interest.

Long before the series was concluded the storm of vituperation ceased. The community, staggered by *The Age's* stern and uncompromising strictures, began to realize the abyss of ruin towards which it had been furiously hastening, and drew up startled and trembling on the brink. Presently consternation reigned supreme. The bubble was pricked. The Boom was about to burst. Parliament recovered its senses. The Government responsible for the crisis was hurled from office and, compelled by *The Age*, the new Government began to institute reforms. Early in 1892 the octopus Railway Bills were laid aside and the Railway Commissioners were obliged to resign from the service. A Railway Standing Committee was appointed to investigate the finances and administration of the department and it immediately effected an annual saving of £594,746, by cutting down useless and wasteful expenses that had been authorized by the Commissioners.

But while all this was doing the enemies of David Syme had not been idle. Mr. Speight, the late Chief Commissioner, mistakenly assuming that *The Age* had attacked him personally and not the system of which he had been the adminis- *[begin page 209]* rator, determined to secure redress from the man who had occasioned his dismissal. He had Parliament, not openly but secretly, behind him - the Parliament which in reality was just as much responsible as he for the railway extravagances; and as well as his friends in the Legislature he had the support of the Free Trade interest, and every enemy of Liberalism, Protection, and the democratic sentiment in the country. These men gathered behind Mr. Speight in a solid phalanx and, perceiving an opportunity to wreak their vengeance on David Syme for old scores, they opened their purses and provided the wherewithal to ruin Syme and destroy *The Age*.

Mr. Speight issued a writ against David Syme, claiming £25,000 damages for libel, and then ensued the greatest libel action of modern times. This may seem a wide assertion, but a few facts will establish the fact beyond dispute and show the nature and extent of the battle. The articles which had caused Mr. Speight's dismissal, having assailed the largest national asset and enterprise possessed and directed by the State, brought into court for discussion details of a technical nature which overspread the range of industrial learning. The instructions for brief demanded the unwearying labour of scores of legal and other experts for many months before they could be presented in abstract form; and even after the brief was prepared and the different sources of investiga *[begin page 210]* tion were apparently exhausted, new sources constantly sprang up which had to be searchingly explored.

It was a colossal undertaking merely to marshal all the facts and place them in an intelligible form for judgment. The action was begun on the 14th of March, 1892. The trial began on the 1st of June, 1893. It lasted continuously till the 10th of February, 1894. It may be said with regard to other long trials, such as the Tichborne Case, the Pigott trial, and the trial of Queen Caroline, that the details were interesting and mastered with comparative ease. But in *Speight v Syme* the details were of a most distractingly technical nature, and so voluminous that they required enormous assiduity to reduce them from a huge unformed mass to something comprehensible. There were no fewer than 1,003 exhibits, and the written documents produced in evidence made so huge a pile that they entirely obscured from view the men whose business it was to number them. There were 108 witnesses examined, and the jury fees alone cost Syme £2,700.

The result of the trial was unsatisfactory (the jury disagreed) and a new trial was applied for. This application was heard on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th of April, 1894, and, to show the maze of difficulties with which Syme had to contend, it may be observed that while the application was being heard in one court a second trial on ten un- [\[begin page 211\]](#) decided issues of the first trial began in another part of the same building; and, furthermore, that three other trials were simultaneously proceeding for alleged libels, arising out of the historic series of articles, brought against Syme by subordinate railway officials who had shared the fate of the Commissioners.

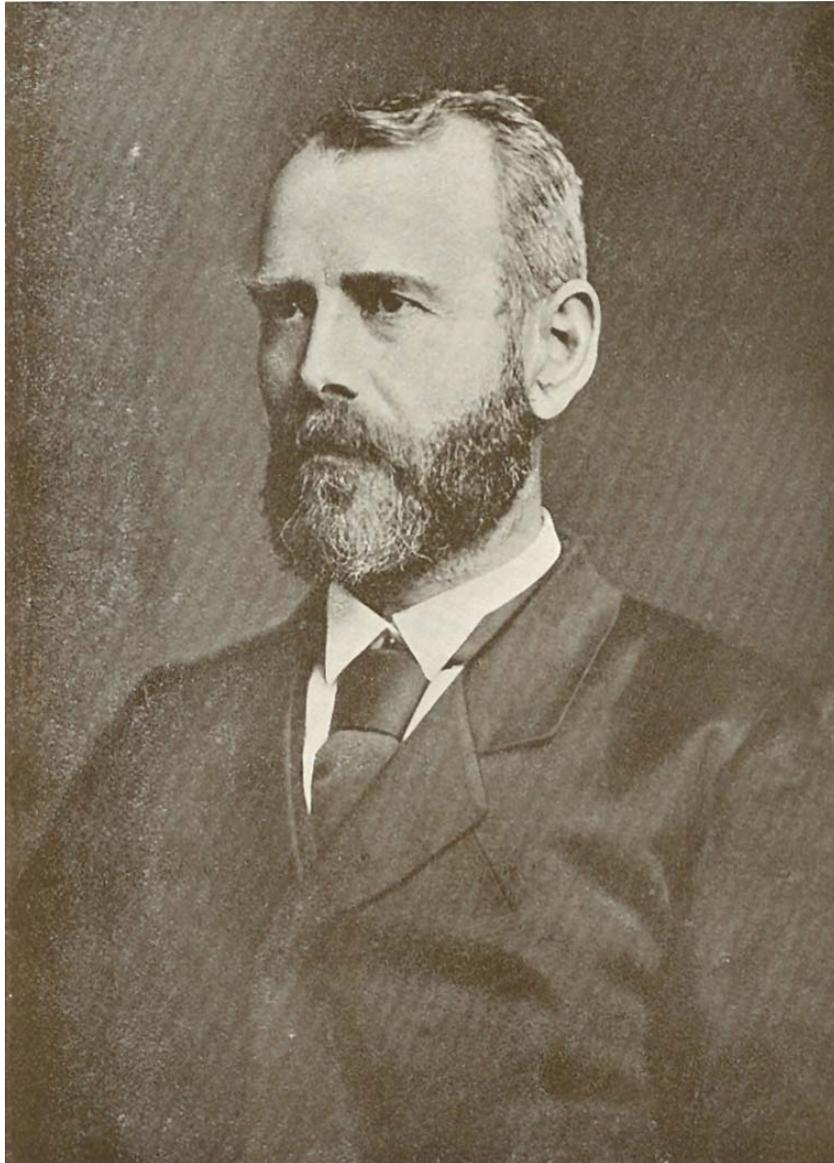
The second great trial lasted 105 days, in addition to the 94 days of the first. Ninety new witnesses were examined and 40 new sets of papers, each the height of a tall man, were, produced in addition to the 1,003 exhibits employed in the first trial. Syme's counsel occupied five days in his opening address to the jury and another five in his closing statement. Speight's lawyers spoke at even greater length. The trial concluded on the 26th of September, 1894. The result was a triumphant vindication of David Syme. He was held to have acted within his rights in commenting upon the department, and all his charges of mismanagement and extravagance were, with one single exception, sustained.

But, although Mr. Speight got no damages and *The Age* was vindicated, Syme had to pay his own law costs to the tune of £50,000. It cost him so much of his private fortune to save the State from ruin. But it cost him, besides money, three long years of worry and anxiety. The people knew that he was fighting for them, and they often showed him marks of gratitude; but did they [\[begin page 212\]](#) realize the magnitude of the personal interests he had at stake, interests which, with almost unexampled magnanimity, he hazarded in the service of his countrymen?

The people grew tired of the weary trials, sick of reading the details; and yet their champion for three long years each day faced the fire in a spirit of unflagging tenacity and self-sacrifice to subordinate his interests to those of the community. Had the case gone against him David Syme would have been cast in £25,000 damages and at least £100,000 in costs; and the two other Commissioners, who had been dismissed with Mr. Speight, would have instantly preferred similar suits. That was the prospect before him throughout those wearing years.

Yet all those sufferings, perils, and anxieties he might easily have evaded. Shortly after the actions had begun the Minister of Railways, a personal friend of Speight, desired to reappoint him in a subordinate capacity to the Railway Service, and sent a message to Syme offering, if he would merely refrain from condemning the proposed appointment in *The Age*, to compromise and settle the actions on the most advantageous terms. But the man who had twice already risked his fortune and future in opposing bad

government for the sake of a principle, was not to be bought. David Syme's written answer to the request was published at a later date. It is a *[begin page 213]* message that deserves to be engraven in the annals of his country.



David Syme, 1860.

"My answer is," said David Syme, "I cannot see my way to do so with honour. I cannot withdraw even by inference what I believe to be true. I cannot stand aside and allow a certain course to be taken which I believe would be prejudicial to the interests of the country. Having nothing to retract, nothing to explain away, there is nothing for me to do but let things take their course. I also feel that the matter does not concern myself alone. I entertain the idea, preposterous as it may seem to some people, that I am to some extent in a position of trust; that I have to see to it that the country shall not lose the benefits of the reforms already accomplished in the Railway department."

Those words in the circumstances which evoked them should procure for David Syme the deathless gratitude of the people of Victoria. They more than justify the commentary pronounced on him at a public ceremony by Mr. Purves:- Gentlemen, if ever a patriot struck true metal David Syme did in this. He is a Protectionist. I am a Free Trader. He is a loyal Liberal, I am supposed to be a Conservative. Yet I say that

when the history of this Colony comes to be written-one of the finest of its pages will be the one which describes how the community, stricken with a summer madness, was awakened to appreciation [begin page 214] of the danger into which it was drifting by the quiet, upright, self-sacrificing man who succeeded in stirring the public up to put forth the effort required to reduce Government expenditure within the State income. And the position he took up afterwards! Through you, gentlemen, I hope that the knowledge of that position may be spread throughout Victoria, so that those hitherto ignorant of the facts may feel that gratitude towards him which, as a citizen, I feel. Have a thought of the terrible time Mr. Syme has been through these four years! You know in your private and personal experience what a dreadful feeling you have when you go to your homes and see around you your wives and children and think of the moneys you have lost which ought to have been theirs and what would be their fate if you were suddenly withdrawn from the centre of action. Mr. Syme has felt that wretched feeling long drawn out. He has endured it for the sake of the people, you, me, each and all of us. The time he has gone through has been one of awful misery to him. I can say no more."

Alfred Deakin, afterwards Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, remarked on the same occasion:- "The first insight I gained into the true condition of the Railway affairs was acquired by reading *The Age* articles. The Ministry to which I belonged also first awoke to the threatening prospects of the future through what was said [begin page 215] in those articles. Prior to their appearance my position was that of thousands of others in the community, none of us aware of the abyss which the whole Colony was approaching. Taken as a whole those articles, after being subjected to the test of legal proof, proved to be monumental in evidence of the good sense and accuracy of David Syme's journalism. The contest which Mr. Syme had been fighting has been represented as unequal because on the one side was a private citizen and on the other a man having at his back the resources of a powerful newspaper. But if there was any unfairness, Mr. Syme is really the man to be pitied; for he had to face Mr. Speight as a poor man and a private citizen, but Mr. Speight was supported by a faction and a cause. I venture to say that if Mr. Speight alone had been Mr. Syme's antagonist and Mr. Speight's personal claims alone had been in question, the litigation would have been quickly finished at a cost of less than a tithe of the money that has been expended. But as a matter of fact the action 'Speight v. Syme' was seized upon by every enemy of *The Age* and its policy and every enemy of Liberalism in this country as an opportunity for vengeance. They thought it afforded them the chance of ruining Mr. Syme, or, at least, in a course of years to cause him to spend most of his private fortune, thus crippling the principal organ of Liberalism and in fact the Liberal party itself. It will stand [begin page 216] in history that Mr. Syme in this case had to fight a faction concealed behind Mr. Speight, striving to wreak its vengeance on him for causes not necessary to particularize."

Such was the public testimony, borne by two notable publicists some months after, the termination of the trials, to David Syme's great services to the country; in the one case by a political opponent and in the other by a political supporter of *The Age's* policy. They both spoke of the place that Syme would occupy in history. What will be thought when I inform my readers that in less than ten years after those words were spoken an official history of Victoria was compiled and published by Mr. H.G. Turner - a work that is usually accepted as the standard history of the State which not only ignored David Syme's existence and suppressed all mention of the great railway trials, but actually inferentially ascribed to the Conservative party (which subsidized Mr. Speight to fight David Syme) the credit of Victoria's awakening from its debauch of extravagance and its return to the paths of economy and common sense?

The consequences of the Speight v. Syme actions may be briefly summed up. The country was saved an expenditure of more than £41,000,000 on useless railways, not one of which has been since constructed, or is likely to be for decades still to come; economics were instituted in rail- *[begin page 217]* way administration amounting to several hundreds of thousands per annum; and David Syme lost £50,000. Syme, however, was enabled to surmount this immense expense by the enormous accession of popular esteem his paper gained through his indomitable championship of the public interest, and thenceforward *The Age* pursued an increasingly prosperous career.

The Boom burst while the trials were proceeding. Syme's attack on the railways had rendered this inevitable, for it had compelled the people to realize what they were doing and to consider the future. *The Age*, moreover, had followed up the Railway Campaign with a vigorous onslaught on the bogus companies and their devious methods of finance, with the result that public prosecutions were in some cases instituted by the Government. Between the years 1889 and 1892 several smaller Banks and Building and Investment Societies failed, but in 1893 the great crash came. Early in that year one of the foremost institutions closed its doors, and there followed a stream of failures culminating in the closing, between April 5 and May 17, of no fewer than twelve large Banks which had been made insolvent by their reckless credit system and the inability of their customers to redeem their mortgages. The rental value of Melbourne and suburbs fell in a few weeks from £6,815,313 to £5,847,079. But the most detrimental effect of the Boom was the withdrawal *[begin page 218]* of large bodies -"of men from productive employment and the derangement of the labour market that ensued.

The crisis was the severest ever experienced in the Colony, but the people met it with heroic fortitude and, assisted by the industrial protection afforded by the tariff, they soon managed to weather the storm. In 1893, the black year, the State expenditure exceeded the revenue by £1,030,521. In 1894 the deficit fell to £593,432 and in 1895 to £45,787. In 1896 it mounted to £81,500; but in 1897 and 1898 the revenue exceeded the expenditure by £61,285 and £205,796, and since then has steadily and continuously expanded. Victoria to-day is one of the most substantially prosperous States of the Empire. She suffered terribly from the Boom, but the experience was not without its value. She has magnificently recovered and no longer feels any of its ill effects, but it has taught her a lesson she can never forget.

[begin page 219]

Chapter XI

Democratic Legislation

David Syme's consistency - Education system - Manhood Suffrage - State aid to Religion - Old age pensions - Water conservation - Anti-sweating laws - Factories Acts - Income-tax - Indeterminate Sentences.

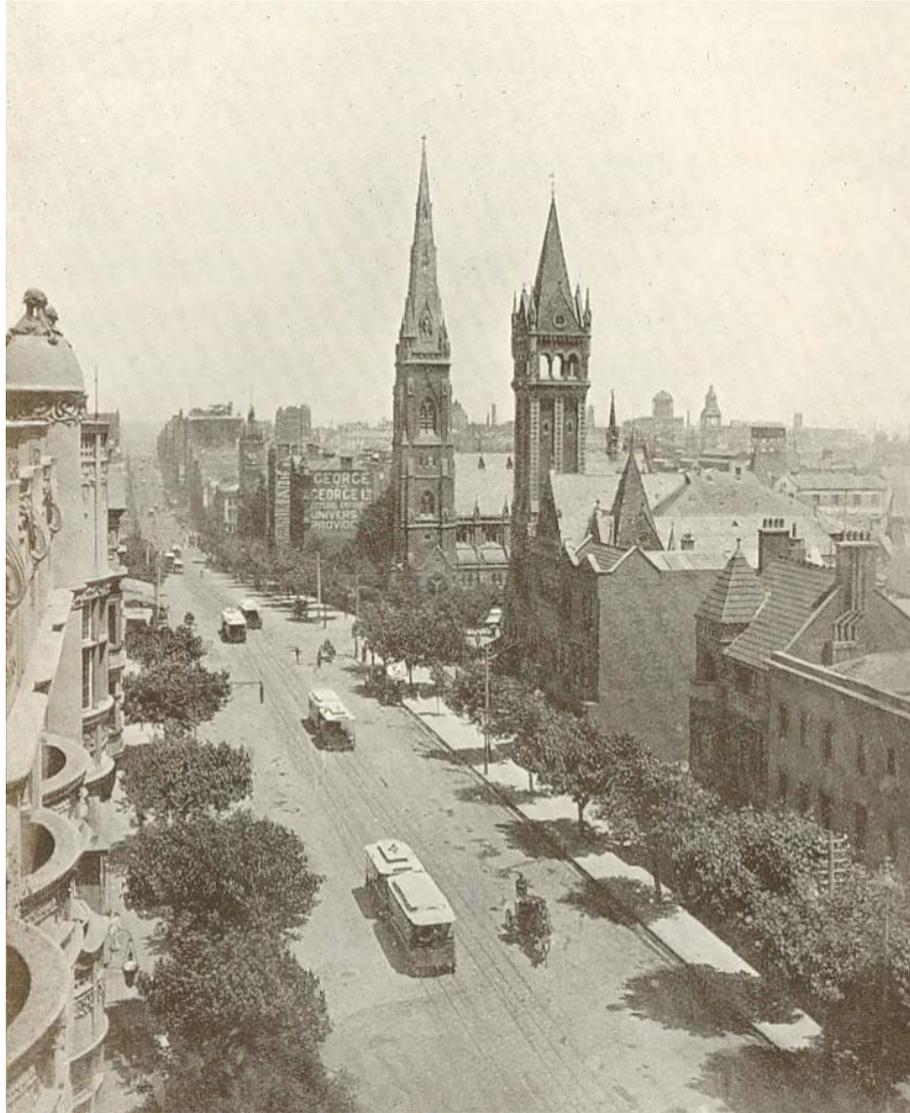
Syme's public career evidenced noteworthy consistency. Each part was in perfect harmony with every other part, and the whole was in admirable accord with the principles of progress and justice which inspired all his efforts to promote the welfare of the State. When he came to Victoria, he found the machinery of Government in the grasp of a small body of plutocrats and monopolists. The masses, on the other hand, were living in a condition of political servitude, toiling and moiling for the benefit of their masters, with no voice in the conduct of affairs and too unsettled and improvident to give much thought to the future. Syme led them from their bondage and made them the dominant factor in the political realm.

Too wise, however, to entrust the destiny of the country to an uneducated people, he pursued the work of their emancipation by equipping them for the responsibilities and duties of a sovereign nation. *[begin page 219]* To achieve this aim he used the first fruits of his successful campaigns for the unlocking of the land and for fiscal protection to native industries to advocate and help into being a system of free, compulsory, and secular education. This Radical reform was not effected without a prolonged and fierce struggle with the Conservatives, who wished to retain learning among their other monopolies and to exclude the sons of the people from the sources of mental enlightenment. But in spite of their opposition Victoria was endowed at a very early date in her history with a system of primary public education more comprehensive and more thoroughgoing than even yet obtains in any other country in the world.

David Syme followed up this victory with a demand for universal manhood suffrage, and he had no sooner wrested this concession than he advocated the payment of members of Parliament, in order that the political representatives of the so-called lower orders might be able to meet their wealthy competitors in the Legislature on comparatively even terms. When this challenge was flung down the anger of vested interests passed all bounds.

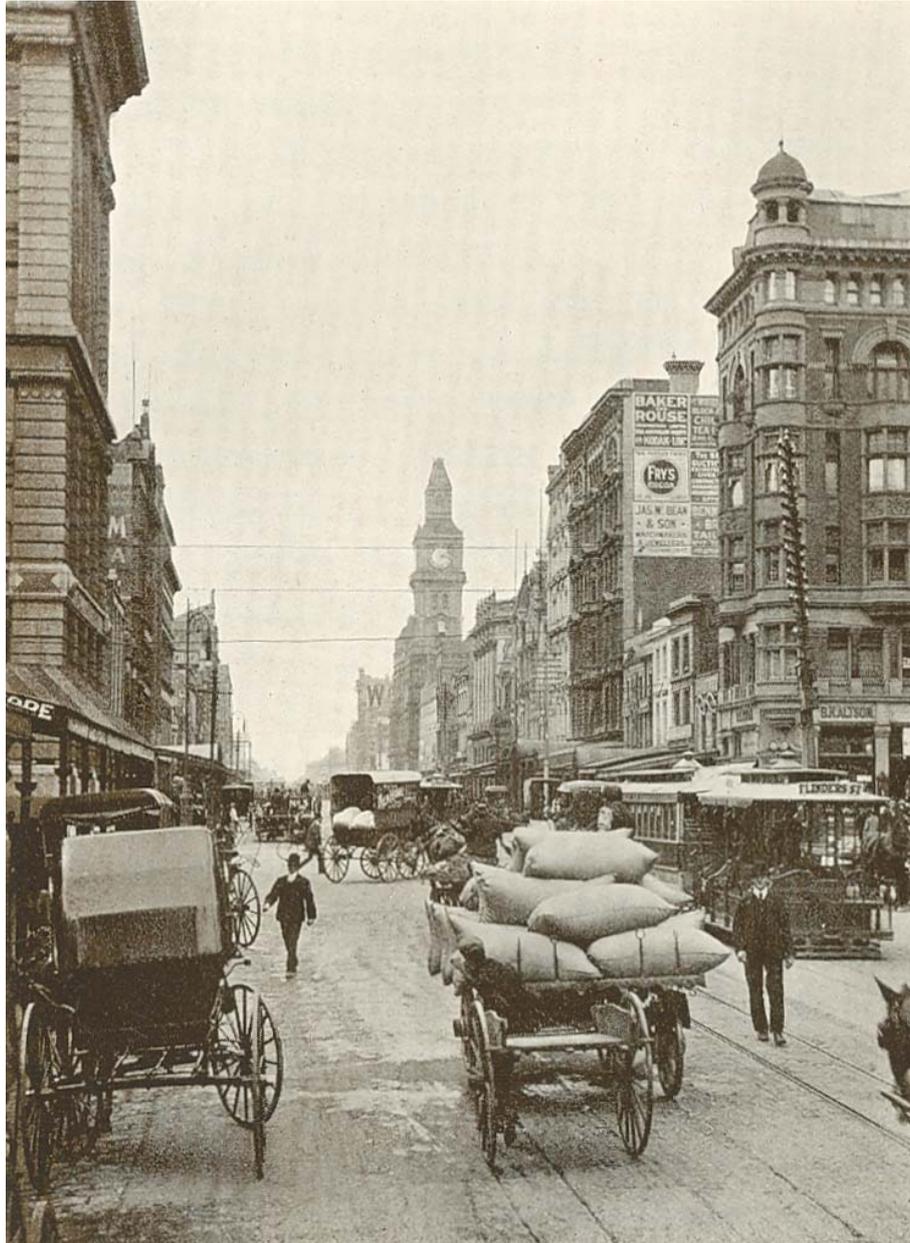
They rallied their forces, fought proposal and proposer with excessive bitterness, and spent money like water in purchasing votes to secure the defeat of the measure as soon as it was introduced to Parliament. Time after time it was either thrown out of the Assembly or blocked by the Council. But *[begin page 221]* Syme always returned to the charge, and after two general elections at which it was the main issue payment of members became the law of the land.

