

## HENRY PARKES ORATION 2006

### *The Crimson Thread: What Unites Australians Today?*

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#### **Parkes's vision**

Speaking in Melbourne in 1890 at the dinner for representatives of the Australasian colonies attending the first Federation Conference, Henry Parkes, Premier of NSW, responded to a pessimistic speech that had just been delivered by a former Victorian Prime Minister. The Victorian had painted a worrying picture for advocates of federation, emphasizing the barriers, especially those created by the differing tariff regimes across the six Australian colonies.

Any barriers to federation, said Parkes in response, could be overcome. Australians were united. "The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all."

These words were to become a rallying cry for the federationists, a beacon of hope for those who feared that disunity would keep Australians apart forever. And Parkes, it turned out, was right. Although he did not live to see it, the unity - the kinship - he identified among Australians was eventually given shape in a nation, the Commonwealth of Australia.

Parkes meant two things by the "crimson thread". First, a common British ancestry – what we might call a common "ethnic" identity today. He also meant the "crimson thread" of shared commitments. Commitments to British institutions – to British law and forms of government - and to a New World version of these institutions. What bound all Australians together, Parkes believed, was both a common origin and common vision of a future Australian nation. The British heritage would be built upon, developed and *Australianised*.

Those, like Parkes, who dedicated themselves to building the Australian Commonwealth, had a vision of Australia as a great and powerful nation in the Southern Hemisphere. Among other things, they imagined that the Australian population would be greatly expanded both by birth and by immigration. Ideally the immigrants would come from Britain, drawn from among those who also shared the crimson thread of ancestry.

The federationists confidently predicted a population outpacing Britain's within less than one hundred years, numbering at the least around 40 million and possibly by the end of the twentieth century as many as 100 million. Today's small population would be one of the biggest surprises confronting the founders of the Commonwealth were they to return in 2006.

But while the population hasn't grown as was forecast, it has diversified. And just as much as that, it has *Australianised*. We no longer think of ourselves as *British*. We are diverse, but we also have a shared, and common culture that is distinctively Australian. Those who built the Commonwealth of Australia welcomed this; they anticipated it; they helped foster it.

Henry Parkes was English. He was born in Warwickshire in 1815, and he came to NSW already an adult, already educated, married and the father of the first of his children. But Parkes quickly became a New South Welshman, and he also saw himself as a future Australian.

He was a democrat, an advocate of the expansion of democratic rights for working men *and* women; he advocated and promoted public institutions – most notably, public schools and hospitals. He was an proponent of immigration. Certainly, his ideal was British immigration, but his vision of what could be achieved did not depend upon this.

In 1881 and 1882 Parkes traveled to the United States. What he saw there had a profound impact on him. In my view it was here that Parkes made a decisive shift in thinking, adopting an all-or-nothing vision of a full Australian nation, where previously he had anticipated incremental steps to a distant, as yet-unachievable goal of federation. From this came a commitment to federating the Australian colonies, if possible, within his lifetime.

Within a few years, back in power, he followed this through, and remained committed to the goal to the end of his life. He almost saw the end of the process. He died in 1896, less than five years before the Commonwealth of Australia was inaugurated.

In his memoir, *Fifty Years in the Making of Australia*, Parkes wrote of his travels in America, and of the impressions of industry and energy and growth he formed there. He also saw the “crimson thread”- common ancestry - among Americans, and – being Parkes - he was not reluctant to lecture them on this.

At yet another dinner, this time in New York, Parkes responded to the toast by, in his words,

“tak[ing] up a bold position. After dwelling upon the vast strides which the great Commonwealth [of America] was taking in wealth, science, and material prosperity, I ventured to warn Americans against the danger of losing sight of the stern maxims of the founders of [their] Union. I then passed on to the ties between England and her noble offspring, and expressed the hope, amidst loud cheering, that they might grow stronger and closer, under the nurturing influence of justice and peace and kindred aspirations. ..”

[I]t [was] abundantly clear”, he concluded, “how these American hearts beat towards England and their scattered kin in England's colonies.”<sup>1</sup>

I recently spent a year in America, living and working in Boston, Massachusetts, where the American War of Independence began, where the oldest written constitution in the world still operates, and where the Supreme Judicial Court that upholds this constitution is currently presided over by a female Chief Justice.

Like Parkes in the 1880s, I am intrigued by the contrasts between the two countries, and, like Parkes, I think that we can learn much from America. It’s probably not a fashionable thing to say these days, but I think there’s something in it.