He similarly secured the abolition of State aid to religion, and at a later date he persuaded Parliament and the people to grant pensions to old and indigent citizens, not as an eleemosynary dole but in recognition of the right of all persons who have spent their lives in honest toil to have their last years made comfortable at the public expense, if through misfortune or even through improvidence they have failed to make adequate provision for their old age.



Melbourne, 1908.

David Syme was the first writer in Australia to recognize that the agricultural future of the country largely depends upon a forward policy of water conservation and irrigation. In order to impress his views upon the public consciousness he twice despatched at his own expense Mr. J.L. Dow, (a former Minister of Agriculture in the Victorian Government) to America, to inquire into the agricultural methods of the United States and Mexico, and the value of irrigation in arid land. He also commissioned Mr. Alfred Deakin (afterwards Prime Minister of the Commonwealth) to tour India and examine and report upon the irrigation works of that country and, their value in preserving a famine ridden, people from starvation. Under the impetus imparted, by such statesman-like journalism Victoria was persuaded to adopt the policy he advocated, *[begin page 222]* and has already spent some £6,000,000 in carrying it out. A good deal of the money has been more or less wastefully expended in experiments, but the broad results are not unsatisfactory. Several hundred thousands of acres of desert lands have been permanently reclaimed and put in prosperous, cultivation, giving homes and employment to hundreds of settlers: and, taught by the mistakes of the past, Victoria is about to perfect numerous schemes of conservation and irrigation, which, humanly speaking, are certain to expand enormously the natural limits of her arable areas and greatly to augment her agricultural population and the national prosperity.



Melbourne, 1908.

When the Protectionist *regime* had begun to curtail the volume of importations from abroad and to supply the needs of the, citizens with the products of their own industries, Syme lost no whit of his old care for the interests of the working classes. His policy had provided them with employment where formerly there was none to give them. But he was not content with that undeniable claim upon their gratitude. He made it his business to provide that they should live in a condition of comfort conformable with a humane and civilized standard. He therefore fathered the enactment of a series of anti-sweating and Factory Acts regulating the wages, the hours of work and the terms and conditions of labour-Acts which mark a stage of progress towards the social ideals of true Liberal *[begin page 223]* sentiment far in advance of that of other manufacturing communities. Further, with the aim of obviating those industrial conflicts and disputes between employers and employés, which, whenever arising, lead to the dislocation of society and widespread human misery, he helped to create Wages Boards, whose success in operation has engaged the attention and commanded the respect of the statesmen of other countries.

David Syme was always an uncompromising opponent of extravagance in Administration. His ideal of Government was a State which is neither a lender nor a borrower; a State which accommodates its expenditure to its income; and which, while prepared to pledge the public credit for the construction of reproductive works will never undertake unproductive, public works except out of surplus revenue. There came a time when these principles were put to a very severe test. The bursting of the Land Boom in 1893 caused such a serious shrinkage of revenue that large annual deficits became the rule, and in a few years the deficiencies had accumulated to the sum of £2,711,000. When these facts were disclosed Syme met the situation with a demand for new taxation that would restore the national finances to a condition of solvency, and never rested until an Income Tax was imposed which speedily began to wipe out the floating debt. Few of Syme's achievements better illustrated the disinterestedness and unselfishness of his character. *[begin page 224]*

He was the only journalist in Victoria who advocated the tax, and yet, at the time he proposed it, no other citizen possessed a larger income. He was, therefore, the chief predestined victim of the impost, and, from the moment it became law, paid a larger annual amount to the Income Tax Commissioners than any other man in the State. A dozen times since then the moneyed classes have agitated for the repeal of the tax; but Syme withstood them, and his benevolent despotism forbade the deletion of the measure from the Statute Book.

These instances of the legislation David Syme originated represent the inflexible consistency of his policy and are typical of many other laws which he played a leading part in fashioning. It may be said indeed with perfect truth that there is not a single Liberal progressive Act in the Statute Book which he did not either solely or partially originate. On the other hand, he prevented the enactment of several reactionary measures and nipped in the bud many crude and hair-brained projects designed to rush the State into ill-considered Socialist experiments.

The latest of his Liberal achievements was the Indeterminate Sentences Act for the treatment of criminals. This measure provides for the detention of all convicted criminals (not in gaols but in reformatories where each man is taught a useful trade), until they shall satisfy their guardians that they may be trusted not to employ their liberty to prey *[begin page 225]* upon society. David Syme began his advocacy of this wise and humane reform early in the twentieth century, and continued unweariedly to place his views before the people until at length his opponents became his disciples and the Indeterminate Sentences Act passed into law, thus adding to the long series of legislative triumphs won by the indomitable will-power and genius for statesmanship of the stern old Scotsman.

[begin page 226]

Chapter XII

Federation and Afterwards

David Syme's part in promoting Federation - The elections for the last Federal convention - David Syme selects ten delegates and Victoria approves his choice - After Federation *The Age* eschews provincialism and preaches nationalism - The first Australian Tariff not Protective - Campaign for high Protection - David Syme and Mr. Reid - The Tariff Commission - David Syme forces on the fiscal issue - Triumph of his policy at the elections - Australia a Protectionist country - Mr. Syme and the "new" Protection - The Anti-Trust Act - *The Age* and the Northern Territory - National Defence - *The Age* and its position in the Commonwealth.

David Syme, as might well be imagined, played a prominent part in promoting the federation of the Australian States. He gave the movement strong support, and when, after many setbacks and delays, in February, 1895, the Australian Premiers met in conference at Hobart and agreed upon the draft of a Federal Enabling Bill, he made an extraordinary effort to prevent the shelving of the measure in Victoria and elsewhere. Largely owing to his strenuous advocacy the Bill was passed by all the Australian Parliaments except Queensland. It provided for the holding of another Federal convention [*begin page 227*] consisting of ten delegates from each colony, who were to frame the Federal Constitution. The delegates were elected by each colony voting as a single constituency.

In Victoria some twenty-four candidates offered themselves for election. They were almost without exception able men and well-known jurists and politicians. Syme selected ten Liberals from the number, and the people of Victoria ratified his choice to a man. Moreover, his approval of the Draft Constitution, when framed, gave a decided impulse to its subsequent adoption by an overwhelming majority at the referendum.

The Commonwealth was no sooner established than *The Age* laid aside the trammels of old provincial habits of thought and stood forth as the protagonist of National, as opposed to State sentiments and interests. From that day it has never ceased to preach the gospel of nationalism and to deprecate the intrusion of parochialism and local jealousies into the sphere of national politics. Syme's object was to abolish all arbitrary divisions and boundaries and to teach the Australian people that they are not any longer New South Welshmen or Victorians, Queenslanders, West or South Australians, or Tasmanians, but Australians - an undivided people and a nation. His success in Victoria was remarkable to the last degree, and he also influenced the other States, for every national ideal he advocated has never failed long of adoption with oftentimes [*begin page 228*] grateful recognition in all parts of the Commonwealth.

Syme's first great national undertaking was to secure a tariff that would give adequate protection to Australian industries. The first Parliament was composed of such heterogeneous fiscal elements that immediate progress in that direction was impossible.

The first Federal Government, led by Sir Edmund Barton, was avowedly Protectionist, but it was obliged by the financial exigences of the States to subordinate the Protectionist-versus-Free Trade issue to the necessity of raising a sufficient Customs revenue to insure the solvency of the States in accordance with the intention of the Federal Constitution; which, in giving the Commonwealth complete control of the Customs, had deprived the States of their principal source of revenue. The Prime

Minister, therefore, announced himself in favour of a tariff that would yield revenue without destroying industries; a policy in other words of compromise or "moderate Protection."

Syme opposed this policy strenuously, for he foresaw that the Tariff outcome of such a proposal would inevitably cause a serious industrial depression in Protectionist Victoria that would react hurtfully upon the other States of the Union. But the Government, with the support of the great body of still unconverted Free Trade opinion in New South Wales, was able to carry out its will. The result was a *[begin page 229]* hybrid Tariff that lowered the old Victorian duties all round and left Australian manufacturers at the mercy of foreign competition.

On September 24, 1903, Sir Edmund Barton resigned office to take up a position on the High Court Bench, and Mr. Alfred Deakin became Prime Minister in his place. Mr. Deakin, however, did not long retain the reins of power. Early in 1904 he was defeated on the Arbitration Bill, and a Labour Ministry under the leadership of Mr. J.C. Watson assumed control of the Treasury. Five months later Mr. Watson in his turn suffered defeat on the same measure, and a strong coalition Government was formed under the joint-leadership of Mr. G.H. Reid, the leader of the Free Trade Party, and Mr. Alan McLean, a Victorian Protectionist; the Conservatives and a section of the Liberals having come together on a tacit understanding to sink the fiscal issue indefinitely in order to make common cause against labour domination and the three party system.



David Syme's Sanctum at the "Age" Office.

In these circumstances it appeared quite hopeless to expect a revision of the Tariff on Protectionist lines. The acknowledged leader of Cobdenism in Australia was in power. The Protectionist party was rent in twain and a majority of its members was pledged to Mr. Reid. Added to this, the coalition Ministry was supported in its resolve to abjure the reopening of the Tariff question by almost every daily journal in the Commonwealth.

[begin page 230]

David Syme, however, was at his best when fighting a seemingly desperate cause and leading a forlorn hope. He had evidence all around him that the low tariff was disastrously affecting a number of old and formerly prosperous native industries in Victoria and elsewhere, and, in spite of overwhelming odds, undertook their championship as soon as the Reid-McLean Administration entered on its first session. Mr. Reid for a time considered that he could defy *The Age*, but he reckoned without his host, and was staggered at the great popular outcry for Tariff revision that extended to the remotest parts of the Commonwealth, and at discovering that his Protectionist supporters in Parliament were beginning to waver in their allegiance to him.

Anxious to remain in office, Mr. Reid decided to make terms with *The Age*. He, therefore, made a proposal in writing to Syme (see Chapter XVI) for the appointment of a Royal Commission of five citizens who should not be members of Parliament but competent business men and whose duty it should be to inquire into the working of the Tariff and its effect on Australian industries. Mr. Reid verbally pledged himself to allow Syme to nominate a Protectionist chairman and other members, to the proposed Commission, and to veto a certain number of names suggested by Mr. Reid, or his colleagues. He also undertook that the Commission should not be appointed until after Parliament rose, so as to give plenty of time for a full discussion [begin page 231] of its Constitution, and that it should be supplied with every facility, when appointed, to perform its duties expeditiously.

David Syme, believing the offer was made *bonâ fide*, accepted it. The event proved that he had miscalculated the Free Trade leader's intentions. Mr. Reid, notwithstanding his promise, did not wait until the end of the Session, but (during one of Syme's temporary absences from Melbourne) appointed a Commission while Parliament was still sitting and without submitting the names of its members for Syme's approval. The Royal Commission thus constituted was (despite Mr. Reid's written agreement with Syme) an unwieldy body of nine persons, all save one politicians and members of Parliament and some Mr. Reid's most attached political adherents.

The Commission forthwith set about its business. Syme did not waste time in reproaches, but gave all his attention to the Commission. He concluded that part of its mission was to protract its investigations and postpone the work of Tariff revision as long as possible, so that Mr. Reid might have an excuse for remaining in power.

Syme waited until he had satisfied himself past question that the Commission would extend its labours over months and even years and then, as was his wont, struck hard at the man who, in his opinion, had broken faith with him. He did this by pointing out to Mr. Reid's Protectionist supporters [begin page 232] in Parliament that the Prime Minister, by his own act in appointing the Tariff Commission, had thereby, reopened the fiscal issue and thus had violated the conditions and terms upon which they had consented to lend him their support.

The result was very discomfiting to the Free Trade leader. He was hoist with his own petard. Mr. Deakin immediately severed his connexion and in his celebrated Ballarat speech gave the Reid Government notice to quit. Shortly afterwards Mr. Reid was defeated on a test vote and Mr. Deakin became Prime Minister of a strong Protectionist Government. At the ensuing general election Mr. Reid made one last desperate bid for a Free Trade policy. He stumped the whole of Australia preaching Cobdenism and, in Victoria in particular, fought a violent campaign, touring the entire State. He might have spared himself the trouble. The elections eventuated in a brilliant victory for a policy of

adequate Protection to native industries, and the Prime Minister was returned to power with a Protectionist following of fifty-two in a House of seventy five members.

The Government, as soon as was practicable, proceeded to the business of Tariff revision and, although its work was not quite finished at the date of Syme's death, it was so far advanced that the grand old journalist had the supreme satisfaction, ere crossing the "Great Divide," of knowing that 'his ambition was on the point of triumphant con- *[begin page 233]* summation, and that the task he had begun, more than half a century earlier, of converting his countrymen to his economic views, had terminated in the establishment of a Protected Commonwealth.

Alfred Deakin seized the opportunity of the Tariff having been cast into the melting-pot to advocate the application of a new principle to Tariff Protection in the interests of the working classes. He claimed that scientific Protection should seek, not only to benefit manufacturers by giving them control of the home market and the workers by giving them employment, but that it should prevent the exploitation of the consumer and aim at equitably distributing the financial advantages conferred by the Tariff between the employers of labour and the employed.

Syme recognized the wisdom of the Prime Minister's proposals and gave them prompt and enthusiastic support. So far Protection, while enriching the manufacturers, had only provided the workers with subsistence. He demanded that these conditions should be altered and that Mr. Deakin's New Protection should be tested to see if it might avail to compel all industrial employers, protected by the Tariff, to share a portion of their profits with their employés in the shape of a wage that would enable the latter, not only to live, but to live happily and well. We are now face to face with the first fruits of this policy. The Deakin Government has applied these principles to Tariff Protection by means of *[begin page 234]* certain Excise Acts. These statutes provide that Tariff-protected manufacturers shall remunerate their employés according to a certain fixed standard, or, in default, suffer the penalty of paying an excise duty on their products severe enough to deprive them of the Tariff benefit. It is too early yet to pronounce on these reforms. The New Protection is in its experimental stage, virtually on its trial before the tribunal of public opinion.

It may be adjudged, eventually, a failure, but I do not think this likely. The principles which called it into being are too manifestly fair and just for an enlightened and reasonable-minded Democracy to tolerate its rejection without the gravest-cause. It is more probable that modifications which experience may teach will be applied to the machinery to reduce friction and to render its operation smooth. It is true that the Australian manufacturers are evincing a disposition to strangle, if they can, the new policy at its birth. But that is merely a case of history repeating itself. Men often change their habits but seldom their natures. The manufacturers now occupy in Australia a somewhat analogous position to that formerly held by the importers when David Syme came to Victoria. I should say, perhaps, they are in possession of analogous opportunities to indulge their selfish instincts at the expense of the wage-earners dependent on them and, in a wider sense, of the community. Since they are merely human beings and not angels, *[begin page 235]* their first thought is for their own enrichment; and considerations of self-interest impel them to resist the institution of the New Protection just as the importers, half a century ago, resisted the old. It was, humanly speaking, inevitable that this should happen. But public opinion is the master of affairs - not they: and just as an awakened and intelligent public opinion compelled the importers to submit to the abolition of Free Trade and the imposition of Tariff Protection, it may be predicted that it will similarly force the manufacturers to submit to the New Protection as soon as science has evolved and elucidated a workable system for its operation.

Prior to the New Protection David Syme advocated the enactment of legislation to protect Australian industries from the unfair competition of foreign rings and trusts, which might, despite the Tariff, "dump" their surplus products on Australian shores; and at the same time to prevent the formation within the Commonwealth of Trusts and Combines devised to restrain trade and kill local competition with a view to exploiting the consumer. Urged by his advice and supported by his assistance, the Deakin Government passed an Antitrust Act embodying these principles and providing machinery for their enforcement.

It is not too much to say that these two measures, the New Protection and the Anti-Trust Act, have placed Australia ahead of the rest of the world and installed her in the proud position of leader of *[begin page 236]* Liberal thought and social, progress. It can easily be estimated how much the Commonwealth is indebted for this to David Syme when it is remembered that *The Age* was the only great daily journal in Australia, to speak in favour of these proposals and to uphold them vigorously through their initial stages, although now a few are to be found - bending to the irresistible force of public opinion - admitting and lauding their virtues and lending aid to cure their defects and increase the facilities for their efficacious administration.

David Syme was the first writer in the Commonwealth to realize the national danger of allowing the Northern Territory to remain undeveloped and unpeopled. Some forty and odd years ago the Colony of South Australia undertook the task of settling the Northern Territory; but the work proved beyond her capacity to accomplish. This great and marvellously fertile province, 521,000 square miles in extent, lies only a few days' steaming distance from the teeming hordes of Asia. It possesses a seaboard exceeding 1,000 miles in length, and is intersected with numerous splendid, land-locked harbours, one of which. Port Darwin, is second only in size and, depth and potential utility to the famous harbour of Port Jackson, one of the finest in the world. It comprises enormous areas of the best agricultural land. It is watered by scores of navigable, fresh-water, permanently flowing streams and rivers, and is capable of supporting a *[begin page 237]* population of many millions. It contains, moreover, unlimited mineral and other natural resources, and yet it has today a paltry population of about 1,100 whites.

Syme came to the conclusion that the empty condition of the Territory extended an open invitation, bound at length to become irresistible, to all over-populated and land-hungry Powers to invade and seize it and hold it as their own. Perceiving that, South Australia was too small and too poor a State to remove the peril by her own exertions, very soon after the Commonwealth was established he proceeded to teach the nation that its duty was to take over the Territory from South Australia and to develop it at the national charge. His voice was at first a mere cry in the wilderness; but he kept talking to the nation day after day, month after month, year after year, until he finally achieved his great purpose. I think I am justified in declaring that there are not to be found today within the confines of Australia a hundred persons who do not believe that the national existence vitally depends upon performing the task which David Syme persuaded the Commonwealth to undertake. All parties in the Federal Parliament are agreed upon its necessity, and steps have already been taken to expedite the transfer and to begin the work of pouring settlers into the northern wilds. It has been given to few men to be acclaimed not in words but in acts as faithful instructors and *[begin page 238]* prophets in their own country in such overflowing measure. But Australia owes Syme other obligations, not the smallest of which concerns the question of national defence.

Before Federation the Australian colonies were dwelling in a sort of fool's paradise. Lazily reclining in the shadow of the mother-country's robe, they relied exclusively on

the Imperial Navy for the maintenance of their integrity and their protection from foreign aggression. For this they paid the United Kingdom a small annual subsidy. No sooner was Federation a *fait accompli* than David Syme counselled his countrymen that if they were not to remain dependent and defenceless they would have to undertake, both in their own and the Imperial interest, the duty of their own defence. In convincing terms he showed them that it would be impossible to avert the danger of invasion from a country so vast and so sparsely inhabited as Australia, except the whole male nation were trained in the use of arms. He demonstrated, moreover, that unless the nation possessed a local navy of its own, it would, in the event of war, become the helpless victim of any hostile cruiser which might contrive to evade the British fleets; and that such a raider, without needing to approach within striking distance of Australia's shores, might destroy and paralyse her shipping and seaborne commerce and thus, in a few days, bring the nation to the very doors of ruin. *[begin page 239]*

Syme strenuously advocated a system of universal compulsory military service and the acquisition by the Commonwealth of an adequate flotilla for the defence of the coasts and commerce, to be composed of torpedo boats and ocean-going destroyers. For more than two years the rest of the Australian daily Press either ignored or scouted his ideas. The Imperial Defence Committee, furthermore, laughed to scorn his naval policy, when embodied in the reports of Captain Creswell, the Commonwealth Naval Director, who shared Syme's views. It will be seen, therefore, that he had a hard row to hoe. But he had on his side reason and the inexorable logic of facts. Inflexibly he pursued his course and slowly but surely made proselytes and won disciples. To be brief, Syme gradually succeeded in making his conception of national defence a burning question in national politics, and ultimately the Federal Parliament made a large Appropriation for the acquisition of the first instalment of a local navy, and the Government also announced its intention of making military training compulsory and universal throughout the Commonwealth,

In view of these facts *The Age* may claim to be the national Australian newspaper. It was the first daily journal in the Commonwealth to voice the national sentiment and consistently subordinate State to national interests; and it has given indisputable proofs of its power, not only to influence national opinion but to impose its policy on the *[begin page 240]* national conscience. No Federal Government can disregard its advice or defy its mandates. Measures that it inspires and supports pass into law with an almost automatic ease. Measures that it condemns usually find their way to the Parliamentary waste-paper basket.

David Syme knew this well: but no man ever heard him say it. Calm, silent, shy, secretive, he sat in his historic den, listening to the, muffled thunder of his presses the while he considered and conceived fresh plans for the advancement of his country and the social improvement of his race. Men came and went - Cabinet Ministers, politicians, lawyers, merchants, workers: he refused audience to none, however low, however high. He listened, with a moveless visage, to what they had to say, impervious to blame or flattery, but weighing carefully their pleas, impartial as a judge, inscrutable as a sphinx. "A hard man," they usually remarked on departing. Hard! He never wore his heart upon his sleeve. That is true enough. But it is truer that he freely and disinterestedly devoted his life to the service of his country. Posterity will do him justice.

[begin page 241]

Chapter XIII

Newspaper Government

David Syme's statesmanlike qualities - His fights with the people - His place in popular esteem - His sacrifices to obtain political power - His power founded on personal consistency and integrity - *The Age's* circulation - *The Age* rules the State by a process of suggestion - Its unswerving adherence to the Democratic cause - King David's audience-chamber - Ministries made and unmade - Political secrets - James Munro and David Syme Newspaper Government essentially a democratic form of rule - Its defects and virtues.

It has been well said that boldness is the grandest attribute of statesmanship. It is the infirmity of mere politicians to cling to a pettifogging policy, but it is the prerogative of statesmen to be ever verging upon what appears to be audacious and impracticable. Courage was ever David Syme's highest virtue, and his courage was always remarkable for its essential quality of grave and cogent endurance. Based upon intellectual conviction, his confidence in himself and in his views held the place occupied in smaller minds by religious superstition. His boldness led him to lengths and into situations which frequently astounded and bitterly antagonized his contemporaries; but his fortitude was never *[begin page 242]* shaken either by opposition or adversity. He believed in every measure he advocated, and unswervingly pursued his aims until his adversaries retired before a combatant whose pertinacity was as invincible as his opinions were weighty.

With many opportunist politicians the custom is to catch a wave of popular emotion, to ride on its crest and direct its course, ostensibly in the public but really too often in their own interests. David Syme despised this practice with all his heart. His methods were essentially different. Conscious of his sagacity and strength, he made it his business to withstand and criticize and check all sentimental mob effervescence, well knowing that solid progress is never established by the racing tide of sudden popular upheavals. He was always for the people and for progress, but frequently had to fight, the people for what he believed to be their good. His greatest victories, indeed, were not over rivals or parties but over the community. At times in the early part of his career he metaphorically seized the people by the throat and held them writhing in his grasp until they yielded to his dominant intention. The people did not always relish his masterful ways. But when experience smoothed their ruffled feelings and unravelled the confusion of their thoughts they forgave him their rough handling in their satisfaction at the issue, which was always to their manifest advantage. They became proud of him: not demonstratively proud perhaps, but most sincerely, *[begin page 243]* and not the less deeply because their peculiar regard for him was subtly tinged with vanity. Australians, and Victorians in particular, came to look upon Syme in a humorously conceited fashion. He represented to them a great institution rather than a personality: and they spoke of him to strangers as people usually speak of some splendid national monument which their talent and industry have created. But one does not love a monument, how ever proud one may be of it: and enormously indebted as Australia was to David Syme, the people revered him more than they loved him.

The reason is not far to seek. Syme always sank his individuality in his paper. To the vast majority of the people among whom he spent his life he was personally unknown. No man dead or living has exercised a more potent influence on the course of Australian events, or has played a more intimate part in public affairs. Nevertheless it

may be doubted whether there were ever more than a few scores of private persons who would have recognized him in the street if they had chanced to meet him.

David Syme was to blame for this. He would have it so. Seldom lived a man more modest or more retiring in his habits, or more negligent of social intercourse. Paradoxical as it may appear, this man who devoted his whole life to the people perpetually held himself aloof from the people. Throughout his career he rigidly abstained from outwardly participating in the turmoil of public *[begin page 244]* life. He resisted all attempts to inveigle him upon the platform. He declined a knighthood offered him by his sovereign; he refused every political distinction and municipal honour the people sought to thrust upon him, and very rarely did he appear at a public or a political meeting.

There can be no doubt that had he adopted another line of conduct he could have made himself a popular figure in Australia. He was endowed with brilliant conversational powers. He possessed a prodigious memory and was deeply versed in all that is best in the world's literature. He was gifted with the finest tact. In any assemblage of distinguished people his commanding physique and striking physiognomy marked him out for a special attention which his discursive talents and the strength of his personality, abundantly justified. In a mixed company he towered mentally and physically above his fellows. I have the best of reasons for asserting that Syme never had anything of the recluse or misanthrope in his disposition. On the contrary, he was a lover of his kind and a philanthropist in the truest sense. What then was his motive in eschewing the position in society to which his natural equipment entitled him and which his character pre-disposed him to enjoy?

The query may be answered in a word - the public interest. At the outset of his career Syme made up his mind to effect by means of *The Age* certain social and economic reforms - I might almost style them *[begin page 245]* revolutions. He perceived that he could only succeed by building up for his paper a political power such as no other Australian journal had ever possessed. He saw also that he must base his structure on the firm foundation of the people's confidence. He must teach the people to believe in him, to trust him to the utmost, and to feel sure that they were safe in trusting him. To accomplish this a great personal sacrifice was necessary. He must show himself above suspicion. He must have no friends whose affection might sway his judgment, no party whose claims and interests might put a bridle on his speech. He must have for his counsellors principles, not parties; and for his associates measures, not, men. David Syme weighed the consequences and made his choice. It condemned him to a life of extraordinary isolation. It obliged him to dwell in the heart of a crowded city as friendless and as lonely as a hermit in the wilderness. But it left him free to act and to speak his mind.

One man in a thousand might possess the strength of character to make and register a vow of self-obliteration, but I take leave to doubt whether there is one in a thousand who could keep it long. Syme kept his unbroken for half a century. He never looked back. In his last hours he looked forward still. Politics is a ceaselessly progressive science - and when he died he was still the people's friend. He had done much for the Democracy, but he held there, was still much for him to do: and at the *[begin page 246]* age of eighty-one he was just as fully bent on improving the conditions of Australian society by wise humanitarian legislation as he was when, a young man of twenty-nine, he took up the pen which in his hand proved a defter weapon than the sword.

Strange, and to some extent unforeseen, results flowed from the resolution I have indicated. It has been shown how David Syme won the three great battles of his life over land monopoly, Cobdenism, and State extravagance. These and many other

smaller victories gradually elevated *The Age* in popular esteem. But to Syme's methods is attributable the fact that with esteem came confidence. Time after time the people saw *The Age* use political leaders and parties with the indifference of a carpenter who flings his hammer carelessly aside after it has driven in the nail. Syme only supported men as long as they were whole-souled ministers of the principles he advocated, and parties as long as they proved faithful to the democratic cause. Did they palter with their promises, did they deviate one hair's breadth from their duty, *The Age* never rested from attacking them until they were either defeated or had repented the error of their ways. At first the people could not understand this new system, so foreign to experience, and lent a ready ear to the plaints of the disgruntled politicians. "*The Age*," protested these latter in chorus, "is a treacherous friend and an unscrupulous foe. It is true to neither friend nor enemy. It is [\[begin page 247\]](#)"



The "Age" Office Today.

here today and there tomorrow." But the paper was true to the people and its own professions: It recognized no other fount of faith, and the people soon found this out.

Inconsequence, their confidence in its consistency, integrity, and honesty of purpose became a rooted conviction in their minds. And this conviction grew in respect when the people further discovered that if the working classes ventured, as at times they did, to make unreasonable demands or to abuse their power, David Syme was invariably the first to expose and criticize their folly and chastise their greed.

With the growth of public faith in *The Age* its circulation expanded until it attained to a daily sale of 110,000 copies, or one for every ten of the people of Victoria.

As time passed, the majority of the population began instead of merely supporting it to lean upon it and to follow it. They had never failed to find its counsels wise and beneficial, had never known it to be guilty of inconsistency. It had frequently been the promoter and ally of all sagaciously progressive movements. It had invariably championed the cause of the helpless and oppressed. It had always been the enemy of misrule and immorality. It had never tolerated abuses or connived at the committal of a wrong, whatever the interests at stake. For these reasons the people trusted it and accepted its guidance.

The paper began quietly and unostentatiously to *[begin page 248]* rule the State by a process of plausible suggestion. Its leading articles actually made public opinion, yet they affected merely to reflect it. The people were flattered by this indulgent deference and made David Syme in all good faith the keeper of their political consciences. It is to his honour that he never betrayed them into a false position, never abused his power, never wavered from the paths of equity and right. During all the years that followed he sat unseen in his office, the virtual dictator of the country, the "power behind the throne."

In his office he occupied a simple swivel chair which was to all intents and purposes a throne, and there he sat until the end, his power only strengthened by the flight of days, his grasp on the helm of affairs only the more firm, experienced, and confident. In his sanctum, what curious scenes have happened, what confessions of weakness have been heard, what pleadings, threats, promises, and imprecations! In that room have been born and bred and fashioned all the best laws in Victoria's Statute Book.

If David Syme had been a smaller man and could have been tempted by the vanity of smaller men to break his seal of silence, what a history, what a human document, could be compiled about the secrets of that room! It seems in some respects a pity that those secrets have been carried to his grave. But we can forgive the circumstance in the light it sheds upon his character.

Some secrets, nevertheless, have been disclosed *[begin page 249]* through the wounded pride or vain glory of those who met with fortune or disaster at "King David's" hands. I may cite for instance the case of James Munro, who was Premier of Victoria in 1891. Towards the close of the year Mr. Munro, whom *The Age* had raised to power to procure certain crying reforms he had been strenuously advocating, disappointed David Syme by the sudden lukewarmness of his actions. Elevation to office had modified his views. Syme determined that he must give place to a more energetic reformer: and, following his usual custom, he notified one of Mr. Munro's colleagues to whom he was giving audience of his resolution. Mr. Munro was a weak man and an opportunist but personally agreeable, and Syme had conceived for him something of affection. "King David" was sincerely grieved, therefore, to give his friend notice to quit: and it was one of the most unpleasant duties of his career to be obliged by conscience to do so. Aware that Munro would call upon him to prefer a personal appeal for mercy, Syme sought to spare his friend a vain humiliation and himself the pain of witnessing the other's pain. In consequence he set out for one of his country estates in a remote

part of the Colony that could only be reached by a long train and coaching journey. But Mr. Munro in rage and despair hurriedly followed, and Syme had hardly reached his destination when, worn out and travel-stained, the Premier of Victoria made his appearance and made an impassioned appeal for *[begin page 250]* leniency. But David Syme would not have been David Syme if he had ever departed from a fixed resolve. It cost him real misery to dismiss his friend, unsatisfied, but he considered himself the trustee of the people's faith, and his iron will sustained him in the discharge of duty. James, Munro, returned to Melbourne and almost immediately resigned the Premiership. Two months later, with Syme's consent, Munro's successor appointed him Agent-General of the Colony, and he repaired to London.

Incidents like these, and there are many, which leaked out, much to Syme's annoyance, made a profound impression on the public mind, but instead of diminishing they increased and consolidated confidence in *The Age's* fearlessness and incorruptibility. Thus was the era of Newspaper Government ushered into being. It is now an established feature and, in truth, a predominant factor of the Democratic institution.

Throughout Victoria and over a great portion of the Commonwealth *The Age* is now the ruling power. It influences the policies both of the Victorian State, and the Federal Governments. It makes and unmakes Ministries. No Cabinet is strong enough to be independent of its support, to resist its counsels, or to defy its directions. It simultaneously creates and expresses public opinion. In a word, it governs the country. Of course it could not do this for a day if it deviated from its fine and historically consistent course. But there is no prospect of that as long as *[begin page 251]* David Syme's influence survives, which is equivalent to saying that its policy is unalterably fixed.

Newspaper Government as practised by *The Age*, is essentially government of the people by the people. It approximates more nearly than any other form that has yet been invented to the true Democratic concept of enlightened popular self-government. It nevertheless possesses the defects of its virtues. One of these, - perhaps the greatest, - cannot be passed without remark. It breeds public apathy. The people have come by long habit to regard *The Age* as their guiding star and mouthpiece. Should some abuse or public ill crop up in the community they look to *The Age* to make inquiries and secure redress. There was a time when they would have expressed their indignation at such things by heartily assembling in public meetings and by making or listening to inflammatory addresses. But now they do not bother to do anything more strenuous than write letters to the Press. If circumstances (as occasionally happens) demand that they should bestir themselves more energetically to wipe out an abuse unusually persistent, they discharge their duty by marching when the time is ripe to the ballot box and voting in a placid phalanx for reform.

I cannot help thinking this is a not altogether healthy frame of mind for a people to fall into. It argues a confidence, judged by ordinary human standards, almost, if not quite too deep for public safety. *The Age* doubtless deserves it. But there *[begin page 252]* is the long vista of the future to consider. On the other hand, it must be admitted that the very apathy I complain of, which Newspaper Government has produced, possesses a singular virtue in its defect. It has almost completely suppressed the demagogue,

The Victorian people were, formerly, the easy prey of any smooth-tongued agitator who made demands upon their leisure. They regard the demagogue, now, with contemptuous indifference, and be he ever so eloquent, ever so specious, decline to waste time in attending to him. Asked why? they answer, "If there was anything in what he has to say, *The Age* would have said it long ago." This is no doubt a good thing

within limits. Yet it indicates another incipient ill. It shows that the people are not thinking for themselves as they used to do. Again I hold that this is not well for the people. I willingly confess, however, that, whatever the imperfections of the new system of Government, it is superior to the system it has replaced, and its creation constitutes not the least of the many services which the big heart and the far-seeing genius of David Syme rendered to his adopted country.

[begin page 253]

Chapter XIV

Characteristics

David Syme's watchword - His forward looking - His national ideal - His ruthlessness - His kindness to Mr. Speight - The mystery that surrounded his actions - His religious beliefs - His capacity for hate - His friendships: instances of generosity, public and private - His public benefactions Anecdotes - Mob enthusiasm - How Mr. Deakin entered politics - Syme's sense of humour - His passionate temper - His self-control - The man as he was - Charge of hardness of heart refuted - The secret of his false reputation for austerity and pride - Syme and his staff - His philosophy - Simplicity the key-note to his character.

David Syme's thoughts were ever directed towards the future. He loved the country of his birth; better still he loved the country of his adoption. His love for his countrymen was always greater than his love for his country. But he loved more than all else the country and the society and the laws of his children and of the children of his countrymen. "Forward" was the watchword of his life. The magic of the future was in his blood. It inspired his indefatigable endeavours. It brought and fixed before his eyes a vision. It controlled his actions, determined his policy, and governed his ambition. His enemies persistently sought to *[begin page 254]* represent him as a man always preternaturally cold and dour, with a heart incapable of a generous impulse. They never understood him. Purposeful and resolute he was, and in a sense which no expressions can exaggerate, but his heart always beat in passionate sympathy for the sorrows of humanity. On the other hand, he was, the captain of his own, soul: a law unto himself, with a will and strength to force that law on others for the achievement of his philanthropic aims.

The present never chained him. His mind was set beyond. He poured all persons and all circumstances into a crucible for the fashioning of the future. He never acted on the spur of the moment under the guidance of emotion. He regarded emotions as temptations which sought to entangle him in petty contests to delay the forward march of his ideas. He suppressed them and sacrificed both himself and his contemporaries to his great ideal the making of a nation. When troubles occurred, acute enough to arrest and command his attention, he would neither advance nor countenance any remedy which he was not convinced would operate harmoniously, with the principles of his progressive policy. When obstacles arose he surmounted them or beat them down. He believed in a straight, undeviating path. He never, in great matters, made a compromise; he never circumvented. To opponents who proposed arrangements he had one unvarying and invariable answer. "Stand aside!" *[begin page 255]* Then came the clash of arms, and always he swept his adversaries from his road. He pitied the vanquished and often succoured them as he passed on. But he never rested. After the great Speight trials he heard that Speight was ruined. His own resources had been strained to the limit by the protracted struggle. But he had been fighting a system, not a man; a principle, not a personality. The news that the man who had, in a bad cause, so long and violently and often venomously opposed him was in difficulties, distressed and grieved him. He sent for Speight's most intimate friend, a Member of Parliament named Zox.

"I hear, Mr. Zox," said David Syme, "that Mr. Speight is being pressed by his creditors." (It should be mentioned that Syme was himself Speight's largest creditor, for the latter owed him the costs of the actions.)

"It is true, sir," Zox reluctantly admitted, for his affection for Speight made him regard Syme with aversion. He, added with some bitterness,

"The knowledge will doubtless give you satisfaction."

Syme's still grey face lost nothing of its habitual imperturbability. "I asked for facts," he answered' not opinions. Are his friends assisting him?

"We are trying to raise funds to enable him to go to West Australia, where employment is offered him," said Zox.

Syme turned to his desk and wrote some words *[begin page 256]* upon a piece of paper. A moment and he turned again, the paper outstretched in his hand. "Kindly present this with my respectful compliments to Mr. Speight."

It was a cheque for £100.

Next morning Speight burst into Syme's office. The two adversaries, the victor and the vanquished, gazed at one another for a little, in silence; then Speight faltered- "Why, why, have you done this thing to me?"

Syme arose and took the other's hand. "It was a good fight," was all he said.

Speight left the room in tears.

This incident rebuts the charge that Syme's heart was cold. Its publication at the time would have made him the idol of the populace. But he had always contemned popularity and shrank from it as from an evil thing. It offended his conceptions of virility and he feared it as an enemy of independence. He had won all his triumphs without incurring it, in a manner indeed to stave it off, for all his victories were gained by first imposing his opinions, *vi et armis*, on the majority of his countrymen, whose prejudices he ever boldly and uncompromisingly either disregarded or ignored.

To those who only know him by repute, David Syme's character is a thing past comprehension, full of mystery, surprises, and contradictions. They judged him unkindly, because he never indulged in petty public charities: non-Imperial, because he *[begin page 257]* did not bow down and worship all Imperial institutions, heartless, because he never spared an adversary in the fight: unappreciative, because, he distributed censure more freely than praise; and irreligious, because he never went to church. Yet the number is legion of unfortunates he privately assisted. When the Boer war broke out no other Australian subscribed more generously to the cost of the Australian contingents. He gave a magnificent endowment to the Melbourne University. He equipped at his sole cost a scientific expedition to the centre of Australia. He despatched at his sole-expense a rifle team to Bisley. And we have seen with what courtesy and liberality he could help a fallen foe. As for religion, his religion was humanity. His abiding confidence in the Democracy had no limitations. To the people his whole life paid the homage of devoted and untiring service not by words but by deeds. As a mere lad, in a German University, he emancipated himself from the thralldom of the theological superstitions which had been instilled into his mind from the cradle, and which the parental will had vainly pre-ordained him to uphold. He replaced them with a philosophy original and all his own. It may be given in two sentences. "If there is a God and if we are His people I cannot please Him better than by employing my talents towards the advancement and uplifting of that portion of the race with which my lot is cast. If there be no God and no hereafter, I *[begin page 258]* shall not sleep the

less soundly in my grave because I shall have acted so that other generations, while they may forget, shall not remember me with obloquy."

His attitude towards the Divine was one of reverent and respectful unbelief - not disbelief. In his extraordinary book, *The Soul*, he makes this clear. This work is an incursion into the realms of mystic speculation. He joins issue with the chilling Monism of Haeckel and makes a tangential departure into the more inviting sphere of Dualism. The book is instinct with agnosticism but exhilarant with hope. In it we see a proud scientific spirit scornfully rejecting unproven tenets and making a bold and eager, and at times, an exciting, tantalizing, half-successful effort to perceive the unperceivable and to pierce the darkness that pervades and shrouds the mysteries of space and death. *The Soul* is curiously self-revealing. It proves David Syme's clay the mansion of a psychic, habitant more humble and not less ardent than his mind, and it proves his mind possessed of unsuspected deeps and of an almost tender inclination to adore his God if he could only find Him.

Syme could hate as few men can. In his animosities he was implacable, and implacably he pursued his vengeance. Injuries he could forgive and did forgive. They did not always arouse in him detestation of the assailant nor always provoke him to strike back. It was the personality of the [\[begin page 259\]](#) offender that antagonized him: and he measured his hate, not by the hurts he received, not even by the power of his enemy to balk or to delay his policy, but by the intellectual abhorrence that his enemy's personality inspired. There were men who caused him by design great grief and damage strong men and weaklings, too, whom he allowed to pass on scatheless. There were others who did him but little ill, and yet whom he assailed with pitiless persistence to the end.

His antipathies are difficult to understand, but the secret of them all lies in the meanness and want of magnanimity of those whom he paid the compliment of desiring to destroy. Incapable of littleness himself, a mean speech, a paltry action, stirred him to his depths. But all his enemies he fought fairly. He gave them no quarter, but he, scorned to take an unscrupulous advantage. He once declared war against a popular politician, a strong man and in many respects a foeman worthy of his steel. An unexpiated, unrepented act of meanness was the cause of strife. Presently there came to Syme a person whom this man had injured, with authentic proofs of a shameful private transgression the publication of which would have brought about instant ruin. Syme bought the papers and posted them to his enemy the day following a rabid attack upon him by the politician under cloak of Parliamentary Privilege in the House. This act of generosity brought the politician to *The Age*, office, [\[begin page 260\]](#) with protestations of gratitude and offers of reconciliation. Syme refused to receive him, and never rested until he had driven the man out of political life.

His maxim was - "Mean rulers make a mean people," and he could not bring himself to tolerate, for long, the employment of mean tools in the structure he was planning.

But Syme could love as well as hate. The few friendships he allowed himself were permanent institutions. No friend ever called on him for help in vain. No man ever did him a favour or a service but received cause to remember it with increasing satisfaction.

In his early days of strife and struggle, when *The Age*, was battling to unlock the land and fighting for Protection, Syme often found it hard to keep the paper going. He did the work of half a-dozen men himself, and cut down expenses to the finest point. Nevertheless there were times, especially during the advertising boycotts, when he had to obtain financial assistance or go under. More than once he was forced to ask his

workmen to wait for their weekly wages. They never refused him, and they never regretted it; for when fortune changed they all received the handsomest rewards. More than once he was compelled to ask for advances from his few faithful advertisers in order to procure paper on which to print *The Age*. Not one of those advertisers but afterwards had reason to [\[begin page 261\]](#) congratulate himself upon his faith. One day a friend, who had been a fellow-contractor of Syme's before his brother Ebenezer's death, called at the office. He found David in the deepest dejection. Things were going very badly with the poor journalist, and ruin stared him in the face. The contractor was intimate enough with him to insist upon his confidence. When he had heard all he promptly decided to prove his friendship in a practical way, and pulled out his cheque-book. "It will take hundreds," said David Syme. "Well," replied the contractor, "you can have hundreds."

The money was lent and very soon repaid. Ten years later Syme heard that this good friend was menaced with bankruptcy. He hurried to his side and offered help. "It will take thousands," said the contractor. "Well, you can have thousands," was Syme's smiling reply, and he put a cheque, signed in blank, in the other's hand.

Syme was the founder and foster-father of the Rifle Club movement in Victoria. He believed that it is the duty of every citizen to be able to defend his country, and always advocated that the teaching of rifle-shooting should be made the basis of national defence. It was in consequence of a series of stirringly patriotic articles in *The Age* that the first rifle club in Victoria, was established; and the movement, once started, spread so rapidly under Syme's forceful patronage that it soon acquired a national significance. The system [\[begin page 262\]](#) he initiated extended at length over the entire Commonwealth even as far as Port Darwin, that lonely outpost which stares into the Tropic Seas. But it was not only with his pen that Syme stimulated the patriotic exertions of his countrymen.

Soon after the bursting of the great Land Boom, when the Turner Ministry was hard at work piecing together the shattered finances of the Colony and trying to restore Victoria's seriously-damaged foreign credit, a suggestion was made that the Government should send a picked team of Victorian rifle shots to England to compete at Bisley for the Kolapore Cup.