## **America and Australia**

Among other things, it was the great American openness to immigration in the post-Civil War years that contributed to the vitality Parkes found there in the 1880s. In the famous

words on the Statue of Liberty, America had held its arms out to the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breath free.

But let's not exaggerate this. Soon after – in the time when the Australian colonies were coming together – America began to restrict its immigration program, much as the Australian colonies were doing, and as the Commonwealth of Australia was to do after federation, refusing entry to persons considered undesirable on the grounds of race. In Australia's "sister colony", Canada, the same thing was happening. Those who claim that the so-called "white Australia" policy is specifically, even uniquely Australian, are simply ignorant of these shared histories.

But, even with restrictions in American immigration, vast numbers of immigrants had already gone to America, and they would continue to do. In the 1890s, Australians compared themselves with the American population at the time of American union in the 1770s. Its population then was 4 million – close to Australia's population of just under 4 million on the eve of Australian federation. In the century that followed America's federation, its population had grown to 60 million. The Australians imagined that their own would follow a similar rate of growth.

The demographic impact of immigration in America was not only in larger numbers – certainly the growth was phenomenal, and the United States now has the third highest population in the world - but it was also in the enormous cultural and ethnic diversity that marks its population. Multiculturalism and diversity continue to challenge Australians. It has long been a simple fact of life in the United States.

One of the lessons we can learn from the United States is to accept ethnic diversity as a given. It is the demographic character of all comparable countries in the world; it is a product of changes in policy, in economics and technologies, that cannot be reversed, even if we wanted to.

We need to think more creatively now about ways other than common ancestry in which we may be united.

### **Changes in Australia today**

But we should not exaggerate the difference between the past and now. Australia has always had diversity in its population. Even one hundred years ago, it was much less ethnically and culturally uniform than many imagine. There were, for example, sufficient immigrant communities from Italy, Scandinavia, France, Germany and China, to support regular newspapers in their national languages at the turn of the century. There were major divisions, both religious and cultural, between those of Irish origin and those of English origin. There were, of course, tremendous differences between the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

But until relatively recently, it was possible for Australians to go through their lives with very little contact with people from non-Australian backgrounds. Again, we should not exaggerate this. My own circumstances are quite typical. My father came here from Holland after the War as an adult, joining his parents who had fled here from Indonesia. His was a non-English speaking background and he retained a pronounced foreign accent to the end of his life. My husband is also an immigrant, from Britain, and our children have dual

nationality. My sister's husband was born in Italy, and came to Australia as a boy with his parents, with whom he still speaks Italian, because they – exemplary citizens, decent and hard-working people – had little opportunity to learn English in their working lives in the building trade. Such family histories are quite typical right across Australia.

What *has* changed are the scale and range of diversity. We encounter, inter-act with, and do business with people from non-Australian backgrounds, from non-English speaking backgrounds now more than ever. But this is in itself it not necessarily disuniting. Australians are good at adapting. We have always known how to make the best of things. We are great improvisers, and good at experimenting with what is at hand. We are an adaptable people. While we see each new wave of immigrants as strange and even disturbing, we – and they - soon adapt. We do not require the "crimson thread" that unites us to be a common ancestry or single ethnicity.

### **Is there an Australian identity?**

What, then, unites Australia today? We often talk of an Australian *identity*. If this is what unites us, what does it mean? Does it refer to a particular physical *type*? – the freckled, sun-bleached "cornstalk"? The Paul Hogans of the world, the modern-day counterpart to Henry Lawson's bushman? Or do we mean a particular model of physical prowess – the sporting hero, the Don Bradmans of the world? That cannot be right. The vast majority of Australians would fail the test, and our own indigenous people would not qualify – a very strange thing - if this was what we really had in mind in talking of Australian identity.

Probably, what we mean by "identity" are Australian ways of doing things, more than Australian features. Here we are on safer ground. There *are* characteristically Australian ways of doing things, and we recognise these particularly when we travel. Indeed, our willingness to travel long distances is itself characteristic of the Australian way. Many times, when overseas, I have heard people comment that Australians are great travellers. And many times during my recent year in America, I was surprised to hear Americans say that while they would love to visit Australia, it was simply too far away. The irony of saying this to an Australian who, somehow had found herself in America, almost always went unnoticed.

There are other Australian characteristics, or cultural habits: our friendliness, for example. Australians are known – quite rightly – as a friendly people. We are outdoors people; we are hedonistic. At the same time, we are tough and resilient. Our sense of irony; and our skepticism are also recognizably Australian.