Sir George Turner caught at the proposal eagerly at first; but after a while he discovered that, as Treasurer of the public funds, he could not, in consideration of the state of the finances and the prospect of a Budget deficit, justify it with his conscience to spare the sum required to defray the expenses of the team. The Hon. William McCulloch M.L.C., who was Minister of Defence in the Administration, pleaded with Sir George long and strenuously, but in vain. The Premier was the most careful Treasurer Victoria has ever had, and refused to spend a shilling in those bad years that could by any means be saved.

Mr. McCulloch, on the other hand, while also a careful man, took a broader view of the situation and pointed out that, as the proposal had been virtually adopted by the Government, it would be a very bad advertisement for the Colony if it were to be known [\[begin page 263\]](#) that Victoria was in such financial straits as to forbid so comparatively petty an expenditure on a national undertaking. Sir George, however was adamant, and the two colleagues were about to part in mutual dissatisfaction when he suddenly exclaimed,

"Ah! if we only had a few generous and truly patriotic spirits among our wealthy private citizens who, would subscribe the money, then, McCulloch, this trouble of ours would be at an end."

Mr. McCulloch made no reply, but the hint had inspired him. He left the Treasurer and went straight down to *The Age* office. He entered Syme's sanctum a few moments later, diffident but desperate; for he was at the end of his resources.

"Hello, Mr. Syme," said he. "I hope I find you in a good temper, for I've come to beg a favour from you."

"Well," responded Syme, "what is it?"

"Turner's prospective deficit has so dismayed him that he won't allow me a penny to send the rifle team to Bisley. I have come to you for help."

"Hum!" said David Syme. "How much do you want?"

"Two thousand pounds."

"Very good. I shall send you a cheque. Good afternoon, McCulloch. Sorry to drive you away, but I am very busy."

Mr. McCulloch related this incident to me exactly as I have set it down. He added - "I entered Syme's den in fear and trembling, anticipating a lot of *[begin page 264]* trouble to persuade him even to open a subscription list. But it was no harder than that to get the whole amount I wanted."

It is pleasant to record that the rifle team Syme's prompt generosity despatched to England had the distinction of winning the Kolapore Cup in competition with the best shots of the Empire.

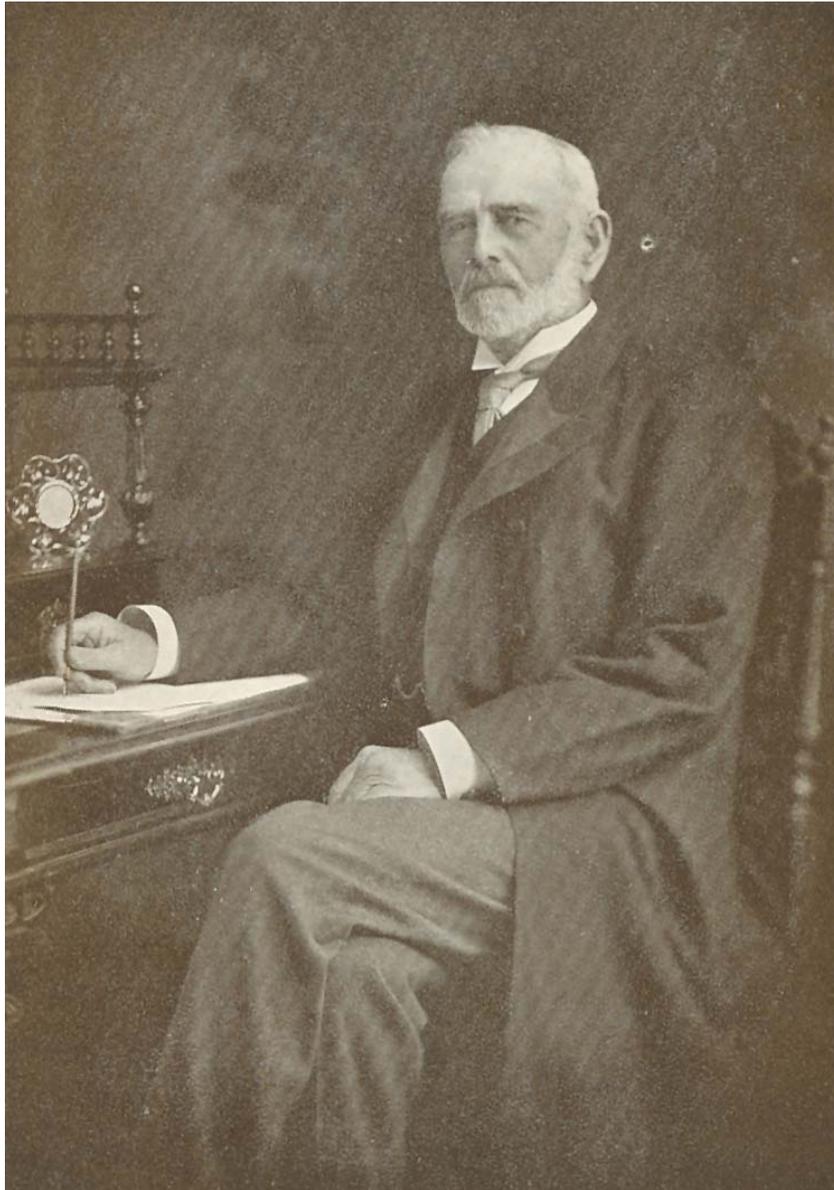
Among Syme's other wise and well-chosen public benefactions three are particularly noteworthy. At the time of the British annexation of Papua he was the first to realize that Papua was ultimately destined to become an Australian dependency. Anticipating the future, he undertook at his own expense the exploration of that great and wonderful island: and to that end he fitted up two, separate exploring expeditions which collected an immense amount of information that has since proved of inestimable service to the Commonwealth Government.

On another occasion Syme despatched an expedition to Central Australia under Professor Spencer, which resulted in the incomparable enlargement of the public knowledge of the "Dead heart" of the Continent, its strange inhabitants and its peculiar geological, zoological and botanical characteristics.

Again in 1904 in order to mark the jubilee of *The Age* he endowed Melbourne University with a very large sum of money to provide in perpetuity an annual prize of £100, for original Australian research *[begin page 265]* work in biology and kindred sciences. This prize is competed for each year, and it has already influenced the study of subjects associated with the material and industrial development of the Commonwealth.

One of the most interesting instances of Syme's bigness of heart was afforded by the course he adopted when he decided to set up the linotype in *The Age* machine rooms. His decision necessarily displaced more than a hundred compositors, but Syme delayed the installation until he had provided for all these men in the most thoroughgoing and systematic manner. It took him two years to complete the arrangements. Those of the compositors who had been twenty-five years in his service

he pensioned for the rest of their lives. Of the remainder, for some he found other employment; he set up several in independent businesses, and many others he helped to settle on the land. He looked after each man with the most earnest personal care. He had an agricultural expert travelling about for three months to find suitable farms for those who wished to go on the land, and was not satisfied until each and every one of his displaced employés was well on the way to make a comfortable living; nor did he hesitate to spend and lend large sums of money to insure their permanent future welfare. There are unhappily but few industrial employers with the patriarchal instincts of the founder of *The Age*. The world would be better were he not *[begin page 266]* the exception but the rule. We may hope, however, that his magnificent example will bear fruit.



David Syme, 1907.

Syme was, for all his bold originality of mind-and, despite the revolutionary nature of some of his successfully-accomplished policies, one of the, most law-abiding citizens the Commonwealth has possessed. Power never tempted him to override authority, and he entertained, at one and the, same time, a deep-rooted respect for settled methods of procedure and a, profound abhorrence of violence. A happy illustration of this side of his character is provided in Chapter II, in which he relates the story of his

Mount Egerton experience. On that occasion he was violently and illegally deprived by a rascal of a most valuable mine. He was then a young and physically powerful man. He was well-armed and had with him a partner and several servants who would very gladly have used force to expel the invader from his property. Syme, however, could not be persuaded to take the law into his own hands; and rather than commit a breach of the peace he suffered himself to be despoiled. No doubt the extreme submissiveness of disposition to established authority thereby indicated was the product of his upbringing. From his earliest babyhood he was trained by rigid and unbending parental discipline to observe the law in spirit and in letter; and this iron breeding bore permanent effects.

Nevertheless, at least once in his long life, Syme *[begin page 266]* broke bounds, and the experiment gave him the greatest possible delight. He was travelling at the moment to Hong Kong on one of the Japanese mail steamers. The Captain, an Englishman, did not know Syme, and it seems had conceived somewhat of an aversion to his distinguished passenger. At any rate, Syme, who sat next to, him at table, found it impossible to engage the Captain in conversation or to extract from him the least attention or civility. About the middle of the voyage Syme went one afternoon on deck, which was for the moment deserted, and, after a short stroll seated himself upon an unoccupied deck chair. Five minutes later a quartermaster touched him on the arm.

"If you, please, sir," said the man, "you are sitting on the Captain's chair."

Syme looked up. "Oh! And does the Captain want it?" he inquired.

"He don't want it just now," replied the quartermaster, "but his orders are it's not to be used."

"I am not hurting, it," Mr. Syme observed, slowly and reflectively - he was watching the Captain, who stood on the bridge, watching him.

The quartermaster persisted. - "The Captain says, sir, that no one is to sit on his chair."

Syme turned and looked the man in the eye.

"Do you mean to tell me, quartermaster," he demanded, "that the Captain sent you to me with that message?"

Yes, sir, replied the man. *[begin page 268]*

Slowly and deliberately Syme arose. Then he stooped down, picked up the chair, and, striding to the ship's side, pitched it overboard. Then he turned to the astounded sailor, and, in a voice loud enough to be heard by the Captain, said "Give my compliments to your Commander and tell him that nothing could induce me to use his chair again." It was one of the biographer's most delightful experiences to hear Syme relate this story; to see his keen grey eyes sparkle wickedly and humorously; to mark his stern old face light up with laughter and to hear his grim chuckle as, in answer to the query, "And what did the Captain do?" he replied, "Oh! the Captain was quite civil to me after that."

Syme always took a lively interest in women's movements. He greatly sympathized with their efforts to secure improved facilities for technical education especially suitable for their sex, and subscribed liberally to all associations having that or similar objects. His purse, moreover, was always open to charitable appeals, and no application was ever made to him in vain for the relief and support of helpless or impoverished females.

Syme loved power as few men have ever loved it, but cared nothing for the customary concomitants of power which delight vain dispositions. During times of political crisis when *The Age* was battling for the people, immense crowds frequently assembled before the office and clamoured for him to appear and receive their enthusiastic homage. Syme's [begin page 269] practice on such occasions was to request a subordinate to stand before one of the office windows and bow an acknowledgment to the mob's greetings. As he was personally unknown by sight to the vast majority of Victorians, the device was never suspected and the people would yell themselves hoarse, innocently supposing that the smiling reporter they were cheering was Syme himself. The truth was. Syme held all such tributes in contempt. He believed that power to be permanent must be more or less unrecognised, and he wanted his authority to be permanent. For that reason he persistently effaced himself. For more than a quarter of a century he selected every Victorian Premier and almost every Cabinet Minister. But that was not all. Before each general election was held, the Ministry of the day invariably submitted for his examination the list of Liberal candidates, and only gave the, party support to the men he approved. Nobody knew of this except the persons interested and *The Age* staff. Syme ruled the country as absolutely as a Tsar, but so quietly and secretly was his domination exercised that the people hardly realized their yoke.

It was Syme who introduced Alfred Deakin to political life. Deakin had been for some time on *The Age* staff as a leader writer. Syme was not altogether satisfied with his journalistic capacities, but was quick to appreciate Deakin's deep political insight and statesmanlike ability. The Berry [begin page 270] Government was then in office. One day, Mr. Patterson, one of Berry's Ministers, went to see Syme. An election was imminent. Most of the Liberal candidates had already been selected, but there was a vacancy for the Bacchus Marsh constituency. Mr. Patterson submitted a couple of names, but Syme shook his head.

"No, said he, "There's a young fellow in my office I want to stand for Bacchus Marsh." Mr. Patterson and later, Berry endeavoured to dissuade Syme from this proposal, because the Opposition candidate was an ex-Minister and they wished an experienced man to oppose him. But to no purpose. Syme insisted, and Alfred Deakin stood for Bacchus Marsh as the Government nominee. A few days afterwards Mr. Patterson burst into Syme's office. Deakin, the previous evening, had made his first speech to the electors and Mr. Patterson had been present. "Hooray! " cried Mr. Patterson. "You were right, Syme, Deakin is just the man for us, He talks - by - George, he can talk!" Deakin was elected. He subsequently resigned his seat in the most chivalrous way, on a point of principle, but he soon, found another with Syme's help, and has continued in politics until the present day with distinguished success.

Another instance of Syme's habitual unobtrusiveness was furnished by a little adventure with his own watchman. This man had been for eighteen months in daily, and nightly attendance at *The* [begin page 271] *Age* office, when on a certain public holiday (the office being closed) he observed a tall lank figure enter by a side door and approach the stairs leading to the Editor's room. The watchman hurried forward. "You cannot go up there, sir," he exclaimed. "I have orders to admit nobody. The Editor is not in."

The visitor turned and regarded him. "Nobody?" he inquired.

"Nobody," said the watchman firmly.

Syme, for it was he, smiled, turned, and left the building. Rather than reveal his identity to his own servant he preferred to postpone what he had wished to do until the

following day. Strange as it may appear, there have been scores of reporters employed on *The Age* staff for months and even years, who have never consciously set eyes on Syme.

In his private life Syme was always distinguished alike for the simple austerity of his moral code and the patriarchal placidity of his family relations. A devoted husband, a firm but affectionate father, his wife worshipped him and his children not only revered but adored him. His residence at Kew was surrounded by the houses of his married sons and daughters. He dwelt in their midst like an old Highland chief with his clan about him. He was the central figure in all the family gatherings, the great parent-tree round which the saplings clustered. Syme found in his home a quiet but perpetual [\[begin page 272\]](#) delight, and in the dutiful affection of his offspring and their spontaneous loving pride in him, the reward of his long labours which he liked best.

Syme was gifted with the crisp dry sense of humour peculiar to his race. There are those who thought him humourless, because he never employed humour as a journalistic weapon. It is quite true that he always kept the columns of *The Age*, locked up from wit. But it was because in his serious pursuits the temper of the man was always stately, tense, and serious. He invariably treated the public with unbending ceremony, lest they should think him relaxing in his purpose. Serious objects in his opinion should be sought out with appropriate gravity. Members of his staff frequently bewailed his hatred of levity. Marcus Clarke, who served him for some years, bitterly complained that Syme's blue pencil had never spared his jests. He had no other complaint against his master.

"It is wonderful, said Marcus Clarke, how unerringly he detects them: however subtle I make them, however I hide them up, it avails nothing. He is utterly humourless himself, but he lights on the humour of others by some diabolical instinct, and the blue pencil gets to work."

The routine on such occasions (it should be explained that Syme read, in proof, all the "copy" that went into his paper) was for the luckless jester to be sent for. He would find Syme in his office, the offending "copy" in one hand, his blue pencil in [\[begin page 273\]](#) the other. "What is this Syme would ask, pointing to the *jeu d'esprit*.

"That, sir, - that's a-a-a little joke!" stammered the scribe.

"Do not let it occur again!" Syme would say with his grimmest air, and the interview was over. But the door once closed behind the humorist, Syme's frown would vanish; he would lean back in his chair; a smile would turn the corners of his lips and his eyes would light up. He knew well that the writer had departed believing him destitute of the saving grace and hard as flint. But he enjoyed the misconception, and would chuckle over it in his dry Scots way. The truth is, no man better loved a sparkling jest or responded to wit more readily; but politics and statecraft were holy things to him, his paper was a political paper and its power was founded on the consistent seriousness of its methods: hence he would have no trifling in its columns. It was a matter of policy. His policy was sacred in his eyes, and he never would have it spoken of lightly, or jested with, however brilliantly.

Syme's temper was naturally hasty, passionate and irritable, but it was under strict command. He mastered himself as a first and essential step to obtaining the mastery of others. Only his closest intimates knew how utterly misjudged he was by those who thought him cold. Cold! Is it possible that the man, whose zeal for the uplifting of [\[begin page 274\]](#) humanity forced him into a long series of life or death struggles with the enemies of the Democracy, could be cold? True, he seemed so. It was because of

his self-control. He had trained himself to drive his passions, not to let them drive him; and to conceal beneath a semblance of composure a fire of enthusiasm, an intensity of will and a ferocity of perseverance as great as ever animated the heart of man. His composure enabled him to bear down everything before it. It was his armour, his mask. It terrified his adversaries and turned them into stone, as did of old the head of the Medusa in the hands of Perseus. But after all it was only a mask, and the man behind it was only different from other men in the superior fortitude which he displayed in order that he might do by deliberation what all right-thinking men would like to do under the spur of generous emotion.

Turn to his portrait and look at the man. It is a faithful likeness of him at the great age of eighty-one: it is a faithful likeness of him for any day during the last five and twenty years of his life. In all those years he had scarcely aged. Time would almost seem to have forgotten him. He worked almost as hard a few weeks prior to his death as in 1860. He directed his paper: he read every article ere it appeared; he personally supervised and controlled all his manifold business interests and affairs. He gave daily audience to Ministers. He read and pondered the best current *[begin page 275]* literature; he kept himself abreast of the science of the day; and he found time to do a good deal of original writing. He was a man surely well worth studying. Consider him closely, with words to help the picture. He was over six feet high; spare, lank, and marvellously vigorous in body and mind. He was slightly- bowed, but from habit, rather than years; the desk accounts for it. He was grey - iron grey; his hair and beard of crisp strong growth. His complexion was sanguine. His forehead was broad and high, a fine square dome of thought. His eyes, were set in the skull at the correct intellectual width apart not very deeply, under straight dark level brows. The eyes were the peculiar bluish grey of polished steel. At first sight they seemed hard as a sword blade and as keen, a second glance discerned them alert, purposeful and penetrating, but full of expectancy and, native kindness. They seemed to say "Are you friend or enemy? If the latter, I am ready to withstand you - if, the former, I shall be blithe to give you welcome."

The nose was well-proportioned, broad at the base, narrow at the apex, and neither long nor short. It had a faint eagle curve. It was the nose of a fighter, but not of a pugnacious man; the nose of a conqueror, one should say.

The mouth was compressed of habit in the straight line of inflexible decision, but in moments of unweariness one perceived it formed of shapely curves: the lips being neither thin nor thick, a compromise *[begin page 276]* between asceticism and sensuousness. The chin, which the close-cropped beard partially concealed, was square, prognathous and predominant. It revealed its owner's granite will. The head was large and square, set firmly on the shoulders with a lithe and eager neck. The man walked with slow, deliberate strides straight to the point he made for, thinking of nothing the while save to reach his immediate destination. So he strode in body and mind through life. So he gained all his objects and ambitions, slowly but surely, one by one.

It is the fashion to consider men who have succeeded splendidly hard and selfish. But critics should discriminate between those who strive and succeed for themselves and those who strive for others, and whose personal triumph is only an incident of the triumph of their cause. David Syme desired power and fought for power in order to strengthen the State. His mind was chiefly concentrated on a disinterested ideal and, only consequentially, on his own career. If the Democratic cause won he would win with it; that was evident enough, since he was identified with the cause; but the mainspring of his actions was unselfish and impersonal. Had he only desired his own advantage he could have accumulated great riches a quarter of a century earlier than

he did; not by serving but simply by not opposing the land monopolists and importers. They offered him, many times, a sure and easy fortune, on those terms. He chose rather to hazard *[begin page 277]* ruin not merely in defying them but in seeking to destroy them in the interests of the masses they exploited. Those interests were sacred to him, and he fought for them as men fight who are led by a vision. His vision preserved his humanity; for his profound love of humanity inspired it, and that was a fountain which never can dry. As a politician and a statesman Syme's highest claim to singularity rests upon that very fact.

Most men, possessed in their early years of Liberal and advanced ideas, when old age approaches grow insensibly Conservative. The Radical of today is the Conservative of tomorrow. The reason is obvious. The race progresses slowly but constantly; the individual rapidly but only to a certain point. The progress of the race during the course of an individual existence frequently establishes in practice the liberal-minded unit's whole stock in trade of liberal ideals. The overtaken unit is then satisfied, and he wishes the world to endure upon that basis. But the world goes inexorably on and leaves him stranded, often enough angrily and vainly attempting to bring the progress of the race to a standstill with himself. To Syme's everlasting honour be it said that at eighty-one he was still almost as far in advance of the progress of society as he was at twenty-nine. He had mentally outstripped the progress of the race, and his seer-like gaze was still piercing the mists of futurity and seeing visions, which his eminent *[begin page 278]* practical abilities were interpreting to his countrymen and patiently persuading and assisting them to realize.

I will now unfold a secret concerning, David Syme which few have guessed outside his family circle. This grim, mysterious, figure of popular estimation, this "cold, hard man," who, for half a century and more was the most important factor in his State, this maker and unmaker of Ministries, this Father of Protection, this destroyer of monopolies, champion of the Democracy, and virtual ruler of more than a million people, was one, of the shyest, most modest, and most diffident persons in Victoria. He suffered tremors of apprehension when he was confronted with a stranger or a notability. He longed to appear cordial, fluent, at his ease. He would have liked favourably to impress his visitor, to make a friend of him. But his curious disease of shyness restrained the impulse: his diffidence of speech filled him with nervousness and almost sealed his lips. In consequence he retreated behind his armour of reserve, and spoke in, stem, dry monosyllables. The visitor frequently retired to add his testimony to the public accumulations of untruth. "David, Syme," he would say, is self-centred, unsympathetic, cold, hard, proud and arrogant." And yet another visit would, in all probability, have discovered a sympathetic companion, a brilliant talker and, may be, a kind and loyal friend for it was only on a first meeting *[begin page 279]* that Syme's strange infirmity froze his emotions and put his intellectual faculties in chains.

Many of those who served under Syme have proclaimed him censorious and dictatorial and ever prone to fault-finding and reluctant to give praise. There is more than a spice of truth in the charge, but the temperament, of the man has to be taken in account. For more than half a century he had himself served, the State to the utmost extent of his ability. He had never in all that time asked for praise. He had frequently been misunderstood, frequently maligned, censured, and vituperated by the people in whose cause he so strenuously strove. But rarely were his services adequately recognized. I cannot recall a single occasion, on which he was rewarded with appropriate eulogy for any of his great achievements. This did not trouble him. He served the people for his vision's sake. He gave them his best because he considered it his duty. Like a true stoical philosopher, he was always perfectly indifferent to either praise or blame. It was enough for him that he was conscious of doing and, having tried to do his duty; and he ever regarded the consciousness of virtue as the only truly acceptable reward of virtue.

It is not surprising, therefore, that he applied the same rule to those who served him. It was in his opinion their duty to serve him loyally and to the best of their ability. When they did so he was silent. They had done their duty. Were they to be flattered because they had not cheated him? *[begin page 280]* If they appeared to fail in their duty to him, he felt that he was being injured, and his custom was to bring the offenders sharply to book. Sometimes, nevertheless, he relaxed the rule.

An amusing story, and a true one, is related of a member of his staff who was one day required to visit the official sanctuary. He entered in fear and trembling, anticipating a stern rebuke for an unwitting offence. Syme met him with extraordinary graciousness: "Mr. --- your work is good, it pleases me. Inform the accountant that your salary in future will be raised fifty percent." The journalist retired in a state bordering on mental paralysis, and repaired to a public-house, where he imbibed not wisely but too well. He was incapacitated from duty for a week in consequence of his libations. When he returned to work he was curtly informed that a second "illness" of the same description would be punished with instant dismissal; but it was his first and last indulgence, and he served Syme faithfully and well for, many years.

The writer can give another instance of the rule relaxed, vouched for by personal experience. Syme entered the Editor's room one afternoon to discuss the morrow's leading articles. He wore a gloomy frown, "Who wrote such and, such a leader, yesterday?" he demanded, glowering at the editor. The editor reluctantly indicated the supposed offender, who was present. Syme turned upon the writer with a face transformed. His cheeks were flushed, *[begin page 281]* his eyes were glowing with enthusiasm. "Sir," he said, "it stirred my blood to read. It made me feel young again!" It should be mentioned that the article in question zealously supported a national ideal. It was an unforgettable incident, and has a value in its demonstration of Syme's passionate attachment to the national aims he advocated, Syme's philosophy was of the most practical order. Like Bacon, the habits of his mind were such that he was not disposed to rate highly any policy or accomplishment, however intellectually admirable, which was of no practical use to mankind. His disposition was singularly sober and sedate. He laboured all his life to give his countrymen a direction towards a statesmanlike utilitarianism which they should permanently retain. Did ever a contemporary propound a new policy or a new reform, Syme at once inquired, not as to what it promised, but as to what it could perform. He had no use for glorious but impracticable ideals. All his ideas were essentially practical: manifestly capable of being realized and of being advantageously enforced. As his aims were, one by one, attained, he passed on to others. He never seemed to believe that anything extraordinary had been done. His philosophy forbade a pause. Its fundamental law was progress. It made the goal of today the starting point of tomorrow, and it left the achievements of yesterday, with contemptuous indifference, to history. He was poignantly interested in the *[begin page 282]* history of the future. In the history of the past he had but little concern. He was a patriot of the tensest and most original character. He loved his country with every fibre of his being, but it was not Australia of today that he adored, it was the Australia of his vision, the country he desired and ardently believed Australia destined to become.

David Syme's character may be summed up in a few words. He was supposed to be complex and mysterious, in reality he was as simple as a child -simple in his loves and hates, simple in his foreseeing aims, and simple in his methods. He was incapable of tergiversation or inconstancy. He was invincibly consistent. He fixed his course and proceeded, with the simple directness of a consciously unconquerable strength, straight to the goal. He never paltered with his principles. He never compromised with his convictions. His face was set before. He never looked back. He injured many

people and sometimes without just cause, but he never did so by devious means, but always, openly and in fair fight. In a word, he was simple, and the great force he employed, which has done so much for Australia, derived alike its origin and its all-compelling power from his simplicity.



David Syme's House at Lilydale.

[begin page 283]

Chapter XV

David Syme as a Writer

Syme's Books - *Outlines of an Industrial Science* - Its scope and aim - *Representative Government in England* - Its effect on Australian politics - *On the modification of Organisms* - Darwin's theory of natural selection disputed - *The Soul* - Syme's, greatest literary work - His power of destructive criticism - His theories of design in nature - His theories of the hereafter - His lesser contributions to literature - His place in English letters.

David Syme's first book, *Outlines of an Industrial Science*, was published in 1877. It embodied the result's of many years of close thought and earnest study, of economic principles in daily practice, and contained an exposition of the science of Protection combined with an attack upon the fallacies of Cobdenism.

With ruthless temerity and logic it dissected the most popular dogmas of the old school, of English political economists, laid bare their defective system of investigation and untenable conclusions, and after exposing their mistakes boldly proclaimed the gospel that "in all investigations of which man is the subject the only proper method of reasoning is by induction."

Syme thence proceeded to prove that political *[begin page 284]* economy was a purely mental science, and debated the evils of unrestricted competition and substantiated the moral and legal title of the State to regulate industrial conditions and equitably to adjust the internecine claims of Capital and Labour. The book is written with amazing conciseness and lucidity, and evinces Syme a master of terse and transparent English. His style is simplicity itself. He obtains all his effects by hard facts and harder arguments, which he marshals like a skilful general and hurls against the foe. But once having gained his point and forced his conclusions on the conviction of the reader he is satisfied. He abstains from harsh comments and coldly passes on to other questions. *Outlines of an Industrial Science* aroused decided interest in scientific circles. Syme was recognized as a powerful writer, and even his most bigoted adversaries admitted he was a new force to be reckoned with. In America and in Germany, where the *Outlines* was shortly afterwards reprinted, he was welcomed as a champion of the principles of Protection, and the work became, and is still employed as, a textbook for students of political economy in many universities and schools.

With Representative Government in England, which was published five years after *Outlines of an Industrial Science*. Syme greatly enhanced his literary reputation. This book contains a learned discussion of the virtues and defects of Cabinet or Party administration. It does not concern itself with the *[begin page 285]* reasons for or against representative institutions, but starting from the assumption that the more representative a Government is, the better it is, it proceeds to trace the historic steps whereby Cabinet dictatorship gradually usurped the governing functions of Parliament and thus superseded in practice the theoretical ideals of the British constitution. It dispassionately investigates the consequences of this supersession, and debates, on the one hand, the position of the electors in their relationship to their representatives and, on the other, the relationship of members to the Ministry. Syme's argument - (for the construction of which the whole constitutional history of England has been laid under tribute) - forcibly elucidates the unwieldiness and legislative incapacity of the existing Parliamentary machine.

The master vice of the system he conceives to be the idea of party which dominates every department of political life. He shows very conclusively that this idea is a thoroughly modern one; that the early Parliaments, when their constituents paid their members for their services and elected them every year, were far more representative in the true, sense of the word: and that it was the passing of the Septennial Act, together with the abolition of the residential qualification for members, that practically made members independent of their constituents and left them free to carry out their personal piques and ambitions under the leadership of any [begin page 286] politician who had the ability to organize them into a party.

He is careful to say that he does not object to party organization as an instrument for disseminating political instruction, or as an engine for moving that large inert mass of people who care, nothing about politics as long as the active minority who do will look after their Affairs for them. The party spirit which he holds in just abhorrence is the spirit that will sacrifice principles to party, the spirit which adopts measures or drops them without any reference whatever to their merits - that fickle and inconsistent spirit which makes, the Conservative of today the bitterest opponent of what he advocated yesterday, and generally induces the representatives of the people to range themselves on opposite sides of the House the moment they come together, and to spend their time in vilifying one another's motives, opinions, and actions, to defeat one another's plans, and to delay and mutilate, when they cannot reject, one another's measures."

Under such a system practical legislation is impeded, years and years elapse before any great measure of reform can be carried, and, the best forces of the nation are wasted in devising means to clear the block which has arrested, the movement of the machine. Syme, has not paused to refer to the apology that is usually made for this state of things, namely, that too much haste is not in accord with the genius of the British constitution: but he at [begin page 287] once grasps the evil which these thinkers are too supine to grapple with, and suggests what a close of past events, a keen and intelligent observation of current ones, and a well-practised generalizing faculty, indicate to him to be the proper remedies.

The remedies as summarized by himself are, first, that the majority of the electors of any constituency should have authority, to dismiss their representatives without waiting for a general election, and, secondly, that Parliament should have the right to nominate the Ministry, which is itself merely a committee, of the two Houses.

The work made little impression on the people to whom it was principally addressed beyond calling forth a generous appreciation of its writer's political insight and literary ability: but in Australia it founded a new school of constitutional thought which is growing every year in numbers and authority, and which aims at the establishment of the reform that Syme's far-sightedness designated and predicted as ultimately inevitable.

Syme's two later works, *On the Modification of Organisms*, and *The Soul: a study and an argument*, although published separately, are intimately related and should be read together. The former contains a vigorous attack upon Darwin's theory of natural selection. The latter, published in 1903, and incomparably the more important work, continues - and develops this campaign, and after running a lively tilt against Herbert Spencer, Haeckel, [begin page 288] and all the Materialists, on the one hand, and, on the other, against the Spiritualists and the apostles of the old orthodox teleology, makes a bold departure into the realms of mystic speculation.

The Soul is one of the most original and most deeply interesting contributions made to the literature of psychology during the last half century or more. Syme reveals himself

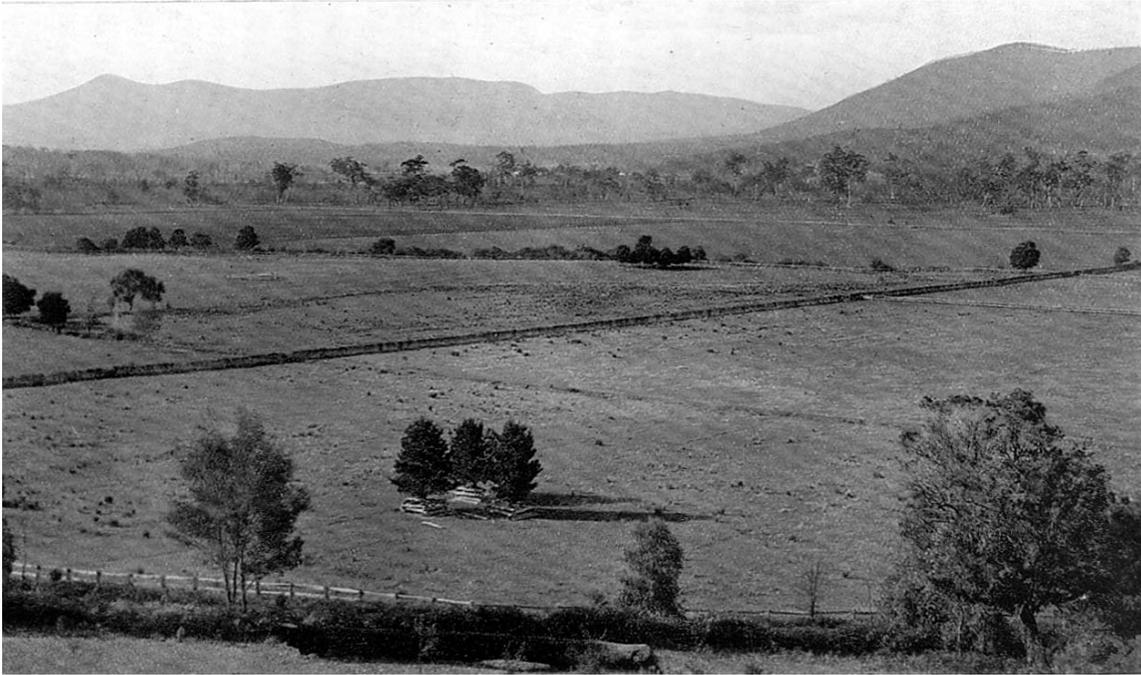
in this work an erudite and thoughtful physiologist and a learned student of natural history. His power of destructive criticism is extraordinary. His mind, indeed, is revolutionary and even at times iconoclastic. He has no reverence for the greatest names. When he perceives an error he seizes on it like a bloodhound on its prey, and the more idolatrously regarded in, popular esteem the author of the fallacy, the more gleefully does Syme expose it and tear it into shreds. In construction he is not quite so happy. Nevertheless he fashions in the unseen a world of sorts, and, if it seems to the reader an unfinished structure, allowance must be made for a scientific disposition which denies the unproved and will only project into the unknown an extension of the known.

Syme believes that mind is not only located in the cerebral hemispheres. He declares that it is not confined to the brain, but is present in all the nerve-centres and indeed in every cell. The "unconscious mind" he believes to be the product of these lower centres, one of whose most important functions is to prepare mental problems for the brain. *[begin page 289]* But, his most original and exciting contribution to his topic is his theory of design. After scornfully examining the endeavour of the orthodox scientists to get rid of design in Nature, he demonstrates that while in Nature all grades of design are revealed, some are constantly descending to clumsiness and inefficiency, thus indicating a basic flaw in the arguments of those who postulate the infallible wisdom of one designer.

His conclusion is that design, that is, the capacity of purposed action, is an integral and indivisible part of the mental furniture, of every living organism, down to the rudimentary cell. Each cell, he affirms, not only lives, but while it lives it designs. But he admits, as well, a central control, and he describes our system as a constitutional monarchy where the head deals with political and the parts with local or municipal questions. His main idea is a mediation of design extending and ascending from the inferior depositions to the supreme direction. His final argument is for a persistency of mind, life after death, based partly upon the indestructibility alike of energy and matter and partly upon the community of instinct and human belief.

The work is one to have made the reputation of an utterly unknown writer. It aided Syme's fame as a *littérateur*, a physiologist, and a philosopher. The *Soul* was greeted throughout the English speaking world with every mark of attention and respect. Newspapers and Reviews devoted lengthy articles *[begin page 290]* to praising, combating or debating its views. Clergymen of all sorts of creeds, both in Australia and abroad, including bishops and archbishops and other high Church dignitaries, lectured and preached upon it from platform and from pulpit: and everywhere it appeared it immediately provoked controversy. It is, in my opinion, a book that will live, for it is profoundly suggestive and provocative of inquiry on the lines it so lucidly propounds.

Besides the four books I have noticed, Syme did much other serious writing. In the 'sixties and 'seventies he contributed, many -thoughtful articles to the *Westminster Review*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and other British and Colonial monthly and quarterly magazines on scientific moral, social, philosophical and economic questions. It is worthy of mention that one such article which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* on the subject of Tariff Protection was reprinted in pamphlet form by one of the leading American Protectionist Leagues and distributed in hundreds of thousands of copies throughout the United States, where it was claimed for it that it notably influenced American thought and greatly contributed to the raising of the American Customs duties. Syme's indefatigable pen was continually busy in the columns of *The Age*, from the day he took over the control of that journal until only a few weeks before his death. It can truthfully be remarked of him that in letters as well as in politics he left an imprint on his times.



View of David Syme's Lilydale Estate
(facing page 304)



"Blythswood" David Syme's House at Kew
(facing page 314)

[begin page 291]

Chapter XVI

Correspondence

Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister - Spiritualism, Theosophy, etc. - Robert Louis Stevenson - David Syme's Daily Life - The power of *The Age* - Essay on the working of Party Government - Syme's ideas of the Press and its functions.

Syme had no love for letter-writing. His business correspondence was transacted almost exclusively by telegraph. He engaged on one occasion in a somewhat voluminous literary controversy with Frederic Harrison upon Comtism, but unfortunately the documents were destroyed. However, a few interesting letters relating to political, personal and religious subjects from his pen have been preserved by their recipients, and have been placed at my disposal for publication. The names of the addresses and the dates of the letters have for private reasons been withheld.

[No. 1]

The Age Office,
Melbourne.

Dear Sir,

It will interest you to learn that the question of legalizing marriage with a deceased wife's sister - *[begin page 292]* now happily settled in England - was first started in Victoria, and by a curious set of circumstances in *The Age* Office. It happened one day that Mr. A.L. Windsor (my editor) and I were talking over subjects for leading matter. On that particular afternoon there was a dearth of topics. I had shortly before heard of some cases in Melbourne of hardship under the existing Marriage Law, and it suddenly occurred to me we might take the matter up. I therefore suggested to Windsor that he should write an article advocating a Deceased Wife's Sister's Act which duly appeared. The following week the member for Beechworth in the Victorian Assembly, Mr. G.P. Smith (a former editor of *The Age*) brought a bill into the House to legalize these marriages. It was passed through the Assembly and the Council without dissension, and sent up to the Governor. It was then forwarded to the Imperial Parliament, and, strange to say, passed through both Houses and became law without the least to-do. With you in England there has been a controversy extending over many years on the question, and 'the whole thing arose here in that simple way. I enclose for you to read the article written by Windsor that originated the agitation.

Yours truly,
David Syme.

[begin page 293]

[No. 2]

This letter discloses Syme's views on Spiritualism, Theosophy, etc.

The Age Office,
Melbourne.

My Dear -----,

Perhaps I can best answer your question, what is my opinion of Spiritualism? by relating some personal experiences. Some years ago I was invited by a leading

Melbourne spiritualist to attend a *séance* at his house, where I was assured I should witness some extraordinary manifestations. I had previously been shown photographs of articles which had come "straight through the air from a Mahatma in India!" These were supposed to have been transmitted to prove the truth of the doctrine of theosophy. These articles were alleged to be pieces of temples, portions of ancient Greek MSS., bricks with cuneiform inscriptions, etc. I went to the *séance*. A dozen or more people were present, all believers in the system. There was also a man who acted as medium. He was dressed in Hindustani costume, and he spoke a sort of mixture of Hindustani and English. This medium presently produced and introduced to us the Rev. Dr. Robinson from the spirit world. The rev. spirit had been a professor of theology at one of the United States universities, and when in this life had written a book on his travels in Palestine, which I had read *[begin page 294]* years ago. Well, this Dr. Robinson appeared, or seemed to appear, on the stage; and he delivered us a lecture, replete with the usual platitudes, of about twenty minutes duration, pointing out the beauties of theosophy.

There followed a demonstration of the extraordinary powers of the Yogas or Mahatmas, who can send through the air anything they please from the remotest part of the earth (?). Of course, all the lights having been previously extinguished, some faith was required to believe that the articles which presently dropped on the table actually passed through the walls of the room without injuring the, said walls. But this faith the spectators seemed cheerfully prepared to accord.

The articles fell with a loud noise. The first was a stone about 5 or 6 lb. in weight. It might have come from Timbuctoo or from under the table. It was too dark to make sure. Next arrived some cuneiform bricks. Then a live fish 4 lb. weight. Then came several live birds, said to have flashed through straight from India that evening. One of these birds was caught and put into my hands. It was a living bird. No doubt about that. But I could not tell if it was an Indian bird. It might have been an Australian bird. That was the whole performance.

When it was over those present were anxious to know whether I was satisfied with the proof given, and I said I was not. I said: "There is one thing *[begin page 295]* which if you will do - and it should be easily done - will accept as absolute proof, and I will believe. You can send birds, fish, letters and bricks through the air, therefore you can do anything. All I want you to do is to produce for me this moment a copy of the *Calcutta Englishman* of this morning's date, or the *Bombay Gazette*. Give me that proof, and I'll ask for no more." "Oh," they returned. "we cannot control the Mahatma at the other end. We must be satisfied with what he chooses to send us." But I was not satisfied.

On another occasion I had two *séances* with the man Foster mentioned in W. B. Carpenter's work - *Mental Physiology*, pp. 308-10-who claimed to be Just a spiritualist. He had made a great sensation in America. I do not know whether he had in London before he came to Australia or not. He sent, when he arrived here, a note of invitation to the members of the Press, saying he would be happy to give a private *séance* at his rooms on a certain date. I accepted the invitation, and attended with my brother George and, amongst others, Mr Hugh George, the manager of *The Argus*, was also Present.

Foster commenced with the paper pellets spoken of in Carpenter's book, and he successfully read every name. He then put these aside and called upon any person in the audience who pleased to think of some deceased person. There was a good deal of hesitation, but at last Hugh George said he *[begin page 296]* had thought of somebody. Immediately he had spoken Foster rose from his seat and commenced

what looked like an harangue, making certain gesticulations. Before five minutes had passed all those present had identified the man Foster was representing and imitating, by his style, his language and his gestures, as the Rev. Mr. Menzies, who had been pastor of a Presbyterian Church in Collins Street and who had died two years earlier. When Foster sat down we asked Hugh George who was the person he had thought of. "Oh," replied George, the Rev. Mr. Menzies."

My opinion is that Foster had been reading George's mind - a case of telepathy-thought-reading. How he did it of course I cannot say.

On the next morning I chanced to meet Foster in Collins Street, and he thanked me for the way *The Age* had noticed his *séance* and said that if I wanted to test him further he would be happy to give me a private *séance* at any time I liked. Well, a day was appointed, and I made up my mind as to the sort of test I should require with a view to proving it was thought-reading, for I concluded it was nothing else. The English mail had arrived the previous day with books, and I asked my brother George to go around and select a certain newly arrived and newly-published book, put it up in a thick brown paper parcel, tie and seal it, and hand it to me. Well, certain things had been told me about this book, and certain other things had not *[begin page 297]* been told me concerning it. The *séance* took place next day in a room selected by me. There was a large round table and one window in the room. Foster was seated opposite the window full in the light, and I sat three or four yards from him I handed him the parcel, and asked him what was in it. He promptly replied, "A book." I asked him (I knew) the subject matter of the book. He replied, correctly, "Politics." So far he appeared to have been thought-reading; but I next asked him the title of the book, and this I did not know. He gave me a title. I then required the author's name. He turned the parcel upside down a dozen times, then threw it down and said, "I cannot tell."

At that I opened the parcel, and to my surprise found that Foster had not only given the title of the book, but that the book was an anonymous publication. I was rather astonished at the result of this test. I had the book in my hand unopened, the leaves uncut. I asked Foster more from curiosity than aught else whether he could read what was in the book. He said, "Yes; turn up page 220. I did so, and he read aloud what was printed there, line after line, paragraph after paragraph. He was not reading my thoughts, for I was following him in the most mechanical way. He read two thirds of the page, word for word, correctly, until I stopped him. This was not thought-reading, I fancy, but a case of clairvoyance.

I have attended many other *séances* at different *[begin page 298]* times, and I have read almost every book of note written about spiritualism, including Mr. Myers, two large volumes; but I have never read or encountered anything that distinctly proves there is a connexion between the spirit world (if there be such a world) and the world we live in. My attitude towards this question therefore is - I do not know.

Yours truly,
David Syme.