There are Australian symbols, in which these cultural characteristics can be captured; there are events or institutions that sum up or stand for Australian ways of doing things: the Sydney 2000 Olympics; the Socceroos' victories and defeats in Germany; our taste for vegemite (and outrage at learning that vegemite has been banned in the United States); our institution of compulsory voting, and our willingness to defend it - something that amazes other people - especially Americans.

These characteristics are not always positive, of course. Our skepticism can disguise a mistrust of innovation and ambition. It was revealing to hear people in America speak openly and without inhibitions, about their ambitions, their ideas and their dreams. I was also surprised to find that Americans are as polite and courteous in stressful situations as

Australians like to imagine themselves to be – that ambition and assertiveness do not necessarily mean aggressiveness or pushiness. We Australians could probably do with a little less skepticism when it comes to new ideas, or stories of success.

The particular ways we do things will change and evolve, necessarily adapting to economic and technological changes, to the contribution of immigrants, and to the influences that come from globalisation. New symbols – new ways of capturing what is distinctively Australian - will emerge.

But I'm convinced that the culture – the characteristics themselves - will remain much more constant than many people fear.

Many overseas writers visited the Australian colonies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and some left accounts of what they observed to be the Australian character. More than one hundred years later, these still read as familiar. Australians, they reported, were friendly, hedonistic, egalitarian, sports-loving, sceptical and a little defensive.

Cultural change happens very slowly. New waves of immigrants make an impact, but they themselves adapt and take on the characteristics of the national culture much more quickly than the culture itself changes. Their children and their grandchildren, if given the opportunity, are no different from the children of non-immigrants in their ways of doing things. That is to say, they quickly come to share Australian characteristics and mannerism. They are also just as varied as everyone else in their appearance, their interests, and their aspirations.

I say, *if given the opportunity*. And I mean this in a particular way. I mean this for all Australians. Our opportunities to be part of a common culture, our opportunities to experience those things that genuinely do unite us, cannot be taken for granted. (I will come back to this in a moment.)

What I am saying here is that the Australian identity is not a physical or an ethnic identity, but a bundle of characteristics – we can share these, and still be very different from each other in many other ways, like members of families often are.

We can also share these characteristics, and hold different personal *values*. Our identity, our characteristics, and our values are not the same thing. We cannot demand that all Australians hold the same values. Not only is this an intrusion into our freedom of conscience – a freedom that is at the heart of our democracy – but we cannot demand it and at the same time be true to what is characteristically Australian. We can't insist that all Australians hold a single set of "Australian" values, but still remain a friendly, ironical and sceptical people.

We often hear it said, in response to clashes of values, that we should be tolerant of other points of view. We often hear *tolerance* included among the core values – perhaps even as the most significant value - that all Australians should share. Tolerance sounds good – who could argue against it? But tolerance is a poor substitute for unity.

We cannot be united by mutual tolerance. That is merely a recipe for mutual indifference, or shared apathy. Tolerance, in this sense, can even *erode* unity. We can, and we should, attempt to see each other's point of view, and have – I would hope – compassion for the

weaknesses and even the stupidity that we see in others, hoping that they will do the same for us. But we cannot be asked to tolerate anything or everything.

What can unite us is neither tolerance nor values, but *commitment* to the legal and political system that permits and encourages mutual engagement, and that requires us at least to hear the other person's point of view – a legal system of equality and a political system where debate, open information, and transparency in government, are its foundations. Democracy, in other words.

We can, certainly – and we should – ask of all Australians (whether citizens or residents) to have in common democratic *commitments*.

### **Australian commitments**

In an Address on 25 January this year, Prime Minister John Howard said of Australian citizenship: 'The truth is that people come to this country because they want to be Australians. ... [But] the irony is that no institution or code lays down a test of Australianness. Such is the nature of our free society.'

'[E]thnic diversity,' he continued, 'is one of the enduring strengths of our nation. Yet our celebration of diversity must not be at the expense of the common values that bind us together as one people – respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, a commitment to the rule of law, the equality of men and women, and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need.'

Despite the recognised difficulty or "irony" that a free society cannot set down a test for its own membership, the idea of some sort of *test* of values has recently been supported by many on both sides of politics. Last month the Commonwealth government prepared a discussion paper on the merits of introducing a formal citizenship test for prospective new citizens. The introduction to this paper re-states the Prime Minister's ideas:

"Citizenship", it says, "provides an opportunity for people to maximise their participation in society and to make a commitment to Australia's common values – which include the respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, our support for democracy, our commitment to the rule of law, our commitment to the equality of men and women and the spirit of a fair go, of mutual respect and compassion to those in need."

This is a worthy and important list. But, these are not exclusively *Australian* qualities. All liberal democratic countries in the world would support such a statement, even though they might use different words to describe what we mean by the "fair go" – equality of opportunity, for example.

British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said something similar in his speech to the Australian Parliament, on 27 March this year:

"We know the values we believe in – democracy and the rule of law, but also justice, the simple conviction that given a fair go human beings can better themselves and the world around them. ... We are open societies. We feel enriched by diversity. We welcome dynamism and are tolerant of difference."

The problem here is not the worthiness of those institutions and practices that both the Australian and British Prime Minister have endorsed. It is the language of values. "Values"

are personal. They may underpin our support for public institutions and practices, but it is to reach too far into the individual conscience to ask us to have the same set of “values”.

When we try to find what unites *Australians*, we should at least distinguish between personal and public values. But I think we should talk less about values and emphasise the idea of public *commitments*.

People’s values will always vary, and democracy must allow for differences in values – indeed it is essential for debate over values to take place, if democracy is to be genuine, and democratic progress is to occur. Democracies like Australia’s *require* debate and contestation. Our parliamentary institutions are built around these: this is why we have an official Opposition, why we have political parties, and why freedom of the media and freedom of expression are an essential part of our political system.

And it is a commitment to these public institutions and these freedoms that can genuinely unite us.

### **The Australian public**

To have common public commitments, we need opportunities to experience ourselves *as* part of the Australian public. If governments want to facilitate a sense of public community – one that rises above the separate sub-communities that are common in all societies, especially in cities – then governments must be committed to maintaining and fostering public institutions.

No test of a person’s “values” can substitute for the public resources and the opportunities that give people a sense of being part of the public, and with it a commitment to the shared public good. The recent calls for tests of citizenship values and declarations of adherence to these values, in the belief that this will make new immigrants more *Australian*, puts the cart before the horse.

A declaration of adherence to a set of values made on a single occasion is not going to make people behave differently, especially if they don’t already share those values; it won’t stop people thinking or saying outrageous things; it would not have stopped the Cronulla riots, and it won’t prevent terrorist acts in the future, if this is what we are afraid of.

For one thing, those who commit acts of violence are not always non-citizens. Probably the majority among those involved in the Cronulla riots – nearly all of them youths – were already Australian citizens. In Britain, the test of history and knowledge about British institutions for naturalization would not have stopped the terrorist attacks in London in July last year. The majority of those who committed those acts were already citizens *by birth*. It would have had no impact either on them, or on those who were naturalized.

A test of “values” or a test of historical knowledge for naturalization won’t harm anyone, but it’s unlikely to do much good for the unity of Australians as a whole.

Immigrants, just like Australian citizens, will have different values. People have different religious values, different ideas about the importance of family, different views about friendship, different ideas about how money should be spent, different views about how we should prepare for death, and many more.

Ethnic diversity means an added layer of diversity in values, and practices, but it is not incompatible with shared commitments. It is possible to have different values, and still have a commitment to the public good, which rests upon democracy, equality, freedom of expression, and the rule of law.

But commitment will not come about by testing people, or by lecturing them. It will come through *practice*, through experiencing the benefits of the public. And these will require support for the public – for public institutions, public spaces and opportunities to participate in public life.

The public good, as we understand it in Australia, and in respect of which it makes sense to require – and to *foster* – commitment, involves local, state and Commonwealth government initiatives, as it should do in a federal system like Australia's. It includes three elements that, notwithstanding all the changes that have occurred in Australia in the one hundred and ten years since Henry Parkes died, are the same elements Parkes himself defended and fostered throughout his life and in his work.

These are: public education; public spaces; and public institutions. The most important of the public institutions are the institutions of democracy.

## **Public education**

Henry Parkes was one of the prime movers behind the introduction of free, secular public education in New South Wales in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. His Education Act of 1880 laid the foundation for the State's modern education system. Parkes believed that education created opportunities for children to take part in society. This principle still holds true.

Today, public education is under threat. Parents – and I am one of them – turn to private schools because local public schools are under-resourced or overcrowded. In inner Sydney, many have been closed down, or amalgamated. Many parents are turning, sometimes reluctantly, to private alternatives.