[No. 31

This letter contains interesting remarks on Samoa and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Dear -----,

My visit to Tutuila and the other Samoan Islands has enchanted me. I found the natives most hospitable and kind, and would have liked to have left the ship and joined them. I was charmed with the people of the Islands. It is, however, with indignation I think that, after all the missionary labour the English have expended on these Islands

and all the trade they had once, England does not own one of them at the present time. Tutuila, which possesses the only, and a splendid, harbour of the islands belongs to America, and all the other islands belong to Germany. As regards Apia, there was no sign of a capital when I called. There were *[begin page 299]* only two or three native houses scattered about, and a meeting house owned by a negro who very likely had run away from some ship. It was about there that Robert Louis Stevenson settled. He took up 600 acres and was going to make a plantation. I think, and have always thought, R. Stevenson an altogether over-rated man.

When he came out to the Islands he had hired a yacht from San Francisco to cruise about. He had it very nicely fitted up, and he had his wife and family on board. He gives, us no account of these beautiful islands, and is most reticent about the state of Samoa. If he had given us an account of his voyaging, the people he saw there, and their habits and customs, he might have made a very interesting book, more so than any he had written

Yours truly,
D. S.

[No. 4]

Giving a picture of Syme's daily life in the early days.

The Age,
Melbourne.

Dear -----,

Let me give you a statement of my daily life for about the first ten years of *The Age*. In the *[begin page 300]* first place there was hardly a decent writer on the Press in Melbourne at that time (1860-1870), scarcely a writer of note at all to be had for love or money. I had two writers. One was Gerald Supple, and the other J.W. O'Hea. They were both Irishmen, one a Catholic, the other a Protestant. Supple was nearly blind and had the greatest difficulty in writing - having to hold his eyes close to the paper and - he was incapable of reading; therefore he knew nothing of what was going on, and I always had to find subjects for him. The other man, O'Hea, had no such drawback; but as he had once acquired a reputation by writing a series of special articles for the London *Times*, that seemed to him all sufficient. He considered it quite unnecessary to post himself up in the events of the day, or to read with a view to writing an article. The consequence was, I had to find subjects for him also. This went on from year's end to year's end.

I had taken a house at this time at Booroondara (now Canterbury Road), five miles out in the country, with a view of getting more exercise and riding into town every day. There were no railways or cars those days. I used to breakfast at 8, read the papers through, then ride into town, arriving at the office about 10.30 or 11. My first work was to attend to business downstairs, financial, mechanical and publishing, and all the other affairs of a newspaper. This occupied me until luncheon. After luncheon I went upstairs and read the corre- *[begin page 301]* spondence, and arranged the duties with the head of the reporting staff. My staff was a small one then - only three reporters. At 3 p.m. I met the contributors, found subjects for them, and instructed them as to the form of the articles. After that I worked hard, reading through all the English newspaper files, and new books, periodicals and magazines, in order to find matter for the next day. This took till teatime. After tea I read the proofs that poured in on me all night, the leading articles generally arriving at 11 or 11.30. Sometimes they required very little alteration, but many and many a time the writer had missed the whole drift, of the

argument I wished unfolded, and I had then to sit down and either recast or write anew the entire article. It was the most trying part of the whole, day's work to write under those conditions, and hampered, too, by the feeling of annoyance at the fact that what I had clearly laid down as the policy of the article had been missed or ignored and all the while the printer's boy outside clamouring for copy, and letters from other contributors coming in which I could not attend to. As a rule this went on until 2 a.m., when the paper had to go to press. My horse was then brought round to the door, and I mounted and rode home. It was rarely indeed that I got to sleep before 3 am. Such, was my daily grind for more than a decade.

Yours truly,
D.S.

[begin page 302]

[No. 5]

The Age Office,
Melbourne

Dear -----,

When *The Age* started to advocate Protection to native industry there was not, as far as I knew, a man in the whole country but was a Free Trader. I never knew of any until *The Age* had been hammering at this for months, so in taking up this question I was running counter to the whole opinion of the country. The advertisers were importers, the few tradesmen were also Free Traders, and advertised to a certain extent. Consumers, of course, had it driven into their heads that Free Trade meant cheap goods, so it looked like a forlorn hope to begin a campaign under such conditions. However, I commenced it and stuck to it.

Re Berry. When we had lifted Berry on to his pedestal he did some very improper things. But we did not support him in those things; we condemned him, on the contrary, just as strongly as we would condemn an opponent. The public was astonished at this, and Berry was annoyed. But it was my policy never to condone anything improper, and we exposed Berry on three or four occasions. Similarly at the time of the great maritime strike we condemned those responsible in the strongest possible manner, and we also exposed that nefarious business of the Eight Hours Committee which raised a large sum each year by an Art Union for charitable *[begin page 303]* purposes and deducted nine-tenths of the proceeds. Friend or foe, it did not matter - all were criticized alike.

Of course *The Age* was continually consulted as to the formation of Ministries. Necessarily, of course, because it made and unmade them. I was always consulted, and I knew the ins and outs of everything. Had I kept a diary I could have given a most interesting account of how almost every Ministry was ever made. It would have been a complete secret political history of Victoria. I was quite aware of the interest that would attach to such a document, but I abstained from keeping a diary, because I regarded all these matters as confidential, although there was never any such stipulation made.

It is quite true that *The Age's* influence has extended beyond Victoria. To give an instance: some fifteen or sixteen years ago the Queensland Government proposed giving to a syndicate the right of building a railway through to the Gulf of Carpentaria on the land grant system, the Gulf country being almost unknown and little appreciated. *The Age* published a leading article, condemning the proposal. The article was reprinted in the Queensland papers, and the scheme was immediately dropped. Furthermore, it has to be remembered that not only is Victoria a Protectionist country,

but South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia, and now New South Wales. That all *[begin page 304]* this has been due in a very large sense to *The Age* is a fact that cannot be gainsaid.

Yours truly,
David Syme.

**An unfinished Essay on The Working of Party Government
Written by Syme shortly before his death.**

Has the Parliamentary machine been working satisfactorily during the last fifty years? Or to put it in another way - Are our Parliaments better or worse than they were? It is a question that is often asked, and the almost invariable answer given by the man in the street is that they are worse. This is almost as a matter of course, as the Parliamentary figures of the past always loom large. But after making allowance for this kind of illusion I am of opinion that there is no sign of improvement in our recent Parliaments compared with our earlier ones. On the contrary, there is a marked deterioration. There is a rollicking and boisterous tone about our recent Parliaments which is not indicative of a determination to do serious work.

Unfortunately, along with Parliamentary Government we have grafted on to it what is called Responsible Government, a pernicious method which is alien to a truly Parliamentary or representative system of Government. Parliamentary Govern- *[begin page 305]* ment is government by Parliament. Responsible Government is government by Party. We had a beautiful illustration of how Party government works in our Federal Parliament during a recent session. This Parliament met for the transaction of business (what a burlesque!), and it spent the whole time in party and personal recrimination. During a very short period we had three Cabinets and three want-of-confidence motions, and in the last division the Government had a majority of two (2)! And this was accepted as a working majority. The-only piece of business done during six and a half months was the selection of a site for the Federal City, and even that was, only partially settled. The last want-of-confidence motion engaged the attention of the House for four weeks, and was unique in its way, and is not likely soon to be forgotten, as the fate of Ministers depended on the vote of one man. It was understood that if the Government had only a majority of one it would have to go out, but if two it might remain in office! During the long debate heads were counted, and it was ascertained that there was a majority of one for the Government, and one doubtful. As may be imagined, every effort was made by the members on both sides of the House to influence the doubtful member (Mr. Cameron from Tasmania) or at least to ascertain how he would vote; but he was as silent as the Sphinx; he openly gloried in the fact that he held the fate of the Government in the hollow of his hand; not *[begin page 306]* a word or a hint would he utter as to how he would cast his vote till almost the last day, when he intimated that he would vote with the Government not, as he said, because he loved the Government but because he did not love the Opposition. I am sure that nine out of every ten persons in the community were scandalized by the whole proceedings. And yet we are told that this is the proper method of carrying on the Government of the country; that, in fact, it is the only system whereby the rule by majority can be carried out.

Let us see how it works. When I said that the only piece of business done during the whole session was the settlement for the site of the Federal City, in this I was wrong. There was a vote taken for the expenditure of £20,000 for a detailed survey of 1,000 miles of a railway through a waterless desert in West Australia, notwithstanding that a flying survey had been previously taken which showed that the line would cost

£5,000,000 and would not pay working expenses. Here we see how Party Government and government by party works. I am within the mark in saying that nine-tenths of the electors in the Commonwealth and an overwhelming majority in the House were entirely opposed to the construction of this railway and to the expenditure of this £20,000. But the West Australia members were in favour of it to a man, and they gave it plainly to be understood that they would vote solidly against any party in the House who opposed it. Hence *[begin page 307]* Ministers in *esse* and *in posse* were in a dilemma. Parties were so nearly alike as regarded numbers that none of them could afford to have the West Australia vote go against them. Sir Edmund Barton was the first to be sounded, and he gave a half-hearted sort of a promise; Mr. Deakin was next approached and he went a little farther; then Mr. Reid, in Opposition, when in Fremantle, distinctly avowed himself in favour, not only of the further expenditure on the survey, but even of the construction of the line. Under these circumstances what could poor Mr. Watson do but say ditto to Mr. Reid? So the money was voted, and the five West Australia members carried the vote in a House of seventy-five. And this is Government by majority.

If Party Government can play such pranks in Legislation, it operates even worse in Administration. Party spirit was never so rampant as it has been the last few years, to the manifest deterioration in Administration in our own States. Sound Administration has at all times been the distinguishing feature of all well-organized States. Unfortunately it has not been so with us for a number of years.

In our earlier Parliaments members were more serious in their demeanour; they were neither rollicking nor boisterous in their manner. They looked and acted as if they met for business and not for play. They sat four days in the week instead of three or rather two and a half as at present; a country member, did not hurry off home on Thursday *[begin page 308]* afternoon, and town members did not count out the House every night in order to catch the last suburban train. Sittings till the short hours of the morning were then common enough. Then again, there were, in our earlier Parliaments, men who had made a study of certain public questions and who were accordingly listened to with respect. It was not customary in those days for members to repeat one another's speeches, to run an argument to death. There was less play and more work than at present. Members did not then learn to become expert billiard-players by constant practice on the Parliamentary billiard-tables. If not in the Chamber members were sure to be in the library, unless absent from the House. We do not find many such members nowadays. Where are our experts in railway matters, in finance, in education, and in public works? We spend much money in the construction of railways, but who ever heard of a member using his free pass to inspect a proposed line? This duty has been handed over to a paid railway committee, as have also all public works of every kind, and what is not covered by this Board is in due course handed over to a Royal Commission. The result of all this is that members are put into office for which they have no qualification. Hence our bad Administration. Take our Lands Department, for example. It would be difficult to conceive of a worse state of things than exists in that Department at the present day. The Department is supposed *[begin page 309]* to exist for facilitating the sale and selection of land, and while the country is crying out for land it takes from eighteen months to two years, to issue a permit for a selector to take possession. It is quite as bad as this, and Ministers know it. Every country member knows it only too well. They are constantly complaining that they have to dance attendance at the Lands Office daily to push through applications for their constituents. One country ex-member told me that while he was in Parliament he was engaged almost a whole day in the Lands Office and a great part of the night in writing letters to his constituents, telling them what he had done there. He found that, other country members had been in the habit of doing this kind of work, and he had either to do it also or resign his seat, and he preferred to resign.

Several of the other Departments are quite as bad. The only departments that are well managed are those of the Law, and they are in charge of experts. All this comes of appointing to office men who have had no training for the work of Administration, who are not men of affairs, and who, are often incapable of carrying through the most simple transaction; and all this is the necessary result of Party Government. The Cabinet should be, and is supposed to be, the Executive of Parliament. But under Party Government it is nothing of the sort. The Cabinet is not elected by Parliament. All that Parliament does is to nominate the Premier, and the Premier, *[begin page 310]* not Parliament, appoints his own colleagues and according to present methods the Premier cannot select these colleagues from both sides of the House, but from one side only, and his Ministry is inferior in consequence of this restriction. He cannot select the best men to begin with, and even in selecting from his own side of the House he is necessarily influenced by other considerations than fitness. Can we conceive of a financial institution being managed on such lines? In electing a Directorate the shareholders would see to the election of the whole of the directors, not to one only, and they would take good care that the selection would not be limited to a section of the shareholders only. We can hardly imagine a system of management less adapted to secure good Administration than that which now exists. How much better it would be if each Minister was elected directly by Parliament! Then we might expect that some consideration would be given to individual fitness. But the system is breaking down, in fact has already broken down from its own inherent weakness. The first instance of this was in the Railway Department. The management of this Department was taken out of the hands of the Minister of Railways and was handed over to three Commissioners. The Education Department came next, and was put in charge of an expert under the title of Director of Education. Then followed the Department of Agriculture with another expert and director. Now we have also *[begin page 311]* a Director of Mining, presiding over the Mines Department. Ministers are still in their old places drawing their old salaries, but there is nothing left for them to do except formally to append their signatures to certain documents which are laid before them by the permanent heads. It is true they still receive deputations, but to any request the almost invariable answer is given, "I will place the matter before the Cabinet." They are in, fact mere automata, or at best only the media of communication between the permanent heads and the Cabinet, to which every question of policy is now referred.

To those on the wrong side of the Speaker's Chair everything is wrong that is done by those on the right. "It is the function of the Opposition to oppose." What Disraeli said in sarcasm is now quoted with approval and acted upon in grim earnestness. It is the plea put forward whenever the Government of the day is attacked, be it right or be it wrong. This vile doctrine is put into practice in England as well as here. The campaign of abuse was carried but there during the Cape war to an extent never reached before. Everything that Ministers proposed was condemned in advance, everything they did was a blunder or a crime. Their conduct of the war was described by the leader of the Opposition. as "cold-blooded" and "brutal"; when the Government established camps for the women and children of the rebels, who were in arms against the Empire, and fed and clothed them, *[begin page 312]* was described by the leader of the Opposition as "methods of barbarism," and the Government was held up to execration in Parliament night after night. Poor Kruger believed that the voice of the Opposition was the voice of the people of England, that a change of Ministers was imminent; and he therefore held out for months after he was practically defeated, at a cost to Great Britain of thousands of lives and millions of money. Later, Party spirit ran even higher; wilful misrepresentation, deliberate perversion of the truth and unjustified personal invective characterized the attitude of the Opposition. Not that the Opposition had any policy of its own which it was eager to have carried out. The so-called Liberal Party in England has not had a vestige of a policy for years; its only policy was to regain office.

There will always be parties both inside and outside of Parliament till the millennium arrives but we need not encourage Party warfare by rewarding the successful Party with office.

Syme on the Functions of the Press.

In England the Press has been called The Fourth Estate of the Realm - not a particularly happy designation, for it cannot be regarded as an Estate at all in the same sense that the Lords Spiritual, Lords Temporal and Commons are Estates. It has no representative character, nor has it any traditional or constitutional claim to such a position. *[begin page 313]*

In one respect, however, it is like the British Constitution, inasmuch as it is a growth; it has been gradually evolved. At first the Press was a newspaper and nothing more, simply a purveyor of news, a recorder of current events, as the titles. *Intelligencer, Courier, Herald*, indicate; later we have such titles as *The Sentinel, Spectator, Examiner*, and so forth, showing that the Press had assumed another function, namely, - of interpreter or commentator or propagandist. The Press has also been described as, the organ of public opinion. But a newspaper is something more than an organ of public opinion; it may represent public opinion, but it also helps to form public opinion. A newspaper, if it is of any account at all, has its own opinions. It does not ask the man in the street what he thinks, but it tells him what he ought to think. It presents him with the facts, shows him what these facts imply and how they affect him as a member of the community. It has even the temerity to tell Parliament what it ought to do under certain circumstances; what grievances it ought to remedy and even how to remedy them. Members don't like to have their attention drawn to such matters by a newspaper. They call it dictation. But if Members attended to their duties there would be no occasion for the Press to interfere. But whether they like such criticism or not they have to submit to it, so long as it is made in the public interest. Public criticism of public men is now a recognized function of the Press. As *[begin page 314]* long as this criticism is exercised in the public interest the Press is unassailable, and members must listen with the best grace they can. And the Press claims to be free only on this condition, and in this respect it claims no more than the, humblest individual possesses. The Press has no licence to slander with impunity. An ill-conditioned member may slander a private individual within the walls of Parliament and refuse him any redress, but a newspaper has no such privilege, and if it makes a charge which it fails to sustain it must pay the penalty.

[begin page 315]

Chapter XVII

Death and Appreciations

The news of Syme's death in his eighty-first year, which occurred on February 14, 1908 at his home at Blythewood, Kew, near Melbourne (to which he had for some time been confined through heart and digestive troubles) was received throughout the Commonwealth with an almost universal expression of public-grief. In the week that followed every journal of note in the Commonwealth paid him the tribute of a leading article, praising his works and lamenting his departure; and in Victoria many leading politicians and statesmen and innumerable municipalities, shire councils, Progress Associations, Rifle-Clubs, Societies and other public bodies, made public confession of his incomparable services to the State.

The appreciations published, in the Australian newspapers would fill a large volume. I have space only sufficient at my disposal to quote a few representative opinions.

The Argus - the Free Trade, Conservative rival in Melbourne and ancient enemy of *The Age* said:- [*begin page 316*]

The position to which Protection has attained in Victoria is largely due to the ceaseless, vigorous, and - if we may say so without any wish to be offensive - remorseless advocacy of Mr. Syme. This is not the place to discuss controversially the procedure he followed, or the intolerance shown by him to men who conscientiously withstood him over problems which have perplexed thinkers and legislators for several generations.

The principles which should govern the discussion of subjects of the greatest importance are not, for the moment, in question. What it concerns us to admit is the earnestness, the vigilance, and the fighting qualities of a combatant who himself was not disposed to concede merit to an opponent or to show quarter in political warfare. Advocacy maintained without wavering, in season and out of season, necessarily found favour with all classes of persons interested intellectually, emotionally, or for prosaic reasons, in the development of manufacturing by means of high customs, duties.

The Herald - Melbourne's afternoon paper - said of him:-

With profound regret we record this evening the passing away of a great man. Mr. David Syme, the proprietor of *The Age* newspaper, died this morning at his residence at Kew, and Australia is the poorer because it has lost one of the most vigorous and capacious intellects ever employed in the public weal. For Mr. David Syme has primarily been a great public servant. Unofficial, of course, but none the less - -some would say, all the more-valuable and practical. Some years ago, in a speech at a Press gathering in London, Mr. A.J. Balfour, the ex-Prime Minister eulogized what he called the splendid sense of responsibility of the "irresponsible" Englishmen who conducted the great journalistic organs in which public opinion is formed and expressed. The word "irresponsible" is hardly accurate, but it sufficiently expresses the idea which it was intended to convey. Mr. Syme's sense of his own great responsibility was ever a dominant factor in his character. It has not always been our fortune to agree with the opinions expressed, or to approve of the policy promulgated by the great man who

has just gone to his rest; but we testify gladly, heartily, and sincerely alike to the sterling integrity of purpose which has marked *[begin page 317]* his Conspicuously fruitful and powerful career, and to the towering ability which he brought to the discharge of every task on which he laid his masterly hand. In Great Britain and in America there are what may be called captains in journalism who have left their mark on the political and social life of the community they have served, but we find it difficult, even among the best of them, to discover a parallel for Mr. David Syme. "You do not know what a great man you have got," said a very distinguished Imperial Statesman to an Australian visitor, when referring during the Imperial conference of last year to Mr. Deakin. It may well be doubted whether Australia is conscious or ever will be adequately conscious, of what a great man we had in David Syme. This is not the place to go into details, to give illustrations, or to seem even to adduce proofs. It is sufficient here to admit freely the value and the merits - Professional and personal - of one who in the obscurity of the impersonal Journalism of Australia has won, in a competitive field where nothing goes by favour, the peculiar power which the public acceptance of a great public journal gives to its conductors, has wielded that Power in the interests of the people; and has just accomplished a magnificent life's work.

The Adelaide Advertiser, one of the most prominent South Australian dailies, said:- It would be no exaggeration to assert that Mr. Syme was the most influential man in Victoria. By reason of his own vigorous personality and the immense-power wielded by the widely-circulated paper whose prosperity he had created, and whose destinies he controlled for so many years, he had long been the arbiter of political fate in the neighbour State. Not only was his strength made manifest in respect to the local Legislature which, in its popular branch at ally rate, has long reflected the opinions of *The Age*, but he did much to fix the complexion of the Victorian representation in the Federal Legislature. Mr. Syme never made any attempt to enter public life himself, and although he had many important interests besides his paper-for he was a landowner on a large scale - it was by his journalistic enterprise and ability that he was best *[begin page 318]* known, as it was from his newspaper that he gained his prosperity. Mr. Syme was the father of the Protectionist movement in Victoria, a cause which he espoused when it was as small as "a grain of mustard seed." But he fought so vigorously in the campaign for the preservation and development of local industries that today there is practically no other fiscal belief extant in the neighbour State, while his enthusiastic and enlightened advocacy has naturally helped in the victory that has been won in the wider sphere of Federal politics. He had been the guiding genius of the great daily he owned for nearly half a century, and it was he who carved out the path of progressive Liberalism along which it has consistently moved. He "knew the seasons, when to take occasion by the hand, and make the bounds of freedom wider yet." There was no popular cry for the policy he initiated. By dint of earnest and energetic work against adverse circumstances and influences he made the popular cry, and with it the fortunes of his paper, which, when he and his, brother, the late Mr. Ebenezer Syme, purchased it in 1854, was at a very low ebb indeed. He had strong views, high personal character, the pertinacity of his Scotch forefathers, and indomitable courage. These qualities were all needed in the battle he had undertaken, and they were all reflected in the editorial columns through which he addressed the people. It was a good thing for Victoria, as it was for *The Age*, that Mr. Syme was spared for so many

years to enforce his will and to live out his ideals. By many persons thought to be abrupt and unsympathetic, it was still everywhere admitted that he was a scrupulously just man. "A terror to evildoers," he was yet always ready to recognize merit in an individual or a party. The many men and causes whose triumph he has secured in political life will all promptly admit that there was no personal interest in his action. He was a man whose maxim was, "Because right is right, to follow right were wisdom in the scorn of consequence." Mr. Syme was granted length of days and mental vigour beyond the lot of most, but he made excellent use of both his physical and intellectual capacities, and no more wasted time or thought than he wasted his resources in other directions. What he possessed he felt was bestowed upon him to turn to good account, and there have been few men in Australia who put to better or more permanent service the gifts of nature and of fortune than did David Syme. *[begin page 319]*

The Adelaide Register, the leading South Australian journal, said:

The death of Mr. David Syme, proprietor of the *Melbourne Age*, has removed from Australian public life one of its most interesting and powerful personalities. Although he was an author of some note, and otherwise contributed to literary culture and scientific research and exploration, yet he will be remembered chiefly in connexion with the political and social growth of Victoria, and the marvellous influence which he exerted through journalism directly and indirectly upon the history of his State. The late proprietor of the *Melbourne Age* did not limit his newspaper ideal to merely material success, though with proverbial, Scotch shrewdness he did not fail to improve almost unexampled commercial opportunities; but he sought to magnify the press as a great instrument of social, political, and intellectual progress. It is not too much to say that he succeeded in concentrating in his personality a force of journalism never surpassed. His leadership of men became so distinctly recognized that he was commonly known as the King of Victoria.