Today, we need a revitalized public education system, both for schools and for adult education. If we are serious about encouraging our children to share a commitment to Australian institutions and to each other, we need to foster a sense that public education is valuable, that it is not a second-rate alternative to private education. We need to be proud of our schools, and proud of being a country that values and supports public education.

Good public education will go a long way towards fostering a sense of shared public commitment in a diverse society.

It is reasonable to hope that people will speak a common national language, although it is a mistake to think that failure to do so indicates unsuitability for integrating into the Australian community. But if we want our immigrants to have a knowledge of English, we need to offer English classes in ways that make it possible for people who work and support families to take advantage of these. English language programs were a familiar feature on the radio when I was a child, and free English classes were available in other forms. The current Adult Migrant English Program offers free classes for recent immigrants, between around 500 and 900 hours, depending on the type of immigrant; we need to support this form of public education, and we need to expand it, including in flexible ways, using a variety of media.

## **Public space**

A commitment to the public also depends upon the availability of public spaces. Parkes was a visionary on this principle too. In 1888, on the Centenary of British settlement in New South Wales, Premier Parkes set in train the creation of Centennial Park in central Sydney - more than 600 acres of land re-claimed from the Lachlan Swamps, which was landscaped and planted with lawns and trees, with lakes, and paths and playing fields integrated into native bushland and small pine forests. It is the place where, five years after his death, the Commonwealth of Australia was inaugurated, and where more than 200,000 people sat comfortably on grassy slopes to watch the ceremony.

Now, on any day of the week, and especially on a sunny weekend, one sees the benefits of Centennial park in a multitude of ways: people of all national origins using the space, walking dogs, running, strolling, riding horses or bicycles, playing games, enjoying picnics, and parties – there is always at least one children’s party, with balloons tied to a tree, near the dedicated bicycle track where children can learn to ride safely, clear of the traffic. This park is one of my favourite places in Sydney. I think of it as “Henry’s Park,” and I bless his memory, and think it should be a model for all towns and cities.

There are, of course, public parks in most towns and most city suburbs, but how often are these attractive? I hope the answer in Parkes is – always!

How often, however, are they surrounded with so many rules and regulations that to do anything other than sit on a bench – if, indeed, there is a bench – is forbidden. How often are the following things prohibited: playing ball games, riding bicycles, lighting fires, drinking alcohol, allowing dogs off leads except, perhaps, after hours?

I am, of course, a law-abiding, indeed legally-trained, individual, but I love to come across the event where all of these rules are broken at the same time – a Saturday afternoon children’s birthday party in a local park, where the child’s new bicycle is shown off, where the parents have a glass of champagne or a beer together while kicking around a ball with their children and cooking fish or sausages on a portable barbeque. And, of course, with the family dog joining in.

All of these activities, it seems to me, are characteristically Australian and, if we want commitment to the public good, as Australians, we should be encouraging them, instead of prohibiting them, just as we should be supporting other free, open and accessible public spaces, where people can mix safely, and where we can see each other, out of our sub-communities, as ordinary people with common commitments, as members of the Australian public, even if our values and ethnic origins are varied and divers.

## **Public institutions**

A common commitment to democracy, equality, and compassion for others, also requires the fostering of our institutions of government. The Australian colonies, with New Zealand, were the democratic innovators of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was here in the Southern Hemisphere that the secret ballot, payment for members of parliament, votes for women, permanent electoral rolls, direct election of both houses of parliament, were first introduced. For more than a century, the institutions of Australian democracy have, with the occasional setback,

continued to innovate and thrive. The Australian Electoral Commission, for example, has been a model for other countries; as has public funding for election campaigns.

We are often cynical about politics and even more so about politicians – this is, indeed, characteristically Australian – but we are surprisingly united in defending the type of political institutions we have in this country. I mentioned compulsory voting and public funding for election campaigns; others, like our federal system, the referendum for changing the constitution, our particular electoral systems, are also core parts of our national commitments.

But recent initiatives have begun to wind back some of these avenues of participation. Amendments to the Commonwealth *Electoral Act* in 2006 now mean an early closing of the electoral rolls, so that persons turning eighteen will have three days, and others only one day to enroll. Previously, tens of thousands of new voters were able to enroll in time for the election in a seven day period, and many more could update their enrolment details. All prisoners are now denied the Commonwealth vote, where previously only prisoners serving sentences of five years or more were disenfranchised.

The Australian Constitution provides for representative government and the direct choice by the voters of their representatives. Enrolling to vote, and participating in elections are among the most fundamental of the public activities in a democracy, and yet – for reasons that are not at all clear – the new laws are discouraging, rather than encouraging participation.