A spontaneous tribute to "kingship" can never be wholly an accident of circumstances. Occasionally the forces of the times seem to gather and find brief expression in a man of the hour, but David Syme was more than a passing voice. Ministries came and went, politicians filed through the forum like a phantom procession, generations changed, conditions altered; but the maker and destroyer of Cabinets remained; the dictator of policies was always in office; his smile was as the breath of life, to, the ordinary Parliamentarian; his pen could write the death Warrant of high officials. His magic was the, inevitable word that controlled his public. Mr. Syme's first published, work which related to industrial science supplied a key to his method. He insisted there that political economy was a science, not of wealth, but of mind; and this doctrine, though when, promulgated quite unorthodox and startling, is now widely accepted. Evidently Mr. Syme owed his unique position in Victorian public life largely to a Profound study of psychology practical knowledge of men and multitudes; and, if in the recent years of federation the voice of the charmer seemed to *[begin page 320]* lose some of its potency, the record of its achievement remained to excite admiration.

It would be surprising if in fifty years some advanced ideas did not cease to be so regarded, and if the democrat of the mid-nineteenth century were not suspected of conservatism in the twentieth century. However that may apply to the case of Mr. Syme, and whatever may be the changed attitude

of the times, the deceased gentleman illustrated the co-ordinating power of an able conductor of a great daily newspaper to mould the affairs of State - a power which is a necessary feature of modern civilization and imposes corresponding and generally acknowledged responsibilities. It is a suggestive fact that the late proprietor of *The Age* further displayed the intimacy existing between the teaching, preaching, and journalistic professions, which - necessarily differing in methods and agencies are essentially one in their educational aim. He was a son of the school, and was claimed for the pulpit, and he devoted himself to the press; and whatever criticism might be offered concerning the politics and methods of his journal it is undeniable that it ranked high, both for its enterprise and its literary quality. Apart from his sentiment Mr. Syme will figure in the history of federation if only for the circumstance that he "discovered" Mr. Deakin, introduced a future Prime Minister of the Commonwealth to public life, and smoothed his path at all times. Victoria mourns the loss of a Warwick, a typical Scotsman, and a characteristic Victorian - a man of penetration, power, and patriotism, and Australia has lost a newspaper conductor of extraordinary intuition, resource, and influence.

The Hobart Mercury, the leading daily journal of Tasmania, said:

The death of Mr. David Syme removes one of the great figures of Australian life, and a man who, in his time, probably exerted a larger influence over public affairs than any other individual. *The Age*, which so long led Victorian political opinion, was more than the mouthpiece of the proprietor, it was David Syme himself. He had the courage of his opinions, and took pains to disseminate them in such a fashion as would have most effect on the public mind. Incidentally, he made a fortune for himself, and yet that, to him, was almost an incident compared *[begin page 321]* with the acquisition of Power. Undoubtedly, he strove to make money, and succeeded; but he strove with even more vigour and whole-souled earnestness to gain power, and here his success was remarkable. We cannot say that, in our opinion, the influence which Mr. Syme exerted on the history of Victoria was always a good one. But we recognize the extraordinary ability, strength of will, and power of concentration which brought his newspaper, and through it the proprietor, into the position where, at times, he was able to dictate the policy of Ministers and of Parliament. Known, as he was, more by name than by acquaintance, he was nothing of a figure in the public eye, and, indeed, he was not one of those who delight in open applause. He had the journalistic instinct, combined with rare business ability, and it was by no accident, or extraordinary luck, that he climbed to his commanding position. His death will leave a gap in the journalistic world.

The *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, the most widely circulated daily newspaper published in New South Wales said:

It is perhaps not too fanciful to say that the late Mr. David Syme, the proprietor of the *Melbourne Age*, was not only a forceful and arresting personality, but was in a very real sense an embodiment of the Spirit of the Time - that actual definable trend or influence which German philosophy calls the "Zeitgeist." Born in that time of intellectual upheaval which followed hard upon the French Revolution, Mr. Syme was in infancy a sharer in those influences which produced a Shelley, singing his Ode to Liberty, and a Cobbett, thundering out the demand of the English commonalty for Reform. The French Revolution released numbed intellects as well as prisoners rotting in dungeons. Strange electric influences were

in the air in those days. When the late Mr. Syme was growing to manhood his mind, plastic in adolescence, took the impress of the Spirit of the Time - and then hardened into granite. After the first great instalment of Reform came Chartism, and during the decade preceding Mr. Syme's departure from Great Britain the Chartists were hammering hard at the door of Tory privilege. His work in Australia shows that he heard the hammering. If he was not *[begin page 322]* actually a Chartist himself he, at any rate, adopted the six planks of the Chartists' platform, and fought for them in Victoria with a vigour and, ruthlessness that were irresistible. The measure of political freedom demanded by the Chartists has practically been accepted now in every British community. But those who were in the forefront of the movement should not be forgotten. And in his sympathies, at any rate, the stern old man who has just died was one of them. He saw the "year of revolutions" - 1848 - in Europe. Then with clamorous shouts for political liberty sounding in his ears from almost every country in Europe - this ex-Divinity student, who had abandoned the narrow Calvinism of his forefathers as incompatible with intellectual liberty, made his way to the Great Republic and plied a pick on the Californian goldfields. Coming on to Australia he found his opportunity, and for more than half a century he continued to pour forth by the pens of picked deputies those ideas of a militant and aggressive Democracy in which he placed all his trust. Most of those Ideas by the splendid assistance of a succession of great popular leaders are now embedded in the statutes of Victoria. That those leaders caught inspiration in many instances, as well as journalistic support, from Mr. David Syme is well known to such as are familiar with the course of Victorian politics.

In a man of great force of character like the late Mr. Syme narrowness of view in some things is to be expected. Such a man is apt to concentrate his gaze upon a particular part and a relatively small part-of the whole moving picture of contemporary life. Width of sympathy is necessarily coexistent with lack of concentration, Mr. Syme was not a man of wide sympathies. As far as could be, gathered from his line of thought as reflected in his paper, he, focussed all the power of his intellect on three main objects, namely, on introducing and maintaining the fiscal policy of protection, on securing government by the people and for the people, and on building up *The Age* newspaper. He did not die without achieving each of those objects in a very-marked degree, and he, has consequently, though almost a recluse by temperament, succeeded in stamping his name and influence indelibly on the history of that portion of Australia where he established himself. Judging him again solely by his paper, it is impossible to say that he was a great, Australian in the widest and fullest sense of the *[begin page 323]* term. He was not. But that was in a large measure due to the period in which he lived. Where is the great Australian, in the fullest sense of the term, before Sir Henry Parkes? To a convinced protectionist like the late Mr. Syme, geographical boundaries between neighbouring colonies were merely sites for Custom-houses. And it must have been almost impossible for a man who was a septuagenarian before the inter-colonial Custom-houses were abolished to rid himself of the ancient and rooted conviction that beyond those Custom-houses lay the country of the enemy. But in the qualities of brain and character, Mr. David Syme was certainly a great Victorian, and, perhaps, his sturdy democratic spirit exercised more influence than even he himself could guess over the trend of political thought in other States of the Commonwealth.

The *Melbourne Punch* said:

Dour is a Scotch term that might have been invented to describe David Syme; he was dour in all his dealings so far as he was known to people outside his circle of immediate friends. He permitted himself to smile rarely, and was a big, iron-framed, rust, coloured man, with the strong bones showing through his clothes, and solidly lined in his powerful head. There was something of Carlyle's character in him, and David resembled the dour philosopher, too. Certainly Syme was the toughest proposition Australian journalism has produced; an ideal editor, of a kind fitting the description of the Sydney celebrity who said that a successful editor must have no friends and live down, a mine. David Syme never obtruded himself in his paper, and we find evidence of the survival of this spirit to the last moment in the fact that *The Age* told its readers nothing of his illness, and was the last to tell of his death. No man of Mr. Syme's large significance has passed out of Australian life with so little ostentation. No individual had exercised nearly as much influence on the affairs of his time in Victoria, and yet knowledge of his illness was not made public until he was at the last gasp. This is in some measure a reproach to our journalism as well as a tribute to Mr. Syme's unostentatious character. In similar circumstances in America the papers and magazines would have made miles of copy out of the big man's death bed. *[begin page 324]*

It is true that David Syme's influence waned a great deal with the introduction of Federation, but he was already a very old man and had fought his fight. To know how staunchly that fight was fought you must appeal to the old enemies of Protection, the men who fought heart and soul against *The Age*, but who now admit that they were beaten by the force of an iron personality behind a movement that had much to commend it, if not nearly as much as *The Age* claimed for it. Sir James McCulloch was the first to pass a Protectionist measure in the Victorian Parliament, but it was *The Age*, that made Protection a popular policy, and it was David Syme [who] made *The Age*. He had a big fight, there were long years, of adversity, but that only goes to demonstrate the tenacity and ability of the man behind the machine. There were times in the 'sixties and 'seventies when the owner of *The Age* had a very hard row to hoe, but David Syme hoed that row, and built up what is probably the finest journalistic property in the Southern Hemisphere, besides winning many terrific political battles. David Syme used the men and materials to his hand, and always used them well. When the men were not above reproach that was not his business; the electors had made them officers in the cause. David Syme was their general; he turned them to the best possible account, with the result that for years the title "King David," thrown at him with some little derision, was fairly descriptive of his position in Victorian politics. Besides running a tremendous business like *The Age*, the late great journalist found time to write several large works of scientific value, and to manage an important squatting and breeding business. He passed away one of our wealthiest men, and in making that wealth it may fairly be said of him now that he kept to the straight course which he earnestly believed was best for the country. David Syme was a good man of the battling kind, the kind that is rarely called good, since it hits too hard and keeps too keen an edge on its enemies.

The Brisbane *Daily Mail*, one of the leading papers of Queensland, said

Under Mr. Syme's management *The Age* has been the pioneer of Liberalism in Australia, for, curiously enough, that paper [\[begin page 325\]](#) has been more the organizer than the organ of Liberalism, and has therefore led rather than followed public opinion in the direction. It advocated the financial supremacy of the Lower House of Parliament, the opening of the public lands for agricultural settlement, the encouragement of native industries by means of discriminating import duties, free, secular, and compulsory education, and the hundred other measures which have now become embodied in the statutes, not only of Victoria but of Australia. Whether owing to the promptitude with which it pronounces on the questions of the day, the judgment which it displays in its views, or the vigour of its advocacy, or all combined, one thing is certain, that there is no newspaper in Australia at the present moment that possesses such influence as *The Age*. Although Melbourne has only about a twelfth part of the population of London, the circulation of *The Age* is equal to that of leading London dailies.

The *West Australian*, the principal newspaper of Western Australia, said:-

By the death of Mr. David Syme the most powerful personality it has ever known has been removed from the field of Australian political journalism. With a mighty engine which he had first to create Mr. Syme dominated for many years the political thought of Victoria, and ultimately impressed the main principles of his creed on the newly-opened book of federal opinion. The founder of protectionism in Australia, he communicated his ideas first to the people of his own colony, and lived to see their triumph in successive Parliaments representing the whole Commonwealth. This fact alone is sufficient to establish the greatness of the man - and "greatness" is the word which those who knew him would select to describe his distinguishing characteristic. But there is scarcely a progressive movement in Australian affairs - and particularly Victorian affairs-with which Mr. Syme and his newspaper have not been prominently associated. Payment of members, the extension of the franchise, free education - in the discussion which led to the establishment of all of these *The Age* newspaper struck in with almost a controlling voice. And David Syme was, until recently at least, *The Age* newspaper. He wielded a consummate power, often beneficent, but at times singularly merciless towards those [\[begin page 326\]](#) who stood in his way. Indeed, at one time his puissant influence threatened to subjugate the intellectualism of Victoria. So impressive did he make his newspaper that the weaker minds quailed before it, and a large part of the community lay for a time in a condition of intellectual, enslavement. *The Age*, with hundreds of thousands, was the final word, the Scripture of politics, what *The Age* thought the greater part of the community thought, and probably still thinks. Almost wherever Victorians are met, especially the youthful ones, the seal of *Age* opinion is set upon their utterances, and their intellectual and political attitude is often an unconscious development of the mental drill which they received at the command of David Syme. From the outset his journal was in touch and sympathy with popular aspirations. It supported the diggers at the time of the Eureka riots, and struck the first deep note in Australian journalism for the principle of a white Australia. The concrete issue at that time was the question of the admission or exclusion of Chinese, and, as will be remembered, Professor Pearson, who was one of Syme's leader-writing lieutenants, laid the economic and moral foundations of the existing racial sentiment by his work

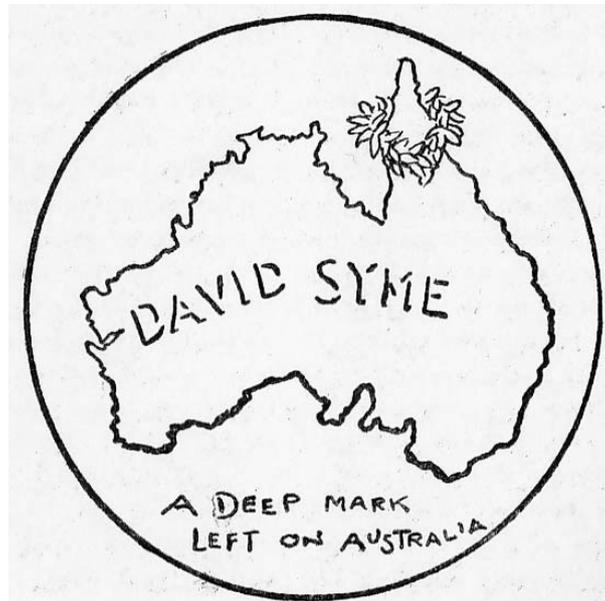
dealing with the yellow invasion. Throughout the stormy times of the 'seventies, *The Age* was the foremost advocate of the popular side in the great struggles with the, Colonial Office and in the protracted battles between, the Legislative Assembly and the, second Chamber. Its principles in those days might have been summed up in the phrase - protection combined with democracy. And it was not without cost to himself that David Syme entered into this warfare of the masses against the classes. A man of culture and refinement he was ostracised by the class to which he naturally belonged, and towards, which his social sympathies directed him. That ostracism was complete. A wall was built to exclude him. He contracted the singular, habit of standing-alone. And here it was that the character of the, man came out in bold relief. Original and unaccommodating," it might have been said of him as Grattan said of Chatham in a wider field, "the features of his character had the hardihood of antiquity." He never drew away from the main positions he had taken-up at the outset, and such were the power of his mind, and the strength of conviction he could assume even if he had it not, that he compelled Victoria to his will. In nearly all of the many fierce encounters *[begin page 327]* in which he continually and persistently engaged, ultimate triumph was his vindication. He made and unmade Ministries, and the men he trained at the leader-writer's desk became his servants as Ministers of the Crown. Students of Victorian political history will readily call to mind the great McCulloch struggle and the annihilation of the Conservative Party at the hand of *The Age* and its supporters. It was here that the paper first rose to a position of dominating influence. Mr. Syme was often ahead of his time. The task he essayed, in making protectionist doctrine popular was no light one in a community reared in an atmosphere of free trade. He advocated the referendum at a time when men laughed at the idea as the notion of a political faddist, yet he lived to see the principle incorporated in the constitution of the Australian Commonwealth. Single-handed he attacked the administration of the railways at the peril of his fortune and power, and invited a lawsuit, which by the slightest stooping to conquer he could have avoided, that cost his newspaper £50,00 in expenses. Yet victory as ever was his, and it is said that he saved the State thereby from an expenditure of forty-one millions on useless railways which Mr. Speight had proposed and to which a sympathetic Cabinet had given its adhesion, besides forcing economies in the administration equivalent to several hundreds of thousands a year. He attacked the landed class, and fought stubbornly the battle for closer settlement. But success never contented him. He was ever seeking new worlds to conquer. Upon protection he built up the theory of "new protection" which the Commonwealth has adopted, and his newspaper, still in the van with new ideas, is now advocating the doubtful experiment of elective Ministries. With David Syme it was an axiom embedded in life and conduct that the old order changeth yielding place to new.

This is one side of his character, and perhaps the most prominent. Withal he was a strange mixture. He combined an unyielding tenacity to a principle once asserted with a singular opportunism in details and minor phases, and with a disregard of the feelings of his opponent carried to such an extreme that it often precluded the rudiments of fair play. Practical, progressive, essentially a man of action, and that kind of man of action the community admires and follows, an almost invincibly strong man of action, he was a dreamer too. Not moments of reflection merely were his, but years of hard, deep, and sound *[begin page 328]* thinking. The works which

he gave to the world on industrial science, on Darwinism, and on metaphysics show a mind richly stored and a penetrating and subtle insight. Little known in Australia, some of these works have had a far-reaching influence in America, and have not left even the economic thought of England unaffected. David Syme, by every rule of measurement, was essentially a great, if in some respects a narrow man. Had his field been wider his influence would, it is safe to say, have reached further. For he was of that mould which compels circumstances to personal ambition and to far-seeing design.

The chief significance of these tributes lies in the fact that, with one or two exceptions, they were paid to the Australian Founder of Protection by powerful Free Trade papers, the organs of the Conservative party which had met so many defeats at David Syme's hands.

It will be seen that, while some made the admission with reluctance, none ventured to deny that he was, as indeed he was, a great man.



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Index

- Adelaide Advertiser*, The, appreciation of David Syme, quoted, 318-19
- Adelaide Register*, The appreciation of David 319-20
- Africa*, the, sailing ship, 52 n¹.
- Age*, *The*-
See also Syme, David. Speight v Syme, see that title.
- David Syme's identification with, v-vii, xxv-xxxi; the office in Elizabeth Street, viii; the office in Collins Street, ix; political influence, xvii, xviii; Ebenezer Syme on the editorial staff, 40; the brothers Cooke, 45-46; David Syme joins his brother, 45; purchased by the brothers Syme, 48-49; David Syme assumes control, 52-54; the first boycotts, 56-59; the only Protectionist paper in Melbourne, 58-59; first editors and contributors, 60-65; policy, 64-65; the people's champion on the land question 7783; its first great victory, 87; attack on O'Shanassy and Duffy, 87-88; boycott by the merchants, 88-89; squatters pretend ownership, 89-90 ; attack on the Nicholson Land Bill, 96; attack on Duffy's Land Act, 101-3; article on the land question *quoted*, 107-9; attacks on the established order, article *quoted* 117-22; boycotted by the monopolists, 128, 130-32 ; forced to exist on its circulation, 132-33; price reduced from sixpence to threepence, 132; importers conspire with the O'Shanassy Government to ruin the paper, 134-35; price again reduced to twopence, 135; object of the Libel Bill, 135; circulation increases and influence grows, 135; triumph of the paper seen in the general election of 1864, 138; vindication of Sir Charles Darling, 146; predominance of, in Victorian politics secured, 154-55; price reduced to a penny, 155; growth of its influence, 155-56; boycott by the importers abandoned, 156-58 ; attack on the Kerferd Government, 162; denunciation of McCulloch, 159-60; 163-64; influence on the formation of the Berry Tariff, 170-72 ; decides on the fall of O'Loghlen, 172-73; formation of the Service-Berry coalition, 173-75; articles on the Victoria "boom" 206-8; provincialism eschewed, and Nationalism preached, after Federation, 227; its position in the Commonwealth, 236, 239; attitude on the Northern Territory question, 236-38; its unswerving adherence to the democratic cause, 246-48; circulation, 247; its policy of suggestion, 247-48; King David's audience chamber, 248-49; political secrets, 249; its Jubilee in 1904, 264-65; introduction of linotype in the machine rooms, 265-66; its great power, 302-4
- Agriculture in New South Wales and Victoria compared, 187
- American river, the, 20
- Anderson's Creek, 42
- Anti-sweating laws, 222
- Anti-Trust Act, the, 235
- Apia, island of, 298
- Arbitration Bill, the, 229
- Argus*, *The*, 47, 61 Report of the Kilmore speech of John O'Shanassy, 60-61; appreciation of David Syme quoted, 315-16
- Audit Act, the, defied by Mr. Berry, 166
- Australia-
Federation promoted by David Syme, 227-8; elections for the last Federal Convention, 227; the first Federal Government, 228; first Australian tariff not Protective, 228; Mr. Deakin Prime Minister, 229; the Reid-McLean administration, 230-32; appointment of the Tariff commission, 230-32; fruits of the Deakin Government, 233-34; Protection established, 232-35; question of National defence, 238-39
- Australia, Central, exploration of, 264
- Australia, South Number of sheep in, 184; work of settling the Northern Territory, 236-38
- Australia, West, number of sheep in, 184
- Bacchus Marsh, 270
- Bakery Hill, episode at, 47
- Balfour, A.J., II, 316
- Balfour, Mr of Whittinghame, 11
- Ballarat, David .Syme mines at, 34-36
- Ballarat riot, the, 40-44, 47-48
- Barkly, Sir Hy., 90
- Barton, Sir Edmund
First Federal Government led by, 228-29; policy regarding the West Australia railway, 307 Bathgate, 2, 11, 12
- Beechworth, 32-33

- Bendigo, 30-31
- Bent, Thomas, 111-12
- Berry, Graham
 Conversion to Protection, 127;
 Protectionist leader in the Assembly, 141;
 Treasurer in the Duffy Government, 163;
 becomes Premier and reforms the Tariff,
 164; dismisses the heads of all
 departments, 165-66; his bill for reform of
 the Constitution, 168; defeat of, 172; secret
 history of the Berry Tariff, 170-72; the
 Service-Berry coalition, 173-75; criticism of
The Age, 3-2-3
- Bisley, Victoria wins the Kolapore Cup, 262-
 64
- Black Wednesday in Victoria, 165-66
- Blair, David, 46, 48
- Blowitz, M. de., xix
- Blythewood, Kew, home of David Syme, 271-
 72, 315
- Boer War, 311; Australian contingents, 257
- Booroondara, 300
- Bowen, Sir George, 166-68
- Bright, T.L., 46, 48.
- Broken Hill Silver Mines, 197-98
- Bushrangers, an adventure with, 32-33
- California
 David Syme's voyage to, 17-19; mining
 camps of, 20-25
- Calvinism, David Syme's views, 12-14
- Cameron, Mr., 305
- Canadian Gully, Ballarat, 34-35
- Cape Horn, storms of, 18
- Cape Town, 54
- Carpenter, W. B., Mental Physiology, 295
- Castlemaine, 30, 44; Professor Pearson
 elected to, 63
- Cattle, number in New South Wales and
 Victoria, 184
- Chapman, Mr., 86
- Charlotte Plains, 71
- Chartism, 321-22
- Clarke, Marcus, xvi, 272-73
- Closer Settlement Board, 111
- Closure, the, introduced by Sir James
 McCulloch, 163
- Clunes, 42
- Cobdenism -
 New South Wales, in, 178-79; principles of,
 assailed and refuted, 117-27
- Coghlan, T.A. -
 Statistical investigations of, 178 *et seq*;
Seven Colonies cited, 179 *et seq*; *Australia*
and New Zealand cited, 188, 191-93
- Cook, Captain, 26
- Cooke, John and Henry, 45-46
- Creswell, Captain, Naval Director of the
 Commonwealth, 239
- Daily Mail*, the Brisbane, appreciation of
 David Syme quoted, 324-25
- Daily News*, Rev. Dr. Lang's letter quoted, 68
- Daily Telegraph*, the Sydney, appreciation of
 David Syme quoted, 321-23
- Dairy cows, number in New South Wales and
 Victoria, 185
- Darling Grant affair, the, 62
- Darling, Sir Charles, 143-44 -
 Recall by England, 146-50; grant voted by
 Parliament to Lady Darling, 149-50; his
 return and pension, 153
- Darwin, history of natural selection disputed
 by David Syme, 287
- Daylesford. 34
- Deakin, Alfred
 Tribute to David Syme, 214-16; his mission
 to India, 221; Prime Minister, 229, 232; his
 Ballarat speech, 232; introduced into
 political life by David Syme, 269-70, 320;
 policy regarding the West Australia railway,
 307
- Disraeli* quoted, 311
- Disruption, the, in the Established Church, 9
- Dow, J.L., 221
- Draft Constitution, the, 227
- Duffy, Charles Gavan
 Leader of the Opposition, 8384; Minister of
 Lands, 86, attacked by *The Age*, 88;
 succeeds again as Minister of Lands,
 1861, 101; Land Act of, its defects, 101-3;
 forms a Government, 161
- Ebden, Mr., 91
- Edinburgh Review*, 290
- Education in New South Wales and Victoria
 compared; 181-82
- England
 Recall of Sir Charles Darling, 146-50;
 attitude on the Victorian Tariff Bill, 150-51;
 pension to Sir Charles Darling, 153
- Eureka Stockade, the, 47
- Europe*, the, sailing ship, 25-28
- Excise Acts, 234
- Factories Acts, 222
- Federal Enabling Bill, 226-27
- Federation, *see under* Australia
- Fellowes, Judge, 62
- Fergusson, Sir James, 11
- Flemington, 30

- Forrest Creek, see Castlemaine
Fortnightly Review, the, 290
 Foster, Spiritualist, 295-98
 Francis, J.G., 161
 Free Kirks, establishment of, 9
 Free libraries, number in New South Wales and Victoria, 181
 Free Trade
 See also Cobdenism
 "Big Loaf and Little Loaf," 11; its hold on Victoria, 116 alliance of the Free Traders with the Protectionists, 161
- Geelong, 44
 George, Hugh, 295--96
 Gilbert, Commissioner, 75
 Gold
 Theory regarding its position in the earth's strata, 21; amount extracted before 1858, 116; failure of the supply, 134; Victorian, value of, 1871-1901, 177
 Gold-diggers, attitude of the Government towards the, 41 -42
 Grafenberg, 16
 Grant, James McPherson, Land Act of 1864, 103-5
 Great Mount Egerton Mine, 40
- Haeckel, 287
 Haines, Mr.
 Chief secretary, 40; defeat of his Ministry on the Immigration Bill, 84-85; Land Bill of, 85; resignation, 86
 Heales, Richard-
 Elected to the Legislative Assembly, 83; attempt to form a Government 91; Land Act of, 97-99; Minister of Lands, 103
 Hegelism, 16
 Heidelberg, 16
Herald, the, appreciation of David Syme quoted, 316-17
 Higinbotham, George, 65
 Hoare, Benjamin Leader-writer for *The Age*, xxvii; *Preferential Trade* quoted, 179
 Hobart, 226
 Honolulu, 25-26
 Horses, number in New South Wales and Victoria, 185
 Hotham, Sir Charles, 47-48
 Howitt, William, *Two Years in Victoria* quoted, 68-77
- Immigration Bill of Mr. Haines, 84-85
 Imperial Defence Committee, the, 239
 Importers of Victoria
 Early trade done by, 116-17; attempt to bribe David Syme 130-31; conspiracy with the O'Shanassy Government to ruin *The Age*, 134-35; their rage at the conference on the Tariff Bill, 146; boycott of *The Age* abandoned, 156-58
 Income tax in Victoria, 223-24
 Indeterminate Sentences Act, 224
- Johnson, John William, 52 n.¹
 Jumping mines, 38
- Keilor Plains, So
 Kentucky, 23
 Kerford, Mr., failure of his Government, 161-62
 Kilmore, 60-61
 Kingslake, his picture of *The Times*, xix
 Kolapore Cup, won by Victoria, 262-64
 Korong, 31
 Kruger, President, 312
- Laissez faire*, David Syme on the policy of, 59-60
 Lalor, Minister of Trade and Customs, 170-71
 Land Act
 Duffy's, see under Duffy, Grant's, of 1865, 103-5; Act of 1869, its effects, 105; Act of 1898, 110-11
 Land Bill
 Nicholson's, see Nicholson
 Haines', 85
 Land Boom, see under Victoria
 Land question in Victoria - See also Victoria, Boom in Land. Australian writers quoted on the situation, 67-77; origin of the Squatters' land monopoly, 71-80; Orders in Council, 70, 78-79; country locked up and people denied access to the land, 79-80; occupation licences, 97-98; suspension of the question by the constitutional contest, 102-03; gradual aggregation of large estates, 106; David Syme's policy of yeoman settlement, 109-13; David Syme's latest proposals, 112-13; future prospects, 112-13; compulsory purchase and a land-tax, 112
 Land speculations in Victoria, see Victoria, *Boom in Land*.
 Land Tax Act, the, 164
 Lang, Dr., letter of to the *Daily News* quoted, 68
 Langton, Mr., 162
 Leader, the, ix, 61

- Legislative Council of Victoria, Constitution of, need for its reform, 140-41; rejection of Mr. Berry's Tariff Reform, 164; passes the Bill for payment of members, 168; reformation, 168
- Letters-
- Marriage with deceased wife's sister, 261-92; Syme's views on spiritualism, theosophy, etc. 293-98; Samoa and Robert Louis Stevenson 298-9; Syme's daily life in the early days, 299-301; Free Trade, 302-4
- Libel, see Speight v. Syme.
- Libel Bill, the, object of the measure, 135
- Licence Tax, the, action of Mr. La Trobe, 42-44, 47-48
- Living, cost of, in Australia, 191-92
- London Chartered Bank of Australia, Mr. McCulloch's expedient, 143-44
- Marriage with deceased wife's sister, Syme's opinion on, 291-92
- McCulloch, Hon. William, asks David Syme, a favour from 262-64
- McCulloch, Sir James 62-
- Tariff Bill of, see under Protection. His conversion to Protection, 65, 139-41; elected to the Legislative Assembly, 83; forms a ministry, 1863, 103; his expedient regarding the collection of customs, 142-45 dissolution and return to office with great Protectionist majority; 1866, 145; resignation and return to office, conference on the Tariff Bill 145-46; resignation and resumption of office, September 10, 1867, 150; policy toward the Council, 153; refuses to form a ministry unless given a free hand, 151; becomes Conservative and resigns, 159-60; return to office - his intrigues 163-64
- Macedon, ix
- McLean, Alan, forms a coalition Government with G. H. Reid, 229
- McMahon, Sir Charles, 172
- McPherson, J.A., Government of, 159
- Mandurang, 49
- Manners-Sutton, Sir S.H., 150
- Melbourne-
- David Syme's voyage to, 25-28; picture of, in 1853, 29; the Melbourne Exhibition, 46; Presbyterian Ladies' College in, 63; tradesmen of, 75; mass meeting to denounce Sir Charles Darling's recall, 148; the "boom" in land, see *under* Victoria.
- Melbourne Punch*, the, appreciation of David Syme quoted, 323-24
- Melbourne University, 251, 264
- Menzie. Rev. W., 296
- Mercury*, the Hobart, appreciation of David Syme *quoted*, 320-21
- Midland Railway Company, 205
- Mill, John Stuart, 126
- Mining, laws regulating, 38-40
- Missouri, men of, 23
- Mitchell, Jean, I
- Morrison, Dr. Ernest, xix
- Morrison, Rev. James, 14, 15
- Mount Egerton, 38
- Munro, James, incident of his resignation, 249
- Myers Flat, 31
- Navigator Islands, 26
- New Hebrides, 27
- New Melbourne Hospital, the, xxx
- New Protection Act, 233-35
- New South Wales
- "Rushes" from Victoria to, 134; comparison with Victoria, 176-95; Protectionist Tariff introduced 178; mineral output, 176-77; railways, 179-80; Post and Telegraph offices, 180-81; education, 181-82; population, 182-83; agriculture in, statistics, 187; manufacturing and commercial industries, 188-89; accumulated wealth of, 189-90; diffusion of wealth in, 190-91; cost of living, 191-92 .
- New York Tribune*, 17
- New Zealand, "rushes" from Victoria to, 134
- Newcastle, Duke of, his despatch in answer to the Squatters' petition, 98-99
- Newspaper Government, its defects and virtues, 241-52
- Nicholson Land Bill, the - Rejected by the Squatters, 90-91; the measure passed, 96; pernicious effects of the measure, 96-97
- Nicholson, William-
- Attacks the O'Shanassy-Duffy Government, 90; assumes office, 90; defeat of his ministry, 97; again assumes office, 96
- Northern Territory, the, question of settlement, 236-37
- Occupation licences, 97-98
- O'Hea, J.W., 300
- Old age. pensions, 221
- O'Loghlen, Sir Bryan, Government of 172-73
- Opposition, the, its function, 312
- O'Shanassy, John, Premier -

- His Kilmore speech, 60-61; leads the Opposition, 83-85; forms a Government with Mr. Chapman, 86; attacked by *The Age*, 87-88; attempts to form a ministry, 91; succeeds Mr. Heales, 101-11; conspiracy with the Importers to ruin *The Age*, 134-35; his Libel Bill, 135
- Papua, annexation of, 264
- Paris Exhibition of 1855, 4-6
- Parkes, Sir Henry, 323
- Parnell Commission, xx
- Party Government, David Syme's essay on, 304-12
- Patterson, James, 63, 270
- Patronage System, the, 10-11
- Payment of Members Bill, 164-65, 220.
- Pearson, Professor C.H.-
 Leader-writer for *The Age*, xiv, xvi, xxvii, 326; sketch by David Syme, 63-64; *History of England in the Fourteenth Century*, 64
- Pike county, Missouri, 23-24
- Port Darwin, 236, 262
- Port Jackson, 28, 236
- Post and Telegraph offices of New South Wales and Victoria compared, 180-81
- Preisnitz, 16
- Presbyterian Ladies' College, Melbourne, 63
- Princess Royal*, sailing ship, 18
- Protection -
 Incident in the early life of David Syme, II; advocated by *The Age*, 57-60; the Beginnings of, 114-28; the question studied by the people, 126-27; first effects of David Syme's advocacy, 132-33; cause of, dependent on David Syme, 129-30; efforts to stem the tide of public opinion, 136; First Protectionist Tariff introduced in Victoria, its fate, 141-42; Tariff Bill, second rejection of by Council, 144-45; third rejection 145; fourth rejection; 145; fifth rejection, 150 found impossible in Victoria until reformation of the Legislative Council, 150-51; accomplishment of, 154-75; David Syme not satisfied with the Tariff, 154-75; Tariff reformed by Mr. Berry, 164; secret history of the Berry Tariff, 170-72; effects in Victoria, 176-95; first Australian Tariff not Protective 228; campaign for high Protection, 228; fiscal issue forced on by David Syme, 232-33; the "New" Protection, 233-35
- Protectionist States of Australia, cost of living in, 91-92
- Purves, J.L., K.C., xxi ; tributes to David Syme, 206, 213-14
- Queensland-
 Number of sheep in, 184; stands out against the Federal Enabling Bill, 226
- Railway administration of Victoria, assailed by David Syme, 208
- Railways, comparison between those of Victoria and New South Wales, 79-80
- Reform Bill, the, 172
- Reform Government, the, defeat of, 99
- Reid, G. H.-
 Coalition Government with Mr. Alan McLean, 229; his proposal to David Syme, 23032; his defeat, 232; attitude on the railway question, 307
 Religion, question of State aid, 221
- Rifle Club movement in Victoria, patronage of David Syme, 262-61
- Robinson, A. B., 170, 174-75
- Sacramento, 19
- Sacramento river, the, 20
- St. Andrews' University, 2
- Samoan Islands, 26, 298
- San Francisco, David Syme's voyage to, 17-19
- Schuler, G. F. H., xxvii, 207
- Seddon, Richard, tribute to *The Age*, 65
- Septennial Act, the, 285
- Service, James-
 Elected to the Legislative Assembly, 83; Minister of Lands, 90-91; his budget, 162; the Service-Berry Coalition, 173-75
- Sheep, number in New South Wales and Victoria, 184
- Sladen ministry, the, 152
- Smith, Adam, 126
- Smith, G.P. -
 David Syme on, quoted, 62-63; his connexion with *The Age*, 60-62, 292
- Smith, James, dramatic critic for *The Age*, 46
- South Yarra, ix
- Speight, Richard
 Action against David Syme, see *Speight v Syme*. Chief commissioner of railways, 205, 207-8; kindness of David Syme to, 255-56
- Speight v Syme*
 Claim of £25,000 damages, 208-17; offers of compromise, 212-13; David Syme's reply, 213; consequences of the struggle, 216-17; Mr. Deakin's comments, 214-16

Spencer, Herbert, 287
Spencer, Professor, 264
Spiritualism, Syme's opinion, 293-98
Squatters, the - Origin of land monopoly by, 71-80; pretensions regarding the ownership of *The Age*, 89-90; rejection of the Nicholson Land Bill by, 90-91; petition sent to England concerning absolute possession, 97; the Duke of Newcastle's reply, 98-99; corruption in election of 1861, 100-101
Stevenson, R. L., 298-99
Suffrage - Corruption and falsification of the rolls in 1861, 100-101; manhood suffrage in Victoria, 85
Supple, Gerald, 300
Swine, number in New South Wales and Victoria, 186 Sydney, 28

Syme, David-

See also "Age, The".

Account of-

His private life, xxv-xxxi, 299-301; birth and parentage, 1; education, 2-4; childhood, 2-11; anecdotes, 11; religious training, 12-16; becomes a journalist, 16-17; voyage to California, 17-19; mining experiences, 20-25; voyage to Melbourne, 25-28; leaves Melbourne for Castlemaine, 30; works hard as a miner, 32-44; joins his brother on *The Age*, 45; purchases *The Age*, 48-49; as a contractor, 49-52; assumes control of *The Age*, 52-54; marriage, 52; illness and trip to England, 54-56; death and appreciations, 315-28.

Characteristics and personality

Personality, viii-xxiii; his consistency, 219; his statesmanlike qualities, 241; his forward looking, 253; his national ideal, 254; his ruthlessness, 255; his kindness to Mr. Speight, 255-56; mystery surrounding his actions, 256-57; charge of hardness of heart refuted, 256; his religious beliefs, 257-58; capacity for hate, 258-59; friendships, 260-61; instances of generosity, 259-60; public benefactions, 261-65; relations with his staff, 265-66; anecdotes, 266-73; mob enthusiasm, 268-69; his sense of humour, 272-73; his passionate temper, 273; self control, 273-74; the man as he was, 274-76; the secret of his false reputation for austerity and pride, 278-80; his philosophy, 281; simplicity the keynote of his character, 282
Correspondence, 291-304

Political Life-

His identification with *The Age*, v-vii, xxv-xxxi; his appeal to the merchants, 92-96; his article in *The Age* on the land question quoted 107-9; his policy of yeoman settlement, 109-13 ; "King David," 160-61, 324; relations with Sir George Bowen, 166-68; his influence on the Berry Tariff, 170-72; formation of the Service-Berry coalition, 173-75; his patriotism and how it benefited the state, 175; his life work vindicated, 193-95; his determination to save Victoria, 205-8; his attack on the Government and the Railway administration, 208; his letter to the Minister of Railways *quoted*, 213 cost of the struggle, 216-17; legislation originated by, 219-25; his part in promoting Federation, 226-27; selects the ten delegates from Victoria, 227; Mr. Reid's proposal 230-32; forces on the fiscal issue, 232-33; attitude toward the "New" Protection, 233-35; on national defence, 238-39; he fights with the people, 242; his place in popular esteem, 242-43; his sacrifices to obtain political power, 243-45; his power founded on personal consistency and integrity, 245-46; incident concerning James Munro, 249; Speight v. Syme, see *that title*.

Writings. - "The Soul," 258, 287-90; "Outline of an Industrial Science" 283-84; "Representative Government in England," 284-86; "On the Modification of Organisms," 287; his theories of the hereafter, 288-89; his theories of design in nature, 289; his place in English letters, 289-90; his lesser contributions to literature, 290; an unfinished essay written before his death, 304-312; on the function of the Press, 312-14

Syme, Ebenezer - Connexion with the *Westminster Review*, 2, 11; on the staff of *The Age*, 40, 45; purchases *The Age*, 48-49; elected to the Legislative Assembly, 49, 83; death of, 52, 56, 92

Syme, George, ix, xvii, 295, 296, work on *The Age*, 54

Syme, George, Senior, 4-6, 11

Syme, James, 11, 12

Syme, Mrs. David (Annabella Johnson), 52

Tariff, see *under* Protection.

Tariff Commission, the, 230-32

Tariff Reform Committee, formation of, 129

Tariff, the Commonwealth, 178

- Tasmania - Copper mines of, 197-98; 184
 number of sheep in,
- Texas, 23
- Times*, The, xix, 300
- Trobe, Mr. La, 42-44
- Tuolumne river, the, 21-22
- Turner, Henry Giles, *History of Victoria*, 117,
 216
- Turner, Sir George-
 Land Act of 1898, 110-11; incident of the
 rifle team, 262-64
- Tutuila, island of, 26, 298
- Vava, island of, 27
- Victoria-
Boom in Land.
 Growth of extravagance in Victoria, 196-
 99; causes of the Boom, 199-200; methods
 of the "Boomsters," 200-4; folly of the
 banks, 203-4; demoralization of
 Parliament, 204-5; railway-spendthriftism,
 204, 207-8; the Boom bursts, 208;
 Government driven from office, 208;
 benefits to the colony from David Syme's
 struggle, 213; aftermath of the Boom, and
 recovery of the colony, 217-18
Land question in, See *Land question in
 Victoria*.
Political History and Parliament-
 Ballarat riot, 40-44. 47-48; political
 condition in 1856, 67; first Parliament, 82-
 86; Haines ministry, 84; manhood suffrage,
 85; O'Shanassy-Chapman ministry, 86;
 second Parliament, 90; Nicholson
 Government, 90-91; invasion of Parliament
 by the mob, 91-92; Heales Government,
 97-99; electoral campaign of 1861, 99-101;
 O' Shanassy-Duffy administration, 101; the
 "rushes" from the Colony, 133-34; report of
 the Board of Public Experts quoted, 137-
 38; first Protectionist Tariff introduced-its
 fate, 141-42; dissolution granted on second
 rejection of Tariff Bill, 145; general election,
 145; Tariff Bill again rejected, 145; Council
 consents to a conference and Tariff Bill is
 agreed to, 146; recall of Sir Charles
 Darling, 146-50; grant to Lady Darling,
 149-50; the Council refuses to pass the
 measure in favour of Lady Darling, 149-50;
 dissolution on fifth rejection of the Tariff Bill,
 Council supported by Downing Street, 150-
 51 ;strong Protectionist Government
 formed, 150-51; no Government - despatch
 from Downing Street withheld, 151; the
 Sladen ministry, 152; reformation of the
 Constitution, 153, 168; new campaign for
 complete Protection begun, 158; Duffy
 Government, 161; Francis Government,
 161; Kerferd Government, 1874-75, 161-
 62; Berry Government, 164; general
 election of 1877, 164; Tariff reformed by
 Mr. Berry, 164; Black Wednesday, 165-66;
 relations of the Cabinet with David Syme,
 166-68; effects of Protection, 176-95;
 payment of members, 220; democratic
 legislation in, 219-25; anti-sweating laws,
 222; Factories Acts 222; ten delegates
 selected by David Syme, 227
Statistics, etc. relating to- Numbers lost by
 emigration, 110, 115; population, 116, 133;
 134, 182-83; industrial condition in 1859,
 116-117; David Syme's patriotism, and how
 it benefited the State, 175; comparison with
 New South Wales, 176-95; railways, 179-
 80; Post and Telegraph offices, 180-81;
 education in, 181-82, 219; industry,
 statistics, 188-89; number of sheep in, 184;
 number of cattle, 184; number of horses,
 185; number of dairy cows, 185; number of
 swine, 185; agriculture, statistics, 187;
 manufacturing and commercial industries,
 188-89; accumulated wealth in, 189-90;
 diffusion of wealth in, 190-91
- Vienna, 16
- Wangaratta, 32
- Water conservation in Victoria, 222
- Watson, J.C., 229, 307
- West Australian*, the, appreciation of David
 Syme quoted, 325-28
- Westminster Review*, Ebenezer Syme's
 connexion with, 2-3, 11
- Whipstick, the, 31
- Wilson, Edward, 62
- Windsor, A.L. -
 Editor of *The Age*, ix, xvi, xxvii, 62-63, 170-
 71, 292; interview with Sir George Bowen,
 167-68; suggests the Service-Berry
 coalition, 174
- Yeoman settlement, David Syme's policy of,
 109-13
- Zox, Mr., 255