In making it harder to vote, we are becoming more like Americans, treating voting less as a right, and more as privilege. This, I think, is regrettable. Democratic rights should not be at the whim of governments. To exercise such rights is a central part of our identity as Australians, and experience of democratic practices is a central part of creating a sense of membership of the public.

But there are still some things we can learn about American commitments. While Americans are much less committed to public education and to public spaces than we are in Australia, Americans have, overwhelmingly, a shared commitment to the public institutions of American democracy. Their democratic institutions are a little different from ours, and their sentiments sound sometimes corny to skeptical Australian ears. But they have public commitments that hold them together despite diversity.

They believe in the presidency, although they have very divergent views on the merits of individual Presidents; they are committed to the ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence, and to U.S. Constitution, both as a symbol and as an institution; they have, indeed, a “constitutional identity” that is quite unfamiliar to us here in Australia. It is this that still unites Americans today, as it did in the past. It is this that allows Americans to feel united, despite cultural and ethnic diversity on a scale far greater than in Australia; despite great differences in values and lifestyles among its population.

## **Conclusion**

Without government support for, and the development of public institutions, we cannot expect a shared sense of the public good among all Australians, whether immigrants or citizens by birth. Without an active *public* sphere, we will inevitably experience ourselves as

separate, as members of sub-communities, as people who have little in common with each other.

We have the opportunity for unity. We must see this despite our fears of disunity. We need the opportunities, and the freedoms to take part in public activities at all levels. The framework for such freedom lies in our commitment to democracy and the public good. It is this that unites us, as it did when the Commonwealth started. It is here that the crimson thread still runs.

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<sup>i</sup> *Fifty Years in the Making of Australian History*, p. 69-70

[The colonies with which I am familiar by forty years of experience are the six colonies forming Australia, and I venture to say in this great and intelligent company that in Australia the British race have before them an experiment in working out British institutions under circumstances more favourable than in any other part of Her Majesty's dominions. We are removed from all possible hostility from other nations. We live on a rich and capable soil, varying so much as to be capable of producing everything which Europe can produce, and almost everything of tropical growth. And we live in a climate favourable to the advance of our race and favourable to the long continuance of life. We can have no enemies if we are wise enough to be peaceable amongst ourselves. We are free from all the errors of the older civilised states of the world, while we have just as much as you possess of the rich inheritance of all scientific achievements and literary performances—in one word, the inheritance of all the glories and all the learning of the old land from which we have sprung. We have [P.82] now planted—with the consent, I presume, of all portions of the Empire—free institutions amongst us, and we have all the advantages to which I have briefly adverted to guide us in the right use of those institutions; and whatever dim stories may reach the ears of Englishmen, we are anxious to preserve the true spirit of those institutions, and to unite ourselves firmly and permanently to the old land which we hold in so much reverence. But I venture to say here before distinguished members of Her Majesty's Ministry, and before other distinguished men who may be in their place in a short time, that the more we are left alone the more closely we shall cling to our august mother; that the softer the cords the stronger will be the union between us and the parent country. I for one have no anticipation of the day when there will be any desire for change amongst us from the position we now occupy as part of the grand old Empire which I believe is destined to carry freedom to all parts of the habitable globe. I would like to say one word more pertinent to the special character of this great gathering. Australia is a vast and as yet an almost untried field for the labours, the enterprise, and the triumphs of engineering genius. Our harbours have to be made, so far as artificial means are necessary, to fit them for commercial purposes. Our rivers have to be spanned with bridges, our vast territory has to be pierced with railways, our coasts to be lighted, and in some places to be guarded from the ravages of the ocean. In every direction there are rich fields for the Civil Engineers of England, and if this is the first time that the toast of 'The Colonies' has been proposed at your annual meeting, I can see no reason why it should be the last. It seems to me that if any special class of Englishmen have an interest in the outlying portions of the Empire which are called the Colonies, it must be the Civil Engineers of England. It seems to me that on an occasion of this kind the toast is singularly appropriate. I shall not detain you longer on behalf of the Colonies, especially of those which I may, perhaps, be permitted to say I fairly represent. I thank you most sincerely for the manner in which you have recognised their importance. [P.83] One word only in addition. The next very few years, the next decade, will give to that group of Australian colonies an importance, an attitude of national grandeur, which will surprise England, and will surprise the world. Their growth will be amazing, but, as I have already intimated, I for one firmly believe that the great desire is that that growth should be in union with the Empire.]